



PHOTO BY DREW A. KELLEY, CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

Former Marine and SCC alum Steven Stenersen now serves at the Santiago Canyon College Veterans Resource Center as a student services specialist and peer mentor.

PAYING IT FORWARD

STENERSON CHOOSES CAREER PATH TO HELP OTHER VETERANS

Alum has experience navigating benefits

By Jenelyn Russo,
contributing writer

When Steven Stenersen arrived at Santiago Canyon College in early 2015, he had just completed nine years of service with the Marine Corps and was looking for a fresh start on a new career path.

He chose SCC for its location, tucked away in the hills, away from the hustle and bustle of Orange County. After deciding to become a history professor, Stenersen began to unravel the often complicated and confusing journey of veterans' benefits.

Stenersen hit several roadblocks in that journey. In search of help, he found himself at SCC's Veterans Resource Center, where staff and peers provide veterans, active duty, reservists and their dependents and spouses assistance in navigating and accessing their VA education benefits. Not only did he find help for himself, but he quickly became a go-to in providing help to others who experienced similar struggles.

"My first semester, I was very standoffish, and I didn't want to be around anybody," Stenersen said. "But by going (to

the VRC), I kind of got a little acclimated and adjusted. ... And that got me engaged with the office. Then I started the Veterans Club (Student Veterans of America - SVA) here on campus to help not only myself but other vets get acclimated to transitioning out of the military."

During his time at SCC, Stenersen continued to get more involved in serving his veteran peers through SVA and VRC and found an inclusive space and a strong community of support as he pursued his education goals.

"At SCC, I was a person," Stenersen said. "It didn't matter if it was a dean, a manager or even the president, for example. He knew who I was, and he knew my story because he had engaged with me. It was very welcoming and very much like a family."

After graduating from SCC in 2017 with three associate degrees, Stenersen transferred to Cal State Long Beach where he earned a bachelor's degree in history with a focus on Latin America. During a visit back at SCC, he was offered a work-study position in the VRC which eventually turned into his current full-time position as a Student Services Specialist and peer mentor. While this is not the path he expected, he is happy to be paying it forward.

"I didn't think I'd work at a college doing something like this, but what I like about it is what they do for vets and what they did for me," Stenersen said. "Transition out of the military, as similar as it is for everybody, what happened here is that it wasn't a one size fits all. When the vets come here, it's very individualized. That was the reason I took the job. I saw what they did, and I saw how they were growing the program."

The VRC is celebrating its 11th year on SCC's campus and is in its third year as a standalone program, located in Building A206. The VRC currently serves approximately 625 veterans, dependents and spouses, which includes 15% growth from year to year, with more than half coming to campus from outside of Orange County.

Statistics show that over 55% of veterans make education their first stop after leaving the service, and SCC's Veterans Resource Center is prepared to help them not only seek their education benefits but other veterans' services as well, such as VA work study, disability benefits and support from community partners in providing emergency grants.

"I think there's a misconception, and I'd like to put out there that all veterans don't get everything," said SCC Assistant

Dean for Student Services LaKyshia Perez. "Once they're done with their service, it's just kind of figure it out, and we're here to help them figure that piece out. I think that's one of the biggest things that we do. Most of our veterans are dependent 100% on their education benefits."

Stenersen's unique experience and skill set are a perfect fit for assisting fellow vets and allow him to connect with them as someone who has been in their shoes and has walked their path.

"They're the most humble folks that you will run into," said Perez of SCC's veterans. "So having peers like Steven and the other folks that we have in the office, they can have a different conversation and say, this is what we're going to give you. And that works really well in our office."

Stenersen has been integral in developing the mentorship program that assists veterans, their spouses and dependents with accessing available services, and he is excited to be part of an effort that makes a difference in the lives of fellow vets, just as the VRC did for him.

"I have found that this job is essentially similar to the same calling I had for joining (the VRC)," Stenersen said. "That's why I'm still here. And that's why I do what I do."



