

Head of UCSC falls to death

UCSC - Faculty
SUICIDE SUSPECTED;
EMBATTLED CHANCELLOR
WAS ACADEMIC PIONEER

By Julie Sevens Lyons, *sjm*
Becky Bartindale and John Woolfolk

Mercury News *6-25-00*

✓ Denice-Dee Denton, chancellor of the University of California-Santa Cruz, apparently jumped to her death Saturday morning from the 44th floor of a San Francisco building where she shared an apartment with her partner.

Denton, 46, landed on the roof of the building's parking structure, said San Francisco police Sgt. Neville Gittens. He was unsure if she had left behind a note. The medical examiner's office is investigating the death as a suicide.

Sources said Denton had retreated from the campus in the weeks before her death, canceling appointments and clearing her calendar. She had sought a medical leave.

San Francisco police said Denton's body was reported at 8:17 a.m. outside the Paramount apartments, where her partner, Gretchen Kalonji, lives. The luxury rentals are

See **DENTON**, Page 21A



Denton

The chancellor was absent from university commencement exercises earlier this month.

DENTON | Chancellor was pioneer, championing women in science

Continued from Page 1A

billed as the "tallest apartment for rent in San Francisco" and are located on Mission Street at Third, across from the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Kalonji was in Washington, D.C., at the time of Denton's death and was heading back to San Francisco, a UC spokesman said.

"Nobody observed her jump," said a San Francisco police source, who said the person who reported her body had called police from the nearby Argent Hotel.

UC officials struggled Saturday to understand what was behind her death. Spokesman Michael Reese said there were more questions than answers and that officials were trying to put the pieces together.

"Her tragic passing is a tremendous loss for the entire University of California family," UC President Robert C. Dynes said in a written statement. "She was a person of enthusiasm, of big ideas, of tremendous energy, and of great promise."

National reputation

She was the first woman in the nation to lead an engineering college at a major university, and was the youngest among UC's 10 chancellors. She had four electrical engineering degrees from Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She made a national name for herself for her advocacy of women in science and engineering and was a champion of diversity. To emphasize that point, she spoke in several languages at her Santa Cruz investiture.

Denton made headlines last year when she confronted Harvard President Larry Summers at a private symposium where he suggested that women didn't have the same aptitude for science and math as men. Last month, she won a prestigious national award, the 2006 Maria Mitchell Women in Science Award, for her work advancing opportunities for women and girls in science.

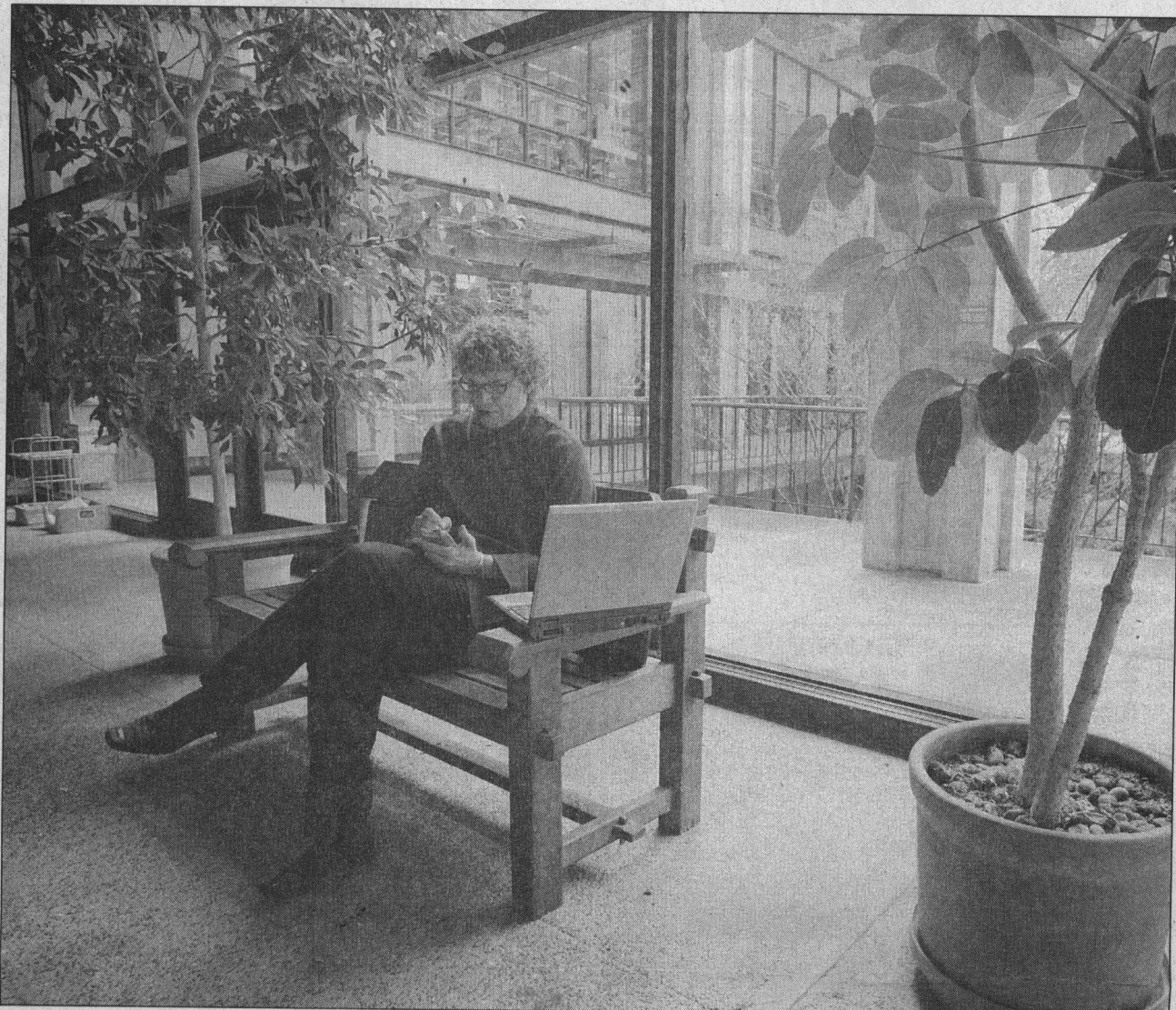
But Denton had been under fire almost since the day she was named to the Santa Cruz post in December 2004 at a salary of \$275,000.

