

# FRESNO@STATE®

MAGAZINE

FALL/WINTER 2023



# Faces of Fresno State

Meet some of the students and alumni making  
the most of a Valley of opportunities

# ‘Faces of Fresno State’ Inspire



## FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

I am often asked what motivates me to wake up every day and dedicate myself wholly to Fresno State. It is without hesitation that I reply, “It’s our students”: our current students, our alumni and the future students who have yet to step foot on campus. In this issue of Fresno State Magazine, I am thrilled to share with you the theme that resonates throughout its pages: “Faces of Fresno State.” This theme captures the essence of our institution, highlighting the remarkable students who are at the heart of Fresno State, past, present and future.

At Fresno State, we firmly believe that our success is deeply rooted in the success of the entire Central Valley. As I read the stories of our current students and alumni, I am reminded once again of Fresno State's profound impact on our region. The faces you encounter in these stories are not just representatives of our university; they are the leaders who inspire and

elevate us to excellence. They are the architects of a brighter future.

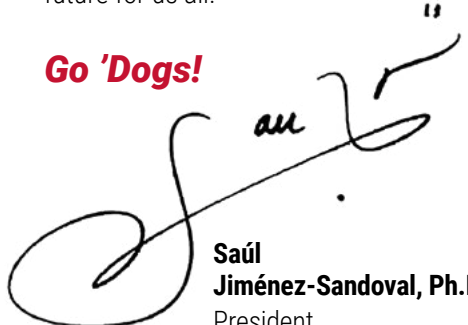
Each story shared is a testament to the life-changing power of earning a Fresno State degree. These individuals have overcome challenges, pursued their passions and emerged as leaders, innovators and change-makers. They are the faces that make Fresno State a dynamic and vibrant institution, a source of inspiration and an engine of progress for our region.

When you support Fresno State, you are not investing in a far-off institution. You are investing in the very people who make up our community. You are bolstering an institution of higher learning that for over 100 years has inspired and equipped eager minds to develop the best versions of themselves. You are supporting the dreams and aspirations of homegrown professionals, providing them with the tools to become the leaders who will serve you right here in your own Central Valley.

About 80% of our students stay in the region after they graduate. By supporting Fresno State, you are giving local students a chance to change the trajectory of their lives, and in each student's success, you are contributing to the well-being and prosperity of the entire region.

As you read these impactful stories of hope, grit, resilience and excellence, I know you will be as inspired as I am by their accomplishments and dedication. These are some of the many faces of Fresno State, faces that represent the region we all call home. Like you, they are shaping a brighter future for us all.

**Go 'Dogs!**

  
**Saúl Jiménez-Sandoval, Ph.D.**  
President

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*Fresno State serves the richly diverse region of Central California. We are proud to have the U.S. Department of Education designate our university as both a Hispanic-Serving Institution and an Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution.*

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**Cover:** A silhouette of the Bulldog logo represents us all – the faces of Fresno State. Every student, alum and supporter of the university helps shape who we are and the impact we make throughout the region, state and nation.

**Left:** Fresno State President Saúl Jiménez-Sandoval joins new students in one of the newest campus traditions – the Run to Victory. Each year, incoming students are invited to run onto the field just before kickoff at Fresno State's football home opener.

Photo by Cary Edmondson

## Stay in touch!

We welcome your comments about Fresno State Magazine at [magazine@csufresno.edu](mailto: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](https://fresnostate.edu/givenow) to make your contribution. Thank you!

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## No Place Like Home

Photo by Cary Edmondson

Welcome to Red Wave heaven on Earth.

On an unseasonably mild day for Sept. 9 in Fresno, the Red Wave (dressed largely in white) was treated to a beautiful sunset and picturesque sky during Fresno State's home-opening sellout win over Eastern Washington.

For anyone who has ever been to a Fresno State football home game, this photo is worth far more than 1,000 words – it evokes the sight of 41,031 fans; the sounds of a roaring Red Wave feeding off the energy of the Bulldog Marching Band; the aroma of grilling in the tailgating lots; and the feel of friends, loved ones and neighbors all around us riding the roller coaster of emotions that a major college sporting event delivers.

This is the value of Fresno State football – the only event in the Valley that has the power to attract more than 41,000 people from all walks of life and unite them behind one, common cause six times per year.

New Five-year Strategic Plan

Fresno State’s new strategic plan outlines the comprehensive goals and strategies that will steer the university in “growing the Valley of opportunity” over the next five years.

“We will strengthen the academic preparation of our students and ensure their future success; enhance faculty research and staff development; and deepen our impact in our region and beyond through partnerships with industry and community organizations,” says Fresno State President Saúl Jiménez-Sandoval, who shared the finalized strategic plan with faculty and staff at an assembly on Aug. 17 after months of collecting input.

The strategic plan, driven by numerous committees of faculty, staff, students and community members, is the product of feedback gathered from thousands of individuals both on and off campus. The planning committee was chaired by Dr. Sergio La Porta, an Armenian studies professor at Fresno State.

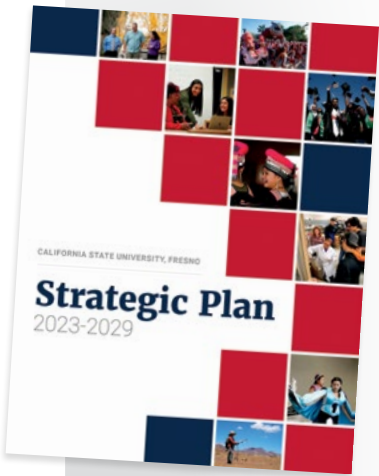
- The plan identifies four core values – exploration, excellence, inclusion and community – each of which are detailed within the 30-page document.
- It also includes five overarching goals for the university:
- Enhance personal and professional fulfillment.
  - Bridge campus and community.
  - Be an innovative driver of regional progress with a global impact.
  - Modernize facilities, infrastructure and technology.
  - Embody full inclusivity and belongingness.



Each of these goals comes with detailed strategies and measurables that will be tracked over the next five years.

The plan also includes the university’s refreshed mission statement: “Fresno State empowers students for success through a transformative education rooted in active service with diverse communities.”

Fresno State’s strategic plan is a dynamic action plan that will be adaptive to the needs of the institution as it evolves. To view the strategic plan, scan the QR code or visit: [president.fresnostate.edu/strategic-plan](https://president.fresnostate.edu/strategic-plan).



Gather ‘Round for Bulldog Bound

Fresno State announced Bulldog Bound – a new guaranteed admissions program – at a kickoff event May 10 at the new Lynda and Stewart Resnick Student Union. Through the program, high school students (from participating school districts) who meet the minimum California State University requirements are guaranteed a spot at Fresno State after they graduate.

The program will also offer ongoing support for high school students and their parents to prepare students to enter college.

Bulldog Bound ensures qualified students in the region have a clear, tangible path to a college degree. Fresno State will support students and their families with admission preparation and resources as early as ninth grade.

“As the Valley’s premier university, Fresno State uplifts every facet of life in the region,” says Fresno State President Saúl Jiménez-Sandoval. “This program will pave the way for future generations of diverse and talented students to come to Fresno State. Participating students will progress on a sure path toward admission and graduation with a valuable degree from Fresno State. They will develop and exercise their innate talents toward the benefit of our vibrant community. By collaborating with our partner school districts through this new program, we will promote a strong college-going culture.”

The following school districts have agreed to partner with Fresno State on the Bulldog Bound program: Fresno Unified, Visalia Unified, Fowler Unified, Sanger Unified, Parlier Unified, Central Unified and University High School.



Fresno State President Saúl Jiménez-Sandoval announces the Bulldog Bound admissions program on May 10 at the Resnick Student Union.

“I see this new guaranteed admissions program to Fresno State as a game-changer for our students, many of whom simply are not thinking about Fresno State as their goal soon enough,” says Fresno Unified Superintendent Bob Nelson. “This partnership is great for our families and great for our region.”

By participating in Bulldog Bound, students receive:

- Guaranteed admissions as early as ninth grade.
- Pre-admission for 11th graders.
- On-the-spot admissions for 12th graders.
- Fresno State ID card, which will give students email and library access.
- Help with career and academic major exploration.
- Assistance with applications.
- Early financial aid estimates.
- Scholarship opportunities.

- Campus life experience.
  - Summer student leadership opportunities.
  - Resources for parents/guardians.
- “This collaboration not only benefits the individual students and supports their families, but it also strengthens the educational pipeline in our region and cultivates a brighter future for all,” says Dr. Kent Willis, vice president of the Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management at Fresno State.
- Signing up for the program does not obligate students to attend Fresno State, though it provides the most comprehensive and streamlined pathway toward becoming a Bulldog.

Guaranteed admission means there will be a spot at Fresno State for participating students; it does not guarantee entry into certain impacted programs.

– Lisa Bell ('95)

# No. 8 Nationally for Social Mobility

Fresno State continues to climb national college rankings for social mobility, a measurement of universities that provide a quality education at an affordable price to create opportunities for students to move from one socioeconomic class to another.

Fresno State jumped to No. 8 among all colleges nationwide for social mobility in the 2024 U.S. News and World Report Best Colleges rankings published Sept. 18. Last year, Fresno State ranked No. 30.

“This high and significant ranking on social mobility is especially important for our students, their families and our region, as it means that Fresno State allows our students to find the best versions of themselves, and in doing so, they become the leaders we all need in our Valley and the world,” says Fresno State President Saúl Jiménez-Sandoval. “That’s why graduation day is so meaningful to me — we are graduating the leader-professionals who will strengthen communities and elevate the quality of life for everyone in our Valley.”

About 65% of Fresno State students are the first in their families to attend college, while many others continue a proud family legacy as second- or third-generation Bulldogs. About 80% of graduates stay and work in the San Joaquin Valley.

U.S. News and World Report has published its Best College rankings for the past 39 years as a guide for students and parents to compare the academic quality of universities and colleges across the nation and find those that best meet their needs.

The rankings evaluated nearly 1,500 campuses on a number of factors, including graduation and retention rates, Pell graduation rates, financial resources, peer assessments and graduation-rate performance.

Here’s a look at other U.S. News categories where Fresno State continues to deliver on its mission to educate and empower students for success:

- Fresno State is ranked No. 101 among the top public schools nationally and No. 185 overall nationally.

- No. 12 for best electrical, electronic and communications engineering and No. 49 for best undergraduate engineering program, non-doctorate. These categories are based on peer assessment surveys.

- The university honors veterans for their service and provides resources to get veterans back on track to earning a degree. Fresno State ranked No. 129 in Best Colleges for Veterans nationally.

In October, Fresno State was ranked No. 6 in the nation among public and private universities for social mobility in the Wall Street Journal/College Pulse 2024 Best Colleges rankings.

In August, the university rose to No. 26 nationally in Washington Monthly’s 2023 annual list of top universities, and No. 13 in the Best Bang for the Buck: West category.

Early this summer, Fresno State received a 4.5-star rating on a 5-star scale in Money’s new 2023 Best Colleges rating of the nation’s best colleges for quality and affordability.

– BoNhia Lee

## DONOR IMPACT



## Advancing Genetic and Molecular Biology Research

Students are gaining new opportunities to engage in scientific research thanks to a generous \$1 million donation that established the first endowed chair position in the College of Science and Mathematics at Fresno State.

The newly established chair position will focus on genetics and molecular biology, supporting education and research that includes cell structure, molecular mechanisms of inheritance, gene expression and development.

The gift from the late Dr. Virginia Stammer Eaton led to the appointment of Dr. Joseph Ross as the inaugural Dr. Virginia Stammer Eaton Chair in Genetics and Molecular Biology this past spring.

Ross said creating the endowed chair position will ensure faculty members have the resources to impact many more students over multiple years.

Dr. Christopher Meyer, dean of the College of Science and Mathematics, says the endowment was a significant step in advancing biological research at Fresno State.

“Fresno State’s students are ambassadors of cutting-edge knowledge and skills to our community,” Ross says. “This endowed chair position will help me help the Central Valley, and beyond, leverage genetics and molecular biology to improve our lives through understanding the natural world.”

Funding from the endowment has already made an impact, providing undergraduate students with supplies

for their research, and wages, which allow students to focus on their research without worrying about looking for a job to make ends meet.

Eaton, a lifelong Fresnan, passed away last year at the age of 99. She graduated from Fresno High School at 17 years old and attended Stanford University, earning a biology degree with honors in just three years.



