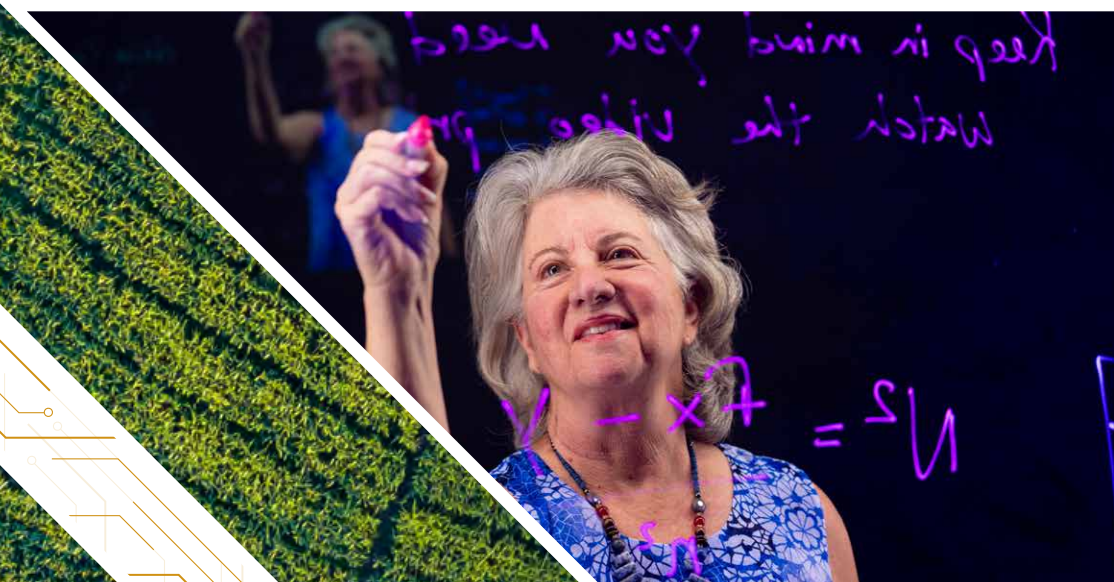




MERCED COLLEGE  ANNUAL REPORT 2022



# MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

**M**erced College is in the midst of developing an educational master plan that will guide our future growth and determine, to a large extent, what this great institution will look like five years from now.

We're also in the process of re-accreditation, which is a valuable opportunity to reflect on all the great things we've done and identify areas where we still have some work to do.

These are two critically important pieces of our identity as a college, and I for one am excited for both processes to unfold. But as excited as I am about the future—much of which you'll read about in this report—I am just as excited right now, today, about the present state of Merced College.

We are blessed to have absolutely incredible people at every level of our organization, in every department, at every location, doing every job. And this year, we're working harder than ever to keep every employee engaged and to help them find happiness in their lives and at work.

The science of happiness and the business case for joy tell us in great detail what our hearts already know—that choosing happiness and choosing to view the world through a positive lens has benefits that go far beyond feeling warm and fuzzy. Happiness isn't something we get to feel once we've become successful—it's something we must choose to feel if we are ever going to become successful at all.

When people feel engaged at work, the hard times don't seem so hard. Tasks and assignments become opportunities to serve and to learn. And the joy that comes from serving others leads us to work even harder—not because we have to, but because we want to.

We love serving our students, and we love our community. We love Merced College, and it shows in everything we do.

Sincerely,



Chris Vitelli, Ed.D.  
Superintendent/President





# FOUNDATION



From our annual State of the College address to a joyous graduation ceremony in front of a capacity crowd at Stadium '76, it was wonderful to see so much activity returning to our Merced College campuses in 2022. We have truly been feeling the love from our community!

Love was certainly at the heart of our largest recent gift, a \$1 million donation from four brothers to honor their late mother, Hermione Isakow. The gift will fund the creation of the Isakow Plaza, a beautiful new space near the front of our Merced campus.

We have been fortunate to receive several major gifts in recent years, including \$5 million from local farmer Raj Kahlon toward the new Agriculture and Industrial Technology Complex, which was unveiled at a ribbon cutting in September 2022.

As grateful as we are for these substantial gifts, we are just as grateful for the many community members who helped fund the renovation of our baseball team's clubhouse in honor of legendary coach Butch Hughes, which we celebrated in April 2022. We are grateful, too, for all the hundreds of Merced College employees who contribute through our employee giving program to support student-centered programs and activities.

Whether large or small, every gift to the Merced College Foundation goes directly to programs that benefit our students. As always, thank you for your generosity and your support, and go Blue Devils!

Sincerely,

**Jill Cunningham**  
 Vice President of External Relations  
 Executive Director of Merced College Foundation

*The Merced College Foundation is a 501(c)3 incorporated, tax-exempt non-profit overseen by a volunteer Board of Directors. Our tax ID number is 23-7385578*



## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Joe Doyland
- Mary Robinson
- Carmen Ramirez
- Emily Haden
- Steve Hobbs
- John Pedrozo
- Grey Roberts
- Kari Ross-May
- Vinton Thengvall
- Andre Urquidez
- Nanette Villegas
- Bud Wallace
- Cary Yanagi



# A MOTHER'S LEGACY

## ISAKOW PLAZA

### Brothers Give \$1M to Create New Plaza

Hermione Isakow loved the outdoors and the arts, and she instilled in her four sons a deep appreciation for education, discipline and family.

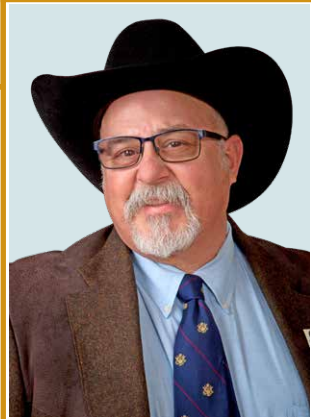
Now, her sons have chosen to honor her memory and her contributions to their lives through a \$1 million gift to fund the design and construction of the Hermione Isakow Plaza at Merced College.

The plaza, near the front of the college's Merced Campus, is envisioned as a welcoming space for the community and campus visitors, a gathering place for students and the campus community, a unique learning space for our the college's arts program, and an intimate outdoor location for events.

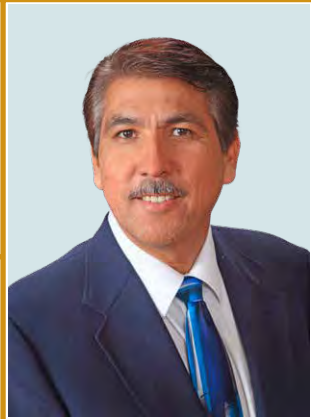
The centerpiece of the plaza will be a large sculpture of a Baobab tree, which will be illuminated from within at night. The Baobab carries great symbolic significance in Africa and is known as the "tree of life," because it can produce fruit and nectar year-round, even in very dry climates.

Construction is expected to be completed in time for the State of the College address in spring, and the family will be honored at the event.

# BOARD OF TRUSTEES



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Trustee



**Ryan Wang**  
Student Trustee

## “Students are our focus and we are known by their success”

The Merced College vision, mission, and core values were updated and approved by the Board of Trustees in December 2022.

### MISSION

At Merced College, students are our focus, and we are known by their success. We transform lives through education and workforce development.

### VISION

Enriching our community through educational experiences and support services:

- Degree/Certificate Programs
- Transfer
- Career Technical Education
- Workforce Training
- Lifelong Learning
- Basic Skills
- Community Engagement

Merced College promotes student success through equitable access, continuous quality improvement, and institutional effectiveness, all with a focus on student achievement.