PHOTO COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS
Gabe Lopez, president of the Santiago Canyon College Associated Student Government

STUDENT GOVERNMENT

Promoting the benefits of classes, life on campus

Clubs, athletics, events a draw

By Lou Ponsi,
contributing writer

Since being sworn in as the president of the Associated Student Government at Santiago Canyon College before the start of the fall 2023 semester, Gabe Lopez, along with his fellow officers, has prioritized bringing more students back to campus.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, many SCC students continue to take

classes online, Lopez said, and one way to draw them back is by offering experiences that can only be had on campus.

"I believe the community college system is very dynamic and able to serve a wide array of different demographics and people via online services," said Lopez, who serves as ASG president through the end of the spring 2024 semester. "But we want to also bring people back, and there are some specific pathways that people can get more benefit from if they're learning in person, not only because of the educational value but also that community value."

One strategy is to create more awareness for programs that already exist such as the numerous clubs, athletics and cultural events, Lopez said.

"These programs can actually bring

people on campus and keep them there," Lopez said.

Last fall, for example, SCC hosted a variety of events to celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month, including a film festival and a Hispanic Heritage Day.

"I had this couple come up and say, 'We're fully online but we came to SCC for the first time because of this event,'" Lopez said. "So, it's a big priority of the ASG this year to hold events and bring as many students onto campus as possible. Luckily, we've been able to do that to a degree."

For some students, food and housing insecurity is an issue, so creating more awareness about the Hawks Nest Basic Needs Center and Food Pantry is important, Lopez said.

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Spring 2024

Semester Begins February 12, 2024



Santiago Canyon College

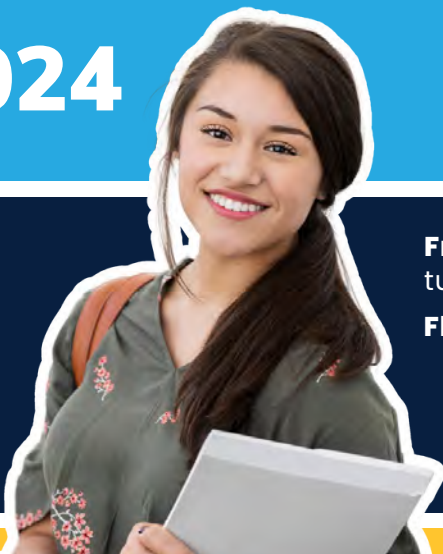
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HAWKS'-EYE VIEW

Flexible courses, wider offerings, apprenticeships expand opportunities

Santiago Canyon College is in growth mode, providing access to students across its service area. This past Fall 2023 semester SCC enrolled 8,153 individual credit seeking students generating 2,535 full-time equivalent students (FTES), a 9% increase from the Fall 2021 when enrollments across the nation fell due to the pandemic. The college's goal is to be back to a pre-pandemic enrollment by the end of the 2024-2025 academic year.



Jason Parks
VP of Academic Affairs

To do this SCC is adapting to new trends and demand from students, adjusting the scheduling of classes to accommodate students and the varying demands on their lives. Programs like the Flight Path, that allows students to take a full semester load of classes while focusing on only two classes at a time and more flexible course scheduling using hybrid and online formats.

The college is also working to accommodate students who are not on campus. Dual Enrollment offerings are being expanded, both online and at local high schools, providing college credit to students enrolled in high school. In Fall 2024, SCC will launch a credit college program inside the Orange County Juvenile Hall, providing access to degrees and career education certificates to youth in custody and a pathway to a more productive life.

Apprenticeship is a large part of what SCC does; this fall there were over 5,400 apprentices registered at the college. And SCC is developing apprenticeships outside of the traditional trades; they recently launched an apprenticeship in Early Childhood Education, allowing students to "earn and learn". This not only provides opportunities for students valuable work experience in the field



PHOTO COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS


Santiago Canyon College provides students with education and career opportunities that fit their needs.

they are studying, but opens higher education to many in our community who lack the resources to not work and attend college.

