



## A life dedicated to education

COMMITTED TO STUDENTS: Chris Piercy, adjunct professor at Victor Valley College, created the K-16 Bridge Program to help students navigate higher education. The program has empowered almost 40,000 students in the Victor Valley.

Photo by: SARAH ALVARADO, DAILY PRESS



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### ***Building a bridge to college for 40,000 students***

December 26, 2008 - 9:48 AM

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*Editor's note: Today we continue our 10-part series profiling some of the people who made a difference in 2008. Those profiled were nominated by Daily Press readers, with the finalists selected by the Daily Press staff. [Click here to see past Person of the Year profiles.](#)*

VICTORVILLE • Chris Piercy doesn't just care about High Desert kids - he revolves his life around them.

He devotes most of his time - literally 70 hours a week - to teaching kids, talking with kids and ensuring their transition to post-secondary education is as smooth as it can be.

Chris Piercy, 52, started one of the most successful programs to prevent dropouts and enroll students in post secondary education in the state, the K-16 Bridge Program.

"I don't think people understand the amount of time and commitment that Chris has put into the Bridge program," said Rick Piercy, Chris Piercy's older brother. "He's just dedicated himself to this, and to the kids of this valley."

His life commitment to educating students has earned him a spot as one of 10 finalists for the Daily Press 2008 Person of the Year.

Chris Piercy is perhaps the longest-serving adjunct professor at Victor Valley College, and he has been teaching high school for nearly three decades.

"The kids call him 'the old man,' because he's been at Serrano even longer than I've been," said Sharon Schlegel, principal at Serrano High School. "He has a great rapport with kids. He's just really one of my best teachers."

Born and raised in Victorville, Chris Piercy grew up with his sister and two brothers, including Rick Piercy, 57, who founded the Lewis Center for Educational Research, in Apple Valley, 23 years ago. His grandfather was the head of mining for the local Pfizer rock plant, and his father owned Joshua Desert Services trucking company.

But his dad wanted to make sure he and his siblings pursued careers beyond blue-collar work by completing a good education.

Rick Piercy was the first in the family to attend college, and he helped Chris Piercy through the enrollment process. Chris Piercy earned his associate's degree at VVC before completing his bachelor's degree at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, and a master's degree in school administration and political science from CSU Fullerton and San Bernardino.

He interviewed for a high-school teaching job on a whim, when his college roommate told him he should give it a shot.

He taught for four years at Nogales High School in La Puente before moving to Serrano High School, where he has coached football and wrestling, organized the graduation and remained a teacher for 27 years.

About five years ago, Chris Piercy started brainstorming how to ease the transition process to college. With support from VVC and funding from the Lewis Center, the nonprofit Bridge program was born.

The program, which features an online system that offers assessment tests, career and college resources and various tutorials through personalized Web sites, started at Serrano High School. For the past two years 100 percent of the graduating senior class has enrolled in some form of post-secondary education. Today, the Bridge program has

expanded to 23 participating high schools. Nearly 40,000 students have participated in the program thus far.

"When Chris gets an idea, he's tenacious," Rick Piercy said. "He came up with this idea for Bridge, but then of course vision is nothing if you don't have the willingness to put it into action, and that's what he did."

Chris Piercy hasn't built up the Bridge program single-handedly. In addition to the computer experts that frequently update the program's technology, he's enlisted the help of his wife, Roberta, and two daughters, 21-year-old Katie, who's now a senior at Cal State University, San Bernardino, and Leslie, a freshman at VVC.

"If you're in the Piercy family, you do Bridge," Chris Piercy said. "You get volunteered to do this."

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