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Guests raise their paddles during the live auction at Santiago Canyon College Foundation's 25th Anniversary Gala held Nov. 14 at The Richland in Orange. The sold-out event raised more than \$120,000 in net profit to benefit student scholarships and basic needs programs.

GALA

FUNDRAISER CELEBRATES 25 YEARS OF QUALITY COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Event nets \$124,000 for SCC Foundation

By **Jenelyn Russo**
contributing writer

In honor of a quarter-century of empowering students, enriching the community and advancing academic excellence, Santiago Canyon College hosted its 25th Anniversary Gala in November, an event that raised a net \$124,000 in support of the Santiago Canyon College Foundation.

As the first-ever gala hosted by SCC, the event concluded a yearlong celebration marking 25 years as an independently accredited institution and represents the largest single fundraising effort in school history.

"This was a big moment for us, particularly, not only because of the 25-year anniversary, but we've never raised this kind of money before," said SCC Foundation Board Chair Betty Valencia, who also served as emcee of the gala.

"So it really sets up an exciting future for us."

Hosted at The Richland in Orange and presented by SchoolsFirst Federal Credit Union, more than 170 supporters, community partners and alumni gathered to commemorate the college's 25-year legacy and support its future.

Among the alumni in attendance, SCC honored three distinguished graduates for their professional achievements: Dr. Heidi Sasvin, a family physician with Providence St. Joseph Hospital in Orange; Jarad Hildenbrand, Orange city manager; and Phillip Wu, an attorney at NVIDIA specializing in global data protection compliance.

The evening included a live auction led by an auctioneer, along with a paddle raise during which guests pledged donations in real time in support of the SCC Foundation.

As part of the event, current SCC

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U.S. Rep. Young Kim, left, presents Santiago Canyon College President Jeannie G. Kim with a congressional proclamation recognizing SCC's 25th anniversary during the SCC Foundation's gala. The proclamation honors SCC's commitment to educational equity and service in California's 40th Congressional District.



PHOTO COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS

Niloofar Mojab is the new women's volleyball coach at Santiago Canyon College, bringing years of athletic experience to her new role.

SPORTS

New women's volleyball coach: An athlete and a mentor

Psychology, social work skills help, Mojab says

By **Nicole Gregory**
contributing writer

The new head coach for Santiago Canyon College's women's volleyball team brings years of personal athletic achievement as well as a range of experience coaching and officiating the game.

Niloofar Mojab, 36, coaches both the indoor and outdoor women's volleyball teams and is actively recruiting for the spring 2026 season.

Born in the city of Shiraz, Iran, and raised in Tehran, Mojab showed athletic ability at an early age. "I started with track and field when I was 9," she said. "In my second year, I picked up high jump as my primary event and long jump, or 100-meter hurdle or 60-meter hurdle for my secondary."

She was the No. 1 high-jump athlete in the 10 -to-18 age group and, at age 14, made it to the women's national team. "I was competing with adults, the youngest of whom was 21," she said. At the age of 15, she competed in her first international high-jump event.

Mojab was introduced to volleyball by a friend and, at 17, she joined Iran's Su-

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Jeannie Kim
president of Santiago Canyon College

So what have we done?

One concrete expression of our commitment to degree completion and employment is the approval of SCC's first bachelor of science degree in digital infrastructure and location sciences, designed to prepare students for careers already shaping our economy and workforce. This degree, the first of its kind in California, positions graduates for work in digital infrastructure, systems management, and technologies that underpin how societies build, manage, and sustain the public assets we all rely on. It reflects a belief that workforce development is not about reacting to past demand, but equipping students for what comes next.

At the same time, SCC has embraced innovation in teaching itself. Our faculty are leading edge in exploring how artificial intelligence can expand access and amplify learning. Professor Scotty James, SCC's Distance Education Coordinator, developed and is teaching a course titled "AI for Educators," helping educators explore AI's transformative impact on teaching and learning and positioning SCC as a leader in this space.

This work connects to a broader statewide initiative. The California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office's AI Fellows Program, where he is one of 13 in the state, is advancing thoughtful, equitable integration of AI across the state's 116 colleges and is working in partnership with the newly established Digital Center for Innovation, Transformation and Equity. These efforts aim to ensure that AI is harnessed not as a novelty, but as a tool for enhanced learning, support services, and workforce alignment for all students.

