

RAMS

MONTHLY

BEST OF 2025



VICTOR VALLEY COLLEGE
2025-2026
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CHAMPIONS



BEST OF 2025

STORIES OF STUDENT SUCCESS AND LEARNING



VICTOR VALLEY
COLLEGE

Letter from the Editor

RAMS Monthly Editor reflects on the year that was 2025 for the VVC community



Here's my annual year in review. And oh what a year it was. If I had to take one word to sum it all up I think the most neutral word to use is "growth"

As mentioned many times on the podcast, my background is from the entertainment/media industry. And this year, I retired (*because I'm so old LOL*) from iHeart Radio in Los Angeles, so for me personally, I reflect on "growth" as growth in ideas, impact, and ability to adapt. From expanding VVC's reach within the community to strengthening internal collaboration with many of you, every challenge became an opportunity in 2025 to learn and evolve. This year wasn't just about progress; it was about laying the foundation for sustainable success and setting the stage for even greater achievements ahead.

The story-telling (*because that's literally my biggest gift to the world*) opportunities for RAMS Monthly has exceeded expectations in 2025. And with the support of our popular podcast, RAMPLIFI, we've been able to do what we set out to do and we're continuing the message....(*very long pause for dramatic effect*).....and that's human connection. Understanding that although we come from different walks of life, we value shared experiences and respect each others perspectives in society just enough to co-exist in our special community we call Victor Valley College.

I've done a lot of traveling this past year, because for me I'm not very good reading about it in a book. I learn better by observing and experiencing. I've

been everywhere from Michigan to Central America in 2025.

I know, I know, what a contrast. But, to be intimate and share a slice of my life with you briefly, in Michigan, I spent the last few days of my grandmother's life with her as she was dying. She had dementia at 95 years old and by the grace of God had clarity for the 3 days I got to spend with her and knew who I was and maintained coherency for the length of my stay. It was a gift and I will forever be grateful we had the opportunity to say our final goodbyes to one another.

And in Belize on vacation, I experienced a melting pot of diverse culture and harmony. I snorkeled with the sea life of the Belize Barrier Reef and for a brief moment, was able to leave all my worries and troubles at the bottom of the Caribbean Sea.

My point is that through just a couple glimpses of how 2025 went for me, I see and understand how meaningful life is and how each moment, no matter how insignificant it can seem, **IS** significant, if you just take a moment to see it. This is why RAMS Monthly continues to be successful. It picks up on little moments in the VVC Universe that matter to our students and staff and shares it because we are all more than staff and students and that deserves a spotlight in the name of student and staff success.

So what's on the horizon? (*See what I did there? See picture for reference. lol*) To expand on what we've already set out to do, it's all about the student lifestyle experience and re-developing what that looks like for the next generation of students. "Look" being the key word. The world is ever evolving and changing, and the demand for what keeps students motivated, engaged, and involved on a digital media scale should meet that demand. So, as the sun sets in 2025, VVC will rise up in 2026, with a new bag of tricks! To quote Emerson, "Every sunset brings the promise of a new dawn." Which is a reminder that endings lead to new beginnings and that my friends is growth through transition.

-Andrew

VVC Hosts College Tour Kickoff for Award-Winning Ice-T Film on Gun Violence

Filmmaker Terry C. Carney, Sr. says this powerful documentary delves into the critical intersections of mental health and gun violence

FEBRUARY 2025 - Victor Valley College (VVC) will host a special screening of the award-winning documentary *Put the Guns Down: A World Epidemic* on Wednesday, February 26th, 2025, from 3:00 PM to 6:00 PM at the VVC Performing Arts Center. This powerful event is presented in partnership with the DVL (Dreamers, Visionaries & Leaders) Project and VVC's Umoja program. The screening will be followed by a panel discussion aimed at sparking critical conversations on the ongoing gun violence epidemic and its societal impact.

The documentary, *Put the Guns Down: A World Epidemic*, has earned over 46 awards for its poignant exploration of the devastating effects of gun violence. The film features real-life testimonies from families and communities impacted by gun violence and emphasizes the importance of mental health awareness and community action.

Following the screening, a panel discussion will take place, led by Platinum City Golden West Entertainment & Films (PCGW). The panel will feature key cast members of the film, including Cortlyn Bridges, Donna Johnson, Justified, CJ Taylor, and Cornell Ward. Terry C. Carney Sr., the film's creator, writer, and director, will also join the discussion to share insights and reflections on the project.

"We jumped at the opportunity to bring this impactful documentary to the High Desert community in partnership with Victor Valley College's Umoja Program," said Regina Weatherspoon-Bell, Founder and CEO of the DVL Project. "This free public event is part of our ongoing mission to empower communities through education and collaboration."

Hakeem Croom, Program Manager of the Umoja-Uzima Scholars Program, also

expressed the event's significance. "We are excited to partner with DVL to bring this timely and critical conversation to our community," Croom said. "Our goal is to inform the High Desert about the urgent issue of gun violence while inspiring those who attend to become agents of change."

Terry C. Carney Sr., the visionary behind the film, hopes the event will inspire action. "This film was created to ignite conversations, foster understanding, and encourage communities to come together to confront these issues head-on," Carney stated. "Events like this are crucial steps in building a safer, more united future for us all."

The event is free and open to the public, offering a unique opportunity to engage with thought-provoking material and contribute to the important conversation about the impact of gun violence on society.

Event Details

What: *Put the Guns Down: A World Epidemic* Documentary Screening and Panel Discussion

When: Wednesday, February 26th, 2025 | 3:00 PM – 6:00 PM

Where: Victor Valley College Performing Arts Center, 18422 Bear Valley Road, Victorville, CA 92395

Cost: Free and open to the public

Disclaimer: Mature Content Warning

The upcoming screening of *Put the Guns Down: A World Epidemic* and the subsequent panel discussion may contain content that some viewers may find distressing. This includes discussions of gun violence, real-life testimonies, and sensitive subject matter related to trauma, loss, and the impact of gun violence on individuals and communities. Viewer discretion is advised.

The film and panel discussion aim to raise awareness, foster critical dialogue, and inspire action around the issue of gun violence. Those interested in attending the event are encouraged to approach the material with respect and understanding of its emotional and psychological impact.



Early Childhood: Empowering Gen Alpha Through Early Learning

MARCH 2025 - If you read the headline you probably did a double take to ask yourself what the heck is “Gen Alpha?”

Generation Alpha refers to individuals born roughly between 2010 and 2025. This generation follows Gen Z and consists primarily of children of Millennials. Gen Alpha is growing up in a world dominated by technology, social media, and artificial intelligence, making them the most digitally immersed generation in history.

More on that later. One aspect of educating this generation is keeping up with the bevaioal and key characteristics that make this future generation one of the most soon-to-be diverse groups on the planet. VVC’s Child Development Center has not one, not two, but three student workers who are helping our Gen-Alpha Rams in their early childhood education.

VVC student worker Joshua Kho tells RAMS Monthly that his start with teaching children began before he attended VVC, “Through tutoring and babysitting while in High School I found I love teaching and the more I help children in their educational growth and journey, the more I love teaching.”



Angelo Fraydealfaro - VVC Student Worker

According to data from Kidsit.com, 38% of people who babysit put it on a resume to find additional babysitting jobs, while 17% do it to obtain childcare employment, additionally another 14% use the experience to apply to a college or educational program.

Jiovanni Mauricio also works at the CDC on campus and says his time at the center is an investment. He also says that it gives him an “opportunity and chance to work with many different families that all have different cultural backgrounds than [his] own.” Jiovanni went on to say that “it gives [him] the chance to experience things that [he] may have not gotten otherwise. And [he] hopes in the future that [he] can integrate the things [he] learned into [his] own classroom” one day.”

We also had the opportunity to speak to student worker Angelo Fraydealfaro who says the joy and



Jiovanni Mauricio - VVC Student Worker

curiosity in the children he helps take care of at CDC is his favorite part, “It’s incredibly rewarding to be part of their early development, helping them build confidence, social skills, and a love for learning. Knowing that I play a role in shaping their future makes every moment worthwhile.”

So, back to those young Rams who fall into the Gen Alpha category. Here’s a sneak peak into who makes up the upcoming generation:

Key Characteristics of Gen Alpha:

Tech-Native – Raised with smartphones, AI, and digital media from birth.

Visual & Interactive Learners – Prefer short-form, gamified, and video-based content.

Globally Aware – More inclusive and connected due to digital exposure.

Personalized Education – Learning shaped by AI, VR, and adaptive technology.

Short Attention Spans – Thrive on quick, engaging content over traditional methods.

Why They Matter?

By the mid-2030s, Gen Alpha will enter the workforce, reshaping industries with their tech-savvy skills, global mindset, and adaptability. Businesses, educators, and marketers are already paying attention to their behaviors, as they will be the largest generation in history and hold significant economic power.

As Gen Alpha continues to grow and shape the

future, the role of early childhood educators—like the dedicated student workers at VVC’s Child Development Center—becomes even more crucial. By fostering a love for learning, encouraging social development, and embracing diverse cultural perspectives, these educators are laying the foundation for a generation that will redefine the world as we know it. As technology and education evolve hand in hand, the investment in Gen Alpha’s early years will undoubtedly pay off, ensuring they are prepared to thrive in an ever-changing global landscape.



Joshua Kho - VVC Student Worker

Op-Ed: Investing in Care to Combat Declining Enrollment in Higher Education

By: Dr. Daniel Walden

Our educational system is facing an unprecedented challenge – declining enrollment. Across the country, community colleges and universities are seeing fewer students enroll, a trend that could have long-term consequences for both individuals and the economy. A shrinking student population means fewer trained workers entering key industries, bringing about economic decline as the demographic cliff continues to grow. The number of traditional college-age students is steadily declining, with fewer high school graduates enrolling in higher education. This enrollment issue is exacerbated by students struggling with loneliness, uncertainty, and declining mental health. As this trend continues, it becomes even more imperative for colleges to be intentional about retaining their current students. At Victor Valley College, we have found a powerful solution that will be instrumental in keeping students engaged and enrolled in the years to come – care.

Turning Enrollment Decline into Growth

Serving California's High Desert, our college has long navigated economic and educational inequities. Similar to institutions nationwide, we saw enrollment plummet during the pandemic, dropping by 20% in 2020-2021. In 2021-22, we regained five percent, followed by a 30% increase the next year and another 20% the year after. Today, we stand as California's fastest-growing community college, with enrollment up 33% overall from pre-pandemic levels. We believe a key factor in achieving this turnaround was building our campus foundation on a culture of care, connection, and belonging through Caring Campus.

