

Spotlight troubled UCSC leader

PEERS SAY DENTON
STRUGGLED TO COPE
WITH HIGHER PROFILE

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Mercury News

UCSC Faculty As a stunned university community attempted to come to terms Sunday with the apparent suicide of University of California-Santa Cruz Chancellor Denice Denton, the reasons why she plunged to her death from the roof of a San Francisco skyscraper remained a mystery. *6/26/96*

But friends and colleagues said one thing was clear: Denton, a somewhat shy engineer who moved from Seattle to take the top UC-Santa Cruz job 16 months ago, had a difficult time adjusting to the high public profile and political pressures of her new assignment.

Although an accomplished scientist, Denton seemed to take personally many of the criticisms that are inherent with the job.

"When you are a chancellor, particularly in a relatively small community like Santa Cruz, you are the show in town," said Karl Pister, UC-Santa Cruz chancellor from 1991 to 1996. "Everything that happens makes the news. You lose your private life."

Pister had known Denton since she was a graduate student two decades ago at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Both were engi-

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Denton

The chancellor's death Saturday is being treated as a suicide.

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neering deans when they came to UC-Santa Cruz. Pister had been dean of engineering at UC-Berkeley, and Denton at the University of Washington.

"Being a dean is a totally different job than being a chancellor," he said. "I had 40 years in the UC system, and that made a huge difference. Unfortunately, Denice came into the system without that experience, and that presented a lot of problems for her."

Pister said he was scheduled to have breakfast with Denton several weeks ago. But like many of her appointments this month, she canceled without explanation.

"Her death is a total shock," he said. "I was fairly close to her. I had no idea she suffered from acute depression, as she obviously did. I'm sorry she didn't get the help that she needed."

San Francisco police said Denton's body was reported at 8:17 a.m. Saturday outside the Paramount apartments where her partner, Gretchen Kalonji, lives. The luxury rentals on Mission Street at Third feature a 44th-story rooftop deck.

Officials at the San Francisco Medical Examiner's Office, who are treating the death as a suicide and leading the investigation, said Sunday an autopsy and toxicology tests will not be complete for about a week. San Francisco police spokesman Sgt. Neville Gittens would not confirm or deny reports that Denton's mother was in the apartment at the time of her death.

Liz Irwin, the campus spokeswoman, said Denton's legacy is the group of women



KAREN T. BORCHERS — MERCURY NEWS ARCHIVES

Denice Denton, talking with a student in February, left a legacy of encouraging women and people of color to pursue science, said Liz Irwin, a UC-Santa Cruz spokeswoman.

and people of color she encouraged to pursue science.

But almost from the moment she took the \$275,000-a-year job as UC-Santa Cruz's ninth leader, she faced turmoil.

The UC system did not initially reveal it had also hired Kalonji to a newly created position in the UC Office of the President that paid \$192,000 annually, which drew calls of nepotism from employee unions. Kalonji, an engineering professor, was Denton's romantic partner for nine years.

More recently, Denton's name surfaced in a UC executive compensation scandal because she received benefits that

weren't disclosed when she was hired. She also came under fire for adding a \$30,000 dog run as part of \$600,000 in renovations to the chancellor's campus home.

At the same time, Santa Cruz residents organized to try to fight the university's planned expansion to 21,000 students, student groups protested tuition increases, and conservative commentators criticized her vehemently after student protesters forced military recruiters to leave the campus during a job fair.

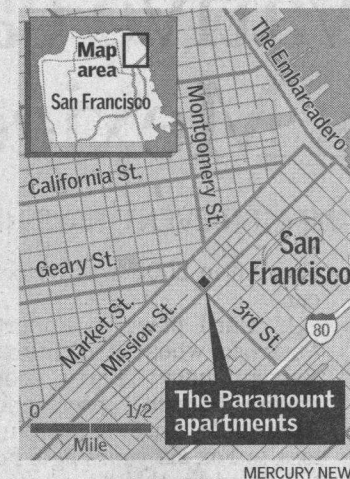
"In my personal opinion, there was a lot of unfair treatment," campus spokeswoman

Irwin said. She noted that Denton made it a point to meet with students at all 10 of UC-Santa Cruz's colleges, and regularly met with high school students.

Denton was engaging, cared about fair wages for the lowest-paid staff members, and was committed to improving campus diversity, said Tom Vani, vice chancellor for business and administrative services. But she wasn't a particularly charismatic leader, he said.

"I think she was a bit more reserved than other folks," Vani said. "But that didn't mean she was less engaged."

Some faculty members



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Friends and colleagues say Denice Denton, a somewhat shy engineer who moved from Seattle to Santa Cruz, had a difficult time adjusting to the high public profile and political pressures of being chancellor.

feared that Denton hadn't made the transition socially from being a science dean to being the figurehead on a major campus. John Wilkes, director of the UC-Santa Cruz Science Communication Program, said Denton didn't go out of her way to win people over.

"She didn't mingle with anybody," Wilkes said. "She would go straight to her office and close herself in."

Steve Thorsett, a member of the search committee that brought Denton to the campus and its dean of physical and biological sciences, said Denton spent her first year getting to know the campus and hiring

deans and vice chancellors. Her style stood in contrast with the magnetic personality of her predecessor, M.R.C. Greenwood, he added.

"I think people were used to seeing the chancellor more often than they saw Denice," he said.

Thorsett said that two weeks ago, at a meeting of the university foundation's board, things seemed to be moving well. "She was on message, she had a good sense of humor and a good sense of rapport with the trustees, and it really seemed like things were coming together," he said.

Right about that time, she went on a medical leave. The university has not disclosed why.

At the UC-Santa Cruz campus on Sunday, an American flag near McHenry Library flew at half-staff. In the driveway outside the chancellor's campus home, a local TV news truck was parked and a security guard told visitors that no family members were available to talk.

Students said they were notified via e-mail from campus administrators that Denton had died, although the notice provided few details.

"It must have been something pretty big," said John Slovacek, a junior. "She had fallen under a lot of criticism lately."

Because Denton had only been at UC-Santa Cruz for 16 months, students were just getting to know her, he said.

"A lot of people had never even seen the chancellor," Slovacek said.

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