

THE BEST OF 2024

RAMS

MONTHLY



STORIES OF STUDENT SUCCESS AND LEARNING AT VICTOR VALLEY COLLEGE



RAMS REWIND: LOOKING BACK AT VVC'S BEST IN 2024

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Letter from the Editor

Victor Valley College Public Relations and Marketing Coordinator
Andrew Caravella Reflects on 2024 at VVC.



Oh, my stars! Another successful year at Victor Valley College! I can't wait to see how we finish out the 2024-2025 school year. If Fall was a teaser for the Spring semester, then I have a strong feeling we are in for a fantastic ride.

So, I sat down and thought long and hard on what to write about this time around that would be different than last year. I also played with having ChatGPT just do the work for me. However, I started to realize, while reflecting on the past year of accomplishments and goals we have been developing in the VVC Marketing Department that there's just too much evolving that I don't think the computer can truly capture the tone I'm looking for.

I truly think that the launch of the new podcast "Ramplifi" has been a big hit on campus and have absolutely loved the incredible feedback as we continue to move forward with that project. The stories of challenges and hard luck as well as triumph and hard work from students, faculty, and staff on this campus has made my job very fun and rewarding.

One of the best highlights on campus I think in the year 2024 has been hands down the October 2024 Trunk or Treat that VVC hosted on campus. I honestly was at a loss for words.

From the bottom of both Matts, both Andrews, and Robert's heart...thank you for helping make "RAMMY's Trunk or Treat" a gigantic success!

We sat down and estimated probably over 4,500 people for that single day experience. It's evident that there's an expectation to rock it out again next year so stay tuned! I think the most special part of that event was that I heard nothing but positive comments and feedback from everyone I spoke to. I saw nothing but smiling faces on little kids' faces.

I saw a campus-wide effort from my fellow colleagues and VVC students, simply volunteering an afternoon away to not create an event, but a legit, immersive experience for our community! All of our tents (nearly 40) all operated by VVC staff or VVC students each had something different to engage kids and parents. ALL OF OUR TENTS!

We now know the answer to how many Matts and Andrews does it take to screw in a lightbulb...2 Andrews, 2 Matts, and 1 Robert to supervise!

Moving forward with RAMS Monthly, we have some neat ideas as to new content to develop for the magazine. I have to say, hearing input

throughout the last year from fellow staff as well as suggestions and leads on stories around campus does help plot the course for the magazine extensively. So, thanks to all of our tipsters out there in the VVC universe for your keen eyes and ears.

I hope and pray that you each have nothing but positive energy and great vibes during the rest of the holiday season. I hope you have caring family and or friends that you can reflect and share your last year of achievements with.

If you're reading this right now and I've interacted with you at least once this past year, I hope I was able to squeeze at least one smile or laugh out of you.

Cheers to 2024 and look out 2025, here we come!

- Andrew

Father-Daughter Duo Lights Up VVC Stage: Dorian and Nayanna Holley's Unforgettable MLK Day Celebration



DORIAN & NAYANNA HOLLEY PERFORMING FOR A NEARLY STANDING ROOM ONLY AT VVC'S PERFORMING ARTS CENTER ON JANUARY 15, 2024. (PHOTO: ANDREW CARAVELLA)

On Monday, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day, the Victor Valley College Performing Arts Center resonated with the soulful melodies of Dorian Holley and his daughter Nayanna Holley, as they united for a heartfelt celebration of the iconic civil rights leader. The father-daughter duo presented an enchanting show that not only showcased their exceptional musical talents but also carried a powerful message of peace, love, and humility.

Dorian Holley, an esteemed American musician, backing singer, and vocal coach, started his professional journey as an on-stage backing vocalist for Michael Jackson during the groundbreaking *Bad* world tour in 1987. With performances that reached audiences worldwide, including British royalty, Holley continued to travel with Jackson for subsequent world tours. His stage presence and vocal prowess received acclaim from music critics, and he collaborated with artists such as Rod Stewart and James Taylor, leaving an indelible mark on the music industry.

In a unique and brand-new show at the VVC Performing Arts Center, Dorian Holley invited his daughter Nayanna Holley to share the

stage. Nayanna, an L.A.-based Singer and Vocal Contractor, brought her own extraordinary musical legacy to the performance. Currently on tour with P!nk, Nayanna is a longstanding member of NBC's *The Voice* House Band, led by Paul Mirkovich, where she has played a pivotal role for nine seasons. She has also graced the House Band of *American Idol* for multiple seasons.

Nayanna's recent film credits include contributions to "The Color Purple," "The Eternals," "Encanto," "Coming 2 America," and "Mulan." Her vocal prowess was showcased during the 2021 Pepsi Super Bowl Halftime Show, where she sang with The Weeknd. Not only a remarkable vocalist, Nayanna has made a name for herself as a Vocal Contractor, assembling and hiring singers for prestigious events like The Oscars, *The Voice*, *American Idol*, and *The Late Late Show* with James Corden.

With a career spanning over a decade, Nayanna has been a part of major tours with artists such as St. Vincent, Kelly Clarkson, Selena Gomez, and Sheryl Crow. Nayanna's dedication to music education is reflected in

her academic background, holding a Bachelor's Degree in Jazz Studies from Western Michigan University. Her journey includes a brief tenure at the Musician's Institute in Hollywood and a focus on music at the L.A. County High School for the Arts.

This year's concert which pays tribute to the teachings of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was hosted by the Victor Valley College Associated Student Body who partnered with the local non-profit known as the DVL Project. (Dreamers, Visionaries, and Leaders.) VVC's ASB President & Student Trustee Jennifer Weis commented about this year's special performance saying "Dorian Holley never ceases to bring an entire community together with his music. He's shown our community the importance of remembering an amazing historical leader with celebration and unity, no matter the color of your skin."

The nearly standing-room-only performance at Victor Valley College not only celebrated the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. but also showcased the unique synergy between Dorian and Nayanna Holley, leaving an indelible mark on all who attended.

DACA Dreams: Gabriel's Journey to Inspire and Educate



In the heart of Victor Valley College (VVC), Gabriel Espinoza Diaz is not just a mathematics enthusiast but a trailblazer, as he navigates the complex world of academia with resilience and determination as a Dreamer under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program.

At just 20 years old, Diaz is the President of the Math Addicts club at VVC, a testament to his passion for mathematics and problem-solving. "I love how math is both complex and simple simultaneously. The process of finding a solution is the most rewarding part for me," shares Diaz, emphasizing the significance of mathematics as a beneficial and invaluable resource for continuing education.

Originally from Baja California, Diaz faced the challenges of adapting to a new language and culture when he moved to the United States at the age of four. With the support of his parents—a hardworking dairy laborer father and a dedicated stay-at-home mom—Diaz overcame the hurdles of language barriers and went on to develop a profound love for learning.

Despite encountering hurtful remarks such as

"go back to your country" and being told he doesn't belong, Diaz remains steadfast in his pursuit of education. He recognizes the stress that comes with DACA discussions in the news but remains grateful for the opportunities he has had.

His dream of becoming a teacher reflects his commitment to creating a safe and inclusive learning environment. "School was a safe place for me, where I never felt attacked. I enjoyed learning, and I believe that lifelong learning is crucial. By choosing teaching, I can provide knowledge and education for others," Diaz explains.

Diaz aspires to attend Cal State San Bernardino, pursuing an undergraduate degree in mathematics with a focus on teaching. Despite the challenges faced by DACA students, he encourages others to persevere. "Keep going, push forward, no matter how long the process takes," Diaz advises.

For him, the biggest challenge growing up was understanding his path and finding the right support. However, his determination shines through as he encourages other Dreamers to persist despite the uncertainties. Diaz, a DACA student on conditional status, missed the cutoff for eligibility to apply for a 4-year university but remains hopeful about the possibilities.

As Diaz continues his journey at VVC, he not only breaks down barriers in math education but also serves as an inspiration for others, proving that with passion, resilience, and a commitment to education, dreams can indeed become a reality.



DACA STUDENT CHALLENGES

DID YOU KNOW?

DACA students confront a multitude of challenges when aspiring to enter a university, grappling with a complex web of legal uncertainties and institutional obstacles. One significant hurdle lies in the stringent eligibility criteria imposed by certain universities, where DACA students may find themselves struggling to meet admission requirements or, in some instances, facing outright exclusion. This exclusionary landscape not only creates a sense of insecurity for these students but also reinforces the broader issue of systemic barriers that hinder their pursuit of higher education. The fear of being denied access to university opportunities, despite their academic achievements and ambitions, further underscores the uphill battle DACA students face.