Caring Campus, developed by the Institute for Evidence-Based Change, intentionally equips staff and faculty with strategies and tools to create a welcoming, supportive environment for every student. At Victor Valley, it has been a game-changer, shifting our campus culture to one where care is not just a value, but an action that we carry out every single day. By fostering strong connections and ensuring that students feel valued as individuals rather than just as numbers at a college, we have created an environment that encourages persistence and completion. This is critical in the face of a shrinking student population.

Proactive Student Support Services

Our Student Services Call Center plays a huge role in ensuring students feel seen and heard. Every call the college receives is answered by our Student Service Specialists, ensuring each caller speaks with a real person and eliminating



frustrating menus and voicemail systems that often leave callers feeling irrelevant. Our Call Center boasts a 90% first-call resolution rate, with the remaining 10% of calls directed specifically to an individual that can help.

We also have four Engagement Centers that provide a space where students can connect with mentors, counselors, faculty, and staff for even more personalized support. Whether they need academic guidance, help navigating college resources, or just a place to feel connected, these centers serve as a crucial hub for student success.

We are incredibly proud to have embedded Victor Valley counselors in our 36 feeder high schools, providing a direct line of support for high school students as they begin their college search. Last year, more than 70% of the graduating seniors in our high schools completed a Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA, and a Victor Valley application, and 40% enrolled. These efforts signal to students that we care about their success even before they set foot on our campus.

Building a Caring Campus for Students, Staff, and the Community

The culture of care on our campus is equally transformative for employees. We celebrate our staff and faculty who go above and beyond in their interactions with students through weekly shoutouts. We also frequently hear of employees putting their own busy schedules on pause to help their fellow colleagues, embodying what it means to be a Caring Campus.

Our efforts have changed how students, employees, and our community view Victor Valley. A college that was once nicknamed

"Tumbleweed Tech" is now a vibrant hub of opportunity and growth. The community is excited about Victor Valley, and students enroll not just because it's accessible, but because they want to be here, and they know we're here to support them every step of their journey.

Community colleges often serve many students from low-income backgrounds, first-generation college students, and those balancing school with full-time jobs. Many potential students feel disconnected from higher education or uncertain about whether college is worth the investment. This is why it's critical to ensure they feel welcomed, supported, and valued from the moment they consider enrolling. When students feel a sense of belonging, they are more likely to stay engaged and complete their degrees.

The Path Forward for Community Colleges

Community colleges are uniquely positioned to lead the charge in reversing national enrollment declines. At Victor Valley College, we have seen that the solution is about people. By building a culture that prioritizes care, we have demonstrated continual enrollment growth. But the ripple effects extend far beyond numbers and statistics. Our culture has created an environment that students, employees, and the community are proud to call home.

Investing in a culture of care is not just good for students – it's good for society. It's time to recognize that addressing potential enrollment crises starts with something as fundamental as awareness, consideration, and kindness; and that by mindfully attending to the needs of students, we help ensure their success both in school and in life.

This Op-Ed was originally published on [DiverseEducation.com](https://diverseeducation.com) March 3, 2025

VVC Receives Donation of Four Buses from VVTA for Transportation Training Facility

MARCH 2025 - Victor Valley College (VVC) is proud to announce the donation of four buses from the Victor Valley Transit Authority (VVTA), marking a significant step forward in the college's efforts to expand its transportation education programs. The buses will be used to establish a new transportation operations training area on VVC's lower main campus, furthering the college's vision of becoming a premier transportation education hub for the High Desert region.

VVTA, a public transportation agency serving the High Desert region of Southern California, is committed to providing safe, reliable, and sustainable transportation options for local residents. By offering bus service to areas throughout San Bernardino County, VVTA plays a crucial role in connecting communities and improving the region's transportation infrastructure. Their donation of these buses underscores their continued dedication to community growth and workforce development, particularly in the transportation industry.

The donated buses will be used to create a hands-on training facility located near VVC's solar fields and river walk, providing students with practical, real-world experience in the fields of transportation, logistics, and fleet operations. As the demand for skilled professionals in the transportation sector continues to grow, this training facility will ensure that VVC students are well-equipped to pursue careers in the industry.

The addition of these buses is part of a larger effort to address the need for workforce development in the transportation field, an area that is critical to the region's economic growth. With its focus on providing students with the necessary skills and knowledge to excel in transportation and related industries, VVC continues to play a key role in shaping the future workforce for the High Desert and beyond.

VVC's transportation education initiative aligns with the college's commitment to providing high-quality, career-focused education and training opportunities. The new training facility will not only offer hands-on experience but will also support VVC's long-term goal of preparing students for success in the ever-evolving transportation industry.

The college extends its deepest gratitude to the VVTA for their generous donation, which will have a lasting impact on the future of VVC students and the local workforce.



Sole Purpose: VVC Tours Skechers Hub, Steps Into Future of Logistics



Real estate developer Iddo Benzeevi leads Victor Valley College representatives on a tour of the state-of-the-art Skechers North American Logistics Center in Moreno Valley, offering insights into the future of automation, sustainability, and job growth in the Inland Empire.

APRIL 2025

By: Andrew Caravella

In a powerful step toward deepening ties between education and industry, representatives from Victor Valley College (VVC) recently toured the Skechers North American Logistics Center in Moreno Valley, one of the most advanced and sustainable distribution facilities in the country. The visit was hosted by real estate developer Iddo Benzeevi, who is also leading the development of the World Logistics Center—a 40.6 million-square-foot mega project that will reshape the Inland Empire's economic landscape.

Located in Moreno Valley, the existing 1.8 million-square-foot Skechers facility is a high-tech logistics hub featuring fully automated systems, a rooftop solar energy array, and LEED Gold certification for environmental efficiency. It represents the gold standard in large-scale warehousing and global supply chain logistics.

“Our goal was to learn about the future of advanced logistics and how we, as a community college, can support workforce training efforts,” said Dr. Mackenzie Tarango, VVC's Associate Vice President of Instruction. “We left with far more than we anticipated. It was both inspiring and reaffirming to hear your emphasis on foundational skills such as English language, literature, and philosophy, and their essential connection to critical thinking and the articulation of ideas.”

The visit came at a critical moment for the region. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and local economic

development reports, the Inland Empire is now one of the fastest-growing logistics hubs in the nation, fueled by its proximity to major ports, highway corridors, and affordable industrial space. Between 2011 and 2023, employment in the transportation and warehousing sector grew by over 100%, with more than 230,000 jobs now directly tied to logistics, distribution, and supply chain management.

Projects like the World Logistics Center are expected to continue that trend. Once completed, the new campus is projected to bring over 33,000 new jobs to the region—many requiring skills in warehouse automation, data systems, logistics coordination, and more.

Economic Opportunities—and Challenges—for the Region

For Inland Empire residents, the logistics boom represents both opportunity and complexity. Entry-level logistics coordinators in the region can expect median salaries starting around \$50,000 annually, while more technical roles in automation and data systems may offer even higher earning potential. Yet, the surge in employment is expected to place additional demands on the region's housing market, infrastructure, and transportation corridors like the I-10, I-215, and SR-60 freeways—raising concerns about congestion and rising living costs.

City officials and economic developers are working to ensure that growth is balanced by new investments in affordable housing, public transit, and environmental protections. The Inland Empire's future as a logistics

powerhouse depends not only on business success but on maintaining a high quality of life for local communities.

Environmental Commitments and Community Dialogue

While the Skechers facility's LEED Gold certification signals a commitment to environmental responsibility, the broader logistics expansion has sparked ongoing conversations about air quality, traffic impacts, and green space preservation. Advocates are urging developers to incorporate stronger sustainability measures, including electric vehicle (EV) fleets, zero-emissions warehouses, and expanded tree canopies to offset environmental strain.

Education as the Gateway to Future Careers

For Victor Valley College, this growth presents a unique opportunity—and a responsibility—to ensure students have direct pathways into these high-demand industries. Plans are already underway at VVC to expand certificate programs in warehouse automation, supply chain management, and logistics technology to meet future workforce needs. The college is also exploring fast-track workforce readiness programs to help adult learners and first-generation college students tap into these new career avenues.

With more than 30% of logistics sector jobs projected to require postsecondary training but not necessarily a four-year degree, community colleges like VVC are poised to play a crucial role in driving economic mobility for local residents.

A National Stage for Regional Growth

Today, the Inland Empire ranks alongside Dallas-Fort Worth and Atlanta as one of the top logistics hubs in America, handling a substantial share of the nation's imports and exports. As the global economy evolves and e-commerce demand accelerates, the Inland Empire's ability to produce a skilled, adaptable workforce will be key to sustaining its growth.

As logistics continues to shape the region's economy, Victor Valley College is committed to being part of the movement—training the next generation of professionals who will power the Inland Empire's future.

VVC-MUN Crunches the Competition in the Big Apple

Global challenges, local champions—VVC-MUN leads with heart, strategy, and grit in NYC.



APRIL 2025

By: Tim Adell

On April 10, the General Assembly Hall of the United Nations erupted with applause as the Victor Valley College Model United Nations team received the Outstanding Delegation Award at the National Model United Nations New York Conference (NMUN). The Outstanding Delegation Award designates the top ten delegations at one of the most prestigious conferences in the world. This year, NMUN brought to New York more than 3,000 students from 174 graduate institutions, universities, and community colleges from across the United States, South and Central America, and Europe. VVC finished in the top ten of all that.

Even more impressively, less than half the VVC team had competed in multi-day conferences before—and NMUN is the mother of all conferences. It runs for four grueling days, including “Melt-down Tuesday,” the day when the work gets done, the papers get written, and the awards are won.

Representing Poland, VVC students pushed through this grind. Mariah Washington and Ashly Smith won the delegate award from their peers in the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Chelsea Villegas and Avery Porter impressed in General Assembly (GA) 1; William Tate and Abigail

Acosta ran their blocs in GA 2; and Tess Bonacio did the work of two delegates in GA 3. Melanie Alvarado, also a lone delegate, worked tirelessly in a committee of more than 300 delegates in the UN Environment Assembly. Kimberly and Angelica Acosta spoke powerfully and impressed their blocs in the UN High Commission for Refugees. Maria Abbott and Roque Real made Poland a force to reckon with in the UN Economic Commission for Europe. Leo Maldonado was at the center of every debate in the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons committee. And Grace Hickey and Josh Martinez navigated several unpeaceable power grabs to succeed in the Peacebuilding Commission.

VVC-MUN advisor Kevork Kazanjian exulted, “This was such an amazing win for VVC. What a great way to make a comeback—to go to New York and win VVC-MUN’s tenth Outstanding Delegation Award. To be recognized in the Grand Hall of the United Nations General Assembly Hall—that was just the greatest feeling in the world!”

