

MAGAZINE

FALL/WINTER 2025

Where's the **PRIDE** OF THE **VALLEY?**

It's all around us.

A University Where Possibility Meets Intention



FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

Dear Friends,

This edition of Fresno State Magazine is a celebration of the Pride of the Valley — a reflection of the many ways our university uplifts lives, creates opportunity and fuels a brighter future. Within these pages, you will find inspiring stories that answer one of the most important questions of our time: What is the value of a university degree?

At Fresno State, the answer is clear!

Independent rankings confirm the extraordinary impact of our mission. Washington Monthly recently ranked Fresno State No. 2 in the nation in “Best Colleges for Your Tuition (and Tax) Dollars.” This recognition affirms what we already know — that a Fresno State degree delivers unmatched value, preparing our graduates to thrive while remaining accessible and affordable for Valley families.

We are equally proud of a new distinction from the Carnegie Foundation, which recognized Fresno State as one of just 479 Opportunity Colleges and Universities nationwide — only about 16% of U.S. universities have this distinction. This designation highlights two essential outcomes: that we are enrolling students who reflect the communities we serve, and that our graduates go on to earn more competitive wages compared to their peers in the region.

The College Futures Foundation’s 2024 report found that in 48 of 49 majors, Fresno State graduates recouped their education costs in less than two years — across fields from STEM and business to teacher education, criminology, communication and more — showing that return on investment is built into the Fresno State experience.

Together, these honors tell a powerful story: Fresno State is a university where possibility meets intention, where we are teaching what matters and where the Valley’s dreams reach far beyond our borders.

As you read the stories in this issue, I hope you will share in the pride that comes from Fresno State’s role in directly powering our Valley’s economy and elevating our communities. Indeed, our collective efforts — those of our students, faculty, staff, alumni and supporters — make it possible for Fresno State to be the Pride of the Valley.

Go ‘Dogs!

Saúl Jiménez-Sandoval, Ph.D.
President, Fresno State

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Cover: What makes Fresno State the Pride of the Valley? It's the things that are all around us, from the athletic teams that build the brand in front of a nationwide audience, to the alumni who inspire, to the educational opportunities that equip students with the ability to improve the socio-economic status of their families. There is no limit to what can be achieved with a Fresno State education, and the “Where’s Waldo” style illustration on the cover is a fun, interactive way to see several of the hundreds of things that make Fresno State the Pride of the Valley. (Illustration by Todd Graves)

FALL/WINTER 2025

Fresno State Magazine is published by the University Marketing and Communications team at California State University, Fresno. Every member of the team contributes to the success of this publication. The project leads are listed below, in alphabetical order.

Marketing and Communications Strategist
Victoria Cisneros Soto

University Photographer
Cary Edmondson

Senior Graphic Designer
Todd Graves

Senior Writer/Editor
Eddie Hughes

Director of Strategic Communications
Esra Hashem

Senior Director of University Marketing and Communications
Ashley Ilic

Associate Vice President for University Marketing and Communications
Lauren Nickerson

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Fresno State Magazine
5200 N. Barton Ave., UL49
Fresno, CA 93740-8023

Phone: 559.278.2795

For change of name or address contact:
advhelp@csufresno.edu or 559.278.4036.

today.fresnostate.edu/magazine

[@Fresno_State](https://www.instagram.com/Fresno_State)

Stay in touch!

We welcome your comments about Fresno State Magazine at magazine@csufresno.edu.

If you receive more than one copy, please pass it along to a friend of Fresno State.

If you would like to support the university, visit fresnostate.edu/givenow to make your contribution. Thank you!

A Capacity Crowd

Photo by Cary Edmondson

The football program known for playing anybody, anytime, anywhere now has something in common with the artist known for performing “Whenever, Wherever” – they’ve both sold out Valley Children’s Stadium.

Shakira closed out the North American leg of her international tour on Aug. 7 at Valley Children’s Stadium – and it was the first stadium concert ever at the Fresno State venue, showing the potential for a new revenue stream for the university. A crowd of 35,000-plus fans rocked out in triple-digit heat with the multi-GRAMMY award winner who was named Billboard’s greatest Latin female artist of all-time.

The concert attracted nearly 10,000 out-of-area visitors to the region, generating an estimated \$2.14 million in visitor spending. About 29% of those visitors traveled from more than 50 miles away.

“Valley Children’s Stadium has always been the heartbeat of our community on fall Saturdays, and this concert showed its potential to shine on an even larger stage,” said Garrett Klassy, Fresno State’s director of athletics. “The energy of 35,000 fans coming together, many from outside our region, created an economic impact that benefited not only Fresno State but our entire Valley. This is proof that our stadium can serve as a source of pride and opportunity year-round, and we look forward to exploring future events that will continue to elevate both our university and our community.”

– Eddie Hughes ('05)



35,000-plus crowd
10,000 out-of-area visitors
\$2.14M in visitor spending





Cary Edmondson

NEWS BRIEFS

No. 2 in the Rankings; No. 1 in Our Hearts

Fresno State was ranked the No. 2 university among all public and private schools nationwide in Washington Monthly's ranking of Best Colleges for your Tuition (and Tax) Dollars. The independent, D.C.-based magazine evaluates schools based on social mobility, affordability, research and public service, offering a measure of value beyond prestige and selectivity. The university is joined in the top 30 by five Ivy League institutions, Stanford and MIT. Fresno State is the only Mountain West university ranked in the top 30, as well as the only top-30 university slated for the revamped Pac-12 Conference, which Fresno State will join in July 2026.

The university also ranked No. 8 in the Best Hispanic-Serving Colleges ranking and No. 8 in the Best Bang for the Buck Rankings: West category, reflecting its commitment to affordability and outcomes. President Saúl Jiménez-Sandoval said the rankings highlight Fresno State's mission of access and excellence in educating leaders who elevate the Central Valley and beyond.

— BoNhia Lee

Online Now:

Fresno State's New Storytelling Hub

The university launched Fresno State Today, a centralized storytelling platform that brings together the university's news, Fresno State Magazine, multimedia stories and college-specific blogs. Debuting July 1, the site replaces fresnostatenews.com, which since 1999 has shared campus stories with alumni, students and the broader community.

The new hub offers a modern experience with larger photo displays, cinematic video and a consistent design — creating a more engaging way to showcase student success, faculty research and community impact. Visit today.fresnostate.edu to explore the latest magazine features, news releases, videos and other stories.

— Eddie Hughes ('05)



How AI is Being Integrated on Campus

When ChatGPT first launched in 2022, the Office of Innovation and Digital Excellence for Academic Success (IDEAS) at Fresno State knew it was time to figure out ways to leverage the use of AI in higher education.

AI, or artificial intelligence, is the ability of computer systems to problem solve, make decisions and understand language — things that typically require human intelligence.

“On a basic level, we understand that AI is not going away,” said Dr. Bryan Berrett, director of the Office of IDEAS. “Our ability to keep pace, to keep up, to keep informed — it’s going to be critical to support our faculty and students.”

To prepare, the Office of IDEAS started training faculty in spring 2023, then worked with the California State University Chancellor's Office on systemwide training with Fresno State instructional designers Jason McGensy and William Hardaway. Soon, the office offered AI for Professionals — training for staff and alumni across the CSU system.

In fall 2023, the Division of Academic Affairs led a campuswide AI Task Force to take a look at what was happening on campus already and to develop university guidelines to govern the ethical use of AI.

“These steps reflect our shared commitment to shaping AI practices that align with our mission and values. Alongside governance, we launched an AI platform that positions us for the future. With it, we now have the ability to create AI agents that support critical processes, drive student success, and elevate the student experience,” said Dr. Bao Johri, vice president of Technology Services and chief information officer.

The task force submitted a report with recommendations and actions, from developing guidelines and training initiatives to research and innovation support and strengthened partnerships. This work led to the creation of the President's AI Initiative to foster interdisciplinary collaboration and equip students and employees with cutting-edge tools and skills.

This past spring, the university held an AI Immersion Day to allow faculty and staff to explore AI tools and their impact on teaching, learning, research and operations. In July, Fresno State launched ChatGPT Edu for students.

In the CSU's first-ever Artificial Intelligence Educational Innovations Challenge, three faculty projects from Fresno State, out of 63 projects systemwide, received awards for their potential to enable transformative teaching methods, foster groundbreaking research and address key concerns about AI adoption within the academic environment.

— BoNhia Lee

Honoring the Legacies of Jan Richter and Dr. John C. Harris

Fresno State honors the legacy of two longtime supporters: Jan Richter and Dr. John C. Harris. Richter, a proud Fresno State alumna, and her late husband, Bud, established the Richter Center for Community Engagement and Service-Learning, ensuring service became a hallmark of the Bulldog experience. Together, they received numerous honors for their generosity, including the Fresno State Foundation Award for Service and the Fresno State Alumni Association's Arthur Safstrom Service Award. Their enduring legacy continues to inspire students, faculty and staff to give back to the community.



Jan Richter



Dr. John C. Harris

Dr. John C. Harris, owner of Harris Farms, was a visionary leader in California agriculture and a champion of thoroughbred racing. He led one of the West's most diversified agribusinesses and gave generously to education — supporting Fresno State's Jordan College of Agricultural Sciences and Technology, the Craig School of Business, the Kremen School of Education and Human Development, the Bulldog Foundation, the Library and the President's Circle of Excellence. In recognition of his extraordinary impact, he received a Fresno State honorary doctorate in 2019. His legacy continues to shape both California agriculture and the Bulldog community.

– Esra Hashem ('13, '16, '21)



- 1. Dr. Janet Loring models her "Sunday best" in the early 1960s.
- 2. Fresno State students perform with elaborate puppets in the 2025 Theatre for Young Audiences production of "Along Came a Dog."
- 3. Dr. Janet Loring holds a proclamation by the City of Fresno declaring March 5, 2016, "Dr. Janet Loring Day" in honor of her 90th birthday.
- 4. Dr. Janet Loring at the 50th anniversary party of the Good Company Players.

Sustaining a Stage for Young Audiences

In a full-circle moment, Dr. Janet Loring — founder of Fresno State's Theatre for Young Audiences — bequeathed over \$4.8 million through her trust to establish the "Dr. Janet Loring Chair in Theatre for Youth" endowment. The gift, the largest received in fiscal year 2025, will sustain the Theatre for Young Audiences and other educational theatre programs in perpetuity.

Loring, who joined the Fresno State faculty in 1957, created the touring children's theatre program in the early 1960s. For more than 60 years, student actors have performed for hundreds of thousands of children across the San Joaquin Valley, often introducing them to live theatre for the first time.

The endowment will support productions, supplies, travel and puppetry, while also funding digitization of Loring's literary works. Loring retired in 1995 after 38 years of service and remained active in mentoring her former students until her passing in 2024 at age 98.

– Benjamin Kirk ('22)

'Lead with Pride: The Campaign for Fresno State'

Fresno State officially launched the public phase of its boldest philanthropic campaign yet: "Lead with Pride – The Campaign for Fresno State." This people-powered movement aims to transform lives through education, discovery and community partnership — reflecting the pride, grit and boundless potential rooted in the Valley and resonating far beyond its borders.

With a focus on four key pillars — pathways of pride, moments that matter, knowledge in action and partners with purpose — the campaign calls on alumni, friends and supporters to help open doors, enrich journeys, advance research and strengthen regional impact. This is not just a campaign; it's a call to lead with pride and shape a brighter future for generations to come.

The momentum is already historic. In fiscal year 2024-25, Fresno State received a record 13 gifts of \$1 million or more, totaling \$38.85 million — the second-highest fundraising year in university history. Philanthropic partners fueled \$28.1 million in academic support and \$10.6 million for athletics, investing in initiatives from nursing and theater to football and plant pathology.

Major gifts include a \$4.8 million estate gift from former faculty member Dr. Janet Loring to support youth theater, and \$1 million commitments from the Leon S. Peters Foundation, Jami Hamel De La Cerda and the Diamond Learning Center, and the James G. Boswell Foundation.

"This was a defining year for Fresno State philanthropy," said Brady Crook, vice president for University Advancement. "With unprecedented generosity, our supporters have positioned us for lasting impact."

As the campaign surges forward, Fresno State is deepening connections with supporters and turning aspiration into action.