Financial strain compounds the difficulties for DACA students as they often find themselves ineligible for federal financial aid, limiting their capacity to afford essential aspects of education such as tuition, textbooks, and other resources. This lack of federal support places an additional burden on these aspiring scholars, compelling them to seek alternative funding options or contemplate the daunting prospect of abandoning their dreams of a university education. The financial roadblocks become formidable barriers to entry, disproportionately affecting DACA students and further underscoring the urgent need for inclusive policies that acknowledge the diverse challenges faced by this resilient group.

Amidst these challenges, DACA students exhibit remarkable resilience, actively advocating for inclusive admissions policies and seeking community support to surmount systemic barriers. Their efforts extend beyond personal aspirations, aiming to contribute to the rich tapestry of diversity within higher education. By highlighting the struggles of DACA students, we illuminate the pressing need for systemic change and underscore the importance of fostering an inclusive environment that recognizes and supports the academic dreams of all aspiring scholars, regardless of their immigration status.

Addressing Student Hunger: VVC's Thrive Resource Center Steps Up



In the heart of Victor Valley College (VVC), a growing number of students are facing food insecurity, a concern exacerbated by economic strains and lack of awareness about available resources on campus.

Jessica Marroquin, a dedicated student majoring in liberal arts for education and employed at the Thrive Resource Center, sheds light on the critical issue and the support systems in place to assist struggling students.

The Thrive Resource Center, Marroquin explains, stands as a lifeline for enrolled students experiencing food scarcity. "If a student is not currently taking classes, we can direct them to resources in the area that can assist with food insecurity," she says.

Among the resources available to enrolled students are the Peak Pantry and Thrive Mart. The Peak Pantry offers meals to sustain students throughout the day, while Thrive Mart, a weekly food market open every Thursday, allows students to select groceries on campus.

"We pick up food from the food bank, sort it, and ensure fair distribution," says Marroquin, emphasizing the importance of accessibility to these resources for the college community.

Marroquin has witnessed firsthand the escalating demand for these services. "We keep seeing students every day in need of food," she shares, attributing this trend to the rising cost of living. "The economy is expensive, especially food and groceries-wise."

The struggle is personal for Marroquin. "My parents used to shop for food two months at a time," she recalls. "Now, people are paying a lot more for less food."

Awareness, Marroquin believes, is key to addressing this crisis. "A lot of students are unaware of the resources available," she notes, recounting an encounter with a classmate surprised to learn about campus support services.

To bridge this gap, VVC is ramping up efforts to publicize resources. "We just added our services to Canvas inside the VVC mobile app," Marroquin explains. This platform ensures students receive updates and announcements about available assistance.

For students whose needs exceed campus resources, Marroquin assures support in connecting with external organizations. "We have a specialized form to better understand

their immediate needs," she says.

As food insecurity continues to plague college campuses, Marroquin remains committed to raising awareness and ensuring that no student goes hungry. "It's about ensuring our students have the support they need to succeed," she affirms.

For more information about VVC's resources for food-insecure students, visit the Thrive Resource Center or access the Canvas app through the VVC mobile platform. Students can also inquire directly at the Peak Pantry or Thrive Mart during operating hours.



Student Voices Resonate: VVC ASB's Impactful Resolutions

Student leaders pass three resolutions at SSCCC General Assembly

Story by: ASB Fine Arts Senator Jacob Kleinsmith



ASB taking a selfie at a roundtable during ASCCC conference in Santa Clara, California. (April 2024)

SANTA CLARA, CA — Through rolling green hills, desolate desert, and torrential downpour, VVC ASB made the 386-mile trek to Silicon Valley for the annual Student Senate of California Community Colleges' General Assembly. Over 70 community colleges gathered to elect students to the local and state positions of the organization as well as vote on resolutions. These resolutions, if adopted, become SSCCC's advocacy goals for the coming year.

Out of 59 total resolutions written by colleges and caucuses across the state, Victor Valley College ASB crafted and sponsored three resolutions: Recognition of Esports at the Collegiate level by the California Community College Athletic Association (CCCAA) (S24.03.16), Expansion of CalFresh/Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) to Campus/State Operated Food Services (S24.03.20), and Clarify the Rubric Used for State Funding of Student Housing for California Community Colleges (S24.03.18).

ASB President Jennifer Weis and Fine Art Senator Jacob Kleinsmith, with the support of the other ASB members in attendance, stood to defend the resolutions they had authored. With

over seven-hundred students in attendance, tensions could not have been higher as the pro and con microphones filled up for Esports (S24.03.16). Each speaker was limited to one-minute and each resolution to ten-minutes.

Speaking first, Senator Kleinsmith emphasized how middle schools, high schools, and four-year universities have already adopted Esports as an official sport and how there are transfer and scholarship opportunities available through Esports. Another student shared how their disability had prevented them from participating in close contact sports and that Esports was a great opportunity for them. In response, students on the other mic wondered how playing video games a sport was, mentioned the possible degradation in mental and physical health, and encouraged those in support to "Get a Life." After a nail-biting ten-minute deliberation and fifteen-minute lunch, the resolution passed with 35 in support and 18 in opposition.

Next on the agenda was the expansion of EBT and CalFresh. President Weis spoke first and explained how not all college campuses have vendors that accept EBT/CalFresh, nor are they available every day the college is open.

With relative ease, the resolution passed 50-2.

Finally, was the system-wide issue of state funding for student housing. A problem known all too well to our college and one the college has been diligently trying to solve. President Weis spoke again and explained how the rubric used to determine state funding has very unclear guidelines, and even after submittal it is unclear what school will receive that funding. Secondly, with the upcoming deficit in California, the state was not made clear if any of the colleges will receive money. After no debate, the resolution passed with unanimous affirmation, indicating the importance of student housing seen across the California Community College system.



Finding Focus: Amethyst A. Woodard's Path to Success at VVC



AMETHYST (LEFT) IN THE BAHAMAS DURING AN EXTERNSHIP FOR CULINARY SCHOOL

In the realm of Victor Valley College, there's a rising star whose journey from Long Beach to Inglewood has now found its focus in the Inland Empire. Amethyst A. Woodard, a dedicated student at VVC, is not just studying real estate but is also a force of nature, breaking barriers and reshaping her destiny.

Born in 1987, Amethyst is says she's proudly the middle child on her mom's side. Growing up, she was known for her quirky, flamboyant, and outspoken personality. Despite projecting a timid demeanor at times, Amethyst went through rebellious teenage years, sharing, "I would steal snacks because growing up with three of us meant we always had to split/divide snacks, junk food, and I would always go ham!"

Raised by a mother who worked three full-time jobs while pursuing a Ph.D., Amethyst absorbed the strength and resilience that characterizes her today. Reflecting on her past, she acknowledges the transformative power of her mother's advice about the importance of moderation, especially considering the health history on her dad's side.

Amethyst's journey took a turn when she decided to shed 100 pounds and subsequently enrolled in culinary school. With a vision to own a restaurant, she aimed to provide a creative sanctuary in the food world while giving executive chefs and leads the creative control she values.

At one point in her journey, Amethyst attended the world renowned former Le Cordon Bleu culinary school in Pasadena, California. That lead to an externship which gave her the

opportunity to practice her culinary art in exotic places like the Bahamas.

However, her entrepreneurial spirit didn't stop there. Aware of the challenges in the restaurant industry, Amethyst is now delving into the world of real estate, studying to obtain a degree at Victor Valley College.

Amethyst's path intersected with her introduction to Victor Valley College. Not long after her discovery of the campus, she found herself drawn to the college during the winter session, seeking a change and breaking free from a cycle of self-sabotage.

In her own words, "I'm here on earth to CHANGE THE WORLD 1 PLATE AT A TIME."

Amethyst just recently wrapped her Winter session where she studied a couple classes including Art History and Personal Community Health. Staying fresh and current in her pursuit of knowledge, she's now into her Spring semester, studying Real Estate. However, it's not a complete career change for her. Amethyst is still practicing culinary arts.

While her meal prep and catering company experiences seasonal slowdowns, Amethyst allocates her time positively, ensuring that her passion for food remains legendary.

As Amethyst A. Woodard navigates her path at Victor Valley College, she stands as a testament to resilience, transformation, and the pursuit of dreams. Keep an eye on this powerhouse who is changing the world, one plate at a time.

On your 2nd or 3rd Career Path? THAT'S OK!