The team had achieved some success earlier this school year, winning nine individual awards in three one-day conferences. Angelica Acosta won at her first conference ever, in the fall semester at

RCC. Mariah Washington won at the Spring RCC Conference and the UC Riverside Conference. Team leaders Leo Maldonado and Grace Hickey led the team through the preparations for New York, which entailed learning Poland’s positions on every major—and many minor—issues. They had to become Poland to succeed.

There were other obstacles to overcome. VVC-MUN had not participated in the National Model United Nations Conference since 2017, mostly because it is an expensive conference. Thanks to the support of the VVC Foundation, the Administration, ASB, and the campus community at large, the funding commitments were met. The team returned from New York, exhausted and triumphant.

Now, they can concentrate on midterms at VVC.



Cory Rose Wins OEC Player of the Year, Two Rams Make Regionals



By: Artie Allen

La Quinta, CA – **April 16th, 2025** – The Victor Valley College (VVC) men's golf team has wrapped up a historic regular season at the Orange Empire Conference (OEC) finals, marking a significant milestone in the program's history. Under the expert guidance of Coach Derrick Williams, the Rams have shattered numerous records and set new benchmarks for excellence.

Cory Rose: A Season to Remember

Leading the charge for the Rams is Cory Rose, a standout golfer from Apple Valley High School. Cory's exceptional performance throughout the season has earned him the prestigious title of OEC Player of the Year. With an impressive average score of 70.3, Cory has consistently demonstrated his prowess on the golf course, securing five first-place finishes this season. His dedication and skill have not only brought him individual accolades but have also significantly contributed to the team's overall success.

Tyler Thomas: Rising Star

Joining Cory in advancing to the 3C2A State Regionals is Tyler Thomas, another talented golfer from the Rams' roster. Tyler's consistent performance and determination have earned him a spot alongside Cory, showcasing the depth of talent within the VVC men's golf team. Together, they will represent Victor Valley College at the regional playoffs, aiming to continue their winning streak and bring home more victories.

Coach Derrick Williams: Architect of Success

The remarkable turnaround of the Rams' golf team can be attributed to the strategic leadership of Coach Derrick Williams. Since taking the helm, Coach Williams has instilled a culture of excellence and resilience, guiding the team to break several records. Notably, the Rams have achieved the lowest score in a round for a VVC team ever, a record that has been broken multiple times this season. This achievement underscores the team's consistent improvement and dedication to pushing the boundaries of their performance.

Looking Ahead

As the Rams prepare for the 3C2A State Regionals, the entire Victor Valley College community stands behind them, celebrating their achievements and cheering them on for future successes. Cory Rose and Tyler Thomas have set a high standard, and their journey to the regionals promises to be an exciting chapter in the Rams' storied history.

Victor Valley College men's golf team has truly made its mark this season, and with the momentum they've built, the future looks bright for these talented athletes.

Athletics at Community Colleges: Opportunity, Access, and a Stepping Stone to Success

Athletics at two-year colleges—also known as community colleges—offer a more accessible and personalized experience compared to the high-profile, high-pressure environments of four-year universities. While fewer than 2% of high school athletes go on to compete at NCAA Division I schools, community colleges serve as a vital and inclusive platform, giving many more students the chance to extend their athletic careers beyond high school.

Community college athletic programs are typically smaller in scale but rich in opportunity. They often focus on regional and state-level competition, allowing student-athletes to sharpen their skills in a less intimidating, more developmentally supportive environment. These programs emphasize personal growth, teamwork, and academic achievement, helping students balance their passion for sports with their educational goals.

Many athletes use community college programs as a springboard—either to transfer to a four-year university, where they may continue playing at a higher level, or to gain exposure to scouts and recruiters they might not have otherwise encountered in high school. Coaches at the community college level often take a hands-on approach, mentoring students through both athletic and academic challenges and providing guidance on transfer opportunities and career planning.

Additionally, because of the lower tuition and often reduced cost of living, community colleges are a more affordable option, allowing student-athletes to pursue their dreams without the burden of overwhelming debt. The community-based nature of these programs also fosters tight-knit teams and strong support systems, creating an environment where students can thrive both on and off the field.

For many, athletics at a community college is not just a continuation of their sports journey—it's a launchpad to future success.



Rams on the Hill: VVC Students Push for Change

From campus to Congress — student leadership in action

APRIL 2025

By: Andrew Caravella

WASHINGTON D.C. - Victor Valley College's Associated Student Body (ASB) traveled to Washington, D.C., from March 15–18 to participate in the American Student Association of Community Colleges (ASACC) National Student Advocacy Conference.

Held at the Washington Plaza Hotel, the annual event is the nation's largest gathering of community college student leaders. More than 350 students from across the country attended this year's conference, which focused on federal policies affecting community college access, affordability and student success.

ASACC is the only national organization dedicated exclusively to community college student leadership. Through its conferences and programs, the nonprofit helps student government representatives develop skills in leadership, citizenship and advocacy. Participants also gain direct insight into federal policy issues such as Pell Grant funding, FAFSA simplification, student loan programs and reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

VVC's student leaders took part in two days

of workshops and presentations led by top education experts, followed by two days of scheduled meetings with members of Congress and their staff. During these visits, students shared their stories and advocated for the needs of their communities — including access to financial aid, educational equity and support for nontraditional learners.

Participation in national advocacy efforts like ASACC reinforces the importance of student leadership at the community college level. With nearly 40% of all U.S. undergraduates enrolled at a community college, according to the American Association of Community Colleges, these institutions play a critical role in higher education. Yet, the voices of their students are often underrepresented in policy discussions.

"Student leaders from community colleges bring an essential perspective to national conversations about higher education," said Dr. Daniel Walden, superintendent/president of Victor Valley College. "They know the challenges firsthand and are uniquely positioned to advocate for meaningful change."

Beyond policy engagement, experiences like ASACC also provide community college students with leadership development that translates directly into success in the classroom, workplace and beyond. National studies show that students involved in leadership roles report higher GPAs, stronger communication skills and increased confidence in navigating academic and professional environments.

ASACC offers additional opportunities for students interested in continuing their development, including national board positions and certification through the organization's LEAPS program. It also provides year-round updates and resources to support student government advisors and college administrators.

Victor Valley College is proud to support ASB's involvement in ASACC and remains committed to fostering student leadership, civic engagement and advocacy — not only on campus, but on a national level.



Michelle Smith Never Left — VVC Alum Just Came Back In Charge

MAY 2025

By: Andrew Caravella

When Michelle Smith walks through the halls of Hesperia Unified School District, there's a sense of homecoming in every step. Not the ceremonial kind—the kind that's rooted in lived experience. She didn't just graduate from this district. She grew up in it, shaped by its classrooms, its culture, and its community. And now, she's returned to lead it.

Back when she first enrolled at Victor Valley College, Michelle wasn't planning on becoming an educator. "My goal was to complete the IGETC and transfer to a university to pursue business or law," she says. But something unexpected happened in her calculus class—she became the go-to person for classmates who needed help. "The joy and satisfaction it brought me to help people get through that difficult class is what made me decide I wanted to be a math teacher."

The oldest girl in a family of seven kids, Michelle spent her early years in a mix of leadership and caretaking. "I feel like I was competing," she says, "but more in the sense that I was taking care of my younger siblings. My older brother had more freedom, and my younger sisters were spoiled—the usual."

Today's students are growing up in a different world than she did, and she's acutely aware of how those differences show up in and outside the classroom. "Every generation has its unique experiences and challenges," she says. "But

the judgmentalism and addictive nature of social media—that's something I didn't have to face. I wish we could protect our children from it."

She's watched Victor Valley College evolve a lot since her time there. As a former high school principal and now district superintendent, she has a front-row view of how those changes are creating real opportunities. "VVC has such a strong partnership now with local high schools," she says. "Helping students start their college courses while still in high school, and making that transition smooth, makes a big difference. I'm proud to have brought dual enrollment to Hesperia High. Eleven years later, it's grown and now serves so many students across the region."

Not all her standout college memories are math-related. "I took a music class that got me hooked on classical—Vivaldi is a favorite," she recalls. "But the highlight might have been a Geology of the National Parks class I took with my dad. We geeked out on plate tectonics together and bonded as learners."

When asked about the hardest challenge in her career so far, she doesn't hesitate. "Distance learning during the pandemic," she says. "That was all about working together, supporting students however we could, and being flexible and creative with problem-solving."

And the biggest shift in education since she started? Technology. "When I began teaching in 1994, it was chalkboards and textbooks," she says. "Now, instructional

strategies have completely changed. And the expectations have shifted too—it's no longer just about getting that diploma. It's about completing career pathways, taking college courses, A-G completion, and working closely with counselors to have a plan after high school."

As she settles into the role of superintendent, she's focused on staying the course while pushing a few key areas forward. "We'll keep working on family engagement and providing strong professional development for teachers," she says. "We'll continue leading the region in college readiness and career pathway completion. Next steps include strong early literacy so every student is a reader by third grade—and planning for growth with the Silverwood housing development."

Education is a family theme in Michelle's life. "We have teachers, administrators, and a director of risk management in the family," she says. "Education is such an important career to invest in, and I'm proud of how many relatives are part of it."

For the next generation coming up through these same classrooms, she leaves them with a clear message:

"Educate yourself today so you can be the best version of yourself in the future. There is nothing you can't do if you commit to it and put in the effort. Don't let anyone else's doubts cloud your vision."

Honoring Sacrifice: VVC Student Leads Resolution For Gold Star Family Priority Registration Statewide



MAY 2025

Could you imagine growing up without a parent because they died while serving in the U.S. military? For many Americans, this is the reality of life as a Gold Star Family—a term that originated during World War I, when families displayed service flags in their windows with a blue star for each serving member and a gold star to represent those who had died in action. Today, Gold Star Lapel Pins are given to the immediate next of kin of fallen service members as a solemn symbol of their sacrifice.

Victor Valley College student and Associated Student Body (ASB) member DeAnn Fulton took steps to honor that sacrifice in higher education. She authored resolution S25.24.06—Gold Star Family Priority Registration—which was brought forward at the Student Senate for

California Community Colleges (SSCCC) during the Spring 2025 General Assembly and passed unanimously. The resolution cites over 1.7 million Gold Star Family members nationwide, the 61.4% college enrollment rate for recent high school graduates, and California's standing as the state with the largest active-duty military population. It formally resolves that the SSSCC advocate to the California Community Colleges Board of Governors to provide priority class registration to all Gold Star Family members at every community college in the state.

Victor Valley College has already implemented this policy beginning Spring 2025. "It was an amazing experience and opportunity to be able to give back to our veterans and their families with this resolution," said Fulton. Army veteran and

VVC student Yasmeen Arnaout added, "Gold Star families may feel forgotten or overlooked, and priority registration is a simple form of recognition that will greatly improve the Gold Star students' education journey as they suffer with the loss of their loved one. We recognize their unique sacrifice and support them." The resolution will now move to the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office for potential adoption statewide.

