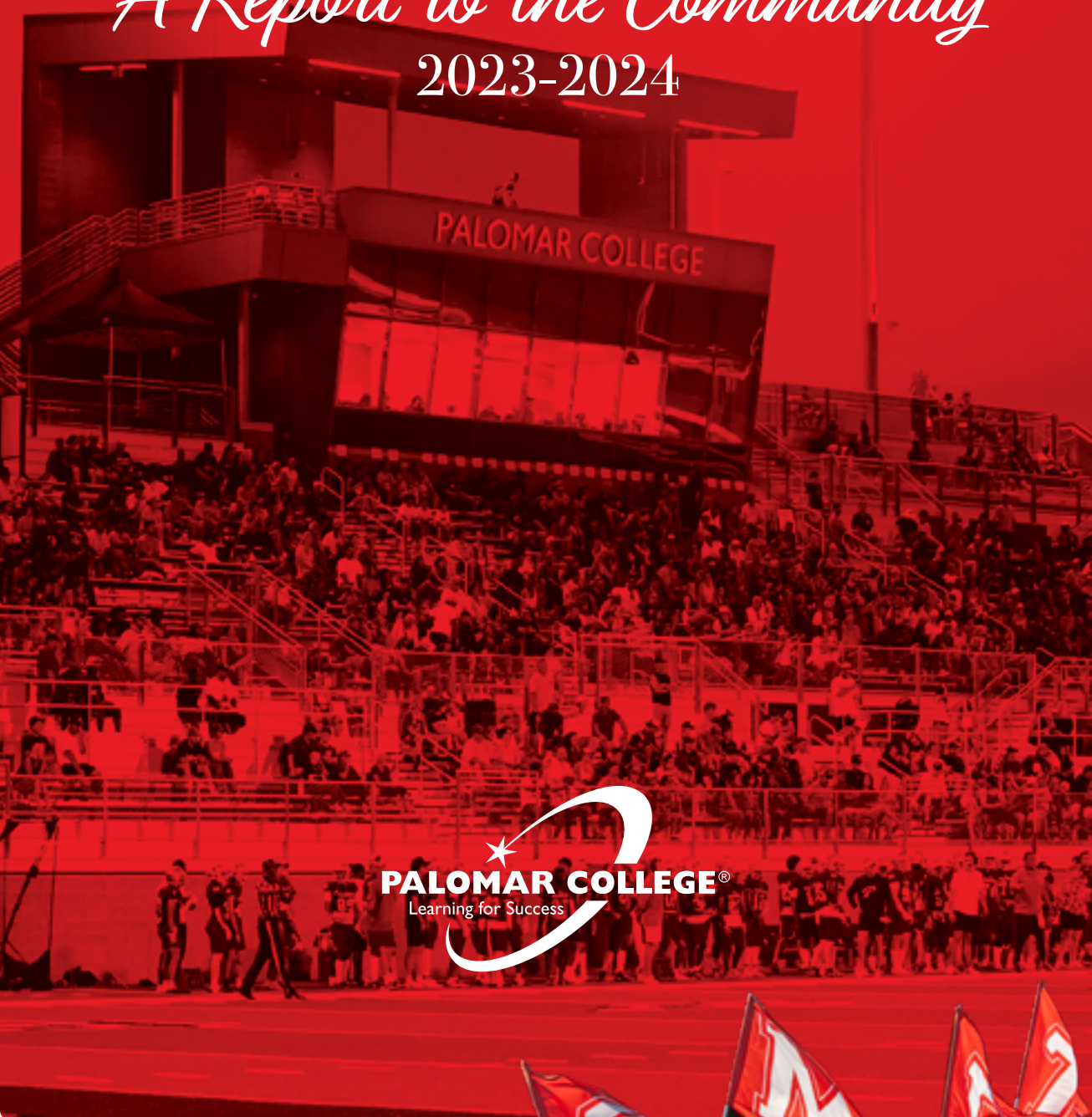




PALOMAR COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT

# *A Report to the Community*

2023-2024



# Superintendent/President's Message

With a focus on student success, it was another incredible year of growth and achievement for Palomar College. The energy at our San Marcos campus and Education Centers in Escondido, Fallbrook, and Rancho Bernardo, and our sites in Ramona and Camp Pendleton, and the Public Safety Training Center remained at an all-time high.

As more students chose Palomar College to achieve their academic goals and career training objectives, our enrollment continued to increase for all three academic terms. Under the leadership of our talented faculty, professional staff, and administrators, we built upon innovative programs and meaningful student success initiatives, all of which contributed to our ability to serve more students. Our persistence in stabilizing the fiscal health of the district also added to our success this year. We continued to operate with a balanced budget, healthy reserves, consistent clean audits, stable credit ratings, and stronger fiscal controls in place.

We celebrated important milestones and accolades while remaining committed to our diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility efforts to ensure that all students and employees feel welcomed and engaged. A significant point of pride was the successful completion of our accreditation cycle, conducted by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges. With a determination that Palomar College meets all accreditation standards, we received the best accreditation visit report in the history of Palomar.

After extensive collaboration with our internal and external stakeholders, we finalized our 2035 Educational and Facilities



*Portrait of Star Rivera-Lacey,  
Ph.D., Superintendent/President*

Vision Plan. The Plan provides a foundation for educational programming and addresses facility improvements for the next 12 years, all of which will positively impact the student experience.

During the past year, the San Diego Regional Economic Development Corporation verified our Associate of Science in Cybersecurity and the Computer Science program, which offers both an associate of science degree and a certificate of achievement. Verified programs are recognized for quality education and training for in-demand jobs within the San Diego County economy. Furthermore, research conducted by an external vendor determined that Palomar College has a

\$1 billion dollar impact on the region's economy, supporting more than 10,000 jobs and providing an education leading to higher-paying careers for hundreds of thousands of alumni.

Our partnerships throughout our district foster collaboration that ensures we remain a leader in serving the educational and training needs of our students. CSU San Marcos presented Palomar College with the 2023 Community Partner of the Year award, and TrueCare recognized our commitment to empowering students to make effective, sustainable community change through higher education.

The academic year culminated with our commencement ceremony featuring a record-breaking number of graduates crossing the stage and thousands of family members radiating with Palomar pride. With these achievements as a foundation, we are excited to build on our commitment to student success in the coming year.

*Go Comets!*



*Governing Board Secretary Michelle Rains, Governing Board President Roberto Rodriguez, Superintendent/President Dr. Star Rivera-Lacey, Governing Board Vice-President Dr. Judy Patacsil, and Governing Board Trustees Jacqueline Kaiser and Cassandra Schaege.*

## **PALOMAR COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT GOVERNING BOARD**

**Star Rivera-Lacey, Ph.D.**  
Superintendent/President

**Roberto Rodriguez**  
President

**Judy Patacsil, Psy.D.**  
Vice President

**Michelle Rains**  
Secretary

**Jacqueline Kaiser**  
Trustee

**Cassandra Schaeg**  
Trustee

**Reagan Barnum**  
Student Trustee

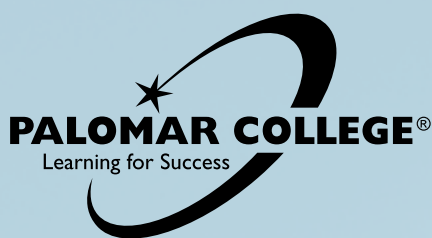
## **EXECUTIVE ADMINISTRATION**

**Tina Recalde, DPT**  
Assistant Superintendent/  
Vice President,  
Instructional Services

**Nicholas Mata**  
Assistant Superintendent/  
Vice President,  
Student Services

**Todd McDonald, Ed.D.**  
Assistant Superintendent/  
Vice President,  
Finance and Administrative Services

**Anna Pedroza**  
Assistant Superintendent/  
Vice President,  
Human Resource Services



## **Mission**

Palomar College respects each of our students' experiences and supports them to achieve academic success. As a community college, we encourage our students to embrace the best version of themselves and prepare them to engage with our local and global communities.

## **Vision**

Transforming lives for a better future.

## **Values**

In creating the learning and cultural experience that fulfill our mission, we are committed to serving our community, including historically and currently marginalized and racially minoritized populations. In doing so, we are guided by the core values of:

### **ACCESS**

We make education possible for everyone.