### CORE VALUES

#### Student Engagement & Support

Merced College prioritizes student access and success. Here are a few ways in which we support our dedication to student access and success.

#### Trust & Communication

Merced College promotes an atmosphere of trust where communication and teamwork cultivate an environment rich for teaching and learning.

#### Innovation & Technology

Merced College utilizes agility, innovation, technology, and responsible risk-taking to anticipate the needs of the future.

#### Collaboration

Merced College actively engages with the campus community and community partners to respond to cultural, educational, economic, and technological needs.

#### Inclusivity

Merced College celebrates the diversity in our community by cultivating an inclusive and equitable college environment. We value the experiences of our diverse campus community and recognize that our collective identity is strengthened by all our lived experiences.

#### Well-Being & Happiness

Merced College fosters and values an environment supporting student and employee well-being, engagement, and happiness.

#### President’s Cabinet

Chris Vitelli, Ed.D., *Superintendent/President*

Karissa Morehouse, *Vice President of Instruction*

Michael McCandless, Ed.D., *Vice President of Student Services*

Joe Allison, *Vice President of Administrative Services*

Kelly Avila, *Vice President of Human Resources*

Jill Cunningham, *Vice President of External Relations/ Executive Director of Merced College Foundation*

Arlis Bortner, *Vice President of Information Technology Services*

#### Annual Report Staff

James Leonard, *Director of Communications and External Relations*

Anton Boyadjian, *Graphic Designer*

Dee Sigismund, Ph.D., *Dean of Institutional Effectiveness*

Juan Rodriguez, *Photography*

Frank Hassett, *Photography*

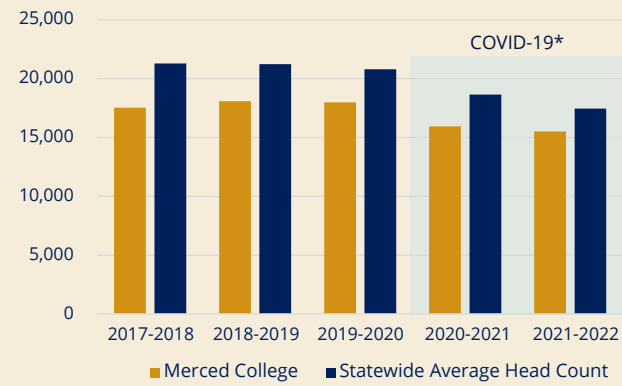
Luci Chavez, *Contributing Writer*

Printed by Merced College Print Services

# WHO OUR STUDENTS ARE

**TOTAL STUDENTS  
2021-2022  
15,506**

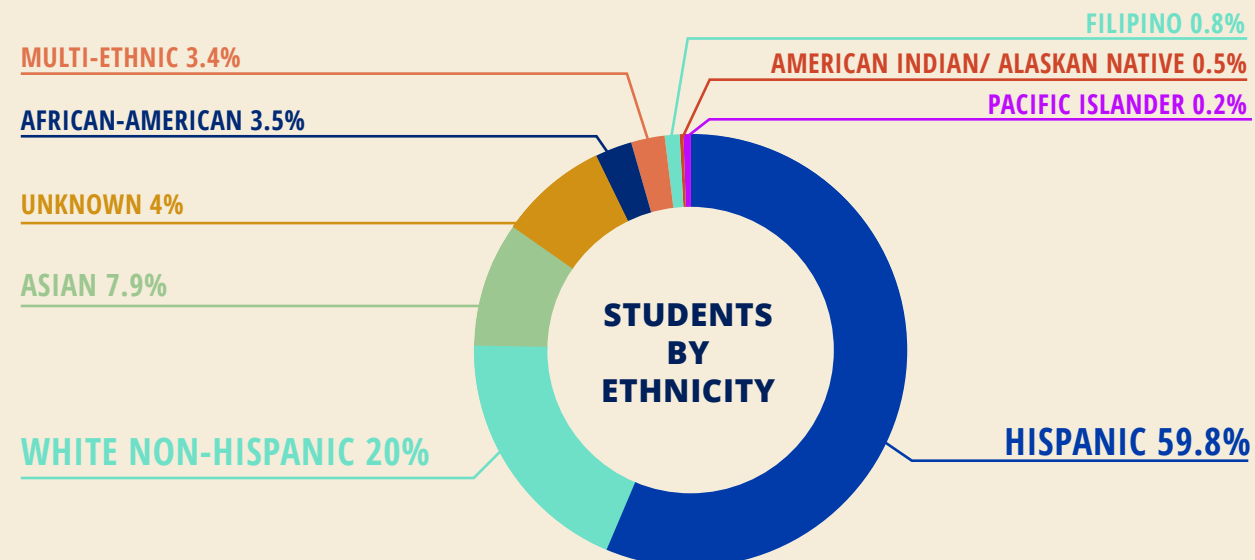
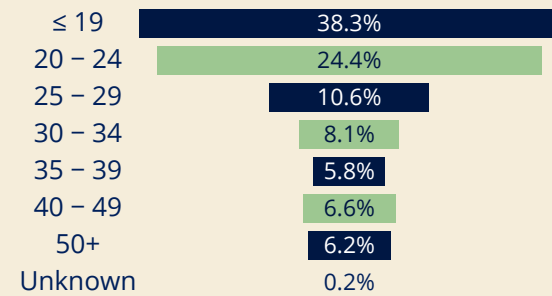
## 5 YEAR ENROLLMENT TRENDS



## GENDER



## AGE GROUPS



\*Statewide community college enrollment has declined since COVID-19.

SOURCE: [https://datamart.cccco.edu/students/student\\_term\\_annual\\_count.aspx](https://datamart.cccco.edu/students/student_term_annual_count.aspx)

# TOP 10 DEGREES & CERTIFICATES AWARDED IN 2021-2022

## TOTAL AWARDED:

**792** ASSOCIATE DEGREES  
**823** ASSOCIATE FOR TRANSFER  
**1,297** CERTIFICATES

CSU General Education Breadth (CT)	Certificate requiring 30 to < 60 units	746
Social and Behavioral Science (AA)	Associate in Arts (A.A.) Degree	240
Psychology for Transfer (AAT)	Associate in Arts for Transfer (A.A.-T) Degree	220
Psychology (AA)	Associate in Arts (A.A.) Degree	157
Business Administration (AST)	Associate in Science for Transfer (A.S.-T) Degree	107
Sociology for Transfer (AAT)	Associate in Arts for Transfer (A.A.-T) Degree	107
Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum (CT)	Certificate requiring 30 to < 60 units	99
Administration of Justice (AST)	Associate in Science for Transfer (A.S.-T) Degree	75
Health Sciences (AA)	Associate in Arts (A.A.) Degree	67
Elementary Teacher Education (AAT)	Associate in Arts for Transfer (A.A.-T) Degree	67