(photo source: Gold Star medal -skysoldiersfoundation.org)

Mission Possible: Former Astronaut Proves Grit is Greater Than Gravity at VVC



FMR. ASTRONAUT JOSÉ HERNÁNDEZ SPEAKS TO A FULL HOUSE AT VVC'S EDUCATIONAL EVENT CENTER ON MAY 23, 2025.

JUNE 2025

Nearly 430 attendees filled the Educational Event Center at Victor Valley College (VVC) to hear from former NASA astronaut José Hernández, who delivered an inspiring and deeply personal presentation to students, faculty, and community members. His visit marked a monumental moment for VVC, as his journey from migrant farmworker to space explorer exemplifies the power of resilience, education, and scientific achievement.

A key highlight of Hernández's presentation was his groundbreaking work prior to joining NASA: the co-development of the first full-field digital mammography imaging system. This innovative technology, which continues to be used today, marked a significant advancement in the early detection of breast cancer. "When people ask me what's my proudest professional moment, it's not wearing this blue suit, it's not going to space, it's this, because I know I've made a difference in humanity in the fact that we've saved countless lives," said Hernandez during a roaring applause by the audience. By enabling more accurate imaging than traditional film-screen mammography, the system allows for earlier diagnoses. This achievement, Hernández emphasized, showcases how science and engineering

can directly impact public health.

"When students meet someone who's literally reached the stars, they begin to see how far their own dreams can be accomplished. At Victor Valley College, through the MESA Program, we empower students from all backgrounds to pursue careers in STEM—and to realize that their potential is limitless. Today it's a conversation with an astronaut Jose Hernandez, tomorrow, it could be you leading a mission of your own." Said Pablo Saldana, STEM Program Manager & MESA Director who coordinated the evening event.

Before becoming a NASA astronaut, José Hernández faced rejection from the space agency not once, but eleven times. Despite being turned away year after year, he remained undeterred, improving his qualifications, gaining flight training, and deepening his expertise in engineering and science. His perseverance paid off in 2004 when he was finally selected as part of NASA's 19th class of astronauts. Five years later, in 2009, Hernández launched aboard the Space Shuttle Discovery on mission STS-128 to the International Space Station. His journey from humble beginnings as a migrant farmworker to a seat in orbit has become a beacon of hope for countless students pursuing STEM careers.

During the event, which included STEM students and members of the general public, Hernández captivated the audience with stories from his career — both in aerospace and biomedical engineering. His firsthand accounts of working at NASA, training as an astronaut, and eventually traveling aboard the Space Shuttle Discovery to the International Space Station served as a powerful reminder of what is possible through persistence and education.

The event was part of VVC's ongoing commitment to providing students with access to real-world professionals and role models in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Hernández's visit not only energized future engineers and scientists but also underscored the college's mission to inspire the next generation of innovators.

For more information about upcoming events and STEM programs at Victor Valley College, visit www.vvc.edu.

VVC Makes History with In-Person College Classes for Federal Inmates

JUNE 2025

Victor Valley College (VVC) and the Federal Bureau of Prisons' Federal Correctional Complex (FCC) Victorville have expanded their long-standing partnership to deliver innovative academic and vocational training programs to incarcerated students—this time, beyond the walls of the correctional facility.

In January 2025, a historic milestone was reached when four female inmates from the minimum-security Satellite Camp (SCP) Victorville became the first federal inmates in the nation to attend community college classes in person while still serving their sentence. The students—carefully selected by FCC Victorville based on academic progress and internal criteria—had already demonstrated strong commitment through correspondence and packet-based learning.

Their journey began with a campus orientation in December 2024, designed to help them acclimate to college expectations and student life. Just four months later, these trailblazing women have completed multiple courses in Kinesiology, Chemistry, Algebra, and English, showcasing both their academic determination and the success of this pioneering collaboration.

“These students are not only earning degrees—they’re redefining what rehabilitation and reintegration can look like through access to higher education,” said Dr. Daniel Walden, Superintendent/President of Victor Valley College. “This is what transformation through education truly means.”

One student shared, “Being able to attend college in person while incarcerated has been life changing—it’s reminded me that I’m still human, still capable, and still have a future worth fighting for.”

Another participant reflected on the role of education in her reintegration journey, stating, “This is a really good program that helps us prepare for reintegration back into society. It proves we can still be productive and contribute.”

A third student added, “The last time I went to school was around 20 years ago. I know that I’m succeeding today because of the support we’re getting and no one making me feel unworthy or less than.”



The four students are on track to earn associate degrees in Business and/or Sociology, with additional coursework in Paralegal Studies and Welding. They also actively participate in student services and campus activities, gaining valuable skills and broadening their academic portfolio.

Building on the success of this first cohort, VVC and FCC Victorville launched their first vocational furlough program, the Workforce Readiness Academy, in early 2025. Twelve additional students from the women’s camp were selected to complete an intensive series of job-readiness trainings and certifications. These include OSHA30 Safety, Forklift Operator (Classes I-V), CPR/First Aid, Workforce Preparation, and Financial Literacy.

These courses were made possible through VVC’s Workforce Development Department & Justice-Involved Education Program, with instruction supported by VVC Faculty, Tomorrow’s Talent, and JPMorgan Chase. San Bernardino County Workforce Development Department also provided resources and logistical support. All training was hosted at VVC’s High Desert Training Center located at the Southern California Logistics Airport.

“This program works because of the dedication and excellence of each student, and the strong collaboration between our college and FCC Victorville,” said Frank Castanos, Executive Director of Workforce Development at VVC. “We’re excited to keep building on this foundation and expand reentry education opportunities across the region.”

This initiative reflects Victor Valley College’s deep commitment to its mission—providing access, equity, civic engagement, and community transformation through outstanding student experiences. By extending higher education beyond campus borders, VVC is leading the way in creating meaningful second chances for individuals who are ready to rebuild their futures.

As the partnership continues to grow, VVC and FCC Victorville remain committed to offering innovative and inclusive educational experiences that not only prepare students for successful reentry but also contribute to safer and stronger communities.

Finding His Voice: Leonardo Maldonado's Journey Toward Pride, Purpose, and Public Service



JUNE 2025

By: Andrew Caravella

For Leonardo Maldonado, pride isn't just about identity—it's about resilience, truth, and building the kind of community where others can feel seen. A Political Science student with a concentration in American Government, Leo is a first-generation college graduate whose dreams include becoming a teacher and, one day, the Attorney General of the United States. But before the vision of law and leadership, Leo had to navigate the deeply personal journey of discovering and embracing who he was.

Leo first thought he was different around the third grade, long before he had the vocabulary to explain it. In fifth grade, he confided in his grandmother sort of in a joking way, to test the waters as he puts it—her fearful reaction at the time planted seeds of uncertainty. By the end of eighth grade, those emotions came to a head when Leo, unable to voice his feelings, turned to his passion for writing. He penned a letter to his father, coming out as gay, and left it for him to read. A year passed in silence—until one day in the car, his father unexpectedly pulled the letter from the glovebox and told Leo, "You are my son, and I will always love you." That moment of unconditional love became a turning point. And when it came time to tell his grandmother, she responded with a gentle truth: "I knew before you did." Her words were filled with memories of Leo dancing in the front yard, singing, loving Cinderella, and playing with his Harry Potter wand like it was a magic wand from the fairy godmother. "I don't love you any differently," she said.

Leo's road wasn't without hardship. He came out as bisexual in middle school to "play it safe" in a new town when his family moved up the hill to the High Desert. When he came out as gay in seventh grade, it spread quickly—resulting in bullying, even physical assault. Still, Leo chose courage. At Serrano High School, he found acceptance for the first time, even in a conservative-leaning community. Surrounded by supportive teachers and classmates, Leo flourished and grew into a leader.

At Victor Valley College, he became deeply involved in student government and Model United Nations club on campus, eventually serving as Activities Director, Vice President, and acting President.



LEO (CENTER) WON A PEER AWARD IN A MODEL UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE, REPRESENTING ALGERIA IN THE SECURITY COUNCIL.

RAMS Monthly asked Leo for some advice to students in which he responded: "Never stop engaging. If you don't see a community, build one. That's how you find your people."

Despite the stereotypes he's faced—from both the Latino and LGBTQ+ communities—Leo has stayed grounded through academics, activism, and mental health awareness. "There's a pressure to check all the boxes of what being gay is supposed to look like," he shares. "But once I let that go, I started living more authentically."

Now transferring to Cal Poly Pomona with plans for a PhD, Leo reflects on how far he's come. "As someone who never thought college was even an option, I now stand here with higher dreams and the fire to pursue them."



IN HIGH SCHOOL, LEO (FAR LEFT) SERVED AS A DIVERSITY INCLUSION COORDINATOR, WITH HIS TWO ADVISORS ON A FIELD TRIP TO A HISTORICAL SLAVERY EXPO.

Leo's story is a powerful reminder of what Pride Month truly represents: the freedom to live as your full self, the strength to overcome adversity, and the importance of community. As he puts it, "I want to dedicate my successes to my supportive community and the millions of unknown Latino and gay activists who have fought for the promise of America. I will never stop speaking up for LGBTQ youth."



Unstoppable and Unforgettable: VVC Class of 2025 Redefines What's Possible

On June 18, 2025, under the unrelenting sun of the Inland Empire, Victor Valley College hosted its largest commencement in school history at the Glen Helen Amphitheater in San Bernardino. More than 950 graduates walked the stage as over 12,000 family members, friends, faculty, and community supporters filled the stands—braving near triple-digit temperatures to celebrate the unstoppable Class of 2025.

As the sun scorched the open venue and temperatures neared 99°F, guests fanned themselves with programs, clutched bottles of water, and shaded their eyes from the glare. Despite the heat, the atmosphere was electric—charged with emotion, pride, and perseverance.



"This record-breaking ceremony reflects the heart and strength of Victor Valley College," said Dr. Daniel Walden,

VVC Superintendent/President. His speech echoed with humor, heart, and conviction, culminating in one of the night's most resonant messages:

"You don't need a title to lead, a spotlight to make a change, or a cape to be a hero. You're ready now—not someday, not after another degree—but now."

Samuel Adams Sinkfield: A Story of Survival

One of the most unforgettable voices of the evening belonged to student speaker Samuel Adams Sinkfield, whose personal testimony held the crowd in a silent, emotional grip. He began candidly:

"I wasn't even supposed to be here. Not at this podium. Not even alive right now."