Join the movement at leadwithpride.fresnostate.edu.
– Lauren Nickerson ('10)



Lead with **PRIDE**

Construction Management 19L



Integrated Construction Lab

Department of Construction Management
Lyles College of Engineering

Professor: **Dr. Wei Wu**



Graduate Teaching Assistant: **Kiran Induri**

Course description:

In this course, students go beyond the classroom and into the lab, stepping onto the job site as part of a team and turning blueprints into tangible structures. Guided by experienced graduate teaching assistants, undergraduate students master safety protocols, manage complex budgets and operate a full range of equipment — from power saws to hand tools — all with the goal of building a completed wood structure that meets rigorous quality standards.

This applied learning approach builds more than just projects; it builds confidence.

"We want them actually to fail sometimes, and to know there are certain ways to do this project better in the future," said Dr. Wei Wu, construction management professor.

This philosophy ensures mistakes become lessons and challenges become opportunities. It's a key reason graduates are so well-prepared for careers as project managers, estimators or superintendents — and why they often receive multiple job offers with competitive starting salaries by the time they graduate.

— Victoria Cisneros Soto ('19, '21)



To see what it's like to be part of the Construction Management 19L "Integrated Construction Lab" course, scan the QR code or visit today.fresnostate.edu/magazine.



Magic on Maple Mall

Two 20-foot-tall animal sculptures celebrating vibrant traditions of Oaxaca and Central Mexico were installed on the Maple Mall at Fresno State. The statues were on display in fall 2025 as part of the "Alebrijes & Nahuales: Fantastic Animals from Mexico" exhibition.

The exhibition included eight large-scale, handmade fiberglass sculptures distributed across Fresno State, Arte Américas and Fresno City College. Each sculpture weighed about 1,200 pounds with bases weighing nearly 1,000 pounds. The sculptures were inspired by Mexican magical realism and were a celebration of Mexican artesanos who create brightly colored sculptures across Oaxaca and Central Mexico.

"These colorful and whimsical alebrijes symbolize spiritual guides, and all students from all walks of life can appreciate their beauty and artistry," said Fresno State President Saúl Jiménez-Sandoval.

— BoNhia Lee



Transforming a Medical Challenge Into Motivation

Born with a congenital heart defect, Fresno State student Danielle Vu (*right*) transformed her medical challenges into motivation to improve health care policy. A Smittcamp Family Honors College scholar majoring in sociology, Vu has earned a 4.0 GPA while completing her honors thesis on discrimination in health care and presenting research at statewide conferences. She is active in the College of Social Sciences Honors Program, McNair Scholars and as a peer mentor.

Vu also supports children of cancer patients through Camp Kesem, calling the experience a reminder that “positive relationships can be the most important and impactful resource of all.” Her academic journey has included research fellowships at UC Davis and Columbia University, and she was selected for the UC Summer Institute of Emerging Managers and Leaders.

This year, Vu received the 2025 CSU Trustees’ Award for Outstanding Achievement. She plans to pursue a Ph.D. in sociology and become a professor and researcher, advocating for equitable health care for underserved communities.

– Marisa Mata (’19)



New Softball Coach Leads with Heart

Fresno State introduced Charlotte Morgan as its new softball coach in June, making her the sixth coach in the program’s proud history.

Morgan comes to Fresno State after serving as head coach at CSUN the past four years, including a 28-win season in 2023. Morgan previously served in assistant roles at Maryland, Georgia Tech, Oklahoma State and UT-Arlington.

A Moreno Valley native, Morgan was a three-time All-American and two-time SEC Player of the Year at Alabama. In 2010, she was the No. 1 overall selection by the USSSA Pride in the NPF Senior Draft.

She will now lead a Fresno State program that boasts 11 Women’s College World Series appearances, including the 1998 national championship and three runner-up finishes.

“I took this [job] to continue the tradition, the legacy,” Morgan said in her introductory press conference. “We will break attendance records, we will get back to being that powerhouse that people don’t want to play. We are not rebuilding this year, we’re redefining who we are.”

Fresno State Magazine sat down for an exclusive Q&A with Morgan leading up to the spring season. For insight into her vision and plan for the program, visit today.fresnostate.edu/magazine, or scan the QR code.

– Eddie Hughes (’05)



► **Fresno State softball coach Charlotte Morgan.**

Cary Edmondson



New Degree Options

Fresno State expanded its academic offerings this fall with five new majors and four new minors. Students can now major in Asian American studies, architectural studies, health administration, environmental and occupational health and safety, and wine business, with new minors in accounting, aerospace engineering, leadership for public purpose and religious studies.



Record Community Service

Students, faculty and staff contributed more than 1.6 million hours of community service during the 2024-25 academic year — the most ever recorded. The university has topped 1 million hours annually for 16 years. The Jan and Bud Richter Center for Community Engagement and Service-Learning estimates the service’s economic impact at nearly \$66.5 million.



Best Business School

The Princeton Review listed the Craig School of Business on-campus MBA program in its Best Business Schools of 2025 report. This marks the fifth time the Craig School MBA has earned a spot on the Best Business Schools list.



Murals Amplify Migrant Stories

Alumna Dr. Lizbeth De La Cruz Santana led the U.S. Childhood Arrivals Mural Project, unveiling murals in Fresno and Brooklyn that depict nearly two dozen undocumented youth. The community-driven art uses portraits and QR codes to amplify migrant stories through digital storytelling.



The Pawd

Fresno State Athletics launched The Pawd, its official podcast, to expand storytelling and fan engagement. The show delivers interviews, behind-the-scenes access and original content that highlight the heart, grit and pride of the Bulldogs, giving fans more ways to connect with their teams.



Engineering Student Center

The Lyles College of Engineering opened a new 2,000-square-foot student center in the Engineering East building this past fall. Featuring Fresno State-branded wall illustrations, the center offers space to study, collaborate and recharge. It includes an open work area, office and conference room.



Where's the PRIDE OF THE VALLEY?

From the mountains to the Red Wave,
the pride of Fresno State is all around us.

20 REASONS Fresno State is the Pride of the Valley

By Eddie Hughes ('05)
Illustrations by Todd Graves ('03)

Fresno State is the Pride of the Valley – it has been for generations. This is a healthy pride – the type associated with self-esteem wins, not the seven deadly sins. For a region like the Central Valley, oft-overlooked in California, pride fuels purpose, rallies passion and unifies the people like nothing else can.

This pride gives the hardworking people of the Central Valley something to hang their sweaty, weathered caps on. It breeds commonality among the millions of people in one of the most diverse regions in the country.

The Bay Area has its tech, Southern California its movies and San Diego its beaches. But none of them can rival the passion and us-against-the-world mentality that Fresno State and its athletic teams generate for the people in Fresno and surrounding communities. As a 2013 Los Angeles Times headline read: "Fresno State's football team is ... perhaps unmatched for fan pride among college teams in California."

So what makes Fresno State so special to this region? Perhaps it's that Fresno State defines the region's identity. Perhaps Fresno State gives the region an invitation to measure itself against the best and brightest. Perhaps it's the personal connections, traditions and relationships built over decades and throughout generations that have allowed us all to see that a Fresno State education has no limits.

The reality is there are hundreds of things that make Fresno State the Pride of the Valley – and for each of us that list of things may be a little different. But next time you're near a water cooler, on an elevator or defending your school against naysayers, here's a list of 20 reasons Fresno State is the Pride of the Valley.

Green V

The Green V featured on the back of Fresno State's football helmets and on the collar of the official four-paw logo symbolizes the pride Fresno State takes in representing the Central Valley. The V is green in recognition of the Valley being the leading agricultural region in the United States, and it has a Bulldog Red line through the middle, symbolizing Fresno State's place in the center of the Valley.

The Central Valley stretches 450 miles through the heart of California, bordered by the Sierra Nevadas to the east and the Coast Ranges to the west. It is divided by the San Joaquin Valley in the south and the Sacramento Valley in the north, with Fresno State boasting the only major college football program between Sacramento and Los Angeles – an area roughly the size of the entire state of West Virginia, with a population similar to the state of Indiana.



Pride and Tradition (and Tailgating)

There is perhaps nothing else in the Valley that unites people quite like Fresno State athletics. Fresno State football is the only event in the region that can attract more than 40,000 people from all backgrounds six times per year and rally them behind one common cause – regardless of race, religion or socio-economic status. It only takes one visit to a Fresno State tailgate – known as the biggest party in the Valley – to see, hear, feel and taste the passion for the local university.

Such is the power of Fresno State athletics. As the porchlight of the university, Bulldogs sporting events are oftentimes the first touchpoint connecting Central Valley youth to Fresno State. It's a way to engage people of all ages and make them feel like they're part of the university. There is potential that every fan who grows up rooting for the Bulldogs and wearing the gear will also explore the university's academic offerings for themselves or their loved ones.

Quotable:

"When you look at sports loyalty, Fresno State is the single commonality that goes all the way from Modesto to Bakersfield and it might make inroads in Sacramento. You tell me what else other than Fresno State athletics unites the Valley like that."

– **Tony D'addato**, longtime Valley broadcaster



Campus Farm (Winery, Corn)

The Gibson Farm Market on campus is well known for its student-produced goods, but when it comes to pride points, there are two headliners. In 1997, Fresno State became the first American university to operate a commercially bonded, on-campus winery. The award-winning Fresno State Wine has only grown in reach since, with more than 600 awards and over 20 varieties of wine.

Additionally, each summer community members flock to the Gibson Farm Market, lining up in the hundreds for that first taste of the seasonal Fresno State sweet corn, which was first planted on campus in 1981.

The university houses a 1,000-acre campus farm – the University Agricultural Laboratory – which contains 18 enterprises, including a vineyard, vegetable crops and beef, sheep and swine units, among others. Students operate the units, growing products that are sold at the university's Gibson Farm Market, the Fresno State Creamery and the Fresno State Winery.

Social Mobility

One of the reasons Fresno State is consistently ranked among the top universities nationwide is because it is a driver of social mobility. Social mobility is defined as how well universities provide a college education at an affordable price, creating opportunities for students to move from one socioeconomic class to another.

Fresno State came in at No. 4 in the nation for social mobility in The Wall Street Journal/College Pulse 2024 Best Colleges in the U.S. rankings. The ranking focuses on the importance of student outcomes such as graduation rates and graduate salaries to help students and their families identify which colleges will do the most to help them graduate and make more money.

The university ranked No. 16 out of 1,205 schools in the 2024 Social Mobility Index published by CollegeNet, a provider of web-based on-demand technologies for higher education. Tuition, economic background, graduation rate, early career salary and the size of a school's endowment are used to determine the rankings. The index also measures how a school's messaging and communications teach faculty, students and the public about the institution's attention to advancing social mobility.

Fresno State also ranked No. 31 for social mobility in U.S. News and World Report's 2025 Best Colleges rankings.



Rising Atop the Rankings

As an overall university, Fresno State reached its highest ranking of all-time in this year's Washington Monthly ranking of Best Colleges for your Tuition (and Tax) Dollars. Fresno State ranked as the No. 2 university among all public and private schools nationwide – ahead of Stanford, MIT and five Ivy League schools.

The Washington D.C.-based independent media organization has been ranking colleges since 2005, focusing on how well universities serve the public good through social mobility, research and public service. Fresno State is the only Mountain West university ranked in the top 30, as well as the only top-30 university slated for the revamped Pac-12 Conference, which Fresno State will join in July 2026.

In addition to Washington Monthly, Fresno State has been regularly recognized by The Wall Street Journal, U.S. News & World Report, Money and other publications for its strong performance in social mobility, affordability and outcomes.

Quotable:

"I am overjoyed that our talented students get a world-class, comprehensive education at an affordable price. This ranking reaffirms our commitment to access and excellence. We educate tomorrow's leaders who will elevate the quality of life in the Valley, the region and the world."

– **Dr. Saúl Jiménez-Sandoval**, Fresno State president



First-Generation Students

While Fresno State celebrates the many second- and third-generation students on campus, there has long been a trend of first-generation college students in the region. At Fresno State today, 64% of students are the first in their immediate families to graduate from university.

Let that sink in – about two-thirds of Fresno State's 24,000 students (or about 15,000 students) are first-generation. That's more than the total enrollment at 11 of the 22 California State University campuses.

Fresno State provides resources and support for first-generation students through programs like Bulldog Bound, a guaranteed admissions program for qualified applicants in local school districts, and the LaunchPad: Bulldog Bound Freshman Success Camp for incoming students who meet one-on-one with financial aid and academic counselors to create personalized course plans and financial success plans.