SCC's leadership in this space includes bringing national voices into local classrooms. On March 4, Santiago Canyon College will host Karen Hao, an award-winning technology journalist widely recognized as one of the leading voices covering artificial intelligence and author of Empire of

AI: Dreams and Nightmares in Sam Altman's OpenAI (Penguin Press, 2025), the first in-depth, behind-the-scenes account of OpenAI and the powerful forces shaping the AI industry. Her session will be livestreamed free to the public and educational communities regionally and statewide. This event reflects SCC's commitment to deepening dialogue about AI's social, ethical, and human implications at the intersection of education and technology.

Advancing programs like these requires navigating complexity and thoughtful engagement with faculty, staff, students, and community partners. These dynamics are not obstacles to leadership; they are part of it. Public institutions are ecosystems shaped by many legitimate perspectives and deep commitments. The challenge is not to eliminate tension, but to hold it thoughtfully while keeping mission at the center.

Some of the work of the past three years has been deeply affirming, strengthening partnerships, aligning programs with workforce needs, and clarifying pathways that connect education to economic mobility. Other moments have been far more difficult.

Leadership is tested not only in moments of alignment, but in moments of disagreement. There are times when decisions made with student outcomes foremost in mind are experienced differently by different groups. There are moments when progress feels uneven, when trust must be rebuilt, and when responsibility means absorbing criticism without personalization.

One of the hardest lessons I have learned is that leadership in public education often requires holding ambiguity, recognizing that people can be deeply committed to the institution and still disagree profoundly about direction or pace. Serving in this role has reinforced for me that listening does not always produce consensus, and consultation does not eliminate responsibility. Accountability ulti-

mately sits with the person entrusted to lead. For me, servant leadership does not mean avoiding conflict. It means being willing to carry it with care, without diminishing others, and without losing sight of why the work matters.

Over time, I have also learned that change is not only structural; it is also cognitive and emotional. Institutions, like people, have limits to how much they can absorb at once. When individuals don't feel equipped to understand why change is happening they may experience it as destabilizing rather than necessary. Recognizing that reality has required humility on my part, about pacing, communication, and the importance of building shared understanding alongside structural progress.

There are moments I would approach differently. Leadership is iterative, and learning does not stop once decisions are made. What has remained constant, however, is my conviction about the purpose of this work.

Community colleges are not abstract systems. They are public promises. We are accountable not only to those inside our institutions, but to students who entrust us with their time, to employers who depend on a prepared workforce, and to communities who rely on us to steward public resources responsibly.

As I look ahead, I am mindful that leadership is not defined by a single moment or outcome, but by the systems we leave behind. My focus now is on ensuring that Santiago Canyon College continues to build structures that support clarity, adaptability, and student success, long after any one individual steps aside.

This moment is a time to reflect honestly on what has been learned, to strengthen what must endure, and to keep students at the center of every decision we make. That is why I came to community colleges. That is the obligation I carry as president of SCC. That is the work that remains.

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ADMINISTRATION

President reflects on achievements in her 3 years at SCC

Faculty, apprenticeships among Kim's upgrades

By Lou Ponsi
contributing writer

In her three years as president of Santiago Canyon College, Jeannie Kim has taken the lead on a series of initiatives, with the goal of elevating the status of SCC from simply another community college to becoming a preferred choice for prospective students.

Hiring more full-time faculty, helping to bolster SCC's apprenticeship programs and increase the transfer rate, and fostering a closer relationship with the city of Orange have been areas where Kim and her administration have made progress.

"When I first arrived at SCC, everybody said to me, 'Nobody knows we exist,'" Kim said. "Everybody just sees us as the college on the hill. We had great programs, great faculty and an enormous apprenticeship program, but nobody knew. So, my primary job was to get out there and make sure everybody knew."

And most recently, SCC's first-ever bachelor's degree program — a bachelor of science in digital infrastructure and location sciences — was granted conditional approval from the California Community Colleges Board of Governors.

A second proposed bachelor's degree program, a bachelor's degree in water science, is also making its way through the approval process.

"We were able to get the right players and the right conversations going," Kim said. "And so, the desire to move forward from our faculty members ... We were able to sort of stoke that fire, and they got it done. So, I think the encouragement that we were able to provide and some additional support got the applications over the finish line. It's definitely a big win for us."