### **DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION**

We recognize and respect diversity, seek to foster a culture of inclusion and belonging, and strive to address inequities.

### **ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE**

We provide quality programs and robust course offerings to support students who are pursuing transfer-readiness, general education, career and technical training, aesthetic and cultural enrichment, and lifelong education.

### **STUDENT FOCUSED**

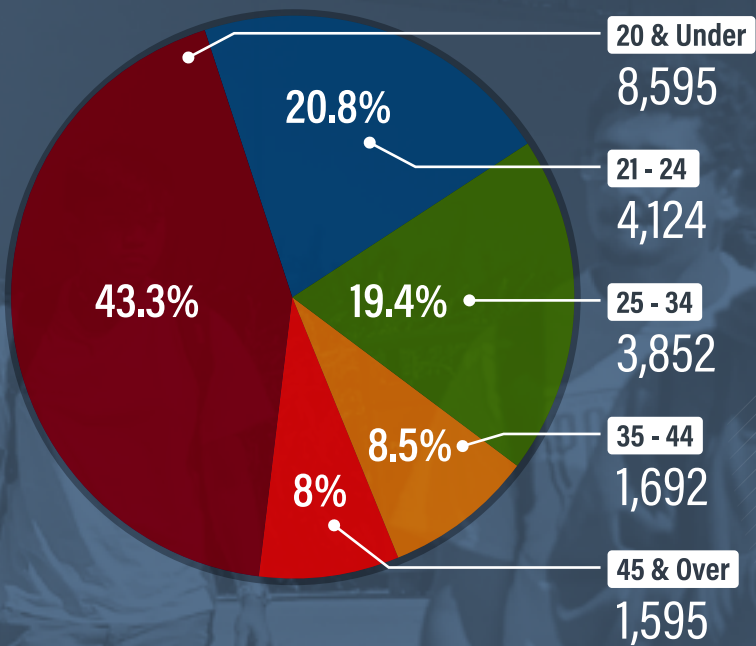
We offer a caring and supportive environment that addresses the holistic and distinct needs of our students.

### **COMMUNITY**

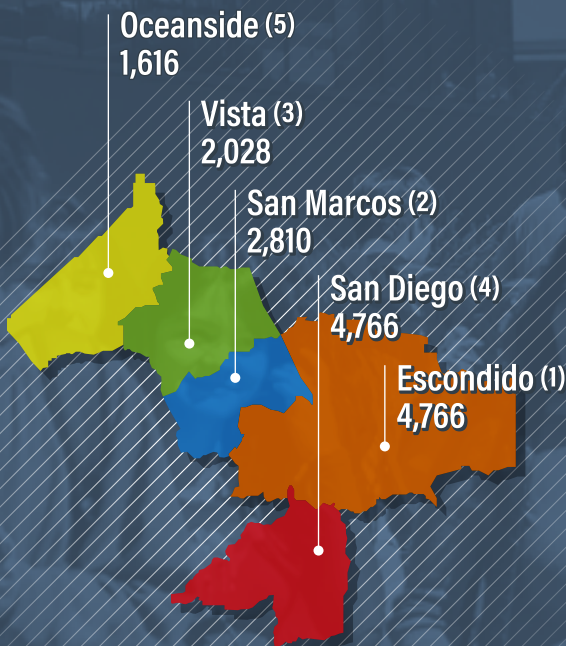
We are an integral part of our region and strive to foster meaningful relationships within our college and local communities.

# Palomar College Facts

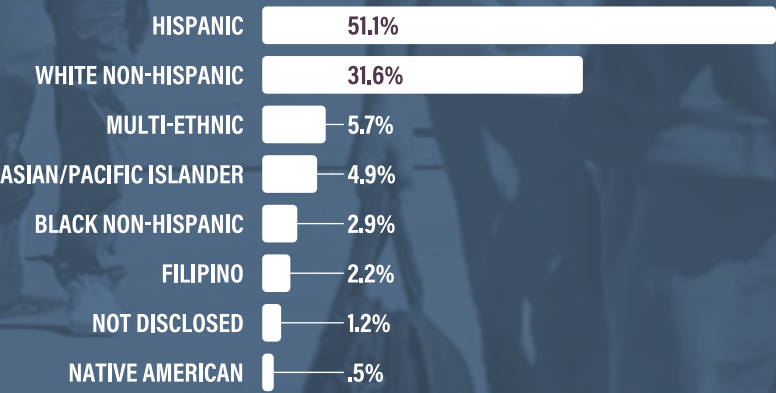
## STUDENTS BY AGE GROUP



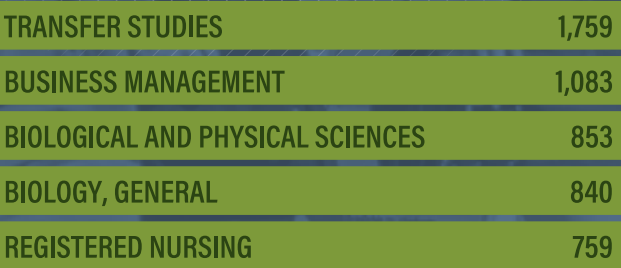
## TOP 5 CITIES IN ENROLLMENT



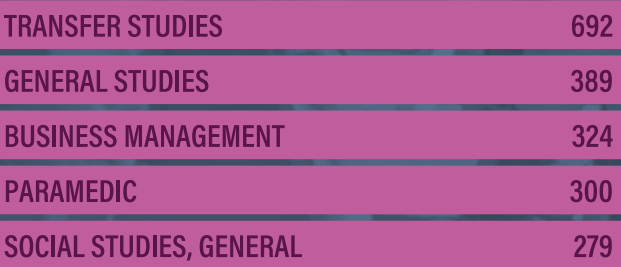
## STUDENTS BY RACE AND ETHNICITY



## TOP 5 MAJORS



## TOP 5 AWARDS



## FULL-TIME STUDENTS

13,641 - 68%

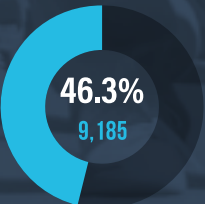
## PART-TIME STUDENTS

6,217 - 31%

## STUDENTS BY GENDER



MALE



FEMALE



UNKNOWN



NON-BINARY

The data source is the college MIS submissions to the CCCCO. AP courses are excluded in determining headcount.

# Proud Graduates Celebrate at Commencement



*Superintendent/President Dr. Star Rivera-Lacey celebrates commencement with Palomar College graduates.*

More than 2,800 graduates celebrated their academic achievements at the Palomar College commencement on May 24, 2024. More than 4,600 degrees and certificates were awarded, with many students receiving multiple awards.

Superintendent/President Dr. Star Rivera-Lacey congratulated the graduates, telling them “the world needs your brilliance, your compassion, and your unwavering commitment to excellence. The benefits of your hard work are not just limited to you. Instead, they ripple out, creating a wave of positive change that can have the power to impact your family, your community, and generations to come.”

The commencement speaker was Elizabeth “Betsy” Pain, an educator at Palomar for 19 years who was the 2022-23 Distinguished Faculty Award winner. Pain, a community college graduate, said her education journey was not linear, but was inspired by the passion of her professors. She continues that passion now as she teaches anthropology and archaeology and serves as the Archaeology Program Coordinator at Palomar College.

Pain discovered her love for archaeology during a dig held by a community college class where she discovered an artifact—a broken piece of Spanish pottery—that was likely used by Presidio soldiers hundreds of years ago. Pain earned her bachelor’s and master’s degrees in anthropology from the University of California, Los Angeles.

Associate Student Government President Christopher Garcia Mendez gave the student commencement address. He is a first-

generation Latino student who transferred to UC San Diego to study structural engineering.

The class valedictorian was 19-year-old Sophia Segerstrom, who has been attending Palomar College since she was 14. Inspired by her Palomar College instructors, she hopes to earn a doctoral degree so that she can become a professor.

“I see how their passion for their subject matter transfers to their students, which has inspired me to want to be able to be in that position to share my love of literature and writing with others,” she said.

During the commencement program, Anton Greenville, Senior Vice President of Balfour Beatty Construction, was honored as Palomar College Alumnus of the Year. Greenville attended Palomar College in the 1980s, and his parents and son have also attended Palomar.

Greenville’s company has built numerous structures at colleges and universities, including the San Diego Supercomputer Center at the University of California, San Diego. At Palomar College, Balfour Beatty built the Humanities Building, and the Teaching and Learning Center.