It is our goal to provide the best possible educational opportunities to everyone who can benefit. Opportunities leading to living wage careers and/or the

pursuit of higher degrees at a university.

Jason Parks is vice president of Academic Affairs at Santiago Canyon College.



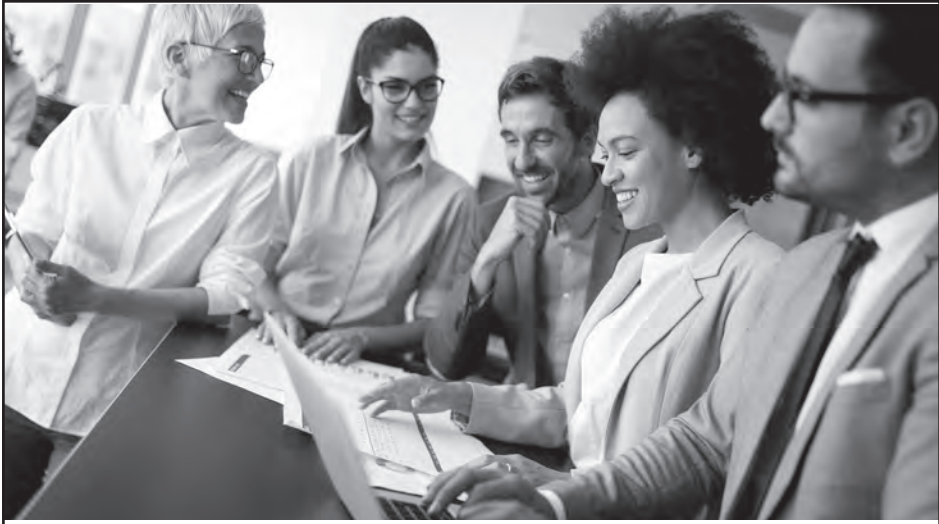
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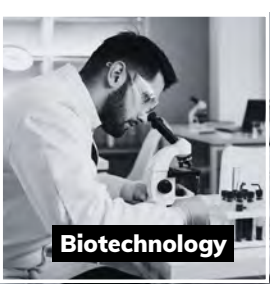
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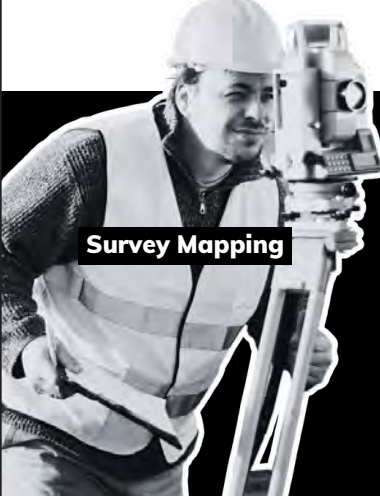
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OVERCOMING SETBACKS

Grateful for support while at SCC, alum now gives back

Commercial banker mentors students

By Nicole Gregory,
contributing writer

Jimmy Ko, 30, is a commercial banker with JP Morgan Chase & Co. in Irvine, but he admits that he was not the best student as a teenager growing up in Anaheim Hills. Even when he followed his older sister to Santiago Canyon College, he stayed out late many nights, not caring that his grades were sinking.

"My first semester at SCC was not the best," Ko said. "And then the spring semester after that, I got tuberculosis."

Forced to withdraw from all his classes and isolate at home, Ko experienced a dramatic change of heart. He reflected on his carefree life and low grades while his parents worked hard in their restaurant to support the family. "I was not particularly proud of myself at that point," Ko said.

He vowed to change.

As soon as he got the OK to return to school, Ko threw himself into his classes and stepped up for leadership roles, eventually becoming president of Associated Student Government. "I was hyper-focused on doing well in school and just trying to be more involved," he said.