Quotable:

"For many first-generation students, Fresno State represents the most accessible path to earning a four-year degree. That's why it is essential to expand opportunities through initiatives like Bulldog Bound, while also providing strong foundations for success through comprehensive onboarding experiences such as LaunchPad. Together, these efforts ensure students gain the knowledge, confidence and skills they need to achieve their academic and career goals."

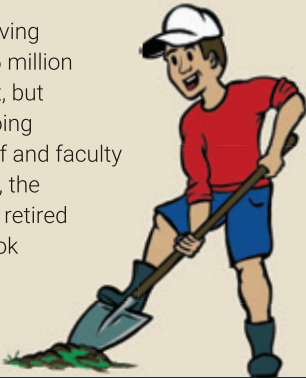
– **Phong Yang**, vice president,
Division of Student Affairs
and Enrollment Management

Community Service Hours

A new record, Fresno State students, faculty and staff contributed more than 1.6 million hours of service in 2024-25 – continuing a 16-year tradition of exceeding the 1 million mark.

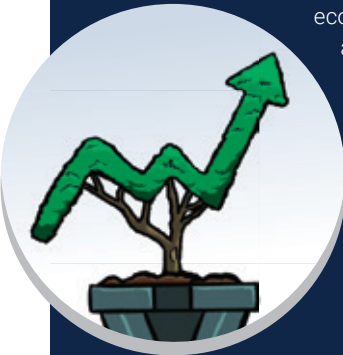
That impact is valued at nearly \$66.5 million, according to the Jan and Bud Richter Center for Community Engagement and Service-Learning. The services range from tutoring and blood drives to physical therapy projects, internships and community revitalization.

"Fresno State has been dedicated to serving our community for decades. Surpassing 1.6 million hours last year is an incredible achievement, but it is simply the most recent step in our ongoing commitment to engaging our students, staff and faculty in meaningful service," said Chris Fiorentino, the longtime director of the Richter Center, who retired in August after 32 years on campus. "We look forward to continuing this commitment."



Economic Impact

Fresno State is a powerful engine of prosperity for the San Joaquin Valley, generating close to \$1 billion dollars of annual economic activity, according to an economic impact report produced by the Craig School of Business.



Among the key findings in the report – economic activity by Fresno State and its auxiliaries generates an annual average of \$954 million in business sales and \$391 million in worker income, while supporting nearly 11,000 jobs. University-related activities generate over \$49 million in annual tax revenue for the State of California and the San Joaquin Valley counties of Fresno, Madera, Kings and Tulare.

The report, conducted by Dr. Antonio Avalos, chair of the Economics Department, also found that Fresno State is a profitable investment for California taxpayers – the annual rate of return on state support for the university equals 6.23%.

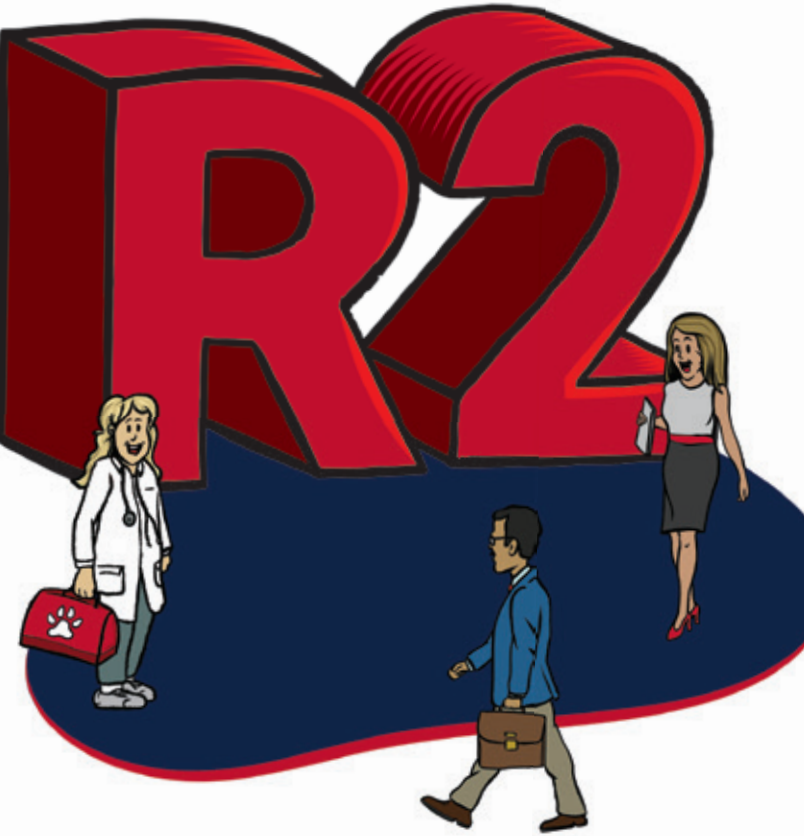
The report measured not just immediate economic impact, but also the ripple effects caused by Fresno State's economic activity. When the university pays salaries to its employees, these employees spend their earnings at local businesses, adding to the Valley's business earnings and supporting more local jobs, and workers from these local businesses in turn create more economic activity.

Educating the Workforce

Fresno State has long been the Valley's top producer of talent across critical industries. Founded as a teacher's college in 1911, the university now graduates more than 400 new teachers each year, and about 60% of school administrators in the region are Bulldogs – shaping the classrooms and futures of Valley youth.

In engineering, Fresno State graduates contribute to some of the state's largest projects, from California High-Speed Rail to agricultural technologies and local infrastructure. Many choose to remain in the Valley, where their skills strengthen the regional economy and serve the communities they call home. Perhaps most eye-opening, the annual average salary for engineers in Fresno County is over \$100,000.

In all industries, these graduates represent the backbone of the Valley's workforce and the university's lasting commitment to education and innovation. It is estimated that about 84% of Fresno State graduates stay and work in the Valley, contributing to communities up and down the region.



R2 Research Designation and Doctoral Programs

Who says a state school can't be a research institution? Not only is research a high-impact practice at Fresno State, but the university also offers undergraduate students the type of research experience they may not have access to elsewhere.

Fresno State first earned its R2 research designation from Carnegie Classifications in 2022, and it was renewed in 2025. An institution is designated R2 status if it awarded at least 20 research doctorates and had at least \$5 million in total research expenditures during the classification update year. Only eight of the 23 universities in the California State University system share this designation. Fresno State awarded 25 research doctoral degrees and spent \$11.4 million on research expenditures in the 2022-23 academic year.

Since becoming the first California State University campus to offer independent doctoral degrees in 2007, Fresno State continues to reach new milestones. Originally, only the University of California schools were able to confer doctorates. But in 2005, the California Legislature approved independent doctoral programs at CSU campuses. In 2007, Fresno State began offering the Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership (Ed.D.), and in 2008 added the Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) program. The Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) began in 2013.

Notable Alumni

From entrepreneurs and innovators, to authors and artists, to judges and politicians, there are countless examples of alumni who prove there is no limit to what Bulldogs can achieve. Alumna Malinda Chouinard and her husband, Yvon, co-founded the popular outdoor clothing brand Patagonia, and were well known for their tireless advocacy in environmental sustainability.

Alumna Rae Dunn earned a bachelor's degree in industrial design from Fresno State and worked in graphics and fashion design before creating one of the most recognizable clay pottery brands in the world, featuring her simple, enchanting font that has become the trademark of her designs.

Known as one of the top thriller and spy novelists of his time, author Daniel Silva is a Fresno State alumnus who has authored nearly three dozen books that were New York Times bestsellers. Known for titles like his debut novel, "The Unlikely Spy" in 1997, and "The Kill Artist," Silva got his start in journalism before pursuing his passion as a novelist.



And did you know a Fresno State alumnus is responsible for developing Bluetooth technology? James Kardach, a graduate of the Lyles College of Engineering was a senior principal engineer at Intel and developed the hands-free communications technology.

These are just a few of the thousands of alumni who have gone on to tremendous accomplishments and who have gained notoriety worldwide.

Think there's an alum we ought to feature in the future? **Let us know!**

magazine@csufresno.edu



Bulldogs in Hollywood

How many Bulldogs have you spotted in show biz? Alumna Emily Kuroda is well known for playing Mrs. Kim in "Gilmore Girls" and a host of other movies and shows. Dot-Marie Jones was a record-setting track and field athlete in the shot put at Fresno State before going on to play Coach Beiste in TV musical "Glee," and has appeared in many other titles.

Alumnus Robert Beltran is best known for playing Commander Chakotay in the 1990s TV series "Star Trek-Voyager." And Brandon Molale, the former Fresno State football standout, has several memorable roles including the character of Blazer in "Dodgeball," quarterback Kevin Ward in "Mr. Deeds" and Guard Malloy in "The Longest Yard" with Adam Sandler.

Perhaps the best kept secret about Bulldogs in Hollywood is the story of alumnus Ross Bagdasarian Sr., the singer and songwriter who created "Alvin and the Chipmunks" and voiced the Alvin, Simon and Theodore characters. Working under his stage name, David Seville, Bagdasarian sped up tapes to modify the pitch and sound and recorded and produced music as "The Chipmunks" from the 1950s until his death in 1972. His son, Ross Bagdasarian Jr., took over "The Chipmunks" after working with his father as a producer and recording engineer. He helped evolve the franchise with a popular cartoon in the 1980s. The franchise has continued to thrive with numerous modern-day movies.

A number of other alumni have gone on to successful careers behind the scenes, including Lou Pecora, an Academy Award nominee for his work on "X-Men" and "Transformers"; Brad Lewis, who produced "Antz" and "Ratatouille"; and the late Roy Christopher, an Emmy-winning TV set designer whose work included "The Richard Pryor Show," "Frasier," "Growing Pains" and "Murphy Brown." Dr. Diana Meehan was a founding partner of VU Productions at Paramount Studios, the nonfiction arm of UBU Productions dedicated to creating documentary and reality-based programming for television on social issues regarding women, children and families.

These are just an example of the many Bulldogs with impressive Hollywood credentials. Look for more in future issues of Fresno State Magazine.



Superstar Athlete Alumni

In recent years, Fresno State has touted its superstar alumni in each of the three major professional sports leagues – home run king Aaron Judge in Major League Baseball, perhaps the NFL's best wide receiver in Davante Adams and perennial NBA all-star and Olympian Paul George. Not to mention the Los Angeles Angels' Taylor Ward having a career year with over 30 home runs and 100-plus RBI, and the recently retired Derek Carr ranking 22nd all-time in NFL passing yards with 41,245. And that's just the current pros.

Past alumni include Super Bowl champion quarterback Trent Dilfer, former No. 1 overall draft pick David Carr and potential Hall of Famers in wide receiver Henry Ellard, fullback Lorenzo Neal and offensive lineman Logan Mankins.

In baseball, the Bulldogs also tout former National League MVP Terry Pendleton and former all-stars like pitcher Bobby Jones.

National Championships

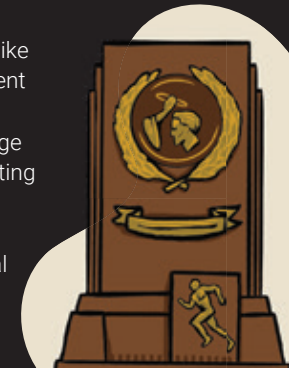
If there has ever been any doubt about Fresno State's ability to compete at the highest level nationally, the Bulldogs have proven naysayers wrong time and again – with numerous conference titles, individual titles and even national championships.

On June 12-13, 1964, at Ratcliffe Stadium, coach Dutch Warmerdam led Fresno State to its first team national championship in any sport. Competing in the College Division prior to Fresno State's Division I days, the team finished ahead of Long Beach State, Cal Poly, College of the Redlands, North Carolina and Ohio State.

In 1968, the men's tennis team won the Division II national championship under coach Richard Murray with a win over Cal State Los Angeles in Fort Worth, Texas.

Fresno State softball captured the university's first Division I team title in 1998 with a 1-0 victory over Arizona to win the Women's College World Series in Oklahoma City. Coach Margie Wright had previously led the Bulldogs to three national runner-up finishes and 11 WCWS appearances.

Ten years later, under coach Mike Batesole, Fresno State baseball went from "Underdogs to Wonderdogs" on its way to the 2008 Men's College World Series championship, defeating Georgia 6-1 in Game 3 of the final series. The win marked Fresno State's first Division I team national championship in a men's sport.



On the links, alumnus Nick Watney ranks 57th all-time on the PGA Tour in career earnings with Kevin Sutherland also in the top 150. And the list could go on.

