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Attending the State of the District event, from left, are SOCCCD board member Lisa A. Bartlett; Chancellor Julianna M. Asperin Barnes, board member Marcia Milchiker; Vice Chair of the Orange County Board of Supervisors Katrina Foley, and board members Ryan Dack, Carolyn Inmon, Timothy Jemal, and Terri Rydell.

WHAT'S AHEAD

CHANCELLOR MARKS ACHIEVEMENTS, OUTLINES DISTRICT'S VISION FOR 2025

Facilities and educational programs expanding

By Nicole Gregory
contributing writer

Chancellor Julianna Barnes presented her second State of the District, sharing recent achievements of the district, including an increase of student enrollment, accreditations, new construction and successful business and community partnerships.

The Feb. 28 address at Irvine Valley College allowed attendees, including community leaders and elected officials, to learn about the ongoing work and strategic planning of the colleges.

Barnes began by showing a photograph from 1967 of men in suits holding shovels at the groundbreaking ceremony for the South Orange County Community College District, which in-

cludes Saddleback College and Irvine Valley College.

The district has grown dramatically since that time. Today, it covers 382 square miles that include Saddleback College, Irvine Valley College and the Advanced Technology and Education Park at the former Marine Corps Air Station in Tustin. This new park complex consists of multiple spaces for programs such as the advancing digital media, design and engineering program and will soon include an automotive training center and a space for a culinary/hospitality program.

The high quality of education and multifaceted support for students recently earned Saddleback College and Irvine Valley College praise from the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges. The commission fully reaffirmed accreditation for

the colleges through 2031, the longest possible span of time for accreditation. This demonstrates the commission's confidence that the district will maintain its high standard of work for the next six years.

Barnes highlighted the commission's praise for the colleges. Saddleback College was commended for its "dedication to a student-centered environment driven by a palpable culture of collaboration and care that intentionally includes administrators, faculty and staff in unified efforts to further student access, engagement and success."

Irvine Valley College was commended for "its exemplary practice in providing support for transfer students, which has resulted in transfer rates and student outcomes that are amongst the highest in California and the nation."

Further recognition recently came

from WalletHub, a financial services company that helps consumers make good choices. It ranked Irvine Valley College and Saddleback College among the top community colleges in the nation in 2024, based on cost and quality. Both schools were also honored to be among the top 150 community colleges by the Aspen Institute, an educational and policy studies organization.

Students are at the heart of the district's mission, a point the chancellor emphasized in her address, stating that the district's support of all members of the community will not waver. "We will persist in our efforts to create a welcoming and supportive space for everyone, ensuring that our campus remains a beacon of inclusivity and respect," she said.

Because many students work and

CHANCELLOR » PAGE 3



PHOTO COURTESY OF SOCCCD PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Students relax on the Irvine Valley College campus. Summer programs on both SOCCCD campuses offer classes for kids, teens and adults.

REACHING OUT

Summer campus programs engage local communities

Building interest in pursuing college

By Nicole Gregory
contributing writer

Summer programs on their campuses are among the many ways Saddleback and Irvine Valley colleges hope to encourage teenagers and even children to envision themselves as college students. This summer, a full spectrum of popular classes is offered, including a few new ones.

Saddleback College's Summer Bridge program, for example, offers intensive weeklong classes in health care, engineering, programming and cybersecurity.

"This program is targeted for high school students to engage with our faculty, engage with the classroom environment and have some hands-on experience and learning," said Kari Irwin, assistant dean, career education at Saddleback College.

"We're weaving into that not just tech-

nical content, but also career exploration so that they also get a taste of what some career planning would look like in those fields," she added.

The Summer Bridge classes are funded through a countywide grant called the K-16 Collaborative, Irwin said, explaining that the grant is led by the Orange County Department of Education. "Connections are trying to be strengthened between that transition from K-12 to college, to career," she explained. "Our faculty are really excited about it."

The College for Kids program at both colleges attracts children of pre-kindergarten age and older with a variety of summer classes and workshops that include academics, arts and computer programming using AI, said Debbie Vanschoelandt, dean of career and continuing education.

SUMMER » PAGE 5

Congrats to the Class of 2025!

This year Saddleback College recognized 5,761 graduates — more than 3,500 of whom will transfer to top universities, such as Yale, UCLA, UC Berkeley, and USC. There were 1,542 students who graduated with honors and nearly 2,000 were 20 years old or younger. This year Irvine

Valley College held its 40th Commencement Ceremony with 1,667 graduates who received 3,147 degrees — including 10-year-old Zora Elling, IVC's youngest graduate. IVC had 930 students who graduated with honors and 36 Early College graduates from Beckman High School.