He studied economics and decided on a business career. "For a first-gen student, your options are business, doctor or lawyer. I knew I didn't want to be a doctor or a lawyer," he said. "My parents always owned restaurants, and so business was a natural transition. My parents were both very good chefs, but they didn't necessarily like the banking side of how to run a business, so I gravitated toward that."

His parents lost their restaurant and decided to return to South Korea when Ko was still at SCC. "So, days before my 21st birthday I had to figure out things on my own," he said. He stayed at SCC to finish his studies while his older sister worked to support them both.

"SCC really helped me because it was like my first family," he said, still appreciative of the support he received from teachers during his 2011-2014 years there — particularly from professors Alex Taber, Rick Adams, Will Lennertz and Corinna Evett.

"I didn't realize the deadline for



PHOTO COURTESY OF JIMMY KO

Jimmy Ko, a commercial banker at JP Morgan Chase, said Santiago Canyon College was there for him during a fraught time in his life.

scholarship applications (for four-year universities) was in 48 hours, so I asked Professor Lennertz and Corinna Evett to write me a recommendation letter, and in less than 24 hours they were able to produce something for me. That was honestly very special."

He never forgot their generosity.

"A big part of why I give back to the community is just thinking about the hard time I had, where I had maybe 15 or 16 meetings a month between all the organizations I was a part of as student government president, and also having to go to class and then work two part-time jobs," Ko said. "I'm very thankful SCC professors were understanding of my personal schedule. For some courses when I didn't do as well as I could have, I reached out to see if I could do extra work during the summer, and they were understanding of that."

Ko was accepted as a transfer student

to University of Southern California's Marshall School of Business. He took a gap year because "I could not afford USC tuition and worked four jobs at that time to try to figure things out," he said.

He started at USC in 2015 and earned his bachelor's degree in business administration in 2017, which led to his job at JP Morgan Chase.

"I work with customers, corporations, dealing with loans, treasury services, cash management," he said, "trying to help businesses run their day-to-day operations and work toward long-term goals."

Ko has funded a scholarship at SCC, is the treasurer of the SCC Foundation and spearheads the Alumni Association. He also sits on three boards at USC.

He remembers vividly the hard years as a student with little money. "Even from that age, I was thinking I don't want another person to have to have the

same feeling of hopelessness, of being so restricted and having zero options. Part of why I spent so much time helping other people is I understand what some people might be going through. I want to be able to show them that there is a light at the end of the tunnel."

Several students he mentored in 2023 were offered full-time jobs in their senior year.

"That's honestly the most rewarding feeling because I have a rough estimate of how much they're going to make," said Ko. "For a lot of these people who are first gen, making six figures will change the course of their family forever. A lot of these families have never seen money like that. Within one generation they're able to secure themselves in this country and build a foundation. They might not be aware of it yet, but just seeing that their family is going to do so well after that, it's a great feeling."

SHARING EXPERIENCE

Veteran firefighter Andrew Lambert creates a legacy

RSCCD Communications

With roots deeply embedded in the firefighting tradition, Andrew Lambert's path to becoming a captain with the Los Angeles City Fire Department began with a spark that ignited at Santa Ana College.

His father's 35 years with the LAFD inspired Lambert to become a first responder.

At just 16 years old Lambert joined the Costa Mesa Fire Department as a fire explorer. That led him to the SAC Basic Fire Academy from which he graduated in 1999. Lambert is now a 22-year veteran of the LAFD and has held various roles over the course of his career, including firefighter, apparatus operator, rescue/ha zmat specialist and now captain.

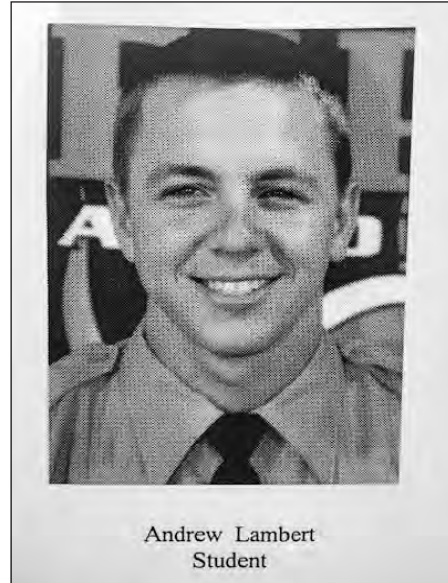
Lambert credits SAC Basic Fire Academy for giving him "a strong foundation

to build his career." He felt so impacted by his time there that he even decided to return as a part-time adjunct instructor.