Navigating a career change can be a daunting prospect, especially as we approach our 30s or 40s. However, a recent article from Franklin University offers invaluable insights into making this transition with confidence and clarity. Titled "How to Change Careers at 30 or 40," the piece serves as a beacon of guidance for those contemplating a shift in professional trajectory later in life. It encourages readers to embark on a journey of self-reflection, skill assessment, and strategic planning to align their careers with their passions and aspirations.

One of the key takeaways from the article is the importance of recognizing and leveraging one's existing skills and experiences. Rather than viewing past career paths as limitations, individuals are encouraged to identify transferable skills and explore new opportunities that resonate with their interests. Additionally, the article underscores the significance of networking and mentorship in facilitating successful career transitions. By building meaningful connections within their desired industries and seeking guidance from experienced professionals, individuals can gain valuable insights and navigate the complexities of change more effectively.

An August 2023 article from Apollo Technical reported that about 52% of American employees were considering making a career change last year and 44% were already in the middle of planning their change in careers.

CNBC reports that the average person switches careers around 39 years old, the switch could indicate that people begin to feel stagnant in their current field by the time they reach a "mid-career point."

As the workforce continues to evolve, this resource offers a timely reminder that it's never too late to pursue a career path that brings fulfillment and purpose.

VVC: 'Caring Campus' Initiative Sparks Transformation and Growth

Victor Valley College (VVC) has experienced a significant transformation by integrating Caring Campus principles and strategies across its campus. This initiative has profoundly impacted the college's culture, enrollment, and community engagement, positioning VVC as a model for other higher education institutions. The Institute for Evidence-Based Change (IEBC) developed the Caring Campus initiative to equip colleges and universities with the tools and resources needed to establish a welcoming campus culture. This program aims to improve student retention, persistence, and success by fostering a supportive environment.

"Caring Campus has helped to redefine what it means to be a part of Victor Valley College," said Dr. Dan Walden, VVC President. "Our culture has really come alive and can be seen everywhere. Our campus is extremely vibrant, and faculty, staff, students, and community members can feel that difference."

The results of VVC's cultural shift are particularly evident in the college's enrollment growth. Despite a 20% drop in enrollment during the COVID-19 pandemic, VVC has rebounded with a 50% increase over the past two years. Dr. Walden credits the Caring Campus initiative as a contributing factor to this resurgence. "The culture of our college has shifted to one where people go out of their way for others," he said. "We don't want students chasing us down for help; we want to meet them at the door and ask how we can help. We've done hundreds of things to show this is a caring campus and that we truly care for every student."

One strategy VVC has implemented is the Connect2Success call center, providing students, employees, and community members with a direct line to get their questions answered. In the 2022-23 school year, student service specialists handled more than 60,000 phone calls, achieving a 90% first-call resolution rate, with the remaining 10% resolved through follow-up calls.

VVC's efforts extend into the community, with counselors placed in 35 high schools to guide and support students as they plan their futures. In the 2022-23 academic year, 70% of graduating seniors in California's high desert completed the FAFSA and applied to

VVC, resulting in 40% of them enrolling at the college. VVC is also proud of its on-campus Engagement Centers, which offer events, guest speakers, and support for students.

"We had a student come into our STEM Engagement Center who was initially enrolled in just one math class and was quite nervous about his performance," said Todd Scott, VVC Vice President of Instruction. "After a conversation with our supportive staff, he felt encouraged to take on a full course load and he ended up becoming a 4.0 engineering student. That staff member's encouragement and belief in him made all the difference in his success."

This spirit of care and support extends beyond academic achievements. VVC's culture is encapsulated by a story in which the campus community, including maintenance staff, other employees, and students, came together to free a goose entangled in fishing line. Such acts of kindness demonstrate the collective commitment to helping one another, ensuring that no one—whether a student or a creature in need—is left without support.

"Victor Valley College's success with Caring Campus is a testament to what can be achieved when an institution truly commits to a culture of care," said Dr. Brad Phillips, CEO of IEBC. "We are proud to see VVC institutionalize Caring Campus into its campus culture and become a model for other colleges nationwide."



Stitching Stories: Deborah Hamilton's Dedication to Family History and Quilting



From Left to Right: Quilt 1 is Deborah's Aunt Julia quilt, described as a Vintage African-American quilt. A family heirloom that has been in the family since the 1930s. Quilt 2 is Deborah's Medallion Quilt, a tribute to her mother that she quilted about 20 years ago.

Deborah Hamilton, a vibrant and spirited 71-year-old student at Victor Valley College (VVC), embodies the essence of resilience and passion. Her journey from the bustling streets of New York City to the serene landscapes of the High Desert is a testament to her unwavering spirit and commitment to family legacy.

Growing up in the heart of NYC, Hamilton's childhood was marked by adversity and perseverance. Raised by her mother in the projects after her father's departure, Hamilton learned the value of education early on. "Mom was determined to get her children to succeed to break the cycle and be freed of poverty," Hamilton recalls, her voice tinged with gratitude and admiration for her mother's unwavering support.

Despite facing racial prejudice and economic hardship, Hamilton excelled in school, propelled by her mother's resilience and determination. Her mother's graveyard shifts as a key punch operator on Wall Street served as a poignant reminder of the sacrifices made for their family's future. "Education was the key," Hamilton emphasizes, reflecting on the lessons instilled by her upbringing.

Hamilton's academic journey led her to Indiana University, where she pursued graduate studies and eventually became the Director of Affirmative Action EEO and Minority Program. In this role, she championed the rights of minorities, women, and people with disabilities,

leaving an indelible mark on the university community.

In the early 2000s, Hamilton found herself drawn to the serene landscapes of the High Desert, where she discovered a new found passion for quilting at VVC. "Quilting is a way of preserving memories and important people in our families," Hamilton explains, her eyes sparkling with enthusiasm for her craft.

Over the years, Hamilton has meticulously hand-quilted numerous pieces, from commissioned works to personal projects, each imbued with a story and a sense of heritage. Her quilting journey at VVC has been enriched by the guidance of instructors like Lonnie Sanders and Pat Adams, whose expertise and support have inspired her creative pursuits.

But Hamilton's interests extend beyond the realm of quilting; she is deeply engaged in unravelling her family's ancestry, tracing her roots back to Jamaica and Aiken, South Carolina. Inspired by the work of historian Henry Louis Gates Jr., Hamilton emphasizes the importance of family history in shaping one's identity and understanding the broader tapestry of human experience.

"Family is responsible for preserving its family history," Hamilton affirms, her voice resonating with conviction. She urges younger generations to explore their heritage and ask questions about their origins, recognizing the transformative power of storytelling in connecting past, present, and future.

As she continues her studies at VVC and delves deeper into her family's history, Deborah Hamilton remains a shining example of resilience, passion, and the enduring power of the human spirit. In her vibrant zest for life and unwavering commitment to preserving her family's legacy, Hamilton's journey serves as a beacon of hope and inspiration for all who encounter her story.

In addition to her academic pursuits and passion for quilting, Deborah Hamilton is a pillar of strength and inspiration in her community. Known for her infectious laughter and boundless energy, she actively engages in community outreach programs and volunteer initiatives. Whether she's lending a helping hand at local shelters or organizing fundraising events for charitable causes, Hamilton's generosity knows no bounds. Her vibrant spirit and unwavering commitment to serving others exemplify the values of compassion and empathy that define her character. Through her selfless acts of kindness and unwavering dedication to making a positive impact, Hamilton continues to leave an indelible mark on the hearts and minds of those around her,



VVC Alum Ignites New Leadership as Victorville Fire Chief

Bobby Clemmer has sit down interview with RAMS Monthly!

The Victorville Fire Department has recently welcomed a new leader at its helm—Chief Bobby Clemmer, a VVC alum and a seasoned first responder with over two decades of experience. Clemmer, who officially took on the role in May 2024, brings a deep-rooted connection to the High Desert and a passion for serving his community.

A Journey of Dedication

Clemmer's journey to becoming Fire Chief began in 2002 when he started as a firefighter in Barstow. Raised in Barstow and Apple Valley, Clemmer's first job was at DiNapoli's, a firehouse-themed Italian restaurant in Apple Valley run by a firefighting family. The irony of his first job was not lost on him, as it foreshadowed his future career.

