



## CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY IRVINE HONORS DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI

*Xavria Schwarz Named Alumna of the Year;  
Erik Rees Receives Distinguished Service Award*

IRVINE, Calif. – Feb. XX, 2016 – [Concordia University Irvine](#) (CUI) today announced that **Xavria Schwarz** and **Erik Rees**, were selected as the recipients of the prestigious *Alumnus of the Year Award* and *Distinguished Service Award*, respectively.

The *Alumnus of the Year Award* is given annually to an individual who is respected as an exceptional contributor and authority in his or her professional discipline and who has demonstrated outstanding qualities of character and leadership. The *Distinguished Service Award* is presented to an individual based on significant contributions through service to his or her community, church, school and/or alma mater. Schwarz and Rees were bestowed with the 2016 Alumni Awards of Distinction at CUI's Homecoming festivities held on Saturday, January 30, 2016.

"Xavria and Erik demonstrate the values and leadership of Concordia University alumni—service, compassion and faith," said CUI Interim Director of Alumni Relations Mike Bergler of Concordia University Irvine. "Xavria has had a tremendous career in Lutheran education, not only at her own school, but serving as a leader and mentor for others in the Pacific Southwest. For the *Distinguished Service Award* we couldn't think of a person more deserving. Erik has risen above difficult circumstances to increase awareness for pediatric cancer and inspire countless others to 'Never Give Up.'"

**Xavria Schwarz**, of San Diego, class of 1996, is the principal at Christ Lutheran School in La Mesa, Calif. Under her leadership, she has played a pivotal role in funding and building a state-of-the-art kindergarten through eighth grade school facility, and led the school through key staffing and enrollment changes. In addition, she launched the school's *Gifts of Grace Gala*, an annual fundraiser that has generated over a half-million dollars in revenue. Schwarz has received a number of distinctions throughout her career including: Pacific Southwest District's Administrator of the Year and in 2011 completed the Van Lunen Executive Management in Christian Schools fellowship. She served the Pacific Southwest District in several leadership capacities including president of Lutheran Educators Conference and serving on the Administrators' Conference committee.



“I am humbled and honored to receive this distinction from Concordia University Irvine,” said Schwarz, “Concordia played a pivotal role in my life and my career in education, equipping me to be a faithful disciple of Jesus and a passionate school leader.”

**Erik Rees**, of Rancho Santa Margarita, class of 1992, formed the Jessie Rees Foundation in 2011 in honor of his late daughter and has functioned as Chairman of the Board to ensure that children fighting cancer have the support and resources they need to “Never Ever Give Up.” He is author of his newest book *Never Ever Give Up: The Inspiring Story of Jessie and her JoyJars*. Under his leadership, the Jessie Rees Foundation has raised over \$4 million dollars to care for children impacted by cancer and their families. The Foundation has also stuffed and sent 123,000 JoyJars to children fighting cancer worldwide. Today, many groups and individuals, including CUI’s swim team, volunteer to stuff JoyJars at the Joy Factory in Irvine. Jars, packed with toys, go to hospitals, Ronald McDonald houses or private homes in all 50 states and 29 countries. Last October, in partnership with the Jessie Rees Foundation, CUI hosted “The Simplest JOYS,” an art exhibit by artist Diana Mordin, who created 30 digital portraits of kids who fought or are still battling cancer.



Commenting on his experience at Concordia, Rees noted, “I really wanted something more intimate where I wasn’t just a Social Security number sitting among four hundred students in lecture. Concordia was an amazing experience for me and I’ll always be grateful for my time there.”

## **ABOUT CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY IRVINE**

[Concordia University Irvine](#) (CUI) prepares students for their vocations—their calling in life. Concordia offers undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral programs in education, nursing, theology, business, and athletic administration. CUI’s undergraduate program is distinctive because of its nationally recognized core curriculum, [Enduring Questions & Ideas](#), and its [Lutheran](#) heritage that provides a thoughtful and caring Christian community that lives out the theology of ["Grace Alone. Faith Alone."](#) Concordia is a *U.S. News* Top Tier Regional University and has been named by *The Chronicle of Higher Education* as one of the fastest growing private nonprofit master's institutions. CUI enrolls over 4,000 students annually and is in year two of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division II Membership Process.

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