Saddleback College • saddleback.edu



Irvine Valley College • ivc.edu

BIG GOALS

Super students aim high: Meet 4 go-getters

District promotes working toward future

By Larry Urish
contributing writer

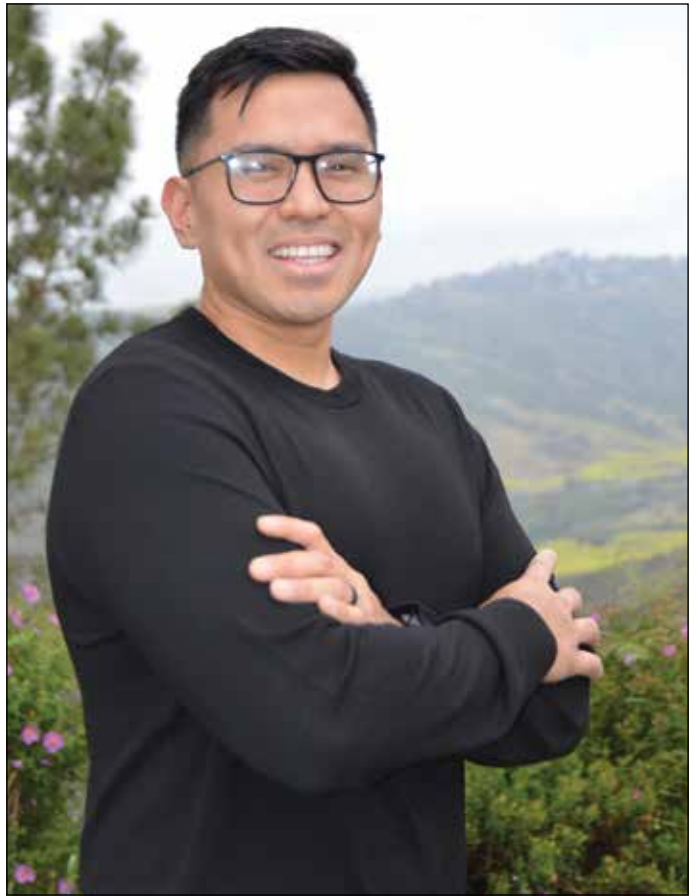
Students in the South Orange County Community College District are encouraged to dream big and work hard, creating bright futures. The following standouts are but a few of the many district success stories in the making.

Kaylin Hahm

Kaylin Hahm's accomplishments are motivated by one early-life success story and four failures many years later. The second-year Irvine Valley College student, double-majoring in business and cognitive science, became interested in business as a young girl while watching her father, who owned a motorcycle dealership. "I saw him working day and night," Hahm said. The failures came in the form of rejections by each of the four UC schools to which she applied as a high school senior. "So I decided to attend IVC and then transfer to a top UC," Hahm said. "My motivation was remembering how it felt to apply and get rejected." At IVC, Hahm redoubled her efforts. "When I first came here, I had no idea what I wanted to do in business," Hahm said. "So I took advantage of the clubs and resources we have here." Did she ever. Along with advanced coursework through IVC's Honors Program, Hahm has served as president of the school's Business Leaders Society, research coordinator and mentor for the Economics Club and student ambassador for the college's Outreach Department. Hahm's hard work paid off. Last month she was accepted into UCLA as a business economics major. Her advice to students: "Your journey isn't over if you receive a no. With IVC's support and community, you can overcome those struggles and thrive."



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SOCCCD PUBLIC AFFAIRS
Kaylin Hahm is in her second year at Irvine Valley College, double-majoring in business and cognitive science.



Mechanical engineering major Christian Sulana is in his second year at Saddleback College.


Christian Sulana



Second-year Saddleback College mechanical engineering major Christian Sulana would like to one day attend UC Irvine or Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. This is well within his reach, since he's already studied at one Ivy League university, and he'll soon partake in a research project at another. Sulana spent five years in the Marines before enrolling at Saddleback in the fall of 2023. Taking advantage of the resources available to veterans, the 4.0 student has since helped other vets adjust to the often-challenging transi-

tion from the military to college. This includes working in Saddleback's Veterans Office and serving as executive coordinator for the VETS Club - Veteran Educational and Transitional Services. "It's a place where student veterans network, get involved in internships and learn about resources that help," Sulana said. "I've also been embedded in three trigonometry classes, helping students, and I work at Saddleback's Tutoring Center with trig and other math subjects." Last year, Sulana participated in the Warrior-Scholar Project, an intensive

two-week "boot camp" at Cornell University, where he studied humanities and STEM subjects. "I didn't see my potential academically until I had support from the VETS Club and the Warrior-Scholars," he said. And this summer, Sulana will participate in the Research Experience for Veteran Undergraduates program at Yale University, working in autonomous robotics and machine learning. "I like trying challenging things," Sulana said. ... "And I'd like to thank all of the people who've been a part of my success" STUDENTS » PAGE 5