SOURCE: INTERNAL MC DATABASE COMPILED BY OIE

SOURCE: CSU STUDENT ORIGIN DASHBAORD / UC INFOCENTER; COMPILED BY OIE, EARLY-FALL 2022

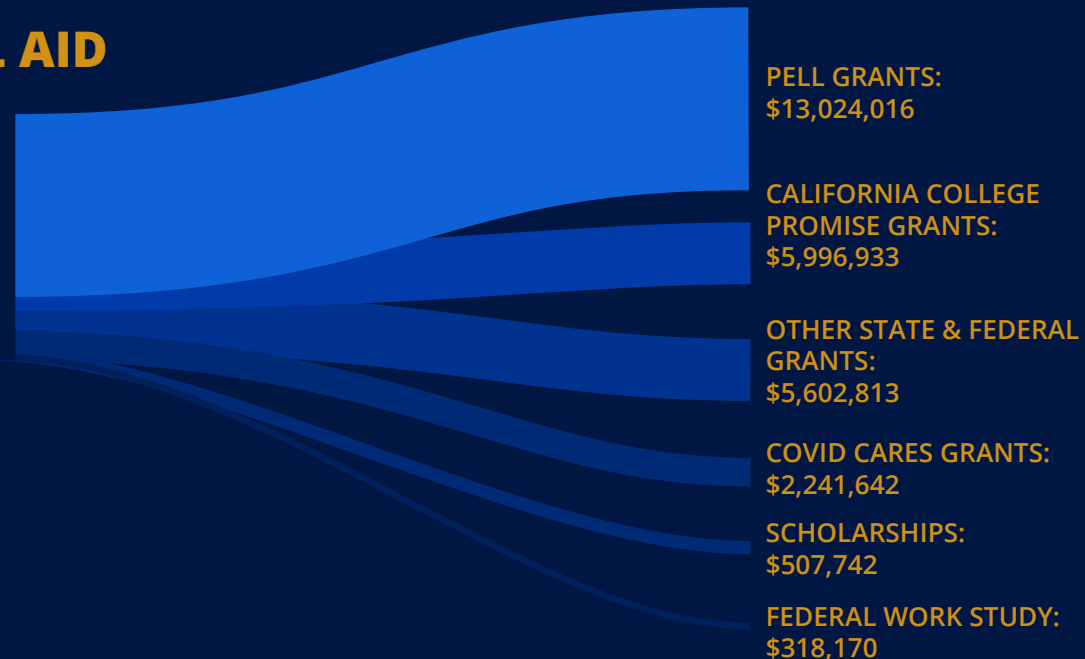


SOURCE: CSU STUDENT ORIGIN DASHBAORD / UC INFOCENTER

# FINANCES

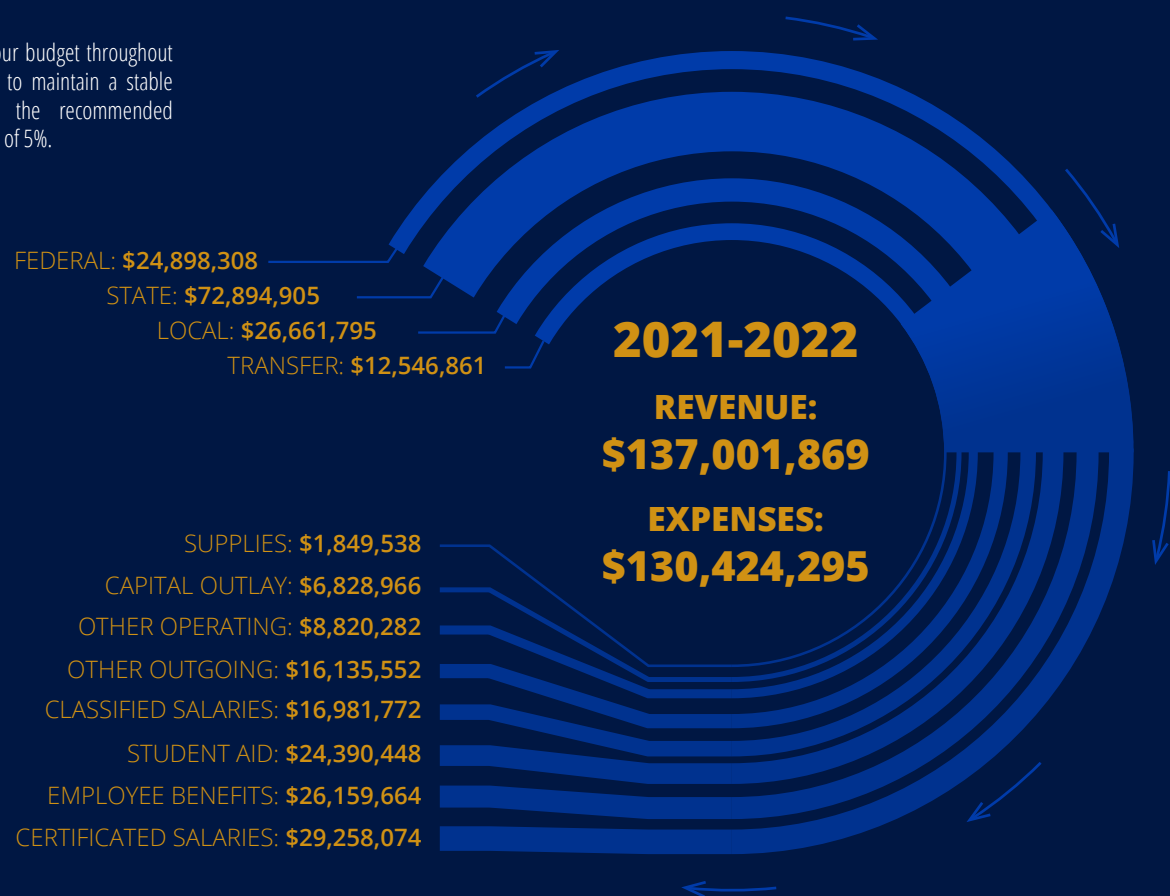
## FINANCIAL AID

**TOTAL AID AWARDED:**  
\$27,691,316



## BUDGET

We regularly monitor our budget throughout the year and continue to maintain a stable fund balance above the recommended minimum prudent level of 5%.



# ECONOMIC IMPACT

## AT A GLANCE

**M**erced College creates wealth for its students, retains wealth for its community, and represents a worthwhile investment for taxpayers, according to an economic impact report released in 2022.

According to the report, through direct operational expenditures like employee wages and the purchase of goods and services, plus other benefits like increasing students' earnings and decreasing their need for government services, Merced College creates a total economic impact of \$545.1 million per year.

"The bottom line is that Merced College provides numerous economic benefits to students, to taxpayers, to local businesses, and to our region and state at large," President Chris Vitelli said.

"We are a major employer that pays good wages with outstanding benefits to local residents. We are an educational institution that provides countless opportunities for students of all ages to increase their earning power and create a better quality of life for themselves and their families. And we are an integral part of the societal and cultural ecosystem that keeps the Merced region thriving."

**FOR EVERY \$1**

**THEY INVEST IN THEIR EDUCATION AT MERCED COLLEGE, STUDENTS RECEIVE \$6.80 IN LIFETIME FUTURE EARNINGS**

**\$412.4 MILLION**

**PER YEAR IN ADDED INCOME FROM GRADUATES WORKING IN MERCED**

**\$110.8 MILLION**

**IN ADDED INCOME PER YEAR THROUGH OPERATIONS SPENDING LIKE ANNUAL PAYROLL**

**\$21.9 MILLION**

**IN ANNUAL SPENDING BY STUDENTS ATTRACTED TO OR RETAINED IN THE REGION**

*The study was conducted by Emsi, a labor market data company that has been advising leaders in higher education, business, and community development since 2001. Emsi measured the economic impacts created by Merced College on the business community and the benefits the college generates in return for the investments made by students, taxpayers and society.*

# BANNER YEAR

It was a remarkable year for grants and external funding, as Merced College received nearly \$46 million for a wide range of projects.

