

'Ambassadors of Goodwill'

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PVCC's Dr. Dina Preston-Ortiz tours across the world with band

Photo courtesy of The Dina Preston Band

Spectators dance as The Dina Preston Band performs "The Twist" at Kiribati Teachers College in Tarawa, Kiribati in July 2016.

[Connor Dziawura](#), Editor-in-Chief, Puma Press
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Dr. Dina Preston-Ortiz has been teaching at Paradise Valley Community College for nearly 15 years, but despite her role in the school's business department, she has always had an affinity for music.



Outside of her work at PVCC, Preston-Ortiz is the vocalist of the Dina Preston Band, with whom she has performed for troops and other countries over the years, most recently with a trip to Fiji and Kiribati on behalf of the U.S. Embassy Suva.

While her music has brought her across the globe, Preston-Ortiz's music career had humble beginnings.

After moving from her hometown of Phoenix to San Francisco in December 1980, she began her studies at San Francisco City College while also performing as a street musician.

"I actually started as a street musician on San Francisco's Fisherman's Wharf," she said. "I used to play outside Ripley's Believe It Or Not."

After several years in San Francisco, she moved to San Diego around 1983, where she found success fronting the Dina Preston Band.

While Preston-Ortiz started the Dina Preston Band when she was just 19 years old, it was 1989 when the band reached its current incarnation. After hiring guitarist Don Ortiz that year, the two eventually fell in love and married.

After several years performing for corporate events, the Dina Preston Band was invited by Armed Forces Entertainment (AFE) to perform for the troops during Operation Desert Storm. It was this trip that took them across the world, experiencing Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Fujairah, Diego Garcia and Japan for the first time. From there, they continued to impress, receiving invitations to perform across the world on the behalf of AFE and many different U.S. Embassies.

"We just got a reputation of being really excellent musicians, but also being very professional," said Preston-Ortiz.

During this time, Preston-Ortiz was a full time musician, touring two-to-three times yearly with her band and running DEO Records & Productions, which operates to this day as DEO Entertainment Group.

While the band got their start touring the world in the 90s, it wasn't until 2007 that they embarked on their first strictly U.S. Embassy tour to Armenia and Azerbaijan.

"They brought us over as a cultural exchange as a way to use music to help the two countries come together in some way," she said of the tour.

The most recent of these trips was a historic tour of Fiji and Kiribati on behalf of the U.S. Embassy Suva; the Dina Preston Band is the first American band to perform on the island of Kiribati.

During this tour, which began at the end of June, the band kept busy. They performed two shows in Nadi, Fiji, as well as a July 4 show at the U.S. Embassy Suva for and hosted by Ambassador Judith Beth Cefkin and a large show at Sukuna Park in the center of Suva, Fiji.

The trip continued in Kiribati, where the band performed at Kiribati Teachers College and the Betio Sports Complex in Tarawa, Kiribati. However, the band wasn't limited strictly to performances; Preston-Ortiz also offered business and entrepreneurship workshops to the locals.

"I think the last trip—Kiribati—was actually probably one of the trips that has really stood out. Really, really stood out," she said. "It was almost like going back in some ways—going back to very basics."

Musically, the Dina Preston Band refer to themselves as "five bands in one," performing originals and covers ranging from rock to blues, country, Motown and even jazz.

"We're there to represent American music and the Southwest, so often they bring us over as a country band," she said, adding, "Truly we're more a country-rock band; although, we do play traditional country."

Despite their country roots, they continue to diversify their eclectic range of genres.

"We're gonna be a dance band that people can come and dance to and have a good time," she explained.

While Preston-Ortiz is now chair of PVCC's Business & Information Technology Division, this path came unexpectedly to her.

"It was an accident," she said.

While she had received her MBA at the University of Phoenix in the mid-90s and had taught with them immediately following, it was 1998 when her brother, Dr. David Rubi, who teaches in PVCC's Spanish Department, suggested she teach some classes at PVCC. She loved the experience and the rest is history.

But even with her important position at PVCC, Preston-Ortiz and her band continue to inspire across the world.

"We're very good about reaching out and getting to know our audience," she said. "From an embassy standpoint, we're really there to exchange goodwill."

This quote rings especially true, with famed Los Angeles radio host Johnny Grant once naming the band "Ambassadors of Goodwill."

"It's really not about us," said Preston-Ortiz. "We're the instruments; we're the tool; we're the vehicle; but it's really about them. It's really about how our music creates relationships...It's about bringing a memory to them. And of course, in return, they create a memory for us, too. So, it's really a pretty cool exchange. It's been a blessed life, it



really has. We've been very fortunate."