Samuel shared his journey through unimaginable challenges—losing his mother at a young age, falling into homelessness, surviving a shooting, and losing friends to violence and injustice. But instead of being defined by pain, Samuel transformed it into purpose. His message was raw and real:

"This speech isn't just about a degree—it's about survival. It's about what it means to break cycles, to carry your pain with purpose, and to never let your

past define your future."

His courage became a rallying point, not just for his classmates, but for the thousands listening in awe.

Hailey Reyes: Building Legacy Through Adversity

ASB President and Student Trustee Hailey Reyes took the stage next, offering a heartfelt reflection on how pain, too, can give way to purpose. After losing her grandmother, father, and aunt within two years—and nearly losing herself in the process—Hailey turned her story of struggle into a story of strength.

Once told she wouldn't graduate with her high school class, she pushed forward and finished seven months early. Though her first semester at VVC ended in failure, she didn't quit—instead, she rose. By 2025, she had authored statewide resolutions, advocated in Washington, D.C., and earned multiple degrees.

"The disadvantages I thought I had been dealt were simply not that—they were my superpower," she declared.

She reminded the class that legacy isn't reserved for the perfect—it belongs to those who show up, speak out, and keep going.

“Your voice, your actions, and your decisions—they are the building blocks of your legacy.”

A Night Forged in Heat and History

As the sun finally dipped behind the stage, graduates walked across the stage to claim their legacy, caps flew into the warm, night sky, the audience erupted in celebration and air horns. The warmth in the air was more than just heat—it was the fire of stories told and lived, obstacles overcome, and futures rewritten.

The Class of 2025 didn’t just break records—they broke molds. And when the world asks where it all began, each one will answer with pride:

“Victor Valley College.”

VVC’s Momentum: Growth That’s Transforming a Region

According to statewide data, Victor Valley College has been the fastest-growing community college in California, consistently leading enrollment growth among the state’s 116 community colleges for several consecutive years. During the 2024–2025 academic year, over 2,100 students qualified for graduation—a milestone reflecting the college’s expanding reach and impact. A recent economic impact report by the college revealed that VVC contributes over \$553 million annually to the San Bernardino County economy. The increased earnings of VVC alumni—both graduates and those who’ve attended—combined with the contributions of the businesses they work for, generate more than \$398 million annually.

Today, Victor Valley College proudly serves approximately 24,000 students across the region, continuing its mission to empower lives, uplift communities, and drive economic opportunity through education.



SOME 2025 GRAD SNAPS



Pat's Passionate Patchwork: Quilting Queen Retires from VVC after 40+ years

JUNE 2025

By: Andrew Caravella

Patricia Adams, better known at Victor Valley College as Pat Adams, has been a beloved part of the VVC community since 1984. Originally from Ohio, Pat moved to the area in the 1960s. In fact, VVC runs deep in her veins—she and her husband, Larry, were part of the college's second graduating class back in 1963. Larry served as student body president, while Pat was the ASB Secretary. Sharing a fond memory with Rams Monthly, Pat joked about their first date at the San Bernardino County Fairgrounds off Seventh Street: "I bought a corn dog and told my husband not to overdo the mustard. Well, he did—and it dripped on my brand new sneakers."

A couple of decades later, Pat joined the VVC staff in the 1980s. By 1987, she was already stitching her legacy as the college's quilting queen. Over the years, students became people, and people became lifelong friends—like an 82-year-old woman who took Pat's very first class.

One afternoon, as Pat sat in our office surrounded by her entourage of lifelong friends, Rams Monthly asked about the recent surge of younger Z and Millennial students crafting their way into her quilting classroom. Pat credits Eleanor Burns, a popular television quilter who has been revolutionizing the quilting world and bringing in many younger people. Pat laughed and shared Burns's famous catchphrase, "Still stripping after all these years," which always draws a memorable crowd of quilting and sewing enthusiasts. "Seeing younger students is great," Pat said. "We need to keep it going so the craft doesn't die out."

With 62 years of marriage under her belt, Pat is now looking forward to a happy retirement. Most of all, she's excited to spend more time in her garden. However, she says the best part of VVC, which she will miss dearly, is the people she has met along the way. Rams Monthly asked her closest friends and VVC alumni to describe Pat in one word, and their responses were heartfelt:

Sedi – "Caring"



Professor Pat Adams started her VVC journey in 1984.

Audrey – "Cheerful"

Trish – "Friendly"

Debbie – "Fantastic"

Beverly – "Exuberant"

Marilyn – "Loving"

Lisa – "Giving"

Aside from gardening, Pat looks forward to canning food—a method of preservation that involves sealing food in airtight containers and heating them to destroy microorganisms and enzymes that cause spoilage. This process creates a vacuum seal, extending the food's shelf life. Pat and her friends laughed about a recent canning mishap last year when one jar exploded, dropped to the floor, and rolled down the hallway. "I found a giant kitchen, and I taught the entire group how to can," Pat recalled with a smile.

Surprisingly, Pat shared that her work at

VVC was also a way for her to unwind. Going to class was her best way to de-stress from daily anxieties. "It's also a way to get away from our husbands," one of her friends shouted during the interview, causing everyone to laugh hysterically. Pat quickly reined in the moment, adding, "We call it therapy—be yourself, nobody judges."

As our time with Pat came to a close, we asked her to leave us with a bit of advice. She said, "Life is not what it's supposed to be, it's the way it is. The way you cope with it is what makes the difference." For the sake of this article, I'll break the fourth wall and address you, the reader. After Pat shared that intimate, heartfelt message, there was a hush in the room. I put my pen down and said, "Wow, that was a very deep and thought-provoking message. Thank you so much." Pat simply smiled and replied, "I stole it from somewhere, I'm sure." Cue more laughter from the entourage.

Daniel is Driven: **Determined to Defy Doubt**



(left to right) - Father, Daniel, older brother
Photo Credit: Daniel Ramirez

JULY 2025

Daniel Ramirez, Class of 2025, walks into a room with a bright smile and an even brighter outlook. A newly minted graduate with his Associate of Science in Business Administration, Daniel is now preparing for the next leg of his journey: transferring to Cal State San Bernardino to pursue a bachelor's degree in Business with a concentration in Marketing.

You wouldn't know it by his cheerful demeanor, but Daniel's path hasn't been the easiest. "Negative thoughts don't change the outcome of situations," he says. "The world keeps going, whether I like it or not—so why dwell on things that hold me back?" Instead, he channels those moments into personal growth, always pushing forward.

Although he grew up in Orange County, Daniel now proudly considers the High Desert his home. "It's grown on me," he says, crediting the area's new developments and opportunities. "I feel like if I didn't move up here, I wouldn't be in the position I'm in today."

His journey included time working at Disneyland as a server—mainly to help pay for school. But when his dad bought a larger home in the High Desert and encouraged the kids to start thinking about investing in real estate, Daniel saw a shift in his path. "At first, I didn't really know what I wanted to do with my life," he admits. But pushing past that uncertainty and stepping outside his comfort zone led him to pursue real estate and business with new determination.

Finding that balance between school and life was one of his biggest challenges. "I had priorities and bills to pay—they didn't stop just because I was going to school," he shares. "Figuring out that middle balance is what helped me find my happy medium."

Daniel's background is rooted in a hardworking, blue-collar family. On his dad's side, construction was the norm—and college wasn't necessarily encouraged. "I didn't have the biggest motivation to keep going when it got hard," he says. That struggle was only

made harder by the fallout with his mother, who once kicked him out of the house after he expressed a desire to visit his grandparents on his dad's side. Today, the relationship with his mom is non-existent. But from his father and paternal relatives, a new bond has formed. "My dad now asks me so many questions about where I'm going next. There's a new level of support."

As Daniel looks ahead, he sees a life built with intention. "Being able to say I was just trying to figure out life—and now I'm working toward a career I can look forward to, one that includes retirement—that's everything," he says.

From Disneyland to real estate and from doubt to direction, Daniel Ramirez is proof that with perspective, balance, and drive, you can build the life you once only imagined.



Victor Valley College Podcast “Ramplifi” Partners with Victorville Cadillac for Season Two



JULY 2025

Victor Valley College is proud to announce a new partnership between its groundbreaking podcast Ramplifi and local automotive sponsor Victorville Cadillac. As Ramplifi prepares to launch its highly anticipated second season, this collaboration reinforces the college's commitment to bridging students with the local community.

“We’re excited! As a college, it’s important to be part of the community. So bringing in partnerships strengthens our mission and shows students that there’s always a place for them in the heart of the community,” said VVC ASB President/Student Trustee Hailey Reyes.

The Ramplifi podcast, hosted by former television and radio personality Andrew Caravella, completed a successful first season and is now streaming in audio format on all major podcast platforms. A video version is also available exclusively through the VVC Mobile App.

Caravella, whose broadcast career includes former roles with KFI AM 640 and iHeartRadio, now serves as the college's Public Relations and Marketing Coordinator.

An award-winning journalist, he brings his signature wit and deep interviewing skills to every episode of the show.

“Every story we do at this college is pure heart. The goal of the show is to connect people to people. We want to spotlight challenges, struggles and triumphs of our students, but bring a tear or a smile to your face while we do it,” said Caravella. “To my knowledge, no one in higher education has created a podcast with this kind of raw, human-centered approach. That’s why it’s resonating so strongly with our campus community.”

The partnership with Victorville Cadillac is rooted in mutual values—highlighting authentic experiences, building trust, and fostering connection.

“Partnering with Victor Valley College reflects our deep commitment to the High Desert. Here at Victorville Cadillac we believe it is our duty to support the High Desert and that begins with empowering others to become all that they can be. Victor Valley College embodies that mission with their commitment to academic advancement, building careers and

supporting personal success. We’re excited for what the future holds and the impact we can make together,” explained Victorville Chevrolet Cadillac President Jacob Soares.

Created and produced by the Associated Student Body of Victor Valley College, Ramplifi has already featured powerful real-life stories from members of the campus community. Highlights include:

A mother and daughter who graduated together, side-by-side.

A 9/11 first responder at Ground Zero who now attends VVC to rebuild a new chapter.

A former student turned Emmy Award-winning filmmaker.

A single mother of five pursuing her dreams against all odds.

A student raised in a family surrounded by gang violence who earned multiple degrees and a full-ride scholarship to a university.

And the list continues to grow.

Season two of Ramplifi is currently in pre-production and is accepting a limited number of sponsorships. Interested businesses or organizations are encouraged to inquire early, as space is expected to fill quickly. Podcast interest has seen a significant rise over the past decade, evolving from a niche medium into a mainstream form of content consumption. According to Pew Research Center, the percentage of U.S. adults who have ever listened to a podcast grew from 22% in 2006 to over 75% by 2023. This growth has been fueled by greater smartphone accessibility, streaming platforms like Spotify and Apple Podcasts, and a desire for on-demand, personalized content. Podcasts offer a wide variety of topics—from true crime and comedy to education and news—allowing listeners to engage deeply with subjects that resonate with their personal interests.

