

Public Works Instructor Continues Lifetime of Service

Teacher is spreading the word about need for trained workers

Bill Tidwell is a man who likes to keep busy. In spring 2006 he retired after a 33-year career with the County of Orange as the manager of public works operations. In that role he supervised over 200 employees and administered an annual budget of \$38 million. Instead of taking a well-deserved break, Tidwell continues his part-time teaching position at Santiago Canyon College's public works and arborist programs, passing along a lifetime of knowledge to his students.

"Due to so many retirements, now is the greatest opportunity for people interested in entering or advancing in the field of public works," Tidwell said. "With a high school diploma and some work experience, Santiago Canyon College can train you for a job that offers security and a living wage."

Tidwell entered the public works field in 1973, when he started as a part-time maintenance worker with the Orange County Department of Harbors, Beaches and Parks. While working his way up to park ranger and supervisor of vegetation (which included overseeing 140 employees engaged in tree trimming, landscape maintenance and erosion control), Tidwell completed three academic degrees. He holds two bachelors' degrees (in biology and social ecology) from the University of California, Irvine, and a master's degree in environmental studies from California State University, Fullerton.

Among the high points of Tidwell's long career are assisting with park activities during the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, when some field events were held in Orange County. But his most rewarding moments came from helping the community by working on clean up and restoration following disasters. After the police, fire and other emergency personnel go home, public works employees become the heroes by rebuilding roads, restoring power, clearing flood control channels, and dealing with the aftermath of floods, fires, wind, earthquakes, oil spills, and other natural and man-made disasters.

Tidwell loves providing the hands-on experience and classroom instruction that helps his students obtain public works employment and advance in their careers. "Because I've been teaching at the college level since 1980, I've never stopped going to school," he says with a chuckle. "I always worked and went to school full-time, so I can relate to what my students are going through. They come to SCC to better themselves, and I'm here to help them achieve their goals."