The cost of a bachelor's degree at SCC is an estimated \$12,000, Kim said.

Once the bachelor's degree program receives approval from the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, the program will transition from conditional approval to full authorization, allowing Santiago Canyon College to formally launch the degree pathway.

In the approval letter to Kim from Sonya Christian, chancellor of the California Community Colleges system, Christian wrote:

"This achievement is a testament to your institution's dedication, vision, and tireless efforts to expand educational opportunities that meet the evolving needs of your community. This marks a significant milestone in your ongoing commitment to academic excellence and workforce development."

Santa Ana College, SCC's sister college in the Rancho Santiago Community College District, offers three bachelor's



PHOTO COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS

SCC President Jeannie G. Kim speaks at the Early College Academy Awards Banquet in May 2025. The event recognized the successful cohort of Orange High School students who earned college credit while still in high school.

degree programs, the most among the state's community colleges.

Under Kim's leadership and the direction of RSCCD Chancellor Marvin Martinez, who was appointed by Christian to promote apprenticeship programs statewide, SCC established a separate apprenticeship division and hired a full-time apprenticeship counselor who is dedicated to working directly with students.

This initiative is part of the college's broader effort to expand apprenticeship opportunities to include nontraditional fields such as early childhood education and health care.

Kim has also hired 26 full-time, tenure-track faculty and increased full-time classified positions.

Efforts to improve the educational opportunities offered at SCC are being recognized.

Niche.com, a website that provides in-depth profiles, rankings and reviews for K-12 schools and colleges, ranked SCC No.7 out of the 90 Best Community Colleges in California for 2026.

SCC was also named No.3 of the 34 Best Community Colleges in the Los Angeles region and the No.1 Community College in Orange County.

Niche ranked SCC No.31 of 406 in the Hispanic Serving Institutions category.

To be considered, a college or university needs to have a Hispanic undergraduate enrollment of at least 25%.

"We are not an HSI because we enroll a lot of these students, even though that's the metric," Kim said. "What our success metric needs to be in terms of being a Hispanic Serving Institution is how many of these students go on to four-year colleges and universities, how many of these students get jobs that are going to last and be able to handle the various changes that occur because they have the critical thinking and analytical

skills that they need in order for them to be able to continue in the job market."

SCC is also seeing an increase in transfer rates, especially to universities within the CSU and UC systems, the

Most recently, SCC's first-ever bachelor's degree program — a bachelor of science in digital infrastructure and location sciences — was granted conditional approval.

president said.

"We are one of the top institutions to transfer to the CSU system and also have some of the highest numbers transferring to UC Irvine," Kim said. "We have a huge contingent that's at UCLA right now."

SCC has also received high marks for its support of military veterans, earning multiple designations as a Military Friendly Institution by Victory, the trademarked standard that measures an organization's commitment to creating opportunities for the military community.

SCC earned a Top 10 Gold / Spouse Friendly distinction from Victory for the 2024-2025 academic year in metrics such as graduation rate, retention rate, GPA and emergency funding, placing the school's veterans support program among the top 10 nationally.

SCC has also launched several support services in recent years.

In 2024, SCC launched TimelyCare, a telehealth platform offering free, 24/7 virtual access to mental health counseling

and general health consultations for all credit and noncredit students, providing support beyond traditional on-campus health services.

"These are areas that are important to her, (Kim)" said Christopher Sweeten, vice president of student services at SCC. "She wants our faculty, classified professionals and managers to be recognized for the work that they're providing directly ... she wants the community to be well aware of what is transpiring here at the college."

Kim has also made it a priority to strengthen SCC's relationship with the city, meeting periodically with the mayor and ensuring that SCC has a presence at events such as the annual street fair.

She invites city officials to events on campus and has helped to establish an internship program for students to perform internships with the city.

"It's a symbiotic relationship," Orange Mayor Dan Slater said. "She's a great cheerleader for the college, and excited about what the possibilities are and what she's already accomplished."

Within months of being hired as SCC's president, Kim also purchased a home in Orange.

"I want to be a part of this community, to be part of the fabric of this community," she said. And so, I have that vested interest, and people know that."

The community should be proud of the "college up on that hill," Kim said.