In the Olympics, Fresno State has been represented 37 times by 26 different athletes and one coach, earning 14 gold medals. Gold medal winners include Laura Berg, who is the most decorated U.S. softball Olympian all-time, and fellow softball athletes Kim Maher, Martha Noffsinger-O'Kelley, Julie Smith, Shelly Stokes, Amanda Scott, Lovie Jung and coach Margie Wright. Baseball alumni have been represented by John Hoover, Tom Goodwin and Jeff Weaver; volleyball by Ruth Lawanson; wrestling by Stephen Abas; and men's basketball by Paul George.



Pac-12 Conference

In a landmark move that signals a new chapter for Fresno State, the university is set to join the Pac-12 Conference in July 2026. After decades of success – from the Pacific Coast Athletic Association to the Big West, Western Athletic Conference and Mountain West – Fresno State continues to elevate its athletic program nationally.

In the new Pac-12, the Bulldogs will compete with longtime members Oregon State and Washington State, as well as new additions Boise State, Colorado State, San Diego State, Texas State and Utah State. Men's basketball power Gonzaga will join as a non-football member, and Dallas Baptist will join as a baseball-only member with a history of success on the diamond.

Quotable:

"Going to an iconic conference like the Pac-12, that has been around for over 100 years, immediately enhances the brand of not just our athletic department but our entire university. Yes, athletics is going to benefit immensely from playing against elite competition week in and week out, but I also believe academics is going to benefit through more opportunities like the potential for increased enrollment and new grant opportunities. Being able to partner with this group of schools is going to help the whole university succeed."

– **Garrett Klassy**, Fresno State director of athletics



World-Class Facilities and Entertainment On Campus

Whether it's the exhilarating drama of live Fresno State sporting events, or the star power of big-name concerts and acts, the Fresno State campus hosts an array of entertainment events that infuse energy into student life on campus and create a vibe throughout the surrounding Central Valley.

In August, the first-ever concert was held at Valley Children's Stadium (the largest sports venue between Los Angeles and the Bay Area), when Shakira drew 36,000 fans. On the opposite side

of the Fresno State grounds, the largest on-campus arena on the West coast, the Save Mart Center regularly hosts major acts in addition to men's and women's basketball and volleyball games. The arena's concert resume includes Garth Brooks, Elton John, Britney Spears, Jay-Z, Metallica and many more.

On the athletics side, the Bulldogs have a softball stadium that has hosted several of the largest regular season crowds in NCAA softball history, including 5,724 fans in 2000 when Fresno State hosted Arizona. Across Cedar Avenue, Pete Beiden Field and Bob Bennett Stadium is one of the largest college baseball venues in the West.

Proximity to National Parks

Fresno is the nation's largest city within an hour-and-a-half drive of three national parks – Yosemite, Kings Canyon and Sequoia. Because of that, Fresno State students enjoy an unparalleled backyard, with not only easy access for recreational hiking, rockclimbing, skiing and other outdoor activities, but also unique opportunities to take courses that offer hands-on experiences in some of the most scenic landscapes in the nation – from Yosemite Falls and Half Dome in Yosemite, to the General Grant Tree in Kings Canyon, to the General Sherman Tree and Crystal Cave in Sequoia.

For 20 years, professor Betsy Hays' MCJ 157 "Public Relations and Advertising Agency" course has partnered with Yosemite National Park to give students experience on creating real-world campaigns. With Yosemite as their client, students are currently working on a campaign to educate visitors on the importance of reintroducing wildlife such as frogs, sheep and turtles to the park.

Fresno State's Bio 167 "High Altitude Biology" incorporates Kings Canyon National Park into its curriculum, taking students on a field trip in which they complete a full-backpack hike to Mist Falls on the Paradise Valley Trail, starting at Cedar Grove. The class explores the biology of plants and animals that thrive at high elevations and often introduces students to long hikes with backpacks for the first time.

More than 10 courses on campus utilize the national parks, also including the Department of Recreation Administration and the Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences.

Did you know?

Fresno is the largest city in the U.S. within a 1.5-hour drive of three national parks.



Coming soon:

Look for an in-depth feature in an upcoming issue of Fresno State Magazine about the unique experiences available for Fresno State students at Yosemite, Kings Canyon and Sequoia national parks.

Vintage Days

A beloved tradition since 1975, Vintage Days has evolved for more than 50 years and continues to welcome the surrounding community to campus in fun (sometimes quirky) ways. This past year, the spring festival attracted about 50,000 people to campus to enjoy street fair vendors, games, music, food and, of course, the beer and wine garden.

In the early days, musicians like Papa Doo Run Run and Tom Petty performed at Vintage Days, which grew to feature traditions like the air guitar competition, a street dance, tricycle races, inner tube water polo, cow chip tosses, frog jumping, a massive tarp slip-n-slide, casino nights and root beer chugging. The early years also featured a ceremonial parade where students from different clubs and organizations made shirts showing off silly team names (such as the "V.D. Crabs") and were judged for creativity.

Quotable:

"Our campus sometimes gets segmented by your college, school or major. When you go to Vintage Days, it's more about student life. Those walls or categories disappear, and we're all Fresno State Bulldogs for a weekend. Vintage Days is a place to embrace the student body outside of the classroom. Those are the memories – beyond dissecting a frog."

– **Peter Robertson**, director of development, Fresno State Alumni Association



TimeOut and Victor E.

Legend has it that in 1921 student body President Warren Moody and friends were continually greeted on campus by a white bulldog. Soon, students were bringing the nameless pooch to football games, and Arids Walker made the motion to adopt the nickname in a student body meeting. On Nov. 21, the Morning Republican first referred to Fresno State as the Bulldogs. Today, the university is represented by iconic costumed mascot TimeOut and live mascot Victor E. Bulldog IV.

In 1981, student Gary Johns designed the familiar gray and white TimeOut costume, and though it has evolved over the decades, TimeOut remains a beloved fixture at sporting events and in the community.

Several live mascots have represented the Bulldogs through the years, with Victor E. Bulldog being introduced in 2006. The university is now in its Victor E. Bulldog IV era, with Victor E. III enjoying retirement. The beloved mascots bring joy to children and adults alike, posing for photos and engaging the fan base on gamedays and at community events.

– *Eddie Hughes is the senior writer/editor for Fresno State.*

Bulldog Marching Band

The Bulldog Marching Band represents Fresno State as the largest and winningest college marching band of its kind, having been recognized by the College Band Directors National Association as one of the country's top eight college marching bands.

The Bulldog Marching Band is the largest student organization on campus, and its members come from every major at Fresno State. The band started in 1926 and grew to more than 200 members in the mid-1980s. Today, the "Best Band in the West" has its largest membership with about 270 members.

The Bulldog Marching Band performed at the 2023 St. Patrick's Day Parade in Dublin, Ireland and has performed in the Rose Parade in Pasadena two of the past three years.

Quotable:

"The Tournament of Roses Parade is the pinnacle of honor for a college marching band, and I am immensely proud of what our student-musicians have achieved."



– **Steve McKeithen**, director, Bulldog Marching Band



contrast to the popular belief that the midpoint lies “where the palm meets the pine” — two trees planted in the median of Highway 99 near Avenue 11 in Madera.

The palm, symbolizing Southern California, and the pine, symbolizing Northern California, have long been seen as markers of the state’s north-south transition. Yet, their exact origin remains uncertain, with no definitive historical record of when or why they were planted — though they are thought to be at least a century old.

“I give extra credit to students in my classes to go visit where the palm meets the pine, or North Fork — for them to see the center of California,” Peterson said. “Even if it may be mathematically not perfect, who cares? It’s a pretty cool thing we have right there. And to be honest with you, when you look at a map yourself and try to find the center of California, it’s pretty close.”

Public concern arose when residents believed the trees might be removed to accommodate freeway expansion. But the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) reassured the community: the landmark palms and pines will not be lost. Instead, they will be relocated nearby, with 15 new palms and 15 new pines planted to honor the site next year.

Peterson, a Valley transplant who has been in Fresno for 11 years, is glad the symbolic mark is being preserved.

“I’d describe the Valley’s land as precious — so valuable. People have

Pines, palms and pride

Domenick Satterberg

What is the Valley?

By Esra Hashem (’13, ’16, ’21)

At the northern edge of the Fresno State campus, the view extends across the rich agricultural soil of the 1,000-acre university farm and out toward the snow-dusted peaks of the Sierra Nevada mountains. To the left, a cluster of buildings is framed by the Bulldog water tower; to the right, a diverse mix of students move about. In the warm heat of summer, the scene appears sharp and bright, while in the colder months, it may be obscured by a dense tule fog.

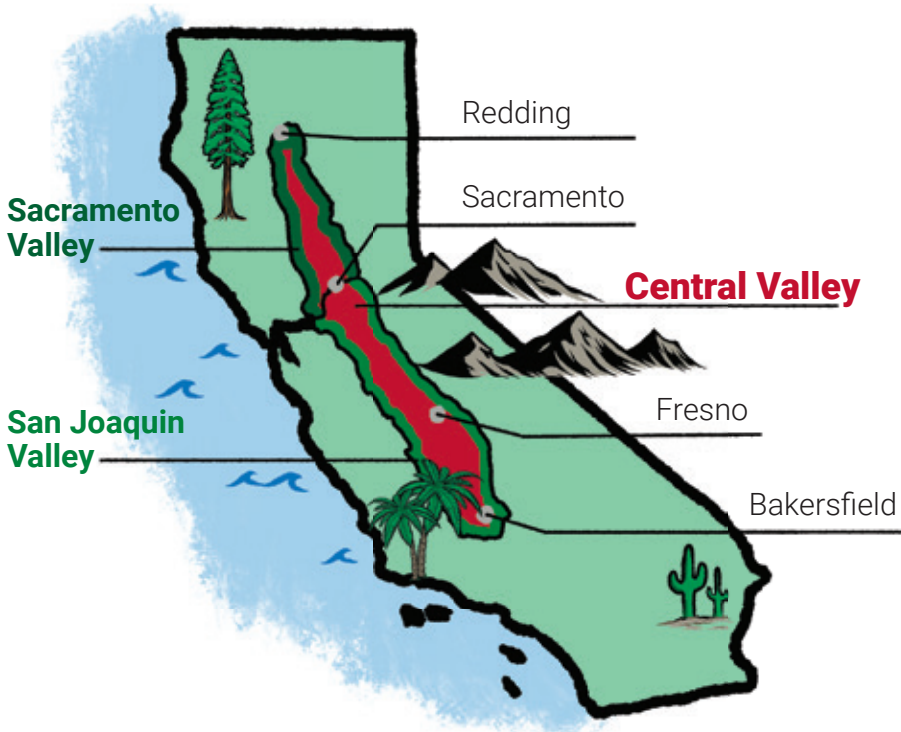
This is the Central Valley — one of the most fertile, complex and misunderstood regions in the country — and Fresno State sits squarely at its heart.

‘Where the palm meets the pine’

Geographically, the Central Valley stretches 450 miles from Redding to Bakersfield, hemmed in by the Coast Ranges to the west and the Sierra Nevada to the east. It is divided into two large parts — the northern one-third is known as the Sacramento Valley and the southern two-thirds is known as the San Joaquin Valley. Within the San Joaquin Valley, Fresno is the largest city, a crossroads where northern and southern California influences mingle.

Dr. Scott Peterson is an assistant professor in geomatics engineering at Fresno State. He said the geographic center of California is often considered to be located in North Fork, east of Highway 99 in Madera County. This stands in

▲ *The Fresno State campus serves as the heart of the greater Central Valley and boasts the only major college football program between Sacramento and Los Angeles — an area roughly the size of West Virginia.*



farmed it, provided for their families, provided for other people's families. It becomes such an integral part of life that you protect it, almost like a member of your family," he said. "When I drive on the 99, and I pass the palm and the pine, and I see rows of crops, I see beauty."

Fuel for the world

The Valley is known as the agricultural capital of the world. Almond orchards bloom in early spring, sweet corn peaks in freshness by June, and grapes hang heavy in late summer and fall.

"The scale of the production is remarkable," said Dr. Sharon Benes, an agriculture professor in the Department of Plant Science at Fresno State. "Our mild, mediterranean climate provides a very long growing season with almost continuous sunshine from the late spring to early fall. And ironically, the lack of rainfall in the summer makes it easy for farmers to control soil moisture through irrigation, which they can manage according to the most suitable times for the crop."