SADDLEBACK





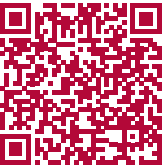
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CAREER ADVANCEMENT

Opportunities abound at Tustin education park

Credit and transfer pathways expanding

By **Jenelyn Russo**
contributing writer

South Orange County Community College District's Advanced Technology Education Park at the former Marine Corps Air Station site in Tustin is evolving into a dynamic hub. Expanding programs from Saddleback and Irvine Valley colleges focus on early college pathways, career-readiness programs and STEM education.

Irvine Valley College was the first SOCCCD campus to establish a presence at the location with the opening of the Integrated Design, Engineering and Automation Building in 2018. As the education park's inaugural facility, the building serves as a hub for career advancement in fields like electronic technology, engineering drafting and design model making.

The 32,000-square-foot space features five classrooms and six specialized labs for instruction in areas such as alternative energy and digital manufacturing. The lab spaces are equipped to support bringing ideas to life through prototyping, 3D printing and experimentation.

"We see it as much more than (technology, design and engineering)," said IVC President John Hernandez. "We see it as an opportunity to start offering educational and career opportunities that branch outside of those main disciplines in order to reach our community."

The facility is home to a fully equipped physics and engineering lab that supports IVC's Engineering Learning Community, an initiative designed to build a strong student cohort through bundled calculus and physics courses offered onsite. This program aligns with IVC's unique partnership with the UC Irvine Samueli School of Engineering, which offers high school seniors a streamlined transfer pathway. Now in its eighth cohort, the program allows students to complete major preparation courses at IVC and earn junior status upon transferring to UCI.

"While at IVC, the students are already engaging with UCI," Hernandez said. "We have found that those students have high transfer success and stay with the program. It's a great partnership."

In addition to credit and transfer pathways, IVC offers noncredit programs for adult learners. Of the more than 900 IVC students served at Advanced Technology Education Park across 43 class sections, nearly 370 are enrolled in 10 sections of beginning,



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SOCCCD PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Breaking ground at the future site of Advantech's new facility at the Advanced Technology & Education Park, from left, are Ann-Marie Gabel, SOCCCD vice chancellor of Business Services; Chancellor Julianna M. Asperin Barnes; Ween Niu, managing director of Advantech North America; and SOCCCD board members Timothy Jemal, Carolyn Inmon, Marcia Milchiker and Ryan Dack.



Irvine Valley College's IDEA Building at the ATEP site stands as a cutting-edge hub for innovation, design, engineering and automation, supporting the next generation of career-ready students.

intermediate and advanced American English as a Second Language classes, all at no cost to students.

IVC also offers an emeritus program for older adults and lifelong learners. Beginning this summer, the program will launch courses in dance, movement, and health and wellness at the

education park, utilizing a newly renovated classroom specifically designed for these activities.

"Our service area is Irvine and Tustin, so offering these classes at IDEA, we're really making it more accessible for adult learners in the Tustin area to take these classes," Hernandez said.

Future plans for IVC at the education park include developing health care pathways, such as dental hygienist and home health aide programs. IVC is working closely with community partners to ensure these programs align with workforce needs and provide stu-

PROGRAMMING » PAGE 6

Chancellor

FROM PAGE 1

have family responsibilities, Saddleback College and Irvine Valley College continue to focus on addressing their basic needs by providing a food pantry, gently used professional clothing, free personal care items and access to financial, housing and mental health resources.

Enrollment has been increasing for the last two years. Throughout this growth, the district remains fiscally responsible. The Board of Trustees ensures fiscal stability by regularly reviewing and approving the budget, making sure it's aligned with agreed-upon priorities and sound financial policies and practices.

Chancellor Barnes is an advocate of partnerships between the district and local businesses and groups such as the Orange County Business Council, the Black Chamber of Orange County, the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and others. She was also instrumental in founding the South Orange County Education Alliance — a collaborative effort with educational partners in South Orange County to track trends and work together on projects such as dual enrollment projects, among other efforts.

The district also actively supports community partners Goodwill, Groundswell, Second Harvest Food Bank and Radiant Health Centers.

Through these partnerships, college administrators learn about the skills required for local jobs in health care, emerging technologies, and others so they can create programs that provide those skills to students. The goal is to keep workers in Orange County so that they don't need to travel elsewhere for work.

Partnerships also allow students to have direct access to business leaders through internships. One example is the arrangement made with Advantech, a company that rents space in the Advanced Technology Education Park, in which Advantech will rely on students from Saddleback College and Irvine Valley College for internship opportunities.