"I think what I am most proud of is the fact that we are deliberately creating pathways for students that are viable, that are living-wage driven, they're high-demand, high-earning potential, positions and jobs now and into the future. and making sure that they have all the supports necessary in order to be successful in whatever, either in their transfer or into the career that they desire."

INNOVATION

College hopes to lead the way in AI for educators

Center would develop use of new tech as a tool

By Brian Robin
contributing writer

Jason Parks is staring at a problem with a moving target of a solution. A problem that not only promises to get worse but comes with the chaser of potentially taking a wrecking ball to his institution's purpose, mission and reason for being.

Scott James is trying to be the solution to that problem. It's a job with a moving target of answers that is the academic whack-a-mole of the 2020s. And James finds himself holding the mallet and wondering where and what he's going to smack next.

The problem is artificial intelligence, or AI, which is turning the world upside down. And as AI flips industry after industry on its head, few industries find themselves dealing with the falling debris and attack on purpose more than academia. This is why Parks, the vice president of academic affairs at Santiago Canyon College, and James, a professor and distance education coordinator at SCC, are trying to get ahead of the AI craze and turn the debris field into an intellectual garden.

They applied for a \$4 million grant through the Department of Education that would allow SCC to establish an on-campus AI Innovation Center. The center would allow SCC to pay for a full-time position that James said would help revitalize the curriculum for teaching programs that include AI, provide funds that support research on how neurodivergent people can use AI and establish a fellowship program that teaches people how to use AI for research and measures the impact of that program.

"This is one of the most challenging parts of my career — trying to figure out how we're going to do this," Parks said. "I was a grad student when Wikipedia

was a thing, and I remember the hysteria. It's become a part of life. I imagine AI is going to be that space now, but it's so much harder because it's changing so fast. It's so scary and it's controversial. ..."

"It's challenging living in a world where the people who invented AI haven't thought of the consequences of this product, and we're dealing with it. Now that it exists and we're dealing with it, we're saying, 'What are we going to do with this?'"

If approved for the grant, which consists of \$1 million paid yearly over four years, SCC would begin work on the center by late February or early March. James said if they don't receive the grant, they'll reach out to community partners in an effort to raise the needed funds.

The urgency is due to tight deadlines that gave applicants only two weeks to submit grant proposals; James wrote the grant proposal in less than two weeks. AI's indiscriminate, blitzkrieg path through academia has professors rending garments in frustration and questioning every assignment coming across their desks with what has become a standard query: Is this the student's work? Or ChatGPT's? Or Claude's? Or Fill-In-The-AI App Here?

"AI has kind of been the topic du jour over the past couple of years," Parks said. "We have faculty at both extremes loving it and hating it — and a lot living in the middle trying to figure out how to deal with this new technology. We need to give our faculty a place to play and to experiment, because what I've heard from many of them is you need to bring in someone to teach us how to use this."

Enter James, who was already in the building, trying to figure out strategies to minimize AI's disruptions and turn the tool into a learning tool, not a cheating one. Along with being SCC's point person on the Innovation Center, James is also one of 12 AI Fellows in the state of California, a distinction bestowed on him by the California Community College Chancellor's Office, based on his work.

That work is considerable and the reason Parks said James is the right man at the right place at the right time to get SCC ahead of the AI steamroller.

"He's raring to go," Parks said. "I have so much respect for the man because he really loves AI and understands what it has the potential to do."

James started using AI after putting his degree in educational technology to use, helping



PHOTO COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS

Santiago Canyon College's plan for a new AI Innovation Center aims to minimize AI's disruptions and turn it into a learning tool.

blind students increase their reading speed from 120 words per minute to 400. He also received a grant from Axim Collaborative, a joint endeavor by Harvard and MIT created to advance digital learning technologies and increase access to high-quality learning opportunities.

Through that, James and others introduced Playlab, a custom chatbot tool created by a nonprofit that doesn't use student data on training, doesn't violate copyright laws and doesn't include bias in its outputs. Instead, Playlab allows users to train chatbots to use customized prompts that don't plagiarize or include bias.

James and other Fellows offered a three-week learning program in Playlab that drew more than 800 instructors from around the state.

"I see AI differently than others do. It's an ability amplifier," he said. "I noticed really quickly that AI helps students with neurodivergence. I have ADHD and it clicked for me. I use it now because it elevates me, makes me read at a higher rate and helps my

focus on reading.