"The fire service is all about passing down training and experience to the next generation. Becoming an instructor allows me an avenue to give back and help mold the future of the fire service," said Lambert.

Tim Butler, director of fire instruction at SAC Basic Fire Academy describes Lambert as a humble leader who finds motivation in contributing to the fire service and guiding the recruits under his instruction.

"Andy sets an example for the recruits by the hard work he puts in here at the SAC Basic Fire Academy. He is a no-nonsense instructor who delivers a depth of instruction to the recruits that provides them everything they need to be not only successful but to excel," said Butler.

Andrew Lambert
StudentPHOTOS COURTESY OF SAC BASIC FIRE ACADEMY
Left, Andrew Lambert's student photo at Santa Ana College Basic Fire Academy; above, Lambert supervises a trainee.

Tim Butler, center, director of fire instruction at SAC Basic Fire Academy with the 2023 class of trainees

PHOTO COURTESY OF SAC BASIC FIRE ACADEMY

ALUMNA SPOTLIGHT

Nurse found more than career at Santiago Canyon

RSCCD Communications

Santiago Canyon College alumna Jenelle Allison's journey into the world of healthcare was no coincidence; it was a calling. Raised by a mother who's a nurse, she grew up witnessing the dedication and compassion that defined the role. As she matured, Allison realized that she, too, wanted to make a difference in people's lives, especially during their most trying moments.

"When I first started at SCC, I was torn between becoming a teacher or a nurse. It was during my nursing prerequisites at SCC that I realized there was no other option for me. I loved learning about anatomy and physiology and microbiology and knew that it was the path I needed to follow," said Allison.

However, Allison's journey through SCC was about more than just academic growth. In her microbiology course with Denise Foley, she forged lifelong friendships. Allison and her fellow students formed a tight-knit study group, making learning not only effective but also enjoyable.

"SCC has a special place in my heart" it is the place that ignited a passion for learning and "even gave me the courage to move to Alaska for nursing school," Allison said. To this day when she drives past the SCC campus, she thinks "I miss it."

As an orthopedic/trauma registered nurse, Allison is a light for patients during some of the most challenging moments of their lives, providing not only medical care but also a compassionate presence.



PHOTO COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS

Jenelle Allison, right, Santiago Canyon College alum and orthopedic/trauma nurse, stands beside her professor, Denise Foley.

CAREER TRAINING

Santiago Canyon College celebrates National Apprenticeship Week

RSCCD Communications

Santiago Canyon College joined in National Apprenticeship Week, which recognizes the role that apprenticeships play in creating opportunities and pathways to good, quality jobs and well-paying careers and ran Nov. 13-19.

In the 2022-23 academic year, 5,288 students were enrolled in SCC's apprenticeship programs, where they gained practical skills while earning a solid paycheck.

"Apprenticeships play a pivotal role in providing workforce opportunities for people who have been traditionally underserved or adversely affected by poverty and inequality," said SCC Vice President of Academic Affairs Jason Parks. "Santiago Canyon is proud to be a leader among California's 116 com-

munity colleges in terms of apprenticeships."

Vicente Lopez was one of the 5,288 apprenticeship students in 2022-23, but his journey began in 2019.

"I had a job working in construction, but I was looking for a career," Lopez said. "But I didn't have a formal apprenticeship."

Through Santiago Canyon College's apprenticeship program, Lopez gained an apprenticeship with the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California as a maintenance mechanic. The program provides entry to journey-level skills training to MWD's workforce in the technical, vocational, and trades occupations using a combination of structured on-the-job training, related classroom instruction, and home study.