Greenville has been an active member of the Palomar College Foundation, and strongly supports Palomar College and the value of community colleges.

“Community college is the leg up for people like me,” Greenville said. “You learn the skills you need, which has led to my success in my professional life.”

# Palomar Makes It Possible for Student Success



*Julie Schlutz with her woodworking projects.*

## **Julie Schlutz**

Julie Schlutz took a woodworking class at Palomar College and discovered a passion for making fine wood pieces that changed her life.

Schlutz had always enjoyed do-it-yourself and crafting projects, but she didn't discover how much she enjoyed working with wood until she took an entry level Cabinet and Furniture Technology class in 2018.

Before taking the class, Schlutz had worked as a real estate agent in addition to raising her two children. Since that class, Schlutz started a business called Woodworking Momma creating a variety of pieces from wood, including custom furniture, signs, and décor pieces.

"I did not love real estate as much as I hoped I would," she said. "Woodworking is my passion and I'm putting all my eggs in that basket."

Schlutz said she was fascinated to learn the ways she could work with wood. She still has the wooden clock she created from her first class.

"It was the hands-on of building something from scratch and learning all the traditional techniques," she said. "I had never used a table saw and a band saw before. The new things really interested me."

Schlutz credited Palomar College with introducing her to the world of woodworking.

"I never would have known where to go if Palomar wasn't offering these classes," she said.

## **Saxon Metzger**

Saxon Metzger says his enthusiasm for helping companies have more sustainable business practices can be traced to his time at Palomar College. Metzger is founder and president of Eighth Generation Consulting, a firm that works with companies, government agencies and nonprofits on sustainability issues.

"My love for business and economics started at Palomar," Metzger said. "It was a place where I learned about social and environmental justice, and how those goals can be achieved in collaboration with economic development."

Metzger began taking classes at Palomar College when he was 12 years old, as an independent study student in middle school and high school. He said he enjoyed taking classes with students many years older than him.

"It was very stimulating intellectually and exciting that there was so much that was offered," he said. "I felt like the diversity present on campus was really important to me. There was a level of multicultural representation and appreciation."

He earned an Associate of Arts degree in Social and Behavioral Science from Palomar College in 2012 when he was 17 years old. Metzger went on to earn a Bachelor of Science degree in Economics from the University of Utah and a Master of Business Administration with an emphasis in sustainability from Wilmington University. In addition to his consulting firm, he is also a graduate lecturer at Wilmington University on sustainable business practices.

Metzger said Palomar College helped him on the path to success.

"Palomar College gave me the encouragement and support to try new things," he said. "It taught me that this was a healthy and positive perspective to have. I was always provided the tools to succeed."



*Palomar College alumnus Saxon Metzger, MBA.*

# Pathways to Law Program Opens Doors for Students Seeking a Law Degree

Palomar College offers a comprehensive program to encourage high school and college students who are interested in pursuing a degree in law.

Through the Community College Pathway to Law School Initiative, high school students can take free college courses that will lead to an associate of arts degree in Law, Public Policy and Society. The degree is transferable to four-year universities, and students in the Cal LAW program who complete their bachelor's degree will have their application fees for law school waived. They will also receive preferential applications at some law schools participating in the program.

Palomar College began offering the Law, Public Policy and Society major in 2019, and expanded the program in spring 2024, as a result of a \$99,000 grant from the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office.

A key goal of the initiative is to encourage greater diversity in the legal profession. A survey by the State Bar of California found that the attorney population in the state is 66% white, compared to a state population that is 39% white.

Justin Smiley, Dean of the Arts, Media and Business Administration division at Palomar College and a co-lead of the project, said the grant helps provide access to college and law school for many students who might not have considered pursuing a higher education. "It really clarifies the path in a way that allows them to see the future and see what might be possible," he said.

Students at San Marcos, Mission Hills, and Twin Oaks high schools are taking Law, Public Policy and Society degree program classes. As part of the Palomar College dual enrollment program, high



*Palomar College students work toward law school admissions.*

school students do not pay tuition, and through the Pathways to Law School grant, Palomar is able to cover the costs of course-related textbooks.

By taking these classes, students will gain an understanding of the path toward a career as an attorney, said Lakshmi Paranthaman, an Assistant Professor of Legal Studies and real estate and faculty lead for the Pathways to Law School Initiative at Palomar College.

Paranthaman said events were held to help engage students about the legal profession. The events included a panel with a diverse group of lawyers and judges and an admission seminar with the University of California at Irvine law school.

"A lot of students learn about careers from their parents. They may not be familiar with the steps you need to take while you are in college," she said. "It's good to learn in advance what a career in law requires."

# Advocating for Palomar College



*United States Representative Mike Levin with Palomar College leaders and former students, in Washington D.C.*

Students throughout the nation seeking a path to a 4-year degree or a new career in high demand industries, enroll in a nearby community college. Here in California, there are 116 community colleges educating over two million students. In San Diego and Imperial Counties, community colleges serve over 200,000 students.

Like students at 4-year institutions, community college students have significant resource needs in order to pursue their short- and long-term education and career goals. Research indicates that most community college students are the first in their families to go to college, and they do so, to set a positive

example for their younger siblings and to establish a better future for their families. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, over 85% of students receive some form of financial aid. In California, the majority of college going students receive financial assistance in order to support their educational goals.

Throughout the year, Palomar College, in collaboration with California community college leaders, engages with elected officials to keep community college students at the forefront of state and federal budget expenditures. Due to the lack of affordable housing in our region and the rising cost of goods and services, the need for this work has never been more significant. "The cost of living in San Diego County and the lingering impact of the pandemic on household incomes, has led to the need for ongoing advocacy for students and community colleges," said Superintendent/President Dr. Star Rivera-Lacey. "Joining community college leaders in Sacramento and at our nation's capital to discuss financial aid reforms and the heightened necessity to better support our students, is a direct outcome of our Palomar College mission and values."

In addition, Palomar College engages with city and county officials within its 2,500 square mile district to identify short- and long-term solutions to address the basic needs of our students. Many of these conversations have resulted in the funding of grants through the Palomar College Foundation.

## Palomar College and Workforce Partnerships

Palomar College has strong partnerships in the region, many of which are specifically tied to providing a pathway for students to further their education or enter the workforce upon receiving their degree or certificate.

"With nearly 5,000 students completing their degree or certificate each year, we remain proactive in establishing partnerships with industry leaders and pathways with 4-year institutions to make certain our students are able to achieve their goals," said Superintendent/President Dr. Star Rivera-Lacey. During the last year, two such partners, CSU San Marcos and TrueCare, recognized Palomar College for its commitment to the region.

CSU San Marcos presented Palomar College with a Community Partner of the Year award, honoring the college's engagement with the university in ways that have supported student success, community growth and development with a focus on justice and inclusion. The award recognized the unique opportunity that Palomar College students have to pursue

both their associate degree in nursing and their Bachelor of Science concurrently at CSU San Marcos.

TrueCare, which provides health care to communities in north San Diego County and Riverside County, expanded its partnership with Palomar College to address the mental health needs of students through the implementation of innovative suicide prevention strategies. Palomar College alongside MiraCosta College and California State University San Marcos were recognized this year for empowering students to make effective, sustainable community change through higher education.

The most recent collaborative effort between TrueCare and Palomar College is centered on creating a safe, welcoming and inclusive advocacy group and campaign to support the needs of Palomar College students and help prevent suicides. Palomar College students are being trained by TrueCare personnel about referral pathways for services and how to help students navigate suicide prevention resources.

# The Economic Impact of Palomar College

A study has found that Palomar College has a \$1 billion economic impact on San Diego County, enough to support more than 10,000 jobs and providing an education leading to higher-paying careers for hundreds of thousands of alumni.

The college's economic impact is equivalent to the financial boost that San Diego County would receive from hosting the World Series 156 times, the study found.

The study also concluded that Palomar College is a great investment for its students, taxpayers, and society in general, with high value returns on the money invested. Students fare particularly well, with a lifetime return of \$6.40 for every dollar they invest in their education—an annual return rate of 21%, far better than the stock market.

The study was conducted by Lightcast, a leading provider of economic impact and labor market data to educational institutions and workforce planners. It was based on data from the 2021-2022 academic year.