**\$27 MILLION**  
AGTEC (BUILD BACK BETTER PROGRAM)

**\$15 MILLION**  
AGTEC (SEN. CABALLERO FUNDING)

**\$5 MILLION**  
COMMUNITY ECONOMIC RESILIENCE FUND

**\$2.75 MILLION**  
DEVELOPING HSI PROGRAMS

**\$2.7 MILLION**  
CONNECTING MINORITY COMMUNITIES

**\$444,000**  
RISING SCHOLARS

**\$400,000**  
SONG BROWN CAPITATION AWARD

**\$150,000**  
PROMISE HOUSING PROJECT PLANNING

**\$114,955**  
MEDICAL SCHOOL PIPELINE PROJECT

**\$100,000**  
FIRST 5 INNOVATION

# \$2.7M TO IMPROVE REMOTE LEARNING

Merced College has been awarded a two-year, \$2.7 million grant from the Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) to help improve remote learning and increase access to technology and broadband connectivity for its students.

The NTIA's Connecting Minority Communities (CMC) Pilot Program is awarding funds to Historically Black Colleges or Universities, Tribal Colleges or Universities, and Minority-Serving Institutions to foster robust broadband access, connectivity and adoption among minority communities.

Merced College, a Minority-Serving Institution, will use the funds to expand educational instruction and remote learning opportunities, spur economic development, and create opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship in Merced County.



# \$5M GRANT FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Merced College is the fiscal agent for the Northern San Joaquin Valley regional collaborative, which received \$5 million from California's Community Economic Resilience Fund (CERF).

The Northern San Joaquin Valley collaborative is one of 13 economic development entities known as High Road Transition Collaboratives that are receiving \$5 million each to diversify local economies and develop sustainable industries that create good-paying, broadly-accessible jobs for all Californians.

Merced College will work with Merced County's Department of Workforce Investment to develop a roadmap for the region, including a strategy and recommended series of investments.

Following this planning phase, CERF will provide \$500 million to fund projects that will be selected through a competitive bidding process based on their readiness and commitment to conduct inclusive planning processes that engage various community groups, including voices that have been traditionally left out of economic planning.



Learn More: Northern San Joaquin Valley  
Community Economic Resilience Fund  
<https://www.northsanjoaquincerf.org/>

# COLLEGE FOR KIDS

The College for Kids summer program, which started in 1976 and offers fun learning opportunities in a safe setting for children from 2nd through 8th grade, introduced a new incentive for parents this year.

Any parent enrolling in at least one 3-unit college course at Merced College this past summer could enroll their child in College for Kids for free.

New offerings for kids this year included an expanded slate of enrichment classes — how to build and fly a drone, how to build and play a ukulele, and how to create "cocoa bombs," to name but a few — along with a new theater offering of Disney's Aladdin Jr. There were also aquatics classes for all ages, plus sports camps in baseball, basketball, golf, tennis and volleyball, as well as hula and self-defense.



# A L U M N I S U C C E S S



## **LUIS LARA** CRIMINAL JUSTICE

For California Highway Patrol Sergeant Luis Lara, success means good health, a good family and a good job—and the ability to do good for his community, as well. “It was great growing up in this area, and it’s a great community to work in,” Lara said. “I want this area to be the best it can be.” Lara has lived his entire life in Atwater, graduating in 1994 from Atwater High—where he was introduced to the Merced College dual enrollment program—and then in 1995 from Merced College, where he found law enforcement as a career. Lara went on to earn a B.A. in Criminal Justice from Stanislaus State and began his CHP career at age 21, spending three years in Redwood City before transferring to the Merced area office. Lara was promoted to sergeant in 2011 to oversee all uniformed personnel who do administrative work in that office.

## **TAYLOR BROWN** POLITICAL SCIENCE

While earning a transfer degree and landing on the Dean’s List at Merced College, Taylor Brown also set a 400-meter-dash school record that still stands (58.35 seconds), but she’s always had an eye on politics. Brown has wanted to serve as an elected official since she was in elementary school. Her political life began early, as student director of athletics at Merced High and Executive Vice President at Merced College. While earning her B.A. in Political Science at UC Riverside, she earned an appointment as Elections Director. Brown, who works as Director of Research for a political communications group in Walnut Creek, sees herself eventually serving on the Merced City Council, or the water board in Sacramento or some other city, and then moving up the ladder in municipal or state government. “Having personal belief makes you go further than you can imagine,” Brown said.

## **NICOLE SILVEIRA** DISTRICT ATTORNEY

At just 10 years old, Nicole Silveira mapped out her future on poster board for a 4-H project—four years of college, three years of law school, 10 years as a lawyer, another 10 as a judge. After graduating from Atwater High and Merced College, Silveira earned a B.A. from San Diego State and her juris doctorate at California Western School of Law. She eventually returned home to accept a position at the DA’s office in Merced, then became the first female attorney to be promoted to a supervisor position there. In June 2022, Silveira was elected District Attorney for Merced County. “DAs have a great opportunity to effect change,” she said. “We are the ones who decide what people are charged with. Of course judges have a lot of power, but it’s really our responsibility as district attorneys to decide who should be charged, who should be held accountable. ... It’s a great responsibility.”

## **CORY MCCULLOUGH** RISING SCHOLARS

Cory McCullough served roughly a year in prison for burglary, which had financed his drug habit. He got clean and enrolled at Merced College in 2012, excelling in mathematics and graduating in 2017 as a member of both the Phi Theta Kappa and Alpha Gamma Sigma honor societies. McCullough happened to connect with Merced College English Professor Jennifer McBride—who coordinates the Rising Scholars program for incarcerated students—last year. Now an instructor in the program and a Ph.D. student in Applied Mathematics at UC Merced, McCullough hopes that completing his Ph.D. will prove to himself and to current inmates that the future is theirs to create. “There are people who made one horrible decision, and that changed the entire direction of their life,” he said. “That reality is lost on people sometimes. They don’t realize prisoners often want to do something with their lives.”

## **SEE LEE** BOYS AND GIRLS CLUB

See Lee earned her A.A. at Merced College, a B.A. in Political Science at Stanislaus State, and an MBA at Fresno State, and she has been committed to social justice throughout her career. Lee worked as an operations and program supervisor with Equus, which provides workforce development services to Merced County. She partnered with community leaders and families as a HUB coordinator with Building Health Communities. She also worked as a gang and teen pregnancy prevention specialist for Valley Community Schools. In January 2022, she took over as CEO of the Boys and Girls Club of Merced County (BGCMC). “We can’t always take these kids into the world, but I hope we can bring the world to them at the Boys & Girls Club,” said Lee, the first Hmong and Asian American woman to lead the BGCMC. “I want this place to be the world for them, so they’re exposed to endless possibilities.”

## **CHRISTIE BRYANT** PHYSICAL THERAPY

Christie Bryant, a two-time all-conference basketball player at Merced College and a Southland Conference All-Academic Second Team selection at Nicholls State in Louisiana, is bringing that same level of drive and discipline to her new role as a Doctor of Physical Therapy. The proud CEO and DPT of Bryant Orthopedic and Sports Physical Therapy, Bryant oversees offices in Merced and Atwater, and the Recovery Spa in Merced. Bryant also works with the nonprofit Students With Aspiring Goals (SWAG), providing financial support and lending out staff for their events. She mentors physical therapy students and provides a scholarship to minorities seeking to join the field. With diverse clientele, Bryant has emphasized diversity among her staff. “It’s so hard to find someone who looks like you to treat you,” she said. “We’re more aware of that now. I will make sure my company has opportunities for minorities.”



# HERE WE GROW AGAIN

WITH DECADES OF TRADITION AND A CLEAR VISION FOR THE FUTURE, MERCED COLLEGE FINDS ITSELF ON THE CUTTING EDGE OF AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN THE CENTRAL VALLEY.