Clemmer attended the Paramedic Academy at Victor Valley College before moving on to a fire academy at a neighboring college. His career as a firefighter officially began in Barstow, where he served from 2002 to 2007. He steadily worked his way up the ranks, becoming an

engineer in 2007. In 2013, he transferred to Apple Valley, where he was promoted to Fire Captain. By the winter of 2023, Clemmer had joined the Victorville Fire Department as a Battalion Chief. His dedication and leadership skills were quickly recognized, leading to his promotion to Deputy Chief in November 2023 and finally to Fire Chief in May 2024.

Looking Ahead: Strategic Planning and Community Safety

As the new Chief, Clemmer has ambitious plans for the Victorville Fire Department. He shared that the department is currently exploring strategic planning with a consultant to evaluate services and improvements over the next five years. A key focus will be on upgrading the department's fleet, with new vehicles including three fire engines, a tiller truck, a water tender, and three paramedic squads expected to join the fleet.

Clemmer is also committed to strengthening the department's arson program. He pointed out that some of the most common causes

of fires in the area stem from homeless encampments and fireworks. In fact, the past 4th of July was the busiest on record for Victorville, though not primarily due to fireworks. The department has been actively cracking down on illegal fireworks, leading to a significant decrease in reports— According to the city, Victorville had 2,479 firework reports in 2020. That fell to just 652 in 2024. During the most recent holiday, 53 citations were issued, and hundreds of illegal fireworks were seized.

On July 4th alone, the department responded to 101 incidents or 911 calls for service. Victorville Fire had in total only 29 calls related to fireworks on the holiday, which included mutual aid in the city of Adelanto.

Evolving Challenges and Community Outreach

Clemmer's 20 years in firefighting have given him a unique perspective on how fires have evolved. He noted that modern materials, often synthetic, are more flammable, increasing the risk of fire. Beyond firefighting, Clemmer is also focused on community outreach.



The department is actively involved in local organizations such as Kiwanis and the Greater High Desert Chamber of Commerce, as well as participating in school visits, city events, and advisory committees for medic and fire programs.

Clemmer is deeply concerned about the mental health challenges faced by firefighters. He acknowledged that the leading causes of death among firefighters include cancer, heart attacks, PTSD, and suicide. According to the U.S. Fire Administration, the number of firefighters dying by suicide continues to climb as they suffer from behavioral health issues, including PTSD, stemming from their work. Studies show that around 20% of firefighters and paramedics experience PTSD at some point in their careers, compared to 6.8% in the general population.

A Personal Mission

With McKenzie as his guiding inspiration, Chief Bobby Clemmer is set to lead the Victorville Fire Department into a future of growth, safety,

and community engagement. When asked why he continues in the demanding field of firefighting after all these years, Clemmer didn't hesitate. "It's because of McKenzie," he said, referring to his late daughter. "She wanted to be a firefighter. She was always the one that had the most interest in my job. When I'm here, she gives me purpose to keep going."



Firefighting & Mental Health



The mental health issues faced by first responders are finally receiving attention. In 2022, Congress passed the Public Safety Officer Support Act (PL 117-172), which extends the Public Safety Officers' Benefits (PSOB) program to include coverage for officers who die by suicide under specific conditions or suffer permanent disability from traumatic self-inflicted injuries. This act recognizes the severe impact of post-traumatic stress (PTS) on firefighters, who endure intense stress and trauma. However, further action is required.

Firefighters experience PTS at rates comparable to military veterans. An August 2016 study found that about 20 percent of firefighters and paramedics face PTS during their careers, compared to a 6.8 percent lifetime risk in the general population. Firefighter suicides are estimated at 100 per year, with a rate of 18 per 100,000, higher than the general public's 13 per 100,000.

To tackle this crisis, the federal government should enhance support beyond existing legislation. It is vital to fund peer-supported mental health programs in fire departments and provide resources for healthcare providers to address PTS. Collecting accurate data on PTS and suicide in the fire service is crucial for developing effective interventions.

The FBI's Law Enforcement Suicide Data Collection, launched in 2022, is a positive development, but similar efforts must include firefighters. Ensuring that first responders receive adequate mental health support is essential. Prioritizing mental health awareness and culturally competent care can help prevent further tragedies among our nation's firefighters.

Student Spotlight: Xavier May Orozco



For Pride Month, we're celebrating Xavier May Orozco, a 19-year-old student at Victor Valley College (VVC). Xavier is majoring in Fine Arts and Film Directing, with dreams of attending UCLA or Cal State Fullerton to pursue a career in the entertainment industry as a professional entertainer.

Xavier has always loved performing. He found confidence on stage, participating in many productions like "The Wizard of Oz," "High School Musical," and "Aladdin" at the George Visual Performing Arts School in Adelanto. In high school, Xavier shined in plays like "Alice in Wonderland" and "Radium Girls." His love for drag performances started when his sisters took him to a drag show. He felt an immediate connection and created his drag persona, Miss Bow 'N Arrow, inspired by his Sagittarius zodiac sign. Drag is now a big part of his life, and he hopes to do it professionally.

Xavier first came out as gay in seventh grade. He always felt more feminine and connected more with girls. His older brother is also gay, which helped him understand sexual orientation better. For Xavier, being gay is not just about who he likes; it's also about how he sees himself. Growing up without a father figure made him feel uncomfortable around men, and finding role models was tough.

Thankfully, Xavier's family accepted him when he came out, providing strong support.

However, some friends turned away because of his lifestyle, which was really upsetting. This rejection happened again during his senior year of high school. With help from his therapist and supportive friends and family, Xavier learned to cope.

Today, Xavier looks up to his godmother and older brother for support, with his brother acting like a father figure. Outside of school, Xavier enjoys watching TV shows and videos for drag ideas, traveling, and hanging out with friends. He loved visiting Disneyland with his mom, especially the Haunted Mansion ride during its "The Nightmare Before Christmas" makeover.

Being a young person in the LGBTQ+ community today comes with many challenges. Many still face discrimination, bullying, and rejection from friends and family. Xavier's experiences reflect the struggles many LGBTQ+ youth encounter. Rejection by friends, especially those they've known for years, can be particularly painful. Feeling abandoned by people who once seemed supportive can lead to feelings of isolation and sadness.

Social media and the internet can be double-edged swords for LGBTQ+ youth. On one hand, they provide a platform to find supportive communities and role models. On the other hand, they can also be sources of cyberbullying



and negativity. Xavier advises young people to find trustworthy and accepting individuals. "Find people who will accept you and never make you feel like an outcast," he says.

Xavier's story shows the importance of a strong support system. Despite facing rejection, his family, therapist, and true friends helped him navigate tough times. For many LGBTQ+ youth, having even one person who supports them can make a huge difference. Xavier's advice to young people who have come out is to find trustworthy and accepting people. "Find people who will accept you and never make you feel like an outcast," he says. Even though the LGBTQ+ community faces challenges, Xavier believes there are allies who support equal rights and will provide a safe, supportive environment.

Xavier's journey is a testament to resilience and the importance of staying true to oneself. His passion for performing and his courage to embrace his identity inspire others to do the same. This Pride Month, we honor Xavier May Orozco and all LGBTQ+ individuals striving for acceptance and equality.



ABOVE: XAVIER POSING FOR A PICTURE DURING A DRAG PERFORMANCE.

Victor Valley College's Commitment to Excellence Recognized with 7-Year Accreditation



Victor Valley College (VVC) is proud to announce the renewal of its accreditation for another seven years by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC). This achievement reaffirms VVC's commitment to providing high-quality education and continuous improvement in student learning and achievement.

Accreditation is a system of voluntary, non-governmental self-regulation and peer review unique to American educational institutions. The ACCJC's rigorous standards evaluate institutions based on their mission, goals, resources, processes, and student outcomes. Achieving accreditation assures students, the public, and other institutions of VVC's educational quality and institutional integrity.

"The reaffirmation of full accreditation for the next 7 years by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) is another example of the continuous commitment for excellence demonstrated by the faculty and staff of Victor Valley College to ensure that our students receive the highest quality education," said Todd Scott, Ph.D., Executive Vice President for Instruction, Innovation and Student Success.

The ACCJC's accreditation standards emphasize continuous quality improvement in critical areas such as student learning, achievement, and the closure of institutional equity gaps. The peer review process, a cornerstone of accreditation, involves comprehensive evaluations by experts from other accredited institutions. This process ensures that institutions meet established standards of quality and effectiveness. An accredited status from ACCJC enables Victor Valley College to qualify for federal grants and contracts, distribute federal financial aid to students, and facilitate the transfer of students' credits to other accredited institutions. These benefits are crucial for the college's mission to provide accessible and affordable education to the community.

Victor Valley College's accreditation renewal follows an extensive self-evaluation and peer review process. The Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER) documented the quality and effectiveness of VVC's programs, services, and practices, demonstrating alignment with ACCJC's standards. A peer review team validated the ISER's findings and

provided feedback for further improvement. "Accreditation is more than a status, it is a testament to the dedication and hard work of our faculty, staff, and students and is an ongoing process that drives us to uphold high standards and strive for excellence," said Daniel Walden, Ph.D., Superintendent/President Victor Valley College. "We are committed to using the insights from the peer review to enhance our educational offerings and support our students' success."

The renewed accreditation highlights VVC's achievements and sets the stage for future advancements. The college will continue to submit annual reports to monitor compliance with ACCJC standards and a midterm report in four years to update on continuous improvement efforts.

Victor Valley College invites the community to join in celebrating this significant milestone. The college remains dedicated to its mission of providing high-quality education and fostering a supportive learning environment for all students.

From Battlefield to Classroom: VVC Spotlights U.S. Vets on Campus

Frank Ayapantecalt



In celebration of Military Appreciation Month, Victor Valley College is proud to shine a spotlight on one remarkable student, Frank Ayapantecalt. At 32 years old, Frank's journey from a U.S. Navy veteran to a dedicated VVC student is nothing short of inspiring.

Frank, who served as an E4 in the Navy, spent his military career aboard the U.S.S. Hartford, a Los Angeles Class submarine. Interestingly, Frank's military adventure began on a whim. Growing up, he didn't have much interest in the military. It was actually a friend's idea to take the ASVAB and get out of class early that led him down this path. Seizing the opportunity to skip high school for the day, Frank took the test and astonishingly scored an impressive 87%, qualifying him for the prestigious nuclear program. His choice to serve on submarines stemmed from a dislike of heights, leading him to the depths of the ocean instead.

From 2011 to 2016, Frank served on the Hartford, where he specialized in sonar operations. His submarine adventures are filled with fond memories, especially his tours in the U.K., though he admits Scotland wasn't his favorite. His most memorable experience was his very first deployment, initially planned as a 30-day mission but extended to over 100 days at sea. A standout moment of his service was participating in a National Geographic documentary. Frank and his crew navigated to the North Pole and dramatically punched through the ice on camera, showcasing the prowess and resilience of their submarine.

Now, as a student at Victor Valley College, Frank brings the same dedication and spirit to his studies. His story is a testament to the incredible experiences and skills veterans bring to our campus. VVC is honored to have Frank as part of our VVC community and celebrate his contributions both in the military and now as a student.

Zach Smith



Victor Valley College proudly honors U.S. Army veteran and dedicated student Zach Smith for Military Appreciation Month. Zach's remarkable journey from the battlefield to our campus exemplifies resilience, dedication, and the spirit of service.

Zach, who retired as an E5 after nine years in the Army, served a memorable tour in Afghanistan in 2010. Specializing as a tank mechanic, Zach's skills were crucial both during his military service and in his civilian career. His transition from military to civilian life was seamless; he recalls, "I got out of the Army on a Friday, I started on the trains by Monday," referring to his work with BNSF on the railroads. His Army training provided a solid foundation for his post-military career, showcasing the enduring value of military skills.

During his time in Afghanistan, Zach faced intense situations, including a bombing that occurred just 50 feet away. Despite the daily dangers, he adapted to the environment, noting that being shot at became a routine part of life. Growing up in Indiana, Zach's military service took him across the globe, from the Middle East to South Korea, and various U.S. bases including Fort Sill in Oklahoma and Fort Irwin's National Training Center in the High Desert. His extensive experience and travels have enriched his perspective and resilience.

Now at Victor Valley College, Zach is not only advancing his education but also giving back to the veteran community. He works part-time at the Veterans Resource Center on the lower campus, where he provides crucial information and support to fellow veterans. His role at the center ensures that veterans at VVC have access to the resources they need to succeed. Zach's journey from Army service to student and advocate embodies the dedication and strength that we celebrate this Military Appreciation Month. Thank you, Zach, for your service and continued commitment to helping others.

VVC Celebrates Record-Breaking Commencement: Nearly 900 Graduates and Over 10,000 Guests in Attendance



Victorville, CA - June 15, 2024 - Victor Valley College proudly announces its largest-ever commencement ceremony held on June 12, 2024, at the prestigious Glen Helen Amphitheater. The event witnessed a remarkable gathering of nearly 900 in-person graduates accompanied by an overwhelming turnout of over 10,000 enthusiastic guests. In total, nearly 2,000 VVC students were eligible to walk from the 2023-2024 school year.

The ceremony was a true testament to the hard work, dedication, and achievements of the graduating class of 2024. Students from various academic disciplines were honored for their academic excellence and commitment to their educational pursuits.

"We are immensely proud of our graduating class and delighted to see such strong support from our community," said Dr. Daniel Walden, President of Victor Valley College. "This record-breaking ceremony is a reflection of the hard work and dedication of our students, faculty, and staff. We congratulate all our graduates on their outstanding achievements and wish them continued success in their future endeavors."

VVC Associated Student Body President Jennifer Weis delivered a thought-provoking

speech to her fellow classmates stating, "If my mother could survive a war, immigrate to America with not a single penny to her name, raise three children as a single mother, and then build her success, there [is] no reason why I should be anything less than perfect. I forgot the little triumphs I made along the way were just as important as the major ones," Weis continued "so often we bury the accomplishments telling ourselves we could have done better, yet here [we are] graduating and celebrating [our] own success."

The atmosphere at the Glen Helen Amphitheater was electric as graduates, faculty, families, and friends came together to celebrate this momentous occasion. The sheer magnitude of the event underscored the profound impact Victor Valley College has had on the lives of its students and the broader community. Keynote Speaker Dr. Bernard Gibson, a former captain in the United States Navy gave an inspirational message, telling graduates "I know some of you might be thinking okay I made it through college so what's next? [This] is just your beginning, today is your commencement not your conclusion, it's the launch pad that propels you into a journey filled with even more opportunities, challenges and triumphs."

The Victor Valley College commencement ceremony at the Glen Helen Amphitheater will be remembered as a historic and unforgettable event that marks a new chapter in the lives of the graduates and the institution itself.

An advertisement for the VVC Mobile App. It features a large QR code on the left and a smaller one on the right. The text "FREE DOWNLOAD!" is at the top in red. Below it is the VVC logo, which consists of a circular emblem with a tree and the text "VICTOR VALLEY COLLEGE" around it, followed by "VVC" in large white letters. Below the logo is "MOBILE APP" in white. Further down is "THE VVC UNIVERSE" in red, and "IN YOUR POCKET!" in red. At the bottom, there are two logos: "GET IT ON Google Play" and "Download on the App Store". At the very bottom, it says "THE ALL NEW VVC MOBILE APP IS NOW AVAILABLE!" in white.

Victor Valley College Nursing Department Honored as Top Disaster Preparedness Organization



In the field of healthcare, preparedness is paramount. When the unexpected strikes, having well-trained professionals ready to respond can make all the difference. Recently, the Nursing Department of Victor Valley College (VVC) showcased their excellence in disaster preparedness on a national stage and emerged triumphant.

This past April, the National Student Nurses' Association (NSNA) hosted its annual convention in Orlando, Florida. Among the attendees were representatives from VVC's Nursing Department, who made their mark by being awarded top honors as the best Disaster Preparedness organization in the country. This accolade is a testament to their commitment to raising awareness of disaster plans and ensuring their community is equipped to handle any crisis.

The NSNA convention drew nearly 40 students from various corners of the United States, providing an invaluable platform for networking, learning, and skill development. VVC's nursing student representatives seized the opportunity to engage in a wide array of discussions and workshops, ranging from epilepsy awareness to hands-on narcan training and neuroassessment.

One particularly enriching experience was a panel discussion on emergency nursing

certification, where VVC students had the chance to glean insights from seasoned professionals, including a flight nurse and an ER nurse. Such interactions not only broaden their knowledge base but also inspire them to excel in their chosen field.

Tiana Gray, Chair of VVC's Nursing and Allied Health Department, shed light on the department's dedication to disaster preparedness, "Our Nursing Program participates in a multidisciplinary Disaster Drill. We set up and run 'hospitals' and triage and care for patient victims who come into our hospitals in large quantities. Margaret was a student who participated last year and she wrote up a very detailed report of our participation in the disaster drill, including costs, staff, and all the components of the drill."

During a recent CNSA meeting on campus VVC student Margaret Sandige, who attended the convention simply said "When the nation needs nurses for emergency disasters, [it] think about Victor Valley College."

In 2023, RNcareers.org recognized VVC's Nursing Department's excellence, ranking it #12 among 160 nursing schools in California and #51 out of over 1,700 nursing programs nationwide. With a commendable three-year average NCLEX-RN passing rate of 97.05%,

VVC exemplifies academic rigor and student success, earning them an overall grade of A.

The NSNA, as the host of the convention, plays a pivotal role in shaping the future of nursing. Comprising over 60,000 members nationwide, it serves as a platform for student nurses to connect, learn, and advocate for their profession. Through initiatives like the annual convention, the NSNA fosters professional development, leadership skills, and a sense of camaraderie among aspiring nurses.

VVC's Nursing Department's recognition as the best Disaster Preparedness organization underscores their unwavering commitment to excellence and community service. As they continue to nurture the next generation of healthcare professionals, their impact reverberates far beyond the confines of the



VVC CNSA PRESIDENT/NURSING STUDENT
MARGARET SANDIGE

Revving Up Relationships: VVC Shifts Into High Gear with Auto Industry Leaders



Victor Valley College (VVC) recently hosted a luncheon, bringing together top community partners from the Auto Industry in the High Desert. This past month, the spotlight was on the automotive sector, attracting leaders from renowned dealerships, including Victorville Auto Group, Valley Hi Toyota, Nissan, Kia, Honda, Sunland Ford, and Browning Auto Group.

The event provided a platform for meaningful dialogue between VVC's Automotive Department staff and industry leaders, fostering closer connections between the college's educational programs and the local automotive industry. VVC is dedicated to delivering exceptional instruction, aiming to equip students with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in various employment sectors within the High Desert.

These engagements help VVC progress towards enhancing curriculum and aligning with industry demands. Currently, VVC offers 13 certifications of achievement and two associate degrees in automotive technology, underscoring a commitment to comprehensive, career-focused education.

In addition to strengthening existing programs, VVC has introduced a new Learning Aligned Employment Program (LAEP) to automotive leaders. LAEP provides funds to allow eligible

students opportunities to earn money by working with industry leaders. This program helps students offset educational costs while gaining valuable, career-related experience in their fields of study.

For employers, the benefits of LAEP are significant. VVC reimburses non-profit employers up to 90% of the salaries paid to student interns, and 50% for for-profit businesses. This initiative not only supports students financially but also ensures that employers have access to a well-prepared and highly skilled workforce.

Victor Valley College is committed to meeting the needs of industry partners by continuously



DID YOU KNOW?

Automotive Service Technicians and Mechanics in California are essential professionals who diagnose, adjust, repair, and overhaul automotive vehicles. This role excludes specific positions like Automotive Body Repairers, Bus and Truck Mechanics, Diesel Engine Specialists, and Electronic Equipment Installers. Typically, employers look for candidates who have completed post-secondary vocational training, ensuring they possess the necessary skills and knowledge. The wages for these professionals in California, as of the first quarter of 2023, average \$29.39 per hour, with earnings ranging from \$21.34 at the 25th percentile to \$35.35 at the 75th percentile.

The employment outlook for Automotive Service Technicians and Mechanics indicates a slight decline. Between 2018 and 2028, the number of positions is expected to decrease from 80,200 to 79,500, representing a 0.9% drop. Despite this, there will be approximately 77,050 job openings during this period due to turnover and the creation of new jobs. The primary industries employing these professionals include automotive repair and maintenance, automobile dealerships, and automotive parts and accessories stores, highlighting the demand across various sectors.

In addition to the technical skills required, Automotive Service Technicians and Mechanics in California must meet certain licensing requirements. These include certifications such as Brake/Lamp Adjuster and Smog Check Technician, issued by the Department of Consumer Affairs, Bureau of Automotive Repair. These licenses ensure that technicians adhere to state regulations and standards, providing quality service to customers. This profession values independence, support, and practical problem-solving skills, making it ideal for individuals who enjoy hands-on work and continuous learning in the evolving automotive field.

Source: edd.ca.gov

VVC professor gets mention in People magazine

Branden Wellington and Meagan Tandy tied the knot with stunning mountain views as their backdrop!

On Sunday, September 1st, the Sistas star and Batwoman actress celebrated their love at a breathtaking 22-acre event space in Lytle Creek, California, nestled in the scenic San Bernardino Mountains. Surrounded by 175 guests, the couple enjoyed a weekend-long celebration filled with fun and unforgettable moments. VVC's Brigham Welch performed at the couple's reception.

Brigham Welch, a dedicated music instructor at Victor Valley College since 2015, is more than just a teacher—he's a seasoned professional musician who brings his real-world experience into the classroom. Last month, he was booked to perform at the wedding of actress Meagan Tandy and "Sistas" star Branden Wellington, an event featured in People magazine. This high-profile gig, secured after Tandy discovered his talents at PVs restaurant, highlights how his passion for music has opened doors to new opportunities. Brigham continues to blend his career as a professional musician with his role as a dedicated educator at Victor Valley

Outside of weddings and restaurant gigs, Brigham's musical career has taken him to some incredible events. He's played for a backyard party with reality TV stars Brock and Scheana from Vanderpump Rules (with Scheana even tagging him on Instagram), a lawyer party on the 56th floor of the US Bank Tower in Downtown LA, and an extravagant backyard bash in Orange County that featured fire dancers alongside his performance. His ability to juggle high-profile events while maintaining his restaurant residency has given him ample opportunities to inspire his students at VVC.

One of the core lessons Brigham ingrains in his students is that a career in music is achievable. "There's plenty of room in this world for them to do music professionally," he emphasizes. "Whether it's performance, composing, recording, or teaching, there are so many creative ways to make a living doing what you love."

Brigham's musical journey began early, shaped by a community of mentors and educators who



Brigham Welch has been teaching student musicians at VVC since 2015.

just a bachelor's degree but also two master's degrees—one in performance and another in education, further solidifying his expertise.

A professional violist, Brigham often jokes about the instrument he's devoted his life to. "If you throw a viola in the fire, it burns longer than a violin," he quips with a smile, playfully acknowledging the instrument's reputation. But on a more serious note, he explains that while the violin typically plays the higher range and the cello covers the lower range, the viola occupies the rich, warm middle ground, contributing its unique voice to the orchestra. It's this depth and versatility that has kept Brigham connected to the viola throughout his career.

Brigham Welch's career is a testament to the power of passion and persistence, and his story is sure to inspire students at VVC and beyond to pursue their musical dreams, knowing that with hard work and dedication, they too can turn their passion into a lifelong career.

"If you throw a viola in the fire, it burns longer than a violin."

People

September 5, 2024

Sistas Star Branden Wellington Marries Batwoman Actress Meagan Tandy in Elegant California Wedding (Exclusive)

After the couple's first dance, violist Brigham Welch performed a solo of "If I Ain't Got You" by Alicia Keys. Meagan also shared a Motown funk self-choreographed dance with her dad, and Branden danced with his mom, Lisa Dickerson. (Story by Erin Clack and Emily Strohm)

College.

Brigham believes that to teach effectively, he must practice what he preaches. "In order to help my students learn what it takes to become professional musicians, I need to lead by example and be an active musician myself," he explains. It's this approach that recently led him to a career milestone—performing at the wedding of Batwoman star Meagan Tandy. Brigham landed the gig when Tandy and her cousin visited PVs, a restaurant in Rancho Cucamonga where he's the resident musician. "She enjoyed the vibe of my music, and I was booked shortly after to play at her wedding."

saw his potential and nurtured his talents. "As they say, 'it takes a village to raise a child.' I got my start in music as a child attending music school every Saturday," he recalls, fondly remembering how his weekends were filled with lessons in music theory, piano, and ensemble practice. These early experiences laid the foundation for his deep love of music. His dedication to honing his craft led him to attend a prestigious arts-focused high school, where his passion only grew stronger. From there, he pursued higher education, earning not

FIRED UP: The Quest to Resurrect VVC's Ceramics Department

A Student's Journey to Preserve Family Legacy and Artistic Heritage at Victor Valley College

By: Jacob Kleinsmith, ASB Fine Arts Senator

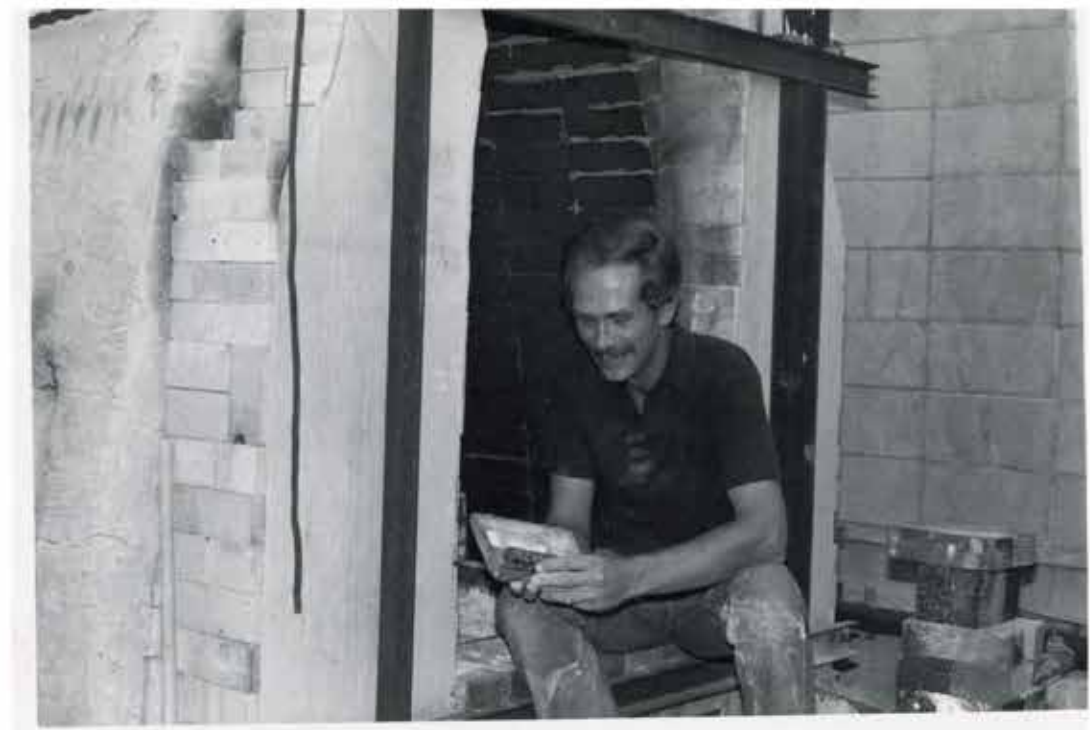
My grandfather, Dr. Gene Kleinsmith, started his move west from Wisconsin in search of higher teacher salaries. After an unsuccessful attempt in Colorado and a short stint in Needles, he settled in Apple Valley, and began his work with Victor Valley College's Art Department in 1970. As Director, and later Department Chair, of the Fine Arts department he taught and developed the ceramics program on campus, offering the first course in 1971.

The program became the most popular on campus, and drew in all types of students with their many workshops and lectures from accomplished ceramists nationwide like Warren MacKenzie, Don Reitz, Ken Ferguson, and Paul Soldner. Unfortunately, after his death in 1994, the flames of the kilns were snuffed and the program fell dormant.

It wasn't until 2018, that a serious attempt would be made to revive the program. Through a grant, the Fine Arts Department was able to add a new electric kiln to its existing arsenal of a gas kiln and an electric kiln. The next year, the Art Department successfully petitioned the ASB council to cover the cost of a vent needed for the gas kiln, which totaled \$8,719. It was decided that the best course of action to revitalize the ceramics program would be to replace it with a new structure.

In 2022, it was scheduled for demolition; however, other projects soon took priority and the kiln yard was once again forgotten. As of this summer, I have made it my personal goal as ASB's Fine Arts Senator to help revive the ceramics program. With support from my fellow council members, faculty, administration, and most importantly the students, I plan to make a convincing argument to make a serious assessment of the Kiln Yard's facilities, in order to build a robust ceramics program and in turn a stronger Art Department.

Today, just to the side of the Art Building, the kiln yard still sits, and peaking above its gray brick wall is the metallic sheen of the smokestack. Its signal for help, its beacon to eager students who have that fire in their bellies. Like the old chocolate factory, I hope one day to see plumes from the chimney and the doors open again.



Second Chances: Tieast Jenkins Balances Motherhood and Education

At Victor Valley College, Tieast Jenkins stands as a remarkable example of perseverance, determination, and the power of second chances. A mother of five—three boys and two girls, with her youngest now 18—Tieast has returned to VVC with clear goals and an unwavering commitment to improving her life and the lives of others.

Before deciding to head back to school, Tieast worked for the Victor Valley Family Resource Center, a nonprofit in Hesperia. There, she helped individuals with rent, utility, and move-in funding and was being trained as a Housing Coordinator. It was meaningful work that connected her with the community, but she realized that her personal dreams were still waiting to be fulfilled.

Now pursuing a degree in Business Administration, Tieast is also earning two business certificates as she lays the foundation for her future. Her ambition? To become a Notary Loan Signing Agent, offering Live Scan services, and ultimately transitioning into the world of government contracting. Her decision to return to school wasn't easy—having first enrolled at VVC in 2009, life's challenges, such as raising young children and financial constraints, forced her to step away. "It was either work and survive or go to school," she recalls. Despite the hardships of being a single mother and struggling with food and clothing, Tieast never gave up. A moment of prayer brought clarity to her situation, and the answer was simple: Go to school.

Her children are her biggest supporters. "They are so proud of me and encourage me all the time," Tieast says. "They tell me to do my homework now." In returning to school, she hopes to show them that no matter your age or circumstances, you can accomplish anything if you set your mind to it.

Tieast is also deeply involved in the VVC community, participating in the BSU Club, VVC ASB, and the Student Engagement Center. She appreciates the freedom students have at VVC to express ideas and bring them to life through clubs, committees, and student government—something she sees as unique to the college.

When reflecting on her journey, Tieast is quick to credit the faculty and staff who have guided her along the way. From the confidence-building lessons of Brian Quarles and Tim Adell to the entrepreneurial wisdom of Dr. Felix Ekpo, each has had a lasting impact. Dr. Henry Young, Dean of Business, has become a mentor,



encouraging her to dream bigger than she ever thought possible.

Rams Monthly asked Dr. Young about Tieast and he said "[she] is an inspirational student leader who brings the intelligence, maturity, and forward-thinking necessary to bridge cultural divides amongst constituency groups. She embodies learning and her academic endeavors with an entrepreneurial mindset grounded in 'going to know' to succeed regardless of the cost."

For other mothers, especially those who may have "empty nests," Tieast has a message of hope: "It's never too late to pursue the goals, visions, and wants you have or had for life.

Make the decision and stick with it. Don't worry about fitting in with the crowd—you've got this." She shares her favorite verse, Ecclesiastes 9:11, as a reminder that success comes in its own time to those who persist.

Tieast Jenkins is proof that with faith, determination, and the right support system, anything is possible.

From Ground to Garden: VVC's Carlos Ruiz Shares Secrets to Sustainable Landscaping



Carlos Ruiz, a part-time faculty member at Victor Valley College, recently took center stage as he hosted an informative workshop for the Mojave Water Agency. The event, titled "Wonders of Water," aimed to educate the public on water-wise gardening practices and sustainable water management strategies.

Ruiz's expertise and passion for environmental conservation shone through as he guided participants through a series of engaging discussions and hands-on activities. The workshop served as a platform for local gardening and soil experts to share valuable insights on how individuals can contribute to water conservation efforts in their own backyard.

The workshop covered a wide range of topics essential for maintaining a water-wise garden. Participants learned practical tips on how to save water in their home gardens, including techniques for efficient irrigation, soil moisture retention, and drought-tolerant plant selection.

One of the highlights of the event was the exploration of drought-tolerant plants and their suitability for the local climate. Participants gained a deeper understanding of native and adapted plant species that thrive in arid environments, allowing them to create beautiful and sustainable landscapes while minimizing water usage.

Ruiz's guidance extended beyond basic gardening practices, providing attendees with valuable insights on how to elevate their gardens to the next level. From soil health and composting to integrated pest management, participants left the workshop equipped with

the knowledge and tools needed to cultivate thriving and water-efficient gardens.

The "Wonders of Water" workshop, hosted by Ruiz and organized by the Mojave Water Agency, exemplifies the agency's commitment to promoting water conservation and environmental stewardship within the community. The event is part of a broader initiative to offer free educational opportunities to the public, covering topics ranging from groundwater recharge to sustainable landscaping practices.

As the Mojave Water Agency continues to expand its outreach efforts, workshops like these serve as invaluable resources for individuals seeking to make a positive impact on their local environment. By empowering residents with knowledge and practical skills, the agency aims to foster a culture of water consciousness and environmental sustainability across the region.

With a full lineup of classes and events planned for the year, the Mojave Water Agency invites community members to join the movement towards a more water-wise future. Together, through education and action, we can preserve our precious water resources for generations to come.

Kudos to Carlos Ruiz and Victor Valley College for their dedication to environmental education and advocacy. As stewards of the land, their contributions play a vital role in shaping a more sustainable and resilient community.

PHOTO CREDIT: Mojave Water Agency

CARBON NEUTRAL by 2045



California stands as a beacon of environmental conservation efforts, boasting a rich tapestry of initiatives and policies aimed at preserving its natural landscapes and combating climate change. With its diverse ecosystems ranging from coastal regions to mountainous terrains, the state recognizes the urgency of safeguarding its environment for future generations. California's commitment to conservation is evidenced by its ambitious goals, including achieving carbon neutrality by 2045 and preserving 30% of its land and coastal waters by 2030, as outlined in Executive Order N-82-20.

The state's environmental endeavors are further bolstered by robust legislative frameworks and innovative programs. California leads the nation in renewable energy production, with solar and wind power contributing significantly to its clean energy portfolio. The California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006, also known as Assembly Bill 32, set ambitious targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020 and establishing a cap-and-trade program to incentivize emissions reductions. Moreover, the state has implemented stringent emissions standards for vehicles and industries, setting a precedent for environmental policy nationwide. Additionally, California invests heavily in water conservation and sustainable agriculture practices, recognizing the vital role of water management in mitigating drought and ensuring food security. Through a combination of legislative action, public awareness campaigns, and community engagement, California continues to pioneer environmental conservation efforts, setting a powerful example for states across the country and around the world.

VVC Dedicates High Desert Training Center to Exquadrum, Celebrating Commitment to Local Workforce Development



Victor Valley College (VVC) recently honored aerospace and defense innovator Exquadrum with a formal dedication of VVC's High Desert Training Center (HDTTC) at the Southern California Logistics Airport. This dedication highlights Exquadrum's invaluable partnership with VVC in workforce development, further strengthening the Victor Valley region's economic and industrial landscape.

In a ceremony at the HDTTC, VVC officials acknowledged Exquadrum President Eric Schmidt, Chief Executive Officer Kevin Mahaffy, and the Exquadrum team for their ongoing dedication to building a skilled workforce and enhancing local job opportunities. The HDTTC provides a critical training environment for Victor Valley residents, offering hands-on, skills-based education that directly supports the local economy.

Reflecting on the company's commitment, Schmidt remarked, "We've been digging in the trenches to make the training center valuable to our community. Sometimes you work so hard you can't see the horizon, but today we were able to lift our heads and see the impact of our work." Mahaffy echoed this sentiment, adding, "Being part of this journey and receiving this recognition is truly overwhelming. We're proud to contribute to a future that brings new opportunities to Victor Valley."

According to a 2022 article from the County of San Bernardino, the High Desert Training Center was developed to deliver a "space-age education" through its state-of-the-art facilities and collaborative approach to technical training. As the article notes, the HDTTC has been a valuable addition to the region, addressing workforce needs by delivering advanced instruction in fields such as manufacturing, engineering, and technology. VVC and Exquadrum's collaboration plays a key role in filling these essential roles, ensuring the Victor Valley remains competitive in today's job market.

With Exquadrum's support, VVC's High Desert Training Center is uniquely positioned to provide training that aligns with the needs of high-demand sectors, contributing to the future workforce's preparedness and the region's continued growth.

AGNR donates over 50 plants to our youngest Rams

In a heartwarming display of collaboration and community spirit, Victor Valley College's Child Development Center (CDC) and Agriculture and Natural Resources (AGNR) department have come together to transform the CDC campus environment. The center recently received a generous donation of over 50 plants from the AGNR department, with families and the volunteers lending a helping hand to plant the greenery around the center.

This thoughtful gesture has brought new life to the campus, with the vibrant plants brightening the surroundings and creating a more welcoming atmosphere for young students, faculty, and families alike. The plants were donated and carefully planted by CDC families, alongside students from the VVC Garden Club, demonstrating the strong sense of community within the campus.

generosity of the AGNR department," said Annette Franquez, VVC Child Development Program Director. "Their donation not only enhances the beauty of our space but also reflects the caring and collaborative spirit that defines our campus community. We are so fortunate to be a part of a place that values both education and the environment."

The collaboration between the CDC and the AGNR department highlights the power of teamwork and the shared commitment to making VVC a brighter, more vibrant place for learning. This donation, which took place on what was otherwise a gloomy day, brings a splash of color and positivity to the campus, reinforcing the importance of working together to create lasting impact.



"We are truly grateful for the support and

Future First Responders: VVC Hosts Successful Public Safety Fair for over 500 Students



Victor Valley College (VVC) recently hosted a large-scale multi-discipline public safety event in November 2024, drawing an impressive turnout of over 500 high school students from across the region. The event aimed to provide valuable insights into diverse careers in public safety while showcasing the vital work of first responders.

The fair, held at VVC's Regional Public Safety Training Center, located in Apple Valley, was organized in collaboration with local law enforcement agencies, fire departments, and emergency medical services. It featured a variety of interactive exhibits and activities designed to immerse students in the fast-paced, challenging world of public safety careers.

Interactive Exhibits and Demonstrations

Students had the opportunity to participate in hands-on activities, such as an obstacle course replicating physical challenges faced by professionals, and to observe emergency scenarios like vehicle extractions using the "jaws of life." These simulations provided a glimpse into the decision-making and teamwork required in real-life emergencies. VVC's student firefighters, paramedics,

emergency medical technicians, and nursing showcased their skills, demonstrating fire suppression techniques and life-saving medical procedures. Meanwhile, booths staffed by representatives from agencies such as the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department and Victorville Fire provided insights into the training and dedication required to enter these fields.

San Bernardino County's top cop, also visited the event in Apple Valley. Sheriff Shannon Dicus says that it was his first time visiting stating, "It was my pleasure to have the opportunity to tour VVC's Regional Public Safety Training Center. I am pleased to see the effort and care taken to expose the High Desert community to the educational resources needed to embark on a career as a first responder. Whether someone is looking to become a law enforcement officer, firefighter, or emergency medical services provider, this campus has it covered. I look forward to seeing many new deputy sheriff applicants come out of this program, a program that benefits the student and community alike."

Inspiring the Next Generation

High school students left the event inspired

and more informed about potential career paths. One senior shared,

"This event opened my eyes to the range of public safety careers available. I've always wanted to make a difference in my community, and now I have a better understanding of the paths I can take."

VVC President Dan Walden, Ph.D., echoed the importance of the event, stating,

"We are happy to provide this platform for high school students to explore various aspects of public safety. Our aim is to inspire the next generation of professionals who will serve and protect our communities."

Building a Stronger Community

The November 2024 Multi Discipline Day highlighted the dedication of public safety professionals while motivating students to consider careers in fields that make a tangible impact. VVC and its partners plan to continue hosting similar events to nurture young talent and contribute to a safer community.



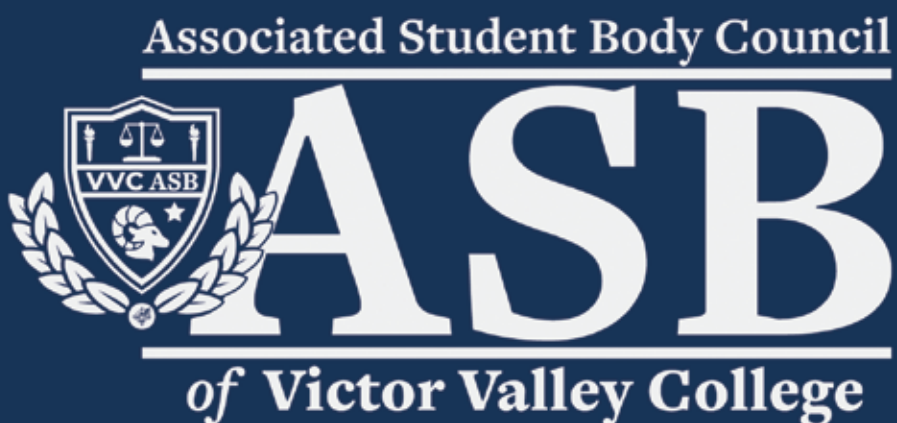
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