

# csun *magazine*



**SPRING  
2025**

Jupiter Bound  
**14**

Mariposa Monarca:  
Long Live the Queen  
**22**

L.A. Strong,  
Valley Strong,  
CSUN Strong  
**26**



## *The Finish Line*

**A**ll hail our newest CSUN alumni! As this issue goes to press, we're preparing to celebrate on the University Library Lawn with more than 10,000 new graduates and their loved ones, at Commencement 2025 ceremonies. Matadors, you make us so very proud. Here's a glimpse of the graduation joy — in just one of our favorite images from last year — at the College of Health and Human Development ceremony, in May 2024. *Photo by Ringo Chiu.*



## Hashtag

# #CSUNonfilm

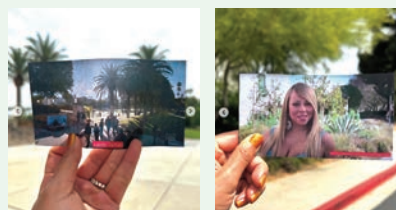
## Roll camera, roll sound and ... action!

Check out some of these notable films and shows shot at CSUN! Did we miss any? Let us know in the comments below!

Learn more about CSUN and join the conversation on social media: [@csun\\_edu](#) on Instagram.

### Filmed on campus...

#### FROM THE CAROUSEL



Fox's "Lucifer"

Interview with Mariah Carey

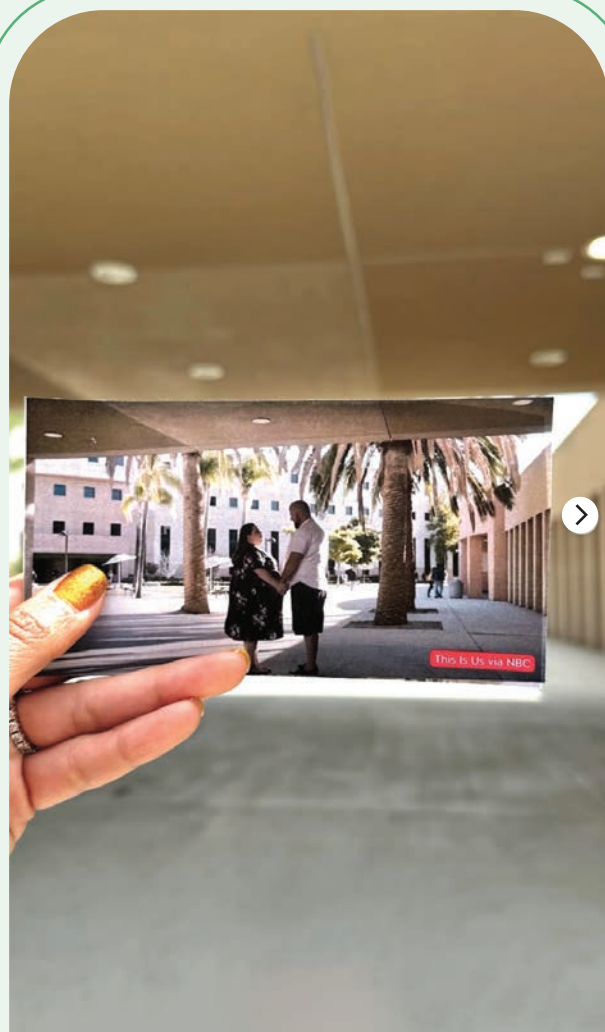
#### FROM THE COMMENTS

**@maxwellconnelly**

How could y'all leave out "Sky High" and "The Office"???

**@d4rkside\_rob**

"Sky High" and "Star Trek" used the Library. "Bring it On 2" (or 3) used the parking lot where the SRC is. "Legally Blonde" used Manzanita, plus numerous commercials.



**Roll camera, roll sound and ... action!** 🎬

Check out some of these notable films and shows shot at CSUN! Did we miss any? Let us know in the comments below!

#### NBC'S "THIS IS US"

filmed outside the Education Building and Cleary Court.

14



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### Shooting the Moon

Planetary protection scientist and Matador preps 'Europa Clipper' probe before launch.

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### Mariposa Monarca: Long Live the Queen

CSUN sustainability experts work to help threatened, iconic butterfly population.

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### L.A. Strong, Valley Strong, CSUN Strong

Meet some of the Matadors helping rebuild L.A. after the January wildfires.

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## Reach for the Stars ... and the Moons!

Matadors are contributing to space exploration — and species conservation right here at home.



One of the highlights of serving as CSUN's president is standing on the commencement stage and looking out at thousands of students whose lives are forever transformed by their CSUN education. As we celebrate the class of 2025 this spring, I have the privilege of congratulating our graduating Matadors and seeing their faces beaming with pride for all they've accomplished—and ready for new opportunities just over the horizon.

At CSUN, we encourage our students to reach for their highest aspirations, whatever they may be. Some of our alumni take this quite literally, serving among the talented scientists and engineers working to explore worlds far beyond our own. Akemi Hinzer '21 (Biochemistry) is one such adventurous alumna. Her job at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in La Cañada Flintridge is out of this world: planetary protection scientist!

Since 2022, Akemi has been working on NASA's Europa Clipper, a probe destined for one of Jupiter's myriad moons, where scientists think conditions might be suitable for life. On Oct. 14, she and her colleagues watched the product of their efforts leave Earth's orbit when the Clipper launched from Florida's Kennedy Space Center aboard a SpaceX Falcon Heavy rocket. In this issue of CSUN Magazine, we share Akemi's story, and the cutting-edge science behind her work.

This issue also features a look at how CSUN Sustainability experts and Climate Action Corps Fellows are working to help protect the iconic monarch butterfly population — and how you can help (hint: plant native milkweeds at home). And finally, we share a powerful and emotional look at some of the Matadors helping to rebuild and heal Los Angeles after January's devastating wildfires. We truly are "L.A. Strong, Valley Strong and CSUN Strong."

To our entire Matador community — whether you graduated this spring, crossed the commencement stage years ago, or supported and cheered on those who did, thank you for continuing to make our university truly stellar.

With gratitude,

**Erika D. Beck, Ph.D.**  
President

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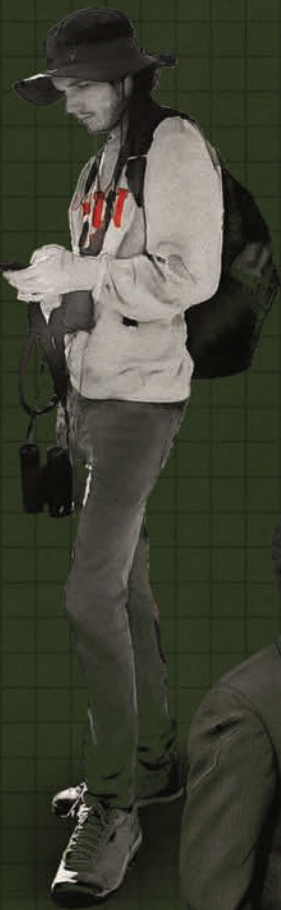
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## BIOLOGY

# Joshua Tree Sleuths

## Public Help Needed to Gather Data

Joshua trees are only pollinated by yucca moths, but how do the moths know when it's time to pollinate? That's what **Pryce Millikin**, a biology graduate student, is trying to figure out, and he's asking the public to help.

Millikin is calling on those who live near the Mojave Desert to observe Joshua trees and help him collect data to contribute to his thesis, "Weather Climate Impacts on Yucca Moths and their Mutualism with Joshua Trees."

"We don't know much about the moths' life cycle, or how they know when their partner trees are flowering, so we're trying to figure that out. The moths can be hard to study directly," said Millikin.

Fortunately, because Joshua trees can only produce fruit when the moths pollinate them, Millikin can track the moths' activity by recording where the trees produce fruit. This is where he turned to crowdsourcing, asking the general public to help him track Joshua tree flowering and fruit production. Using the iNaturalist smartphone app, anyone can share information about nature, including uploading images of Joshua trees.

Millikin can review iNaturalist records to note which images show the trees with flowers or fruits. He's already using iNaturalist data to train computer models that can help identify weather conditions that cue the moths to pollinate Joshua trees. The trees flower from late February to the beginning of April, said CSUN evolutionary biologist **Jeremy Yoder**, Millikin's thesis advisor.

"The trees will be flowering, if they flower [in 2025], in late February, and they'll be making fruit by May or June," Yoder said. "But we can use records taken any time of year."



For more information about how to contribute to Millikin's Joshua tree research, visit [joshuatreegenome.org/archives/2025](https://joshuatreegenome.org/archives/2025)



### Who We Heard

We explored Black cinema with Robert, heard from the Lt. Governor, danced to Deorro's beats and swooned for Diana.



### 2.12

#### Robert Townsend

Robert Townsend's films were the focus of a special series celebrating Black History Month, "Black Cinema: Cultural Labor and Liberation." The CSUN Cinematheque and Africana Studies hosted a screening of his comedic satire "Hollywood Shuffle" on Feb. 12, as well as his historical drama "10,000 Black Men Named George," followed by a Q&A with the filmmaker Feb. 19.

### 02.24

#### Eleni Kounalakis

California Lt. Gov. Eleni Kounalakis was among the dignitaries who headlined a gathering of more than 200 of the region's elected officials and business leaders, as well as CSUN leaders and alumni at the campus' Orchard Conference Center.



Millikin is asking the general public to help him track Joshua tree flowering and fruit production using the iNaturalist smartphone app. Flowering occurs in late February, and fruit appears by May or June.



#### SUMMONING HOPE

"My recovery is a daily fight," Giffords said, "but fighting makes me stronger."

#### TECHNOLOGY

## Celebrating 40 Years

Former Rep. **Gabby Giffords** Gives Keynote at CSUN Conference

For 40 years, the CSUN Assistive Technology Conference has been a global leader in accessibility innovation, connecting experts, advocates and tech pioneers. This year, the "CSUN Conference" marked its milestone anniversary March 10-14 at the Anaheim Marriott, drawing more than 4,000 attendees to explore cutting-edge assistive technology and its impact. From founder Harry Murphy '66 reflecting on its beginnings to a moving keynote by former Congresswoman Gabby Giffords, the event showcased how technology continues to transform lives.

Murphy, who was the director of CSUN's Center on Disabilities in the mid-

'80s, kicked things off at the opening keynote ceremonies on March 11. He spoke about starting the conference on the CSUN campus. He thanked everyone for sharing what they have learned at conferences over the years. "Over 40 years, the CSUN Conference has touched the lives of millions of people with disabilities," he said. "Millions."

Giffords appeared with her longtime therapist, speech-language pathologist Fabi Hirsch Kruse. Hirsch Kruse led the conversation with Giffords about her long recovery after she was shot in 2011 outside a shopping center in Tucson. Fourteen years later, Giffords said, she still actively works on her recovery from the resulting brain injury.

#### BUSINESS

## Nazarian College Receives Prestigious Dual Accreditation for Business and Accounting

The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) has granted CSUN's David Nazarian College of Business and Economics supplementary accreditation for its accounting program. The college is one of only six institutions in California and one of only 194 institutions worldwide to hold AACSB accreditation in both business and accounting.

"This significant achievement affirms CSUN's commitment to providing a superior business education with high-quality teaching and impactful learning experiences that prepare our students to become leaders in business, industry and their communities," said President Erika D. Beck. "Achieving and maintaining this level of excellence requires immense rigor and dedication, and I am deeply grateful for the engaged efforts of our Nazarian College faculty."

"Having dual accreditation brings considerable prestige to a business school, which often translates to increased recognition for the university and enhanced opportunities for our students," said Chandra Subramaniam, dean of the college.

The Nazarian College is one of the largest business schools in the country, with more than 6,700 students.

CSUN #S

1

for economic diversity of students, among public colleges nationwide, according to The New York Times.

ranked Tier One by CEO Magazine, the David Nazarian College of Business and Economics MBA program is among the best in the 2025 Global MBA rankings.

largest Jewish student population in California and #14 nationally, per Hillel.

"Our program prepares students to thrive in their careers and make a lasting impact in their industries."

Chandra Subramaniam, Dean, David Nazarian College of Business and Economics

# Welcome Home, Matadors

CSUN Unveils First New Residence Halls in a Decade



**P**ack your extra-long twin sheets, Matadors. Your fan, desk lamp and power strip.

At the corner of Lassen and Zelzah, two brand-new residence hall buildings are nearing completion at University Park, on the north end of campus. This fall, 198 lucky students will be the first to call the shiny new buildings their campus home.

Student Housing buildings 22 & 23 are CSUN's first new dorms in a decade, since the university opened three similar residence halls in 2015. The newest dorms will increase CSUN's available student housing by about 6%. (Currently, CSUN has 3,156 beds within University Park.)

The university received a \$37.5 million affordable-housing grant from the state, through the California Higher Education Student Housing Grant Program, to help fund the approximately \$72.9 million project.

CSUN's new dorms marked the first approved for affordable student housing in the

California State University system, and other campuses are following suit.

Many CSUN students need additional resources to access housing, William Watkins, vice president for Student Affairs and dean of students, noted at the 2023 groundbreaking.

"Students are best able to focus on their studies when they have their basic needs met, especially their housing needs," added Shelley Ruelas-Bischoff, associate vice president for Student Affairs. "With these two new buildings, we are expanding our capacity to help CSUN students meet this critical need, all within an environment that is intentionally focused on students' academic success."

The four-story buildings cover 60,290 square feet — including 45,000 square feet of living spaces, plus multipurpose spaces for group programs, classroom space and lounges.

