

Den Ouden

A College of the Redwoods Success Story



As CEO of Humboldt Independent Practice Association (IPA), recent College of the Redwoods graduate Rosemary Den Ouden is responsible for a complicated organization. The IPA's 40 plus employees provide administrative, claims processing and medical management services for health plans like Anthem Blue Cross and the Blue Lake Rancheria while also providing primary services care through the Priority Care Center. In addition, the IPA initiates and manages community programs that enhance public health and promote access to quality care. Rosemary didn't need a college degree to get or keep this challenging position, but she spent years attending College of the Redwoods and obtained her AA degree anyway.

Coming to Humboldt

Den Ouden grew up in the Sierra Foothills where she met and married her high school sweetheart, Derek Den Ouden. After starting a family, in 1998 the young couple decided they were ready for a change and moved to Humboldt County. The area offered a friendly small-town atmosphere, proximity to the coast and inland forests. They found a house on Trinity River in Willow Creek, where they would live for the next 15 years.

Derek Den Ouden found employment with a woodworking company and Rosemary put the Certified Nursing Assistant Certificate she had earned through her high school's Regional Occupational Program to use at St. Joseph (now Providence) Hospital in Eureka.

Rosemary had always dreamed of becoming a nurse, but the demands of working in the medical field and raising a busy family proved too much and she suspended her formal education. Over the years she worked in administration as well as direct patient care at various hospital systems and physician practices. Eventually weary of the long commute from Willow Creek to Eureka, she took a job at the medical clinic in Willow Creek, which was then run by St. Joseph's. After working for a year in medical records, she took on more responsibilities and in 2001 Rosemary became the clinic's site administrator. Over the next nine years she also managed the facility's transition to a satellite for Open Door Community Health.

In 2010, the IPA advertised for a chief operating officer (COO). Rosemary did not hold a college degree but knew her fifteen years in the medical field had built the skill set the IPA was looking for. The IPA agreed. For the next nine years, Rosemary supervised day to day operations and worked under Martin Love, CEO of the IPA (and later NCHIIN, the IPA's non-profit North Coast health Improvement and Information Network) to design and implement policies and programs that furthered the IPA's mission and goals.

Den Ouden excelled at her job, but Martin Love encouraged her to go back to school. "He thought it would be helpful to broaden my understanding of business concepts. I had no formal accounting training. No business law, etc." She also saw going back to CR as an opportunity for personal growth and in 2012 Rosemary enrolled at College of the Redwoods. Over the next ten years she "chipped away" at her general education requirements a class or two a semester while working full time and commuting to work from Willow Creek. "I took everything online," she remembered. "It was the only way could do it because I just couldn't take time away from work and family to attend classes on campus."

Rosemary focused on her general education but maintained a business focus that included practical classes relevant to her job. "Martin [Love] encouraged me to take accounting classes and it took every ounce of fortitude to get through

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them. I hated it," she admitted, while acknowledging that the instruction helped her better understand the IPA's financial structure.

"I was also fortunate that I wasn't working toward a degree so I could get a better job, so while I often selected classes that applied to my role at the IPA, I also took classes I was personally interested in. I wanted to walk away with something and not just check the boxes." While taking only a class or two a semester was a practical time management decision, she said the slower pace also helped her get more out of each experience.

"So many classes needed for your general education have nothing to do with work but can be transformational," she observed. A class on death and dying while she was in the midst of losing a family member, for example, offered key insights. "That class really helped me support my family and understand my own process through our loss and grief," she said. Anthropology, she added, has helped her understand how to "interact better with humans."

2010- IPA

In January of 2019, while still working on her AA degree at College of the Redwoods, Rosemary became the CEO of the IPA and NCHIIN. She is responsible for ensuring that IPA members access the care they need and running the IPA's day to day operations while also managing the long-term sustainability of the organization. As the head of NCHIIN, Rosemary also supports programs that facilitate the exchange of health care information, increase community access to services and support better health outcomes. In addition, the IPA also manages the student health center at College of the Redwoods and has established wellness centers at multiple Humboldt County Middle and high schools.

In 2022, Rosemary graduated from College of the Redwoods with an AA degree. "I didn't need to further my education to build my career," she said. "But it absolutely enhanced my knowledge base. It is just great that CR has so many classes and offers flexibility for young parents or those working full time. For many, realistically, College of the Redwoods offers the best way to achieve your goals."