"This study demonstrates the broad impact that Palomar College has on our students and our community," said Superintendent/President Dr. Star Rivera-Lacey. "Our students get a high return on their investment in their education and our region reaps the many benefits of a skilled workforce."

It noted that the college promotes economic growth in San Diego County through its direct expenditures and the resulting expenditures of students, alumni, and county businesses. Specifically, the study found the following economic impacts:

- Operations spending: \$132.2 million in added income, the equivalent of 1,330 jobs, for the day-to-day operations of the district for facilities, supplies, and professional services.



*Student in the Water Technology lab at Palomar College.*

- Construction spending: \$2.3 million, the equivalent of 25 jobs.
- Student spending: \$23.3 million, the equivalent of 328 jobs, for bringing in students from outside the county and retaining students who would otherwise have left the county.
- Alumni spending: \$857.9 million, the equivalent of 8,555 jobs. As a result of their education, alumni receive higher earnings and increase the productivity of the businesses that employ them.

Lightcast also conducted an investment analysis comparing the amount spent with the return on investment. Students with an associate degree earning about \$10,000 more each year than those with a high school diploma, which amounts to \$414,000 over a lifetime of earnings.

For the more than 25,000 students who attended Palomar College in 2021-2022, the cumulative higher lifetime earnings for their education are \$659.6 million.

For every dollar that students spend on their education at Palomar College, they receive a return of \$6.40 in higher future earnings.

Taxpayers and society also benefit as the result of higher taxes paid by graduates with better jobs and a lesser likelihood that they will need social services or financial assistance. The study found that for every dollar invested in Palomar College, the people of California receive a cumulative value of \$11.30 in benefits.

The study concluded that Palomar College creates value for students and society.

"Palomar College enriches the lives of students by raising their lifetime earnings and helping them achieve their individual potential," the researchers concluded. "Finally, Palomar College benefits society as a whole in California by creating a more prosperous economy and generating a variety of savings through the improved lifestyles of students."

# Student Pathways to Success



2024 Valedictorian Sophia Segerstrom

## Sophia Segerstrom

Beginning when she was 14 years old, Sophia Segerstrom was attending classes at Palomar College. Five years later, she graduated in May 2024 as valedictorian.

Segerstrom began taking dual enrollment courses at Palomar College while she was attending high school at the Audeo II Charter School. She said taking courses that she enjoyed—particularly theater classes—enabled her to take a wider variety of classes than her high school offered. She explored her interest in theater by acting in two Palomar College productions: *Kentucky* in spring 2022 and *Greetings from the Red Planet* in fall 2022.

However, it was a creative writing class that Segerstrom took that helped her discover a true passion for writing and literature. She said English Professor Rocco Versaci made her see the writing process in a whole new way.

"His class was amazing," she said. "He teaches English as the power of language. It was his way of seeing and looking at word choice, connotations, perspective, and setting. It was the way he broke down the techniques a writer can use."

Segerstrom said she immensely enjoyed being an embedded tutor for English classes, helping students with their papers and assignments.

"I have encountered students in moments of crisis and have often been in the role of offering emotional support and guidance," she said.

Segerstrom transferred to Johns Hopkins University to earn a bachelor's degree in English and literature, and plans to pursue a master's and doctoral degree so that she can become a college instructor.

She said she wants to become a professor because she was inspired by the teachers she had at Palomar College.

"I see how their passion for their subject matter transfers to their students, which has inspired me to want to be able to be in that position to share my love of literature and writing with others," she said.

## Jerrie Fabrigas

Jerrie Fabrigas got a bachelor's degree in art history because she thought she wanted to curate other people's art. It wasn't until she took a ceramics class at Palomar College that she realized she had a talent for making her own art.

Since her first ceramics class at Palomar College in 2020, Fabrigas has been making and selling her ceramic art pieces. She was selected as a 2024 Artaxis fellow, which provided funding so that she was able to attend a two-week summer workshop at the renowned Haystack Mountain School of Crafts in Maine.

"I always thought I would be observing but not participating," she said. "I never considered myself an artist."

**"I feel so grateful  
for Palomar College.  
My life would not be  
what it is today!"**

—Jerrie Fabrigas

Fabrigas grew up next door to Palomar College and took classes there while she was in high school. In 2014, she earned her bachelor's degree in art history from the University of California, Irvine.

After a two-year teaching stint teaching English in Japan, she decided to pursue a master's degree in art restoration with the career goal of becoming a museum curator. In 2020, she took courses at Palomar College to qualify for the master's program and took a ceramics course on a whim. Although she couldn't create much during the online course held during the pandemic, Fabrigas said Ceramics faculty member Sasha Koozel Reibstein encouraged her.

"She said I should dedicate more time to this," Fabrigas said. "It was eye-opening and surprising to me because I never thought I would be in the fine arts."

After several semesters, the ceramics courses that Fabrigas was taking called to her more than her chemistry and archaeology courses. Fabrigas attributes the blossoming of her passion for ceramics to instructor Koozel Reibstein.

"Her assignments encourage the conceptual with me," she said. "She's always pushing me to build bigger and think about the concept behind what I'm making." Fabrigas said she creates ceramic sculptures and wearable art such as chest plates and helmets. Her work has been featured in a student art exhibition and led to an internship at the Anderson Ranch Art Center in Colorado.

Fabrigas said she wants to earn a master's degree in fine arts and work as a ceramic artist.

"I feel so grateful for Palomar College. My life would not be what it is today," she said.



Ceramic sculpture by Jerrie Fabrigas

## Sydney Huffman

Sydney Huffman never thought of herself as a ballet dancer before she attended Palomar College. After taking classes at Palomar College, she was selected to attend a prestigious six-week summer workshop to hone her skills as a dancer and choreographer.

**"I was trying to get into something fun and I fell in love with it."**

—Sydney Huffman

Huffman started taking classes at Palomar College while she was still in high school, so it made sense for her to continue at Palomar College when she graduated. She signed up for a ballet class taught by instructor Molly Faulkner.

"I was trying to get into something fun and I fell in love with it," she said.

As she took more classes with Faulkner, her love of ballet deepened.

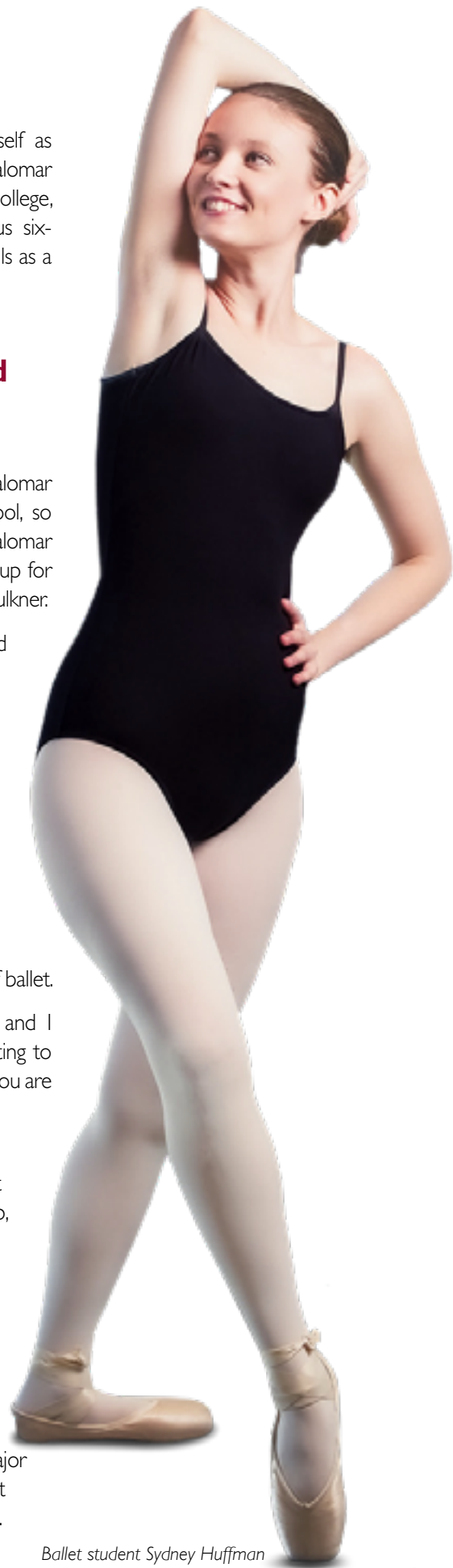
"She is so supportive no matter who you are and what your background is," Huffman said. "She sees potential in everyone. I had never danced before, and she made me feel like I was a dancer. She is amazing."