Additionally, Edison Research's "Infinite Dial" report notes that in 2023, an estimated 90 million Americans listened to a podcast monthly, with younger audiences (ages 18–34) making up the largest demographic. The flexibility of audio content—allowing users to multitask while driving, exercising, or working—makes podcasts especially appealing in today's fast-paced world. As educational institutions, businesses, and independent creators continue to embrace this format, podcasts are increasingly seen as powerful tools for storytelling, brand building, and community engagement.



VVC Foundation Awards Over \$262k in Scholarships to Students at Annual Ceremony



PHOTO: IG/VVCFoundation

JULY 2025

Victor Valley College proudly honored student achievement and community generosity at its annual Scholarship Awards Ceremony, where \$262,600 in scholarships were awarded to 300 unique students through 332 individual scholarships. The event celebrated not just academic success, but the transformative power of educational access, fueled by the generosity of local donors.

"Today we celebrated student success at our

annual Scholarship Awards Ceremony," said the Victor Valley College Foundation. "Thanks to the generosity of our donors, \$262,600 in funding was awarded through 332 scholarships to 300 unique Victor Valley College students. Your investment in education makes all the difference—thank you for believing in our students and their futures."

The VVC Foundation plays a central role in this annual tradition. As the nonprofit, philanthropic arm of Victor Valley College, the Foundation's

mission is to remove financial barriers for students while fostering educational excellence and access. Through donor partnerships, community engagement, and stewardship of resources, the Foundation ensures students can pursue higher education regardless of their financial circumstances.

Scholarships awarded range from merit-based academic recognitions to need-based awards, honoring students from diverse backgrounds and academic disciplines. Many awards also reflect the wishes of families, local organizations, and businesses who have established named scholarships in memory or celebration of loved ones and community leaders.

Beyond the numbers, each scholarship represents a life changed, a dream within reach, and a student empowered to move forward with confidence. The impact of these awards is not only felt in the classroom but will ripple into the workforce, local economy, and community at large.

The event serves as a reminder that when a community comes together to support education, the results are lasting. Thanks to this year's scholarship donors and the tireless efforts of the VVC Foundation, hundreds of students are closer to achieving their goals and building brighter futures.

To learn more about how to support Victor Valley College students through scholarships or to get involved with the Foundation, visit www.vvcfoundation.com or contact the VVC Foundation Office directly.

CELEBRATING FIFTY YEARS OF SUPPORT

THE VVC FOUNDATION IS MARKING ITS 50TH ANNIVERSARY, A MILESTONE BUILT ON DECADES OF HELPING STUDENTS STAY ENROLLED, STABLE, AND MOVING TOWARD THEIR GOALS.

HOW THE FOUNDATION SHOWS UP FOR STUDENTS

Scholarships, emergency grants, food assistance, and program funding are often provided by the Foundation. Many students benefit from these resources without ever knowing where they originate.

WHAT IT MEANS TODAY

This milestone isn't just about the past. It is a reminder that support is here, still growing, and designed to help you navigate college with fewer obstacles and more opportunities.

MORE INFO:

+1 760 245 4271 x 2741

www.vvcfoundation.com/scholarships/

@VVCFoundation



VVC Rams to receive 'special tuition' for ASU Online Bachelor's Degrees



AUGUST 2025

Victor Valley College students now have a new, more affordable path to earning bachelor's degrees online, supported by a new partnership with Arizona State University.

Beginning this fall, eligible students and alumni from Victor Valley College can save 22% on tuition when they transfer to ASU Online through the California Community College Achievement Plan.

The opportunity is part of the university's broader effort to increase access to higher education for students, including Victor Valley College. This seamless and affordable transfer pathway for California residents reduces financial barriers and supports students who need flexibility and options for an education that prepares them for the future. There are no income requirements to receive the tuition reduction.

"At Victor Valley College, we are committed to ensuring our students have every opportunity to continue their education without being held back by financial barriers. This partnership with ASU Online creates a clear and

affordable path for our graduates to reach their goals, enrich their lives, and strengthen our communities." — Dr. Daniel Walden, Superintendent/President, Victor Valley College

The program is a promising opportunity to expand access to undergraduate degrees from a global research university, especially for place-bound students and those in regions without nearby higher education institutions.

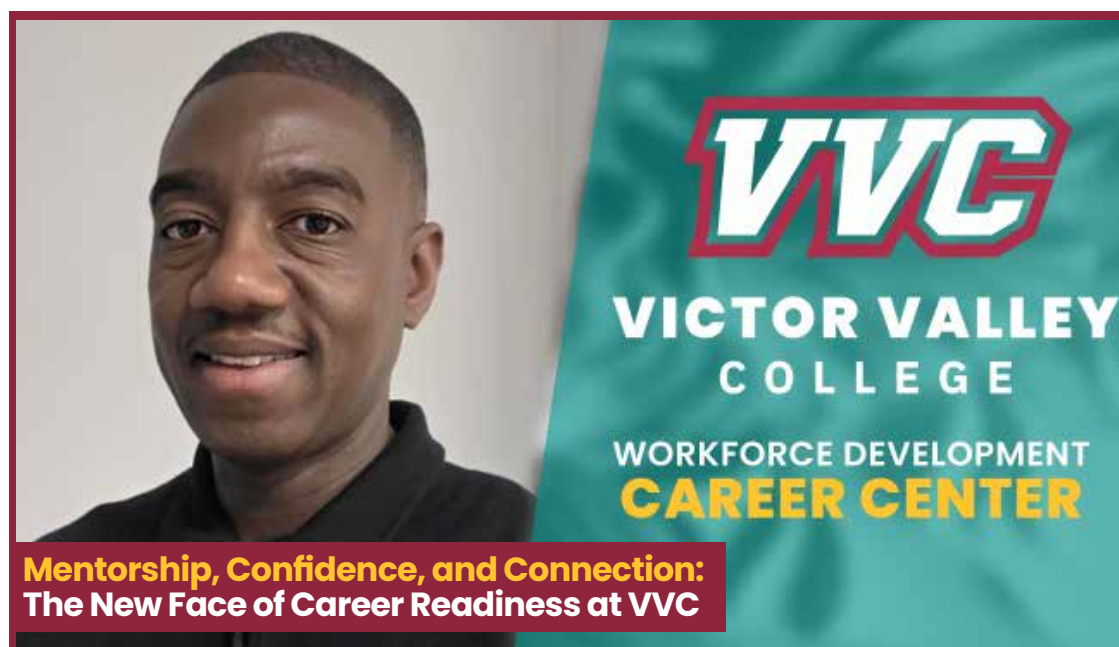
ASU Online reimagines learning by providing students top-tier university resources and support from enrollment to graduation and beyond. Students can choose from 180+ undergraduate degrees — all taught by the same faculty using the same curriculum available on campuses.

ASU Online and Victor Valley College serve thousands of California students and alumni, empowering them to succeed by preparing them to contribute to their local communities and the state's workforce and economy in fields such as business, psychology, communication, nursing, biological sciences, computer science, medical studies, and

kinesiology.

To learn more about the program and how to enroll, visit californiacc.asu.edu.





center as a pipeline—a feeder system of prepared, confident candidates who can step into jobs and thrive.

For Students, Alumni, and Everyone In Between

Williams knows not every student fits the traditional mold. Many Rams are juggling jobs, family, and coursework. That's why he's pushing to expand services virtually, with Zoom résumé reviews and flexible one-on-one sessions. Alumni, too, are part of the vision. "It's about keeping that connection alive even after they've moved on," he says. "I want graduates coming back, sharing stories, mentoring, paying it forward."

AUGUST 2025

By: **Andrew Caravella**

By the time Na'Im Williams sits down to talk about his new role at Victor Valley College, it's clear he's not here just to shuffle résumés or run mock interviews. With more than 14 years of experience in student services, Williams isn't interested in producing cookie-cutter employees. He's here to light a fire.

"Not just to be someone's employee," he says, leaning in with conviction, "but to empower students to learn and then lead in their career field. Mentorship is going to be huge here."

Williams, VVC's new Senior Student Services Specialist, is stepping into the Career Center with a vision that goes well beyond polishing cover letters. He wants the center to be a bridge—a launchpad connecting students to meaningful jobs, mentors, and a network that carries them long after graduation.

Career Readiness in 2025: More Than Just Skills

Ask Williams what "career readiness" means, and you won't get a buzzword-heavy response. Instead, he describes a holistic process. "Sometimes we don't know what we don't know," he admits. Technical chops are vital, sure, but they're not enough. He talks about punctuality, work etiquette, communication, resilience—traits that can't be coded into an app or automated by AI.

"There must be a human connection when tackling tough issues and solving problems," he adds. "That's something automation can't replace—at least not yet."

Programs With Personality

Part of Williams's plan is to make career prep engaging and memorable. This semester, he's rolling out a slate of workshops with names that sound more like mixtape tracks than seminars: "Tune-Up Tuesdays" for résumés, "Thrive and Shine" for interview prep. His aim is to turn intimidating tasks into approachable, even inspiring, experiences.

And students are already responding. In his short time at VVC, Williams has seen their confidence spike after résumé critiques and mock interviews. "I want them to leave here knowing they've got this," he says with a grin.

The Closet That Changes Everything

One of the Career Center's most unique features is the Career Closet, a boutique-style room where students can pick out professional outfits for interviews or new jobs. Williams lights up when he talks about it. "Sometimes all it takes is the right suit or dress shirt to change the way you carry yourself. Confidence follows." Thanks to the vision of colleagues Charlotte Allen and Valerie Trujillo, the closet feels less like a charity rack and more like a private styling session. Each enrolled student can pick one outfit per semester—though, as Williams notes, exceptions are made when the need is greater.

Employers, Meet the Rams

Of course, the Career Center isn't just about students. Williams spends plenty of time connecting with local employers, learning what they need and matching them with VVC talent. He sees the

Advice You'll Remember

When asked for his go-to piece of advice, Williams doesn't hesitate:

"If you aim for nothing, you will hit it every time. So, do your best to make your mistakes in the right direction."

It's the kind of line you could imagine scribbled on a Post-it above a desk—or shouted across a lecture hall on the last day of class.

More Than Just a Job

For Williams, this role is personal. His own college years weren't about test scores or GPAs as much as they were about growth and friendships that lasted. "That's what I treasure the most," he says. Now at VVC, he's eager to build new relationships, new programs, and new futures.

"I'm looking forward to the joy of knowing I helped someone achieve their goals," Williams says, and it's the kind of line that makes you believe him.

