

## Colleen Hines- Former Student, Palomar College Water Technology Program

Hello and good morning, everyone. It is my pleasure to share my story with you all today. My journey into the water industry was not a straight path but meandered quite a bit. I started going to Palomar right out of high school. Like many young adults, I was confused as to what I wanted to do with my life. The idea of a career scared me and seemed like something other people did, not me. I took a lot of classes, changed my major a few times and finally settled on photography as my major. I had so much fun studying photography at Palomar but after a while I realized that many of my classmates had left for university, and I was the student just constantly taking classes at Palomar. So, after 9 years I transferred to Cal State Fullerton to study photography.

At Fullerton I took a geography class and that is when I learned where the water comes from that we use in Southern California. It blew my mind, and I was completely fascinated. I started reading books about Southern California water history and dams. After graduating with my BFA I did what many of my fellow millennials do with their degree- absolutely nothing. I continued working as a nanny which I loved and had been doing since I was eighteen. Although I could've spent the rest of my life playing with children, I knew that I had to get a "real" job. After casually flipping through the Palomar catalog, I noticed the Water Technology classes and I thought "Hey maybe I could do that." It was a topic I already had an interest in. I started taking water classes and with each class I became more and more excited about water as my career. Along with the excitement was complete fear and I questioned my actual ability to go from a nanny to working in the water industry. Would I actually like the job? It was so different from nanny life. I would soon have the answers to those worries and questions because I was selected to participate in the San Diego County Water Authority internship program.

I am so grateful for the internship. That's when I really got to see what the day-to-day job was like. I worked at different water districts and got to see many different job options. I was relieved that I did like the job and that gave me the confidence to start applying. I applied for every entry level job throughout the county. My goal was to become a wastewater operator (it turns out that changing diapers for 15 years prepares you very well for working with wastewater!) I eventually got hired at Stone Brewing working as an operator at their wastewater plant. That was my first step into the industry and 7 months later I got hired at the city of Oceanside as an operator in training at the San Luis Rey wastewater treatment plant. I've been there almost two years now. My 18-year-old self would have never imagined myself working as a wastewater operator. But I am very happy at my job. I feel satisfaction in keeping the community healthy. I have a stable job and am able to support myself as a single woman in San Diego.

The water technology program at Palomar changed my life for the better. It's great to see a program that can get you an excellent job without needing a 4-year degree. And the internship is the perfect hands-on experience that people like me need. I would encourage everyone, but especially those who do not quite know what to do and for those that don't have the traditional university path as an option, to consider water technology. It worked for me, photography major nanny turned wastewater operator. Thank you.