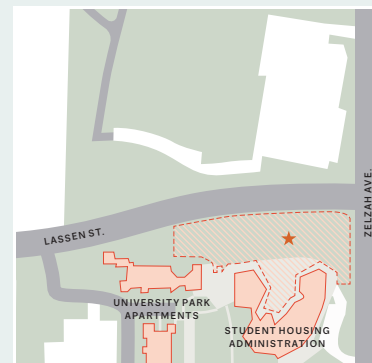
The residential floors offer all doubles (two students per room), designed

for first-time freshmen. One of the best features? Each bathroom is shared by just two rooms (four students per bathroom)! The residential floors also boast a living room and a laundry room. The ground floor of Building 22 features a community kitchen, study spaces, multi-purpose rooms, lounge and gender-inclusive restrooms.

Contractor C.W. Driver Companies expects to complete construction, with the dorms ready for Move-In Day in late August.

As CSUN refreshes and expands the student housing area, one of the coolest additions is outside G'mo's campus dining, adjacent to the new dorms: A new courtyard boasts outdoor dining; a shaded, permanent photovoltaic canopy for those warm Valley days; oversized ceiling fans and a large, outdoor TV — perfect for hosting movie nights and watching big games.

—*Olivia Herstein*



## SPECS

**60,290** square feet  
(including 45,000 square feet of living spaces)

**Late August** open for move-in

**\$72.9M** project, funded in part by \$37.5 M state grant

**2** years to construct

**Name** University Park Apartments buildings 22 & 23

(until CSUN grants the dorms their new tree or plant names, per campus tradition)

**99** beds per dorm (198 total)

## AMENITIES

**22** community kitchen, study spaces, multi-purpose rooms, lounge and gender-inclusive restrooms.

**23** package center, new student lounge



## Who We Heard

(continued)



03.29

### Deorro

Deorro headlined Big Show 2025 on the University Library Lawn on March 29. The Latin Grammy nominee had Matadors dancing for hours with his signature EDM music.



05.14

### Diana Krall

Diana Krall, the legendary jazz singer and multi-Grammy winner, returned to The Soraya stage on May 14, a decade after her Soraya debut! The New York Times called her voice "at once cool and sultry, wielded with a rhythmic sophistication."

## ARTS

# Campus to Red Carpet

## Students Take the Stage at Golden Globes

On one of Hollywood's biggest nights, CSUN students took the stage as trophy presenters at the 82nd Annual Golden Globes. Film students **Nikolet Ocampo**, a junior, and **Albert Rutledge**, a sophomore, spent their Sunday night surrounded by Hollywood's biggest names as the Matadors handed off trophies to celebrity presenters and escorted winners off stage. The ceremony took place Jan. 5 at the Beverly Hilton.

During a Jan. 4 rehearsal, Ocampo and Rutledge witnessed the magic up close, practicing alongside renowned stars and watching the event come to life.

"I shared a moment with Sharon Stone backstage. She was so down-to-earth and willing to give me advice on how to stay calm during the show," Rutledge said. On show day, Stone recognized him and they snapped a selfie to commemorate the film student's unforgettable night.

Other Cinema and Television Arts students assisted at the show as externs, and social media and fashion specialists. Those working behind the scenes included Eliya Brennan, Devyn Hunter, Robert Kutruf, Rebecca Okonek and Henry Parker. All are students in the university's top-ranked Department of Cinema and Television Arts, in the Mike Curb College of Arts, Media, and Communication.

The Golden Globes has reached out to professor Nate Thomas, head of CSUN's film option, annually since 2017 to recruit externs and for the past two years he has spearheaded the selection process for the on-stage student presenters.

"[The experience] gave me the confidence to keep pursuing this passion of mine [directing and producing]. Getting to be there solidified my love for this and how I want to be involved in every aspect of entertainment," Ocampo said. "I feel so lucky to be a film student at CSUN."

CSUN's Mike Curb College has a longstanding relationship with the Golden Globe Awards, a relationship that continues under the Golden Globe Foundation.



# Celebrating the Launch of Black-Serving Institutions

CSUN President Erika D. Beck joined CSU and community college leaders, along with state lawmakers, at Cal State Dominguez Hills on Feb. 7, to celebrate California's new **Black-Serving Institutions (BSI)** designation. The new program was created by legislation, Senate Bill 1348, which was signed by Gov. Gavin Newsom and went into effect this year. The designation will be given to state college campuses that demonstrate commitment to Black student success and provide academic resources to Black and African American students. Beck said CSUN is looking forward to becoming a Black-Serving Institution and work is under way on the application.

"We are a proud Minority-Serving Institution that celebrates the cultural wealth and aspirational capital of every student seeking a

CSUN education," Beck said. "Achieving the BSI designation will highlight our ongoing work to eliminate structural barriers to higher education and complements our equity-centered work across the campus."

To qualify as a Black-Serving Institution, a college or university must demonstrate academic and equity goals, and devote resources to improve retention, time-to-degree and graduation rates for Black and African American students. Qualifying institutions must have at least 10% of the student population that identifies as Black or African American—or

have at least 1,500 Black and African American students enrolled. The legislation also establishes a governing board to oversee the applications and renewals for the program.

CSUN's Black and African American student population is nearly 2,000. Campus initiatives aimed at fostering and supporting Black and African American scholarship include Black Matadors Rise, Black Scholars Matter, the Black House and the landmark Africana Studies program, one of the oldest and largest departments of its kind in the nation, within the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences.

**"We are a proud Minority-Serving Institution that celebrates the cultural wealth and aspirational capital of every student seeking a CSUN education."**

## Quad Style

### Fast Fashion No More

The TRENDS annual spring fashion show highlights collections created by seniors, with each outfit designed and produced in approximately three weeks.

Established in 1978, TRENDS is the Fashion Design and Merchandising student organization within CSUN's Department of Family and Consumer Sciences. According to TRENDS club President Kathryn Oz '25 (Fashion Design and Production), Gen Z is moving away from fast fashion, especially at CSUN. "With growing awareness of the harmful effects of fast fashion, this generation is shifting toward creating timeless pieces that will last a long time," Oz said.

The fashion design program hosts an annual sustainable fashion competition in collaboration with Associated Students' Sustainability program, promoting eco-friendly practices and giving students the opportunity to showcase innovative, sustainable designs. TRENDS students also produce an annual spring fashion show to spotlight their capstone pieces. In late March, graduating senior Ruby Durant and graduate student photographer Sonia Gurrola visited the TRENDS students in Sequoia Hall's fashion lab, as they pushed to finish their ensembles for the May 8 show. Here's a taste of what they found!

**Siam Sewell**, a junior fashion merchandising major and TRENDS club member, makes a statement in a color-blocked, retro-inspired jumpsuit, accessorized with a bucket hat and purple Doc Martens.





Graduating senior **Julie Hanna '25** (Fashion Design and Production) perfects the final details of her strapless, floor-length purple dress.



**Abner Albino '25** (Fashion Design and Production) puts the finishing touches on a striking purple skirt and blue, faux-fur coat.



**Professor Jongeun Kim** carefully adjusts a black ensemble on a mannequin, guiding students in the art of fashion design and garment construction.

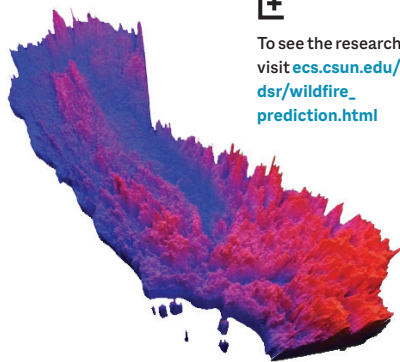
## RESEARCH

## Training the Next Generation of Wildfire Predictors

As the recent wildfires have reminded us, one needs to be prepared for the unexpected, particularly as population density, urbanization and other factors continue to impact the environment around us. To that end, researchers at CSUN are working across disciplines to use machine learning to train a new generation of students in how to use existing data to prepare for potential disasters such as wildfires.



To see the research, visit [ecs.csun.edu/dsr/wildfire\\_prediction.html](https://ecs.csun.edu/dsr/wildfire_prediction.html)



“By working together, we are giving undergraduate students tools that will make them desirable employees in a variety of fields, whether it’s for insurance agencies, developers, urban planners or governmental agencies,” said environmental geographer Mario Giraldo. “They are learning, using real data, how to identify indicators that can predict where a wildfire may happen, and what may happen when it starts.”

Giraldo is working with computer scientists Xunfei Jiang and Li Liu to train students to implement tools that, using data collected from the U.S. Geological Survey, NASA, National Centers for Environmental Information, and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (known as Cal Fire), can identify what factors are key in the prediction for risks of wildfires.



## CULTURE

## Let the Games Begin (Again)!

Success of '84 Olympics in L.A. Brings Optimism for '28

Known for its prior success hosting the games in 1932 and 1984, Los Angeles will become the first city to host the Olympics three times, setting the stage for a historic two-week event. However, questions remain about the city’s readiness amid rising costs, transportation, housing shortages and recent environmental impacts like the L.A. wildfires, which caused widespread destruction and billions of dollars in damage.

Despite these challenges, geography professor Steven Graves argues that Los Angeles is best positioned to host the games, citing the economic and organizing success of the 1984 Olympics.

“There’s a lot we can learn from the 1984 Olympics, and the biggest is how using existing infrastructure can make an event of this size financially responsible and feasible,” Graves said. “While it’s been well documented that previous Olympic host cities built massive facilities, which now sit empty and unused, Los Angeles was different and that was the case in 1984 — becoming clear for

organizers that there is a viable and responsible way to host the games.”

There has been considerable investment in the city’s transportation system, Graves noted, including a light-rail extension that will connect LAX to the city core, potentially relieving congestion during the height of the games. Officials also expect to bring in more than 3,000 buses from across the country to help move fans. Graves said he believes Angelenos will be willing to make sacrifices to stay off the roads, like in 1984.

The 2028 Olympics may also represent an opportunity to showcase “the beauty and rich, diverse culture that is Los Angeles,” he said.

“The Olympics can be our triumphant return after the recent fires and represent a rebirth of our city,” Graves said. “It’s also doing a number of other things for us: It gives us an excuse to push forward with some badly needed public transportation infrastructure and gives us an excuse to try new, bold things that we might not do otherwise.”

88.5 THE SOCAL SOUND (KCSN) - A SERVICE OF CSUN SINCE 1964



**TUNDE ADEBIMPE**

**STING**

**BEABADOOBEE**

**ST. VINCENT**

# PUBLIC RADIO AMPLIFIED

*"You'll hear music that you won't find anywhere else"*  
- Los Angeles Daily News



*"I'm a fan of the Los Angeles based radio station 88.5"*

**RINGO STARR**



*"This public radio station serves the community I live in and is funded by listeners"*

**JOE WALSH**



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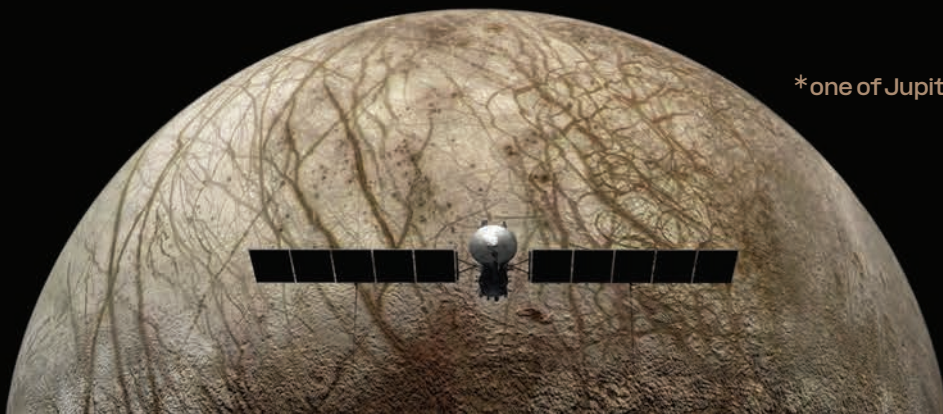
SHOOTING

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THE MOON\*

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\*one of Jupiter's moons, that is.





BY JACOB BENNETT

Planetary Protection  
Scientist and Matador  
Preps 'Europa Clipper'  
Probe Before Launch.



THE SUCCESS of NASA's mission to explore Jupiter's moon Europa depended, in part, on Akemi Hinzer's choice of outfit before she left for work.

She had to be clean and dressed strategically — no ripped jeans or fuzzy sweaters or anything that shed threads.

When the CSUN alum arrived at the Kennedy Space Center, she donned a mask, a hairnet and a full-body garment called a “bunny suit” — essentially a onesie, Hinzer said — that keeps hair and skin from contaminating the controlled environment where technicians prepped the spacecraft for launch. She pulled on big, sturdy boots and thick gloves that are hard to tear, all taped to the suit. She wiped her phone and computer down with alcohol. Lastly, she walked through an “air shower,” which blasts team members with clean air to blow away dust and other contaminants.

Then, she entered the cleanroom.

Hinzer '21 (Biochemistry) has a job title fit for an awesome movie: planetary protection scientist. She was promoted from intern to full-time employee in 2022 to work on NASA's Europa Clipper — a probe destined for one of Jupiter's myriad moons, Europa, where scientists think conditions might be right to harbor life.

The planetary protection team worked to make sure the uncrewed mission doesn't accidentally leave some life behind on the icy moon.

“We're trying to see if this is a place that can support life,” Hinzer said. “If we want to be successful, we can't go contaminate it with our Earth bacteria.”

Hinzer normally works at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) in La Cañada Flintridge, but in May 2024, she and about 60 colleagues followed the Europa Clipper to the storied Kennedy Space Center in Florida to prepare for the probe's Oct. 14, 2024 launch aboard a SpaceX Falcon Heavy rocket.