Preparing students for immediate employment is also the purpose of apprenticeship programs. Hands-on experience and certificates of completion will enhance students' readiness for employment, which ultimately leads to social mobility for graduates.

Improving skills can also help work-



PHOTO COURTESY OF SOCCCD PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Chancellor Julianna M. Asperin Barnes interviews Saddleback College President Elliot Stern and Irvine Valley College President John Hernandez during the State of the District event.

ers get ahead in jobs they currently hold. An innovative new partnership with the United Domestic Workers union allows domestic workers to take classes in English provided by the district so they can improve their English-speaking skills and advance in their jobs.

This ongoing engagement with local groups and businesses has been a benefit to the surrounding community. A 2023 economic impact study showed that the South Orange County Community College District had a \$7.1 billion impact on the Orange County economy, according to a regional market study.

The growing student enrollment has shown there is a need for student housing. Chancellor Barnes said the Board

of Trustees has approved a recommendation to incorporate student housing into facilities master plans for both colleges. Meanwhile, construction of new buildings at both campuses continues to address space needs.

The district also has accepted an invitation to serve as a founding partner for the statewide Digital Center for Innovation, Transformation and Equity. This center will support creative partnerships with state agencies and industry leaders that will benefit California community college learners and the state's workforce. For instance, it will immerse students in the newest uses of technology, such as artificial intelligence, or AI.

The district embraces AI and is fo-

cused on utilizing this new technology productively, with an Artificial Intelligence Task Force formed to guide policy development.

Strategic planning in the district is done by participatory governance with the Chancellor's Planning Commission. This means that every group involved with the colleges is represented at planning meetings and can weigh in on recommendations and decisions. The commission is now finalizing the long-term strategic plan, called Inspire 2035.

Building on the successes of last year and continued commitment to a student-centered mission, the district is on track to meet the needs of its students and the South Orange County community in the year ahead.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SOCCCD PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Faculty mentors and interns gather for a group photo at the conclusion of the 2025 B.L.O.O.M. Faculty Internship Program, celebrating collaboration and growth.

B.L.O.O.M.

Graduate internships prepare future college faculty

Mentors guide students’ teaching experience

By Lou Ponsi
contributing writer

Three years ago, the South Orange County Community College District launched a graduate internship program designed to increase student success and improve on the chances for equitable outcomes by attracting and supporting diverse and inclusive faculty.

The program is titled B.L.O.O.M. An acronym for Building Leadership Opportunities through Outstanding Mentorship, B.L.O.O.M., places its graduate interns into a fully immersive experience involving all aspects of teaching in a community college.

“We want to offer participants empirical experiences in community college classrooms and professional development opportunities so that interns can have comprehensive access to community college constituencies and spaces,” said Kelicia Galvin, associate ESL professor at Irvine Valley College and B.L.O.O.M. faculty internship coordinator, who also helped create and build the program. “We want to expand the diverse and inclusive nature of part-time and full-time faculty hiring pools in our district and the system at large.”

A key feature of B.L.O.O.M. is its emphasis on real-world experiences, Galvin said.

Student interns gain valuable insights by teaching classes, developing lesson plans and interacting with students, gaining invaluable insights into the daily life of a teacher.

The students also participate in workshops and seminars that cover a wide range of topics, from educational technology to inclusive teaching practices.

The program benefits both interns and mentors in a variety of ways, Galvin said.

“Interns are provided training in inclusive pedagogical development, equitable outcomes, comprehensive student support and modern teaching methodologies, as well as invaluable insights into the profession that they could not otherwise get through part-time teaching experiences alone,” Galvin said. “Mentors benefit from the program through having opportunities for mutual improvement. While they observe their intern and give them tips, the interns observe all of their classes, too, and discuss what they see and what they learn with their mentors.”

While the mentors provide insights and direct experiences, the interns provide feedback, helping the mentors discover how their own teaching styles come across, Galvin said.

Regular meetings and social events allow participants to share their experiences, challenges, and successes.

“This network of support is crucial for interns as they navigate the complexities of their new roles,” Galvin said.

Erick Aguinaldo just completed his second year teaching at Irvine Valley College and is one of B.L.O.O.M.’s success stories.

Before entering the B.L.O.O.M. program, Aguinaldo said he would never have considered a career in the community college system, but that is because he knew little about it.

After participating in B.L.O.O.M.’s inaugural cohort, Aguinaldo’s career plans became clear.

“In engaging with the program, I was excited to discover that the aspects that drew me to the community college system, such as direct and intentional focus on student support through teaching, service and mentorship, were not only present in the South Orange County Community College District but were prioritized and actively sought after,” Aguinaldo said. “The experience solidified my desire and aspirations to become a full-time faculty member at a community college.”