Though it represents less than 1% of the nation's farmland, the Central Valley produces more than a quarter of the country's food supply. Nearly 40% of America's fruits and nuts are grown here, along with over 250 crops each year — making the Valley the most vital and productive agricultural region in the world. It's no wonder Fresno State Athletics proudly features the Green V, honoring the Valley's rich agricultural heritage and the hardworking communities that help feed the nation.

"When I think of agriculture's effect on the culture, I think of the resilience of the people," she said. "Not everyone here is involved in agriculture, but there is a sense of land stewardship, of people wanting to do a good job, of resilience."

Pride rooted in its people

Dr. Matthew Jendian, professor of sociology at Fresno State, agreed. "There is a sense of resilience, hard work and grit in the Valley, because of the economic challenges people have faced, and how they have overcome," he said. Known as one of the most diverse places in the country, immigration patterns show a long history of movement into the region — from Indigenous communities



► A Fresno State student studies crops at the University Farm, reflecting the Valley's deep agricultural roots.

Cary Edmondson

whose roots stretch back thousands of years, to Dust Bowl migrants in the 1930s, to farmworkers and families from Mexico and later refugees from Southeast Asia. Armenian and Greek survivors of genocide, Sikh and Punjabi immigrants from India, and more recent arrivals from the Middle East have also made the Valley home, each bringing their cultures, traditions and faiths.

Over 100 languages are spoken within Fresno schools, a testament to the linguistic diversity within the region.

"Where else can you go in the world and hear a hundred different languages, or taste food from every corner of the globe?" Jendian asked. "In Fresno and the Valley, diversity touches all the senses — we can see it, hear it, smell it, taste it and even join in. That richness is something we need to celebrate."

Jendian emphasized the Valley is not a "melting pot," where differences are erased, but a place of pluralism where

communities adapt to American life while also retaining their languages, religions and traditions.

"We don't have to give up who we are to become American," he said. "We can add to our cultural capital while embracing our American identity."

While the Valley is not without its challenges — poverty, inequality and questions of regional self-esteem — Jendian said it is also a region defined by love, wisdom and perseverance that cannot be measured by money alone.

From the palm and the pine to the fields and classrooms, the Valley is defined by both its land and its people; it is a place where heritage and hope grow side by side.

"When I think of Pride of the Valley, I think of our people," he said. "Their grit, their strength, their love — that is what makes me proud."

And that's what Fresno State represents.

— Esra Hashem is the director for strategic communications at Fresno State.



— The PULSE —

A Valley Children's Healthcare Publication

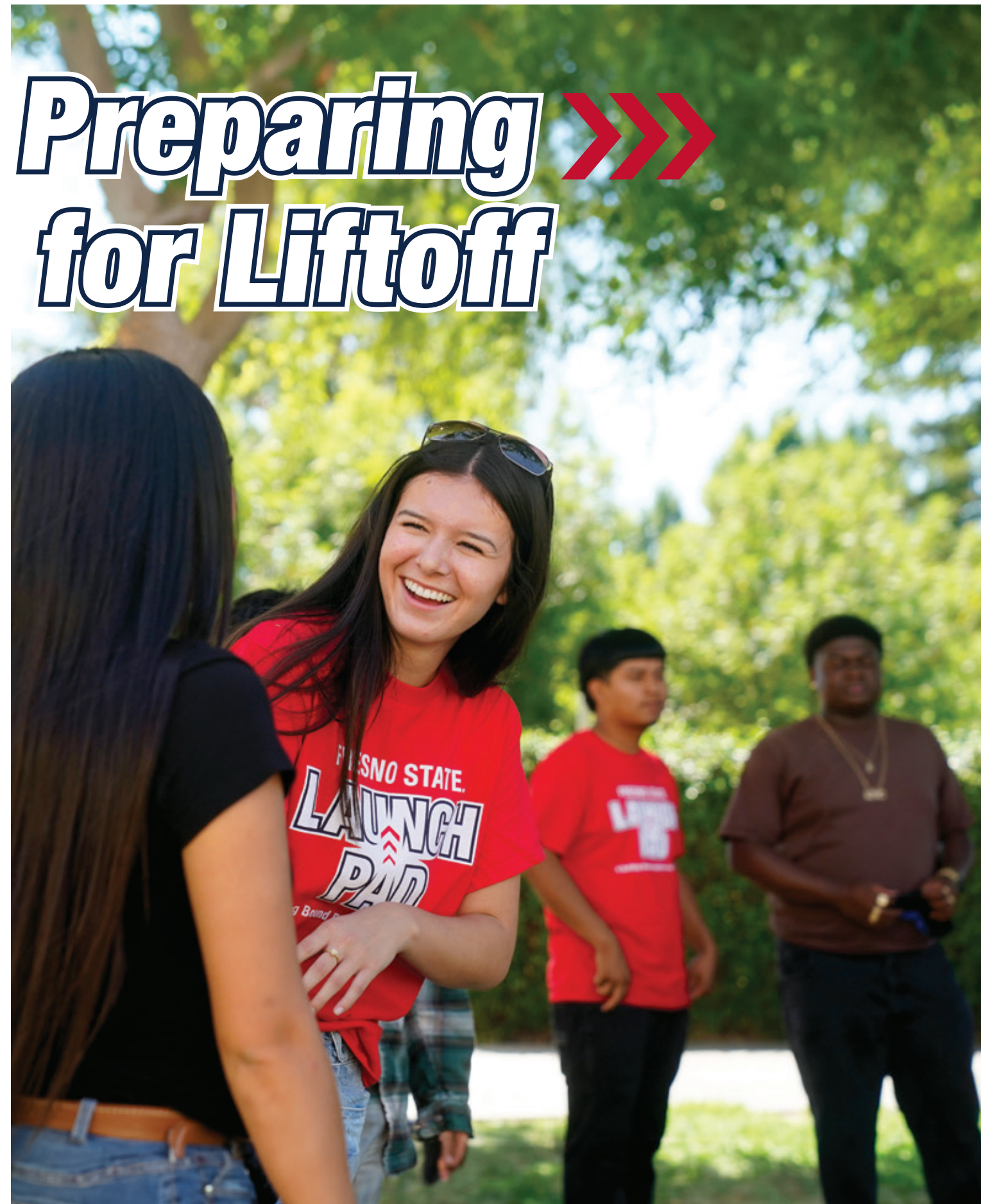
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Preparing >>> for Liftoff

Cary Edmondson

Meet the LaunchPad students ready to make their mark

By Marisa Mata ('19)

Two hundred incoming freshmen gathered at Fresno State's Satellite Student Union a week ahead of the fall semester; all of them excited, nervous and on track to be the first in their families to earn college degrees.

Without family experience to lean into, many first-generation students face hardships when navigating their college experience. At Fresno State this is a reality for a large portion of the student body, as first-generation students make up over 60% of all enrolled students.

The university has taken steps to ease the transition into college life for incoming Bulldogs, especially first-generation students, through the creation of the Bulldog Bound guaranteed admissions program in 2023, and LaunchPad: Bulldog Bound Freshman Success Camp this year.

Hosted on campus in partnership with Fresno Unified School District, LaunchPad is a week-long immersive orientation designed to supplement students' experience in Bulldog Bound and support their holistic wellbeing, offering opportunities to explore campus, connect with university resources and build relationships with classmates and mentors, including:

- » Meeting one-on-one with financial aid and academic counselors to create personalized academic and financial success plans.
- » Enrolling in a one-unit course designed specifically for the camp and taught by Learning Center staff, centered on topics such as time management, study strategies and digital literacy.
- » Participating in team-building activities with fellow students and Fresno State staff and faculty at the EDGE Ropes Course, Valley Children's Stadium and Wonder Valley Outdoor Education Center.
- » Connecting with a peer mentor who will continue to guide them over the course of their first year on campus.

"We are excited to introduce this new and impactful program designed to support the transition of incoming freshmen into college life," said Ruby Sangha-Rico, interim associate vice president for Student Success Services at Fresno State. "This free, five-day camp aims to provide our newest Bulldogs with the tools, information and confidence needed to succeed at Fresno State."

Additionally, all LaunchPad participants received a free iPad and a scholarship to help with the cost of their first semester.

Recognizing the start of a student's college journey may lead to a period of transition and growth for their entire family, LaunchPad invited parents and guardians to campus as well, offering time to learn how to best support their students and take an active role in their education.

"Our first-generation students want to earn a degree and create a secure future for themselves," said Martina Granados, interim associate vice president of Strategic Enrollment Management at Fresno State. "They also are very eager to support their families and create generational change, for their families and also the communities they were a part of growing up."



Scan the QR code or visit today.fresnostate.edu/magazine for an extended photo gallery and recap video that highlights the energy and excitement of this week-long experience.



LaunchPad is a week-long orientation tailored for first-generation students who are part of the Bulldog Bound guaranteed admissions program. LaunchPad helps prepare students for success by connecting them with university resources, networking with classmates and introducing them with mentors.



FRESNO STATE.
**LAUNCH
PAD**



Meet a few of the students who participated in LaunchPad and spoke about their dreams for college and beyond.

Gabriela Melchor
(construction management)

With a lot of hands-on building experience from a career technical education pathway class at Fresno High School, Gabriela Melchor wanted to pursue a construction management degree. Her class toured Fresno State, and she found herself questioning if going into a male-dominated field was the right choice, but a few encouraging words from a female student reassured her that “girls are here to get the work done.” Now into her first semester on campus, Melchor has found herself using resources she learned about during LaunchPad, including tutoring sessions at the Learning Center. She said, “My future is in my hands now. I was nervous about that, but Fresno State has made me so confident. The resources and people, the community here makes me less scared. I wouldn’t want to be anywhere else.”



Jasmin Pacheco Reyes
(English literature)

Inspired by her older sister, a first-generation student attending UC Berkeley, Jasmin Pacheco Reyes decided she also wanted to earn a college degree and took steps to do so beginning in her freshman year at Edison High School, where she joined Fresno State’s Upward Bound program. Through Upward Bound, Pacheco Reyes received mentorship, participated in workshops for personal and academic growth and discovered her passion for community service. Pacheco Reyes recalled wrapping toys for a community toy drive, saying, “I’m thankful for what I have, and thinking of my parents as kids, knowing they couldn’t have everything because of their situation, knowing there are kids out there like that, I want to be able to help. I want to see a huge smile on their faces.” During LaunchPad, Pacheco Reyes toured the Richter Center, a hub for community service opportunities. She hopes to find like-minded people and new opportunities to grow her impact on the community through college and into her career as an educator.



Giovanni (Gio) Hall
(criminology-law enforcement)

For some students like Gio Hall, LaunchPad was a “heartwarming” experience. A graduate of Hoover High School, Hall knew since he was young he wanted to become a police officer and participated in ride-alongs before starting college. “I really loved it,” he said. “It’s fun to drive [and] rush toward something that’s going on, wanting to help out. I couldn’t ask for more.” Hall appreciated LaunchPad offered opportunities for him to begin refining skills he would use throughout college and in his career while he strives to eventually become a detective. He sees opportunity to work on skills like communication, collaboration and the ability to adapt to people with backgrounds different from his own. LaunchPad also gave Hall the opportunity to experience campus culture for the first time. He recalled learning to connect and lean on peers for support as well as professional staff members, saying, “Everyone always wants to uplift one another. It warms my heart.”



Alana Plum
(liberal studies)

Alana Plum always pictured herself at Fresno State; growing up hearing stories about her mom’s time as a Bulldog, she wanted the same experiences. For Plum, a Bullard High School graduate, joining Bulldog Bound and participating in LaunchPad was natural and without question. But when it was time to transition into college life, Plum still found herself nervous. LaunchPad helped to ease those nerves. Plum said, “At the end, I felt like a weight was lifted. I learned so much about others, myself, the whole school, and I was feeling very accomplished, comfortable and ready for school to start.” Plum plans to become an elementary school teacher, to have the same positive impact on children that she experienced from her own teachers. She has already secured a part-time job in Fresno Unified School District, working with children through an afterschool program. She said, “I hope Fresno State changes me, making me a better person for the community. I feel like this is my calling, and I’m very passionate about it.”

Cary Edmondson



The LaunchPad program was made possible, in part, with the generous support of community partners, including Education Employees Credit Union, Pacific Service Credit Union, Palazzo at Campus Pointe and University Place Apartments.

– Marisa Mata is a marketing and communications specialist in the Office of University Marketing and Communications.



'Perception of Perfection'

At Diamond Learning Center, the perfect person is anyone who walks through the doors

By Eddie Hughes ('05)

▲ Defensive lineman Martin Owusu and his Fresno State football teammates visited Diamond Learning Center in Clovis for a "Red Wave Dance Party" with some of their biggest fans.