Playing a critical role in such a high-profile NASA project is an unexpected high point in a career Hinzer, 33, didn't always envision for herself. She was a non-traditional student who eventually tried college and, the way she tells it, kept getting pressured by professors and classmates into grudgingly applying for opportunities that led her to NASA.

CSUN biochemistry Professor Karin Crowhurst, who worked with Hinzer for three years through the BUILD POD-ER undergraduate biomedical research program, tells a different version. In Hinzer, she saw a motivated student with innate ability who, like many first-generation students, didn't know what opportunities and career fields were available to her — but who wisely took advantage when doors opened.

“Research opportunities can be absolutely critical and transformative for students, and this is a perfect example of a suc-

“

Hinzer has a job title fit for an awesome movie: planetary protection scientist.

cess story that comes from it,” Crowhurst said. “Once students realize that they can do this, they take it and run with it, and it's amazing to see, because it can change the entire course of their lives.”

## MISSION: EUROPA

LIFE AS earthlings know it couldn't have developed without three ingredients — liquid water, certain chemical elements (like carbon and oxygen) and an energy source (like the sun). Europa, the fourth-biggest of Jupiter's 95 moons, is covered in thick ice, but scientists believe there's a vast, salty ocean beneath the surface. The moon could also have the right chemical elements and viable energy sources, such as chemical reactions triggered by the harsh radiation from Jupiter.

The Europa Clipper mission isn't intended to find life; its purpose is to verify that Europa holds these conditions. If it can, Europa would be the first place in our solar system outside of Earth verified to currently hold conditions suitable for life. This data could inform a future mission to Europa to look for life. It would also mean that there are probably many other worlds hospitable to life.

Akemi Hinzer '21 (Biochemistry) stands on the floor of HighBay 1 at JPL, where much of the Europa Clipper's assembly happened.

When flying missions in space — especially to places that likely have hosted life before, like Mars, or could host it now, like Europa — NASA must follow an international treaty to minimize the chances of accidentally contaminating other celestial bodies.

Hinzer's team was responsible for ensuring the bacteria levels on the spacecraft's surfaces remain below levels that are as close as possible to a zero probability of contamination. Not every microbe is a danger; most couldn't survive the harsh environments encountered during space travel, Hinzer said. But some bacteria can form bacterial spores

“  
Accidentally leaving living spores on Europa could contaminate future science, so steps were taken to minimize them by every team through every step of the mission.

— a seedlike structure that might protect them in space until they find a hospitable environment in which to thrive.

“[Bacterial spores] can survive some really horrible environments for years,” Hinzer said.

Accidentally leaving living spores on Europa could contaminate future science, so steps were taken to minimize them by every team through every step of the mission. Hinzer's Planetary Protection team developed a plan and worked with other teams from mission partners including NASA, SpaceX and Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory to make sure these procedures were followed. A lot of Hinzer's job was communication, coming up with a reasonable plan and making sure everyone on multiple teams understood what they were supposed to do.

The Clipper is a huge spacecraft, about the length of a basketball court when deploying its solar array wings that serve as a power source. It's carrying nine high-tech instruments to take images and measurements, including cameras, a thermal imaging system and ice-penetrating radar.

The Europa Clipper was first assembled at JPL, then transported to a cleanroom at Kennedy Space Center. Anything brought in — new spacecraft parts, tools, scaffolding, etc. — was cleaned first, with solvents such as isopropyl alcohol, or baked at high temperatures to kill bacteria.

Anything that came close to the spacecraft got sampled. Hinzer took her samples back to the lab for processing, where they were grown on Petri dishes so she could count them and estimate how many bacteria were on the spacecraft. If there were too many, engineers were required to clean the area so it could be sampled again, but this rarely happened.

“It's really, really good. It's very clean,” Hinzer said of the spacecraft, just before launch. “It's so much cleaner than any other environment you have ever encountered in your life.”

The harsh realities of space travel aid in Hinzer's quest to prevent Earth bacteria from surviving on Europa. Any bacteria remaining on the spacecraft would have to survive the inhospitable cold and vacuum of space and, especially, the extreme amounts of radiation that exist around Jupiter.

“On the off chance that something goes terribly, terribly wrong and [Europa Clipper] lands somewhere we don't want it to, we have such a small, small, small chance of getting anything living from Earth to somewhere we don't want it,” Hinzer said. “That's what we're working towards, always minimizing that risk and reducing that chance.”

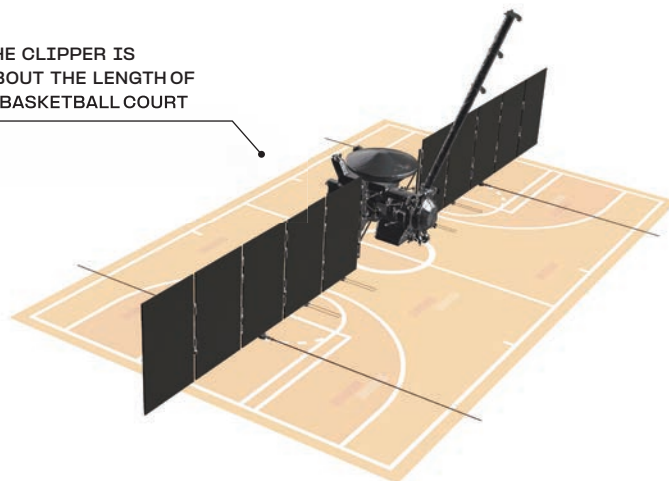
## TO EXPLORE STRANGE, NEW WORLDS

EUROPA CLIPPER is expected to reach Jupiter in 2030. It'll take a winding journey to get there — it successfully flew by Mars early this year, and will pass back by Earth in 2026, using our planet's gravity to “slingshot” and increase velocity. The probe will orbit Jupiter and capture data during about 50 scheduled flybys of Europa over four years.

Hinzer's own journey took several twists and turns. She graduated from La Cañada High School, right by JPL, but didn't envision a career there. She flipped cars as a mechanic, joined her dad on a construction crew, decorated wedding cakes. She didn't plan to go to college; she thought her life was fine without it.

But about six years ago, Hinzer found herself with an unexpected hole in her schedule. She took a class at

THE CLIPPER IS ABOUT THE LENGTH OF A BASKETBALL COURT



Technicians attach the five-panel solar arrays to NASA's Europa Clipper spacecraft inside the Payload Hazardous Servicing Facility at the agency's Kennedy Space Center in Florida.



Pasadena City College to fill it. It went well, so she took another.

“And then, I don’t know, I was in too deep,” she said.

Soon, she was on a pre-med track, considering a career as a physician assistant, possibly in hospice care. A community college chemistry professor “absolutely bullied” her into applying for a BUILD PODER research fellowship, Hinzer said. She was accepted, and while still in community college, she began working in Crowhurst’s lab at CSUN.

She learned a lot of skills she employs at NASA in the Crowhurst lab, Hinzer said: following protocols religiously, labeling everything, giving presentations. Hinzer was shy when she arrived at the lab, but with time, she grew to be a great communicator. In 2021, her hard work was recognized with CSUN’s Weigand-Jewett Award for Outstanding Senior in Biochemistry scholarship.

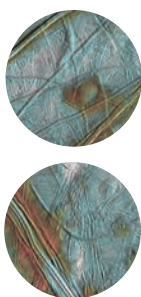
Peer pressure also led Hinzer to NASA, she said. One of the members of her BUILD PODER cohort convinced her to apply for a workshop held by members of JPL’s planetary protection group, which featured CSUN biology Professor Rachel Mackelprang as a guest speaker. Until that point, Hinzer hadn’t realized that NASA needed biochemists.

Connections Hinzer made in that bioinformatics workshop led to an internship in July 2021, analyzing unprocessed metadata collected by the planetary protection team ahead of the 2020 Perseverance Rover mission to Mars. The internship was supposed to last six weeks, but JPL colleagues extended it until she was hired full-time in her current role in late 2022.

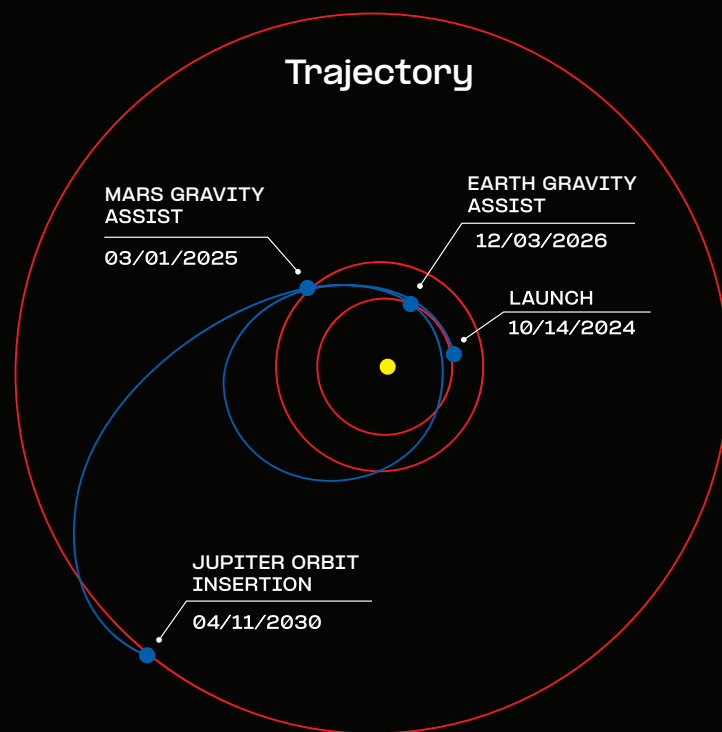
Hinzer is among the many CSUN alumni who have gone on to work as permanent employees of JPL. CSUN’s relationship with JPL goes back decades, as students, faculty and alumni from the College of Science and Mathematics and the College of Engineering and Computer Science, including the Autonomy Research Center for STEAHM and its partners across campus, have collaborated on projects with JPL.

Hinzer twice has returned to CSUN to help lead the bioinformatics workshop that initially connected her to JPL.

“It was kind of full circle,” Hinzer said. “Some of the people that I was in BUILD with were now grad students in labs, and were part of this workshop, and that was fun.”



**Europa, the fourth-biggest of Jupiter’s 95 moons, is covered in thick ice, but scientists believe there’s a vast, salty ocean beneath the surface.**



## ‘COOL LITTLE THINGS’

IN OCTOBER, after nearly two years of long, grueling days preparing the Clipper for launch, her work on the mission was, essentially, done. Crews placed the Europa Clipper in its protective “shell” of sorts — a nose cone called a “fairing” — and her team couldn’t touch it anymore.

On an isolated, grassy patch of Kennedy Space Center, a little more than a mile from the rocket, Hinzer watched the launch with a few colleagues.

“Oh my gosh, you feel that rumble through your whole body, and it’s so bright and so fast, and you can trace it for probably a minute and a half until you lose sight of it,” Hinzer said. “And then it’s gone.”

The stress of the last few months hit her, she said, and she felt the permanent loss of the project on which she’d spent so much time.

“I cried so hard,” she said. “I ugly-cried the entire time. This thing that we put so much of ourselves into, and then it just leaves the planet? So, major separation anxiety there.”

But after the dust settles, there’s no rest for the planetary protection team. Or, not much. Hinzer has turned her focus to future missions. She’s part of a team back at JPL investigating ways to identify even more species of bacteria that manage to survive in a cleanroom. She’s also overseeing experiments to kill bacteria with UVC light. It’s interesting work, but there’s been an adjustment from the high-stakes pressure of the Europa Clipper launch.

“There’s a little bit of fear — is this the coolest thing I’m ever going to do? Have I peaked?” Hinzer said.

If so, she said, she could live with that. But that probably won’t be the case.

“I’ve always been really lucky; I’ve always had something to be excited about,” she said. “I have no idea what it’s gonna be, and it’s never very intentional on my part, but I have a very long history of stumbling into cool little things, so I’m just gonna have faith that that’s gonna continue.”

**LEFT** A SpaceX Falcon Heavy rocket — with Europa Clipper aboard — launches from Kennedy Space Center in Florida on Oct. 14, 2024.

**BELOW** Hinzer and team at the NASA launchpad on the day before launch: (L-R) Ceth Parker, Hinzer, Moogega Cooper and Ryan Hendrickson.



MARIPOSA MONARCA.



LONG  
LIVE THE  
QUEEN

## CSUN Sustainability Experts and Climate Action Corps Fellows Work to Help Threatened, Iconic Butterfly Population.

by Danielle Fairlee ✦ illustrations by Yeti Iglesias

AS STUDENTS walk to and from class along the path between CSUN's baseball and softball fields and Northridge Academy High School, a life force lies dormant beneath the soil at CSUN's half-acre G.A.R.D.E.N. Planted in December 2024 amid the poppies and lupines next to raised beds of vegetables, 75 dormant seedlings of native milkweed soon will sprout leaves and flowers — part of a campus effort to save the western monarch butterfly, a threatened species that spends its winters along the California coast.

Milkweeds play host to female monarchs, which lay their eggs on the plants, and milkweeds are the only food source for monarch caterpillars. Milkweed flowers also provide nectar for other pollinators, such as bees and other butterflies. But not all milkweeds are beneficial to monarchs, and CSUN's sustainability experts and California Climate Action Corps (CCAC) Fellows urge local gardeners to ensure they're planting native milkweed (more on that in a bit).

"Without milkweed, monarchs cannot survive," said Sarah Johnson '09 (M.A., Educational Psychology & Counseling), lead sustainability specialist at CSUN's Institute for Sustainability.

At CSUN's G.A.R.D.E.N. (Growing Accessible Resources for Diversity, Education and Nourishment), the new seedlings join existing patches and pots of native milkweed, planted over the years to support monarch caterpillars and butterflies. Native milkweed also was planted recently around Valera Hall, across campus, along with other drought-tolerant plants.

As additional campus green spaces are converted to drought-tolerant native plants and landscaping, native milkweeds will be included, Johnson said.

### Monarch Population Declining

THE Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation, a nonprofit organization that counts and protects pollinators like the monarch, reported that in early 2025, just 9,119 of the butterflies spent the winter in the Golden State — a sharp decline from the past three years, when volunteers and scientists observed more than 200,000 western monarch butterflies. For context, millions of monarchs were observed annually by scientists throughout the 1980s, according to the Xerces Society.

In December 2024, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposed extending Endangered Species Act protection to the monarch, a process now in the public comment phase. Johnson praised this move, saying it would bring more awareness to monarchs and help protect monarch habitats.





Climate change, pesticides and habitat loss are all affecting monarch population, Johnson said. The declining population helped inspire her to lead conservation efforts at CSUN.

"I've always loved butterflies," she said, recounting childhood visits to her grandmother's home in the Colorado mountains. "There were butterflies everywhere. As I got older, I realized I wasn't seeing as many monarchs."

Now, in her role at CSUN, Johnson is offering native milkweed seeds to local gardeners through the Institute for Sustainability's Seed Library. Housed at the institute within a repurposed University Library card catalogue, the Seed Library contains seeds for more than a dozen varieties of native plants, including native milkweeds as well as vegetables and herbs.

## Planting the Right Milkweed

AT CSUN, sustainability experts know that for monarch butterflies to thrive, it's important to plant the right *variety* of milkweed. Unfortunately, well-meaning gardeners often plant tropical milkweed, which is widely available but harmful to monarchs.

"Native milkweed dies off in the winter and remains dormant in the soil," Johnson said. "Tropical milkweed is very easy to grow in our environment, but it doesn't die off in the winter."

Because it has no dormant period, tropical milkweed allows a parasite called *ophryocystis elektroscirrha* — OE for short — to thrive. If monarch caterpillars eat the parasite, it later affects the butterfly's lifespan, size and ability to fly.

### Become a Citizen Scientist!

Community members can help count monarch butterflies anywhere in California, using the iNaturalist app, which allows users to photograph and upload images of monarchs and other flora and fauna, along with location data. Information is shared with scientists, researchers and conservationists.

Download the app at [inaturalist.org](https://www.inaturalist.org)



"It basically cripples them," said Mabel Trigueros, who manages CSUN's G.A.R.D.E.N. and supervises the university's three sustainable agriculture CCAC Fellows. "If the monarchs get OE, they emerge with crippled wings."

Trigueros explained that native milkweed's winter dormant period ensures the parasite dies. "It is really important for monarchs that we only plant native milkweed," she added. Native milkweeds planted at CSUN include woolly milkweed and narrow leaf milkweed.

Elizaveta Pabon '24 (Biology) is one of CSUN's sustainable agriculture CCAC Fellows. She led the recent native milkweed planting effort and hopes to inspire more interest in conservation. With other fellows, students and community volunteers, Pabon planted the native milkweed seedlings, donated by the Xerces Society.

## A Symbol of Resilience

WHILE LEADING conservation efforts, Pabon, Trigueros and Johnson recognize the symbolism of monarch butterflies, on campus and in the wider community. At CSUN, a Hispanic-Serving Institution where 69% of students are the first in their family to go to college, first-generation and immigrant students often incorporate monarchs into their caps, mortarboard decor and sashes at graduation — and the monarch is the symbol of the DREAM Center of the University Student Union, serving students, staff and families who are undocumented.

"Monarchs are so small and they make these thousand-mile journeys. It speaks to the migrant experience, as well as resilience and beauty," Johnson said.

Trigueros, herself a first-generation college graduate and former CCAC Fellow, agreed, noting that she often wears a corduroy jacket emblazoned with a large patch of a monarch butterfly. "They are a symbol of resilience, especially in the immigrant community, especially amongst Latinos," she said.

"In the Mexican community, people believe the butterfly is the soul of a passed-away family member, so from a cultural perspective, it is very important," Pabon said.

## Counting Monarchs

TO PROTECT the iconic insects, scientists and conservationists conduct annual monarch butterfly counts during key migration periods. Thanks to a partnership between the Institute for Sustainability, the Xerces Society and the Getty Villa Museum in Pacific Palisades, CSUN students and the CCAC Fellows take part in local monarch counts at the Getty Villa. (Matadors participated in the Getty Villa counts in October and November 2024, but the most recent count in January 2025 was postponed due to high winds and later canceled due to the Palisades Fire. The Xerces Society's Western Monarch Count Monitoring Period will resume in October 2025.)

"It's so rewarding to be able to provide this experience to CSUN students and Fellows," Johnson said. "The goal is to inspire folks to continue protecting monarchs and other pollinators."

Thanks to technology, community members can help count monarch butterflies anywhere in California, using the

iNaturalist app, which allows users to photograph and upload images of monarchs and other flora and fauna, along with location data. Information is shared with scientists, researchers and conservationists.

"This is the same app that we are using as sustainability and biodiversity experts," Johnson said.

## How You Can Help

WHETHER YOU have a large yard or a tiny patio, CSUN experts said, home gardeners can easily plant native milkweeds to help monarch butterflies. In addition to the free seeds available from the CSUN Seed Library, the Santa Monica Mountains Fund offers native milkweed giveaways. Native milkweed is also available for purchase from the Theodore Payne Foundation for Wild Flowers and Native Plants, based in Sun Valley.

"These plants do well in the ground or deep pots on a balcony or doorstep," Johnson said.

"Since they're native, they don't need much water," Pabon added. "You'll have nice, pretty milkweed, and the butterflies will come. In the winter, you can trim it back and it will come back in the spring."

Another important step in protecting monarch butterflies is limiting pesticide and herbicide use, something CSUN's Physical Plant Management team and grounds crews have done across campus. Home gardeners can remove pests like aphids by hand and put down a layer of cardboard to discourage weeds.

"It takes a little more labor, but you can shift your mindset a little to slow down a bit, go out and take care of things little by little," Johnson said.

Home gardeners can also make their yards and patios pollinator-friendly by planting a variety of native plants that bloom at different times of the year to attract bees, hummingbirds and butterflies.



### Get Involved at CSUN

Free milkweed seeds and other native plant seeds are available to alumni, students, faculty, staff and community members from the CSUN Seed Library! Interested in taking part in future butterfly counts or volunteering at the campus G.A.R.D.E.N.?

For all these opportunities and more, reach out to the Institute for Sustainability at [sustainability@csun.edu](mailto:sustainability@csun.edu).

"Plant the rainbow," Johnson added. "Plant some reds, some pinks, some whites, different shapes and flowers blooming at different times."

## Lifecycle on Display

IN THE CSUN G.A.R.D.E.N.'s Nat Zappia Community Classroom area, a series of clay pots are home to native milkweed plants. They were decorated by CSUN art students to showcase the lifecycle of the monarch butterfly and other monarch-themed artwork. The outdoor classroom was named for Natale "Nat" Zappia, the late director of the Institute for Sustainability, a master gardener who was passionate about native plants.

The monarch's amazing life cycle — from an egg laid on milkweed, to larva (caterpillar), pupa (chrysalis) and then to adult butterfly — continues to fascinate and inspire people of all ages, Trigueros said. She fondly remembered her own son, age 6, learning about caterpillars in school and asking about monarchs. "They are so beautiful, with showy colors," she said. "It is hard to believe that something so delicate travels so far."

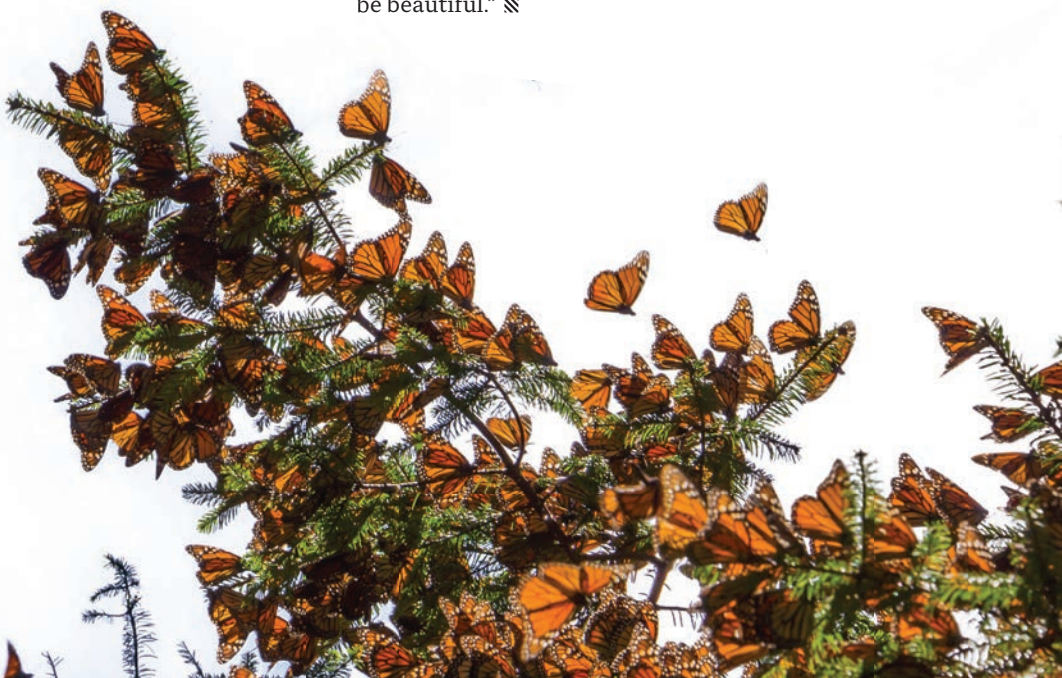
Learning about butterflies can be a gateway for children and adults to lean into other conservation topics, Pabon said.

"Learning about monarchs pulls people in," she said. "If they become interested in monarchs, they slowly become interested in other organisms and wildlife." With human help, Pabon said, she hopes the monarch population will increase.

"Population numbers can fluctuate, and some years can be better than others," she said. But without native milkweeds and reduced pesticide use, the future for monarchs "is still pretty grim," Pabon said.

In March, Trigueros and Pabon were patiently waiting for their native milkweed seedlings, patches and pots in the G.A.R.D.E.N. to awaken from their long winter "slumber." By press time for this article, spring will have arrived and, they noted, those little life forces will take flight.

"When everything starts blooming, you will see monarchs flying around our campus," Trigueros said. "It will be beautiful." ❧



# STRONG

BY **OLIVIA HERSTEIN**

PHOTOS BY **RINGO CHIU AND DAVID J. HAWKINS**

THERE ARE times when Los Angeles feels like the biggest small town in the world. In our minds, that has never felt more so than in January 2025. On Jan. 7 and 8, as the second- and third-most destructive fires in state history ravaged our city, we were terrified. Heartbroken. Shocked.

But on Jan. 9 and the days that followed, we rolled up our sleeves and got to work. Angelenos of all ages rallied to feed, house, clothe, support and crowdfund for our neighbors. We counseled, held and took in our relatives, friends, neighbors, friends of friends.

Angelenos are no strangers to natural disasters, especially in Northridge — where the 1994 earthquake marked a defining moment in our university's history. Where Matadors coined the phrase: "Not just back—better!" And we made it so.

We know what it takes.

Matadors have been among the thousands of L.A. residents who opened their homes, their wallets and their arms to neighbors in need — helping to rebuild what was lost, whether it was a home, a business or the countless intangible things that make up a community. Matadors also have helped comfort and reimagine when rebuilding proved impossible. Here are some of their stories.

## FACULTY AND STUDENTS

## Digging into Eaton Fire Pollutants



BY JENNY STEINBECK

**L**ike thousands of other Angelenos, CSUN professors Jennifer Cotton and Mads Andersen have spent the past few months mired in insurance paperwork and cleaning their smoke- and ash-contaminated homes. Cotton lives in Altadena, and Andersen lives in Sierra Madre, where high winds propelled the Eaton fire through the hills, then the neighborhoods—to within just a few blocks of their homes.

“We’re in southwest Altadena, so because the winds were coming from the northeast, everything was blowing right at us,” Cotton said of the blaze that began Jan. 7. “When the winds died down, after having burned through more than 3 miles of houses from where the fire started, it stopped just 2 blocks from us.”

(L-R) Students Tabasom Taei (chemistry), Francisco Martin Escobar (environmental science), Anna Gasparyan (chemistry), Denise Berg (geological sciences graduate student) and Joseph Newstadt (chemistry) with Jennifer Cotton, associate professor of geological sciences, prep soil samples in CSUN’s Live Oak Hall.

Cotton and Andersen are colleagues in the College of Science and Mathematics. Cotton is an associate professor of geological sciences; Andersen is an associate professor of chemistry and biochemistry. Despite the challenges at home, they began thinking about the larger environmental concerns resulting from these



historic fires. They came up with projects to give undergraduate and graduate students opportunities to learn and to make a difference for affected communities.

Andersen noted that the ash that has settled into the soil will be sticking around for months.

"Ash is pretty big stuff, but the smaller particles, the fine and ultrafine particles, those are the route of heightened concern regarding human exposure to many environmental contaminants, both indoor and outdoor," Andersen said.

Cotton's work as a geochemist and paleo-climatologist has touched on fire's impacts throughout Earth's history, using fossilized soils to study climate and environmental change through time. She hadn't researched modern soils for more than a decade—but the Eaton fire study changed all that.

Cotton noted that many Altadena residents have taken to social media platforms, expressing concerns about the toxicity of burned electronics, cars and appliances. However, the vintage and antique homes that give the area its charm are harboring their own, unique concerns due to their age.

"There's a big portion of Altadena that has 100-year-old houses, and before 1979 it was OK to use lead paint," Cotton said. "How many layers of lead paint are underneath the new paint in those houses, that were then burned and released into the atmosphere? [They were] volatilized—blown around—deposited onto people's yards, where insurance companies aren't necessarily going to cover the remediation, especially for people who don't have a total loss."

Any larger, longer-term studies must first begin with proving that there are unusual

"When the winds died down, after having burned through more than 3 miles of houses from where the fire started, it stopped just 2 blocks from us."

—JENNIFER COTTON

amounts of lead and other contaminants in the soil, Cotton said. Luckily, she had taken some soil samples from her own yard before the fire, so she had the materials to establish a comparison.

Cotton, along with a team of CSUN undergraduate and graduate students, collected soil samples from 21 sites across Altadena, Pasadena, Sierra Madre, San Marino and South Pasadena in mid-February. In the Department of Geological Sciences lab, they have analyzed water samples for heavy metals. A graduate student is leading the method development to study the soils and sediments. And Anna Gasparyan, 21, one of the undergraduates on the team, said she feels she's making a difference for people by doing this work.

"It gives me an opportunity to inform people, to open their eyes," said Gasparyan, a chemistry major. "Maybe it'll encourage them to do their own research, too."

This work will benefit students in their studies and in their future careers, Cotton said.

"This is providing field work and meaningful research opportunities for CSUN students, as well as giving them the opportunity to work one-on-one with faculty as well as industry standard instrumentation for soil analyses," she said.

More research on the impacts of wildfire at the wildland-urban interface is necessary, Cotton said, because these types of fires are becoming more common due to a combination of factors such as climate change, ecological change, invasive species and aging electrical infrastructure. The impact of wildfire smoke on the environment is more widely studied, but studies on large-scale urban fires like in Altadena or the Palisades—or in Paradise, California, or Lahaina, Maui—have been few and far between. That's because, she said, these types of events had been very rare, historically. Until now. —J.S.



**LUIS M. RODRIGUEZ '08, M.A. '16**

# Funding Recovery, Centering the Most Marginalized



**N**ot all heroes wear capes. Some wear Nikes and wield a pen, a laptop and grant funding.

Luis M. Rodriguez, 41, holds double degrees in Chicana/o Studies from CSUN, and he seems to type, speak and move in double-time as well. Rodriguez is program manager for the California Community Foundation's Wildfire Recovery Fund, one of the largest funds for fire victims and recovery in Los Angeles. The Inglewood native

is working with nonprofits, service providers, faith-based organizations and many others to rebuild L.A. communities through millions of dollars in grant funding.

The Wildfire Recovery Fund was founded in 2003 to address the particular needs of communities devastated by wildfires, which have increased in severity and scope in large part due to climate change. The Palisades and Eaton

Fires, and their aftermath, have posed unique challenges for Rodriguez and his team.

"There's been so much interest from donors," Rodriguez said. "The primary goal of the foundation is to support nonprofits and the most marginalized communities. What's different this time is the individual staff were equally impacted by the fires—staff at these organizations have also lost their homes. A lot of our work is listening and trying to make sense in the chaos."

Rodriguez '08, M.A. '16, who has returned to his alma mater as a part-time lecturer in the Department of Urban Studies and Planning in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, is passionate about Los Angeles and lifting up its disadvantaged communities. In the first round of grant funding in January, Rodriguez said, the fund awarded \$15 million to more than 125 nonprofit organizations. When we spoke in late February, the fund's team were working on a second, \$15 million round of grants to 85 organizations.

Just two of the beneficiaries in the first round of funding were the Altadena Children's Center, a child care center that had been housed in the Altadena Baptist Church (which suffered a total loss during the Eaton Fire), and the Boys & Girls Club of Pasadena, which opened its doors to nearly 300 local children affected by school closures—offering free daily programs at its East Del Mar Avenue facility.

"We prioritize the most marginalized—senior services, disability services, the food insecure, youth services—and how do we keep our social network intact?" Rodriguez said. "With youth services, what does child care look like without a



"A lot of our work is listening and trying to make sense in the chaos."

— **LUIS M. RODRIGUEZ**

school? Kids need a safe place to be, but it's also the economic impact on the family—with child care, parents can work. You're doubling the positive return by investing in youth services."

After completing his master's at CSUN, Rodriguez worked at TreePeople in Los Angeles, focused on the environment and building community. During this time, he went back to school, earning a second master's degree—in urban planning, from USC.

He joined the California Community Foundation in 2022, working first on its California COVID Community Health Project before jumping into wildfire recovery work. In fall 2024, he was thrilled to return to his alma mater to lecture twice a week and pay it forward.

CSUN was central to his life, where he met his wife, Elizabeth Gutierrez Rodriguez '07 (Child Development), at a fundraiser in the hallways of Jerome Richfield Hall. "CSUN was a place we were inspired," Rodriguez said. "We were both first-generation college students, and having faculty and staff who had that lived experience was so important."

While working on the Wildfire Recovery Fund, "I do think about CSUN being located in between two of the biggest fires, Eaton and Palisades," he said. "Our students come from everywhere, including the fire zones."

What does recovery look like, from where he sits?

"On the ground, we're seeing a lot of determination from historically Black neighborhoods in Altadena, to return to their community," Rodriguez said. "They need support, whether it's social, economic or systems navigation—like navigating FEMA applications and harnessing their collective power. The through line will be the arc of resilience." — *O.H.*



**DARREN LLOYD '07**

# Saving Lives, Fighting for His Neighborhood





Los Angeles City firefighters typically work about 18 days a month. Those days on are 24-hour shifts. That is, they're on call 24 hours a day, and they usually sleep in beds in their fire station. Darren A. Lloyd was off duty Jan. 7 when the Eaton Fire broke out in the foothills above his hometown of Altadena.

Lloyd '07 (Communication Studies) was at home with his wife, Krystal, on West Mendocino Street, when the couple lost power about 8 p.m., he said. Like most of West Altadena, they hadn't received an evacuation order.

"Around 2 a.m., we started getting phone calls from friends and family around the area, saying, 'The fire's headed your way! You need to get out!' I went to my window, and I could see the fire," said Lloyd, 46. "The Santa Ana winds were blowing about 90 miles per hour. I'd never seen anything like that in my 16 years as a firefighter paramedic. Like, the street signs were being bent over by the wind. I immediately knew this was *bad bad*."

Lloyd roused his wife, then about three months pregnant, and asked her to gather passports, birth certificates and other important documents, and he packed her into her car and sent her to her parents' house in Gardena. Then, he ran down the block, pounding on doors and trying to wake his neighbors. Several are elderly, so Lloyd helped some to their cars and urged them to leave. Then, he jumped in his own car.

Lloyd's family had lived in Altadena since 1950, and his parents purchased the three-bedroom house in 1973, in what would become a vibrant Black community. They raised Lloyd in that house, and it stayed in the family. After his parents passed away, he inherited the house. Lloyd and his wife had just completed a major renovation on the property in August 2024.

With the Eaton Fire raging, "I wanted to protect my neighborhood, because these people knew my parents," Lloyd said, voice thick with emotion. "They knew my family."

After checking in with his captain, Lloyd turned his car around and tried to access West Mendocino Street. About an hour later, with power down and traffic gridlocked as Altadennans fled the area, Lloyd crept slowly back up into the foothills.

"I was praying, 'Please, please let my house be there,'" he said. "I was coming up Lincoln [Avenue], and I was trying to mentally prepare myself."

It still stood, in the middle of the block, but "the wind and fire was pushing toward my house."

So, Lloyd did for his own block what he does every day for citizens across the city of Los Angeles. The thing is, firefighting is not a one-man job.

"It's hard if you're not prepared for this, and how could anyone be prepared for this? For our city, it hurts, and you're humbled. You try to be thankful."

—DARREN LLOYD,  
ALTADENA

Four houses down from his, two of his neighbors' homes were on fire. Lloyd pulled his gear out of his car, suited up and "got down low" outside a window, using a garden hose to pump enough water inside the houses "to try to knock the fire down enough" to stop another exposed house next door from catching fire from the radiant heat, he said.

That's when he spotted a bright red engine from Riverside County racing down the block, through the smoke—one of 100 called for mutual aid in the firestorm.

"They pulled up and said, 'Where's your crew?'" Lloyd said. "I said, 'I am the crew!'"

With their help, he was able to save three of his neighbors' houses. Lloyd thanked his new comrades, and they moved on to another block. There were so many in need in Altadena. Driven by adrenaline, Lloyd then turned to prep his

other neighbors' houses, to hose them down and try to defend them from flying embers as best he could. "I went to turn on the residential water hoses, and then, there was no more water. I was on my knees, saying, 'Dear God, I need a little help here.'"

This time, Lloyd said, his prayers were answered — not by firefighters but neighbors, some of whom had returned after daybreak to try to retrieve a few more belongings. They started tossing Lloyd their home fire extinguishers and shovels to move dirt onto hotspots and smoldering rubble.

In the end, Lloyd kept vigil on West Men-docino for three days, putting out spot fires. When those two neighbors' homes flared up again, he flagged down passing engine companies for help.

By March, the exhaustion and scope of the community's losses — nearly 7,000 homes lost in the Eaton Fire, plus thousands of churches, schools, businesses, community organizations and other structures — had taken their toll. Like his neighbors, Lloyd and his wife were still displaced — with no drinkable water at home and smoke remediation and cleanup underway — and they've rented an apartment in the San Fernando Valley. And, like every first responder, business owner, teacher and others whose neighborhoods were hit in Altadena, Pasadena and Pacific Palisades, he has navigated this traumatic experience as a professional — a firefighter paramedic — but also personally, as a husband and father-to-be.

As his community took stock, Lloyd was filled with emotion: uncertainty, frustration. But hope remained.

"Just last week, I went over to check on my house," Lloyd said. "I was talking to one of my neighbors, and a little old lady came up to me. It was the woman who owned the house I saved! She was crying and thanking me, and I was just stunned. It was good.

"I also thanked the engine company from Riverside County," he said. "I sent them a bunch of ribeye steaks as a thank-you. I said, 'Thank you for saving my house, my block. Just, thank you.'" — *O.H.*

## VICTOR VILLA '15

# Con Tacos, Todo es Possible



You can smell the secret to Victor Villa's success before you see it. Pulling into a strip mall on Figueroa in Highland Park, the irresistible aroma hits you hard: *carne asada*. *Queso*. Homemade, blue-corn *masa*. Smoke billows off the grill at the edge of the parking lot, wafting over the street and luring you straight to the door. A line of eager taco lovers fall in behind you, as the queue starts to wrap around the building.

Seven years after launching what would become the wildly successful taco stand in front of

at Villas Tacos #1, with the newest shop, #3, focused on shrimp and seafood tacos.

A native son of Atwater Village and Highland Park, Villa learned from his family to cherish community, work hard and give back. From his earliest days as a *taquero* manning the grill in front of his grandparents' house, he fed first responders and neighbors in need and gave back to local businesses.

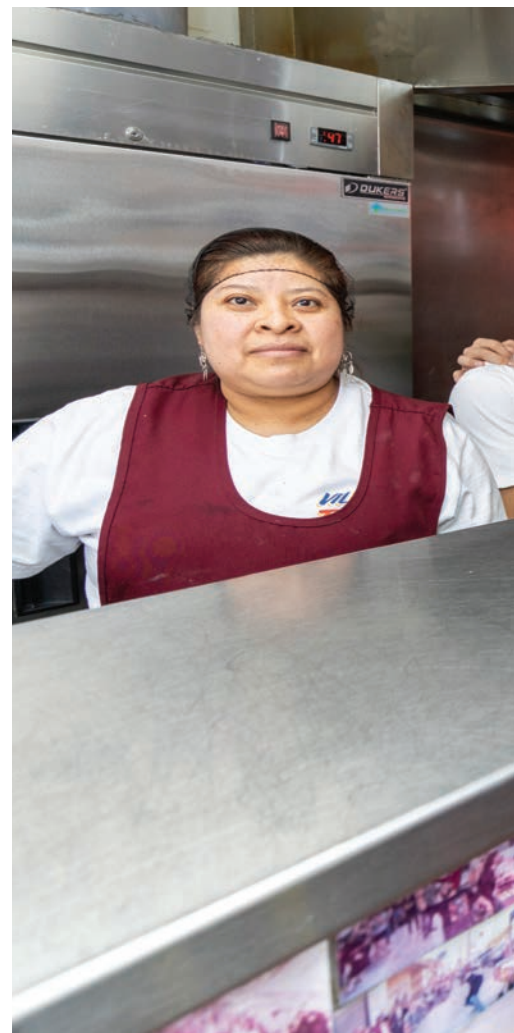
On Jan. 7, a catastrophic day no Angeleno will soon forget, Villa jumped into

"That's my calling —  
to make this world  
a better place,  
one taco at a time."

— VICTOR VILLA

his grandparents' Highland Park home, and two years after opening his first brick-and-mortar storefront — plus a second location in downtown Los Angeles' storied Grand Central Market — Villa's Tacos is an unqualified success.

In the city where taco is king, and our love for the handheld comfort food cuts across race, age and socioeconomic — what the late food critic Jonathan Gold called "a gift to the universe" — Villa's Tacos has taken off like smoke from his grill. Villa '15 (Management) opened a third location in late March, just seven blocks east on Figueroa from where patrons stand (and feast)



action and responded the only way he knew how: feeding, comforting and making sure his community's basic needs for food and fellowship were met.

"The day the fires broke out, I told everyone at the restaurant to get home safe. That night was crazy — I was home with my family in Alhambra, which is not that far away [from where the Eaton Fire broke out]," said Villa, a married father of three small children. "We were praying for the winds to go down. We knew something was about to go down, we just didn't know what."

Earlier that evening, as the firestorm whipped down out of Eaton Canyon, across Altadena and beyond, he had closed his Highland Park shop. "In the morning, we learned about the homes being affected in Altadena," he said. "I have many friends and family in Altadena who lost their homes."

Villa's heart and energy seem as big and boundless as the punch packed by his home-made mango habanero salsa ("ferociously hot — you've been warned!" the label cautions).

His crew had been feeding local first responders since their first days at the taco stand in 2018. "It's so important to us, from the bottom of our hearts," Villa said. "If anyone

comes in uniform, whether it's firefighters, police, paramedics, we take care of their meal. I have friends who are firefighters in Pasadena and Highland Park. Their dedication to get out there — to run *toward* the fire when everyone else is running away from the fire... [in January] it drew me to take immediate action.

"Our restaurant was closed, but we wanted to go out and bring the energy and bring them some warm food during difficult times," he added.



Victor Villa's star is on the rise. For three straight years, renowned site L.A. Taco crowned Villa '15 (Management) "Taco Madness Champion."

With a well-developed, cheeky and vibrant social media presence, Villa's put out the call on Instagram and more: In the chaotic days of Jan. 8-12 and beyond, the team asked for patrons' help connecting them with firefighting units. Villa's Tacos followers came through, and soon the team was delivering to hungry first responders, as well as fire victims across the Palisades, Altadena and other locations.

"It made me very proud to be part of this great community," Villa said. "We were doing something positive, during a time that was tough for Angelenos. The video we did, we wanted to show the good energy and the good vibes. It was a time in L.A. that was very somber, where people were mourning the loss of their homes and property.

"In one day, people went from just enjoying their lives to losing everything," he said.

"This is what community means to me — being there for our neighbors. Being there for the people who really need it," Villa added.

Two months on, Villa said, business had, in some ways, returned to "normal" in L.A. "But it's really not — homes are down, and it's going to take people years to rebuild. There are still people who are struggling and don't know what the future has in store," he said. "For

all the people who are still feeling kind of lost, we're still trying to comfort with our food. We're still offering meals to families who have been directly affected by the fires. When people come out and enjoy their meal, maybe for a few minutes they're not thinking about that. That's the power of good food, and that's what makes Villa's Tacoso special." — O.H.



# Athletics



## Champions to Legends

Hall of Fame Welcomes Class of 2025

**C**SUN's Athletics Hall of Fame made its return in February after a seven-year hiatus. The 2025 class, made up of three individuals and one team, were inducted during a night of Matador pride and celebration, Feb. 28 at the Warner Center Marriott Hotel in Woodland Hills.

This year's inductees are Channon Fluker '19 (Women's Basketball), Don Strametz (Track and Field/Cross Country coach), Joseph Vaughn (Football, posthumous) and the 1987 National Champion Softball team.

Decked out in their CSUN gear, the honorees and their loved ones arrived at the ceremony filled with energy and excitement, chanting "CSUN!" in a call-and-response as they walked in.

"They're a really special bunch that have accomplished incredible things and have made an impact," said Susan King, assistant athletics director for external relations.

The 1987 National Champion Softball Team was among the 2025 inductees to the CSUN Athletics Hall of Fame.



The Hall of Fame ceremony traditionally has been held every other year since 2018, but COVID-19 and other factors led to a number of delays. The tradition and its return were crucial to CSUN Athletics and the Matador community, according to Athletics leadership. King noted the broader significance of the event.

"The celebration of those involved in athletics is a celebration of the university," she said. Matador teams at CSUN are often the first way people connect with or become aware of the school, she said. "Athletics is kind of the front porch of the university. The Hall of Fame is a celebration of the Valley," King added.

Selections for the Hall of Fame are made by a committee of athletics administrators and coaches, but the nomination process is heavily community-driven. The open nomination period ran from Sept. 18-Oct. 1, 2024, allowing friends, family and supporters to submit their candidates through an online forum. CSUN Athletics received nominations from throughout the country.

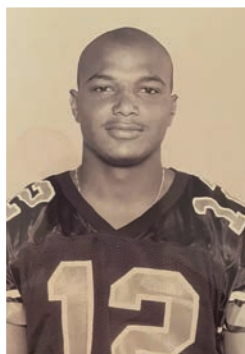


**Don Strametz**  
Track and  
Field/Cross  
Country  
coach

**Channon  
Fluker '19**  
Women's  
Basketball



**Joseph Vaughn**  
Football  
(posthumous)



To be considered, nominees must meet eligibility requirements under at least one of five categories: student-athlete, coach, team, community member or posthumous award.

"Being a Matador is one of the biggest achievements of my life," said Fluker '19 (Early Childhood Development), the third Matador Women's Basketball player to be named to the school's Hall of Fame. "I am blessed to have been able to attend a university that gave me a lifetime of memories, and being part of a community that gave me lifelong friendships is something I will forever cherish."

The ceremony was a testament to Matadors' enduring school spirit. "Together we're better" was our slogan, and we believed it," said Debbie Ching, assistant coach of the 1987 National Champion Softball team.

"To this day, we're still together," former player Lori Shelly Castellano '89 (Teaching/Coaching) said. "We bleed red and black."

—Ruby Durant

## Matadors Nab First-Ever NIT Selection

CSUN Men's Basketball faced Stanford on March 18, in its first-ever trip to the National Invitation Tournament. It was just the fourth time at the Division I level that CSUN men's hoops played in a national tournament, and the first since competing in the College Basketball Invitational in 2019. The Matadors made the NCAA Division I "March Madness" tournament in 2000-01 and 2008-09.

The NIT can be a stepping stone for up-and-coming teams such as CSUN, who this season tied a school record in wins, finishing with a 22-11 overall record. The Matadors played Stanford tough on the road, but fell in an early hole and the Cardinal held them off, 87-70. Led by second-year head coach Andy Newman, CSUN has posted back-to-back winning seasons for the first time since 2008-09.

Don't forget, tickets are free for CSUN students, faculty, staff and alumni — get them online. And keep an eye on CSUN Athletics Instagram for more promotions and team schedules this fall. Go, Matadors!



## First-Ever Night Games Played Under New Lights at Renamed Robert J. Hiebert Field



In late February, CSUN Baseball played the first home night games in school history, as the university debuted a brand-new lighting system — part of an ongoing renovation and expansion of their home field.

The lights, installed during the offseason, illuminated 15 of 24 games this season, bringing a vastly different experience to CSUN fans. The Matadors recently renamed their home ballpark Robert J. Hiebert Field, in honor of the former coach, the school's all-time wins leader, who won two NCAA Division II World Series at CSUN. Hiebert '64 (Physical Education), M.A. '68 (Physical Education) began his CSUN journey as a student-athlete and served from 1965-98 in roles as an assistant coach, head coach, faculty member and director of athletics.

The Matadors finished 1-2 in the home opener Feb. 20-22 series (including two night games) against Brigham Young University, with the win coming on Saturday afternoon.

The new lights are one of the key priorities for upgrading Hiebert Field. The \$28.6 million initiative will transform player and fan experiences and enable broader community access to the only Division I baseball program and field in the San Fernando Valley. Last spring, CSUN installed a new Daktronics video scoreboard. The Matadors also recently enhanced the playing-field surface, which is now among the best on the West Coast.

CSUN is currently raising funds to complete many other exciting upgrades to the park that opened in 1961. A new clubhouse, enhanced seating and other improvements will make games even more enjoyable for players and fans. Philanthropy is playing a key role in the updates, spearheaded by alumnus Irv Zakheim '72 (Physical Education).

The renovation will boost player recruitment for an ascendant Matador team in the Big West Conference.

# Matador Matters

Updates from Alumni



## Snapshots

On Oct. 19, CSUN celebrated the 2024 Distinguished Alumni Awards. **1 Milt Valera '68** (Journalism), Hon.D. '23 and **Irv Zakheim '72** (Physical Education) celebrate Matador excellence. **5** Retiring University Student Union Director **Debra Hammond**,

a beloved campus leader, fetes another: DAA honoree **William Watkins '74** (Urban Studies).

**7 Maria Reza '66** (Home Economics) congratulates MBA student **Cory Soto**, First Generation Scholarship Recipient, at the 2024 Alumni Association Student Scholarship Celebration.

At Men's Basketball Alumni Fan Night on Feb. 1, Matadors turned out in force to cheer on our team! **2 Charles Humphrey Jr. '86** (Mechanical Engineering), **Cedric Ainsworth Jr. '17** (Management) and **3 Esther Lanier '98** (Human Resource Management), M.S. '07 showed their spirit.

**4** Three past alumni association presidents, **Cindy Chernow '78** (Anthropology), M.A. '91 and **Dan Chernow '67** (History), M.A. '89, M.A. '03 (History) and **Felicia Conlan '09** (M.S., Communicative Disorders/Teaching Credential), Ed.D. '17 (Educational Leadership & Policy Studies) honor students at the 2024

Alumni Association Student Scholarship Celebration.

**6 Doris Abrishami '97** (Radiologic Technology), M.A. '13, Ed.D. '18 and **Bob Ortego '85** (Radiologic Technology) connect during the Radiologic Sciences Alumni Chapter's fall 2024 speed mentoring program.



## Extra! Extra!

Want to find more ways to plug in to your Matador community? Read on!



## Alumni Success Stories

We're proud of you and your success! Your journeys inspire current students and strengthen our vibrant community. We invite you to share your success stories—whether it's a career milestone, a passion project or a life-changing experience. Your story could be featured in this magazine, our alumni newsletter, website or social media, showcasing the amazing impact our graduates are making around the world. Let us celebrate your achievements and inspire the next generation. Submit your story today and stay connected with the community that helped shape your journey. Visit [wkf.ms/4cotAJs](http://wkf.ms/4cotAJs) or scan the QR code.



# Character Study

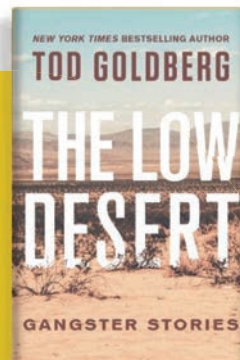
Alum and NYT Best-Selling Author Investigates Crime Stories.

**Tod Goldberg '06** (English) is fascinated by the human propensity for violence and the domino effect of violent acts. To feed his lifelong fascination, he tells stories: of individuals on the precipice of making irreversible, bad decisions—of, Goldberg said, “bad people doing bad things to worse people.”

A New York Times best-selling author, Goldberg's crime novels explore the world of gangsters and organized crime. He plumbs the consequences of those “bad decisions” and the impact on perpetrators and victims, examining the nebulous morality surrounding his characters. His compelling narratives

### STORYTELLER

Tod Goldberg has published 15 original fiction books, including 2021's “The Low Desert.”



shine a light on the darker corners of our society, where right and wrong blur. Crime fiction “holds a mirror up to society and forces us to look at the things we may stridently avoid in our typical lives,” Goldberg said.

With 15 original fiction books published, this Matador also has written five books based on the popular and acclaimed TV series “Burn Notice,” as well as numerous nonfiction articles for national outlets such as the Los Angeles Times and USA Today. His books have been nominated for the Hammett Prize for excellence in crime writing, the International Thriller of the Year Award, the Los Angeles Times and the Strand Critics Award. Books from his “Gangsterland” series have been named Amazon Best Book of the Year and Southwest Book of the Year. While living in Nevada in the late 1990s, he won five Nevada Press Association Awards for articles written for the Mercury and CityLife and was honored with the Silver Pen Award from the Nevada Writers Hall of Fame for his body of work.

Goldberg's latest novel, “Only Way Out,” is set to be published this fall, and he's working on his next novel centering on organized crime in the Salton Sea area in the 1960s.

Diagnosed with dyslexia, as a child Goldberg was told he'd never read or write above a fourth-grade level. After intensive therapy, he proved those educators wrong and became an avid reader and writer. He published his first novel when he was 29, “which is absurdly young, in retrospect,” said Goldberg, 54. He has continued to publish a book every 18 months, “which is also absurd without even being in retrospect!”

He struggled to identify any particular inspiration for writing, which feels to Goldberg as natural as breathing. “It's a little bit like asking a turtle what they like about their shell,” he mused. “It just ... is.”

Goldberg enrolled at CSUN in the early 1990s with a passion for storytelling and an insatiable curiosity about the human experience. Majoring in English with an emphasis in creative writing, he credited “hard criticism from writing professor Jack Lopez and being immersed in great literature through the teachings of Dr. Arlene Stiebel, [for] a great foundation for the work [I'd] go on to produce.”

Goldberg served in student government for most of his time at CSUN, as Associated Students student senator and chief of staff, which gave him the know-how to navigate the administrative side of his work, he noted. Among his mentors and most profound influences: Rameen Talesh (then a campus activities director at CSUN, now dean of students



at UC Irvine), his advisor when Goldberg served as president of Sigma Phi Epsilon; Bill Foster, general manager of Associated Students; and Tom Piernik, director of student development.

One of his most memorable experiences at CSUN, and one that he has drawn on since, was the 1994 Northridge earthquake. It took CSUN decades to rebuild, and Goldberg had a front-row seat in student government in helping “spread the word that the university was coming back, that we were in it together, and that it was going to be a unique and lasting challenge,” he recalled.

After CSUN, Goldberg pursued his MFA degree and has since parlayed his creative and administrative experiences into his role as the director of the Master of Fine Arts program at UC Riverside—a program he founded in 2008—where he advises his students to “approach writing as an actual business,” he said. He encourages his students to focus on their creative process as a deliberate effort, not just “wait for the muse to show up,” and “pay equal attention to the process of creating art and the process of making money from it.”

His pragmatic approach has paved the way for his students to diversify their abilities so they “can always make a living doing what [they] love,” he added.

His bachelor’s degree from CSUN, it turned out, had an interesting postscript: Due to a small

**“Wait for the muse to show up ... [and] pay equal attention to the process of creating art and the process of making money from it.”**

oversight, Goldberg didn’t realize he was just 2 units short of officially completing his undergraduate degree ... until he applied to the MFA program a dozen years later and requested his transcripts! He quickly completed a community college course, transferred the units to his CSUN coursework, and officially graduated from CSUN with the class of 2006.

Goldberg’s journey from CSUN undergraduate to celebrated, best-selling author inspires his UC Riverside students, colleagues and his fellow CSUN alumni. His accomplishments prove the power of passion, hard work and perseverance—a true success story and beacon of possibility for aspiring writers. —*Naz Keynejad*

To learn more about Goldberg and his work, visit [todgoldberg.com](http://todgoldberg.com)

## Lights, Camera, Connection!

We’re thrilled to announce that the Entertainment Alumni Chapter is officially chartered! This new chapter was created to bring together CSUN alumni in the entertainment industry—in film, television, theater, music, entertainment journalism, video games and beyond. The chapter aims to cultivate a strong community



Follow  
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on Instagram  
for the latest.

of creatives, provide career opportunities and insights, and uplift alumni as they navigate this dynamic industry.

For its first act, the chapter hosted a buzzy mixer in 2024 at CSUN alum-nus-owned San Fernando Brewing Co., where more than 75 industry pros and fellow Matadors gathered to network, reconnect and celebrate. And that’s just the beginning! The chapter is actively engaged in planning more networking and career development events, creating more opportunities to collaborate:

Get ready for some Matador magic, because in entertainment, it’s all about who you know AND what you create!



**Extra! Extra!**

Continued



### Join a Chapter!

The Alumni Association is home to nearly 20 unique alumni chapters. These chapters foster connection and nurture professional and personal relationships among Matadors. Many chapters offer career development opportunities such as workshops, continuing education units (CEU) seminars and day-long conferences. They also organize social events and reunions, strengthening the bond between members and creating a sense of community. Chapter membership is free, and all alumni are welcome! To get involved, visit [tinyurl.com/Alumni-Chapters](http://tinyurl.com/Alumni-Chapters) or scan the QR code.



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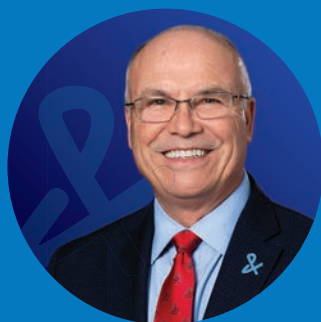
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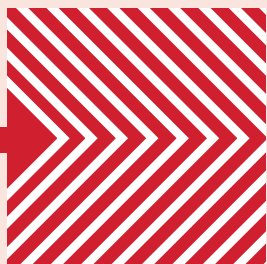


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# Make a Difference Today!



## See this envelope?

This is no ordinary envelope — it's a tool for transforming the lives of CSUN students!

When you donate to CSUN, you make a real difference in the student experience, helping Matadors thrive through their academic journeys and beyond.

**Want to help students focus on their studies?**

→ Your gift to the **University Scholarship Fund** can help relieve the financial stress that many students feel, allowing them to focus on academics and participate in the wealth of campus programs that enrich their college experience.

**Do you care about supporting students' basic needs?**

→ A donation to the **CSUN with a Heart** fund provides resources to ensure Matadors have access to basic needs. Your support gives our students reassurance that CSUN is here to help them succeed every step of the way.

**Are you passionate about our CSUN Athletics teams?**

→ When you give to **CSUN Athletics**, your donation will help our student athletes excel on the court or playing field and thrive in the classroom. Your generosity supports Matador student-athletes in every aspect of their CSUN experience.



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There are many other opportunities to support our mission and our students: Donate to scholarships, the University Library or your college, department or program of choice!

Use this envelope to mail in your gift, or scan the QR code to give online at [engage.csun.edu/MagSp25](https://engage.csun.edu/MagSp25).



# Helping Hungry Students

Donor Support Fuels Student Success and Inspires Others to Pay it Forward.



"Imagine waking up hungry. You get to class, and you're already thinking, 'When am I going to eat next?'" Lira Flores said. "You can't focus. You need proper nutrition to take exams. When you're hungry, it's difficult to succeed."

Flores '25 (Sociology), a graduating senior, understands the experience of Matadors who experience food insecurity. Flores saw them every day, working as the lead student assistant for CSUN's Pop-Up Food Pantry.

Flores knows firsthand the high costs of being a student. "Tuition. Materials. Rent. It's really hard to make sure you're eating healthy food as a student, because what is cheap is not necessarily healthy," she said. Flores also studied the

impact of food insecurity in her sociology coursework.

"Food is a basic need," she said. "If students' basic needs are not met, it's difficult to succeed academically. Thankfully, with help from our donors, we are able to provide more food to students and combat food insecurity on campus."

When the Food Pantry received a handwritten thank-you letter and a donation of food from a graduating student who had been a pantry client, Flores saw how donor support translates into student success — and the inspiration to pay it forward.

"He wanted to thank us for supporting him," Flores said. "For him, [the pantry] was really impactful and he wanted to return the favor." —Danielle Fairlee

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## Matadors Go to Washington

Couple's Gift Boosts D.C. Internship Program



### OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

Jobany Osorio poses near the U.S. Capitol during his CSUN in D.C. internship program in spring 2024.

**J**obany Osorio had never left California before he boarded a plane for a spring 2024 internship with the U.S. Department of Labor in Washington, D.C.

He'd been working two jobs, one off campus and one in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences advisement office. His supervisor there encouraged him to explore the CSUN in D.C. internship program, which offers students a chance to live, work and study in the nation's capital. The sociology major never had considered a career in public service.

But Osorio, then 20, thrived when he got to work in the Department of Labor's Division of Indian and Native American Programs — writing reports, delivering presentations and working with people at many levels of government.

"Now, any room I walk into, or anyone I talk to, I feel more comfortable," he said. "I feel like I can speak what I want to say and not really get nervous."

He made such an impression that the department asked him to stay on after his internship — he was able to work remotely while continuing his studies at CSUN. He's

## “It’s a transformative program for these students that otherwise would not have the experience nor the opportunity.”

Alan Jeffery '65, CSUN in D.C. program supporter

on track to graduate in May 2025 and strongly considering a career in public service — in D.C., California or elsewhere.

The life-changing internship would have been, simply, out of reach — financially speaking — without significant philanthropic support for his housing, living expenses and cross-country flights.

A new gift from longtime CSUN supporters **Alan '65 and Rose Jeffery** ensures that more students like Osorio get these opportunities. The Jefferys donated \$112,000 to create an endowment and support CSUN in D.C. students with internship-related expenses.

“I’m always going to be thankful and appreciative. It wouldn’t have been possible without the help of the donors,” Osorio said. “If it weren’t for them, students like me wouldn’t get these opportunities, or it wouldn’t even cross their mind.”

Since 2013, more than 350 Matadors have participated in CSUN in D.C., where they’ve worked for members of Congress, advocacy groups, nonprofits, embassies, museums, private firms and other service-oriented organizations. Program alumni have gone on to work in government and politics in California and around the country.

About 50 students from majors across campus participate each year, networking with each other and contacts across Washington. They also take night classes from on-site CSUN faculty in a classroom space near the Capitol.

Alan Jeffery '65 (Experimental Psychology), whose own insurance career launched by chance after he spotted a job ad posted in the university’s employment office, gravitated to supporting the CSUN in D.C. program because it offers real-world career development experience.

“It’s a transformative program for these students that otherwise would not have the experience nor the opportunity,” he said. “At this stage of our life, we wanted to do something a little more impactful, and so we decided to set up an endowment program that will help one or two students a year work in D.C.”

Today’s interns become tomorrow’s entry-level political staffers, eventually working their way up to positions of increasing influence, said Lawrence Becker, the political

science professor who directs the program. Most internship sites in D.C. recruit from a small group of schools in D.C. and the northeast, Becker said, leaving talented students across the country as an untapped resource. CSUN students bring unique perspectives, talents and backgrounds that are attractive to CSUN’s internship partners.

“If you want to change how government or business operates, you have to change the pipeline of interns,” Becker said.



Alan and Rose Jeffery created an endowment to support CSUN in D.C. students with internship-related expenses.

CSUN in D.C. alumni have gone on to work in Congressional offices, for the Human Rights Campaign and for political campaigns in California.

“Students will be listened to by their peers on how things work in government and what efforts it takes in order to make change,” Rose Jeffery said.

In recognition of the Jefferys’ impactful gift, CSUN named Maple Hall classrooms 217 and 317 in their honor, the first naming gift in the impressive new classroom building. The Jefferys hope their donation inspires others to also make naming gifts.

Nearly every CSUN in D.C. participant receives at least some funding, Becker said. Some support comes from the university’s Instructionally Related Activities Fund. And for students like Osorio, philanthropy creates incredible opportunities.

“It is the difference between a student being able to do this and not,” Becker said.

—Jacob Bennett

# Northridge Notes

## 1960s

### HOWARD WANG '67

(Anthropology) and **Stephen Horwitz '67** (Education)

founded Sierra Canyon School in Chatsworth in 1978. Today, Sierra Canyon is one of the most prominent K-12 independent college prep schools in the country, with approximately 1,200 students. Sierra Canyon is one of the most-accessed schools on social media and counts high-profile professional athletes and performing artists as parents and alumni.

### BETTY BEAUMONT '69 (Art)

had her artwork displayed in the exhibition "Territorial Perspectives" at the Ludwig Forum for International Art in Aachen, Germany, from May 26, 2024, to April 27, 2025. Beaumont's work in the exhibition included three videos: "The Journey" (1980), "Ocean Landmark Virtual World" (2000), and "Imagining Imaging" (2001).

## 1970s

### GONZALO MUNÉVAR

'70 (Philosophy), M.A. '71 (Philosophy) is a professor emeritus at Lawrence Technological University in Michigan. Munévar has authored several books on science, including "Radical Knowledge: A Philosophical Inquiry into the Nature and Limits of Science" and "The Dimming of Starlight: The Philosophy of Space Exploration."



### MARCIA BOOKSTEIN '77

(Music), cellist, has retired from the San Diego Symphony Orchestra after 47 years. She performed her last concert with the orchestra during its summer 2024 opening weekend.

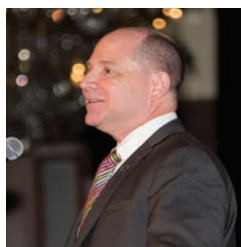
## 1980s

### DR. MARK R. HENSCHKE '80

(Biology) led an expedition to Magdalena Bay, Mexico, for the Surfers Medical Association in August 2024. This year, he is publishing an article on new weight loss drugs' effects on triglycerides, in Medical Research Archives, the journal of the European Society of Medicine. Henschke is a board-certified physician in internal medicine and medical management, and he maintains a hospital-based practice in York, Maine. Henschke holds a Doctor of Pharmacy degree from the University of Southern California and Master of Medical Management degree from Carnegie Mellon.

### OLIVIA ROBLEDO '89 (Spanish

Language and Culture) was named the 2025 Woman of the Year for District 43, by state Assemblymember Celeste Rodriguez. Robledo's career has spanned years of impactful work, beginning as a teacher and culminating in her role as a Los Angeles Unified School District principal.



### ZEKE ZEIDLER '87 (English),

judge of the Los Angeles Superior Court and CSUN Distinguished Alumni Award winner, was honored by the American Bar Association Commission on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity on Feb. 1

## 1990s

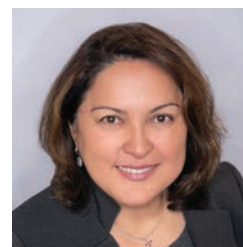


### TIMOTHY BELCHER '91

(Radio-TV Production) is a manager director at Light Iron, the post-production creative services division of Panavision.

### PHAEDRA ELLIS-LAMKINS '98

(Political Science), co-founder and CEO of Promise, was featured by Forbes in August 2024, exploring how she turned her company into a \$520 million powerhouse by helping municipalities and utilities collect unpaid bills with zero-interest payment plans.



### ESTHER (LEE) LANIER

'98 (Human Resource Management), M.S. '07 (Career Counseling), has returned to her alma mater as the associate director of employer relations in the CSUN Career Center, after working at the USC Career Center for 17 years.

## 2000s

### BROOK CHALMERS '09

(Cinema and Television Arts) returned to campus April 3 to serve on an alumni panel about early-career pathways in the entertainment industry, sponsored by CSUN's Entertainment Alumni Chapter and Entertainment Industry Institute. Chalmers was joined on the panel by fellow Matadors Sergio Serna, Casey Hodgkinson and Chaya Supannarat (**see notes on next page**). Chalmers is a voice director and actor working in animation, video games and dubbing.



### ARBY JEAN (TACUB) WOLKOV

'09 (Deaf Studies), M.A. '13 (Special Education, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education), American Sign Language teacher at William Howard Taft Charter High School, was selected as a 2025 California Teacher of the Year.



Please submit notes for future publication to [magazine@csun.edu](mailto:magazine@csun.edu).

## 2010s

**SERGIO SERNA '11** (Cinema and Television Arts) returned to campus April 3 to serve on an alumni panel about early-career pathways in the entertainment industry, sponsored by CSUN's Entertainment Alumni Chapter and Entertainment Industry Institute. Serna is a Writers Guild of America award-nominated writer who has written most recently for Hulu's "History of the World Part II" and Comedy Central's "Fairview." Previously, he served as a supervising producer (season 2) and staff writer (season 1) for Comedy Central's "Alternatino with Arturo Castro," and a writer for NBC's "A Little Late with Lilly Singh," as well as variety specials and numerous other projects.