A B.L.O.O.M. intern works alongside their mentor, bringing fresh ideas and getting hands-on experience in the classroom as part of the faculty internship program.



A B.L.O.O.M. intern and their faculty mentor engage in a thoughtful discussion outdoors, fostering mentorship and professional growth beyond the classroom.



A B.L.O.O.M. intern leads a lively classroom session, engaging students with hands-on learning and fresh perspectives.

Aguinaldo said he enjoyed the direct mentorship and guidance from each of the program coordinators along with the leadership, faculty and staff members who were involved at both Saddleback and Irvine Valley colleges.

“Throughout my involvement in the program, it was clear that everyone was committed to our success and truly cared about us as developing educators and professionals,” Aguinaldo said. The opportunities we were provided to interact

with each college’s president, both formally and informally, truly made me feel valued and that the program believed in my ability to succeed in the community college system.”

Michelle Chin is a B.L.O.O.M. faculty intern in the district’s current cohort, where she is attending and formally observing her mentor’s course section for ESL.

Chin is currently working with students studying at Cal State Long Beach

for short-term ESL programs to improve their grammar skills and conversational fluency.

Chin said being an intern has been a rewarding experience.

“I’ve learned things I never had the chance to before in and out of the classroom, Chin said. “And the one-on-one mentorship has been a privilege. I feel more confident and excited for my future teaching career in ESL because of B.L.O.O.M.”

PARTNERS

Alliance creates a ‘seamless educational pipeline’ in south OC

Smoothing students’ transition options

By Lou Ponsi
contributing writer

Through partnerships with K-12 schools and four-year universities, the South Orange County Community College District offers programs enabling high school students to earn college credits and other post-secondary benefits while still in high school.

In an effort to bolster and improve on the success of initiatives such as College and Career Access Pathways and others, the SOCCCD and its educational partners have joined together to form the South Orange County Education Alliance.

The alliance, which includes the SOCCCD, five K-12 districts and post-secondary institutions, Cal State Fullerton and UC Irvine, will “leverage the collective expertise and resources of our educational community to address shared challenges and pursue common goals,” as stated in the alliance’s guidelines charter.

The idea of allying with the partner agencies stemmed from discussions between SOCCCD Chancellor Julianna Barnes and Capistrano Unified School District Superintendent Chris Brown, along with input from the presidents of Irvine Valley College and Saddleback College, the districts making up the SOCCCD.

“Noticing that our individual partners with the various districts have their opportunities but also their challenges, we realized that there might be some kind of power in numbers to bring everybody together as a collective to have collective discussions about the various things that we’re grappling with and some of the great initiatives and strategies that we’re employing,” Barnes said.

The alliance also provides more legislative strength, enabling its members to collectively advocate for policies and initiatives that benefit students, families and communities across the county, the charter states.

“And when we see that there’s an in-



PHOTO BY JEFF ANTENORE, CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

From left are Martha McDonald, Irvine Valley College vice president for Student Services; Grant Litfin, Tustin Unified School District assistant superintendent, Administrative Services; Chancellor Julianna M. Asperin Barnes; Cassie Parham, superintendent of Irvine Unified School District; Christopher Brown, superintendent of Capistrano Unified School District; Saddleback College President Elliot Stern; Liza Zielasko, Saddleback Valley Unified School District assistant superintendent, Educational Services; and Ryan Brook, district director, Chancellor & Board Operations, SOCCCD.

stitutional barrier or policy barrier that’s not allowing a student to transition from one segment to the next, then we have the ability to actually discuss it and talk about how we can remove those barriers,” the chancellor said.

When the member institutions met for the second time at Saddleback College on May 15, the meeting included a discussion of “hot topics,” – impactful issues that will likely need to be more closely examined moving forward.

The implications and outlook of federal funding were discussed, along with the preservation of diversity, equity and inclusion policies in the midst of executive orders aiming to eliminate DEI initiatives.

There was a robust discussion of artificial intelligence and the need to imple-

ment guidelines around the use of AI.

At the minimum, more formal gatherings probing AI should take place, Barnes said.

“I think it would be great for us to provide an avenue for faculty to come together with the high schools, the colleges and universities, and even some of our industry partners,” the chancellor said.

While each school district has had its own unique partnerships with the colleges and the SOCCCD, the alliance ensures that all partners share the same goals of educating students, Brown said.

“The reality is these are all South Orange County students,” Brown said. “It’s not just my students or Saddleback students.”

Irvine Valley President John Hernandez said the alliance will play a vital role in expanding and strengthening the col-

laborative relationships between Irvine Valley and Saddleback community colleges and the K-12 partners.