Huffman said she enjoys the universality of ballet.

"It's very rigorous and very structured and I really like that," she said. "I find it comforting to have structure. No matter where you go, you are always going to have that structure."

Huffman was selected to attend the prestigious Burklyn Ballet Theater summer workshop, both as a dancer and as a choreographer. She spent six weeks at the summer workshop in Vermont. The intensive workshop is designed to give dancers real-life experience within a ballet company.

Huffman, inspired by Faulkner, plans to major in ballet and general business management and hopes to teach ballet to young children.



Ballet student Sydney Huffman



## 2023 JULY

Palomar College baseball players selected in the Major League Baseball draft



## 2023 SEPTEMBER

Kate Kovrig appointed to Independent Citizens Oversight Committee



## 2023 NOVEMBER

Fallbrook Education Center selected as a voting center



## 2023 AUGUST

Start of the fall semester delayed due to tropical storm Hilary



## 2023 OCTOBER

Palomar College alum Tim Hill nominated for the Roberto Clemente Award



## 2023 DECEMBER

Palomar College program verified by the San Diego Regional Economic Development Corporation





## 2024 JANUARY

Palomar College receives  
historical best ACCJC  
visit report



## 2024 MARCH

Coach Leigh Marshall  
marks 275th win



## 2024 MAY

More than 4,600 degrees  
and certificates conferred  
at commencement

## BER

programs  
Diego  
c  
poration

## 2024 FEBRUARY

Launch of smart lockers  
to address basic needs



## 2024 APRIL

Ramona Unified School  
District and Palomar  
College advance future  
collaborations



## 2024 JUNE

Classified professionals  
honored during Classified  
Appreciation Week



# Palomar College Alum Recognized with Marine Corps Association Top Award



*Marine Staff Sgt. Graham and Marine Corps leaders at award ceremony.*

Marine Staff Sgt. Victoria J. Graham was recognized by the Marine Corps Association for her work with Palomar College's Military Leadership program to encourage more Marines to pursue a college education.

Graham, who is Chief Faculty Advisor at the Staff Non-Commission Officer Academy Camp Pendleton training program, was recognized

as the Training and Education, Command Faculty Advisor of the Year.

The Marine Corps Association, a nonprofit organization that supports the Marine Corps, recognized Graham for her "superior leadership, outstanding instruction and professional contribution." She was one of six finalists from Marine Corps academies across the nation.

Graham works at Camp Pendleton's Sergeant School, a five- to six-week course for Marine sergeants that teaches communication, leadership, sustaining, and war fighting.

"They learn how to apply those things to their everyday lives as sergeants, and it makes them promotable to the next rank," Graham said. Palomar College started the Military Leadership program in 2020, which allows Marines in Sergeant School to apply their coursework toward credits at the college. Students can earn 12 credit units followed by 2,000 hours on the job that can lead to an associate degree in Military Leadership from Palomar College.

Graham, who completed the program in August 2022, said it encourages Marines to pursue a college degree and shows them how the experience they are gaining will serve them.

"It helps the students realize that they are not wasting their time in the military," she said. "What they do in the military can translate to a civilian job. They're going to be able to use the skills they learned, to impact their future."

## Top Honors for the Palomar College Speech and Debate Team

Palomar College's Speech and Debate team hauled in the trophies in the 2023-2024 academic year, receiving recognition in regional contests and national and international competitions.

During the 2023-2024 school year, the Speech and Debate team participated in 12 tournaments in southern California and won 50 trophies.

One honor came at the International Forensics Association competition in Dublin, Ireland, when Palomar College student Cipriana Rodriguez made it to the finals in two events. She placed sixth in Prose Interpretation and was awarded



*Speech and Debate team winner Cipriana Rodriguez*

fourth place in Persuasive Speaking among 41 colleges and universities that competed.

"It was a really interesting experience," Rodriguez said. "You get to see the differences in how people compete in terms of their acting styles and speaking styles. You see so much diversity."

The Speech and Debate team also had impressive results in a state speech tournament. The team members took the following awards: Dia Hill, bronze in Impromptu; Kat Caldwell, bronze in Prose and gold in Impromptu; and Jesse Stirling, silver in the International Public Debate Association debate and selection as the top speaker of the event. Palomar College won first place in the Limited Entry Division sweepstakes.

# Palomar College Employee Honored for Commitment to Diversity



*Woman of the Year award winner Anel Gonzalez*

Anel Gonzalez's recognition as Palomar College Woman of the Year by the Empowered Women Alliance is the culmination of her years of efforts as a beacon for leadership in diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility, and antiracism.

Even before she began working at Palomar College in 2004, Gonzalez was running a program for day laborers through Interfaith Community Services. She helped spearhead the Hiring Hall, which is still operating, but realized that laborers needed more than just a day job to improve their lot in life.

"I have always thought that education is the key to breaking the cycle of poverty," Gonzalez said. "So, what better place for me to work than Palomar College. I feel very fortunate that the opportunity came to me."

She began working at Palomar College in 2004, and has served in several departments, including Extended Opportunities Programs and Services (EOPS), and the Teaching and Learning Center First-Year program (now known as the Palomar Promise program).

In 2018, she was elected to serve as president of the Council of Classified Employees, AFT Local 4522. In July, she moved into the position full-time.

"I really enjoy the community of Palomar," Gonzalez said. "I enjoy my co-workers and the positive impact we make for students. My favorite day is commencement because that's what we're all here for."

Anel Gonzalez is a founding member of the Association of Latinos and Allies for Student Success, which focuses on enhancing community college accessibility, supporting DACA and undocumented students, and organizing events that promote diversity.

She is also part of a team that coordinates Hispanic Serving Institution programming that supports students,

employees, and the community, including Hispanic Heritage Month events, Tarde de Familia, and initiatives like the Family Institute, a multi-session course that introduced families to the full range of resources and opportunities at Palomar.

The nomination to the Empowered Women Alliance at Palomar College by her colleagues noted her commitment to classified employees and to ensuring the diverse group of employees are heard.

"Anel's leadership shines through her commitment to actively listening to the experiences and perspectives of individuals from underrepresented groups," the nomination said. "She uses her platform to amplify voices that are often marginalized or silenced, fostering a culture of inclusivity and belonging at Palomar College."



*Dr. Nora Kenney, Anel Gonzalez, and Jenny Fererro at the Woman of the Year Ceremony.*

# Palomar College Establishes Pathway for Students to Attend CSU Sacramento

Palomar College and California State University, Sacramento (CSU Sacramento) that gives priority to high-achieving students with an interest in Black history and culture, allowing them to transfer to a new Black Honors College (BHC) at CSU Sacramento.

Palomar College is one of 25 colleges in the state, and the only credit-offering community college in the San Diego and Imperial County region, to enter the memorandum of understanding with CSU Sacramento for the venture. The purpose of the agreement is to foster improvement of completion rates and showcase the excellence of Black history, life, culture, and contributions by providing support for select motivated students who seek to attend the BHC.

"This agreement provides for a unique and innovative path for students



*Superintendent/President Dr. Star Rivera-Lacey, CSU Sacramento President Dr. Luke Wood, and Chief Diversity Officer of Palomar College Dr. Nicole Belisile*

transferring to CSU Sacramento. It is a wonderful opportunity for our outstanding students, from all races and backgrounds, who want to further their education and learn more about the societal contributions of Black

people," said Superintendent/President Dr. Star Rivera-Lacey.

The partnership provides for both institutions to establish a framework that ensures a robust academic alliance resulting in guaranteed admission of eligible students into the BHC. Beginning in January 2025, Palomar College students with a 3.8 grade point average will be offered guaranteed admission to the BHC if they are academically eligible to attend CSU Sacramento. Students with a grade point average between 3.5 and 3.79 will have priority admission.

Palomar College is providing opportunities for its students to visit CSU Sacramento, and to provide joint programming that supports students in their academic, personal, and professional success.

## Proposition M Positively Impacts Learning Environments



*Palomar College Football Stadium*

Over the last 18 years, the \$694 million facilities bond measure passed by taxpayers in 2006, has transformed the learning environments throughout the Palomar Community College District. The last few projects are in progress.