"When I started using AI, I had an epiphany. We can use it for the same thing: converting text to speech. AI helped me, but I wasn't using it the same way as students who were having it do the work for them were. I used it as a thought partner and as an employee working for me. But I saw the benefits and the drawbacks right away, and the impact it was having on our teachers."

This is the urgency in getting SCC's Innovation Center up and innovating, even as the center is literally a work in progress. Parks said they have a space for it that is adaptable, but he says he still doesn't know the exact form of that center. All he knows is SCC needs a place, an intellectual garden, so to speak, that helps turn AI from a menace to a machine.

"Our faculty has some of the most brilliant people I've ever met, and they need a space where they can let that brilliance out with each other," he said. "They're going to figure out how to do this; that's going to happen, and I'd love for SCC to lead the way in that space. ..."

"The biggest part is we're in the plane, but maybe the wings aren't formed yet. We're building this plane as we fly."

SPORTS

Women's soccer team ends season in state semifinals

RSCCD Communications

The Santiago Canyon College women's soccer team saw a historic season end with a 3-1 loss to Sierra College in the 3C2A State Championship semifinals on Dec. 5 at Saddleback College.

The Hawks advanced to the state championship tournament for the first time since 2019 and competed for their fifth state title. SCC entered the postseason ranked as high as third in the state by the California Community College Soccer Coaches Association.

The Hawks fell behind after Sierra scored three first half goals. SCC responded with sustained pressure in the second half, controlling possession and keeping play largely on the Wolverines' side of the field. Freshman Noelle Zuvic scored in the 54th minute with a deep strike that sailed over the goalkeeper to put the Hawks on the board.

The Hawks reached the final four by winning three matches in the 3C2A Southern Regional Championships after earning the No. 2 seed and finishing second in the Orange Empire Conference. SCC defeated Bakersfield, Santa Barbara and Long Beach to secure its place in the state tournament.

SCC finished the season averaging 2.5 goals per match while holding opponents to 0.58 goals per game. The Hawks scored 60 goals and averaged 15 shots per contest. Sophomores Mia Lussier and Ayleen Jimenez led the attack as first team all-conference selections. Lussier scored a team high 13 goals, while Jimenez added 11 goals and led the team with 30 points and eight assists.

Defensively, sophomore Karen Pedraza, the Orange Empire Conference Defensive Player of the Year, anchored a back line that included all-conference selections Jordyn Gallegos and Melanie Salazar. Sophomore goalkeeper Makayla Worcester recorded 50 saves, 14 wins and an .862 save percentage, earning first team all-conference honors.

The Hawks concluded the season at 17-3-5, extending the program's streak to 24 consecutive winning seasons and marking its 11th state championship appearance in the past 19 seasons.

SCC will graduate eight sophomores, including All-American and All-State honorees Pedraza, Jimenez, Lussier and Worcester, along with all-conference selections Rayleen Chairez and Gallegos.



Santiago Canyon's Karen Pedraza (4) battles for the ball during SCC's semifinal game at the 3C2A State Championships. The Sierra College women's soccer team advanced to the final with a 3-1 win Dec. 5 at Saddleback College.

PHOTOS BY MICHAEL GOULDING, CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER



Santiago Canyon's Rayleen Chairez (19) defends during the semifinal.



Santiago Canyon's Jordyn Gallegos (8) brings the ball upfield, during a semifinal game of the 3C2A State Championship.



SCC's Makayla Worcester gets some help defending a kick on goal from Faith Ammann.



Sierra's Olivia Dewey (25) celebrates her goal with the Sierra bench.

BRAVO

Forensics team wins a 1st place at statewide championship

RSCCD Communications

The Santiago Canyon College Forensics Team delivered a standout performance at the 2025 Pacific Southwest Collegiate Forensics Association Fall Championship Tournament, held Dec. 5–7 at Mt. San Antonio College. SCC earned first place in the Limited Entry Sweepstakes Division, which honors the top-performing college among programs entering a smaller number of competitors.

The tournament featured 36 colleges and universities from across California, including UCLA, UC Santa Barbara, UC San Diego, Cal State Fullerton, Cal State Long Beach and the University of La Verne. Competing in a highly competitive field, SCC students demonstrated excellence in debate, interpretive performance and public address.