The alliance ensures “a seamless and coordinated educational pipeline for the students we proudly serve throughout our region,” Hernandez said.

Prior to the formation of the alliance, challenges, successes and ideas were mostly discussed through one-on-one conversations between SOCCCD officials and each K-12 partner, Saddleback College President Elliot Stern said.

“I think there is more to be gained by that collectively than in the individual conversations that we have,” Stern said. “Julie meets with Chris, I meet with Chris. We have lots of spokes, but this is the only chance we have to look at the wheel.”

Students

FROM PAGE 2

Katie McClusky

Katie McClusky knew she needed a change. After studying nursing at Saddleback College from 2009 to 2010 and earning a bachelor’s degree from Cal State Fullerton in 2014, she worked for three years in Hoag Hospital’s neurosurgical intensive care unit.

“I’ve always been a creative person, and I wanted to help people through creative art,” McClusky said. So she returned to Saddleback in the fall of 2023 as a fine arts major.

“My specialty is ‘intuitive writing,’ which involves tapping into your intuition,” McClusky said. “I’ve been doing writing workshops as an English tutor at Saddleback’s Tutoring Center.”

McClusky has led several workshops that help participants make important life decisions based on intuition. “We’re also using concepts from traditional English classes,” she said. One workshop designed and led by McClusky, “Stop, Pause, Go: Acting Your Way Through Writing,” taps into sensory details and uses metaphors to flesh out descriptive writing.

McClusky, who plans to earn a master’s in fine arts or creative writing, has also incorporated dance into her work. “We had an open choreography session, and the theme was human imperfection,” McClusky said. “I had the participants write out, ‘I release (blank) and become (blank).’ We created choreography around this as the participants said their affirmation out loud.”

Thanks to her leadership skills and stellar academic standing, last March, McClusky was named a Coca-Cola Scholar, one of only two given to Saddleback students. “People can definitely find an-



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SOCCCD PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Katie McClusky studied nursing at Saddleback College in 2010 and returned in 2023 as a fine arts major.

swers through creative expression,” she said.

Steve Salinas

Third-year Irvine Valley College student Steve Salinas, the first member of his family to attend college, is making the most of his opportunity. Having already earned an associate degree in chemistry, Salinas will garner another one, in biology, later this spring. Last summer, he participated in Project RAISE, a research project at Cal State Fullerton. “It was nice to be in a lab environment with grad students,” Salinas said. “That helped shape my career aspirations.”



Third-year Irvine Valley College student Steve Salinas has an associate degree in chemistry and is pursuing another in biology.

These aspirations include medical school, with the goal of one day becoming a surgeon. “I love all the technical and hands-on applications of surgery,” Salinas said.

Salinas later presented his Project RAISE work at the Annual Biomedical Research Conference for Minoritized Scientists, a national conference held last November in Pittsburgh. This summer, he’ll be doing stem cell research at the Jonas Salk Institute in La Jolla, as one of nine interns out of over 400 applicants.

Salinas remains grateful for all the Irvine Valley College resources that helped him along the way, including Mathemat-

ics Engineering Science Achievement, where he’s also tutored, Extended Opportunity Programs and Services, and IVC’s Honors Program.

Aware of the financial hardship his immigrant parents once faced, Salinas has given back to several resources that helped him and his family, including volunteer food-service work at South County Outreach and the Southwest Community Center.

His hard work and altruism have paid off. “I was recently accepted into UCLA as a neuroscience major,” Salinas said. The sky’s the limit for this future surgeon.

Summer

FROM PAGE 1

At Saddleback College, about 400 kids are expected to enroll in classes this summer, said Arron Searcy, director of community education. The idea is to “provide enrichment and a fun program for students ages 5 to 17 and give them an idea of college life,” she said.

Vanschoelandt concurs: A summer class is “a way for these younger kids or teens to come to a college campus,” she said. “I think it really grabs them early with a topic that they’re super interested in and then makes that connection that IVC is a place to go for fun and, potentially, the way to a career path.”

Students who are already planning to attend Irvine Valley College and have decided to study math, engineering or science can take summer classes focused solely on those skills.

The MESA (mathematics, engineering, science achievement) program has two summer classes, explained César Montenegro, program manager. “One is the MESA Academy for Excellence, a one-week academy to enhance their understanding of critical STEM skills to ensure their success in calculus in general chem-

istry and calculus-based physics.”

In these classes, students work with faculty members for about 90 minutes every day of that week and are matched with tutors.

“We try to help normalize student and faculty interactions,” Montenegro said. “We offer lunch for faculty and students during that week so that our students get to know their faculty in a more casual setting and feel more comfortable, potentially going into their office and asking questions in class.”