The UC system did not initially reveal it had also hired her partner, Kalonji, to a newly created position in the UC Office of the President that paid a \$192,000 annual salary, which angered employee unions. Kalonji, an engineering professor, came with Denton from the University of Washington. Then Denton's name surfaced in a UC executive compensation scandal because she received benefits that weren't disclosed. The openly gay leader came under fire for adding a \$30,000 dog run as part of \$600,000 in renovations to the chancellor's home on the UC campus.

Denton was noticeably absent from university commencement exercises earlier this month, and backed out at the last minute of a dinner she was supposed to host for graduation speaker astronaut Steven Hawley, a UC-Santa Cruz alum.

Denton had taken a medical leave beginning June 15. "She said she would be away and on medical leave for a short period of time," said Jim Burns, a UC-Santa Cruz spokesman. "She was expected back early this week."

"We're all very, very sad that a person of such substance had this demise," said UC-Santa Cruz chemistry Professor Eugene Switkes, who served on the campus search committee that recommended Denton. "I thought she was a person of integrity and passion. The things she has done



KAREN T. BORCHERS — MERCURY NEWS ARCHIVES

Denice Dee Denton took over as UC-Santa Cruz chancellor in 2005. She was the first woman to lead an engineering college at a major U.S. university. She had a national reputation for advocacy of women in science and engineering and diversity.

for women in science and education and diversity have been wonderful."

Switkes said he had seen Denton on two recent occasions and said the chancellor was cordial and "seemed herself."

David Kliger, who as provost is Denton's second in command, called it "a tremendous loss."

"She led the campus with clear statements of the importance in transforming lives and in creating opportunities for all," Kliger said in a statement.

Some of those who knew her said the nearly constant criticism had taken a toll.

She had been recently ridiculed by area cartoonists. And on campus, she had been the target of many protests, students said, with protesters rallying against everything from employee wages at the school to workplace conditions in foreign countries where UC apparel is made.

Denton had called campus police a few times after protesters camped out on the grounds around her house, said Santa Cruz City Councilman Mike Rotkin, a lecturer at the school.

Home vandalized

A picture window at her university home had also been broken.

"I don't think she was worried or afraid about a particular person," he said, "but I think she felt personally threatened by it."

After one recent event in which students surrounded her car and performed a five-minute play in support of workers and minority students, she seemed to grow increasingly fearful, said Josh Sonnenfeld, a student organizer.

"She or the university hired a security guard to be outside her campus home 24/7. She hired a body-

guard-type figure to go around with her everywhere," he said.

Students were aware that it wasn't business as usual for Denton, he added.

"I heard rumors that she was possibly mentally unstable and very depressed," he said. "People were saying she wasn't feeling very good."

Denton was appointed by the UC Regents as the ninth chancellor of UC-Santa Cruz, and assumed office on Feb. 14, 2005. She also was a professor of electrical engineering.

At the San Francisco apartment building, Raven Meadows, 49, said residents were talking about the suicide all day.

"They're saying, 'Who was it?' Most of all, they're horrified."

She said the building, which opened four years ago, has roof access for the tenants and also that the windows in the building, which has no balconies, open to the outside.

"Good god," she said quietly. "Good god."

On the UC-Santa Cruz campus, a woman who answered the door at Denton's University House residence Saturday afternoon told a reporter, "I can't talk to you." Nearby, several unopened newspapers were piled up on the driveway.

Not long after, a driver in a university pickup arrived and blocked the entrance to the driveway. A university police car followed soon after.

Maureen Catto, a university official who arrived on the scene, said relatives were gathered inside the home. She said they had no statement to make.

The normally bustling campus was quiet Saturday; no classes are in session. But those who were on campus said they were saddened by the news.

"I think it's really depressing. It's

DENICE DEE DENTON

TITLE: Chancellor of the University of California-Santa Cruz.

BORN: Aug. 27, 1959, in Texas.

CAREER: Dean of the College of Engineering at the University of Washington in Seattle, 1996-2005; electrical and computer engineering professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1987-1996.

EDUCATION: Bachelor's, master's and doctorate degrees in electrical engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

FAMILY: Partner for seven years is Gretchen Kalonji, the first woman to hold an endowed chair in the University of Washington's College of Engineering.

NATIONAL HONORS: Presidential Young Investigator Award from the National Science Foundation, 1987-1992; Presidential Award for Excellence in Science, Mathematics and Engineering Mentoring, 2004; Maria Mitchell Women in Science Award for her work advancing opportunities for women and girls in science, 2006.

sad. It's going to affect the entire campus," said Erin Ness, 22-year-old psychology major who had just graduated from UC-Santa Cruz last weekend.

"It's definitely going to be a big shock."

Mercury News Staff Writer Dan Reed contributed to this report.

Contact Julie Sevreus Lyons at jlyons@mercurynews.com or (408) 920-5989. Contact Becky Bartindale at bbartindale@mercurynews.com or (408) 920-5459.