

Sonia Batra Offers College Advice

By SUE PASCOE
Editor

Dr. R. Sonia Batra, a 1991 Palisades High graduate, Harvard graduate and Rhodes Scholar, was the inaugural speaker for the newly formed Roads to Your Future Club at PaliHi.

"Work hard and go for it," she told the nearly 100 students assembled in Gilbert Hall during lunchtime on February 3. "What you do in this short window of your life plays out for your future. It will have an impact on every opportunity, and has a direct impact on your life."

"These opportunities come before you're ready for them," Batra said.

While at Pali, "I was on the AcaDec team with Mama G [famed teacher Rose Gilbert]. We won City and took second in state," Batra said. "We wanted to go to Nationals so badly because Mama G told us if we made it, she'd take us to Hawaii."

The multi-talented Batra played piano in a.m. orchestra with Joel Lish and flute in the marching band—both a continuation of her musical career at Paul Revere under

Stewart Rupp.

She also was the 1991 valedictorian. A student asked her GPA. "I think it was a 4.0, but that was before they were weighted," Batra said.

One student wanted to know if there was some subject that was hard for her. "Golf. I was not good with it and it was a P.E. requirement." Another student asked her least favorite class. "Life skills and health. I sat there thinking this was a complete waste of my time."

After PaliHi, Batra attended Harvard University, where she was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. "When I went to Harvard I was in a class with students who had gone to some of the most elite private schools in the country, but I felt prepared because of the great teachers I had here."

"What you need for your future is obtainable here," Batra said. "It is a question of dedication, passion and utilizing the platform to go for it. Where you go to college does make a difference."

Graduating after only three years at Harvard with a dual degree in history and biochemistry, she was nominated to be a Rhodes Scholar and received one of only 32 scholarship given annually in the United States. Academic excellence, personal energy, ambition and ability to work with others and to achieve goals are necessary requirements in order to earn a scholarship to Oxford, with tuition, transportation costs and a stipend provided for one to three years.

"My parents are immigrants from India and they were not pleased I was applying," Batra said. "They are doctors and thought I should start working."

Batra graduated from Oxford in 1996 with a master's degree in genetics and then entered Harvard Medical School, where she also earned a master's degree in public health in 2000. Her internship, residency and chief residency in dermatology was at Stanford.

"I decided on dermatology because of the continuum—you treat men and women and all ages. My oldest patient is 107 years old and I treat newborns," Batra said. "There are few fields left in medicine that



Dr. R. Sonia Batra

are multi-generational." She also told students she likes performing surgery.

After Stanford, Batra became head of dermatology at the City of Hope National Medical Center in Duarte in 2005. Since she grew up near Kenter Canyon School, she and her husband Sameer Malhotra, a urologist, bought a home about a mile from where Batra grew up.

In 2007, she went into private practice and now has a staff of 12 at her office in Santa Monica. "I like running the show," Batra told students. "Some of my patients were my former high school teachers." She is also a clinical assistant professor of dermatology at USC Keck School of Medicine.

A student asked Batra if there was anything she would change if she looked back. "I wish there were some things I hadn't given up so early," she said. "At Oxford, I played soccer; I wish I had held onto that a little more tightly. But then there's not time to do everything."

The couple have two children: Tara, 7, and Shaun, 5, who attend Kenter Canyon, their mother's old school.

Freshman class president Amir Ebtehadj,

who with the help of the Pacific Palisades Optimist Club, has brought this highly successful Revere Middle School speaker program to PaliHi, said: "It was important to bring the program here because it is a great resource to hear successful stories, meet the professionals, and most importantly to have students gain crucial facts and tips about college and ultimately the real world. After today's presentation, I can say that the program is off to great start."

The March speaker is architect Rich Wilken, also a Palisades High School alumnus.



One enthusiastic PaliHi student took a selfie with the doctor.



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