In the last year, the construction of the football and softball stadiums was the main focus. In spring 2024, the highly accomplished women's softball team was able to play their final games of the season in the new softball stadium. A historical milestone occurred later in the year, as the first ever home game of the 79 year-old football program was held in the new football stadium. The athletics complex will be finalized when the athletics fieldhouse is finished. This project is planned for completion within 2-3 years.

Throughout the year, the design and construction plans for the

40,000 square foot building at the Fallbrook Education Center progressed. This project is expected to start in the 2025 calendar year. Internal discussions continue regarding the last and final Prop M funded project, a relocation of student services.

All Prop M projects continue to be designed with the current Cal Green building code and Title 24 requirements as well as LEED and/or Living Building Challenge standards, inclusive of features that will make the facilities net zero compliant. For instance, the new building in Fallbrook not only includes a photovoltaic (PV) system that will make it net zero, but the facility will also include a battery storage system that is sized to eliminate the peak demand load which will reduce electricity costs. Similarly, the athletics fieldhouse project includes a (PV) panel system and passive solar design features that will make the facility net zero.

# Palomar College Aligns with Network Promoting Latino Student Success

Palomar College is a Hispanic Serving Institution with more than 50% of students identifying as Hispanic. As such Superintendent/President Dr. Star Rivera-Lacey has affiliated with the national network of Presidents for Latino Student Success, a group of college presidents and chancellors who have committed to making their institutions learning environments where Latino and all students thrive.

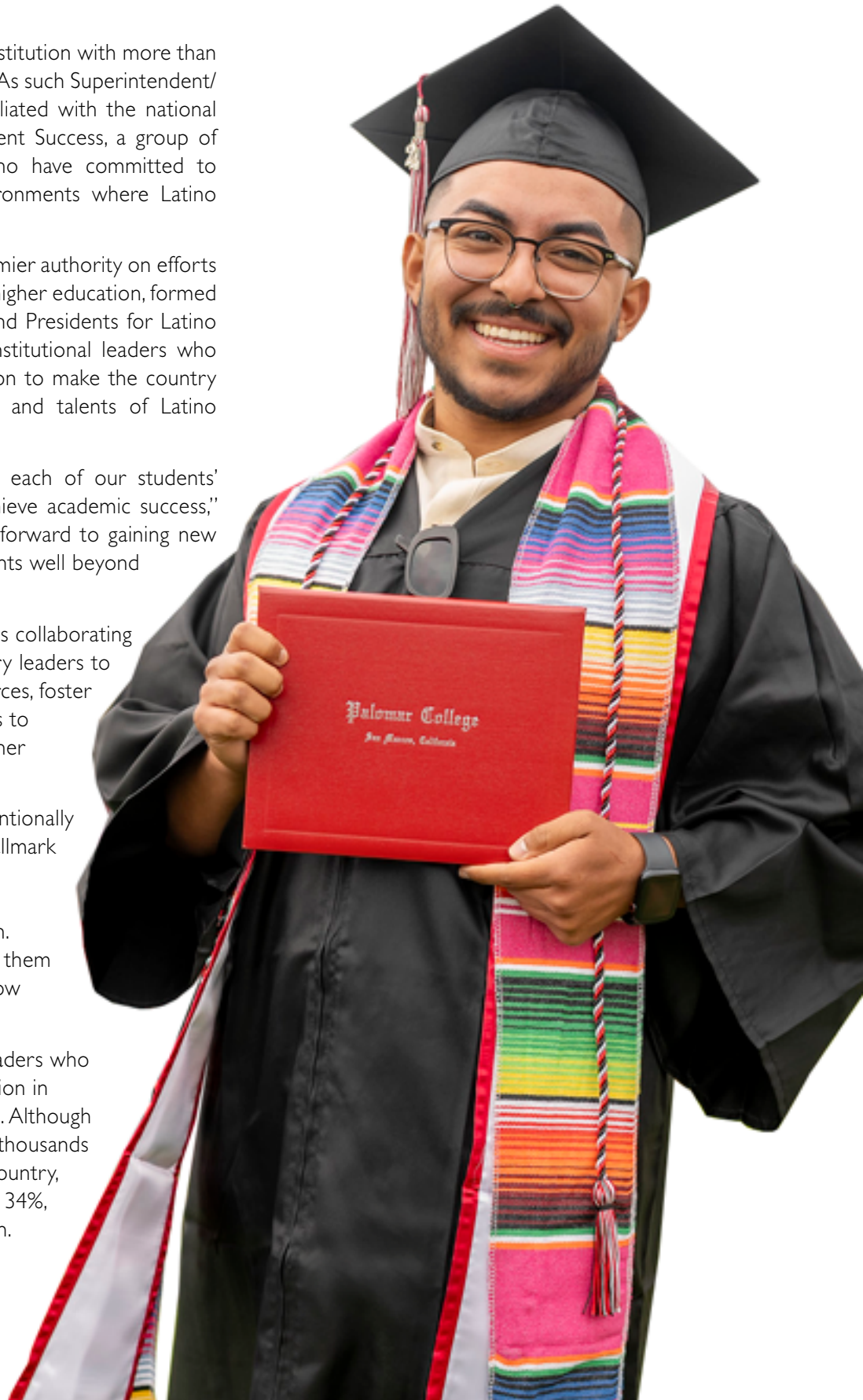
Excelencia in Education, the nation's premier authority on efforts to accelerate Latino student success in higher education, formed a network of common cause in 2011 and Presidents for Latino Student Success in 2014 to support institutional leaders who are aiming to transform higher education to make the country stronger with the contributions, skills, and talents of Latino college graduates.

"Palomar College values and respects each of our students' experiences and supports them to achieve academic success," Dr. Rivera-Lacey said. "We are looking forward to gaining new insights that positively impact our students well beyond their time at Palomar College."

Through the network, Dr. Rivera-Lacey is collaborating with Excelencia and other postsecondary leaders to leverage collective expertise and resources, foster partnerships, and amplify current efforts to accelerate Latino student success in higher educational nationally.

"Institutional leadership focused on intentionally serving Latino, and all, students is the hallmark of the presidents and chancellors in this network," said Sarita Brown, co-founder, and president of Excelencia in Education. "We are proud to catalyze and support them as they advance student success and grow talent or our country's bright future."

Dr. Rivera-Lacey joins more than 150 leaders who belong to the network and lead the nation in enrolling and graduating Latino students. Although the network represents only 5% of the thousands of colleges and universities across the country, the network enrolls 32%, and graduates 34%, of all Latino students in higher education.



*A proud Palomar College graduate.*

# Comet Kudos



With a teamwide 3.5 GPA average, the Palomar College softball team was recognized as a Scholar Team by the California Community College Athletic Association.



Dr. Hossna Sadat Ahadi led a presentation with Rising Scholars students titled "From Incarceration to Liberation & Healing – The Journey of African American Rising Scholars in Community College."



Palomar College Professor Dr. Molly Faulkner was co-author of an article in the prestigious *Oxford Handbook of Ballet Pedagogy*.



Palomar College Fallbrook Education Center employees celebrated Earth Day by cleaning up their community.



*Ale Brider* – A documentary film created by Palomar College Adjunct Instructor Ruth Weber received awards from the Accolade Global Film Competition.

# Palomar College TRIO Programs Serve Thousands of Students



Former Palomar College Upward Bound student, Ebony Wiley

Palomar College is home to six federal TRIO programs, each dedicated to opening doors for students from underserved backgrounds. These programs—two Educational Talent Search (ETS) projects, two Upward Bound projects, the North County Educational Opportunity Center (NCEOC), and Student Support Services (SSS)—serve students at every stage of their academic journey, from middle school to adulthood. The common goal is to ensure college access, success, and retention for first-generation and low-income students.

Through the ETS programs, over 1,000 students from the Vista Unified School District, Escondido Union School District, and Escondido Union High School District receive support tailored to their unique needs. Services include academic advising, college tours, tutoring, career exploration, and assistance with college admissions and financial aid. These interventions help students realize their potential and set them on the path to higher education.

“The ETS staff work tirelessly to ensure our programs are fully integrated into every school we serve,” said Nelida Martinez, Project Director of the TRIO Educational Talent Search and North County Educational Opportunity Center. “We’ve established strong relationships in these communities to reach students who benefit most from the services we provide.”