Raj Kahlon was joined by friends, family, and dignitaries to celebrate the opening of the new Agriculture and Industrial Technology Complex.

Local students seeking careers in agriculture and industrial technology fields have long looked to Merced College to find the next step on their journey. Now with a new, state-of-the-art facility in which to learn and grow, the future for those students is looking brighter than ever.

The college held a ribbon cutting in September to mark the substantial completion of the 29,000-square-foot Raj Kahlon Agriculture and Industrial Technology Complex, the first new building on campus in more than a decade.

The \$25-million complex will house several of the college's academic programs, allowing them to train even more students for well-paying, emerging, and high-demand jobs in agriculture, industrial technology, and other related workforce programs in the region.

"Merced College has offered robust programs in agriculture and industrial technology fields for decades, and we're proud to give those programs the home they deserve," President

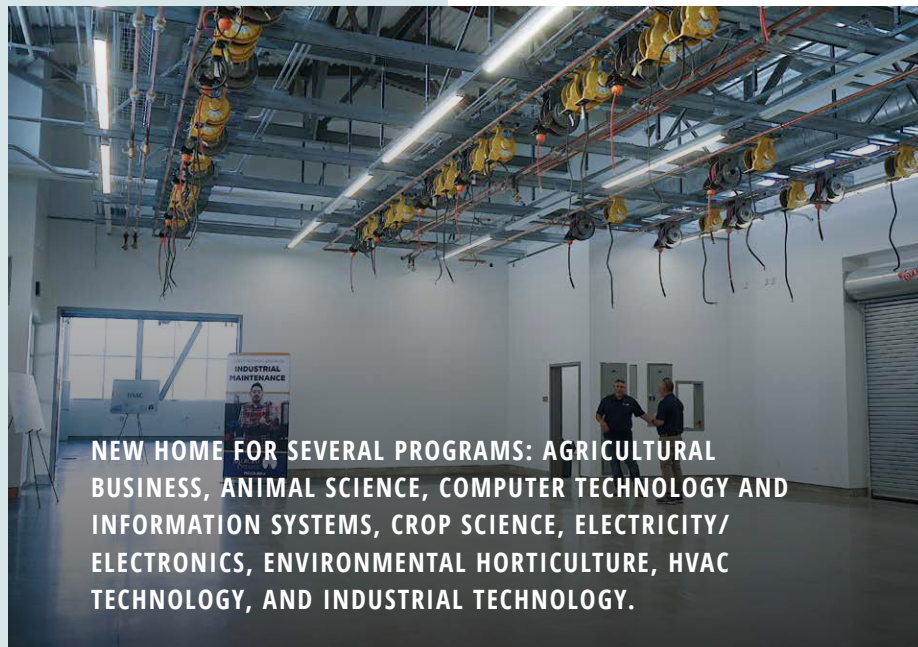
Chris Vitelli said. "This beautiful new facility is an incredible addition to the Merced College main campus, but more importantly, it represents a remarkable investment in our students and in the future of our region."

What started as a dream 20 years ago is now a 29,000-square-foot reality that represents accessibility—to state-of-the-art design and technology, to collaboration and to the future.

"The names behind the original planning are gone and retired," Professor of Electronics and Industrial Technology Aaron Hamilton said. "We're just the keepers of that vision."

The new facility will bring together faculty and staff in several academic programs: Agricultural Business, Animal Science, Computer Technology and Information Systems, Crop Science, Electricity/Electronics, Environmental Horticulture, HVAC Technology, and Industrial Technology.

"It's a new perspective—one building bringing all of our ag needs together,"



**NEW HOME FOR SEVERAL PROGRAMS: AGRICULTURAL BUSINESS, ANIMAL SCIENCE, COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY AND INFORMATION SYSTEMS, CROP SCIENCE, ELECTRICITY/ELECTRONICS, ENVIRONMENTAL HORTICULTURE, HVAC TECHNOLOGY, AND INDUSTRIAL TECHNOLOGY.**

## BUILDING HIGHLIGHTS

**A 7,500-SQUARE-FOOT COURTYARD WITH AN INTEGRATED SOUND SYSTEM FOR OUTDOOR EVENTS.**

**A SUN ROOM FOR PLANT SCIENCE EXPERIMENTS.**

**AN ANIMAL SCIENCE ROOM TO BRING IN SMALL LIVESTOCK FOR DEMONSTRATIONS, WITH AN ADJACENT HOLDING PEN FOR LARGE ANIMALS.**

**A COHESIVE ADMINISTRATIVE AREA IN THE BUILDING'S DISTINCTIVE "SILO" THAT INCLUDES A CONFERENCE ROOM WITH A 16-FOOT-LONG "LIVE EDGE" TABLE WITH A CUSTOM BASE FRAME DESIGNED BY THE MERCED COLLEGE WELDING PROGRAM.**

said Merced College Student and Ag Ambassador Gabby Lucas. "[It shows] how much Merced College has evolved."

Local farmer Raj Kahlon has committed \$5 million to support the programs within the complex—the largest donation in Merced College history.

"For our agriculture industry to continue to thrive in an uncertain future, we need advanced technology, and we need students who are equipped to use that technology," Kahlon said. "Merced College plays an integral role in educating and preparing our workforce, and this new building will help ensure a successful future for local students and our entire region."

### Technology and Design

Professor of Animal Science Nikki Maddux said having space to

work and think, along with new technology, will revolutionize the college's ag and industrial technology programs.

When faculty met with architects in 2019, they had to consider what type of training students seeking ag careers would need, both the day the building opened and for years into the future.

"Thankfully and gratefully they heard what we said," Maddux said. "Spaces here are designed for what's most effective for our subject, our industry and our students."

Before, students shared campus labs with other departments. In the animal science room alone, they now have wet labs (with faucets, microscopes, Bunsen burners, etc.) to do things like tissue analysis. The dry lab setup, with integrated computers, monitors, etc., enables students to analyze data on animals and soil.

Since the classroom has water and a drain, Maddux can now clean up after bringing small animals inside for lessons. She can open double doors into a pen right outside the door to do demonstrations with cattle.



The complex was situated and designed to gain precious access to the school farm. The plant science area also has both a greenhouse inside and a nursery right outside its doors. Ag business students will work in a room with a sliding wall, to split the room in two or open fully to arrange the larger space for classes or events.

Classroom monitors sync with all computers to facilitate onsite and remote collaboration. For example, instructors and students can view data (temperature, weight, milk production), on monitors or their laptops, coming straight from high-tech RFID tags attached to the ears of the cattle.

"The animals are not going to change," Maddux said. "But the practices, how we treat them if they're ill or how we feed them, someone is working on those formulations right now. We're developing products and feed using data analysis that we could never have done before."

She added, "There's never gonna be a job shortage in the cattle and dairy industries. We produce so much livestock in this area, it's important to teach all parts of the animal and all of the technology. We want to lead in this area."

### Workforce of the Future

The new building is just one example of how Merced College is poised to lead the Central Valley ag industry into the future.

In September, the college announced the new Agrifood Technology and Engineering Collaborative (AgTEC), led by the Central

Valley Community Foundation (CVCF). The AgTEC initiative will leverage the strength of community colleges throughout the Valley — with contributions from small farmers and multinational companies alike — to revolutionize how agricultural workers learn the skills they need to pursue rewarding careers in the industry.

A \$15 million investment from the state, made possible by Sen. Anna Caballero, will help launch the AgTEC initiative.