Student achievements included:

- Vincent Tran and Brittany Roque — Silver Medal, Parliamentary Debate (2v2). The duo outperformed 18 opposing teams, showcasing sharp argumentation, quick thinking and effective teamwork.

- Brittany Roque — Silver Medal, International Public Debate. Competing individually, Roque advanced through a field of 99 participants in one of the tournament’s most demanding events.

- Airy Fernandez — Bronze Medal, Poetry Interpretation. Fernandez’s performance was praised for its emotional depth, creativity and mastery of language.

- Alex Roslin — Finalist, After Dinner Speaking. Roslin impressed judges with a well-crafted, humorous speech that placed among the event’s top entries.



PHOTO COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS

Members of the Santiago Canyon College Forensics Team, who won first place in the Limited Entry Sweepstakes Division, join with coaches following the 2025 Pacific Southwest Collegiate Forensics Association fall championships at Mt. San Antonio College.

“Our students continue to show what’s possible through hard work, preparation and passion,” said Ralph Castellanos, associate professor of communication and director of forensics. “This victory is a testament to their growth and to the SCC commu-

nity that supports them every step of the way.”

The SCC Forensics Team is supported by a committed coaching staff: Castellanos, individual events coach Rita Rafael and debate coach George Talavera. Judges included

SCC alumna Emily Pogosova and Diana Martinez.

The PSCFA Fall Champs is one of the most competitive tournaments in the region, promoting critical thinking, public speaking and civic engagement among college students.

Volleyball

FROM PAGE 1

per League, the highest volleyball level in that country.

“There was a federal regulation that every team have at least a few players younger than 19 to inspire younger players to join the sport,” she explained. Mojab fell in love with the sport and played consistently through age 25.

Her family moved to the United States, and Mojab joined them, deciding to stay, become a U.S. citizen and build a life here. She obtained her bachelor’s degree in social work from Whittier College while playing for the Whittier volleyball team before she retired as an athlete. Today she lives in Irvine.

As a certified volleyball official — she received her Junior National Certificate in 2021 — Mojab has officiated volleyball at high school, collegiate and club games. “I referee in DII Conferences such as the PacWest Conference,” she said.

Her SCC women’s volleyball team plays both indoor and beach volleyball, each challenging players’ skills in different ways, Mojab said.

“You can take a lot from beach volley-

ball to use for indoor,” she said. “I think beach volleyball is closer to being an individual sport than indoor. When I’m coaching beach volleyball, I see my players use a mental toughness. It reminds me of what I needed to do in track, where yes, you are on a team and team results are what matter, but in each moment it’s up to you and you only to figure out what to do — no one will come and save you.

“It’s a mental toughness that allows players to be more resilient. After my indoor players play beach volleyball, they say, ‘I move faster, I react better. I see the game better.’”

Mojab is still refining her approach to coaching as she seeks the right balance of showing love and support toward her team and being firm.

“The style that has always been my signature is what people call tough love. My players, at the end of day, see the love I have for them, though they might not be able to see at the beginning because I am firm and strict,” she said, adding that her goal is to build a culture of accountability.

One thing she knows for sure: “Constant yelling and criticizing and being negative as a coach is not going to work, especially with this generation,” Mojab said. “They need to know where you’re coming from. Clear communication



PHOTO COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS

In addition to SCC’s indoor and beach volleyball teams, Mojab coaches the Pro-Play club team in Orange and the high school volleyball team at Rosary Academy in Fullerton.

about expectations is what they need the most.”

The indoor volleyball season begins in the summer and can go through November, depending on how far the team advances. Beach volleyball starts in January and can go into May. In addition to coaching the SCC team, Mojab also coaches the Pro-Play club team in Orange and the high school volleyball

team at Rosary Academy in Fullerton. As someone who has studied psychology and social work, and at one time considered working as a life coach, Mojab says helping people has always been her passion. “With teachers and parents, we’re all on the same page to help and empower young women,” she said. “It’s a privilege, and the most rewarding job on the planet.”

Gala

FROM PAGE 1

student Sara Gasca was recognized and shared how she overcame severe childhood challenges and found a second chance for education through SCC.

With an upbringing marked by drugs and abuse, followed by dropping out of college shortly after high school, Gasca never imagined she would have another opportunity to pursue higher education.