Dr. Virginia Stammer Eaton

She then joined the University of Southern California medical school. She finished her studies in 1947 as the sole woman to graduate in her class in an era when women faced discrimination and were discouraged from pursuing areas of medicine beyond pediatrics and gynecology.

Soon after graduating from med school, she embarked on a distinguished career as a pediatrician at age 25, dedicating herself to diagnosing and supporting children with developmental disabilities and serving underprivileged communities.

Ross said he met Eaton in 2017 when he volunteered to give her a tour of his lab.

“I remember that she was keenly interested in one of the main topics we researched: how cells control the transmission of certain critically important pieces of DNA from parents to their children at fertilization,” Ross recalls. “I suspect this was perhaps meaningful to Virginia because of her long career in pediatrics and especially how genetics affected her patients. I had no idea at the time that a potential gift was perhaps being planned.”

– Maurice Ndole (’07, ’11)



Cary Edmondson

 **STUDENT SPOTLIGHT**

Cary Edmondson



**Neuroscience Student Receives CSU Trustees’ Award**

At a young age, Ali Fakhrudin Dadawalla was inspired to study the complexities of the human brain after meeting a family friend who had a condition he wasn’t familiar with.

Responding to an inquiry from the young Dadawalla about his condition, the man said, “Ali, have you ever heard of Parkinson’s disease? I’m dying and there aren’t any treatments for me right now.”

Dadawalla entered Fresno State as a member of the Smittcamp Family Honors College, wanting to study neuroscience. Because a neuroscience major is not typically offered at the

university, Dadawalla worked with faculty and staff within the College of Science and Mathematics to create a special major.

“I decided that I wanted to study the brain and the underlying conditions that lead to death and degradation of this small but complex organ,” Dadawalla says. “With the creation of this major, I [am] able to take courses across different departments within the College of Science and Mathematics as part of the core curriculum.”

Dadawalla has had the opportunity to actively apply what he learns while working in clinical neuropsychology and biological neuroscience research labs at Fresno State. His research primarily involves analyzing neuropsychiatric symptoms of patients with neurodegenerative diseases as well as exploring how to modify diagnostic criteria, ultimately helping clinicians to diagnose more accurately.

“While my research may not have a direct effect on the vast community of individuals suffering from these diseases, I know that my work can have the impact to aid future researchers in conducting potentially life-changing studies.”

On Sept. 11, it was announced that Dadawalla was one of 23 students (one from each campus) selected by the California State University system to receive the 2023 CSU Trustees’ Award for Outstanding Achievement. Established in 1984, this is the CSU’s highest recognition for student achievement, recognizing superior academic performance, personal accomplishments and community service. Dadawalla is the 2023 Chancellor Emeritus Charles B. and Catherine Reed Scholar.

“Receiving this honor is meaningful to me because not only do I get the opportunity to represent my university and hometown, but I also get the

*“Receiving this honor is meaningful to me because not only do I get the opportunity to represent my university and hometown, but I also get the chance to represent future first-generation students who I hope to inspire to study the sciences.”*

**Ali Fakhrudin Dadawalla**

chance to represent future first-generation students who I hope to inspire to study the sciences.”

Now in his final year of undergraduate studies at Fresno State, Dadawalla serves as a chemistry tutor at Fresno State’s Learning Center and a scribe at Community Regional Medical Center’s emergency department. He also volunteers with a number of

organizations, including Boy Scouts of America and the Fresno State Physics Outreach team.

After graduating, Dadawalla plans to pursue a doctorate and become a physician-scientist in the Central Valley, researching neurodegenerative diseases and treating patients in underserved communities.

– Marisa Mata (’19)

 **AROUND THE FOUNTAIN**



**‘Bulldog Born, Bulldog Bred’**

Jim Sweeney was posthumously inducted into the Fresno State football Ring of Honor at the Bulldogs’ sold-out home opener on Sept. 9. His name was placed atop the press box alongside the nine former players whose jerseys were previously retired, including his son Kevin Sweeney who addressed the crowd at halftime. Jim Sweeney compiled a record of 143-75-3 in two stints as the Bulldogs coach, from 1976-77 and 1980-96. He led the Bulldogs to eight conference championships and was known for his motivational tactics, including coining the phrase, “Bulldog born, Bulldog bred, I’ll be a Bulldog ‘til the day I’m dead.”



**‘Anyone, Anytime, Anywhere’**

Pat Hill became the second former Bulldogs football coach inducted into the Ring of Honor on Oct. 27 at a sold-out Valley Children’s Stadium. Hill succeeded Jim Sweeney and coached Fresno State for 15 years. With a record of 112-80, Hill elevated Fresno State’s brand with his hard-nosed, blue-collar identity, coining phrases like “anyone, anytime, anywhere” in regard to his philosophy of scheduling and beating some of the biggest-name football programs in the country. Hill led the Bulldogs as high as a No. 8 national ranking in 2001 and regularly had the team competing for top 25 status.



**Victor E. Bobblehead**

The National Bobblehead Hall of Fame and Museum unveiled three officially licensed, limited-edition bobbleheads featuring Fresno State’s live mascot. The bobbleheads feature the university’s current live mascot, Victor E. Bulldog IV, the recently retired live mascot Victor E. Bulldog III, and a dual bobblehead featuring costumed mascot TimeOut with Victor E. Bulldog III. The bobbleheads, which are individually numbered to 2,023, are only available through the National Bobblehead Hall of Fame and Museum’s online store, just in time for the holidays.



**M.K. Gandhi Center: Inner Peace and Sarvodaya**

The recently established M.K. Gandhi Center: Inner Peace and Sarvodaya opened its physical space on Oct. 18 on the third floor of the Fresno State Library. The Gandhi Center will offer a space for students to come together and discuss Gandhian principles, including human dignity, social justice and equity, as well as explore creative ways for developing inner peace and a culture of sarvodaya – “uplift of all.”



**Reintroduced into wild**

Fresno State – in partnership with the Fresno Chaffee Zoo, the Bureau of Land Management, California Department of Fish and Wildlife and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – reintroduced 10 blunt-nosed leopard lizards to the Panoche Plateau on May 17. “This is a great moment for the recovery of the blunt-nosed leopard lizard. In just three years, we went from a dire situation with this population of lizards to a day that gives me hope that the species will thrive in the Panoche Hills,” says Michael Fris, field supervisor of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Sacramento Fish and Wildlife Office.

**Poetry Foundation Fellowship**



Fresno writer Roda Avelar, who earned a bachelor’s degree in English literature from Fresno State in 2020, won a Ruth Lilly and Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Poetry Fellowship from the Poetry Foundation. Among the largest awards offered to young poets in the United States, the \$27,000 prize is intended to support exceptional U.S. poets between 21 and 31 years of age. As an undergraduate, Avelar worked as an editorial assistant for the university’s national literary magazine, The Normal School.

# Faces of Fresno State



## Meet some of the students and alumni making the most of a Valley of opportunities

by Eddie Hughes ('05)

**S**tand up, walk to the nearest mirror and take a good, long look. You are the face of Fresno State.

Chances are, so are many of your neighbors, your friends and your family. As well as *their* neighbors, friends and families. In various ways, Fresno State represents all of us who are reading this magazine — and all of us represent Fresno State.

In the Central Valley, six degrees of separation is more like six degrees of education. Because, in all likelihood — with 80% of graduates staying and working in the region — there are far fewer than six degrees of separation between you and the next Fresno State alum or supporter.

Whether you earned your degree from Fresno State, grew up in the area rooting for the Bulldogs, or have donated at some point to support the university's mission — you are one of the faces of Fresno State.

You are one of the people who rose to the challenge despite all odds and showed the world what Fresno State and its people are capable of, while many others doubted what this university could be. You are a part of a university proudly centered within California's fifth-largest city, in the ninth-most diverse area of the United States, growing 25% of the nation's produce.

This school — your school — has graduated alumni who have

accomplished truly remarkable things. There are businesspeople like Malinda Chouinard, who co-founded outdoor clothing company Patagonia; engineers and astronauts like the late Col. Rick Husband, commander of the Space Shuttle Columbia; creators like Ross Bagdasarian Jr., who revived the "Alvin and the Chipmunks" franchise created by his late father; and sports icons like Aaron Judge, the New York Yankees star who holds the American League record for most home runs in a season. Countless other students and alumni have powerful stories that are waiting to be written.

In the spring 2023 issue, Fresno State Magazine featured an imaginative glimpse at what the Valley

would look like without Fresno State. There would be glaring holes in health care, a lack of qualified teachers in classrooms, less entrepreneurs and innovators. There would be major impacts to law enforcement and the judicial system, as well as agriculture, finance and media industries — just to name a few examples.

Thankfully, the university is here to stay — and it remains dedicated to educating and empowering the next generation of leaders to drive the region forward.

And, once again, it will be the people connected to Fresno State who decide just how great the university's impact and reach will be for future generations.

As Fresno State embarks on its ambitious new strategic plan, the university will need unprecedented community support to meet the growing needs of the Valley and continue climbing the ranks academically and athletically.

This fall, Fresno State rose to No. 26 in Washington Monthly's rankings of the top national

universities, based on research, service and social mobility. In 2022, the Fresno State football team finished the season ranked No. 24 — making Fresno State one of just five universities in the nation to rank in both Washington Monthly's top 40 and in the Associated Press top 25 college football poll. The Wall Street Journal ranked Fresno State No. 6 nationally for social mobility, a measurement of the university's impact on the socioeconomic class of its graduates and their families, and U.S. News ranked the university No. 8.

In the following pages, Fresno State Magazine features several of the "faces of Fresno State" who have overcome challenges, inspired change in their families or communities, served a need within our region and are striving to accomplish great things.

When you support Fresno State, these are the types of people you're supporting. And this is where their stories begin.

— Eddie Hughes is the senior editor for Fresno State Magazine.

## Nationally Ranked

**No. 6**  
The Wall Street Journal ranked Fresno State sixth nationally for social mobility.



**No. 24**  
The 2022 Bulldog football team finished 24th in the Associated Press poll.



**No. 26**  
Washington Monthly ranked Fresno State 26th among all universities based on research, service and social mobility.



# Super Intentions

**New Clovis superintendent leans into lessons learned as Fresno State student-athlete**

By Lisa Bell ('95)



Connections run deep for Dr. Corrine Folmer. From her ties to Clovis Unified School District to her history with Fresno State, the past, present and future of Clovis Unified's newest superintendent are tightly woven together into the fabric of both institutions.

Four generations of her family have received their education from Clovis Unified, including her two daughters — one in middle school and one in high school. She was one of the early graduates of Buchanan High School, where she competed as an athlete.

While at Fresno State, she played soccer for all four years of her undergraduate education on a scholarship. And she didn't even start out as an education major.

Folmer started college as an engineering major but found that challenging due to her soccer travel schedule and her commitment as an instructional assistant and assistant soccer coach at Buchanan High School. She consulted with a mentor, Mary Noga, a math teacher at Buchanan High School, who encouraged her to consider teaching as an alternative since she was already getting a taste of it.

"At the same time, I was coaching," Folmer says, "and I loved working with students. It just naturally worked."

She credited her advisers and faculty at Fresno State for helping her make the transition and providing "great academic support." She became a special education teacher.

After graduating in 2001, she began teaching at Sierra High School in Tollhouse.

"At a small school, you wear many hats," Folmer says, "so I taught math and special education and coached soccer and track. It was a great experience. There is a great community up there."

▲ Dr. Corrine Folmer, the new superintendent of Clovis Unified School District, earned bachelor's (2001), master's (2008) and doctoral (2021) degrees from Fresno State. As an undergrad, she attended Fresno State on a soccer scholarship, and was initially an engineering major before discovering her passion as an educator.

In 2003, she returned to Clovis Unified “to work with kids in the place where I grew up.” Over the next 20 years, she moved into administrative roles, acquiring her master’s (2008) and doctoral degrees (2021) from Fresno State along the way.

Her newest role is a culmination of that journey. As of July 1, Folmer is the new superintendent of Clovis Unified, following the retirement of Dr. Eimear O’Brien, who held the position since 2017.

“Teaching is one of the most noble professions,” Folmer says. “We have the true ability to impact children, to build long-lasting relationships in a community and help students achieve things that they sometimes don’t even know they can achieve. I commend anyone who wants to be a teacher because it’s hard work, and I often tell them it’s a work of the heart because, at the end of the day, you’ll close the door to your classroom, you’ll turn the light out and the job stays with you. You’re still worried about a student in your class. It really is work of the heart, and it requires passion.”