The TRIO programs at Palomar College create a seamless support system. Students in ETS who successfully enroll at Palomar are referred to NCEOC or SSS, ensuring a continuum of care as they transition into college life. This pipeline approach fosters long-term student success at the postsecondary level.

The TRIO NCEOC serves more than 1,000 adult students annually, providing one-on-one assistance with college admissions, financial aid applications, and enrollment. The program especially supports vulnerable populations, including the Rising Scholars initiative, which helps formerly incarcerated individuals pursue higher education.

Many TRIO alumni return to their communities, inspired to give back, a testament to the profound impact these programs have on their lives.

Corbin Ulloa, an ETS alumnus from Orange Glen High School, credits the program with helping him navigate the college application process. “They definitely opened my eyes,” Ulloa said. “They made me realize what colleges offer and helped me choose the right one.” After attending Palomar College, Ulloa successfully transferred to CSU San Bernardino and now works as a data analyst with the Gannett Corporation.

Similarly, Ebony Wiley participated in Upward Bound in 2009 while she attended Mission Hills High School in

San Marcos. As part of the program, she visited college campuses, attended cultural events, and went to workshops to learn about preparing for college.

“I had been planning on going to college, but I didn’t necessarily know how to get there,” she said. “Upward Bound helped me on my journey. It made my dream even more of a possibility.”

Wiley stayed in touch with her TRIO family while she attended Palomar College before she transferred to Arizona State University, where she earned a bachelor’s degree in Ethnicity, Race and First Nations studies.

After working for Upward Bound at Palomar College and at CSU San Marcos, Wiley is now working at a nonprofit that helps first-generation college students. The legacy of Palomar College’s TRIO programs is clear: these initiatives are not just transforming the lives of students—they are building a future where education is accessible to all, regardless of background.



Former Palomar College ETS student, Corbin Ulloa.

# Palomar College Police Department Pledges to Support Women Officers



*Palomar College Campus Police Officers  
Maureen Lopez and Nicole Davis*

The Palomar College Police Department joined a national initiative to increase the representation of women officers on its force to 30% by 2030, becoming one of the first community college departments in the country to take the 30x30 Pledge.

Although hundreds of police departments across the nation have signed the pledge, most are from municipal agencies, with some university police forces.

Police departments that sign onto the pledge agree to take measures to increase the representation of women in law enforcement, ensure that policies and procedures are free of bias; promote equitable hiring, retention, and promotion of women officers, and ensure the department's culture is inclusive, respectful, and supportive of women.

"This initiative aligns with our institutional goals of promoting diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility and anti-racism," said Chief Diversity Officer, Dr. Nicole Belisle. "It helps with our recruitment pipeline challenges and demonstrates our commitment to supporting women on our police force."

Chris Moore, Chief of Police for the Palomar Police Department, said having more women officers would mean a more diverse workforce that is more reflective of the campus community.

"It's an important part of the evolution of policing and we are actively working toward this goal," he said.

In Spring 2024, the Palomar College Police Department had seven full-time officers, all male, and one part-time officer, a female who came back to work after retiring in 2020. The department has about 40 employees, with 9 women who serve as professional or support staff.

## Palomar College Prioritizes Mental Health of Students

With increased concerns about mental health among college students nationwide, Palomar College is taking proactive steps to support the mental health and basic needs of its students.

Suicide is a leading cause of death on college campuses, and many students face stressors such as balancing school and jobs or taking care of parents, siblings or their own children. Community colleges serve larger numbers of LGBTQ+ students, veterans, foster youth, low income and first-generation college students than other higher education institutions. Many of these students experience stress, including discrimination, food and housing insecurity, and intergenerational trauma. The recent COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these stressors.

Palomar College is handling the basic needs of students in several ways. At the Anita and Stan Maag Food & Nutrition Center students receive free groceries, diapers, and other essential products. Employees on campus who assist with basic needs programming work together through the Comets Care Network, a regular meeting held to discuss ways to help promote a sense of community.

The Palomar College Behavioral Health Counseling Services have expanded. The mental health services team has added two full-time licensed therapists to work alongside a group of part-time therapists and interns to address the needs of students.

In addition, culturally-informed services have been developed along with liaisons with departments throughout the College to address the mental health issues of underrepresented students, including Latinx, LGBTQ+ and African American students.

All the efforts are supported by the Student Wellness Advocacy Group, a group of Palomar College students who work under the guidance of healthcare professionals to reduce stigma and promote help-seeking behavior in their peers.

Palomar College has also entered into partnerships with nearby community healthcare clinics, giving Palomar College therapists and other healthcare providers the ability to refer students who require long-term therapy or a higher level of care.

# Palomar College Solidifies Leadership

Throughout the last academic year, Palomar College filled vacancies at the administrator level by conducting comprehensive searches and promoting qualified employees. These individuals are highly dedicated professionals focused on student success who will engage with hundreds of colleagues throughout the college to help achieve the short- and long-term goals of the College.

---



## **Diane Studinka, Ed.D.**

Dr. Diane Studinka, who began taking classes at Palomar College during her senior year of high school, was named Dean of the Social and Behavioral Sciences division. This division, one of the largest at Palomar College, offers degrees and certificates in child development, economics, history, political science, psychology, social justice, archaeology, and sociology. Dr. Studinka began her career as a teacher in the Palomar College Early Childhood Education Lab School. As Dean she will continue to positively impact students and colleagues.

---



## **Nick Mata**

Nick Mata, who came to Palomar College by way of Santa Monica College, was named Assistant Superintendent/Vice President of Student Services. He previously worked as the Dean of Special Programs and also held leadership positions as Dean of Counseling and Interim Dean of Students. Nick, a former low-income, first-generation Latino college student, is now in a position to lead a team of professionals dedicated to student success, just like those who guided him during his academic and career paths.

---



## **Anna Pedroza**

Anna Pedroza, who formerly served as Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources at Sweetwater Union High School District, was named Assistant Superintendent/Vice President of Human Resource Services. With nearly 25 years of experience in public sector human resources management, including roles as a Chief Human Resources Officer and Director of Human Resources, she is committed to leading positive change to achieve short and long-term goals at Palomar College.

---



## **Leanne Maunu, Ph.D.**

Dr. Leanne Maunu, who was named the Dean of Languages and Literature division, has worked at Palomar College for more than 22 years. Her parents, both first-generation college students, met when they were students at Palomar College. Before she served as Dean, Dr. Maunu was an English instructor and also worked as a writing center coordinator and the faculty professional development coordinator. Her passion for learning and teaching will guide her as an administrator.

---



## **Amrik Johal, Ph.D.**

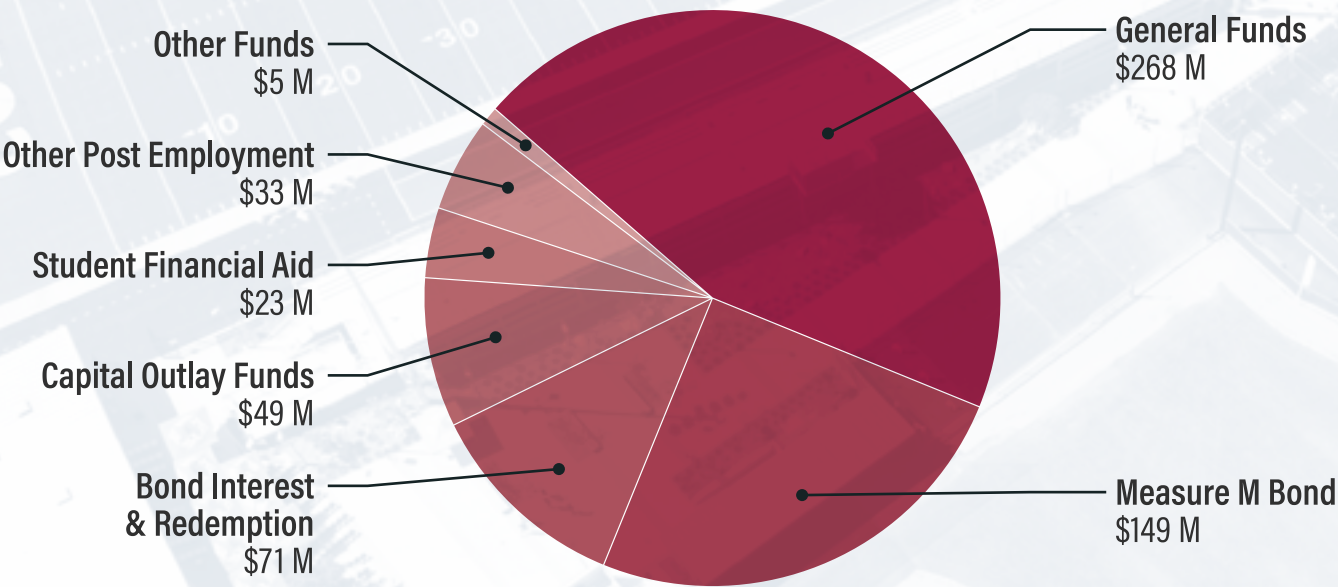
Dr. Amrik Johal joined Palomar College as the Dean of Student Life and Leadership after working for six years at Irvine Valley College in the South Orange County Community College District as Assistant Dean of Students. Dr. Johal and his family immigrated to the United States when he was 11 years old. Being a first-generation college student allows him to easily connect with students and he is certain to use this experience to support the success of Palomar students.