The VVC Career Center is open by appointment in Building 42 – Academic Commons Entrepreneurship and Innovation Space. Services range from workshops and résumé reviews to interview prep and the Career Closet. Students and alumni can book sessions by emailing career.center@vvc.edu.

Na'Im Williams may be new to VVC, but one thing is clear: he's not just preparing students for jobs—he's preparing them for life.

\$80,000 Grant Strengthens Victor Valley College Veterans Resource Center



SEPTEMBER 2025 - The Victor Valley College District Foundation is pleased to announce it has been awarded an \$80,000 grant from Yuhaaviatam of San Manuel Nation to strengthen the Veterans Resource Center (VRC) at Victor Valley College (VVC).

This funding will directly support the academic and career success of student veterans during the 2025–2026 academic year. The Tribe awards grants to support four philanthropic pillars: inspiring future generations through education, empowering lives, fostering healthy and resilient communities, and preserving cultural traditions while supporting Indian Country.

This grant holds deep meaning for Yuhaaviatam of San Manuel Nation. At the Foundation's President's Circle Luncheon on September 4, 2025, Program Officer Monique Osorio emphasized the Tribe's enduring commitment to education, stating, "It is the Tribe's belief that education provides knowledge to excel all people and is the

key to creating paths to a better future for generations." Osorio also highlighted the remarkable legacy of Native American service in the U.S. military, noting that Indigenous peoples have enlisted at disproportionately high rates compared to other populations and have courageously served in every major conflict for over two centuries.

With this award, the Foundation can assist the VRC in expanding its hours of operation to include evenings and Fridays and provide scholarships and emergency aid to alleviate financial pressures.

"This grant ensures our veteran students have the resources, support, and opportunities they deserve to thrive academically and professionally," said Esteban Peñameza, Program Manager of VVC's Veterans Resource Center. Kirsten Acosta, Executive Director of the VVC Foundation, added, "Yuhaaviatam of San Manuel Nation has long supported education and community initiatives. We are proud to collaborate

with them once again to strengthen services for those who have served our nation."

This investment not only strengthens the Veterans Resource Center but also reaffirms the college's commitment to those who have served our nation. By expanding resources and removing barriers, the college is helping veteran students achieve their goals with dignity and confidence. Together with Yuhaaviatam of San Manuel Nation, the Victor Valley College Foundation is building a stronger community of support for veterans now and for generations to come.



Scholarship Spotlight: Katherine Salazar Receives IME Becas Scholarship



OCTOBER 2025

Victor Valley College student Katherine Salazar has been awarded the prestigious GIA/Mexican Consulate/IME Becas Scholarship, a program designed to support students of Mexican origin in their pursuit of higher education. This scholarship not only eases financial burdens but also celebrates academic achievement, leadership, and community involvement.

Katherine, a Child Development major, shared that her inspiration to pursue college came from her mother, a single parent born in Jalisco, Mexico, who has been her guiding light throughout her educational journey. "My mom has supported me in continuing my education," Katherine said. "At VVC, I've grown by joining campus clubs, connecting with faculty and staff, and learning to speak up and ask for help."

The scholarship will help Katherine cover essential costs such as transportation, food, tuition, and class supplies—including textbooks, notebooks, and flashcards. "It's a huge support for both my education and my family," she noted.

Being recognized as a student of

Mexican descent through this program holds deep meaning for Katherine. "It reflects the strength and support I've received from my mom, relatives, faculty, staff, and friends at VVC," she said.

Katherine's advice to other students considering scholarships like IME Becas is simple but powerful: "Communicate with others—students and staff—about scholarship opportunities. You never know what someone else might have found online or through school."

After graduating from VVC, Katherine plans to transfer to CSUSB to continue her studies in Child Development and pursue her dream of becoming a preschool teacher.

DID YOU KNOW?

Victor Valley College, through the VVC Foundation, offers a wide range of scholarships designed to support students from all backgrounds. Whether you're just starting college, returning after a break, or balancing academics with family responsibilities, there's a scholarship opportunity for you.

While all students are welcome to apply, many scholarships are tailored to support those with financial need, dependents, military service, disabilities, or unique life circumstances. Others recognize school or community involvement, athletic participation, or connections to current or former classified employees. Emancipated youth, foster care alumni, undocumented students, and members of marginalized groups are also encouraged to apply.

The VVC Foundation matches applicants with scholarships that best reflect their academic achievements, extracurricular activities, and chosen major. To strengthen your application, visit the Writing Center for help with your personal essay and attend Foundation workshops offered during the application period.

Applicants will need to submit their academic history, a personal essay, and two letters of recommendation from individuals outside their household—such as a teacher, coach, counselor, or church leader.

To learn more and begin your application, visit vvcfoundation.com/scholarships

Your future could be just one application away.





RICKY SAMPSON #3
WIDE RECEIVER/QUARTERBACK

Victor Valley College Secures Historic Bowl With Second-Half Surge

Rams defeat Santa Monica in their first-ever home turf bowl

NOVEMBER 2025 - Under the crisp desert night sky, Victor Valley College's college's football team etched its name into local sports history with a thrilling 38–23 victory over Santa Monica College in the American Division Bowl game. The matchup was a rollercoaster of momentum swings, explosive plays, and sheer determination that had fans on the edge of their seats until the final whistle.

A Battle of Wills

The contest began with Santa Monica drawing first blood, converting a field goal after a defensive stand. Victor Valley's offense struggled early, hampered by penalties and a blocked field goal attempt. But the Rams' resilience shone through in the second quarter when quarterback Seth Burbine orchestrated a 75-yard drive capped by a touchdown strike to Darren Gandy, giving the Rams their first lead at 7–3.

Santa Monica answered swiftly, reclaiming the advantage with a touchdown pass from Dylan Moreno, setting the stage for a tense back-and-forth battle. At halftime, the Rams

trailed 10–7, but the energy in the stands told a different story — Victor Valley wasn't done yet.

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Turning Point in the Third

The second half opened with fireworks as Santa Monica's McKenzie Parks broke loose for a stunning 69-yard touchdown run, widening the gap to 17–7. The Rams responded emphatically. Running back Carlos Amplayo ignited the comeback with

a 39-yard touchdown sprint, followed by another scoring drive capped by Gandy's second touchdown reception. Suddenly, Victor Valley held a 21–17 lead, and the momentum had shifted.

Closing the Deal

The fourth quarter was all Rams. A defensive stand forced Santa Monica into desperation mode, and cornerback Zatravion Stevenson Henderson delivered the dagger with a clutch interception, returning deep into Corsair territory. Victor Valley capitalized with a field goal and a defensive score, sealing the 38–23 triumph and sending the home crowd into jubilation.

Stars of the Night

- Seth Burbine showcased poise under pressure, delivering key completions and two touchdown passes.
- Carlos Amplayo dominated the ground game with explosive runs, including a pivotal 39-yard score.
- Darren Gandy hauled in two touchdowns and kept drives alive with clutch catches.
- The Rams' defense, led by Henderson's interception and relentless pressure, proved championship-caliber.

Coach's Corner

"This American Division Championship win against a very competitive Santa Monica team means the world to us. It validates the belief I had in Victor Valley College and the High Desert community when I accepted the position of Head Coach in 2023," said VVC Rams Head Coach David Slover, "VVC, along with Dr. Walden, the Board of Trustees, and Athletic Director Artie Allen has provided exceptional support for our Athletic department, creating an environment where growth and success are truly possible. I have always

believed the depth of talent within the High Desert and surrounding communities, and this Championship reflects what we can build together at VVC. Being the first to achieve something of this magnitude is extraordinary. It creates a legacy that will stand the test of time and highlights the resilience and hard work of so many contributors—our administration, support staff, coaches, and, of course, our players. I couldn't be more proud of what we have accomplished."

"This American Division Championship is truly one of the greatest moments of my career in over 20 years in Community College athletics. When I arrived in June 2021 as head football coach, the amount of work required just to field a team felt almost insurmountable. Fast forward to 2025, and the dedication of everyone in this athletic department—along with the unwavering support from Dr. Walden, our Board of Trustees, and so many others—has put us in a position to achieve this historic milestone," said VVC Athletics Director Artie Allen, "Bringing in Coach Slover in 2023 was a strategic decision; having worked with him before building a championship team together, I knew he understood what it takes to build championship teams. It's more than what happens on the field—he knows how to develop a program. His incredible coaching staff has recruited at a high level and brought exceptional expertise. Congratulations to our student-athletes and coaches for making history."

Community Pride

The victory marks a historic moment for Victor Valley College athletics, energizing the local community and reinforcing the Rams' reputation as a powerhouse program. Fans packed the stands, creating an electric atmosphere that will be remembered for years to come.



JAYON GILLETT #10
RUNNING BACK



Victor Valley College Named 2025 Pathway Champion of Transfer



NOVEMBER 2025

Victor Valley College (VVC) is proud to announce its selection as a 2025 Pathway Champion of Transfer by the Campaign for College Opportunity. This prestigious recognition honors VVC as a California Community Colleges Pathway Champion of Growth in the Number of Associate Degrees for Transfer (ADT) Awarded, celebrating the college's commitment to expanding equitable opportunities and fostering student success.

The Pathway Champion award recognizes top-performing community colleges that have consistently increased the number of ADTs awarded from one academic year to the next. VVC's intentional leadership and campus-wide dedication to closing equity gaps have set a standard for excellence in California.

"This recognition as a 2025 Pathway Champion of Transfer means a great deal to our entire Victor Valley College community. It reflects the hard work and dedication of our faculty, staff, and students, all united in the mission to create more equitable opportunities and open doors for every learner. We're proud to see our efforts in increasing Associate Degrees for Transfer honored, and we remain committed to helping every student find their path to success," said Dr. Daniel Walden,

Superintendent/President of Victor Valley College.

This is not the first time Victor Valley College has received recognition from the Campaign for College Opportunity. In 2023, VVC distinguished itself as the only community college in Southern California to earn a superior rating in Campuswide Transfer-Level Math Enrollment. This achievement signifies that VVC has effectively supported 100% of its students in enrolling directly into transfer-level math coursework. Furthermore, VVC has been commended for its exceptional support in enabling 100% of students to enroll directly in transfer-level English coursework, demonstrating the college's ongoing commitment to equitable placement and student achievement.

"We are deeply proud to recognize Victor Valley College for its leadership in advancing equitable student success, strengthening California's transfer pathway, and ensuring more California students reach their transfer goals," said Jessie Ryan, President of the Campaign for College Opportunity.

The Campaign for College Opportunity is dedicated to ensuring every Californian has the opportunity to attend and succeed in college, building a stronger future for

California's communities. Pathway Champion awards honor campuses advancing landmark reforms in the ADT, streamlining transfer between community colleges and California State Universities (CSUs), and breaking down barriers for students.