Lopez had hoped to gain an apprenticeship as an electrician, as he worked

as a construction electrician.

"You have to take a skills exam and I was last on the list, so I got placed as a maintenance mechanic (apprentice) at a water treatment facility," Lopez said with a laugh. "That's OK, because I wasn't an electrician until I started doing it."

SCC apprentices attend classes providing supplemental instruction directly related to their field. The classes are free and count towards college credit - depending on the program, students may be eligible to receive a higher-level degree or certificate. Upon successful completion, apprentices are issued a certificate of completion by the state of California, which officially designates the apprentice as a skilled journey worker.

Lopez completed his apprenticeship earlier in 2023.

"From day one, we go in and get on-the-job training and work on the job," Lopez said. "You get raises and promoted every six months. I started at \$18 an hour and when I top out, my salary will be in the six figures."

SCC currently offers seven apprenticeship programs in carpentry, cosmetology, electricity, maintenance mechanic/electricity, operating engineers, power lineman and surveying.

"We've been very successful in connecting students with industry sectors to make a living while getting on-the-job training," Parks said. "We're grateful for our industry sector partners and we look forward to growing our apprenticeship programs."

To learn more about apprenticeship program at SCC, visit sccollege.edu/apprenticeship/. To learn more about SCC, visit sccollege.edu.



SHUTTERSTOCK

Apprenticeship programs for trade careers offer valuable learning opportunities for workers entering a new industry.

ADMINISTRATION

Longtime Santa Ana City Council member elected RSCCD board president

RSCCD Communications

At its regular monthly meeting and annual organization of the Board on December 12, the Rancho Santiago Community College District Board of Trustees unanimously elected Trustee Sal Tinajero board president for 2024, Trustee Daisy Tong vice president and Trustee Phillip E. Yarbrough clerk.

In his new role, Tinajero, Trustee for Area 3, will preside over meetings and serve as the chief spokesperson.

“Serving as vice president last year has been a privilege, and I am excited about the opportunity to continue making a lasting impact this year,” Tinajero said.

With over 25 years of diverse experience, Tinajero has held roles from instructor at Fullerton Union High School to Santa Ana Unified School District board member and mayor pro tem of Santa Ana’s City Council.

Tinajero said his goal is to ensure affordable tuition, foster paths to employment through collaboration with businesses and strengthen educational opportunities.

“Education is the cornerstone of a thriving community, and I am dedicated to leveraging my experience to ensure that every student in our district has access to quality education. My passion for education and the well-being of our community will be the driving force behind my decisions as Board of Trustees President,” he said.

Tinajero, married with children, grew up in Southern California. He earned his bachelor of arts degree in speech communication from Bradley University in Peoria, Ill., and a master’s degree in Cross Cultural Education from National University in San Diego. He currently serves as a communication program specialist for Santa Ana Unified School District and started the nationally-awarded SAUSD Speech and Debate program in 2016.



PHOTO COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS

Rancho Santiago Community College District Board of Trustees President, Sal Tinajero

Government

FROM PAGE 1

Several other initiatives are currently working their way through the ASG’s legislative process, ASG Vice President Karelly Elizarraraz said. One is to provide more food offerings that meet the needs of SCC’s culturally diverse student population.

Through its participation in academic senate meetings, the ASG is working with professors and administrators to develop curriculums that will get students to campus and improve their chances for success, she said.

“I feel like they try to create very personal relationships so all the students can succeed,” said Elizarraraz, who is the only first-generation student serving in the ASG. “I’ve never seen a school or administration or a faculty so interested in making sure their students succeed.”

Another item making its way through the legislature is a resolution to make course syllabuses available far enough in advance to help students choose classes, the vice president said.

The mission of the ASG, as stated on the SCC website, is:

“To promote and engage in student representation and involvement by safeguarding collegial governance and representative democracy, to influence institutional policy affecting student affairs, to facilitate campuswide activities for the improvement of student life, and to provide a platform for the fundamental development of a cohesive and accountable group of student leaders at Santiago Canyon College.”