"The San Joaquin Valley is one of the biggest producers of food in the world, yet our communities continue to struggle with poverty and unemployment," Caballero said. "AgTEC provides innovation, education and training that will lead to better-paying jobs and an even more vibrant industry for our region."

AgTEC is part of the Fresno-Merced Future of Food (F3) Innovation Initiative, a CVCF-led collaboration that aims to fund a Valley-wide Climate-Smart Agrifood Technology and Engineering Cluster with a focus on digitalization and data science, mechatronics, equipment, and systems testing and integration for agrifood applications. The program is a collaborative workforce education program among seven regional colleges, including Merced, Reedley, Madera, Fresno City, Clovis, West Hills Lemoore and Coalinga, and College of the Sequoias.

The F3 initiative received \$65 million through the U.S. Economic Development Administration's Build Back Better Regional Challenge. As part of this allocation, Merced College will receive more than \$27 million to serve as the project lead for the AgTEC Workforce initiative, which will include another new building: the Ag Technology Innovation Center.

Goals of the program include the training and upskilling of 8,400 job-ready workers within four years, a 60% growth in wages for agricultural workers, and a total investment of \$50 million toward workforce development.

Merced College, along with the seven



other community colleges and worker representatives, will develop a new, integrated approach to ag technician education that ensures a long-term sustainable and equitable workforce pipeline. The result will be open access to a joint regional training program with the capacity to double the annual workforce pipeline.

The college will build an Ag Technology Innovation Center to support the effort. The new innovation center will include a processing plant with labs for almond, fruit and vegetable production.

The AgTEC initiative will leverage the center, resources from Valley community colleges, and the expertise of small farmers and area multinational companies alike, to revolutionize how students hone their skills for ag careers.

"If the Ag-IT building shifts our efforts from third to fourth gear, the AgTEC initiative will send us into overdrive," Hamilton said. "Merced isn't competing with local farms, but the Central Valley is competing with the world. We're in a fight here in the Valley, and we have to make sure we keep our employees on the cutting edge." 🌱

# 60 years and counting

Like all great institutions, Merced College sprung from humble beginnings, but never wavered in its commitment to supporting local students on their journeys to growth and success. Today we have a renewed focus on the employees who make it all possible, developing new leaders while continuing to refine our vision for the future.

# WHERE WE'RE HEADING

Master planning and accreditation might not sound like the most scintillating of topics, but both are critical to the success of any college or university.

In 2022, Merced College began the hard work of developing its next five-year Educational Master Plan. The 2018 plan established a new foundation for the college and its work, and the 2023 plan promises to raise the bar when it comes to innovation and creativity, charting a course for the next five years of growth in academics and student support. After an extensive process of gathering and synthesizing input from throughout the district, the new plan is expected to be adopted in May 2023.

The rigorous process of accreditation is also well underway. Accreditation is required for much of the funding the college receives, but it also provides assurance to students, parents and the general public of the quality of our educational offerings. Merced College's re-accreditation through the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) is in progress now—the first phase, a self-evaluation, will be complete by August 2023, followed by a review and site visit by the ACCJC, and final action in Spring 2024.

There's plenty more to look forward to in 2023. The 9th annual State of the College event will celebrate the Isakow family and the new Isakow Plaza at the front entrance of the Merced campus. In addition, the Vocational Building will undergo a complete renovation throughout the year, and two potential student housing developments are in the works. Stay tuned!

## HOW IT STARTED

The Merced Community College District was formed by a vote of the people of the Le Grand and Merced Union High School Districts on February 27, 1962. The district, which comprised the eastern half of Merced County, consisted of the areas served by these two high school districts.

The college held its first classes in 1963 at the Merced County Fairgrounds, and the current Merced campus opened a few years later. In a letter to Merced College students in the first edition of the Inferno yearbook in 1964, founding President Lowell Barker wrote:

"Few people have the privilege of helping to establish a college. We who have done so this year at Merced have found the experience to be at times satisfying, at times frustrating, but the result one in which we can all take great pride. ... It is hoped that students who attend Merced College in the years to come will continue with friendly cooperation, pride in themselves and the college, high academic standards, and enthusiasm for developing a top quality college in Merced."



## Reconnect

## HOW IT'S GOING

When the Merced College team returned to in-person work in 2022-23, the residual effects of pandemic isolation could still be felt. So President Chris Vitelli dedicated the academic year helping employees "Reset, Reconnect, Renew."

Monthly "Fri-Yay!" events kicked off in September, giving employees a chance to take a break and enjoy each other's company. There is a slew of newly formed employee clubs, from running to weightlifting to hiking to gardening, and more. And the college is hosting workshops for employees on topics like the science of happiness and the power of gratitude.

Meanwhile, the President's Leadership Academy is in its second year of grooming new college leaders from within. Read all about the college's commitment to employee engagement and happiness in the November issue of the [Blue Devil's Advocate](#).



# STUDENT NEEDS DRIVE EVOLUTION OF ONLINE INSTRUCTION

The shift to online instruction when the COVID-19 pandemic began was abrupt and dramatic, but Merced College faculty quickly adapted. As student needs continued to shift and morph in the months that followed, the urgent need for adaptation was replaced by a clear opportunity for innovation.

Dean of Instruction Garrick Grace and his team of instructional designers, based in the new Trident Innovation Center, are working with faculty to create new course designs to keep students engaged.

"We had to clear the hurdle of how to train faculty, who have learned and mostly taught in an on-campus forum, to teach in and embrace an online forum," Grace said. "How do we find the balance between traditional methods of teaching and what works well online? We want online courses to mirror a quality on-campus experience as much as possible."

The Innovation Center houses a remote worker lounge, a training room and two state-of-the-art recording studios for online lectures and course content. Six faculty support coaches keep daily office hours to advise their peers on everything from recording lectures to structuring assessments.

Math Professor Maria Radhika Albert said many students

are now asking for asynchronous work, which they access on their own schedule. This can be a challenge for group projects, however, and students initially pushed back when she required them to set up a time to meet as a group online to discuss the assignment and complete the work.

So Albert changed to an asynchronous approach. Now students have five days to post their initial responses and discuss their answers with group members. Then they have another two days to finalize a group answer.

"They actually said they feel less isolated doing it that way," Albert said. "This is what we're refining right now."

Center, faculty are better able to navigate the trial-and-error phases inherent in the relatively new frontier of online instruction. And for all the challenges that arise, there are also unexpected benefits. For example, when instructors conduct discussions on Canvas in private mode, students can respond without being identified. For many, the anonymity frees them to contribute and increases participation.

"That's the humanizing part of taking online courses, and that comes from the course design," Grace said. "We design the interaction to happen. We don't have to hope for it."

## ACADEMIC INNOVATIONS

### Relaunch Program

As the labor market continues to evolve, more and more adults are looking to return to college to further their education and advance their careers. The Relaunch program meets that need with a selection of fully online degrees designed with working professionals in mind. In just 17 months, students can obtain an associate degree in Business Administration, Early Childhood Education, Administration of Justice, or Computer Technology and Information Systems.

### Credit for Prior Learning

Through Credit for Prior Learning, students can use military experience and/or on-the-job training to earn college credit. Merced College's Veterans Resource Center is working to align the training offered in the military with even more college classes, with the goal of creating an articulated list of classes for veterans to earn credit based on their prior experience and training.

### Competency Based Education

A self-paced form of learning in which students can move through their studies at their own speed, Competency Based Education allows motivated students to complete faster and spend time on the coursework they need most. Merced College's Child Development program is one of just 40 in the entire state community college system spearheading this new learning format, with implementation planned for 2024.