Victor Valley College will be celebrated during the Pathway Champions: Celebrating Colleges Building Seamless Paths to Student Success event, held virtually on Thursday, October 23, 2025, from 10:00–11:30 a.m. in recognition of National Transfer Week. The event will feature Deputy Chancellor Dr. Rowena Tomaneng, highlighting the importance of equitable placement and transfer reforms statewide.



Turn Campus Life Into Prizes: Truck, Cash, Tech and More!



VVC VICTOR VALLEY COLLEGE

THRIVE TO DRIVE

ENGAGE AND WIN A RAM!

THE ONE EVENT THAT LETS STUDENTS WIN BIG AT VVC!

The advertisement features three RAM 1500 pickup trucks in blue, red, and grey, arranged vertically on the right side. The background is a dark blue gradient with a checkered flag pattern behind the 'THRIVE TO DRIVE' text.

NOVEMBER 2025

Want to win a RAM 1500 pickup just for staying on track at Victor Valley College? The Thrive to Drive program, a partnership between VVC and Victorville Motors, is giving students the chance to drive away in a brand-new truck while rewarding academic success and campus involvement. This isn't just a contest—it's your opportunity to turn everyday campus activities into big rewards and make your college experience unforgettable.

Picture this: You're cruising down the highway in a shiny RAM 1500, knowing that your dedication to school and campus life made it happen. That dream could be yours if you take advantage of Thrive to Drive. The rules are simple, and the benefits go beyond the truck. By participating, you'll stay connected, meet new people, and make the most of everything VVC has to offer.

To qualify for the truck giveaway, students must download the VVC mobile app, complete at least six units in both fall 2025

and spring 2026, maintain a GPA of 2.0 or higher, follow the student conduct code with no major disciplinary issues, and attend the RAM Rush event on Saturday, April 25, 2026, at Victor Valley College. RAM Rush isn't just a requirement—it's a celebration. Expect music, prizes, and a campus-wide party that brings the community together. Want better odds? Start earning points now. Every point equals an additional entry in the truck drawing, and earning points is easier than you think. Attend athletic games and cheer on the Rams. Show up for student performances and cultural events.

Join tutoring sessions and Engagement Center programs to boost your academic success while stacking up entries. Keep an eye out for flash events throughout the year for surprise bonus points. These aren't just chances to win—they're opportunities to make memories and build connections that last.

Not taking six units? Don't worry—you can

still score big. The top point earners will take home \$1,000 for first place, \$500 for second, and \$250 for third. Plus, TVs, computers, gift cards, and more will be given away during RAM Rush. Imagine walking away with a brand-new laptop or a big-screen TV just for being part of campus life. Every event you attend brings you closer to incredible prizes and a stronger sense of belonging at VVC. This program is about more than giveaways—it's about thriving. It's about showing up, getting involved, and making your college experience count.

Every game, every performance, every tutoring session is an opportunity to rack up points and get closer to amazing rewards. Download the VVC mobile app today, check out upcoming activities, and start earning entries. The more you participate, the better your chances to win—and the more connected you'll be to the VVC experience. Don't just go to college.

Thrive. Drive. Win.

Staff Spotlight: New Student Services Director Talks Equity Driven Approach To Higher Ed



Victor Valley College has announced Pablo Saldana as its new director of student services, bringing a vision focused on equity, inclusion and student success.

Saldana said his goal is to make Student Engagement Centers “vibrant, inclusive

spaces that serve as a home base for students throughout their educational journey.” The centers align with VVC’s Guided Pathways and RAMPaths and offer peer mentorship, embedded counseling and co-curricular programming to help students connect academic goals with career aspirations and graduate in two to three years.

His research on undocumented student success informs his approach to supporting diverse populations. “Institutional barriers often go unseen unless intentionally addressed,” Saldana said. “Undocumented and underrepresented students must not only be served — they must be seen, heard and celebrated.”

Recognized as a Region 9 Rising Scholar in Higher Education Administration, Saldana credits mentorship as a cornerstone of his leadership philosophy. “I am a product of mentorship,” he said, encouraging students and professionals to seek guidance in their fields.

To strengthen collaboration among faculty, classified professionals and management, Saldana plans to expand Caring Campus initiatives with behavioral commitments such as

the “Ten Foot Rule,” warm referrals and cross-departmental training.

Engagement centers will also prepare students for success beyond the classroom through career workshops, transfer panels and networking events. “They’re launchpads,” Saldana said. “Our goal is to ensure every student leaves VVC not only with a degree but with a clear path forward.”

Upcoming equity-driven initiatives include expanding DREAMers support, implementing culturally relevant programming, tracking success for first-time full-time students and producing a Caring Campus video to showcase VVC’s commitment to inclusion.

As an immigrant and first-generation scholar from Guadalajara, Mexico, Saldana said his personal experiences fuel his dedication to student success. His background in music, communication and marketing influences his creative approach to higher education. “The world would be a better place if more people made music,” he said.

Victor Valley College Foundation Leader Honored at White Diamond Gala

Kirsten Acosta, Executive Director of the Victor Valley College Foundation, has been named a recipient of the prestigious 2025 Women of Excellence Award by the Today’s Woman Foundation. The award was presented during the White Diamond Gala on Saturday, October 11, 2025.

The gala celebrated outstanding community leaders whose achievements reflect resilience, service, and a commitment to making a difference. Acosta exemplifies these qualities through her leadership at Victor Valley College, where she champions initiatives that empower students, support families, and foster transformational growth.

Acosta describes her work as “purpose-driven,” guided by integrity and compassion. She encourages students to embrace courage and curiosity, reminding them that “Excellence is not about knowing everything—it’s about being willing to learn, ask questions, and continue growing.”

Since joining the Foundation, Acosta has collaborated with teams, committees, and volunteers to raise and steward millions of dollars for scholarships and programs. She often calls her role “the best job on campus,” reflecting the fulfillment she finds in helping students succeed.

By earning this honor, Acosta joins an esteemed group of women dedicated to enriching their communities through service and leadership.

The Today’s Woman Foundation supports women through mentorship, career development, and initiatives such as Bundles of Hope, which provides comfort to women undergoing cancer treatment. The foundation also partners with the Victor Valley College Foundation to fund an educational endowment for students pursuing degrees in psychology and social services—furthering its mission to empower women and inspire hope.



Leading with Heart: VVC Nursing Students Share Their Journey



Jewelina Sifuentes

Valaree Bridgewater

By: Mia Johnson, VVC ASB Public Relations Senator

Daniel Kniss, department chair of Nursing and Allied Health, proudly recommended two outstanding nursing students: Valaree Bridgewater and Jewelina Sifuentes. Valaree currently serves as the Nursing Process 4 Class President, and Kniss commends her for demonstrating “great leadership skills while maintaining excellence in the classroom.”

To learn more about their journey, I asked Valaree and Jewelina a few questions.

How does it feel to be in the nursing program at VVC?

Valaree shared, “I am truly honored to be part of the VVC Nursing Program. VVC has an outstanding reputation for developing skilled, compassionate nurses who make a real difference in patient care.”

Jewelina echoed this sentiment, describing the experience as amazing and supportive: “I have made some amazing friends. All the instructors, both in lecture and clinics, are there for you, whether it be help with school

or advice.”

What or who inspired you to become a nurse?

For Jewelina, inspiration came from her parents and life experiences: “Initially, I wanted to be a doctor, but due to COVID and other reasons, I decided that wasn’t for me. My parents suggested nursing, which would align more with my life goals, so I decided to apply. After the first few clinics, I fell in love with this career.”

Valaree’s passion grew from her desire to provide direct care:

“I often found myself listening to patients’ worries and passing them on to the nurses, but I wanted to do more—to be the one providing comfort, care, and solutions. Over time, it became clear that becoming a nurse was the path that would allow me to truly make a difference in people’s lives.”

Both students emphasized the value of resources and connections.

Valaree highlighted the Launch Program, which led to an apprenticeship at Desert Valley Hospital:

“This experience not only deepened my passion for nursing but also helped me

secure a job after graduation.”

Jewelina praised the Communication Center and Access Program:

“The communication center gave me a great place to study and print materials. Access was another great resource when I needed extra support and accommodations for my learning disability. The people there are so supportive and make me want to succeed even more.”

What advice would you give to someone interested in the VVC Nursing Program?

Jewelina encourages future students to seek help and stay curious:

“Go to the nursing office and ask questions about everything and anything.”

Valaree adds, “Never give up, no matter how tough it gets. Every challenge, setback, and hurdle you overcome shapes you into a stronger, more resilient version of yourself.”

Leadership in Action

As Class President, Valaree reflects on her leadership role:

“I’ve learned that true leadership isn’t about standing in front; it’s about standing with others, listening, supporting, and growing together.”

Jewelina, a PEEPS student volunteer leading a project, shares her experience:

“It’s been rewarding to work on this project. We are trying to implement new changes to support fellow nursing students and foster more collaboration between cohorts.”

Closing Thoughts

Valaree and Jewelina exemplify the dedication, resilience, and leadership that define VVC’s Nursing Program. Their stories remind us that with passion, support, and perseverance, the journey to becoming a nurse is both challenging and deeply rewarding.





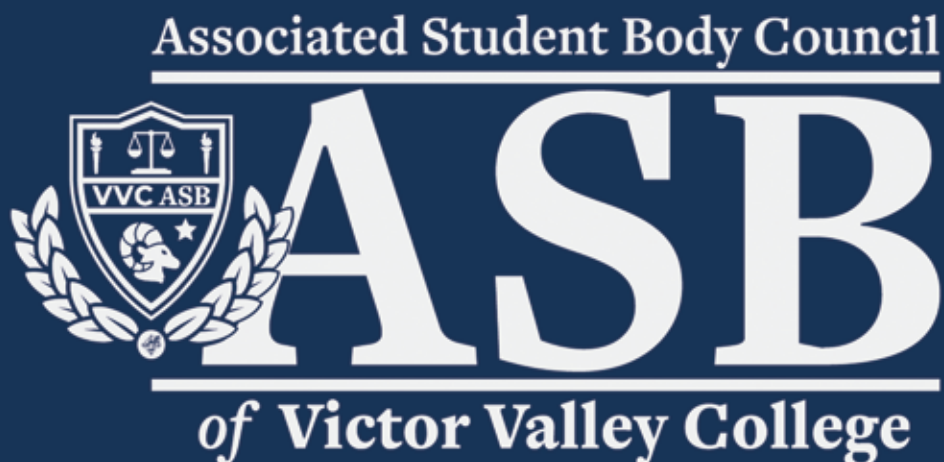
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