CABRILLO COLLEGE

By TODD GUILD

Jiaoqiao Hine (right) of the HuBei Province of China and Xiaoyan Huang of the Canton Province prepare to enter the Cabrillo College commencement ceremony.

People should never give up their dreams ... Life can be a struggle, but in the end it’s all worth it.

— Ana Mendoza Hernandez

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to methamphetamine and she became a victim of domestic violence.

"It was really, really hard," she said. "Sometimes I didn’t have enough money to get to school. But I was consistent, I had goals and my daughter was my motivation to keep moving ahead."

To help pay her way through UCSC, she has received the prestigious Pfister Scholarship, the Soroptimist “Live Your Dreams” award, Soroptimist Region awards and the CAP transfer scholarship.

"People should never give up their dreams," Mendoza said. "Life can be a struggle, but in the end it’s all worth it."

In his early high school days, Ismael Medina had a third-grade reading level and admits that a life of cutting classes and associating with the wrong crowd nearly landed him in juvenile hall.

"A lot of people I hung out with didn’t believe in education," he said.

Medina was born in Watsonville in 1984 to parents who had recently immigrated. His mother from Jalisco (she worked in the cannery and agricultural industries), and his father from Michoacan worked construction.

The turning point came during a conference when he overheard a teacher tell another that Medina was a "lost cause."

He said he made up his mind that he would prove them wrong.

The first step was making up for lost academic time, which he did with Cabrillo College’s Digital Bridge Academy, a 13-year-old program designed for students who struggle in high school and considered "under-prepared" for college.

And he focused on boosting his reading skills, starting with the basics such as Mother Goose and Dr. Seuss. Those were a segue into Steinbeck, Lord of the Rings, Conan the Barbarian and other classics.

Medina dropped out of school when he was 16 to work at Home Depot and Circuit City, where he discovered a knack for computers. He graduated from Watsonville High School in 2003.

Medina then attended Cabrillo, where he joined the college’s music program. There, he helped form the college’s Music and Technology Recording Arts Club for aspiring recording engineers.

"My ultimate goal was to graduate from college," he said.

He said the major gave him organizational skills and allowed him to work with a diverse group of people.

"It was a positive turning point," he said of deciding on the major.

Medina is now transferring to CSU Monterey Bay, where he plans to major in recording technology. He said he hopes to record music, teach and inspire young people.

When asked his advice for young people facing the same difficulties, Medina was quick to answer.

"I would tell them never to give up," he said. "Everyone has the right to choose what to do. Never give up and stay focused on what you want."