---

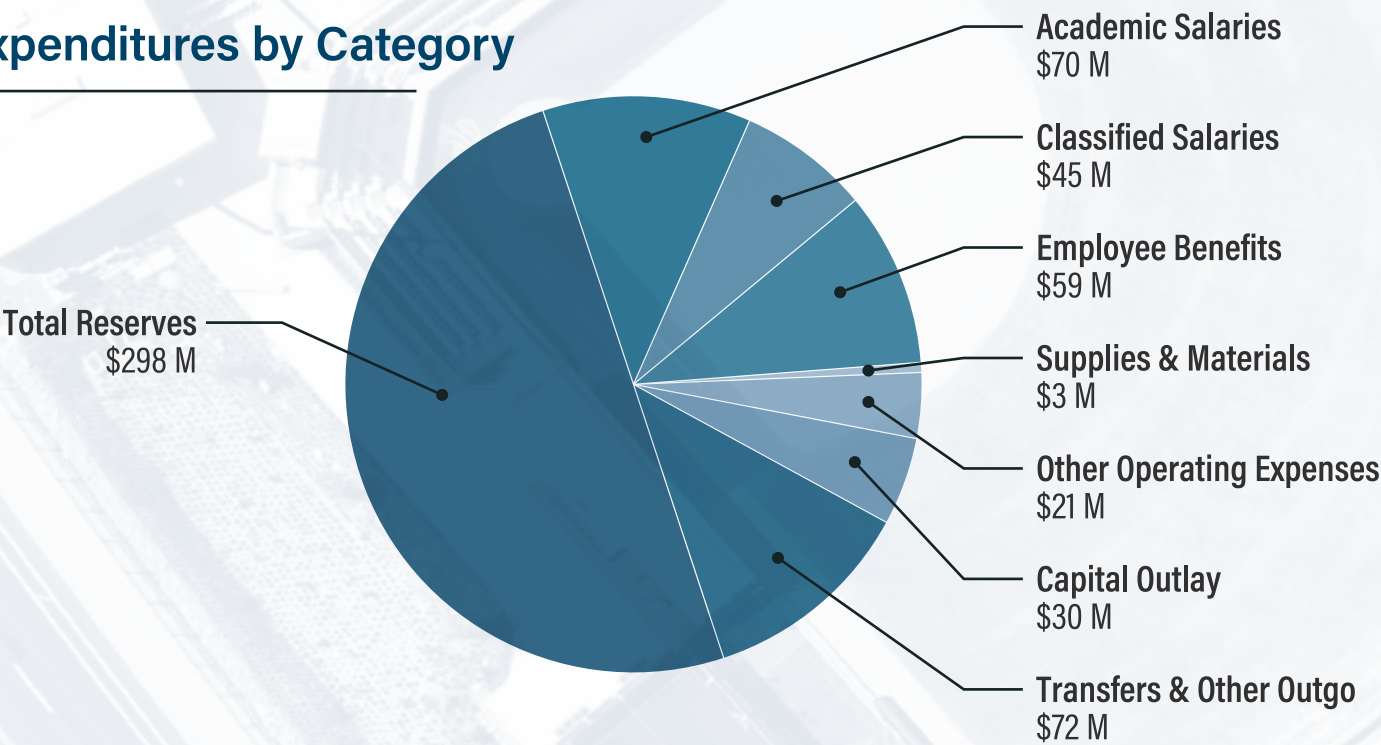
# Fiscal Report

Palomar Community College District received an unmodified opinion on the 2022-23 fiscal year financial audit, indicating that the District’s financial reporting is in order. For the \$694 million Construction Bond Program (Measure M) approved by voters in 2006, the District also received an unmodified audit opinion on the 2022-23 financial audit and the performance audit noted no instances of noncompliance. In addition, Palomar earned an A on the San Diego County Taxpayers Education Foundation report card which rates the transparency and accountability of the College leveraging taxpayer dollars. The fiscal year 2024-25 Budget for the District totals \$607 million.

## Revenues by Category



## Expenditures by Category



# Palomar College Foundation Salutes the Military



*Former Palomar College Comet Award Winner Brian Cahill, Palomar College Foundation Board of Directors Chair Will Rivera, Superintendent/President of Palomar College Dr. Star Rivera-Lacey, former Palomar College Comet Award Winner Klaus Kirchhoff, President of the Assistance League of Inland North County Diana Towne, and Palomar College Foundation Executive Director, Stacy Rungaitis.*

The Palomar College Community Showcase, brought 400 campus and community leaders from across north county to the California Center for the Arts in Escondido to "A Salute to Those Who Serve." The event hosted by the Palomar College Foundation honored active duty military and veterans. The expansive programs and

services available at Palomar College designed specifically for military-affiliated students were featured.

Superintendent/President Dr. Star Rivera-Lacey presented her Report to the Community, highlighting the past year and future initiatives that will impact

generations of students to come. During her remarks, she mentioned the progress Palomar College has made to increase the number of students enrolled throughout the 2,500 square mile district and the completion of its Vision 2035 plan, which sets a path for new educational programs and facilities for the next 12 years.

The annual Comet Award was presented to the Assistance League of Inland North County. The Comet Award recognizes individuals or organizations dedicated to serving others and our community. The Assistance League of Inland North County is an all-volunteer 501 (c)(3) nonsectarian, nonpolitical, nonprofit organization serving children and families in need, including a scholarship program for high school and college students.

## Palomar College Foundation Adds More Scholarships to Assist Students

The Palomar College Foundation awards more than 500 scholarships annually, and 23 new scholarships were added this year to assist even more students.

Palomar College Foundation Executive Director Stacy Rungaitis said many of the new scholarships are endowed, meaning they can be offered to students in perpetuity.

In addition to the increase in scholarships, the Palomar College Foundation has also seen its net assets grow fourfold, from \$6 million to over \$28 million.

One new scholarship with special meaning was created to honor Pete Rogers, who served on the foundation's board of directors from 2018 to 2022 and was president of the board from 2019 to 2022. Rogers has been diagnosed with cancer.

"Pete has been an important part of the foundation," Rungaitis said. "He's an idea guy and has a large vision for what we can be and how we can grow. He helped us aspire to bigger heights."



*Deborah Rogers, Pete Rogers, Stacy Rungaitis, Foundation Board Member Malena Bennett, and Foundation Board Chair Will Rivera celebrate the establishment of the Pete Rogers Welding Scholarship*

The Pete Rogers Welding Scholarship was created through a partnership with Carlsbad Rotary Club, of which Rogers is a member. The scholarship is endowed, so Palomar

College will be able to award up to four \$500 scholarships each year forevermore.

The scholarship focuses on welding students because Rogers developed a connection with program after visiting it.

Rogers said his father was able to immigrate to the United States from Canada in the 1950s because of his skills as a welder.

"I feel so lucky that I was given the privilege to be raised in the greatest country on Earth because my father had a dream of moving here and had the necessary skill to bring it to fruition," Rogers said in an email.

"Everyone has dreams," he said. "We at the foundation knock down financial and bureaucratic barriers to enable those with dreams to actualize their dream."



palomar.edu | 1140 West Mission Road, San Marcos, CA 92069 | 760-744-1150