Originally established in 1911 as a teacher’s college to attract and retain students who would stay and teach

in the Valley, Fresno State is now consistently in the top three public universities preparing the most K-12 school teachers in California. About 60% of school administrators across the region are Fresno State alumni, leading Valley schools and shaping the future of local youth.

Fresno State President Saúl Jiménez-Sandoval looks forward to working with the new Clovis superintendent.

“Dr. Folmer’s journey from a dedicated student and impressive athlete to an accomplished leader exemplifies the transformative power of education that Fresno State instills in all of our talented students,” he says. “As the new Clovis superintendent, she brings with her a wealth of experience, a passion for education and a deep understanding of the impressive opportunities and aspirations of our region. I am genuinely excited to work alongside Dr. Folmer in her new role.”

Folmer talked about some of her experiences at Fresno State that helped prepare her.

“One of the things I loved about the professors I had was that they were always encouraging you to think critically,” Folmer says. “It was a lot of,

► As a Fresno State soccer player from 1998 to 2001, Dr. Corrine Folmer played many positions—defense, midfield, striker and left wing. In her new position as Clovis Unified superintendent, she makes it a point to visit classrooms at every grade level within the district, as shown during a September visit to Reagan Elementary (right).



‘How would you handle this problem? What are your thoughts?’ It was this great collective of experiences that I’ve taken forward into my career because you’re always reflecting, thinking, ‘Gosh! What is the new research? And how does this play out and work with teams?’”

But she learned on the field as well, during her time with the Fresno State women’s soccer team. She moved around each season, playing different positions, starting on defense, moving to midfield, striker and left wing, then back to defense in her final year.

“On the athletic side. I don’t think there’s any better lesson than just learning to work with a team,” she says, “being connected to campus on a greater scale, being prideful of Fresno State, and learning to really persevere as a team, knowing that none of us could accomplish anything without each other. That’s a great lesson in life.”

Clovis Unified, with almost 43,000 students, is the 14th largest public school district in California (Fresno



Cary Edmondson

Unified is the third largest). The district has 34 elementary schools, five comprehensive intermediate schools and high schools, as well as adult and alternative education schools.

And the district is growing. Another elementary school will open in 2024 and the Bradley Educational Center will open in 2025.

Folmer is confident the Clovis Unified team is up to the challenge.

“Our aim is to maximize achievement for ALL students, and all is capitalized because we believe it is every single kid,” she says. “It’s really important to unify our team. We have about 7,000 employees, and it takes every one of us doing our piece of the big puzzle every day with that focus to continue to make our educational system be the best it can for our kids.”

Another challenge Folmer sees is improving students’ academic achievement. As the nation adapts coming out of the pandemic shutdown, school districts (and universities) are tackling solutions to overcome learning gaps from when students

weren’t in classrooms — “that’s across the state, that’s everywhere.”

“We still have work to do,” she says. “We’ve got to pick up and get refocused. I want to complement our educational team. They are working hard to help our kids adjust back into a social environment and all of those expectations. Academic achievement is one of those goals.”

Folmer sees great opportunities for partnership with Fresno State, including the new Bulldog Bound program, which launched in May. The guaranteed admissions program will ensure high school students in participating districts have a clear, tangible path to a college degree. Fresno State will support students and their families with admission preparation and resources as early as ninth grade.

“We’re excited about the Bulldog Bound program,” Folmer says. “We had a great meeting with Fresno State. A good number of Fresno State students become our teachers. I think there’s always been this great

partnership and pride in our students who go to the university. Not all of them become teachers — we send a lot of prepared students who join the great agricultural department, the engineering department and many others. It’s a great source of pride to us when we see our students continue to contribute to our community.”

— Lisa Bell is the public information officer for Fresno State.

## Valley of opportunity

Dr. Corrine Folmer is one of over 242,000 living alumni from Fresno State, and this is where her Bulldog story began. With continued support from the community, Fresno State alumni are committed to educating youth throughout the Valley, state and nation. Because about 60% of Valley educators are Fresno State alumni, your support today will ensure the vitality of the university and the region for generations to come.

**“I commend anyone who wants to be a teacher because it’s hard work, and I often tell them it’s a work of the heart because, at the end of the day, you’ll close the door to your classroom, you’ll turn the light out and the job stays with you. You’re still worried about a student in your class. It really is work of the heart, and it requires passion.”**

**Dr. Corrine Folmer**

Superintendent, Clovis Unified School District

# Like Father, Like Sons

**Merced twins and their father set to attend Fresno State together**

By BoNhia Lee

A member of the Fresno State club men's rugby team stopped twins Jacob and Jeremiah Schwesinger and their father during Dog Days student orientation in June.

"Are you a student?" the rugby player asked dad Carl Schwesinger, 47, who proudly wore a red Fresno State T-shirt and baseball cap. He answered yes. "You're too old," the rugby player said.

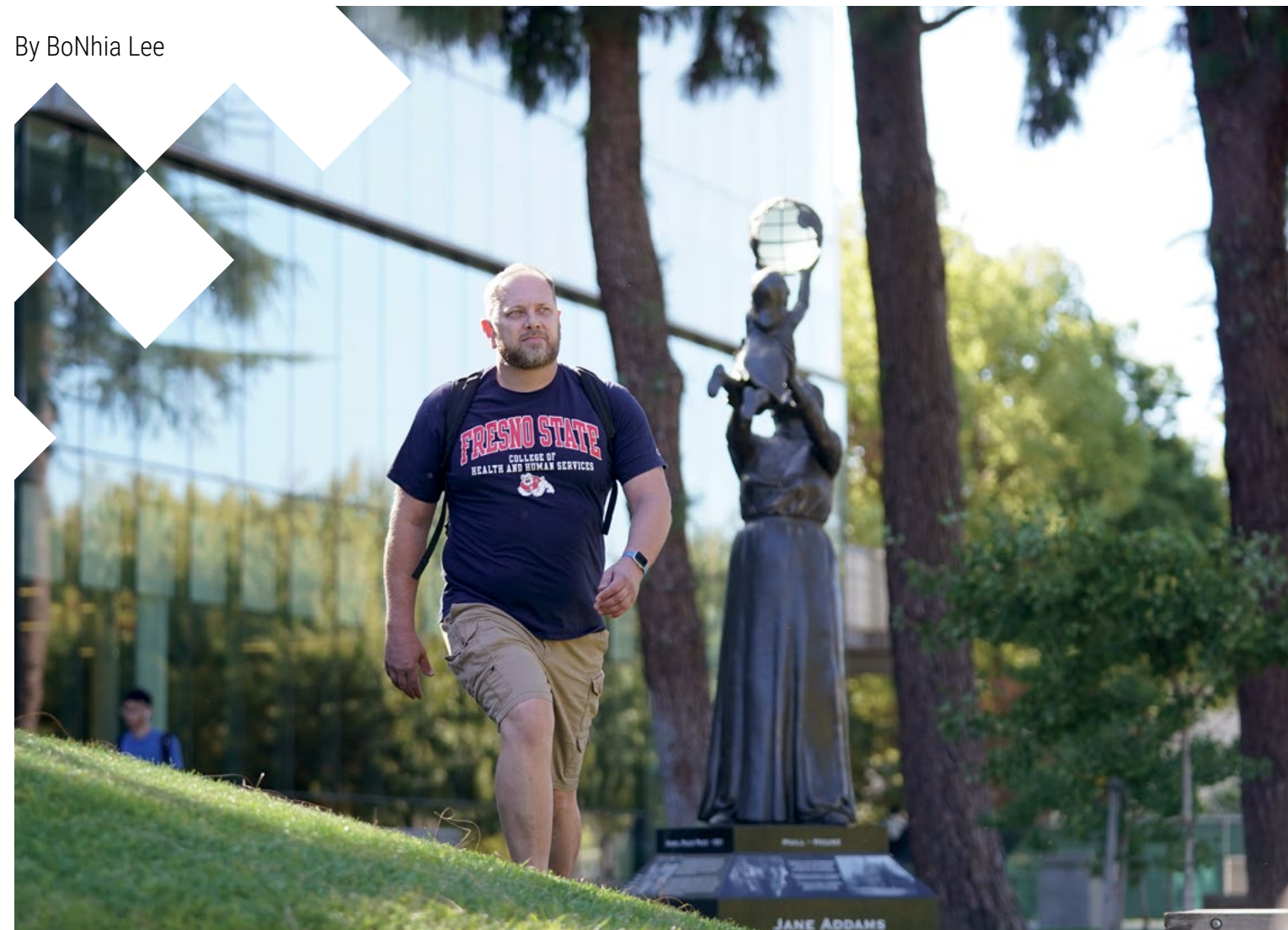
All three Schwesingers graduated from Merced College in May with their associate's degrees and transferred to Fresno State, where each will begin a journey to finish their undergraduate degrees.

Carl is majoring in communicative studies to pursue a career in speech-language pathology. The rugby player asked if Carl wanted to play. "You've got a rugby body," he said.

The trio laugh about the encounter during their first trip to Fresno State together. They said they were awed by the size and beauty of campus and excited for what's to come — football games, campus life and dad occasionally crashing on the boys' off-campus sofa when he commutes to town for class. They picked Fresno State for its proximity to their home in Merced, for its affordability and for the programs they are interested in.

*"When I couldn't get a problem he'd help me, when he didn't get a problem I'd help him. It's mutual understanding and just really nice to have family in [class together]."*

**Jacob Schwesinger**  
Communicative studies student and father



Cary Edmondson

The twins want to work with animals so they will both major in animal sciences and ag education. But first, they will attend boot camp this fall for the National Guard. Jacob is training as an aviation mechanic, and will begin his studies at Fresno State in 2024. Jeremiah left Oct. 3 to train as a chaplain assistant and will start at Fresno State in fall 2024.

"I want to be able to serve my country," Jacob says. The National Guard "allows you to serve your country and go to college at the same time."

The twins have been on a fast educational track since the end of middle school when they told their parents they wanted to take college classes while in high school. They were able to take courses through Merced College with their father.

Carl had plans to study business in college, but life had different plans — a new baby for the young entrepreneur and his girlfriend, who

is now his wife. He pushed school to the side and went to work to support his family, which includes two older daughters before the twins were born. He bought and operated two pizza restaurants before going to work for a food service company that had a program to help employees go back to school and earn their degrees.

He enrolled at Merced College alongside his boys, taking two to three classes together, including statistics.

"When I couldn't get a problem he'd help me, when he didn't get a problem I'd help him," Jacob says. "It's mutual understanding and just really nice to have family in [class together]."

Carl jumps in to say that the college experience with his sons was another way they could connect. "We've done some Spartan races together, hikes and different things ... It's always nice when you can connect with your kids on different levels."

— BoNhia Lee is a communications specialist at Fresno State.

▲ Carl Schwesinger, 47, and his twin sons, Jacob and Jeremiah, each graduated from Merced College in May with their associate's degrees and transferred to Fresno State. Carl is majoring in communicative studies to pursue a career in speech-language pathology, and his sons are in boot camp for the National Guard before returning to major in animal sciences and ag education.

## Valley of opportunity

The Schwesingers are among 24,000 students at Fresno State, and this is where their Bulldog stories began. With continued support from the community, Fresno State is committed to providing the resources and pathways — for students of any age — to open up a Valley of opportunities for students and alumni alike. Your support today will ensure the vitality of the university and the region for generations to come.



Cary Edmondson

# Three generations of Bulldogs

**While many Fresno State students are the first in their families to go to college, others have made it a family tradition to be Bulldogs**

By Lisa Bell ('95)

When Joseph Fraga was a young man working for Ernest and Julio Gallo in Modesto, his bosses gave him a choice that changed the direction of his family tree for generations to come.

While studying accounting at Modesto Junior College and working for the largest exporter of California wines, Fraga's desk at the Gallo Company was a piece of plywood on top of two filing cabinets right outside Ernest Gallo's office, where he was accessible when the boss needed him.

Fraga wasn't a vice president, but he and his wife, Maybelle, were invited to Christmas dinners with the Gallos and the company vice presidents at the Gallo home. Seated to the right

of the company founders, Fraga was chosen to give the blessing before the meal.

After Fraga had been with Gallo for a while, Ernest Gallo gave him a choice.

"They wanted me to go to either Modesto, San Francisco or Fresno," all locations where Gallo had offices, Fraga says. "I told him I would have to go to Fresno because that's where Fresno State is."