**CASEY HODGKINSON '13** (Cinema and Television Arts) returned to campus April 3 to serve on an alumni panel about early-career pathways in the entertainment industry, sponsored by CSUN's Entertainment Alumni Chapter and Entertainment Industry Institute. Hodgkinson serves as a mentor with the Hollywood Radio & TV Society, and she's the lead contributor and event producer for the Cramer Comedy Newsletter. An experienced, creative producer specializing in comedy, Hodgkinson focuses on scripted content and live events. Previously, she served as creative executive at Apatow Productions. She began her career in talent representation at 3 Arts Entertainment,

where she worked with leading comedic talents such as Kevin Hart, Amy Poehler, Maya Rudolph and Issa Rae.



**CLAUDIA LOPEZ '15** (Kinesiology) has been promoted to assistant director of Government and Community Relations at CSUN. Lopez joined the Department of Government and Community Relations (GCR) in 2019, where she initially provided general administrative and calendar support. Over time, her role has expanded to include coordinating the logistics of CSUN's participation in CSU's Sacramento Advocacy Day and D.C. Hill Day, managing CSUN's community memberships and event sponsorship logistics, high-level event coordination for elected officials and CSU colleagues, researching and flagging key information for GCR and more.

**ERICA (ROOD) LUNDY '15** (M.A. Elementary Curriculum and Instruction) was named a Los Angeles County 2024 Teacher of the Year. She teaches fifth grade at Welby Way Charter School. In 2016, Lundy was named the science recipient for the Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching by former President Barack Obama.



**EVERTO RUIZ '71** (Sociology) is a professor emeritus of Chicana/o studies and a member of the La Raza Alumni Association at CSUN. In October 2024, a musical gala at CSUN's Plaza Del Sol Performance Hall paid tribute to Ruiz for his dedication to CSUN and community partners.

## JUSTIN CABANTING '17

(Financial Analysis) started a new position at the Partners in Care Foundation as a senior account assistant, where he assists senior leadership as they work to provide innovative healthcare solutions for our community. At CSUN, he started as a student assistant in the Resource Management department in University Relations and Advancement, before joining the staff in 2017 as assistant to the chief financial officer for the CSUN Foundation. For eight years in that role, Cabanting played an integral role in the foundation's move toward electronic processes, including the incorporation of Adobe Sign, a credit card program and online banking transactions with vendors.



**JERMEI ASHLEY PAIR '17** (Cinema and Television Arts) is an emerging filmmaker and teaching assistant at the New York Film Academy in Burbank. Pair's career has included an internship with Ghosthouse Pictures, Sam Raimi's production company, where he worked in the development department. His debut feature, "Meathook," is making the festival rounds, after screenings at prestigious events such as the Days of the Dead Film Festival, Tucson TerrorFest and the Chicago Horror Film Festival, where it received a nomination for "Best Feature Film." Pair is also in pre-production on an untitled horror-comedy feature film, which he plans to write, direct and produce. He's

also working as a screenwriter on the horror feature “Fear Asylum,” set to shoot later this year.

#### CHAYA SUPANNARAT '18

(Cinema and Television Arts), M.F.A. '21 (Screenwriting) returned to campus April 3 to serve on an alumni panel about early-career pathways in the entertainment industry, sponsored by CSUN's Entertainment Alumni Chapter and Entertainment Industry Institute. Supannarat is a director and producer known for her work in action, thriller and horror films. She has directed and produced several projects, including “Bangkok Dog” and “Gladiator Underground.” She is in development on the martial arts-driven film “The Last Match.” Supannarat is known for her atmospheric storytelling.



**BRIDGET FORNARO '19** (Journalism) is a talent acquisition coordinator at NBCUniversal in Los Angeles, supporting candidate experience for Peacock, ad sales, and operations and technology. She celebrated her three-year anniversary at NBCUniversal in February. In October 2024, NBCUniversal highlighted Fornaro in an employee social media spotlight for “National Disability Employment Awareness Month,” on LinkedIn and Instagram. Peacock also spotlighted her for the awareness month in 2023. During her time at NBCU, Fornaro has volunteered with the MyAbilities Network, an employee resource network, serving as professional development chair for the Los Angeles Chapter. She expects

to complete a Master of Arts in Communication Studies from the Hugh Downs School of Human Communication at Arizona State University in August.

#### 2020s



#### KAILA MOORE-JONES '22

(Africana Studies), donor and member services specialist in CSUN's Division of University Relations and Advancement, welcomed her son, Kenneth Gammage III, on Dec. 16, 2024.

#### JASON WHALEY '22

(Marketing) is a team member at the celebrated Villa's Tacos in Highland Park, founded by fellow Matador **Victor Villa '15** (Management). Prior to CSUN, Whaley was a pitcher on the Glendale Community College baseball team.

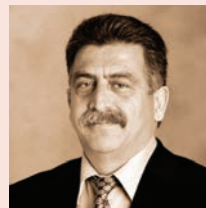
#### BRUNO GAMBOA '23

(M.A., Clinical Fieldwork – Psychology) is an AP Psychology teacher and assistant coach for the varsity girls volleyball team at Milken Community School in Los Angeles. He also serves as an assistant coach for the Surfside Volleyball Club.

**ERIKA AYÓN '24** (M.A., English) was selected as a finalist for the 2024 Alta California Chapbook Prize for her collection “Create Birds,” judged by Richard Blanco.

## In Memoriam

#### FACULTY & STAFF



#### BEHZAD BAVARIAN

(Manufacturing Systems Engineering and Management), former department chair, professor of materials engineering and director of CSUN's award-winning Materials Engineering Undergraduate Research Program, died in Nov. 2024.

The university honored Bavarian's teaching with numerous awards over the years, including the Distinguished Teaching Award, College of Engineering and Computer Science Outstanding Faculty Award, Don Dorsey Mentoring Award, and San Fernando Valley Engineers Council Distinguished Engineering Achievements.

In the college, Bavarian also held the Mory Ejabat Endowed Chair and served as director of the W.M. Keck Advanced Materials Laboratory and the Advanced Corrosion Laboratory.

He earned his doctorate in metallurgical engineering from The Ohio State University.



#### DAVID CRANDALL

(Associated Students/Student Affairs), former executive director of CSUN's Associated Students (AS), died on

Jan. 8, 2025. He was 71. Crandall retired as the AS executive director in 2019 after dedicating more than 18 years of service to Associated Students and Matador students.

“David dedicated his life to student development, shared governance and the power of education to transform communities,” AS leadership wrote in a tribute. “More than just a leader, David was a mentor, advisor and friend to generations of Matadors. ... Colleagues and students alike remember his warm demeanor, thoughtful approach to challenges and deep-rooted belief in the importance of student self-governance.”

A campus scholarship established in his name, the Associated Students David Harry Crandall Scholarship, supports AS student employees and leaders.



#### KARLA (JOHNSON-MAJEDI) PELLETIER

(Minority Engineering Program), who served as retention coordinator in the College of Engineering and Computer Science's groundbreaking Minority Engineering Program (MEP) for decades, died on Jan. 11, 2025. She was 65.

Pelletier began her career at CSUN as a retention coordinator for the MEP in 1994. In 1995, she became the director of the college's Student Development and Equity Center, where she worked diligently to help students

become engineers. She also earned a doctorate in education from Pepperdine University in 2002.

After retiring from CSUN, she embraced a lifestyle centered on health and creativity. She founded “Sweet Yard Tweets,” a business specializing in custom-designed lawn celebrations, bringing joy to countless occasions. Her passion for natural remedies led her to become an apothecary, launching a YouTube channel, “Karla’s Magikal Journey,” where she shared her expertise in crafting botanical creations such as tinctures, salves and herb gardens.

#### ALUMNI

##### VIRGINIA (DINGUS)

**RAMSEY ’65** (Elementary Education) passed away at the age of 89. After graduating from San Fernando Valley State College (now CSUN), she became a kindergarten teacher at El Oro Way Elementary School in Granada Hills. She later settled in Irvine. Ramsey loved to paint portraits, scenery and flowers.



##### FRANCINE OSCHIN ’84

(Journalism/Speech Communication), M.A. ’85 (Mass Communication), past president of the CSUN Alumni Association (2013-15), died on Sept. 20, 2024. She was 81. A former journalist, she also served as assistant chief deputy to Los Angeles City Councilman Hal Bernson. She served the city in that role for 13 years and led projects on

transportation, civic life and public safety.

Oschin (nee Strauss) was born in Brooklyn, New York, and spent her childhood living on both coasts, before her family settled in Los Angeles. She attended Fairfax High School, where she met her husband, Michael Oschin.

After battling and surviving breast cancer, she enrolled at CSUN, where she earned two bachelor’s degrees and a master’s, in quick succession. After graduation, she worked as a journalist and then at Los Angeles City Hall. In addition to civic life and transportation, she championed the environment, women’s rights and Jewish life across the city, state and country.

At CSUN, her unwavering commitment to the university community was evident in her various leadership roles. For more than a decade, she represented CSUN on the 23-campus, statewide CSU Alumni Council, where her voice and vision made a lasting impact. She frequently joined the university delegation in Sacramento, where she engaged with elected officials, urging them to support initiatives that strengthened higher education. She was a fervent believer in the power of public education.

“I got a public education. I owe it to somebody to make sure they get a public education,” Oschin said in 2017, when CSUN honored her with her second Volunteer Service Award (VSA).

Beyond her advocacy for academic excellence, Oschin had a deep appreciation for the arts. She served on The Soraya Ambassadors Advisory Council, where she championed cultural

enrichment on campus and in the community. She also supported student scholarships, reflecting her belief in empowering the next generation. The university recognized Oschin’s contributions through multiple honors, including the VSA in 2006 and again in 2017, and she was named CSUN’s Advocate of the Year in 2010.

In addition to her volunteer and philanthropic work, she built her own consulting firm, Oschin Partners, where she worked for more than 20 years with businesses and governments to develop and improve transportation solutions across California.

Oschin treasured traveling with family — especially in the great outdoors of California, Hawaii and abroad. She was a fervent downhill slalom skier, and she could be found flying down the slopes at Mammoth Mountain into her late 70s. She was a Sierra Club leader who hiked, backpacked, mule-packed and camped across the California mountains. She shared her enthusiasm for the outdoors with her grandchildren, who grew up discovering nature with her on numerous trips.

Whether it was making latkes and chicken soup for her family, climbing a glacier-topped peak or debating transportation policy in City Hall, she took on every challenge with dedication, love and ambition, her family said.

She is survived by her sister, Audrey, and brother-in-law, Brian; brother, Louis; son Daniel and daughter-in-law Faryl; daughter Karen and son-in-law Jeff; daughter Katherine and son-in-law Elliot; son-in-law Mike Goodman; and three

grandchildren, Zachary, Jacqueline and Halayna.



##### FUMI KITAHARA ’91

(Marketing), an animation publicist who guided award-winning campaigns for DreamWorks, Aardman, Laika, Netflix, Disney and independent studios during her distinguished 30-plus years in the industry, died Feb. 24, 2025. She was 56. Kitahara died in Los Angeles of complications from a rare blood cancer, a spokesperson for Walt Disney Animation said.

According to a tribute in The Hollywood Reporter, among the many animated features she helped publicize were the first three “Shrek” films, “Chicken Run,” “Wallace & Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit,” “Coraline,” “How to Train Your Dragon,” “Kubo and the Two Strings,” “Over the Moon” and “The Sea Beast.”

She also oversaw awards campaigns for numerous Oscar-winning shorts, including recent titles such as “The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse,” and “War Is Over! Inspired by the Music of John and Yoko.”

“We at Aardman are so very deeply shocked and saddened by the loss of our dear friend and colleague Fumi,” Nick Park, executive director at Aardman Studios, told The Hollywood Reporter. “It’s hard to put into words just how much she will be missed. Her years of unrelenting enthusiasm, invaluable support, and her eternally generous

spirit and friendship will always live on for us. A bright and very precious light has surely gone out in the animation world today.”

After graduating from CSUN, Kitahara started in the office of publicist Howard Green at The Walt Disney Studios in 1992. In 1996, she joined the fledgling DreamWorks SKG, where she started her own department and went on to serve as the company’s head of animation publicity for the next 11 years. From the first animated feature at DreamWorks, “The Prince of Egypt,” through her departure in 2007, she played a major role in marketing and publicizing its releases.

After DreamWorks, Kitahara opened a boutique firm, the PR Kitchen, in 2007. As a consultant, she contributed to publicity and awards campaigns for myriad Oscar-winning and -nominated films and shorts. Other career highlights included a four-year stint as entertainment publicist with Google Spotlight Stories, where she worked on strategy, launch and awards campaigns. Kitahara served as the PR chair for Women in Animation for more than 10 years and was a member of the public relations branch of the Film Academy.

She is survived by her husband, Simon Otto, a veteran director, head of character animation and animator; their son, Max; her mother, Teruko; her sister, Hiroko; and her brother, Keiichi.



## *April Showers*

**T**he San Fernando Valley saw plenty of rain this spring, a welcome pattern for a region that suffers periodically from drought. We love rainy days on campus: Umbrellas sport pops of color, students and faculty crowd into cozy coffee shops, and our lush canopy of trees benefit. Senior Photographer Ringo Chiu captured this Matador crossing the Sierra Quad on a recent, rainy spring day — she came prepared!

**SET**



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*On the cover:* CSUN alumna Akemi Hinzer '21 (Biochemistry) with the Europa Clipper spacecraft at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in La Cañada Flintridge. Read more about Hinzer's work as a planetary protection scientist on the spacecraft, now bound for one of Jupiter's moons, on page 14.