If it's true that nobody's perfect, somebody forgot to tell the students at Diamond Learning Center. To them, everyone who walks through the doors is perfect.

The feeling is reciprocal. To Jami Hamel De La Cerda, her staff and guests — like the Fresno State football players and dance team members who visited in September for the "Red Wave Dance Party" — the nearly 200 students at Diamond Learning Center are perfect, too.

"I look at it as a perception of perfection," said Hamel De La Cerda, the founder and president of Diamond Learning Center. "Because, to me, every one of these people who steps through this building is perfect. But if you look at

society, the perfect person is the football player. So it truly is a perception of what is perfection to you."

Diamond Learning Center serves adult learners with intellectual disabilities who range in age from 18 to 67. Located in Clovis, the center moved to a 60,000-square-foot building this summer — nearly triple the size of its previous location — in an effort to better serve its students and the special needs community.

Students are offered full-time programming, from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. Diamond Learning Center also hires some of its own students among its 67 employees.

"They're so excited. Anybody that walks in here is a rock star, especially if you've got a **Fresno State** jersey on. It's beautiful."

— Jami Hamel De La Cerda
Diamond Learning Center,
founder and president

"I wanted to create a program where these students have the same rights as the rest of us, so they could go to school in an adult learning environment during the day and, on the same day, if they want to develop job skills or work, they can."

A lasting bond

Diamond Learning Center has a relationship with Fresno State athletics that goes back years. A photo hangs at the center commemorating the day in 2013 when then Fresno State standouts (and future NFL stars) Davante Adams and Derek Carr spent hours interacting with students.

Countless other Fresno State student-athletes have made similar visits since, and each time they walk through the doors, they receive a heroes' welcome.

"They're so excited," Hamel De La Cerda said. "Anybody that walks in here is a rock star, especially if you've got a Fresno State jersey on. It's beautiful."

That same excitement filled the room in July, when the center hosted a press conference announcing Hamel De La Cerda's \$1 million donation to Fresno State football — the largest single gift from a woman in Fresno State athletics history.

"There's really no nicer gift than to see someone smile and know that you're helping them in the long run," she said.

The gift was the inaugural donation for the new Valley Co-op, a giving model designed to help coaches invest in the recruitment, development and retention of student-athletes with gifts large or small.

"Just like a Valley co-op, every size of crop, harvest or farm matters," said Garrett Klassy, Fresno State's director of athletics. "This fund isn't just for major gifts, it's about everyone doing their part, big or small, to keep Fresno State competitive. When the Red Wave rallies together, we can grow something powerful."

Hamel De La Cerda moved from Vancouver, Canada to attend Fresno State as a student in 1985. She was a member of the highly competitive club bowling team. Her experience on that team, competing with few resources, compelled her to give back to Fresno State students today.

In addition to her history of giving to the Bulldog Foundation, she has also supported the bowling team. She recalled how she used to help earn money for her bowling club as a student.

"I worked at the recreation center, the bowling alley and I cleaned Fresno State red seats to make money for our club," Hamel De La Cerda said.

Four decades later, Hamel De La Cerda owns season tickets for 22 of those red seats at Valley Children's Stadium, as well as a suite where she regularly invites her family, students and staff to attend Bulldogs football games.

Cary Edmondson



▲ Alumna Jami Hamel De La Cerda is presented a jersey by Garrett Klassy (left), director of athletics, and Matt Entz (right), Bulldogs football coach.



▶ Standout linebacker Jadon Pearson shows off some dance moves with Diamond Learning Center students at the "Red Wave Dance Party."

Ally Barriga



► Alumna and donor Jami De La Cerda with her three sons: Isaiah (left), Elijah (front) and Samuel (right).

Aly Barriga

Family at the heart of the mission

Beyond athletics and philanthropy, Hamel De La Cerda's inspiration is deeply personal – her three sons. Oldest son Isaiah, 22, works at the center as a teacher and transporter for the students.

Elijah, who has Down syndrome, promoted his new on-site sandwich shop, E's Diamond Deli, by giving away free box lunches to everyone in attendance at the gift press conference.

And 19-year-old Samuel is a student at Clovis Community College with plans to transfer to Fresno State next year to study sociology. He's one minute older and about five inches taller than his twin brother, Elijah.

From the moment Samuel was born, he has seen the challenges and hardships many of these students, including his twin brother, face in their day-to-day lives. But it rarely shows from their attitude and demeanor.

"It's just a special place. You can walk in having a bad day, but the second you

get here, they act like you're a celebrity," Samuel said.

The twins were born just four months after Hamel De La Cerda founded Diamond Learning Center in September 2005. She already had about a decade of experience working in special education before opening the center to bring to life her vision of LIFE ("Learning is for Everyone").

"Mark Twain said, 'The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why,'" Hamel De La Cerda said, "and that's really true because I know when the Lord blessed me with twins, and they came after I already had the Diamond Learning Center, it just emphasized why I was born. It was me doing what I'm doing."

Her words reflect the larger spirit of Diamond Learning Center – a place built on acceptance, dignity and joy.

Nobody is perfect. But at Diamond Learning Center, everyone is made to feel like they are.

– Eddie Hughes is the senior writer/editor for Fresno State.

'Red Wave Dance Party'

The energy was electric at the Diamond Learning Center's event venue on Sept. 25. Red and blue stage lights, strobes and Bulldog signage set the scene while songs like "Who Let the Dogs Out," "Macarena" and "Gasolina" rocked the dance floor. The center's students cheered and blitzed toward the entryway as Fresno State football players and dance team members entered the dance floor, generously passing out high-fives, fist bumps and hugs before dancing alongside the students.

Vicki Kaur said she loves coming to Diamond Learning Center, where she has been a student since it opened in 2005. She was chosen to welcome the football players because she's such a big fan.

"You feel the energy and positivity from all the people here," said sophomore running back Brandon Ramirez. "The Diamond Learning Center, I feel like these are our biggest fans. I just hope they got to see how we are as people outside of football, and I just hope they had a good time as well."



Putting the AG IN SWAG

The Central Valley is more than just a home – it defines the identity of the people who call it home. And many wear that pride on their sleeves.

The iconic Green V featured on the back of Fresno State's football helmets and on the collar of the official four-paw logo symbolizes the pride the university takes in representing the region. The V is green to honor the Valley as the leading agricultural region in the United States, with a Bulldog Red line through the middle, symbolizing the university's place at its center.

To celebrate the long-standing farming heritage that sustains the region, Fresno State football proudly showcased a new agricultural-themed white football jersey during the Ag Fest-themed regular season finale against Utah State on Nov. 22 at Valley Children's Stadium. The jerseys featured green lettering and sublimated farm imagery – including various fruits, nuts, vegetables and livestock unique to each jersey number.

And now, fans can rep the unique look, too. Officially licensed Adidas replica jerseys are available at the Kennel Marketplace, Kennel Bookstore and select retailers.



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Joel Beery

ALUMNI HONOREES

Celebrating the 2024 Top Dog Alumni Award recipients

By Eddie Hughes ('05) and Nicole B. Traverso ('05)



Cary Edmondson

Nicole Linder, a community leader and advocate against domestic violence, is among the 2024 Top Dog Alumni Award honorees.

The Top Dog Alumni Awards recognize Fresno State alumni who have made significant contributions to their community, and whose accomplishments, affiliations and careers have enriched the legacy of excellence at Fresno State.

Linder, CEO of the Marjaree Mason Center, received the Distinguished Alumna Award – the highest honor bestowed by the Fresno State Alumni Association – for her dedicated and unwavering work to empower adults and children affected by domestic violence in Fresno County. The Marjaree Mason Center is one of the largest domestic violence services agencies in California, offering safe housing, counseling, legal services, training and education.

A Fresno native and Fresno State graduate, she earned a bachelor's degree in mass communication and journalism in 1998. Throughout her career, Linder has driven philanthropy to support community organizations such as Valley Children's Healthcare Foundation and Fresno Pacific University. She helped enhance the Marjaree

Mason Center service delivery system, improved resources for clients, participated in statewide policy advocacy to create change for survivors of domestic violence and led a \$20 million fundraising campaign to build the organization's new Community Resource Center.

Each year at Fresno State, individuals can be nominated and considered to receive a Top Dog Outstanding Alumni Award. One honoree is selected from each of the university's eight academic schools and colleges, plus the Department of Athletics. The Outstanding Alumni Award recognizes Fresno State alumni for exceptional achievements in their fields.

"The Top Dog Alumni Awards is an inspiring event that recognizes the achievements of our most accomplished alumni," said Jacquelyn Glasener, executive director of the Fresno State Alumni Association. "This year's class of honorees represent what it truly means to be a Bulldog. We are excited to celebrate their achievements and to inspire others through their impactful stories."

– Eddie Hughes is the senior writer/editor for Fresno State. Nicole B. Traverso is events manager and volunteer specialist for Fresno State Alumni Association.

Nicole Linder, CEO of the Marjaree Mason Center was recognized with the Top Dog Distinguished Alumna Award – the highest honor bestowed by the Fresno State Alumni Association.



Scan the QR code to watch the full awards show and learn more about each honoree's notable successes.



CONGRATULATIONS TO THE 2024 TOP DOG HONOREES



DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD

Nicole Linder (1998)
College of Arts and Humanities



ARTHUR SAFSTROM SERVICE AWARD

Marlene Peacock (1977)
College of Health and Human Services
Gary Peacock (1977)
College of Social Sciences

OUTSTANDING ALUMNI AWARDS



Jim Boren (1972)
College of Arts and Humanities



Carol E. Scott (1972, '76)
College of Health and Human Services



Tami Lundberg (1987)
College of Science and Mathematics



Lee Brand (1973)
College of Social Sciences



Allysunn Walker (2008)
Craig School of Business



Sandi Taylor (1982, '88)
Department of Athletics



Lloyd Fagundes (1979),
Ralph Fagundes (Alumnus),
Fred Fagundes (1986)
Jordan College of Agricultural Sciences and Technology



Phouangmala Diane Phakonekham (2005, '11)
Kremen School of Education and Human Development



Tony Akel (1983, '85)
Lyles College of Engineering

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'OUR PRIDE COMES FROM OUR PEOPLE'

How one Fresno State alumnus created a legacy 50 years in the making

By Melissa Tav ('07)

Each year in mid-May, sounds of mariachi music come alive as more than 1,000 Fresno State students march onto the main floor of the Save Mart Center donning their most colorful graduation regalia. Over their gowns are stoles that signify their rich heritage. In the crowd are families, three generations strong, beaming with pride. This is the Chicano/Latino Commencement Celebration at Fresno State and, for nearly 50 years, it has become a Fresno State tradition.

For two-time alumnus Manuel Olgin, it is a tangible example of the pride of the Valley.

"The commencement is a springboard to higher, greater, further destinies in life. It is generational and it is part of what makes Fresno State great," Olgin said.

Olgin's connection to it is personal. He, along with fellow alumnus Tony Garduque, launched and championed the commencement in 1977 as part of their graduate theses.

Olgin, 77, graduated from Fresno State with a bachelor's degree in social work in 1974 and later earned his Master of Social Work degree in 1978. His long history of service to Fresno State, as an employee and advocate, earned him the Top Dog Alumni Award in 2011.

Now his voice can be heard narrating the newest Fresno State commercial, penned "Pride of the Valley".



► 2025 Chicano/Latino Commencement Celebration

Cary Edmondson



► Graduates and guests gather for the third annual Chicano/Latino Commencement Celebration, held at the Paul Paul Theater at the Fresno Fairgrounds. Ray Reyes (class of 1978) is at the podium welcoming the class of 1979. Manuel Olgin is seen standing over his left shoulder in the background. Founder Frances Pena is seen in front left of the stage with a folder tucked under her arm (white dress).



► The planning committee for the second annual Chicano/Latino Commencement Ceremony celebrates at the official dance, held at the Industrial Education Building at the Fresno Fairgrounds.

Fresno State Magazine sat down with Olgin to delve deeper into his Fresno State roots and what drives his pride for the Valley and the university.

Fresno State Magazine: Where does your pride come from?

Manuel Olgin: It comes from my family roots. I am a Chicano Native American of Mexican heritage. But most of all, I am an American. I am a veteran and come from a family of veterans, including my father and brother. I served in Germany and in the Vietnam War, my father served in World War II and my brother served in Iraq.

