

Equity in Access

Dr. Roxi Smith: LaVenture STEM Program

September ushers in the start of the school year, and for Dr. Roxi Smith, this will be her 14th year teaching Chemistry at Skagit Valley College. But her biggest impact may be the one she's having on the Mount Vernon High School class of 2023. Starting in 2010, with a 1st grade classroom at Lincoln Elementary, Dr. Smith has worked with a cohort of students every year through elementary, middle, and starting this year, high school.

Deciding a long-term approach to community outreach would have a bigger impact, she's spent hours with these students through their educational journey. "I didn't have a good science education experience in the K-12 system," Roxi states. This helps students in a way that she didn't get until she was in college.

During the past three years, Roxi has incorporated the help of over 40 SVC student volunteers to lead in-class lab experiments with this cohort during their middle school years. Most of her students are eligible and she tries to get as diverse a population of volunteers as possible. The goal is to allow the children to relate to at least one SVC student, to see that SVC are full of people just like them, and hopefully encourage them to pursue a career in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math). "Representation is so important," Smith says. It wasn't until college when she saw a STEM teacher that she could physically identify with. "Representation is profound."

The *American Chemistry Society (ACS)* coordinates many community outreach efforts and provides people like Dr. Smith with small funding for their efforts. However, local support has increased to expand what Roxi has been able to do. This past year, the Skagit Valley College Foundation donated \$1,000 to fund last October's Middle School experiments. Shell Puget Sound Refinery has joined the effort this year with a \$1,000 contribution and is interested in providing volunteers for the classrooms. Roxi says that this new partnership wouldn't exist without her relationship with the Foundation and the Foundation's relationship with Shell.

"Where I grew up and the community I grew up in, to have an education and a degree was a life changer. The opportunity to be in this position and to serve my community through this role, it's the most important part of my job...it makes me feel like I'm returning what was given to me."