That decision in the 1950s paved the way for the next two generations of his family to become Bulldogs. His daughter, Becky, and her husband, Craig Collins, later earned their degrees, as did their daughter, Jessica Piffero, and her husband, Ben Piffero. The whole family has matching class rings.

Fraga earned his degree in accounting, but he also researched in the Fresno State wine lab. He helped plan and execute the move of Fresno State's nascent wine program from its original location at the campus where Fresno City College is now to the current campus at Shaw and Cedar avenues.

He ultimately worked for Gallo for 44 years before retiring in 1997.

▲ Jessica Piffero (second from right), Fresno State's social media coordinator, is the third generation in a family full of proud Bulldogs. Through agriculture, education, athletics and the Bulldog Marching Band, the family bonds stretch across several areas of campus. From left to right: Craig Collins, Ben Piffero, Mia Piffero, Joseph Fraga, Maybelle Fraga, Jessica Piffero, Becky Collins.



**Left:** Third-generation Bulldogs Ben and Jessica Piffero gave birth to baby Mia in 2022. Chances are, she may one day be part of the family's college-going tradition.

**Right:** Though the family is spread out in Bakersfield, Madera and Fresno — as longtime football season ticket holders — they often get together for home games to share their Bulldog spirit, as embodied by their matching class rings.



Cary Edmondson

***“She’s being raised in a Bulldog family on both sides ... So she’s getting the Bulldog spirit from all branches of the family tree.”***

**Jessica Piffero**

Social media coordinator, Fresno State

**The second generation**

Becky Collins and her sisters saw their father earn his college degree. Becky was in kindergarten at the time.

“I don’t remember his graduation, but I remember the party at the house,” she says.

She didn’t feel pressured by her parents to pursue college. However, an experience with a high school guidance counselor put her into college prep classes instead of a possible future in something more secretarial.

“That got me ready on the path because it was four years of math, four years of science, four years of English,” Becky says. College was a logical next step when she graduated from Clovis High in 1973. While she would have loved to consider universities beyond Fresno, the family’s financial situation limited that option.

“I didn’t have the typical college experience,” she says. “I lived at home, and I worked at Gottschalks. I went to school and then back to work. That’s all I did. No clubs, no sororities, no organizations, no marching band.”

Becky and Craig met while they were both Fresno State students, introduced by a mutual friend. They walked along with Craig’s sister in the commencement ceremony at Selland Arena in downtown Fresno in May 1978.

Becky and Craig married in 1980, and Jessica — an only child — was born in 1987. Unlike Becky’s experience, Jessica did grow up — in Bakersfield, where her parents lived — with an expectation she would go to college.

“Absolutely! From day one,” Becky says. “We always wanted her to explore Fresno State, but she ultimately wanted to consider other possibilities.”

**The third generation**

Fresno State was a big part of Jessica’s childhood, even growing up nearly two hours south of town.

“During my childhood, Fresno State was always key,” says Jessica, who now works as the university’s social media coordinator. “We would spend time with my family and grandparents in Fresno during the holidays. Everyone always wore Fresno State baseball hats or shirts. We always talked about

the games and how the teams were doing. Family itineraries would revolve around athletics in our household. ‘When and where are we going to eat?’ ‘That depends on where the Bulldogs are playing.’”

Joseph and Maybelle are longtime season ticket holders for football and sometimes basketball. Craig and Becky have been football season ticket holders since 2005 when Jessica went to Fresno State and joined the Bulldog Marching Band.

Initially, Jessica didn’t think Fresno State was where she wanted to go to college.

“When you’re told your whole life you’re going to go to Fresno State to be a Bulldog, when you’re a stubborn teenager, you want to push back against that,” she says.

She applied to — and was accepted at — several other schools.

“But, at the end of the day,” Jessica says, “Fresno State was the one that truly made the most sense.”

After performing in the marching band for the last six years of her

primary education and wanting to continue in college, part of it came down to the Bulldog Marching Band and Fresno State’s sports program.

“If you want to do the marching band experience,” says Craig Collins, Jessica’s father, “out of the schools that accepted her, Fresno State was the obvious choice.”

Jessica met Ben while they were both members of the Bulldog Marching Band. They graduated — Jessica in 2009 with a degree in mass communication and journalism, and Ben in 2010 with a degree in construction management — and married in 2010.

**The fourth generation?**

With the birth of their daughter Mia in 2022, their family might have a fourth-generation Bulldog on the sidelines.

“She’s being raised in a Bulldog family on both sides,” Jessica says. “I’m a third generation, and Ben is a second generation. [Ben’s mom is also a Fresno State alum.] So she’s getting the Bulldog spirit from all branches of

the family tree. Our extended family really values Fresno State’s role for us, and I think that the next generation will continue that tradition.”

Mia may even have the experience Becky had, seeing a parent earn a degree from Fresno State, as Jessica is currently working toward a master’s degree in public administration.

“Fresno State has had a lifelong impact on all of us,” Jessica says. “Papa moved to Fresno for work and college, and here we are today.”

**Valley of opportunity**

The Fraga, Collins and Piffero families are among 240,000 living alumni of Fresno State, and this is where their Bulldog stories began. With continued support from the community, Fresno State is committed to uniting and engaging us all — through academics and athletics — to open up a Valley of opportunities for students and alumni alike. Your support today will ensure the vitality of the university and the region for generations to come.

# The Art of the Game

**For Bulldogs big man Eduardo Andre, there is artistry in the story of his basketball journey**

By Eddie Hughes ('05)

**E**duardo Andre never shies away from a blank canvas. From country to country, state to state, he's kept his faith, embraced fresh starts and created works of art – whether it was with a paintbrush or a basketball in his hands.

"I come from a family of athletes and artists," Andre says in his British accent, a small hint at his journey.

Standing 6-foot-11, Andre had a breakout junior season last year as the center on the Fresno State basketball team. In his first year with the Bulldogs, he led the team with 44 blocked shots, was second in rebounding (5.9 per game) and fourth in scoring with 8.3 points per game.

Andre didn't start playing basketball until he was about 15 years old, but throughout childhood he recalls playing soccer, running track, playing cricket and even boxing.



Keith Kountz

Always one of the tallest people in his class, Andre showed great potential on the basketball court. As a sophomore in high school, he came to the United States and attended Woodrow Wilson High in Dallas for two years. During his senior year, he transferred to Arizona Compass Prep in Chandler, Arizona and became a top 200 recruit nationally.

Andre landed a college basketball scholarship to Nebraska, and spent his freshman and sophomore seasons as one of the first big men off the bench for the Huskers, before transferring to play for coach Justin Hutson at Fresno State. In search of a center after losing Orlando Robinson to the NBA's Miami Heat, Hutson saw Andre's potential and envisioned a larger role for him.

"Coach likes playing defense, I like playing defense, so to me it was a match made in heaven," Andre says.

Off the court, Andre is majoring in media, communications and journalism, with an emphasis in advertising and public relations. He says he is intrigued with studying what motivates people to buy things and how advertising can influence those motivations. To complement his major, he is minoring in art.

"Art is definitely one of my hobbies," Andre says. "I like design, whether it's the design of products, whether it's paintings, drawings, fashion. I've always been into art my whole life. When I was a kid, I used to be scribbling and painting, and art was a class I did really well at in high school."

In his free time – which isn't much as a major college basketball student-athlete – Andre makes time for his art. His latest project, which he's worked on for numerous days in the living room of his Clovis apartment,

is a large canvas painting of three hot air balloons drifting in open air. Andre says the hot air balloons represent the frequent childhood dreams he had about flying – though he's afraid of heights – and the various shades of blue on the balloons represent the sky.

He says he gets his artistic ability from his father, Kiese Andre. "My dad, he's really smart," Andre says. "When I was [young], my dad got a master's degree in civil engineering. He's always been artistic in that way, making buildings and things like that."

When his dad was studying at University of East London, Andre recalls tagging along with him to the library at night. "He'd be in there studying, and I'd be messing around looking at books." Andre's mother, Candida, worked numerous jobs to help support the family.

Art and sports are common bonds in the family. Andre's older brother, also named Kiese, is an architect and also used to play basketball. His older sister, Elisa, is in marketing and used to run track. His younger sister, Joyce, is also into art, and his younger brother, Melchi, might be the next basketball star in the family. "He's tall as well, so I'm trying to get him over to America playing basketball," Andre says.

All four of Andre's siblings are back home in London, where he spent most of his childhood.

Andre was born in Luanda, Angola, a port city on the west coast of Africa, and moved to London with his family when he was 4 years old. His parents are back in Angola now, helping to build a church.

"My whole family is really faithful," Andre says. "I try to pray every day. My mom is always telling me, 'Make sure you're reading your Bible, make sure you're praying.' Keeping faith has helped me a lot in life."

Andre's family has not yet been able to make the trip to the U.S. to see him play a college basketball game, but he's hoping that will soon change. "With COVID and everything, it was hard, but hopefully this season they can come over and catch a game. I know my older sister and older brother should be able to come for my Senior Day."

Fresno State closes the regular season at home March 9 against Wyoming, in what could be Andre's final game as a Bulldog. Because of the extra year the NCAA grants student-athletes who missed out on a full season due to COVID, Andre could potentially return for the 2024-25 season, but he also aspires to play professionally if he has the opportunity.

When he first started playing basketball, Andre recalls watching old NBA games and studying different superstars from various eras.

◀ In his free time, Fresno State basketball standout Eduardo Andre enjoys painting. His latest project, which he worked on in his Clovis apartment, is a large canvas painting of three hot air balloons representing the childhood dreams he had about flying – though he's afraid of heights.



"I don't emulate my game after anybody, really, but I like picking things out from every player I like," Andre says. "Like Kevin Garnett, his ferocity; Hakeem Olajuwon, the way he's skillful; Kobe Bryant, his mentality; and Michael Jordan, the way he finishes games."

This summer, Andre and his Bulldogs teammates got to spend two days with Fresno State alumnus and eight-time NBA All-Star Paul George of the Los Angeles Clippers. George came to campus and worked out with the team, gave some pointers and just spent time getting to know every player on the roster. He even name dropped Andre and several other Bulldogs on "Podcast P," his first-year podcast that has exploded in popularity.

"That was really cool," Andre says. "He's a cool guy, a humble guy, down to Earth. I think everybody on the team really enjoyed having him here. It gives us confidence to know that if we have goals of trying to make it pro, it's achievable."

George shared his phone number with everyone on the team and started a group chat. "He always shoots us texts saying, 'you guys keep focused up there.'"

The Bulldogs are focused on improving after some growing pains last season with a young team that finished 11-20 (6-12 in the Mountain West). They showed flashes of their potential in a win over No. 21 New Mexico and a two-game sweep of UNLV.

This season, under the leadership of Andre and senior guard Isaiah Hill, and with new pieces like transfers Xavier DuSell and Enoch Boakeye (Arizona), Fresno State could be a team to watch in the Mountain West.

"As a team, at the end of the day, we're here to win," Andre says. "Our big goal here is to win. Individually, I felt like I should have been up for [Mountain West] Defensive Player of the Year, so that's definitely something I'm trying to achieve. I don't look too much at individual accolades – if it comes it comes – but my goal is to do whatever I need for my team to win."

The Bulldogs start conference play in January with another blank canvas. Andre – along with his teammates – will do everything he can to turn it into a masterpiece.

## Valley of opportunity

Eduardo Andre is one of nearly 500 student-athletes at Fresno State, and this is where his Bulldog story began. With continued support from the community, Fresno State is committed to providing the resources and pathways for student-athletes to excel on and off the court or field, creating a Valley of opportunities for students and alumni alike. Your support today will ensure that Fresno State athletics continues to elevate the university's brand on a national stage for generations to come.