We were campesinos (farmworkers) and worked in the fields. Eventually, my father got out of the fields and attended Fresno City College, where he graduated as a valedictorian in 1953, and later graduated from UC Santa Cruz. Both my mother and father were very active leaders in church and veterans organizations. My sister and brother were also active community leaders. We were raised and educated here in Fresno. We are like countless others in this Valley, we are part of the pride of the Valley.

FS Mag: What words from the commercial resonate most with you?

Olgin: "In this Valley, our pride comes from our people." I love the feeling those words give me. Pride is me, it's you, it's us. We are the Valley, and we are Fresno State. That's a message I have long championed to folks.

FS Mag: In addition to being a proud alumnus, you also worked on campus for 36 years in student services before retiring in 2011. In what ways do you stay connected to Fresno State today?

Olgin: I am in my last year as president of the Fresno State Chicano Alumni Club and have been busy raising over \$700,000 for the club's scholarship endowment. I initially helped create the association back in 1976 when I was a graduate student. I have also just been elected to serve on the Fresno State Alumni Association Board of Directors as vice president of chapters, clubs and networks.

FS Mag: The Chicano/Latino Commencement Celebration is one of the biggest celebrations of its kind in the U.S. Can you take us back to 1977 when it began?



► Chicano Alumni Club Board members with Fresno State President Saúl Jiménez Sandoval at the Chicano Alumni VIVADogs Tailgate 2022: Tom Uribes, Frances Peña, Manuel Olgin and Martina Granados.

Olgin: The first celebration was held at the Fresno Fairgrounds Industrial Education Building and Paul Paul Theater with 57 participants. We maxed out capacity. No matter the venue, it was always a big celebration with dinner, a dance, mariachi, danzantes and multiple speakers. Over the years, the number of participants increased and the venues got bigger, and social media gave it worldwide exposure. To this day, I get comments from people all over the nation.

FS Mag: How did this commencement go from being a thesis and idea to reality?

Olgin: Tony [Garduque] and I are both Vietnam veterans who entered the same social work graduate program. Some of our former Fresno City College classmates were graduating from San Jose State and participating in their Chicano Commencement. So we took a road trip to celebrate them. We loved and related to the commencement ceremony. Eventually we needed a thesis project and jointly decided to put together a Chicano Commencement at Fresno State as our thesis project.

In 1976, an official committee was formed along with founding board members Frances Peña [Olgin] and Ernesto Martinez. The Chicano Commencement Committee started as a casual committee of MEChA. Later, we became part of the Chicano, Faculty, Support Staff and Student Organization until finally coming under

the wing of the newly formed Chicano Alumni Association. In 1995, we met our long-term goal of institutionalizing the Chicano Commencement by passing it on to the university.

FS Mag: Looking back, what was your favorite memory on campus?

Olgin: Meeting my wife Frances Peña [Olgin] at Baker Hall.

FS Mag: Where does your pride of Fresno State come from?

Olgin: I grew up and attended local schools here in the Valley. I've had successes and failures like anybody else, but I hope that my efforts have also brought pride to others. I am grateful to Fresno State for providing me with the tools to succeed.

— Melissa Tav is a marketing and communications specialist in the Office of University Marketing and Communications.

PRIDE OF THE VALLEY

Scan the QR code to watch the full commercial and see more of what makes Fresno State the Pride of the Valley.



Bulldog Born. Bulldog Brewed.

Alumnus champions
officially licensed craft beer

By Victoria Cisneros Soto ('19, '21)

Fresno State athletics and Tioga-Sequoia Brewing Company debuted Red Wave Light Lager, the officially licensed craft beer of Fresno State, in summer 2024. While the project spanned three years, its completion fulfilled a decades-long dream for Tioga-Sequoia's president and Fresno State alumnus Michael Cruz.

During his time as a business administration marketing student in the Craig School of Business at Fresno State, Cruz interned for a local distributor who was working with Tioga-Sequoia's ownership group to bring the brand to market. After graduation, he forged his own path at the company, taking on various roles and special projects, but none more meaningful than collaborating with his alma mater on the Red Wave Light Lager.

"I really, really appreciate the experiences that I had [at] Fresno State, really, that have led me to where I am today. And I have everything to thank for my alma mater and my experiences there," Cruz said.



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locations
across
the Valley**



Scan the QR code or visit today.fresnostate.edu/magazine to view behind-the-scenes video and photos showing how this locally crafted lager came to life.

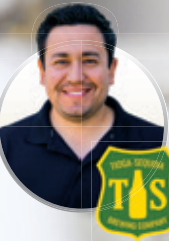
According to Cruz, the goal behind Red Wave Light Lager and the decision to name it after the university's dedicated fanbase was to create a symbol of pride that represents the Bulldog Spirit of the Central Valley and the hometown team that unites the community.

The locally crafted lager is widely available at over 100 locations throughout the Valley, including Fresno State athletic events, Save Mart and Costco locations, and local establishments like Dog House Grill and Tioga-Sequoia taprooms, with multiple locations more than 50 miles outside of Fresno. As an officially licensed product, a portion of every purchase benefits Fresno State students and programs.

Cruz said this project is a testament to the community pride of the entire brewery staff, many of whom are also Fresno State alumni. "Red Wave Light Lager is truly 'Bulldog born, Bulldog brewed,'" he said.

— Victoria Cisneros Soto is a marketing and communications strategist in the Office of University Marketing and Communications.

"I really, really appreciate the experiences that I had [at] Fresno State, really, that have led me to where I am today. And I have everything to thank for my alma mater and my experiences there."



— **Michael Cruz** ('09) president, Tioga-Sequoia Brewing Co.

CLASS NOTES

'Thy Sons and Daughters Hail Thee Great, Our Alma Mater, Fresno State'

Compiled by Eddie Hughes ('05), Angel Langridge ('20) and Daisy Thao (student)

1960s

Angelo L. Mazzei (1966), founder of Mazzei Injector Co., known for designing and manufacturing fluid mixing and contacting technologies, was honored for his contributions to Bakersfield and Kern County as this year's winner of the John Brock Community Service Award.

Gary Smith (1960) earned the 2025 Certified Angus Beef Industry Achievement Award for his indelible mark on the meat science and beef community.

1970s

Norah Au (1973), a medical technician and specialist in blood banking, was honored for 50 years of service with Community Regional Medical Center.

Robert "R.B." Bookwalter (1979) is the interim provost and senior vice president for academic affairs at Marshall University in Huntington, West Virginia.

John Christy (1973) helped develop a U.S. Department of Energy report evaluating the impact of greenhouse gasses on U.S. climate.

Dan McAllister (1974), San Diego County's treasurer-tax collector, retired after 23 years in the post.

Joe Scordino (1974) has been selected as Edmonds Citizen of the Year by the Edmonds Kiwanis Club, a group dedicated to serving the Edmonds, Washington community with a focus on supporting young children and adolescent programs.

Jim Shaw (1975), managing director of the Buck Owens Private Foundation, was the piano player for Buck Owens' Buckaroos, performing with Owens from 1970 through 2006. He was recently featured in news stories discussing the closure of Buck Owens' Crystal Palace in Bakersfield.

John Sierra (1972, '74), co-founder of Arte Americas, was featured in Community Alliance for his lifelong contributions to Chicano art, education and community activism in the Central Valley.

Richard Sloan (1972, '74) was featured in a FresnoLand article for his lifelong work cleaning the San Joaquin River.

1980s

Marga K. Cooley (1987) is the executive editor of Santa Maria California News Media.

Jay Gill (1988) is vice chairman of United Security Bank.

Tom Hallinan (1984) was appointed by Governor Gavin Newsom to the California Board of Professional Engineers, Land Surveyors and Geologists.

Jill Twisselman Heely (1982) was named the 2025 Cattleman of the Year by The San Luis Obispo County Cattlemen's Association.

Marsha Ingrao (1987, '88) promoted her new poetry anthology, "Embracing the Power to Live," in a guest post on the blog "Robbie's Inspiration."

Connie Moreno-Peraza (1983, '87) is director of the Santa Cruz County Health Services Agency.

Kelly Rodrigues (1989), CEO of Forge Global Holdings Inc., rang the closing bell of the New York Stock Exchange on June 26 to celebrate the launch of its Next Generation Marketplace.

1990s

Alexan Belekian (1999), a longtime TV and radio news anchor, was featured in a Business Journal executive profile for his consulting business, AGB Valley Enterprises.

Dustin Chambers (1997), an economics professor at Salisbury University's Franklin P. Perdue School of Business, was appointed to the U.S. Council of Economic Advisers.

Marc Forth (1994) was named CEO of Jeune Aesthetics, Inc., a biotechnology company that addresses and reverses the biology of aging or photo-damaged skin.

Cándida F. Jáquez (1990) spoke at a roundtable discussion at Portland University about mariachi ensembles in higher education.

Matt Markarian (1997), executive director of the Fresno Police and Fire Chaplaincy, was featured in an executive profile for The Business Journal.

Tricia Protzman (1991, '92, '04) is now Madera County Superintendent of Schools.

Tim Rios (1993) is now executive director of strategic relationships and specialized programs at Wells Fargo.

Peter Robertson (1992, '95, '22) was selected as the keynote speaker for the Lavender Celebration Recognition Ceremony at Merced College.

Tanya Russell (1998), who has worked for the Kings County library system for 30 years, was appointed as library director.

Antonio Sajor (1997) is retiring after nearly three decades with the Stockton Police Department, most recently as deputy chief.

Steve Skibbie (1993), a photographer and production specialist with the Fresno County Superintendent of Schools, was interviewed by The Fresno Bee about how his move to Fresno to study photojournalism in 1987 led to a lasting connection with the community and a decades-long career.

William Soto (1998), is now a biology professor at Chadron State College.

Steve Wolfenberger (1993) joined California-based Alliant Insurance Services as vice president within its Employee Benefits Group.

2000s

Stephen Barile (2004) published the poem "When Primo Came Home from the Viet Nam War (1966)" in the Decolonial Passage, a literary magazine.

Leisa Biggers (2007), previously the director of human resources at Los Angeles Community College District, was appointed to California's Commission on Judicial Performance.

Jorge Carillo (2002), a market reporter with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, was a presenter in the Northern Plains Forage Association's forage webinar.

Soreath Hok (2006) is now the host of the afternoon news program "All Things Considered" on KVPR, Central California's NPR station.

Rafael Iniguez (2008, '22), superintendent of Parlier Unified School District, was named Superintendent of the Year (Region 3) by the California Association of Latino Superintendents and Administrators.

2000s (continued)

Ryan Jacobsen (2002, '04) was awarded the California Image Award by The Native Daughters of the Golden West.

Deitra Lewis-Metcalf (2009), manager of people and culture at TELUS Digital, was included in Marquis Who's Who for Excellence in Human Resources.

Earl Mercado (2005) is now director of sales at West Coast Insulated Glass Products in Cerritos.

Stephanie Mercado (2003) wrote and published a poetry book "Crate of Dreams: Adrift in Sorrows."

Robin Miller (2008), is now president of the American Association of Heart Failure Nurses for the 2025-26 term.

Cindy Pena (2009), is now principal of James Monroe Elementary School in Madera.

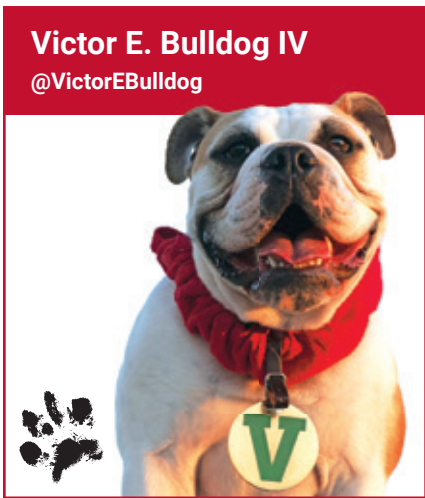
Mike Snell (2004), CEO of the California Teaching Fellows Foundation, was featured in an executive profile in The Business Journal.

Stephen Trembley (2008) is now the associate athletics director for external relations at Saint Mary's College in Moraga.

2010s

Sean Akin (2012), vice president of branch operations at Pridestaff, was featured in an executive profile for The Business Journal.

Joseph Bohigian (2015), participated in a dual exhibition, providing the sound installation "From the Fields of Fresno," at the Armenian Museum of Fresno.



Sarah Bugayong (2011), a fourth-grade teacher at Fancher Creek Elementary, was featured as Educator of the Week by YourCentralValley.com.