The research-based MESA Summer Projects Advancing Research & Knowledge program is also being offered to new or continuing students for the first time this summer, Montenegro explained, to help them apply their skills in creating their own project-based research.

“Since our program does target our first-generation college students and those who are from low-income backgrounds, we’re hoping that this program will retain them in STEM and help them identify engineers or scientists,” Montenegro said.

Both programs are noncredit and free to students. In fact, students will receive a stipend so that they do not have to work at a summer job while attending either program.

Summertime dual enrollment classes — college-level classes for high schoolers

to earn credit — are especially popular in the summer.

“Last summer we had over 1,300 students,” said Vinh Nguyen, interim director of dual enrollment at Irvine Valley College. “Summer is an especially good opportunity for high school students because they don’t have their sports or other high school obligations.”

Popular classes include introduction to business, introduction to psychology and language classes, particularly sign language, he said. The classes are free.

High school students can access Saddleback College’s full portfolio of college courses over the summer, Irwin, the assistant dean at Saddleback, said. Students come to Saddleback College from about 15 different high schools in three school districts.

“We often see an increase in enrollments in the summer, typically because there’s more time available for students,” she said. “It’s also been helpful that we’ve added more online courses over the last few years for students who might be traveling or in other camps or commitments over the summer.”

Dual enrollment classes are a direct result of a statewide priority to expand college access equitably, spelled out in the governor’s Vision 2030 plan.

“Our goal with those programs is to give college exposure to students in high

school, so that they can see themselves as a college student, get excited about having a college goal, but more specifically, start to understand where their areas of interest and strengths are and what they’d like to study,” Irwin said. “So really getting them on that pathway to college is important, but then also to help them identify early on pathways that they would like to pursue.”

A positive experience can generate enthusiasm for college. “We see a ripple effect of the excitement students have when they get hands-on experiences on our campus,” Irwin said. “When a high school student comes to the campus and has a good experience, they remember it, and they talk about it with their peers. And so, there’s a little bit of a ripple effect that I don’t have data to substantiate, but you can hear the conversations, you can see the excitement, and it’s memorable.”

Ongoing learning is not just for young people — a full schedule of popular summer emeritus programs for older adults is also offered by Irvine Valley College and Saddleback College.

Summer classes for the two colleges promote valuable enrichment and educational opportunities for their surrounding communities, creating critical engagement with current generations of students and those of the future.

Programming

FROM PAGE 3

dents with hands-on training and direct pathways to employment.

“It creates a health care pathway for adult learners, in particular, in what we think are accessible, high-growth career pathways with sustainable living wages, especially for adult and low-income learners,” Hernandez said.

Saddleback College will also have a presence at the education park beginning this summer with the opening of a new 50,000-square-foot facility that will house its automotive technology and culinary arts programs. The building will welcome students for a full slate of fall classes as Saddleback relocates both programs from the Mission Viejo campus to offer comprehensive training at the Tustin site.

The more than 30,000-square-foot automotive technology building will have the capacity to serve nearly 1,000 students with its 14 lift bays, seven high-tech classroom labs and specialized training spaces for engine-part cleaning, transmission repair and automated driving-system calibration. The classroom labs are equipped with monitors and technology to support teaching and allow for remote learning, and an outdoor yard will store equipment and instructional vehicles.

The Automotive Technology program offers 13 degree, certificate and non-credit pathways, including alternative fuel vehicle specialist and commercial learner’s permit training. With its proximity to the Tustin Auto Center, Saddleback is looking to build out its apprenticeship programming that will support hands-on training for in-demand careers.

“It’s one thing to have a degree, but it’s another thing to have a degree and experience when it comes to employment,” said Saddleback College Dean of Economic and Workforce Advancement and School of Business and Industry John Jaramillo. “Our goal is that every student has the opportunity to participate in a work-based learning activity.”

The 20,000-square-foot culinary arts facility will feature four commercial kitchens, including an instructional kitchen, a bakery and pastry kitchen and a production kitchen that supports a teaching restaurant. An outdoor courtyard with fruit trees and student-maintained raised-bed gardens will offer farm-to-table opportunities. The building will also be home to a student-run coffee shop offering house-made pastries for everyone on the campus to enjoy.

With the ability to serve upwards of 800 students, the Culinary Arts program offers nine degree, certificate and



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SOCCCD PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Groundbreaking has begun on the buildings that will house state-of-the-art culinary arts and automotive technology programs at the Advanced Technology & Education Park.



The Goddard School opened its doors Jan. 28 at the ATEP site, expanding access to high-quality early childhood education within South Orange County’s growing educational and innovation corridor.