### Expanded Modalities

The college continues to offer dozens of fast-track certificate programs, as well as accelerated course offerings that start at various times throughout the semester, allowing students to begin or resume their academic journeys when it's most convenient for them.

# NURSING EXPANDS TO DOUBLE STUDENT CAPACITY

The nationwide nursing shortage has been especially acute in California's Central Valley. Now, Merced College is teaming up with clinical partners to double the number of slots available for students in its nursing program.

The college, which already has a longstanding partnership with Mercy Medical Center in Merced, is resuming a previous partnership with Emanuel Medical Center that will provide even more opportunities for Merced College nursing students to find the clinical training they need to become professional nurses or to advance in their careers.

The partnership with Mercy Medical Center enables the training of 30 students per semester. The partnership with Emanuel is expected to increase that number to 60 per semester,

resulting in 120 graduates per year.

"We are so grateful to our hospital partners for the opportunities they provide to our students," said Registered Nursing Director Lauren Marson. "When we are all aligned and working toward the common goal of improving health care in our region, there is nothing we cannot accomplish together."

This increase in the annual number of RN graduates will be accomplished through a gradual increase in student intake starting in Spring 2023. To begin this expansion, the college is expecting to add 30 seats for current LVNs to enter the LVN to RN bridge program next year, pending approval by the California Board of Registered Nursing.

# 'TEAM' EFFORT IS A NEW APPROACH TO STUDENT SUCCESS

Supporting student success has always been a priority at Merced College. In Fall 2022, it became even more of a "team" effort with the creation of new Student Success Teams.

No longer will each support area—financial aid, basic needs, tutoring, etc.—operate in a silo. Now, members of each support team, led by a dean, are assigned to work with faculty and students from seven different academic schools.

Within each school, students can reach out to their respective team—people they will see regularly and come to know—for help.

"It's a different way to structure services, to make sure we have timely communication with students," Dean of Student Services Brooke Boeding said. "Students will realize they have a team behind them, and we'll see greater levels of success from them."

Jazmin Serrano, a counselor in Los

Banos, said one longstanding issue for students has been meeting a different counselor every time they come in for advice.

The college took steps to embed counseling services into the Success Team model, where counselors work with a specific group of students. As a result, they gain a more nuanced understanding of students' life experiences and ambitions, and tailor their interventions with those in mind. Counselors are paying close attention to making sure multi-major students get placed in the right school for their needs, and they are also taking this time to plan workshops and visit classes to introduce themselves.

"We're not chasing information for them, but connecting them with the person they should know and should be working with," Serrano said.

The college has also implemented an Early Alert system into the SST model. The system, Navigate, first sorts all

students into their respective teams and sets a schedule of emails that remind students, for example, to enroll for the upcoming semester or apply for financial aid. Then, during the semester, faculty can send early alerts asking the team to get a student help with basic needs, tutoring, mental health, etc.

"It's a holistic approach," said Jennifer Edrington, Student Services Area Administrative Coordinator. "And, at the end, we can measure the effectiveness of the alerts themselves. That's the key to the new system—the alerts plus data."

Serrano said that while the SST model will continue to evolve, it shares similarities with the learning communities already in place at the Los Banos Campus, and the results there have been encouraging.

"We're now doing this on a much broader scale, and we hope students take advantage of it and appreciate it. We hope it makes navigating higher education easier."



## A DYNAMIC PLAN FOR EQUITY

Approved by the Merced College Board of Trustees in November 2022, the new Student Equity Plan aims to build on the work that came before in dynamic and transformational ways.

The original plan was created in 2019, with the goals of supporting students, ensuring compliance, and providing activities that promote diversity, equity and inclusion. The new plan promises a more race-conscious approach that is more community-driven, more data-driven, and more thoughtful in addressing student needs and concerns.

With a particular focus on Hispanic and first-generation students, the new equity plan will track student enrollment, persistence, completion of transfer-level math and English classes, and transfer and completion rates. The plan details specific efforts such as registration events, expanded student support services, and an Equity Academy to educate faculty and staff on the unique needs of different populations.

## CAREER/TRANSFER LEVELS UP

The Career/Transfer Center at Merced College serves a dual purpose: to help students research careers to find out which one would be best for them, and to provide students with accurate and up-to-date information to ensure a smooth transition from the community college setting to a university setting.

It's a big job, and the center is getting a big upgrade. Supported by nearly \$750,000 in one-time state funding, the Career/Transfer Center is relocating from the Leshner Building to a larger space in the Student Union Building, making it more accessible and visible to students.

An expanded computer lab and new workshop room are in the plans, as well as increased office space for college staff and for university representatives based at the college. Another major addition will be a new position—a Job Developer, whose role will be to develop relationships with employers in the community to create more job and internship opportunities for students.

Learn more about the many programs and services Merced College offers to students.

New **Umoja** program to better serve black students and others:



**Puente** unlocks doors for Hispanic and other underserved students:



**NextUp** Program guides former foster youth along their journeys:



**M.O.M.** group supports low-income, single parents through college:



**Food Pantry** expands to serve even more Merced College students:





## BLUE DEVIL BLITZ DISPATCHES CAMPUS LEADERS TO SPREAD THE WORD

The Blue Devil Blitz is a simple idea with huge ambition.

For three days in early August, roughly 80 Merced College ambassadors fanned out into Merced County to recruit, re-recruit and unearth new students.

The Blue Devil Blitz was scheduled to lead into the college's annual Extreme Registration, where students could register for school, enroll in classes and get loaded up with resources for Fall 2022.

"This is us taking a step to serve our community in nontraditional ways," said Merced College Dean of Student Services Greg Soto.

The college used the Blitz model to address a significant drop in enrollment due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cal Matters, a nonpartisan, state policy newsgroup, said the statewide community college system lost 20 percent of its enrollment between Fall 2019 and Fall 2021. The State of California responded with funds to attack outreach, retention and technology. Merced College received \$800,000 to be used in 2021-22, and another \$1.2 million for 2022-23.

Soto said 70% of students they worked with at the two Extreme Registration sessions found them through the Blue Devil Blitz. It also showed Merced College employees how powerful they could be at the ground level.

In preparation the Blitz campaign, the Merced College Outreach team trained employees from other departments to field questions they might hear from prospective students. Roughly 20 people

per day worked 10 locations, including Broadway Market in Planada, Orchard Grill in Chowchilla, O'Reilly AutoParts in Livingston, Hobby Lobby and Get Fit 24/7 in Los Banos, and Merced County Credit Union and Save Mart in Atwater. In Merced, they manned tables at Raley's, Body Shak, In-Shape, Best Buy and Planet Fitness. Another group attended National Night Out at Apple-gate Park on August 2.

Travis Hicks, Dean of Instruction for English & Humanities, felt buoyed by working with colleagues he rarely sees—Caroline Dawson, Dean of Instruction for Business and Adult Education, and Michelle Joseph, Director of Child Development Center—and locals who shop a block from the Merced campus.

They met two business students there—one returning and one newly enrolled at Merced College.

"It was nice because Caroline gave the incoming student a larger picture of what they would face and shared ideas about what they could study once there, like entrepreneurship and international business," Hicks said.

## TRUCK DRIVING PROGRAM KICKS OFF



The Merced College truck driving program, years in the making, kicked off in early 2022 with its first cohort of 12 students seeking a Class A Commercial Driver's License (CDL).

It was a perfect time for the college to launch this free, noncredit program. Pay for truck drivers has increased during the pandemic, and there are well-paying jobs to be had.