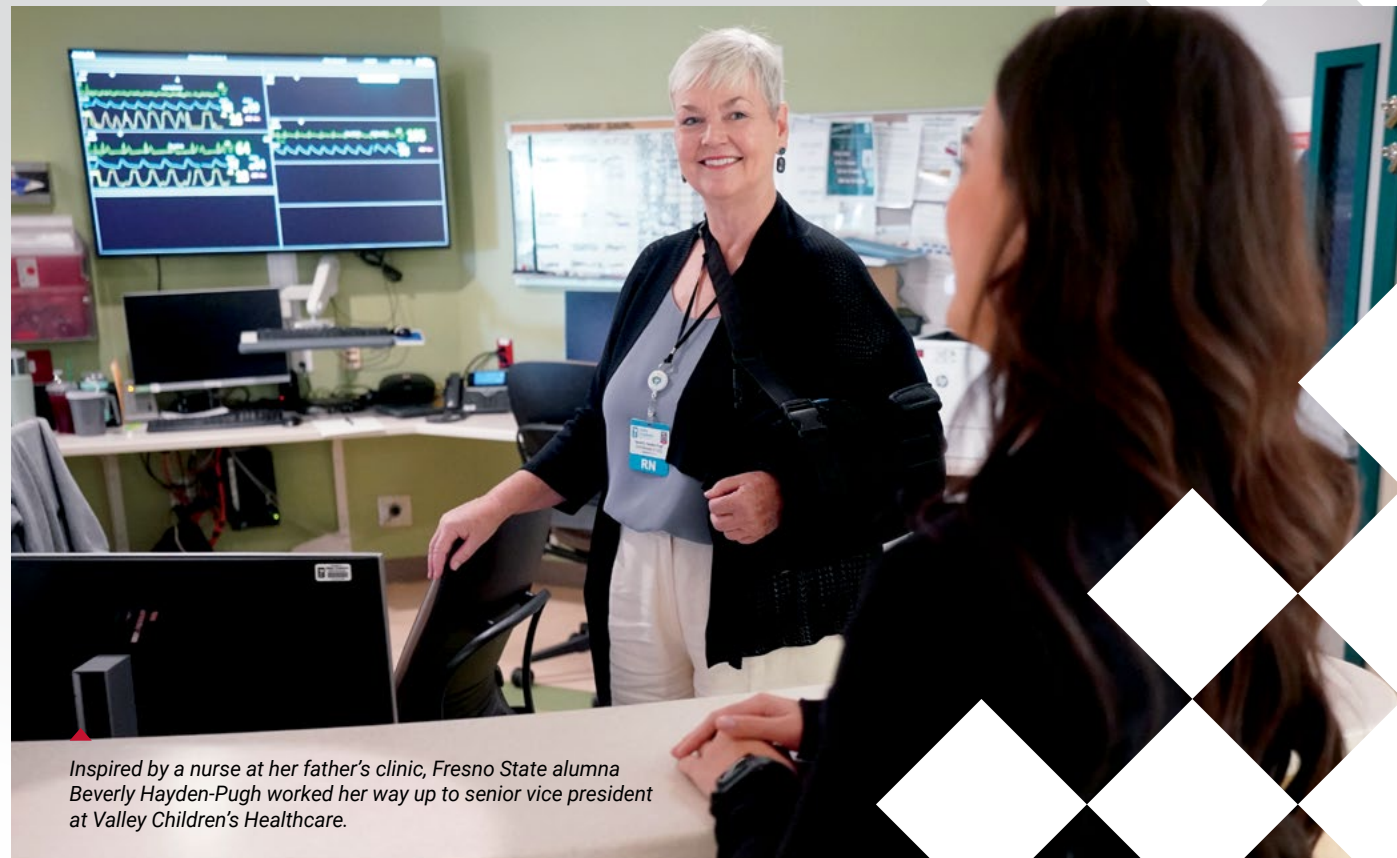


Cary Edmondson

# A Caring Career

**Nursing alumna has impacted patients and colleagues alike for four decades at Valley Children's Healthcare**

By Lauren Nickerson ('10)



Inspired by a nurse at her father's clinic, Fresno State alumna Beverly Hayden-Pugh worked her way up to senior vice president at Valley Children's Healthcare.

Cary Edmondson

In the heart of the Central Valley, a partnership between Valley Children's Healthcare and Fresno State can be highlighted in many ways – including the story of a woman whose journey from a small mountain town to a prominent health care executive exemplifies the power of education, leadership and a shared commitment to serving the community.

Beverly Hayden-Pugh, a proud alumna of Fresno State, embarked on an extraordinary career that took her from Fresno State graduate to senior vice president, chief nursing officer and chief transformation officer at Valley Children's.

Hayden-Pugh's journey began in the mountain town of Big Creek, where her father, a physician for Southern California Edison, introduced her to the world of health care. She spent her formative years assisting her father in treating an array of injuries for both locals and tourists, from chainsaw lacerations to broken bones.

While volunteering at the clinic exposed her to all of the possibilities of a career in medicine, her father's trusted nurse, Esther, was her inspiration. "Esther showed me how, as a professional nurse, that you could positively impact people in ways beyond the immediate clinical visit"

Hayden-Pugh says. In this close-knit community of around 500 residents, she learned the invaluable lesson that helping people could take many forms.

After a few years away at the University of California, Santa Barbara, Hayden-Pugh came home to Fresno State, initially pursuing a bachelor's degree in health sciences and eventually completing the nursing program in 1983. Her path led her to a career that has spanned four decades, left an indelible mark on countless lives and has been closely intertwined with her alma mater.

She joined Valley Children's Healthcare in August 1983 as a

registered nurse in pediatric oncology. It was there she found her calling. Working with a dedicated team and caring for a special patient population, she fell in love with the mission of Valley Children's.



Hayden-Pugh's (pictured above) impact over her 20-plus years as chief nursing officer and 40-plus year career at Valley Children's is nothing short of remarkable. Under her leadership, the organization achieved the prestigious Magnet Nursing Designation, an accolade earned by less than 5% of hospitals nationwide. One of the most significant touchpoints of Hayden-Pugh's career has been her close collaboration with Fresno State.

She served as a preceptor for Fresno State students early in her career, participated in the Children's Institute and contributed to the development of health care policy, and championed clinical education. Under her guidance, Valley Children's has become a vital training ground for Fresno State students in nursing, physical therapy, occupational therapy, child life and even business and technology internships.

"Nursing is a wonderful pursuit. I have had the opportunity to serve in a variety of roles ranging from being a bedside caregiver for pediatric oncology patients to director of outpatient surgical clinics to being a health care executive," she says.

"I see future nurses as having the same opportunities to create the paths that they choose. Such is the gift of professional nursing. People say that the COVID-19 pandemic changed health care forever, and I would agree- COVID helped us realize our opportunities."

One such opportunity has come through the partnership that has blossomed between Valley Children's and Fresno State – two pillars of the region that are invested in the success of Valley youth. The two organizations launched a joint initiative, "Healthy Kids. Healthy Futures.," in May.

"Beverly's journey from a Fresno State graduate to a distinguished health care leader inspires us all. Her unwavering commitment to nurturing the next generation of health care professionals exemplifies the values we hold dear at Fresno State," says Fresno State President Saúl Jiménez-Sandoval. "Her story is a testament to the high quality leadership that our alumni manifest –they live and breathe the transformative power of their Fresno State education that elevates the quality of life in our Valley."

## TV commercial

In the university's national TV commercial that debuted this fall, that partnership was on full display. The commercial highlights alumni who are leaders in their fields, including Fresno State alumna and NFL quarterback Derek Carr, and Sarah Holland, another registered nurse at Valley Children's who is shown in the ad wearing a Fresno State-branded surgical cap while caring for her patient. Formalizing the partnership and highlighting the many touch points between Fresno State and Valley Children's Healthcare, makes Hayden-Pugh immensely proud. "Both organizations are inspirational in their own right, but our leaders are equally inspiring as well," she says.

"There are few individuals who more perfectly reflect the very best of health care and of nursing – hope, dedication, compassion and giving more to others than you ever receive," says Dr. Todd Suntrapak, Valley Children's president and CEO, a Fresno

State alumnus. "Beverly's journey is a testament to the limitless possibilities that education and opportunity can offer – and to the shared values and commitment of the Valley Children's and Fresno State partnership to improve our community's well-being."

As Hayden-Pugh continues her journey, mentoring future leaders, advocating for quality health care, she remains a shining example of how collaboration between visionary leaders and institutions can make a profound difference in the lives of children and communities.

"You cannot walk through the hospital without seeing a child and remember why you are here," Hayden-Pugh says. "It takes everyone working together to make an impact on the health of a child and our community."

– Lauren Nickerson is the associate vice president for University Marketing and Communications at Fresno State.

Scan QR code to view TV commercial.



## Valley of opportunity

Beverly Hayden-Pugh is one of over 242,000 living alumni from Fresno State, and this is where her Bulldog story began. With continued support from the community, Fresno State alumni are committed to providing health care to youth and adults in communities throughout the Valley, state and nation. Because about 20% of Fresno State students major in health care-related careers, your support today will ensure the vitality of the university and the region for generations to come.

# Staying on Path

Cary Edmondson

## Inspired by his brother's health scare, chemistry student is determined to overcome any barriers in his way

By Maurice Ndole ('07, '11)

▲ With dreams to pursue a medical degree after graduating in 2024, Marvin Cornejo credits the Dream Act and campus resources for helping him stay on track to complete his education.

A serotonin molecule structure tattoo on his right wrist summarizes Marvin Cornejo's attitude toward life — optimism and resilience.

Serotonin is a brain chemical that regulates mood, sleep and various functions in the human body, contributing to feelings of happiness and well-being.

"I got [the tattoo] as a reminder of my love for chemistry and my path toward medical school," says Cornejo, a senior chemistry major at Fresno State.

But despite his positivity, Cornejo's path to Fresno State was paved with challenges that would make most give up.

Cornejo arrived in the U.S. from El Salvador when he was 16 years old in 2016. He was an unaccompanied minor making a second attempt at a treacherous journey in the hands of human smugglers known as coyotes.

His first attempt to seek asylum in the U.S. occurred in late 2015. Cornejo says the journey was excruciating. It took almost three months, and he ended up in a juvenile detention center in Mexico and was deported back to El Salvador.

A few months later, Cornejo made the second attempt. The journey lasted nearly a month, landing him on the border between the U.S. and Mexico and into the hands of the U.S. Border Patrol in Texas.

Cornejo is from Azacualpa, a village in Cabañas state, El Salvador, which he estimates had a population of 200 at his departure. Cornejo said his future looked dire because education was not easily accessible.

"My village only had a school up to the sixth grade, so to access higher education, I had to travel. It wasn't easy, as my family didn't have the financial means to support that," Cornejo says.

The lack of schools made students vulnerable to violent gangs.

"Gangs would recruit young people. If you refused [to join], you were seen as a rival gang member. It could be life-threatening. There were instances of students being killed, and I often felt unsafe walking to school," Cornejo says.

Safety concerns for her son prompted Cornejo's mother to send him on a journey to the U.S. to join his father, who was living in Mendota.

### Inspired to pursue medicine

Cornejo says, since childhood, he desired an education beyond what was available in his village. He dreamed of becoming a doctor, an ambition fueled by his brother's medical scare. Cornejo witnessed his parents' gratitude when an El Salvadorian doctor removed a life-threatening tumor from his brother's head.

"Seeing the impact of that surgeon on my family left an impression on me. They treated him like a hero," Cornejo says. "That made me want to be a hero for others, to solve problems, and to make a positive difference in people's lives."

At Fresno State, Cornejo says he found the support to pursue his dream.

He points out CSM 10 and CSM 15 as integral courses that helped to prepare him to major in chemistry. CSM 10, the scientific methods, and CSM 15, evidence-based decision-making, are classes geared toward laying a solid foundation for students majoring in courses offered within the College of Science and Mathematics.

The support he has received has made him grateful to the Valley. He hopes to return to serve in the region that has long had a shortage in health care providers.

"With my medical degree, I want to come back to the Central Valley," Cornejo said. "It's the community

that opened its arms when I arrived in this country."

### Resources to succeed

Even with the support, things have not been easy. As an undocumented student seeking asylum, Cornejo has at times lacked basic needs such as food or money to pay bills and tuition, forcing him to take breaks from school and prolonging his path to graduation.

When he lacked food, Cornejo says he relied on the Amendola Family Student Cupboard, a Fresno State resource that provides students with free food and hygiene products.

And he credits the Dream Act for providing financial aid to get him to this point — he is on track to graduate in May 2024 with bachelor's degrees in chemistry and Spanish, before applying for medical school.

Because of his immigration status, he could only work with a permit.

"I applied for my latest work permit renewal in July 2022, but it wasn't approved until [September 2023]. So, I couldn't work for an entire year," Cornejo says. "I could have graduated in spring 2023, but I dropped out because I couldn't pay the fees for the spring semester."

Despite the challenges, Cornejo, now in his fifth year at Fresno State, has found ways to get through his education using on-campus resources. He mentioned the Health Careers Opportunity Program as an example of a support system that has given him insight into the requirements to build a career in the medical field. He has also regularly used Supplemental Instruction, which he said has come in handy to succeed "in tough chemistry courses."

To give back, he has volunteered with different programs, such as Westside Youth in Mendota, an organization that assists in providing food and clothing for people

experiencing homelessness and mentoring at-risk youth.

At Fresno State, he has served as a supplemental instructor for organic chemistry.

As he continues to settle in the U.S., Cornejo worries about his mother and three sisters in El Salvador.

"I stay in touch with my mom and sisters through messages and social media," Cornejo says. "We talk about what's happening in our lives. My family situation has been challenging, but we do our best to keep in contact."

Cornejo is optimistic for his future, determined to overcome any barriers that stand in his way.

"My background and everything I've been through inspires me to keep going. I've come too far to give up now, no matter what happens," Cornejo says. "I've done so much, and I can't let it go to waste. I've held onto my dreams, and I plan to achieve them. Dreams can come true with determination and planning."

— Maurice Ndole is the media and communications specialist in the College of Science and Mathematics at Fresno State.

### Valley of opportunity

Marvin Cornejo is one of 24,000 students at Fresno State, and this is where his Bulldog story began. With continued support the community, Fresno State is committed to providing the resources and pathways — such as the Health Careers Opportunity Program and Amendola Family Student Cupboard — to open up a Valley of opportunities for students and alumni alike. Your support today will ensure the vitality of the university and the region for generations to come.

# A New Way to Serve

**Fresno State program helps veteran return to school to pursue a career caring for other vets**

By Douglas Hoagland ('74)

Cynthia Gomez watched – poised for action – as a military helicopter carrying people rescued from a Sierra forest fire touched down near the Fresno airport.

Hastily-mounted lights pierced the darkness of the September night and revealed scores of first responders – military personnel like Gomez and others – moving quickly to help evacuees from the 2020 Creek Fire. “I remember exactly how I felt that night,” says Gomez, now a Fresno State student aiming to become a nurse who cares for veterans. “It was a sense of pride, and I was really happy that I was able to do my part.”

That desire – plus ambition to keep moving forward in the health care field – led Gomez to a crossroads in 2022. She had worked for more than a decade as a medic at the Air National Guard’s 144th Fighter Wing – coordinating medical care for personnel and then administering vaccines and implementing health guidelines during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

She’d deployed once to Kuwait and immediately upon returning was sent to Southern California to help provide emergency care for senior citizens left abandoned in skilled nursing facilities during the pandemic. Gomez worked to set up a care facility of about 125 beds

► Cynthia Gomez, a medical group technician in the Air National Guard’s 144th Fighter Wing, returned to school through Fresno State’s Veterans Education Program – a two-semester program that prepares veterans and active-duty military to kickstart their studies.

Cary Edmondson



at the Riverside County Fairgrounds in Indio to assist the skilled nursing facilities and to receive overflow from local hospital emergency departments.

At her crossroads, Gomez decided she wanted to take greater control over her future. “I realized I could be doing more with my life. I needed to go back to school.” Fresno State was the only university she considered attending. “I’ve been in Fresno all my life, and Fresno State has always been a part of me. I knew that was where I was supposed to be going to get my educational career back on track.”

To begin that journey, Gomez entered the university’s Veterans Education Program – a two-semester academic program that prepares veterans and active-duty personnel kickstart their studies at Fresno State. Through her 20s and 30s, she had attended community college and a technical school, but the Veterans Education Program gave her a sense of belonging by connecting her with fellow veterans and providing resources to pursue her college and career goals.

“It felt like there was military accountability to succeed but without a superior looking over your shoulder and saying, ‘hey, get the work done.’ It was your accountability, and a lot of us in the program ended up feeling like masters of our destiny.” Gomez found it – in her words – “refreshing.”

A shared military background builds camaraderie among the students in the Veterans Education Program. “And the best part: the instructors were phenomenal. Always available. Got on us when we needed it. It was good,” Gomez says. She finished the program in spring 2023 and entered Fresno State the next semester as a public health/community health major. Her goal is to transition into Fresno State’s nursing program.

“Health care – taking care of people – is where my heart’s at,” Gomez says. She would like to eventually work at the Veterans Administration Medical Center in Fresno, where she would bring an understanding of the pandemic’s toll on mental and physical health. Dealing with that toll has become “a huge part” of her work at the base, Gomez says. “By doing our

part here, our members can be more healthy – physically and mentally – and they can do more in life.”

Like many Fresno State students, Gomez balances her studies with work – she’s continuing in her full-time job with the Air National Guard. She says her classes are “fantastic,” and one course on disaster emergency management is particularly energizing. It reminds her of the night the helicopter brought evacuees from the Creek Fire.

“We were helping people come off the helicopter, getting them where they needed to be and making sure families stayed together. I watched my fellow medics and the nurses do the things they’re best at – making sure everybody was taken care of. The whole community – civilian and military – came together. Everybody knew what they were going to do, and everybody executed the mission.”

– Douglas Hoagland is a journalist and freelance writer in Fresno.



## Valley of opportunity

Cynthia Gomez is one of 24,000 students at Fresno State, and this is where her Bulldog story began. With continued support from the community, Fresno State is committed to providing the resources and pathways such as the Veterans Education Program to open up a Valley of opportunities for students and alumni alike. Your support today will ensure the vitality of the university and the region for generations to come.

# Academic Prestige

**For 25 years, the Smittcamp Family Honors College has attracted some of the top students in the state and region**

By Katie Xiong

**A**rya Desai had a lot of options when the time came to choose a college. He was accepted into all of the University of California campuses he applied for, and their corresponding honors programs, but his choice was Fresno State and the Smittcamp Family Honors College.

Celebrating its 25th year, the Smittcamp Family Honors College has admitted about 1,100 high-

achieving students from across California, attracting some of the brightest minds to Fresno State. These students have gone on to become university deans, United States diplomats and active-duty physicians in the U.S. Air Force, among many other careers.

That level of success is motivational for students like Desai, a senior business management (finance) major with a minor in data analytics.

"There's so much to be said about the benefits of Smittcamp Family Honors College," Desai says. "First of all, they cover all of my academic financial needs. This enables me to utilize the funds for networking, internships and securing a job with minimal financial burden during my undergrad."

Applicants to the honors college must have a minimum 3.8 GPA in grades 9 through 11 or be in the upper 10% of their graduating class. Each Smittcamp scholar receives a President's Honors Scholarship, up to a maximum of eight semesters, for an undergraduate degree program. Each scholarship, valued at \$6,000 per academic year, also covers an optional credit for a standard room in university housing should a scholar choose to live on campus.

President's Scholars are required to volunteer a minimum of 70 hours of community service during their four years. In the 2022-23 academic year, scholars totaled 3,187 hours of service to 47 on- and off-campus organizations.

"The learning environment at Fresno State was a significant factor in my decision," Desai says. "Many of my peers and family members who attended UC colleges described the atmosphere to be competitive and stressful. However, at Fresno State, the focus was on developing individuals alongside peers. There was no pressure to compete with my friends, and I had the freedom to explore various aspects of business at my own pace."

The honors college has been instrumental in boosting the academic perception of Fresno State since 1997, when a \$1 million donation by the late Earl and Muriel Smittcamp and their family launched the program.

The Smittcamp Family Honors College has become the academic flagship of the university, says Dr. Saeed Attar, director of the honors college. Alumni surveys show the existence of the college as a support system, and the lifelong friendships it catalyzes are one of its most important factors, he adds.

Desai is an Indian American, specifically Gujarati. It is customary in his culture for family members to live together until marriage, and, as a result, he was able to enter the business world early on through his father's almond business. He expressed gratitude for the many advantages and wealth of experience that he has gained from his family.

"I started college right when we were at the heights of the COVID-19 pandemic," Desai says. "Even though I live on campus, I'm only 20 minutes away from my house and 30 minutes away from my brothers and sisters. If anything were to happen, I would be able to be there for them. My family is my No. 1 at the end of the day."

Desai addressed the social stigma some have about attending

college locally, citing the majority of his peers' desire to leave Fresno. Fortunately, with the on-campus housing accommodation of the honors program, he was afforded the opportunity to experience college life while still residing in his hometown.

"The greatest lesson I have learned is that you can still accomplish anything you want, no matter what school you choose to attend," Desai says. "To this day, I am very confident in my decision to attend Fresno State because we have one of the most amazing and diverse educational programs. As long as you put in the effort, you will see yourself where you want to be."

After the successful completion of an internship with Mastercard during summer in Washington, D.C., Desai plans to pursue a consulting position with the company in San Francisco following his graduation in spring 2024.

— Katie Xiong is a student assistant in University Marketing and Communications at Fresno State. She is on track to graduate in 2025.

*"To this day, I am very confident in my decision to attend Fresno State because we have one of the most amazing and diverse educational programs. As long as you put in the effort, you will see yourself where you want to be."*

**Arya Desai**

◀ Arya Desai was accepted into all of the University of California campuses he applied to, but chose to attend Fresno State as part of the Smittcamp Family Honors College.

## Valley of opportunity

Arya Desai is one of 24,000 students at Fresno State, and this is where his Bulldog story began. With continued support from the community, Fresno State is committed to providing the resources and pathways — such as the Smittcamp Family Honors College — to open up a Valley of opportunities for students and alumni alike. Your support today will ensure the vitality of the university and the region for generations to come.

# ‘The Heart of the Music Department’

**Amid challenges, a music student with perfect pitch utilizes accessibility centers to graduate with honors**

By Benjamin Kirk ('22)

There were about 100 people, a large crowd for a senior recital, at the Fresno State Concert Hall. Even though Maurissio Rodriguez had just performed nearly an hour of challenging piano music by Haydn, Brahms and Chopin, there was no sheet music perched atop the piano. The entire performance was played from memory. Rodriguez stepped out for the last time as a Fresno State student, walked to the piano and gave a long bow as the audience applauded.

He invited everyone to sing along as he began a special encore, his interpretation of “Bohemian Rhapsody” by Freddie Mercury.

“Is this the real life? Is this just fantasy?”

The crowd began quietly as Rodriguez played his version with a clear melody line on the piano, giving the audience confidence to grow louder.

“Mama, oooh. Didn’t mean to make you cry.”

The audience crescendoed to sing with full abandon in celebration of Rodriguez’s accomplishments. This recital was his, and it aptly ended in a shared celebration of love and care.

“He created the most wonderful experience you can have,” says Audrey Rodriguez (*not related*), administrative support coordinator for the Music Department at Fresno State. “At that very moment, we were one masterpiece.”

Some were nearly in tears as Maurissio Rodriguez stood from the piano with a beaming smile, and gave a long, overtly gestured bow.

“Good night, everybody,” he said in his signature, resounding voice.

## A student’s journey

Rodriguez is on the autism spectrum, which, he says, affects his social skills. He struggles with poor eye contact, limited vocabulary, controlling the volume of his voice and taking jokes seriously. Despite this, he makes a point to greet everyone and stop to have a conversation before ending with, “Have a great day!”

“He is the most compassionate person I have ever met,” Audrey Rodriguez says. “The relationship he established with the department is not the typical student and Music Department. It’s more like Maurissio and his extended family.”

Maurissio Rodriguez’s parents immigrated from Guatemala to the Bay Area. He received his first keyboard as a gift as a young boy, and he soon discovered he had the gift of perfect pitch.

“Perfect pitch is a documented phenomenon in the musical community and is marked by the ability to instantly and effortlessly distinguish the pitch of a tone,” says Dr. Peter Klimo, assistant professor of piano at Fresno State.

With the ability to hear songs and then play them with limited practice, Rodriguez found his purpose. But it was more than natural talent that drew him to the piano. It was also the comfort he found in the music.

“Music really helps relieve the stress, ease all the loneliness,” Rodriguez says. “It can give you a really intelligent mind. It helps you stay focused.”

That focus helped Rodriguez excel in his schoolwork. After moving to Fresno in 2015, he graduated from Clovis East High School and earned his associate’s degree from Fresno City College. During the pandemic, he transferred to Fresno State to major in music-instrumental performance (piano).



▼  
Maurissio Rodriguez continues to use his gift of perfect pitch to inspire others through his music, just as he did during his final days as a Fresno State student before graduating.

Cary Edmondson

***“Maurissio is the heart of the Music Department. He is a person with motivation and passion, and he has music running through his veins. He is someone to look up to because he keeps pushing forward, not losing sight of goals.”***

**Audrey Rodriguez**

Administrative support,  
Music Department



At Fresno State, Rodriguez utilized the Services for Students with Disabilities, a program designed to eliminate barriers and raise disability awareness, and the TRiO Student Support Services, which provides academic support, financial aid literacy other resources to support retention and graduation. He said these services were key to his academic success.

“These humans really mean so much to me,” Rodriguez says. “Without them, I wouldn’t have made it to where I am today.”

A prolific performer, Rodriguez excelled in his studies and graduated with honors.

“Maurissio is the heart of the Music Department,” Audrey Rodriguez says. “He is a person with motivation and passion, and he has music running through his veins. He is someone to look up to because he keeps pushing forward, not losing sight of goals.”

### Finale

With tassels turned at the 2023 College of Arts and Humanities commencement ceremony at the Save Mart Center, with hundreds of his peers celebrating their graduation in front of thousands of family and friends, Rodriguez took the stage ready to recreate the magic from his senior recital.

He sat down and began his rendition of “We Are the Champions” by Freddie Mercury, but something was amiss. As the platform party left the stage, Rodriguez’s frustration grew and the performance melted down.

“It’s in the wrong key!” he exclaimed as he fiddled with the knobs on the electric piano.

The instrument had been jostled in transport, and the “transpose” setting was stuck. Anyone without perfect pitch would not notice the difference, but Rodriguez knew the notes were wrong, causing him to struggle with the performance.

His friends stood side-stage shouting their encouragement as he turned the keyboard off, then back on, abruptly fixing the problem.

“OK,” he shouted. “Here. We. Go!”

Just as he had done in the struggles throughout his life, in that moment, Rodriguez overcame.

“I’ve had my share of sand kicked in my face, but I’ve come through.”

Amid cheers, the crowd of fellow graduates, parents, friends and loved ones joined in singing. The crowd crescendoed.

“We are the champions, my friends. And we’ll keep on fighting ‘til the end.”

With his gift of inspiring those around him, Rodriguez became a champion for those who knew him at Fresno State. Since graduating, he’s now sharing that gift by providing music therapy at Fresno Community-Based Adult Services, a center that provides care to adults with mental and emotional disabilities.

Because, while life may not always be perfect – pitch can be.

– Benjamin Kirk is a communications specialist in the College of Arts and Humanities at Fresno State.

### Valley of opportunity

Maurissio Rodriguez is one of over 6,000 students who graduated from Fresno State in May, and this is where his Bulldog story began. With continued support from the community, Fresno State is committed to providing the resources and pathways – such as Services for Students with Disabilities – to open up a Valley of opportunities for students and alumni alike. Your support today will ensure the vitality of the university and the region for generations to come.

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**BULLDOG SPIRIT**

## Rolling Out the Bulldog Bred Carpet

Darrell Copeland III was overflowing with Bulldog Spirit – and it showed with his bedroom décor, full of Bulldog swag and even carpet featuring the four-paw logo. Copeland attended nearly every Fresno State football, baseball and basketball home game, and often even attended football practices when they were open to fans during the Pat Hill era.

He graduated from Fresno State in 2009 with a degree in media, communications and journalism (public relations) and was determined to use his talents to help elevate the brand of his alma mater. But, in 2011, at just 25 years old, Copeland died unexpectedly after collapsing while playing recreational softball with his close friends (including Eddie Hughes, the editor of Fresno State Magazine).

Inspired to keep Copeland's memory alive and leave a legacy at Fresno State, his parents and friends raised about \$90,000 – through softball tournaments, holiday craft boutiques and in-kind donations – to create two scholarship endowments in his honor. One endowment supports student-athlete scholarships through the Bulldog Foundation, and one supports students in the Department of Media, Communications and Journalism.

"Darrell had a positive educational experience at Fresno State and thoroughly enjoyed writing for The Collegian," says Diana Copeland, his mother. "He was passionate about giving back to the university, which is why family and friends rallied together to provide two scholarships in Darrell's memory."

**"Darrell had a positive educational experience at Fresno State and thoroughly enjoyed writing for The Collegian. He was passionate about giving back to the university, which is why family and friends rallied together to provide two scholarships in Darrell's memory."**

**Diana Copeland**  
Darrell's mother

# CLASS NOTES

## 1950s

**Rolland Todd** (1958) was inducted into the Fresno County Athletic Hall of Fame.

## 1960s

**Jerry Black** (1969) was inducted into the Liberty Union High School District Athletic Hall of Fame in Brentwood after coaching 19 years for Liberty High.

**Lawson Fusao Inada** (1960) was scheduled to have his award-winning 1997 poetry book, "Drawing the Line," featured in the History Book Club by Orange County Regional History Center in Orlando.

**Joaquin Patino** (1969) was featured on 23 ABC in Bakersfield for his part in preserving the history of Chicano culture in Kern County through an independent magazine called El Mensaje.

**Michael Tritico** (1965), an environmentalist who hopes to bring government and public attention to potential contamination in Little River in Westlake, Louisiana, was featured in the media.

## 1970s

**Nicholas Ambriz** (1972) featured his paintings and photographs that capture the mystical atmosphere of the summer season at the Agora Gallery in New York in June as part of his exhibition, "A Midsummer's Dream."

**Ken Brown** (1974) was named Sta. Rita Hills Wine Alliance 2023 Vintner of the Year.

**Joe Del Bosque** (1975) was selected as Farmer of the Year by the Los Banos Downtown Association.

**Danny Frigulti** (1973) released his third book, "Exposed: The False Faith Healing-Prosperity Gospel."

**Michael Gallo** (1973), a third-generation farmer and businessman from Livingston, was named a Significant Sig by Sigma Chi, one of the fraternity's highest honors.

**Rhonda Herb** (1977) published the historical novel, "The Jewel of Paradise," in 2022.

**Sharon Lamb** (1972) was honored with a surprise ceremony at Red Bank Elementary in Clovis on June 2. The 2022-23 yearbook was dedicated to her for 50 years of service in Clovis Unified School District. She has taught kindergarten at Red Bank since the school's opening in 1991.

**Theravada Bhikkhu Ven. Ajahn Suchart Abhijato Maha Thera** (1972), of Thailand, was featured in the Sunday Observer for his effective Dhamma teaching methods and meditation practice.

## 1980s

**Robert A. Barton** (1984) was reappointed to the Board of Parole Hearings by Gov. Gavin Newsom.

**Tamara "Tami" Bohannon** (1987) was featured in Arizona Foothills magazine as the president and CEO of Foundation for Senior Living.

**Marcus Bursik** (1981) is now on the advisory board for Rockland Resources Ltd. in Vancouver, Canada.

**Bob Cabral** (1984) is now a consultant on the winemaking team at Bricoleur Vineyards in Windsor.

**Jay Gill** (1988) was appointed to the board of directors for United Security Bancshares, the parent company of United Security Bank.

**Nancy Hollingsworth** (1982) retired as president and CEO of Saint Agnes Medical Center in Fresno.

**Vachik Javadian** (1983) is vice president of applications engineering at ERP Power.

**Terri Kim** (1988) published her new book, "The Enlightenment Stories Represented in the Samgook Yusa and the Princess Bari."

**James M. Lindsay** (1989) was appointed chief of enforcement by The Fair Political Practices Commission.

**Teenie Matlock** (1983) retired after 20 years at UC Merced, where she was founding chair for the Department of Cognitive and Information Sciences, the first McClatchy chair in communications and vice provost for academic personnel.

**John Mattern** (1988) joined the Friends of Mendocino College Music Program and Friends of Mendocino College Recording Arts Technology.

**Eric McAfee** (1986), a Silicon Valley entrepreneur who has founded eight companies including Aemetis, which develops agricultural waste into low-carbon biofuels, hosted a Q&A session during the Scottish Business Network event in Edinburgh, Scotland.

**Robin Johnston McGehee** (1988) joined the City of Fresno's Office of Community Affairs as a liaison for the LGBTQ+ community.

**John M. Melikian** (1984) is now executive director for University Enterprises, Inc. at Sacramento State.

**Greg Montez** (1987) is now technical service and field development manager for Alpaugh, a supplier of crop production products based in Ankeny, Iowa.

**Nejat Neisan** (1985), an engineer who established the OMIS Corporation and developed a liquid crystal display panel that is used in screen monitors today,

was included in Marquis Who's Who as one of America's most accomplished innovators.

**Rick Schuil** (1982) is the co-founder and chairman of the board for Schuil Ag Real Estate in Visalia.

## 1990s

**Eileen Apperson** (1993) was a guest speaker for Valley History Talks hosted by the Kings County Historical Society.

**Brad Ardis** (1993) is president of Huff Construction in Modesto.

**Thad Avery** (1996) is now city engineer for the city of Clovis.

**Judith Cagle** (1992) is now on the board of directors for Bear Valley Community Services District.

**Rudy Cardona** (1995), a retired lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Air Force, is now principal of Porterville Military Academy.

**Beatriz Chaidez** (1992) is now interim chancellor at San Jose Community College.

**Ondine Chattan** (1997) had three of her wines showcased at the inaugural Naked Wines tasting tour in Kenwood.

**Gina Cuttone** (1994) is the owner and president of Barthuli & Associates Insurance Services, Inc.

**Bradley J. Dandridge** is the interim chief of the the Santa Maria Fire Department.

**Rossana D'Antonio** (1988) was reappointed to the Board for Professional Engineers, Land Surveyors and Geologists, where she has served since 2020.

**Sonia De La Rosa** (1998) is now chief administrative officer for Monterey County.

**Edward Gomes** (1995) is now superintendent of Selma Unified School District.

**Raymond Greer** (1994) is now a primary care mental health integration psychologist with the Greater Los Angeles VA health care system based in Santa Maria and San Luis Obispo.

**Miguel Guerrero** (1994) is now superintendent of Lemoore Union High School District.

**Michael S. Hartley** (1991) was reappointed to the Board for Professional Engineers, Land Surveyors and Geologists.

**Bobby Jones** (1991), a former professional boxer and two-time Junior Olympic champion, is the owner of BBQ Bob restaurant and catering in southwest Fresno.

**Donald Ryan Kenedy** (1995), an English professor at Moorpark College, published his new novel "Blameless" in October.

**Adam LaZarre** (1997) is the winemaker at Broadside in Paso Robles.

**Richard Lunsford** (1990) is chief financial officer for Best Formulations LLC, a leading pharmaceutical manufacturing company.

**Matt Macia** (1992) is now chief risk officer for Peoples Bank, headquartered in Marietta, Ohio.

**Kim Mohr** (1999) is director of public relations for Envision Health.

**Tony Niemoetka** (1999) is now executive vice president of community health for Medicus IT.

**Shannon Wentworth** (1992, '97) opened Wentworth Law Firm in North Fork.

**Julianne Williams** (1996), along with 19 inspirational authors, published the book, "You Can, You Will: True Stories of Finding Hope Through Grief and Mental Health Journeys."

**Debi Younger** (1991) is now principal of Sparta Elementary in Belton, Texas.

## 2000s

**Eiji Akaboshi** (2006) is associate winemaker for Freeman Vineyard in Sebastopol.

**Ethan Chatagnier** (2005) won the Golden Poppy/Octavia E. Butler Award for his novel "Singer Distance," which was also listed as a best book of the year by NPR and PopSugar.

**Gayle Copeland** (2005) is now Park University's dean of the College of Education and Health Professions.

**Geno Delerio** (2007), of Delerio Construction LLC, was listed as one of Fresno's eight best general contractors by Home Builder Digest.

**Derek Elrod** (2008) is a partner at Bridgewealth Advisory Group, LLC and chairman of the board of the Financial Planning Association of Central California.

**Barry Falke** (2001) was named CEO for the American Red Cross for the states of Missouri and Arkansas, as well as southwestern Illinois and parts of eastern Kansas.

**Neil Gibson** ('05) is now principal officer of the American Institute in Taiwan (Kaohsiung Branch).

**Pilar Christiana Graham** (2006) was featured in the Monterey Herald for her collection of poetry, "Currents."

**Christopher Harris** (2003) is a licensed realtor at Guarantee Real Estate focusing on properties based in Visalia.

**Gilbert Infante** (2005), of Elk Grove, was appointed to the Board of Parole Hearings.

**Travis Isbell** (2009) is now director of esports at Michigan Tech University.

**Darren Maxfield** (2007) will be operating as a real estate agent, specializing primarily in residential sales, for Sierra Nevada Properties.

# CLASS NOTES

**Daniel Medina** is an internationally published editorial cartoonist and is the staff editorial cartoonist for TK News.

**Will Oliver** (2009) is now president and CEO of the Fresno County Economic Development Corporation.

**Rick Perea** (2001) is now director of risk for FGI Worldwide's credit insurance brokerage and risk advisory division, based in Boca Raton, Florida.

**Brittany Richards** (2008) is a winemaker for High Wines.

**Belen Sanchez** (2001) is owner and broker of Belen Sanchez Insurance Agency Inc. in Fresno.

**Mark Sanchez** (2004) is superintendent and president of Southwestern College.

**Shimel Her Saychou** (2002, '18, '23) is now inaugural program director of the Southeast Asian Student Success Center at Fresno State.

**Meghan C. Sherry** (2005) joined the employment law firm LightGabler in Camarillo.

**Andrew Smith** (2000) is now chief financial officer for John C. Fremont Healthcare District.

**Matt Studwell** (2006, '08), a former thrower on the Fresno State track and field team, is now director of facilities and operations for the Arizona Cardinals, Insignia Event Services.

## 2010s

**Jorge Angeles** (2013) is now weed management and ecology adviser for Tulare, Kings, and Fresno counties for the UC Cooperative Extension.

**Darlene Avila** (2018) is now digital marketing manager for The California Table Grape Commission.

**Stacey Balkun** (2014) is the coordinator for the graduate and undergraduate English programs at the University of New Orleans.

**Elisa Blair** (2015) runs a private practice providing couples therapy, and therapy for individuals who have had trauma.

**Kyle Campbell** (2015) published his book, "Beyond Belief."

**Joe Castelan** (2016) and Kris Daniels began hosting the "New Kiss Country Morning Show with Kris and Joe" from 5-10 a.m. on 93.7 Kiss Country in Fresno.

**Michael Cook** (2015) received the James F. Whitley Founders Scholarship through the Wine Society of Texas Scholarship Program.

**Brenna Flynn** (2019) is now director of food safety and quality assurance for Braga Fresh.

**Jose Garcia** (2017) is now a science instructor at Matilda Torres High School in Madera.

**Giuliano Galdi** (2017) is now an agronomy and crops adviser for the UC Cooperative Extension in Merced County.

**Marcy Guthrie** (2013) is now principal for Gardnerville Elementary in Gardnerville, Nevada.

**Esra Hashem** (2013, '16, '21) is now director of strategic communications at Fresno State.

**Zachary Hill** (2011), a former Fresno State football player, now serves as the team physician and orthopedic surgeon.

**Josh Hokit**, a former Fresno State and San Francisco 49ers running back, signed a multi-fight mixed martial arts contract with combat-sports promoter Bellator MMA.

**Megan Lausten** (2013) is the marketing manager at International Agri-Center, where she is responsible for marketing, communications and brand management for the organization's programs including World Ag Expo.

**Adam Mortanian** (2010) is now managing director for PACT Capital Inc.

**Lisa Munro** (2013) is now director of development for the United States Equestrian foundation.

**Troy Polnitz** (2012,'15) is now diversity, equity and inclusion officer at Agrace.

**Michael Raymon Bliss** (2018) is now grower services manager for California Citrus Mutual.

**Lucca Petrucci** (2016) was the keynote speaker for the 10th annual Rainbow Graduation Celebration at Fresno State.

**Christopher Rodriguez** (2019, '21) portrayed Shadow Edgar in Stewart Copeland's "Tell Tale Heart," and the demon in Deborah Kavasch's "Annabel" world premiere with Opera Modesto.

**Francisco Rojas** (2017), director of operations for CalBurton, Inc., which uses technology to locate underground pipes, was included in Marquis Who's Who.

**Chad San Juan** (2012) is the supervisor of the California Accidental Release Prevention Program for Kern County Public Health.

**Stephanie Soto** (2017) is now retail marketing manager for The California Table Grape Commission.

**Taniece Thompson-Smith** (2015) was named Abilene Independent School District's Elementary Teacher of the Year.

**Erik Valencia** (2014) is the president and CEO of the Greater Reedley Chamber of Commerce.

**Edgar Vargas** (2010) is a senior product designer at Canvas.

**Jacob Vazquez** (2016), a Butte College professor and former Fresno State offensive lineman, received the Young Teacher of the Year Award by the California Agricultural Teachers' Association.

**Dan Ward** (2014) completed a four-year residency training program in emergency medicine at UCSF Fresno.

**Michael Watson** (2012) is the head of global customer evangelism at Eightfold, a company specializing in AI-enabled talent intelligence platforms.

**Derick Webb** (2015) is the owner and winemaker of Lumberyard Cellars.

**Ashlee (Garcia) Wolf** (2010) is now director of philanthropy and communication for the Marjaree Mason Center.

## 2020s

**Inderpreet Bal** (2020) is now in the UCSF San Joaquin Valley PRIME class of 2024.

**Emily Diacono** (2022) is a coach for Orlando Thunder water polo.

**Eric Ebert** (2020, '22) is now a counselor for college relations and outreach at Fresno City College.

**Jake Haener**, the star Fresno State quarterback, was drafted by the New Orleans Saints in the fourth round.

**Kendrick Liu** (2021) is a project engineer for Alten Construction in the Bay Area.

**Alexis Elisa Macedo** (2021) is the playwright and producer of "Chicana Legend" in Atlanta.

**Hector Mendoza** (2020) is a reporter at KTVB in Boise, Idaho.

**Fidel Moreno** (2021) is the new morning and noon news anchor at KDBC-TV in El Paso, Texas.

**Jordan Pulido** (2020, '23) was accepted into the Disney College Program.

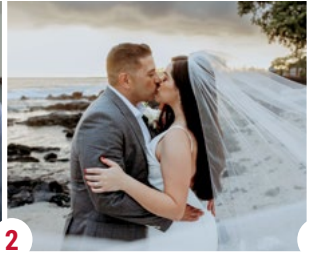
**Linda Ramos** (2020) is now an officer with the Fresno Police Department.

**Vincent Titiriga** (2022) is now a member of the Castaic Union School Board in Santa Clarita.

## Bulldog Born, Bulldog Wed



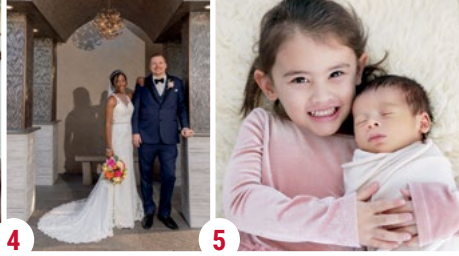
**1 Albert Cano** (1994) married **Mike Swain** (1987) on July 3 in Palm Springs.



**2 Mario Gomez** (1999) married Brenda Gonzalez on July 12 in Kailua-Kona, Hawaii. (Photo by Jamie Cadiente, Modern Milestones Hawaii.)



**3 Dominico Johnston** (2007) and **Molly Fagundes-Johnston** (2005, '14) welcomed their third child, Maximo McNeil, on July 9. Also pictured are Joseph Frank (4) and Dominic (2).



**5 Kendall Mitsuoka** (2008) and **Megan Mitsuoka** (2010) welcomed the birth of their second child, Grayson Katsumi, on December 3, 2022.



**6 Nikko Motta** (2013) and **Taylor (Thompson) Motta** (2013, '15) welcomed triplets, Eliana Neva Motta, Jaxon Rolando Motta and Malachi Miles Motta, on July 22.



**7 Jocelyn Estrada Sepulveda** (2016) married **Luis Sepulveda** (2016, '23) on July 17.

**4 Gabriela King** (2016, '18) married Justin Wiekamp on June 3 in Las Vegas.



In Memoriam

‘For thee, our hopes and memories’

**Phyllis Agalos** (1969),  
July 21, Bakersfield.

**Yass Amir-Ebrahimi** (1985),  
Aug. 12, Powell.

**Deloris Anenson** (1940),  
July 17, Chowchilla.

**Willard Kenneth Baxley**  
(1954), Aug. 23, Visalia.

**Elenore Evelyn Bedell**,  
Sept. 1, Escalon.

**Chester Bergfeld** (1969),  
May 31, Fresno.

**Gregg William Causey**  
(1983), April 13, Kernville.

**Paul Dolan** (1977),  
June 26, Healdsburg.

**Michael Emmert** (1997),  
March 22, Fresno.

**Roy Fowler** (1955),  
June 25, Turlock.

**Terryl Lynn Garrett** (1965),  
Aug. 30, Visalia.

**Janet Lee Haar** (1988),  
July 14, Fresno.

**Fred Luther Haynes** (1953),  
Sept. 2, Bakersfield.

**Elizabeth Georgiana Hays**  
(1950), Visalia.

**Paul Hokokian** (1974),  
June 27, Fresno.

**Kathie Reynolds Housden**,  
Sept. 1, Laguna Beach.

**Donald Houston** (1972),  
Aug. 15, Paso Robles.

**Richard Hovannisian**  
(1954), July 10, Los Angeles.

**Berl Jay Hubbel** (1968),  
Jan. 17, Fresno.

**William Ray Jantzen**  
(1958), June 23, Madera.

**Maren Gail Kneeland**  
(1965), July 19, Rock  
Springs, WY.

**Carolyn LiCalsi** (1991),  
Sept. 13, Clovis.

**John Webster Marshall**  
(1955), Sept. 2, Lake  
Jackson, TX.

**Kimberly Mayhew** (1992),  
Sept. 25, Fresno.

**Robert Douglas McKeand**  
(1977), May 7, Coarsegold.

**Douglas Lyle Minnis**,  
May 28, Davis.

**Mary Edna Monadhan**  
(1953), June 15, Atwater.

**Peter Cottrell Morris**,  
April 16, San Jose.

**Duane Arthur Munger**  
(1961), Jan. 10, Fresno.

**Gary James Oberti** (1963),  
July 14, Madera.

**Miles Standish Oswald Sr.**,  
July 16, Alto.

**Kenneth Doyle Oyer** (1973),  
July 7, Turlock.

**Lloyd C. Painter** (1965),  
July 11, Kerrville, TX.

**Kwame Paul Parker**,  
June 30, Fresno.

**James M. Patton** (2022),  
May 28, Fresno.

**Lynette Pond** (1964),  
June 9, Sachse, TX.

**Mark Christopher Ray**  
(1988), July 2, Fresno.

**Danny Dwight Richards**  
(1967), May 8, Bakersfield.

**Bony Saludes** (1954),  
May 21, Sonoma County.

**Emison Sensney** (1973),  
July 7, Fresno.

**Kimihiro Sera** (1970),  
Sept. 17, Fowler.

**Donald Sherrett** (1964),  
July 10, Alameda.

**Donna Jeanne Shoemaker**,  
Sept. 1, Tulare.

**Martha Staby** (1939),  
Sept. 27, Loveland, CO.

**Tom Strentz** (1962, '66),  
Sept. 15, Fredericksburg, VA.

**Robert Jean Sumpter**  
(1965), Oct. 7, Madera.

**Lauifi Nunu Paopao**  
**Tauiiili**, July 9,  
Honolulu, HI.

**Jewell Lee Toombs** (1970),  
July 21, Redondo Beach.

**Ramon Trice**,  
Aug. 9, St. Louis, MO.

**Sharon Louise Tristao**  
(2000), July 2, Atascadero.

**Audre Lynne Suggs** (1963),  
Aug. 22, Visalia.

**Steven Tyler** (1971),  
July 17, San Diego.

**Paul Janvrin Vincent M. D.**  
(1953), April 20, Los Gatos.

**Cleta Ann Wallace** (1977),  
May 15, Woodstock, GA.

**Debra Willman**,  
Sept. 19, Manteo, NC.

**David Richard Wlaschin**,  
Sept. 1, Lemoore.

**Gary Zarounian**,  
July 12, San Luis Obispo.

FACULTY/STAFF

**Diane Harris Cline**,  
July 8, El Paso, TX.

**Walter Daniel Hebern**,  
May 25, Great Mills, MD.

**James Michael Highsmith**,  
May 29, Fresno.

**Rolland “Woody” Hurst**,  
Jan. 16, Cœur d’Alene, ID.

**Elaine Mason**, (1947),  
May 31, Fresno.

**H. Ray McKnight**,  
Aug. 5, Richmond.

**Francine Oputa**, (1985, '12)  
Sept. 14, Fresno.

**Eugene Zumwalt**,  
July 17, Tollhouse.

FRIENDS

**Dolores “Dolly” Arredondo**,  
June 29, Fresno.

**Wimer Bill Reynolds**  
**Farrell**, July 12, Bakersfield.

**Lillian Peeler**,  
Sept. 12, Fresno.

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