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Note to Editor: To request a photo of Omba Kipuke, please send an email to winklet@losrios.edu or bensonm@losrios.edu.

Student Trustee Kipuke Preaches Campus Involvement with Missionary Zeal

You want ideas? Omba Kipuke has plenty of ideas for engaging his fellow students of the Los Rios Community College District in the “community” of community college.

How about a food drive to stock a pantry with non-perishable items for needy Los Rios students? How about a student-led fundraiser for the District’s vital Student Emergency Fund? How about a holiday toy drive for Sacramento area children’s shelters and homes? And what about some sort of jamboree that would encourage student-athletes to mix and mingle with their classmates off the field and off the court?

You want more? Oh, he’s just warming up. And once you start him up, you get the feeling he’ll never stop. Kipuke, this year’s elected student trustee for the Los Rios district, also displays a missionary zeal to see his ideas through.

And his mission is clear: when student body leaders encourage their classmates to embrace the *community* of their college, Kipuke contends, those students will grow more committed to their colleges and their classmates, grow more appreciative of the importance of campus elections and of the student body association’s role as a catalyst for real change.

“Working with students – our constituents – to me, that’s the most important part of this job,” he said during a recent visit to Sacramento City College. “They need to believe we have their best interests at heart. We really need to establish that right away. You have to catch them early. If you wait to spring [student] elections, you deserve this slap in the face” of dismal voter turnout at the polls.

You could say his missionary zeal comes naturally to Kipuke. His parents, Esaho and Beatrice Kipuke, are both missionaries, and he was born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The family fled Africa for Boston in 1994, when Kipuke was 4 years old, as his parents sought political asylum.

Today, Kipuke, 24, is a Homeland Security/Emergency Management major at American River College. He attended high school outside Atlanta, while his parents completed their seminary studies at nearby

Emory University. His parents are back in Africa, directing one of the biggest community development missions in the nation of Togo.

After high school, Kipuke traveled to California in 2008 to visit his sister who had moved to Carmichael. He returned two years later, in 2010, to enroll in American River College, “lured out here” by what he said was the college’s great performing arts and theatre program.

“Public servitude is where my interest is,” Kipuke said, but the performing arts – singing and acting – “is my therapy. I’ve had a lot of stresses in life, past and present. Theatre is a place I go to escape.” Indeed, since enrolling at American River College, Kipuke – a bass-baritone – has developed as a self-taught musician, singer and actor, and has participated in numerous theatrical productions.

“He can work with people. He shares stuff very, very well,” said Sam Williams, a professor of Theatre Arts at American River College who has directed Kipuke in several productions. “He takes initiative. He is very, very humble. I know he can be a strong leader, but what he shows us is that he can follow very well ... He will give me all he’s got.”

It was Kipuke’s involvement in the arts that led to his first elected position at American River College: he was voted president of the Theatre Arts Club.

Then, in 2011, he was elected vice president of the Associated Student Body at American River College, a campus of more than 23,000 students. While serving as vice president, he was also appointed as director of activities for the campus Clubs and Events Board. That same year, he was elected vice president of the Black Caucus of California Community Colleges.

A year later, in 2012, Kipuke launched a campaign for student trustee but later withdrew for personal reasons. Earlier this year, he decided to run again – and won – and his one-year term began in June. In addition to attending monthly Los Rios board meetings, Kipuke also chairs the District’s Student Advisory Committee, which comprises the student Senate presidents of the four colleges.

In his current role, “I kind of help facilitate the dialogue” between those campus student leaders, the District administration and his fellow Trustees. “It’s more of an outreach position. That’s what I’ve always wanted ... The role is really supposed to be more of an ear than a mouthpiece.”

And those who have witnessed Kipuke in action attest to his listening skills.

“I think he’s actually a very reflective individual, which is exciting to see,” said Genevieve Siwabessy, the student life supervisor at Folsom Lake College who also advises the districtwide Student Advisory Committee. “You can definitely have a conversation with him and he will take it into consideration and take everyone’s interests into consideration and come to a decision or some other commentary based on everyone’s input.”

As for Kipuke’s commitment, Siwabessy added, “He definitely has the best interests of the District at heart when he makes a decision. He is very interested in service rather than just bringing forward issues. I think that’s something the student leaders need to be reminded of. They’re here to serve. They’re here to represent the students.”

About Los Rios

The Los Rios Community College District is one of the nation's most respected learning institutions and the second-largest community college district in California, serving the greater Sacramento region. Los Rios includes: American River, Cosumnes River, Folsom Lake and Sacramento City colleges; five major education and outreach centers; and specialized workforce and economic development programs for regional businesses, governments and organizations. Los Rios colleges offer AA/AS degrees, certificates and transfer-education opportunities in more than 70 career fields. Nearly 77,000 students are enrolled in the four colleges. For more information, go to www.losrios.edu.