Going Strong in a tough time. At a time when the University faces ongoing drastic cutbacks, our loyal supporters—donors, volunteers, and University staff members—continue to enable Smith Renaissance to thrive despite the challenges. We entered our eleventh year with sixty-three Collegiate Fellows, down slightly from last year’s high of sixty-six, bringing to one hundred and seventy-seven the total number of students served since our 1999 start, when we had just three.

Given the dismal national statistics for students like ours who enter college, how do ours fare? Our long-time financial aid advisor and SRS board member Cheryl Perazzo, who tracks our retention and graduation rates, reports that as of the end of last year eighty-four percent of our SRS students stayed in school and graduated, a significantly better rate than that of the UCSC student body as a whole, and close to the same rate as that at UC, Berkeley. Many have gone on to good graduate and professional schools or have launched themselves professionally.

Professor Gary Miles, who created and coordinates our home-grown mentoring program, one of the key success factors, reports that within a month of the start of the school year all thirty students who have requested mentors had been matched.

This year we aim to offer SRS membership to former foster youths currently attending Cabrillo College who aspire to transfer to UCSC. With the support of Dennis Bailey, Cabrillo’s new student affairs vice president, and a couple of committed Cabrillo staff members, we expect to launch a successful pilot by mid-year.

Alameda County Preview Day pioneer keeps on keeping on. Over the years our Collegiate Fellows have hosted groups of pre-college foster youths, often coinciding with UCSC’s Preview Day, and including
admission and financial aid overviews. Peggy Martin, wife of UCSC alumnus Demian Martin and a long-time volunteer with Alameda County’s Independent Life Skills Program (ILSP) for foster kids who will be on their own at eighteen, is a dedicated champion. For the last six years she has teamed with Alameda ILSP training director Robert Jemerson, to make sure that their kids get a chance to show up. This year they brought sixteen, including a young mother with three kids of her own.

Says Peggy Martin, “Even though most will never go to UCSC, this is valuable because students who have never thought about college or been on a college campus get to see college as a way of life that is open to them and hear that there is a way they can afford it. They get to see that people like them are in college and thriving, even if it is a struggle.

Many are concerned about homelessness after high school; this gives them a chance to experience residential life, to get a sense of community, to see people they can count on.”

Ten-year anniversary celebration. The Stevenson College Fireside Lounge was filled to capacity on a beautiful, bright Sunday last April when we celebrated our ten year anniversary. Chancellor George Blumenthal and his wife, Professor Kelly Weisberg, joined current and former Smith students, mentors, volunteers, donors, and wonderful staff from throughout the University who support our work to celebrate our collective success. Cheryl Perazzo and Gary Miles received well-deserved Founder’s Awards to salute their extraordinary service almost from the beginning. Smith graduate Scott Page, who is slated to receive next spring his PhD in electrical engineering from MIT, flew out from Cambridge to present the award to Gary, his Smith mentor and now a friend for life.

Pioneer spirit lives. UC president Clark Kerr and founding Chancellor Dean McHenry imagined that to make UCSC’s pioneering small-college model sustainable they would need private funds. That spirit
guides SRS. Almost entirely a volunteer effort, we run by design a lean operation. However, as mentor coordinator Gary Miles will tell you, we’ve grown to a point where it would be extremely difficult to do what we do without the amazing service of Amy Hamel, our part-time student advisor and only paid staff.

When it became clear last year that the University would be unable to fund this position, some of you rallied to help solve the problem. Cowell Pioneer, long-time Smith supporter, and UCSC Foundation board member Mike Graydon, a manager with the Operating Engineers union pension plan in Los Angeles, put the icing on the cake when he showed up at our ten-year celebration with a $12,000 check from Operating Engineers Local #12 Charity Golf Outing. With more recent help of others, including two small grants from the David Gold Foundation and the Stuart Foundation, we are home free for another year.

Smithies pilot middle school program. Even before Colette Hottinger transferred from community college in Alameda she dreamed of starting something for middle school foster kids. Partnering with fellow junior, Sierra Reid-Hoffman and Smith co-founder, Mary Male, last spring she saw her dream become real with the launch of Foster Youth Initiative (F.Y.I.). Collaborating with Santa Cruz County Court-Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), their mission is to give young kids a fun taste of being together with a low-key, you-can-do-this message about college in the background.

Starting modestly, with a few girls and their CASAs, they keep it simple. The first time out they ate pizza under a tree in Capitola, followed by an ice-breaking water fight in the Monterey Bay. They have brought kids to the campus to play volleyball and eat in a dining hall, taken them berry picking in Watsonville, and visited an Ethiopian restaurant in San Jose to celebrate the heritage of one of the girls. On the drawing board this year: a visit to Long Marine Lab, a scavenger hunt at McHenry Library, arts and crafts and creative writing workshops, a movie outing, witness a May Day action, and a picnic or beach trip to celebrate the end of the school year. CASA Judy Thibodeau is enthusiastic, “These little girls don’t have role models. It’s magical to watch them together with the UCSC students.”

Says Colette, “We want to start early. When I was in high school I hit a roadblock and I didn’t think college was an option for me. I wish I had been exposed to it.
before I got busy being a teenager.” Adds Sierra, “We want to normalize the expectation of college earlier, to tell them ‘you can do something with yourself’, to let them know that there is more to life than court dates.”

Old joins new. Deutron Kebebew, our first student leader, prepared for a career in electrical engineering. When he graduated in 2003 he never imagined that over the next six years he would make his living instead working with Santa Cruz foster kids and leading a research team on the adverse effects of missing fathers.

Now serving as our board development lead, he also keeps alive an annual College Camp that he initiated in 2004. High school foster youths stay in a dorm for two nights, attend classes with Collegiate Fellows, and learn the nitty-gritty of the why and how of a college education. Initially limited to Santa Cruz County youths, this year Deutron decided to experiment by opening it to three of Mr. Jemerson’s Alameda high schoolers. After attending Cabrillo, one of his original campers is now a UCSC student. Another attends Cabrillo with plans to transfer to San Francisco State.

When he isn’t busy with all that, he now serves as Senior Fellow advisor to our current student leaders.

For more information on the Smith Renaissance Society, please contact: Services for Transfer and Re-Entry Students (STARS), (831) 459-4968, smithsociety@ucsc.edu, or visit our web site at www.smithsociety.ucsc.edu.