Now a 30-year-old mother of twins, she maintains a 3.89 GPA, is pursuing a degree in geology and has held multiple internships with NASA. She credits the support of SCC staff and professors with helping to change her life.

“It’s a story of triumph, a story we want to hear and really highlight because it shows the power, not just of education,” said Valencia. “Education without the support would not be what it is.”

The funds raised from the gala will be able to establish a new scholarship endowment, the Strenger Vasquez Legacy of Innovation Fund, named after SCC former presidents Dean Strenger, the college’s first president, and Juan Vasquez, SCC’s longest-serving president. The newly established fund will award scholarships annually, expanding the number of students who receive assistance.

“Being one of the youngest community colleges in Orange County, it’s been our goal to keep increasing that dollar amount because the students still have a real need for financial support,” said Kathy Jennison, executive director of SCC’s Office of College Advancement and Foundation. “We’re trying



PHOTO COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS

From left: Santiago Canyon College Foundation Chair Beatriz “Betty” Valencia, Dr. Heidi Sasvin, SCC President Jeannie G. Kim, Jarad Hildenbrand and Phillip Wu; Sasvin, Hildenbrand and Wu were alumni honorees at the event.

to raise as much funding as we can to help students like Sara.”

The SCC Foundation also supports several on-campus programs and organizations, such as the Hawks Nest Basic Needs Center, the SCC Speech and Debate team and the SCC Model United Nations team.

“We want to be able to have enough so that we can say yes to as many people, as many students and as many faculty as possible, so that these programs can really keep excelling,” Valencia said. “We want to make sure that we keep students as engaged

as possible without any kind of boundaries or limitations in terms of finance.”

Valencia, who has served on the SCC Foundation board for seven years, including four as board chair, is also an SCC alumna, along with several other board members. She holds a deep commitment to community colleges, as her educational journey took her from earning a GED to earning a PhD, an achievement she says would not have been possible without her start on SCC’s campus.

“There used to be this idea that SCC

was a really well-kept secret, but we do not want to be a secret,” Valencia said. “We want people to know who we are. We want them to know what we do. And we want them to know why we are different.”

“We might be a small campus,” Valencia said, “but we are kind of a big deal. And we are a big deal because we show how much we care for the students.”

Thanks to the outpouring of support, the funds raised at the gala will allow SCC to leave a legacy of enabling students to achieve their educational and personal dreams.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Students raise more than \$3,800 at St. Baldrick's Shave-a-Thon

RSCCD Communications

Santiago Canyon College students celebrated another successful year of fundraising for childhood cancer research during the annual St. Baldrick's Shave-a-Thon, held Nov. 17 at Strenger Plaza. This year's event raised more than \$3,800 for the St. Baldrick's Foundation, bringing the college's total contributions since 2008 to nearly \$81,700.

The Shave-a-Thon began at SCC in 2009 when Professor Jared Kubicka-Miller, of the Department of Communication, launched the event in honor of his brother, Scott Buehler. Buehler had participated in St. Baldrick's fundraising efforts and lost his life in an accident while rescuing

a cat from a tree. Kubicka-Miller created the campus event both to continue his brother's legacy and to teach students in his Group Communication course how to plan and execute a community-driven charity event.

Students in the course have organized the Shave-a-Thon every year since, contributing to its growth and longstanding impact. Participants from across the SCC community volunteer to shave their heads in solidarity with children undergoing chemotherapy and to raise funds for childhood cancer research. The event also provides opportunities for attendees to learn about donor registration through programs that support patients facing blood cancers.



PHOTOS COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS Philip Hernandez from Circle City Barbers in Orange shaves the head of SCC student Benjamin Sepin as part of the annual St. Baldrick's Shave-a-Thon, held Nov. 17 at Strenger Plaza. This year's event raised more than \$3,800 for the St. Baldrick's Foundation, bringing the college's total contributions since 2008 to nearly \$81,700.



SCC student Gavin Arnold gets his head shaved by Philip Hernandez. Arnold has previously participated in the event.

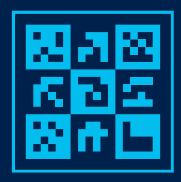


SPRING ENROLLMENT AT SCC

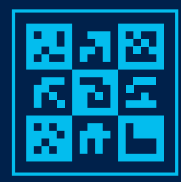
Registration is NOW OPEN!



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Returning Students Register Online: sccollege.edu/register




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