Derek Carr (2013), former Fresno State quarterback and NFL star with the Raiders and New Orleans Saints, is retiring from the NFL after 11 seasons. He ranks 22nd all-time in the NFL with 41,245 passing yards and 23rd all time with 257 passing touchdowns.

Eriq Davila (2019), an enologist who works at Cru Winery in Madera, was featured in an article for Edible Monterey Bay.

Danielle Deprima (2012), president of Willow Gardens Nursery, was featured in an exectuvie profile in The Business Journal.

Nico Herron (2011), a former Fresno State football linebacker, is now a teacher for the new barber academy associated with Stein High School in Tracy.

Alyssa A. Jarrett (2012) wrote and published a new romance novel titled "Love and Paklava."

Nick John Jarrett (2015) is the cover artist of the book "Love and Paklava."

Tyler Johnson (2014), a former Fresno State basketball standout and eight-year NBA veteran with the Miami Heat, Phoenix Suns, Brooklyn Nets and San Antonio Spurs, returned to serve as an assistant coach for the Bulldogs.

Dao Lor (2017), program manager at The Fresno Center, has been named a fellow of the 2025 Fresno Workforce Leadership Academy.

Jonathon Porter (2018) has been appointed to the 24th District Agricultural Association Tulare County Fair Board.

Darren Rigg (2012), field buyer for Minturn Nut Co., was interviewed about his journey in the almond industry and the growth of emerging almond markets.

Eliana Saucedo (2010), debuted her new paintings titled "The Fruit of Life" at the Fresno Art Museum, celebrating the rich agricultural traditions of the San Joaquin Valley and her own family and culture.

Eric Santos (2011) opened Neat & Noir, a craft cocktail bar highlighting espresso-based drinks in downtown Fresno.

Corey Torres (2015), district manager with the Tehachapi Valley Recreation and Park District, was recognized for 10 years of service.

2020s

Eric Antrim (2021, '23), a crop and soil specialist, is part of a tri-county ag team formed by the Cornell Cooperative Extension to reflect the needs of Jefferson, Lewis and St. Lawrence county agricultural producers in Canton, NY.

Rachel Axt (2024), previously Miss Clovis 2025, was crowned Miss California 2025.

Emma Brandstad (2022) is a commercial banking officer with Oak Valley Community Bank.

Crystal Navarro (2023, '25), a regional coordinator with the Rising Scholars Network, was featured in a profile for the Success Center for California Community Colleges.

Dawn Parker (2025), co-executive editor for the San Joaquin Review Journal, published a poem titled "Late Bloomer."

Erik Rodriguez (2023) joined the University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources as the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act technical assistance community educator for small farms in Fresno and Madera counties.

Rhett Rodriguez (2022) is a weekend weather anchor and reporter at KSEE24 and CBS47.

Christian Segura (2025) is a viola instructor at the Porterville Summer Strings Camp, which serves middle and high school students.

Ruth Soderlund (2023), artist, supports emerging creatives by connecting them with mentors, free of charge, through a new community initiative called The Artist Mentorship Project of Fresno.

Jose Soria (2022), artist, was interviewed in a Fresno Bee article about growing up in a traditional Catholic Mexican household, navigating queerness in the church and how those early experiences fuel his symbolic artwork.

Gloria Valdovinos (2022) is the executive director of the Downtown Merced Property Owners Association.

Diego Vargas (2024) is now the education equity reporter for FresnoLand.

Join Fresno State Alumni and Friends on an Adventure

The Fresno State Alumni and Friends Travel Program invites readers to see the world alongside fellow Bulldogs, family and friends. Discover breathtaking destinations with expertly planned itineraries that balance cultural immersion, relaxation and camaraderie.

Whether exploring Europe's timeless cities, cruising along the world's great rivers or stepping into a once-in-a-lifetime adventure, travelers will enjoy exclusive opportunities designed for the Fresno State community.

To learn more and view upcoming trips, scan the QR code or visit alumni.fresnostate.edu/travel.



40 Under 40

Each year, BusinessLeaders.TV recognizes 40 outstanding business professionals under age 40 in Central California who have demonstrated strong work ethic, and are leaders in their fields. Here are the Fresno State alumni who were part of the 2025 class.

- Jonathan Bravo** (2018), Fresno Grizzlies
- Mayra Campa**, Office of Fresno City Councilwoman Annalisa Perea
- Emily Erwin**, KSEE 24
- Brett Ford** (2020), JD Food
- Henry Garcia** (2007), Fresno Police Department
- Karen K. Gill** (2008), Gill Estate Law
- Michael Manjarrez** (1988), Whelan Financial
- Sarah Maokosy** (2012), Coalinga College
- Estevan Parra-Guerrero** (2014, '18, '25), Fresno State Upward Bound
- Brandon Simons** (2010, '23), Fresno County Department of Social Services
- Mario Trevino** (2012), Iron Key Real Estate
- Gloria Valdovinos** (2022), Downtown Merced and Tourism

Bulldog Born, Bulldog Wed



Jose Christian Juarez (2022) married Liliana Duran on June 20 in Puebla, Mexico.



Megan (Morales) Kane (2010) and Nolan Kane welcomed their daughter, Kendall Brielle Kane, on March 13.



Nick Schumaker (2014) and **Gretchen Fruth Schumaker** (2015) celebrated their 10-year wedding anniversary.

In Memoriam

‘For thee, our hopes and memories’



Carol A. Aguirre (1974)
Sept. 4, 2024, Fresno.

Sue "Sunny" Aitken (1970)
June 13, Paso Robles.

Paul Fredrick Areida (1977)
July 24, Lodi.

Armen Charles Avakian (1975)
Feb. 24, Indianapolis, IN.

Brada McCormick Bailey (1962)
Aug. 4, Salem, OR.

Kent Baucher (1975)
Feb. 15, Salt Lake City, UT.

Juanette Joy Baysa (1968)
May 6, Hilo, HI.

John L. Berkey Jr. (1962)
May 31, Taft.

Judge Shawn Delayne Bessey (1989)
May 1, Hughson.

Donald Dean Bishel (1954)
April 5, Madera.

Richard Eugene Boles (1990)
April 27, Fresno.

Cheryl Kim Vollmer Bolin (1971)
July 17, Elko, NV.

Lynn Bomberger (1969)
July 4, Pacific Grove.

Margaret Bruland (1966)
July 5, Medford, OR.

Carol Leon Cowin (1971)
May 19, Bend, OR.

Robert Arne Dresslar (1976)
July 20, Fresno.

Sheila Ann Eagles (1997)
June 27, Hendersonville, TN.

Norman Fletcher (1966)
April 2, Fresno.

Gerald Gains
July 2, Greenville, PA.

Rosalie Nan Gald (1984)
June 14, Fresno.

Marcelino Mark Gamino (2021)
April 15, Fresno.

Mark Steven Gonzales (1977)
July 19, Bakersfield.

Kevin Green (2020)
April 22, Minneapolis, MN.

Donna Lee Haggerton (1958)
Aug. 15, Fresno.

Marvin Heupel (1962)
Dec. 17, 2024, Santa Maria.

Rodney Lester House (1965)
June 7, Clovis.

Charles Frank Hudek (1968)
July 30, Bakersfield.

Noble Keith Johnson (1958, '60)
April 25, Visalia.

Jennifer Ann Tucker Kahn (1967)
July 23, Hanford.

Timothy Lawton Kent (1976)
July 21, Clovis.

Clyde Dwight Kimura (1972)
March 26, Watsonville.

Leland Murray Larsen (1954)
July 8, Shaver Lake.

Donald George Larson (1961)
June 29, Fresno.

Michael Travis Latham (1972)
May 18, Wichita Falls, TX.

Shannon Leso (1989)
April 1, Sanger.

Ralph E. Lockwood Jr. (1950)
Aug. 1, Clovis.

Frank Louis Mandella Jr. (1981)
April 3, Fresno.

Ronald Edward McCary (1966)
Aug. 16, Fresno.

Lois Bly McFarland (1953)
Aug. 5, Scottsdale, AZ.

Delores Charlene Miller
May 31, Bakersfield.

Cecil Alexander Rhodes (1973)
May 10, Modesto.

Charles Gary Riddle (1966)
July 8, Fresno.

Rick Roberti (1981)
May 16, Manhattan Beach.

Mario Ephraim Rodriguez (2003, '07)
June 18, Fresno.

Roy Seidmeyer (1989)
March 29, Broadlands, VA.

Dennis Michael Shaves (1964)
June 15, Fresno.

Sharon Shaw (2002)
July 7, Fresno.

Melvyn Silva (1962, '68)
June 7, Fresno.

Steven Fred Sperry (1969)
March 4, Modesto.

Jeri Ann Starkweather (1974)
May 11, Fresno.

Mary Lou Stewart (1966)
April 26, Santa Cruz.

Dennis "Denny" Ray Stimson (1966)
March 28, Ventura.

Susan Stirling (1973)
Aug. 19, Norman, OK.

James Rodney Swanson (1953, '61)
May 11, Fresno.

Raymond Doyle Thurm (1963)
June 30, Bakersfield.

Patricia Diane Trafican (1973, '74)
May 9, Fresno.

Gary Lee Washburn (1966)
July 14, Chatsworth.

Eugenie Madden Watson (1960)
May 11, Palo Alto.

Timothy Lee Willis (1985)
April 28, Marysville.

Matthew Thomas Woodsford (2014)
June 28, Clovis.

Memoriam Faculty/Staff

R. Gene Anderson
July 4, San Antonio, TX.

Gary Victor Cortner
Aug. 11, Clovis.

Lynn David Hemink
Aug. 11, Fresno.

Vanvilai Katkanant
March 6, Burbank.

Manuel Perez
March 24, Fresno.

Gary Robert Sells
July 27, Fresno.

Burke Zane
March 21, Spokane, WA.

Friend

Carole Ann Butler
May 1, Fresno.



Remembering President Joseph I. Castro

Dr. Joseph I. Castro, the eighth president of Fresno State, passed away on Aug. 24 at the age of 58. Castro made history as the first Mexican American, first Valley native and first Californian to serve as president of Fresno State (from 2013 to 2020), and later as the first Mexican American to lead the California State University system as chancellor.

His story — from Hanford to Cal to Stanford and back to serve the Valley at Fresno State — inspired and resonated with many, and he dedicated much of his professional life to expanding access to higher education. During his time at Fresno State, while reminding students and the community to “be bold,” he launched initiatives focused on student success and social mobility, and championed support for first-generation students. He shared his vision for academics and athletics to rise together at Fresno State, while leading the university to new highs in national rankings like Washington Monthly and U.S. News, in which the university was touted for driving social mobility and improving graduation rates.

Castro is survived by his wife of 33 years, Mary; sons, Isaac and Jess; daughter, Lauren; and daughter-in-law, Marilyn.

For those who wish to honor Castro’s legacy, remembrances may be directed to the Castro and Borges Family Basic Needs Endowment Fund at Fresno State.



Cary Edmondson

BULLDOG SPIRIT

The Ticket to a Lifetime of Memories

When it comes to showcasing Bulldog Spirit at home, alumni Freddy and Leslie Rau have a Bulldog room with enough aesthetic appeal to be on HGTV. After all, their room got a professional touch.

A partner at Darden Architects, and an interior designer by trade, Leslie Rau helped bring the couple's vision to life — coordinating every item's frame and location around the centerpiece Fresno State pool table. Each holiday season, she adds a Fresno State-themed Christmas tree and decor to the room. She also decorated the couple's tailgate trailer and hand-painted the checkerboard end zone design on the floor.

Look closer around the room, and you'll see personal touches, including the framed game ticket from the couple's first date — a Fresno State football game against Idaho on Oct. 11, 2008. Their wedding featured the Fresno State fight song and her garter belt had the Bulldogs logo. The couple has been going to games ever since — home and away — including trips this year to Lawrence, Kansas, Corvallis, Oregon, Honolulu and more.

One ticket sparked it all. And now the room represents a lifetime of Bulldog Spirit.



“When we use the room, it reminds us of not just our first date and where we’ve met, but all the friends we’ve made attending football games and other Fresno State events.”

— Leslie Rau



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Making Bulldog Spirits Bright

The holidays are a time for nostalgia and connection — to honor the people and places that mean the most. This season, discover the keepsakes designed to make Bulldog spirit shine bright. For proud alumni or devoted fans, pieces like this are a heartfelt reminder of Fresno State pride and memories that last a lifetime.

Scan the QR code to see what's new this season, from sweaters and hats to ornaments and other keepsakes.