When first getting involved with ASG, Lopez acknowledged not being fully aware of all the functions of student government, but over time, the role of the ASG has become clearer.

“We serve as the main advocacy body for students,” Lopez said. “We go to the proper people and through the proper channels and be the voice of the students in the room when those conversations are happening.”

The structure of the ASG is like that of the U.S. government.

As president, Lopez oversees a 10-member cabinet made of commissioners who focus on different areas of the college.

Cabinet members include commissioners of sustainability, athletics, publicity, recruitment and other areas.

There are also 10 senators, who are either elected or appointed and serve as the legislative body and are overseen by the ASG vice president.

A judiciary branch ensures that the ASG bylaws are followed.

“It’s mainly working together as a team to create a change,” Lopez said.

Lopez and Elizarraraz are both graduating from SCC after the spring semester, and both intend on transferring to four-year universities.

Elizarraraz wanted to participate in ASG to help build leadership skills and learn to work as a team.

“In college, this is where you end up building relationships and networking with people,” she said. “I think it’s important to get involved to know what’s going on and to vote on certain things. And not only that, but I also want to represent all the first-generation Latino students because I’m the only one at that table and in a leadership position that’s



PHOTO COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS

SCC ASG president Gabe Lopez speaks to students and staff during a regular meeting.

first-generation Latina.”

To hold an ASG post, students must be enrolled in at least five units at SCC and maintain a GPA of at least 2.0, be enrolled in a RSCCD Adult Education program or be a currently enrolled SCC student with a verified disability on record with the office of Disabled Students Programs and Services.

ASG officers must follow the RSCCD Student Code of Conduct and fulfill the

responsibilities associated with their office specified in the ASGSCC Bylaws.

“If I could have one thing etched on my tombstone at the end of my life, it is that I wanted to help solve problems and just be someone that contributes to a solution,” Lopez said. “I believe that being president of ASG will benefit me in being able to better understand what it takes to be able to solve problems and also just help the students at SCC.”



PHOTO COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS

Among other student advocacy initiatives, the Associated Student Government collaborated with the Orange County Transportation Authority and OC Bus to provide free bus rides to SCC students.

MEN'S BASKETBALL

Hawks win big in second conference contest

RSCCD Communications

The Santiago Canyon College men's basketball team was all gas and no brakes against the Riverside City College Tigers on Dec. 21 in an Orange Empire Conference showdown on home hardwood. Nine players scored at least one point while five players surpassed the double-digit mark en route to a dominant 29-point triumph.

The Hawks' record is 11-3 with a 2-0 conference start after their 91-62 victory over Riverside.

The Hawks chalked up a season-high 56.1 percent shooting mark. They utilized seven three pointers to own a 33.3 percent clip from long range. While the offense was impressive after 91 points, it was the defense that truly shined. The brigade's holding the Tigers to 62 points ties a season-low for the Hawks. Furthermore, they forced Riverside to cough up the rock 18 times which shaped into 21 points.

Leading the charge on the offensive end was sophomore guard Kai Smith. He scored 20 points for his fifth-consecutive double-digit game. He also tallied six rebounds, three assists and a steal in the process. He sits at 17.9 points-per-game which ranks fifth in the conference.

Freshman guard Tony Colley scored 16 points on a 7-for-9 night from the floor to go along with five rebounds and a career-high four steals. Freshman guard Trevor Manning matched his efforts in a supporting role with 16 points and four rebounds.

Sophomore guard Damien Parker scored 12 points, four rebounds and three assists while freshman center Chico Lopez scored 11 points and four rebounds.

Freshman guard Marly Jaisel saw time in the later stages of the blowout and scored three points.



PHOTOS COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS
Kai Smith, at left, and 4 above, formerly a star player at La Habra High School, led the Hawks against Riverside City College in their second conference game.

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