"It's such a great opportunity to serve the community and employers," said Caroline Dawson, Dean of Instruction for Business, Adult Education, Noncredit and Workforce Development. "There's such a great demand for drivers, like for local ag companies or Amazon long-haul drivers. There are so many opportunities, and this career is a lot more varied than people would expect."

It starts with classroom instruction for eight hours per day on Saturdays and Sundays for four weeks at Merced College's Business Resource Center. Then students will have behind-the-wheel

training, also on weekends, at a paved and enclosed 5-acre spot on Thornton Avenue owned by Merced County. The last step is completing a 30-hour local internship.

Merced College added a key member to the team in November, when it hired an experienced and passionate instructor in David Thomas.

Thomas began his driving career in 1982 as a civilian working for the Department of Defense civil service, transporting and delivering furniture to American military personnel throughout Europe. After returning to the U.S., Thomas attended Merced College and earned AAs in Social & Behavioral Science and Addiction Studies in 2020.

"I was always in such great spirits going to Merced College because I got to know such great people," he said. "I just wanted to be a part of that team."

## HOSPITALITY CAREER ACADEMY EVOLVES

As the local hospitality industry grows, Merced College continues to prepare students for great jobs in hotels, restaurants and more.

From customer service and conflict resolution to crafting cocktails, local students can learn all the skills they need through Merced College's Hospitality Career Academy. The free, 12-week program is a partnership between Merced College, El Capitan Hotel and Mainzer that first launched in Fall 2021.

Students receive college credits in addition to practical training and sage advice from longtime industry leaders on topics including communication, customer service, team building, conflict management, unconscious bias, and attitude in the workplace.

In its third installment, the academy again offered the crowd-favorite mixology workshop, with Billy Pedrozo of Bella Luna. Staff from El Capitan and Mainzer provided panel discussions, property tours, presentations on guest services, and customer service scenarios, and in a new addition to the academy, UC Merced Executive Chef Mitch Vanagten presented on the business of catering.

Near the end of the program, students participate in a "Hospitality Job Fair," meeting with local employers to learn about job opportunities and apply for jobs. Several graduates from the first two cohorts of the academy secured employment with local hospitality employers.



# NO. 1 FAN HONORED



Morgan Boyle, Merced College's most ardent football supporter, showed up to practice not knowing what to expect after the team lost at Foothill College on Sept. 11. Boyle, who has cerebral palsy and is wheelchair-bound, has shared the program's ups and downs for 16 years. He knew better than to guess what head coach Justin Pinasco's mood might be.

But at practice's end, Pinasco called out to Boyle, and the Blue Devils immediately came alive, whooping and hollering at their football brother. Pinasco told everyone he was tired of seeing Boyle in old Merced College gear, and then he then gifted Boyle a new uniform—road and home jerseys, pants, a helmet, all bearing the No. 1.

The players shouted their approval and then circled around to give him enthusiastic daps and high fives, the weight of a difficult loss lifted.



Read more and watch a video at the link

"We needed something to rally behind," Pinasco said. "And this is bigger than all of us. We see all of the things Morgan handles and he still shows up. ... I think it's great that our players learn that through him."

# LIVE THEATER RETURNS

The Merced College Theater Department returned to the stage in March, with six performances of *The Great Gatsby*. The production marked the first public performances for the department since before the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We were very excited to welcome the Merced community back to our theater for our live events, in particular after several years of online performances only," said John Albano, Dean of Fine & Performing Arts and Social Sciences. "Our students enjoy the interaction with audiences, which is a central component of the learning process as well as the joy of live performance in the arts."

Professor Lauren McCue-Bryx, the show's director, said the cast and crew of the production were nearly all Merced College students, including Ezra Cross as Jay Gatsby, Alyssa McCabe as Daisy Buchanan, Zak Dimpel-Alvarez as Nick Carraway, Danielle Pasos as Jordan Baker, Christian Smith as Tom Buchanan, Matthew Rivera as George Wilson, and Vickie Costa as Myrtle Wilson. Music student Cody Benner, the production's musical director, also contributed some original music.



# HAUNTED HOUSE FULL OF TRICKS

The Merced College Theater was transformed into a unique, interactive haunted house experience in October.

Directed by Professor Lauren McCue-Bryx and written by Merced-based Phoenix Creative Collective, *The Last Masquerade* featured a variety of scares, from vampires and moving statues to bloody ghouls and zombies.

In the elaborate maze of the castle, creatures lurked behind every corner. The awe-inspiring scenic and lighting design was by technical director Chad Phillips, who brought years of experience designing haunted attractions.

Merced College students enthusiastically rehearsed for their performances. As Maxx Smith said, "I've never acted in a haunted house before, but I've been to several, and the best part is always the interaction. You aren't just watching someone else's story on a stage, you're a part of the story. And it's thrilling, whether you're an actor or a guest."



# MEN'S SOCCER REACHES FINAL FOUR

In just its second year since restarting the program, the Merced College men's soccer team made it to the very brink of a state championship.

The Blue Devils pulled off a dramatic, 2-1 victory over Clovis in the NorCal Regional Playoffs on Nov. 26, scoring a pair of second-half goals to come from behind and advance to the Final Four in Sacramento. On Dec. 2, Merced faced Oxnard in the semifinals and gave up a lone goal in the 77th minute of a 1-0 loss.

Led by two-time conference Offensive Player of the Year Daniel Borges and Midfielder of the Year Felipe Lopez, the Blue Devils finished with a 17-4-3 overall record, laying a solid foundation and setting a high bar for the future of the program.

# TITLE IX TURNS 50

READ MORE:





## NEW LOS BANOS CHILD DEVELOPMENT LEADER

April Heft, a new faculty member charged with leading the development of the Child Development Center at the Merced College Los Banos Campus, brings a wealth of experience and expertise to the role.

Heft helped open the first nonprofit center, Children Today, to serve homeless children and families in the Long Beach community. Then in the Newport-Mesa Unified School District, she was instrumental in establishing the first inclusion preschool program in the district, serving children with special needs.

Now, Heft is fulfilling a much-needed gap at the Los Banos Campus, becoming

the first full-time child development faculty member there in nine years. Her presence there will enable the college to offer Westside students access to all the core child development coursework without having to travel to the Merced Campus for certain courses.

Heft also has a leading role in the development of a new Child Development Center (CDC) at the campus. The Los Banos Child Development Center is set to open in Fall 2023. Like the CDC on the Merced Campus, the Los Banos CDC will serve two important purposes: first, serving as a laboratory site where students can be coached and mentored as they develop and refine their teaching practices; and second, as a high-quality early childhood care and education school, which will serve children from 3 months to 5 years old.

Heft said she strives to eradicate barriers to student success, empower students, and inspire a more just society overall.

## MORE COMING TO LOS BANOS

The Merced College Los Banos Campus has worked hard to establish a presence on the Westside of Merced County and to develop its own identity as a campus.

Over the past 51 years, it has grown from operating in leased buildings to having its very own campus in 2007, and that growth continues in 2023 with the announcement that Los Banos will host its first graduation ceremony on May 25.

Campus leaders hope and expect families and local graduates will choose to attend graduation at their home campus, and this will not just be a one-time deal. This will be a standard yearly ceremony for Los Banos students, with a keynote speaker and graduates dressed in their regalia.

A new student café will be of great interest, providing a space for students and staff to be able to purchase a hot, prepared meal on campus. This will help alleviate food insecurity among students, while also giving students one less reason to leave campus during the day.

Also new to the Los Banos Campus is a Welcome Center in which Student Services staff can assist students from start to finish on their journeys.





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