The ATEP sign marks the gateway to the Advanced Technology & Education Park, a regional hub for hands-on learning, educational partnerships and workforce development in South Orange County.

noncredit pathways that range from food science and catering to hospitality management and baking. And like the Automotive Technology program, Saddleback has developed partnerships for apprenticeship programs with local hotels and restaurants, such as The Ranch in Laguna Beach.

“Programming at this site can’t be your traditional programming alone,” said Saddleback College Vice President for Instruction Tram Vo-Kumamoto. “We’re hoping that apprenticeship or work-based learning, along with our

instructional programming, is what’s going to be the signature for us there.”

Advanced Technology Education Park will also be home to a future boarding high school developed by Victory AI Academy, LLC, that will align with Saddleback and IVC to offer dual enrollment and early college pathways. Additionally, SOCCCD is leasing site parcels to private partners, such as industrial computing company Advantech and early childhood development center The Goddard School, to strengthen community partnerships and expand

student learning opportunities.

These new initiatives and developments will broaden access, enhance hands-on learning and open education and career pathways for students across the SOCCCD region.

“Many individuals are limited in their career choices by their social network and by their family networks, but what we’re hoping to do with work-based learning is to create portals for anyone into an area that they may never have thought of before,” Jaramillo said. “It can be life-changing.”

ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY & EDUCATION PARK (ATEP)

A Catalyst for Growth & Innovation

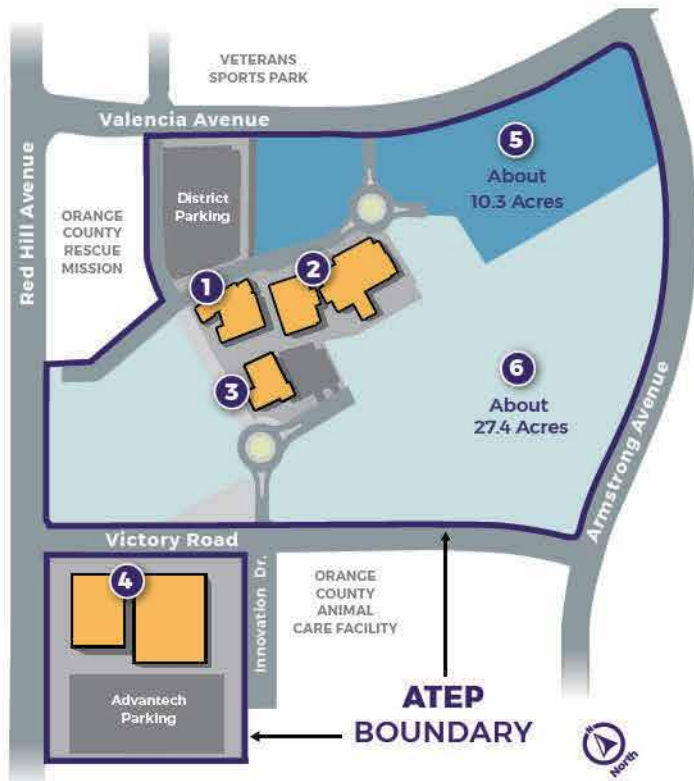
With 61 acres of entitled land, ATEP is the region’s emerging hub for education, innovation, and job creation – backed by the strength of Irvine Valley College, Saddleback College, and visionary public-private partnerships. Through strategic ground leases, SOCCCD has welcomed private development to ATEP, generating revenue to reinvest in student success, while building a collaborative ecosystem.

1 Irvine Valley College
IDEA Building, opened 2018.

2 Saddleback College
Culinary Arts and Auto Technology buildings, opening August 2025.

3 Goddard School
Opened 2024, offers childcare and educational services.
OFFERING INTERNSHIPS

4 Advantech
A leading technology firm, it will open a warehouse in 2025 and an office tower in 2026.
FUTURE INTERNSHIPS



5 Top Tennis Management
Tennis academy with dorms; in lease negotiations.
FUTURE INTERNSHIPS

6 Victory AI Academy
K-12 private boarding school; in lease negotiations.
FUTURE INTERNSHIPS



Saddleback College Culinary Arts

The Culinary Arts program offers hands-on training for students in its four state-of-the-art commercial kitchens, a public restaurant, and a student-run coffee bar.



Saddleback College Auto Technology

The Automotive Technology program provides job-ready certificates and vital training for students in its four classrooms, auto shop with 14 lifts, and a high-tech lab.



Irvine Valley College IDEA Building

The state-of-the-art IDEA Building (Innovation, Design, Entrepreneurship & Art) is home to cutting-edge programs in augmented and virtual reality, design, and advanced manufacturing.



SOUTH ORANGE COUNTY
COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT