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THE CROWN

In this issue:

WATER LILY

PHUNG'S FAREWELL

A JOURNEY OF HEALING



Photo by Jeremy Ruiz



Photo by Griffin O'Rourke

THE
Crown
MAGAZINE

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Editor's note: Resurrection of The Crown

As I sit here on deadline, sleep-deprived and jittery from six cups of coffee, I'm trying to sum up the work the staff has done over the past year. I'm struck by the idea that Valley College, much like a person, has grown and evolved over time. From a dairy farm to an academic institution serving over 18,000 students in just 80 short years — it's a question we can't fully answer, just as we can't fully capture the multitude of individual experiences that occur every day on this campus.

What we can do is write about the people who have made Valley what it is today — our champions; the record-breaking swimmers, the inspiring artists, the influential coaches, the hard-working educators. We can pay homage to the spaces that house them, and we can celebrate the accomplishments that have arisen from their hard work.

The last time the Valley Star staff published a magazine was during the tumultuous era of the COVID-19 pandemic, when our words lived in an online PDF document. But now, with the printing of this issue, we're experiencing some return to normalcy — that overused phrase, but feels apt nonetheless. Physical copies of The Crown will once again land in the hands of Monarchs.

So to the small yet-hard working staff at the Star, thank you for going the extra mile. And to our readers — the community that we both serve and represent — thanks for riding this wave with us. Together, we're Valley and Valley is us, and our story is one of growth and evolution that will continue for years to come.

Valley College, thank you.

Isaac Dektor
Editor-in-Chief



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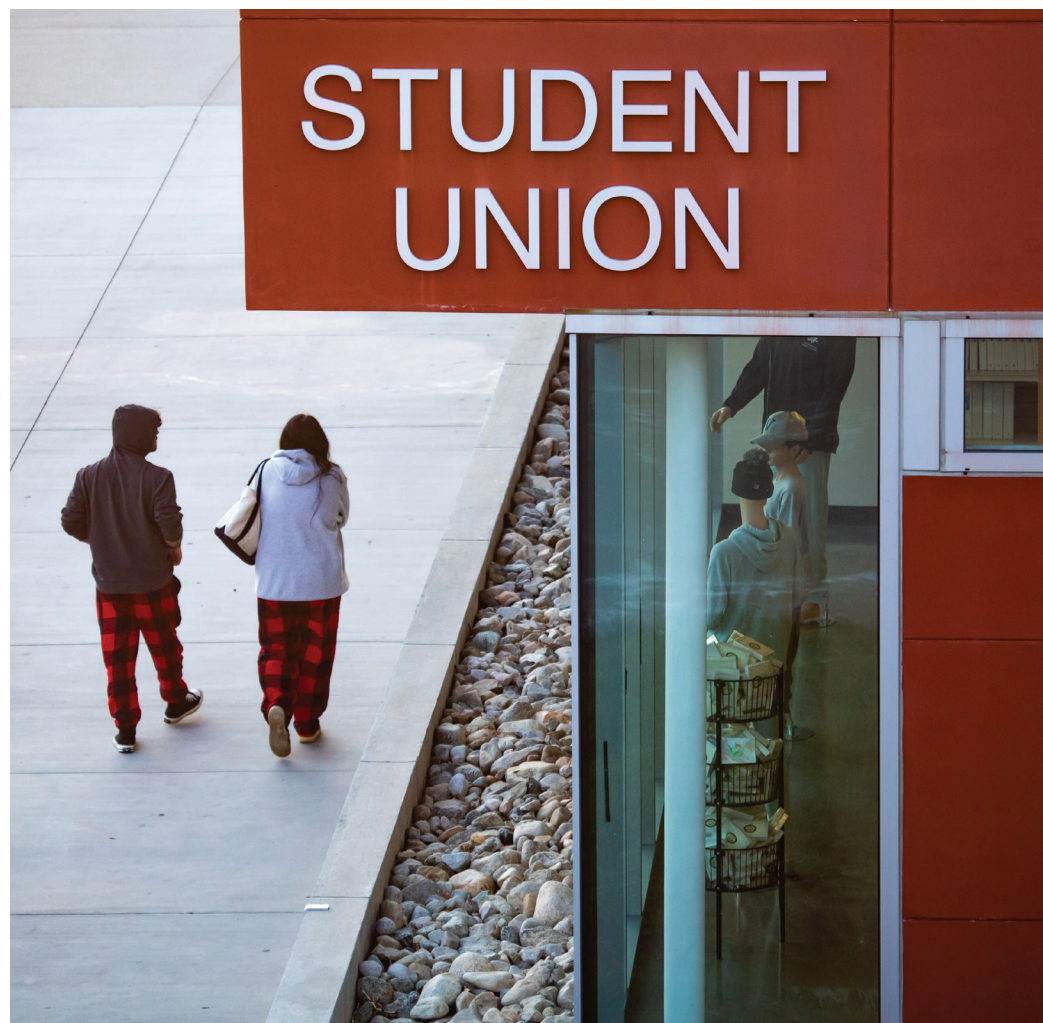


Photo by Isaac Dektor



Photo by Griffin O'Rourke



Photo by Griffin O'Rourke



Photo by Savannah Greenly

Don't Let Campus Center Rot

Story By Cassandra Nava



Photo by Jeremy Ruiz

Monuments once sacred to the infrastructure of the college should be revered, handled with care and upkeep. Traditional architectural structures tie humanity to the past. According to the college's first master plan from 2002, there was a great significance placed on the aspect of community on campus. The placement of each tree, building and student mattered to the flourishing college landscape.

With every passing decade, Valley College's Campus Center becomes more of a treasured antique.

Society's throw away culture, the idea of wanting new and more has its pros and cons. On Valley's campus, the deteriorating bungalows are demolished to make room for new state of the art buildings. These new structures, with their sustainability models and fresh technology prove to be beneficial to students. But why so quick to be out with the old?

A building like Campus Center, as crime-ridden as it is, is worth cobbling back together. We must keep it alive and flourishing for the next generation.

Let us revisit the good, the bad and yes, the ugly parts of the Campus Center.

CRIME WAVE CRASHES IN SPRING

On April 29, there was a reported break-in to the 51-year-old building. Someone appeared to be living in a room on the second floor, as five separate offices were broken into. The loiterer forced their way into the building.

Unluckily for the perpetrator, the

campus was not alone that morning, as the chairperson for the theater and dance department, Jennifer Read was there to set up for Middletown rehearsal — the college’s upcoming play. Read’s early morning presence may have scared him, as he ran away from the empty building. He left behind various tools and a heavy stench of body odor, leaving sheriffs to believe that he had been cooped up in a room for a number of days.

“We got to do something on campus, especially with this building and Academic and Career Advancement, the Allied Health and Sciences and the new Valley and Academic Cultural Center building — because as our buildings get bigger, it’s going to be more difficult to secure them and keep our students safe,” said Read following her encounter with the criminal.

As if the center had not been violated enough, this was only the second offense in the spring semester.

If April showers bring May flowers, then March floods bring... power outages. Heavy rain poured throughout the state, leaving cities without power. So when about half of Valley’s campus went dark, many hypothesized it had to do with the torrential downpours, but Campus Center was to blame for the disruption. The ‘70s era building suffered a flood in the basement which damaged the alpha data center — interrupting internet, network and telephone service in at least 16 buildings. The flood was not due to external circumstances, but rather by a PVC pipe coupling bursting open; a repeat offender that caused a flooded basement just three years ago.

A LONG RAP SHEET

The flood of fall 2020 was one riddled with consequences. About 250,000 gallons of water flooded the basement after a six-inch pipe burst. Luckily, students were busy in a quarantine lockdown, so there was little to no direct interruption.

But in the semester that followed, trace amounts of asbestos were found in the adhesive between floor tiling. This caused the entire building to go dark, as it was closed off until deemed safe for student use.

The basement was broken into in the last weeks of the fall 2021 semester, while it was still closed off. The Media arts department stored cameras, lights and computers — at a combined value of around six-figures — in the basement, but nothing appeared to be stolen. Tarps separating asbestos-ridden areas were torn down, disrupting the asbestos cleaning project.

Campus security upped the ante, doing



Photos by Griffin O'Rourke

their best to field off any other infringements to the building and basement. But in February 2022, crafty thieves stole copper piping located on the exterior of the center which was used for the air conditioning unit.

Despite the onslaught of hurdles thrown its way, Campus Center persevered.

The first floor of the center, now known as the Mosaic Village or Unity Center, was finally able to open its doors in the fall 2022 semester. After being derailed by first COVID-19, and then asbestos following the basement flood, a ribbon cutting reminded Monarchs the value of community.

“I think it’s really important that this space is here and students are finding a sense of belonging in a community because we have a space for them,” said Cecilia Cruz, acting associate dean of student equity. “Before, there wasn’t really a Rainbow Pride Center where students could hang out with their other friends who also identify as LGBTQIA+. It’s giving them an opportunity to interact more and get support from the programs.”

The snipping of the green ribbon meant more than just a new trove for student resources, it showcased the importance of repairing something that easily could’ve stayed boarded up for good.

HALL HOSTS MONARCHS



Photo by Griffin O'Rourke- Victor Rios speaks at a Career and Academic Pathways open house event on Nov. 30, 2022 at Valley College in Monarch Hall.



Photo by Elli Bayati- Fatema Baldiwala, Professor and club advisor, and Dr. Elliott Coney, in the center, pose on stage during a Denim Day event in Monarch Hall.

Within Campus Center’s layout rests Monarch Hall, a unique multipurpose room whose orientation allows for a variety of events due to its unique architecture. The flat floor seating and stage give the room a chameleon-like property, able to morph into whatever is needed for an event. The hall has been converted to everything from a polling place, to a lecture hall and a blood donation center.

A plethora of events have taken place in the once vacant hall. There was a fiery Dia de Los Muertos dance performance last fall, multiple ASU events and most recently a Denim Day event.

The hall was even incorporated into the Valley Theatre Department’s play last fall: “The Laramie Project.” Director Matthew McCray came up with an inventive way to display the performance despite not having a stage and theater. Campus Center as a whole was the stage, as performers ushered audience members throughout the building to follow the true story of the 1998 homophobic murder of Matthew Shepard. Cast members floated around the center, making stops in Monarch Hall, the Monarch Patio and even the hallways.

The department’s next performance, slated for later this semester, will once again take place in the center. Without a theater to call home, Monarch thespians are utilizing the older building as their stage.

The thread that ties the community together is seen in the events hosted in Campus Center. Students and locals near the college can flock there, knowing that on any given week, an inclusive event will be in session.

UNIQUE ARCHITECTURE

Modern buildings like the Administration and Career Advancement or the Student Services Center are indicative of modern architecture trends.

Trends come and go, and the minimalist look of gray, one-note buildings will show a lack of historical significance. Campus Center oozes character, with its mid century modern-esque decorative facades and unique layout.



Photos by
Griffin O'Rourke

Top The opening scene of *The Laramie Project* shows the college students leaving for Laramie, Wyoming.

Middle Deckland Jones plays the part of Detective Rob DeBree.

Bottom Right Edward Malcolm plays the part of Doc O'Conner.

Bottom Left Alanna Walker plays the part of a death row inmate.



Campus Center glues the college and the community together; ushering in students to a shared communal place, whether that be a guest speaker in Monarch Hall, or finding solace in the Unity Center's inclusive area.

Despite its aging architecture sticking out like a sore thumb amid the ever-changing campus, the charm of buildings like Campus Center are required. In order for students to strive for growth, the historical reminder of the thousands of Monarchs who have come before them is necessary.

GOLDEN MONARCHY

In a practice dating back to 15th century Japan, artists practiced a craft known as kintsugi, which translates to golden joinery. The artist will repair broken pottery by joining the pieces together with a gold or platinum colored lacquer. The importance of the original creation and repair are equal in value, as the technique honors the pottery's journey while maintaining its original intended use. Mistakes are not only highlighted, but almost assertive in nature.

Similar care should be taken to Campus



Photo by Ava Rosate
Left A man enjoys silent disco night in Monarch Hall.

Photo by Isaac Dektor
Top Serj Tankin, an Armenian activist and System of a Down frontman spoke at Valley's Armenian Diaspora panel.

Photo by Jeremy Ruiz
Bottom right Man performs the Fire Dance in Monarch Hall for the Dia de los Muertos event.



Center. The college should embrace its flaws. Its withering security is a threat to the architecture that has become rare compared to its newer counterparts. The center has many wounds in need of repair, and while the process of joining the pieces back together will be an arduous one, it is necessary in order to see the campus persevere.

The easy way out would be to partake in the commonplace notion of throw away culture. Board up the building or demolish it. With newer ones on the way, would anyone really care?

But we must treasure what we have now, for the harder option is often the most rewarding. Let's keep the fragile bowl that is Campus Center, and meld it together. The golden joinery will not come from lacquer we line the building with, but will be evident with the consistent refurbishments to the building — highlighting the flaws while utilizing the purpose of Campus Center.

The extra work and care will leave the building shining, an opulent reminder of Valley's once flourishing campus. And the monument is not just a reminder of where we came from, but of what's possible for those who come next.



Photo by Isaac Dektor
Top Director Matthew McCray talks with Valley actors at a dress rehearsal for the Laramie Project.

Photo by Griffin O'Rourke
Left Second-year theater majors Deckland Jones and Edward Malcolm.



Photo by Griffin O'Rourke



Photo by Ava Rosate

CURTAINS STILL CLOSED AT VACC



THE VALLEY ACADEMIC AND CULTURAL CENTER

STORY BY ISAAC DEKTOR
& GRIFFIN O'ROURKE

PHOTO BY GRIFFIN O'ROURKE





Photo by Griffin O'Rourke

Top A construction worker cuts notches in a metal bar called a zigert at the Valley Academic and Cultural Center at Valley College on Oct. 17. The workers are replacing the installed 16 gauge zigerts with new 10 gauge bars.

Bottom Subcontractors work at the VACC job site amid a heatwave on Tuesday morning, Sept. 6.

The sounds of construction have permeated the Valley College campus for years now. The Valley Academic Cultural Center, a premiere arts facility stacked with amenities and state-of-the-art facilities slowly comes to fruition on campus. The over 400-seat theater, motion capture studio and other top-notch features of the building have been overshadowed by delay after delay and a racketeering lawsuit. The courtroom drama predates the ribbon-cutting of the stage and in many ways, the spotlight has been stolen from the people this building is designed to serve.

Rather than dwell on squabbles between the district and Pinner Construction, let's take a look at how this building is going to revamp Valley's campus and change the game for so many students.

The Media Art's building features a sophisticated main stage theater, complete with a state-of-the-art sound system, hydraulic stage lift and efficient air conditioning. This will be a massive step up from



Photo by Miles Bailik Stone

the theater department's current soapbox in Campus Center; the main stage theater could be Valley's own Broadway. Four more theaters will also be available to thespian students: a 225-seat screening room, a 150-seat horseshoe theater, an 80-seat lab theater and an outdoor amphitheater.

A radio station, newsroom, a motion-capture studio and a scene shop will be open to students and faculty of the Media Arts department. Several other rooms will feature smart classrooms, studio rooms, rehearsal rooms and audiovisual labs. These labs and classrooms will be outfitted with advanced equipment that students can use to study and experiment. Smart classrooms house technology like smart projectors and whiteboards that improve student engagement with the teaching material. Audiovisual labs have a variety of uses and are utilized across many different fields for different purposes. In Media Arts, the labs are used to help sync sound and video as well as simulate, encode and transmit it.

With these new state-of-the-art facilities and Valley's proximity to Hollywood, the nucleus of television and film production worldwide, Media Arts students will have the opportunity to not only gain the necessary skill sets to find work in the industry but also build the relationships that will lead to jobs.



Photos by Griffin O'Rourke

Top Construction workers use paver machines and tools to pave out asphalt for a new driveway outside the VACC. **Middle** Rolling out sheets of carpet for flooring at the Main Stage Theatre in the VACC.

Bottom: Construction workers use a lift to replace metal bars called zigerts onto the outside wall of the VACC.





PHUNG HUYNH: PAINTING THE TOWN

Photos by Jeremy Ruiz

Phung Huynh poses in her Pasadena home studio. Details of her studio show artwork and supplies.

Story By Cassandra Nava

After 14 years as a full timer, and about eight years adjuncting, the full time Valley College art professor wipes her paintbrush clean of Valley, though Monarch pride remains a vital hue on her palette. Huynh will continue inspiring students at Cal State LA next fall, with an emphasis on being able to focus on her one true passion.

“I’m moving out of the house, but I’m still part of the family!” exclaimed Huynh.

Huynh’s unwavering passion to pro-

duce and learn about her craft fueled her decision to transition to the university scene. Moreover, she will have more freedom — inside and outside of the classroom. Rather than teach a range of eight to 11 classes per semester, the artist will have a maximum of three classes, with 24 students each — as opposed to the 40 student limit at Valley.

Prior to landing at Valley, Huynh was jumping around the city; teaching at art centers, USC and East LA college for about eight years. But with no solid



Photos by Jeremy Ruiz

Phung Huynh teaches an art class at Valley College.

roots planted, the need for a full-time job grew. Being embedded within the community is a core principle to Huynh, and investing into those around her is one way she hopes to create change. But with the nature of community college being transient — with students constantly shifting and transferring — she was further prompted to move to Cal State.

“Learning to sew and knit from my grandmother was really my introduction to art,” said the professor. “One day my older brother bought me a watercolor set. I just loved creating, it made me feel empowered. And I remember feeling that way with my teachers when I went to school, and I always remembered, ‘I want to give this back one day too.’”

Though Huynh’s time at Valley is coming to an end, remnants of her presence linger on, permeating throughout Los Angeles.

Most students learn about her public, local creations by accident, most notably while boarding the Metro G “orange” Line.

“One of my students said, ‘Oh my gosh, I took the orange line and got off at Laurel Canyon and saw these paintings that look very much like your style, there were these cherubs.’ And I’m like, ‘Yo, that’s mine!’” exclaimed Huynh.

Her creations are scattered around the city. Passersby see the vibrant colors and shapes of her work before reading her name in the fine print.

The Vietnam native carefully weaves the stories of her community into the art she creates. A myriad of mediums make up her never-ending portfolio, but her pride comes in highlighting stories of the typically unheard — most recently immigrants and women of color.

THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE

The professor extracts motivation from her family’s history and shared immigrant struggles. Huynh’s father fled war-torn Cambodia on a bike, eventually landing in Vietnam where he would meet his future wife. The Huynh family escaped Vietnam on a boat, landed in another refugee camp — this time in Thailand, escaped again and finally resettled in Michigan. Five-year-old Huynh would eventually relocate with her family to the diverse city of Los Angeles, which she would later come to call home.

Huynh takes nothing for granted. Her parents’ experiences not only remind her of what is important, but inspire her works. The Vietnam native frequently turns to her “ancestor altar,”



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BUT I'M STILL
PART OF THE
FAMILY!"**



to honor her lineage. The physical reminder for gratefulness sits atop the fireplace in her studio where photographs of her parents, grandparents and uncle watch over her.

“This capitalist consumer culture doesn’t honor the land that we live on, and ancestor worship and honoring ancestry is really important to my values,” said Huynh. “So when things get rough I think, ‘how did my family do this?’”

SOBREVIVIR

The City of Angels, and the large LatinX group within it, shape the lens through which Huynh creates her art. Growing up in Mexican immigrant communities played a large part in her assimilation process, so when an opportunity to create a public art installation outside Los Angeles County-USC Medical Center came up in 2019, Huynh chose to honor the group of women that shaped her.

The activist took a year-long sabbatical from teaching to pursue this project. “Sobrevivir,” which translates to “Survival,” sheds light on forced sterilizations that were performed on non-English speaking Mexican immigrant women in the 1960s and ‘70s.

A 21-foot-diameter steel disk is etched with roses and prayer hands akin to our Lady of Guadalupe, in a copper color that when seen as a whole, mimics the look of traditional Mexican engraved leather pieces.

The disk on the floor is lit from below, so the etchings are visible at night. Surrounding the round area are

benches and quotes from the mothers on the surrounding wall. One quote reads, “If you speak English, they treat you one way. If you don’t speak English, they treat you another way.” The other quote, displayed in Spanish reads, “Yo, por dentro, siento mucha tristeza. Se me acabo la cancion,” which translates to, “I feel so much sadness inside. I have lost the ability to sing.”

Despite being an invaluable piece of art and history for the city — especially for the hospital to recognize — Huynh debated even creating the piece. She did not want to apply for the position, and felt that this is a story for a LatinX artist to share.

When the piece was being set up, Huynh overlooked the process. During this time, a white woman in scrubs who Huynh presumed to be a nurse, displayed physical signs of discomfort at the quotes displayed along the wall. The woman told the artist that the quote about language will further divide people. It was at that moment that Huynh was glad that she, as a Vietnamese and Cambodian woman, was the one creating this work.

“It would be terrible for any LatinX artist to pour their heart out and be retraumatized, I’m happy to take one for the team,” said the artist.

There are a plethora of reasons why the proud Angeleno calls this the most important piece she’ll ever create. She experienced a connection to its meaning as a mother, a woman of color, an immigrant and overall someone who cares about women’s rights.



“I want to honor these moms who were going through this at the same time my family was coming to the United States,” said Huynh. “My mom is the same age as these moms who were forcibly sterilized. And these moms had no language access, they were punished under a racist medical system for being immigrant women, for being brown women and for being seen as “draining the system.” If a white woman, who’s English speaking, came in, she wouldn’t be handed papers to be sterilized.”

TAKE THE LEAP

The 45 year old’s belt sags heavy with titles; full-time art professor, artist, activist, board member to non-profit organization La Mas and solo mother of two. The modern renaissance woman is motivated by her cultural experiences, along with those who surround her. She manages to juggle everyday responsibilities with the paramount task of creating works of art in and for her community.

“I could have laundry going, then hop into my garage — that I converted into my studio and where I make my work,” said Huynh. “It’s always been that way since [my sons] were little, I don’t know how I did it. I would put the kids to bed and make art until two in the morning and then wake up at 5 a.m. That’s why sometimes students don’t know. We’re humans too; an artist isn’t someone who has a fancy studio, we’re part of the community.”

According to the professor, the only way to grow as an educator is to continue doing the research and honing the craft. For her, creating is just as important as teaching.

Huynh hopes to inspire her students. Her successes with her public art pieces, working as a creative strategist for the Office of Immigrant Affairs and being represented by Luis de Jesus gallery help inform her students of the ins and outs of the artist ecosystem.

To the students who may fear diving into the art world head on — where there is little to no job security (especially for beginners) Huynh wants to remind them that this city is a great place to take the leap.

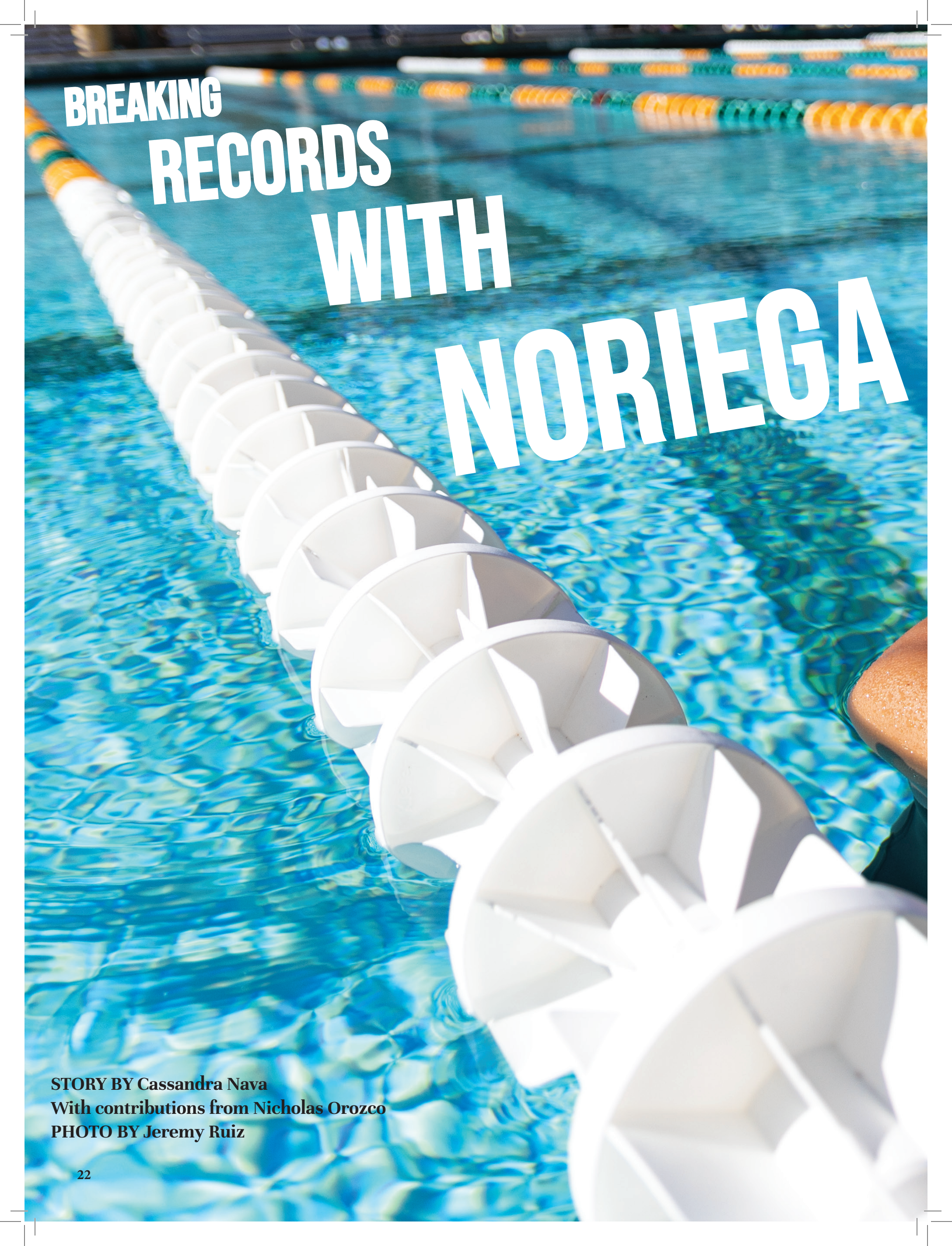
Though the valued art professor hangs up her coat at Valley, students have reminders of her persistence in the art sprinkled around the city. As melancholy Monarchs bid farewell to Huynh, her leaving acts as a bittersweet reminder of the steps one must take in furthering their craft.





Photos by Savannah Greenly

Valley College art professor Phung Huynh has her work depicting cherubs and poppy flowers on display at the Lauren Canyon stop on the Metro Orange Line.

A photograph of a swimming pool with lane lines. The water is a vibrant blue with ripples. In the foreground, a white lane line with a central fin is prominent. In the background, other lane lines with orange and green floats are visible. On the right side, a portion of a swimmer's arm is visible.

BREAKING RECORDS WITH NORIEGA

STORY BY Cassandra Nava
With contributions from **Nicholas Orozco**
PHOTO BY Jeremy Ruiz





Photo by Jeremy Ruiz

Top Lilliana Noriega swims freestyle during a morning practice session with her swim team at the Valley College Aquatic Center.

Photo by Chris Dreadson

Middle After completing the 100-yard backstroke, Lilliana Noriega gives a handshake to Lizzie Hernandez from Allen Hancock College.

Photo by Joseph Acuna

Bottom Lilliana Noriega competes at East LA college during the CCCAA Swim and Dive Championship.

Lilliana Noriega's toes practically hang off the edge of the pool. The swimmer isn't getting ready to jump in, she's shouting out words of support for her fellow teammates, doing her best to cultivate an aura of positivity.

"I just hope they can hear me cheering," said the 19 year old after cheering for fellow teammate Zoey Francis during a 500-yard freestyle at last month's Western State Conference Championships Swim Meet. "I hope that they can hear me cheering, and know that people are there."

According to Noriega, she can only hear the shouts of her coaches, family and teammates when she comes up for air. If she's doing it right, she should only hear them a few times. But that doesn't stop her teammates and family from roaring in support.

The freshman is a Valley superstar. This is only her second semester swimming at the junior college level, but she's no rookie. In her short time on campus, she's broken two school records, one standing for 48 years. The record, set in 1975 for the 50-yard freestyle, was 25.1 seconds and Noriega completed it in 25 seconds flat. At the WSC Swim Meet in April, which was the qualifier for statewide championships, Noriega broke the record for the 100-yard backstroke. The swimmer's time was 1:01.70, just three milliseconds faster than the previous record that was set in 2019.

Every millisecond counts in competitive swimming. Shaving off a few can mean the difference between breaking a school record, or competing at the state level.

In the first weekend of May, the Valley womens swim team traveled to East LA College to compete in the California Community College Athletic Association: Swim and Dive Championship. Noriega raced against the top swimmers of the state. Eight female athletes made it to the championship finals for the 100-yard backstroke, and Noriega finished in fifth place with a time of 1:00.57. Although not the outcome she wanted, the athlete maintained her optimistic attitude.

"Overall I think I did the best I could," said Noriega post-championships. "I'm happy knowing I tried my best. I look forward to dropping more time in my events and placing higher in state next season."

FAMILY TIES

The swimmer's outlook can likely be traced to her net of familial support.

The record breaker's parents display a presence of resolute support, and seem to shape the 19-year-old swimmer's positive attitude. Her parents, Bertha and Salva-

dor Noriega, not only celebrate her achievements — she had the honor of choosing their celebratory post-competition dinner at Raising Canes — but help improve her performance in the sport. During the WSC Championships held at Valley, her mother recorded every race the swimmer participated in. While water splashed and coaches shouted, Bertha Noriega stood quietly and made sure to capture every stroke her daughter made so they could watch it back. This is common in sports, as athletes watch their “game film” to pinpoint specific motions that either strengthen or hinder their overall performance.

Her dad, on the other hand, didn’t stay quiet as he cheered loudly in support of Noriega.

“We hope she competes well, and puts it all together so it’s a good race for her,” said the swimmer’s father, Salvador Noriega, before his daughter competed in a conference race that would make her eligible for state championships. “As long as she gets out of the water and feels like, ‘I did my best,’ that’s good.”

The state swimmer has the privilege of leaning against the familial wall of support behind her, allowing her to extend the love to her teammates.



Photos by Jeremy Ruiz

Left

Lilliana Noriega prepares to compete in a backstroke event at East LA college during the CCCAA Swim and Dive Championship.

Bottom

Lilliana Noriega is a first-year student at Valley College and a swimmer for the women’s swim team. She has been swimming competitively since she was 12 years old. Noriega fulfilled her goal of breaking a college record in the 50-yard freestyle that stood since 1975.



“She just leads in and out of the water. She’s the epitome of what a student athlete should be. She takes instruction, always looking to improve herself, always smiling and has a great demeanor.”

-Women’s swim coach Pete Loporchio



POSITIVELY COMPETITIVE

The Burbank native learned to swim by taking lessons at her local YMCA, and dove headfirst into competing. At age 12, she competed in the LA Swim Club, racing against others to gauge their speeds in the water.

She must’ve caught a bug for competing, since it carried on into her high school years. While attending John Burroughs High School, she broke four school records; the 50-yard freestyle, 200-yard freestyle relay, 200-yard medley relay and 400-yard freestyle relay.

Despite the numerous accolades, Noriega doesn’t look like someone who cares if she wins or loses. The swimmer has a consistent smile on her face, happy to be included and recognized for her hard work. But looks can be deceiving, as she continues to place Valley on the map.

The second semester swimmer cites Katie Ledecky as an inspiration. Ledecky, the most decorated female olympic swimmer, is known not only for her achievements but for her positivity. Noriega mirrors this mindset, as she remains optimistic even when she doesn’t come out on top.

When she doesn’t win a race, Noriega says that she’s just glad she was able

to drop some time on her own personal record. When she’s nervous before a race against women she knows are faster than her, she says she looks forward to the challenge.

“She just leads in and out of the water,” said women’s swim coach Pete Loporchio. “She’s the epitome of what a student athlete should be. She takes instruction, always looking to improve herself, always smiling and has a great demeanor.”

Someone like Noriega is invaluable in a team setting, consistently able to find the silver lining in every cloud. And, hey, if that cloud bursts you know she’ll be happy to swim in it.



Photos by Jeremy Ruiz

Left
Lilliana Noriega swims freestyle during a morning practice session with her team at the Valley College's Aquatic Center.



VALLEY KEEPS NURSE'S DREAM ALIVE

Story and photo by Isaac Dektor

Gulnoza Kamilova pushes her daughter, Mariam, on a swingset in the Child Development Center's playground.

Gulnoza Kamilova prepares to don her nurse scrubs instead of a traditional cap and gown at the culmination of this semester, marking the end of the nursing major's long and arduous journey that led her to this moment.

Growing up in a country ravaged by civil war, Kamilova always dreamed of a career in medicine. But it wasn't until she found herself just blocks away from Valley College and discovered the Child Development and Family Resource centers that her dreams began to take shape. These centers became her family, providing not only a safe and nurturing environment for her children but also a community of support that propelled her toward a brighter future and opportunities that had once seemed impossible.

Kamilova, her husband John and their one-year-old son Yunus moved from Kyrgyzstan in 2010, after a tumultuous civil war began. By 2012, the now mother-of-three was enrolled in classes at Valley and began a new chapter in her life.

"We came here because there was a war in my country," said Kamilova. "We were here as refugees and then we stayed here."

Valley's nursing program is demanding. Students complete challenging classes followed by 12-hour shifts at a local hospital. For the 36-year-old refugee-turned-citizen, who is not only a student worker but a mother of three, time management is a delicate balancing act. Kamilova deftly juggles her responsibilities as a student, worker and mother. But thanks to Valley's Child Development and Family Resource Centers,

Kamilova didn't let a ball drop, and now she's about to close this chapter.

Her oldest son, 13-year-old Yunus, spent nearly a decade at the CDC before reaching the age limit this year, but 9-year-old Mariam and 4-year-old Yusuf are currently enrolled. Children as young as 4 years old engage in science projects, gardening, weekly vocabulary and story-time at the center — all free of charge through a subsidized program.

The average cost of childcare for preschool-aged kids is just under \$10,000 per year in Los Angeles County, according to data organization site Kids Data.

"They are family," said Kamilova. "The center helps me to stay on track with my classes. I know my kids are okay so I'm not worried when I'm in class. The teachers are amazing — sometimes, when I get stressed out, they comfort me."

The nursing major's youngest child, Yusuf, is currently in room five where he learns through various game activities.

"My little one's first word was Olga, who is his teacher right now," said Kamilova. "If your kids want to go to their school it means it's good for them. My kids love the afterschool program and preschool. Honestly, I want to go there," she said with a chuckle. "It's a really good and safe environment."

The school's resources served as a catch-all for many of the nursing majors'



Photos by Chris Dreadson

Top Gulnoza Kamilova, a nursing major at Valley College, is set to graduate this spring.

Bottom Kamilova reads from a medical chart.





Photos by Isaac Dektor

Gulnoza Kamilova and her daughter, Mariam, play in the CDC's playground.

academic and familial needs — from childcare to stipends for textbooks. Through these various resources, Kamilova found the necessary assistance to pursue her academic and professional goals.

“The CDC was taking care of my kids and FRC was buying books and diapers and anything to help my finances,” she said.

According to a study conducted by UC Davis, there were 145,061 student parents enrolled in community college in California as of 2018. Eighty percent of those student-parents were female with an average of three or more children and an income of \$28,495.

Jennifer Guevara, director of the CDC, emphasized the benefit of the center not only for children but for the parents too.

“Any parent would say that if my child is in a nice place right next to me, you’re going to feel less stress because you know that they’re well taken care of,” said Guevara. “All of our families, the staff, we’re all just a big family. We all feel at home here.”

While taking advantage of the wrap-around services available at the college, Kamilova works at the front desk of continuing education, where nontra-





ditional students reenrolling in college begin their time at Valley. She assists English learners to enroll in classes in addition to assessing their ESL needs.

“To study takes a lot,” she said. “When you have a family, you have to worry about kids, food – it can feel like too much. I want to help other students to achieve their goals.”

As Kamilova prepares to graduate this spring, she looks back on her years at the community college with immense gratitude. She’s thankful for the resources, the people and the opportunities that helped her achieve a long-awaited dream.

“They’re part of my family and I think I’m part of their family.”

Photos by Chris Dreadson

Left Nursing major Gulnoza Kamilova practices reading an EKG machine.

Bottom Gulnoza Kamilova, a nursing major set to graduate soon at Valley College, practices in a skills classroom.





Photo by Isaac Dektor

A CROWN OF FLORA: VALLEY'S

Story by Natalie Metcalf

Photo by Beatriz Garay



BLOOMING BOUQUET OF GENUS

The San Fernando Valley has been suffering a drought for years on end, but mother nature sends little gifts to remind us of the Earth's beauty. This year, colorful wildflowers spring out of the nooks and crannies on Valley College's campus.

A plethora of greenery surrounds campus while students attend classes and participate

in student events. From the Campus Center, Monarchs can take in vibrant gardens of flowers in bloom. Hues of purple, orange and light shades of pink cover the outskirts of the Mosaic Village. Wildlife, such as bees and lizards are seen buzzing and skirting around the raphiolepis indica and elkhorn ferns. Rusty orange flowers crowd the Student Union Pla-

za, soaking in the fluctuating weather in the spring semester. The growth among Valley's agriculture creates an inviting and aromatic atmosphere.

The plants sprouted because of this year's record rainfall, and luckily for the college, most of the flowers found on campus require little to no maintenance.



Biology students and floral enthusiasts can enjoy the abundance of flora. The genus provides cleaner air and more oxygen circulation around campus.

This superbloom, a rare desert botanical phenomenon in California, is not an annual occurrence. This year's blossoming was largely due to a wet winter. Wildflowers and California's state flower — the poppy — have sprouted all throughout the state, most notably on hillsides in Antelope Valley.

According to the Associated Press, Los Angeles saw high rainfall and heavy snow in mid-February. The National Weather service reported the storm was one of the strongest to hit Southern California. The Los Angeles Almanac recorded 8.66 inches of rain in January, 7.84 inches in February and 6.89 inches in March.

With over 20 inches of rain hitting the southland, Valley saw some damage on campus.

At the end of February, a handful of maintenance workers cut and removed a fallen tree on the southside of campus. The large pin oak fell on the fence guarding the college's water tank, damaging a portion of the chainlink barrier.

"The tree is old and all the rain loosened up the soil so with the winds, it pushed it over," said Valley Gardening Supervisor Rudy Majano at the time of the incident.

The minor damage was only part of the



Photo by Chris Dreadson

winter's tale. As the storm clouds cleared, the flowers began to bloom, and Perez's sea lavender began to show its face.

The purple and white plant is intricate and delicate to the human touch but beautiful

to the eye. The plant can be found near the college's library.

Buzzing bees swarm around the raphiolepis indica. This plant creates pollen, a nutrient bees collect. Tiny lizards hide among the Elk-

horn Ferns. The name comes from the plant's likeness to elk horns.

Students can thank the rainfall for the explosion of flowers around campus.



Photo by Savannah Greenly
Left Blooming flowers attract pollinating bees on campus.

Photo by Chris Dreadson
Right Pollinating bees spread grains of pollen while they hunt for nectar allowing flowers to germinate.

Photo by Chris Dreadson
Bottom Left A lizard crawls through the grass on campus.

Photo by Chris Dreadson
Bottom Right Yellow flowering sunflowers bloom outside the ASU skybox.





GOING PLACES AT STEADY PACES

STORY BY GRIFFIN O'ROURKE

PHOTO BY JEREMY RUIZ



Left

Aggregating anemone and starburst anemone are the most prevalent species of sea anemone found within the tide pools of Malibu Lagoon State Beach.

A common misconception about STEM majors is that they spend all their time in the classroom, their eyes bloodshot from staring at scientific journals. In Valley College's Pathways and Career Exploration in STEM program, these majors trade in their textbooks and scantrons for water shoes and sunscreen.

Twenty-eight students make up a cohort of Valley and Pierce College sophomores pursuing various STEM careers: fire technology, microbiology, nursing and biology are just some of the degrees they are chasing.

The PACES program sends junior scientists all over the greater Los Angeles area. Students risked falling into the cold waters of Malibu as they hunted for twitchy crabs and elusive octopuses. In the warm foothills of the San Gabriel mountains, they navigated over and under fallen trees as they searched for signs of Southern California's most remote creatures.

PACES was created in September 2021, through a one million dollar grant awarded to the Los Angeles Community College District from the National Science Foundation. Alongside Pierce, Valley has partnered with USC and BioscienceLA, a non-profit organization that assists students with paid internships. These partnerships aim to increase transfer rates among community college students to four-year institutions.

The program is divided into two tracks, each a year long. The first cohort is for new students and the second cohort is for students preparing to transfer out of the

Photo by Griffin O'Rourke

Marine biology professor Patrick Lyons holds out a sea star that he found in a tide pool at the Malibu Lagoon State Beach.



Photo by Jeremy Ruiz

Top Marine biology professor Patrick Lyons and two students pose at the Malibu lagoon tidepools.

Photo by Griffin O'Rourke

Left Student Desere Navarro steps over a pool of water on the rocky intertidal area of the Malibu Lagoon State Beach.



Photo by Jeremy Ruiz

Biology major Bailey Cox holds up a California sea hare in her hands for others to see as she and other students within the Pathways and Career Explorations in STEM program of Valley College.





program. The first track helps freshmen decide on their STEM career through a College 101 class and a Pathways to STEM workshop.

“Our students come in and if you say, you know, what’s your major, they say, I’m a biology major, but they don’t know what they could do with that biology major,” said Valley Professor Pamela Byrd-Williams, a co-principal investigator with the PACES grant.

After completing the first year, sophomores have the opportunity to enroll into the Research Methods Class during fall and a Career Explorations Class in the spring. The fall class immerses students into field research labs that drops them into the ecosystems of Los Angeles. These labs expose them to the basics of professional research.

The labs show students how interconnected science is out in the field.

“I don’t think people realize how much science interacts with each other,” said sophomore microbiology major Anthony Villarreynacortez. “Because in microbiology, I didn’t think I would be looking at the macro. But sometimes you have to.”

The sophomores learned about the roles insects play in Sepulveda Basin’s wildlife reserve during a bug hunt led by Valley Professor Estenia Haley. They chased down dragonflies, butterflies and praying mantises with nets. The bugs were put into “killing jars,” mason jars with nail polish and acetone. Back in the Allied Health and Sciences building, students carefully pinned the delicate bug bodies to boards.

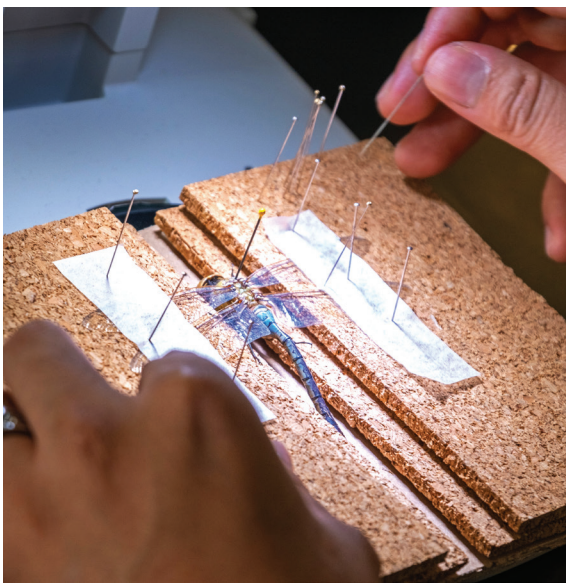
The class later returned to the reserve for a bird watching endeavor led by Valley professor Suzanna Baldwin. Students noted the flying patterns of ducks and the behavior of scavenging turkey vultures using binoculars and field guides.



Photo by Griffin O'Rourke
Top Professor of biology Suzanne L. Baldwin leads a biology 3 class through the trails of the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve in a bird watching field lab.

Photo by Griffin O'Rourke
Middle Biology Professor Estenia Haley shows a biology class her collection of butterflies before they preserve and pin the bugs they caught at Sepulveda Basin.

Photo by Jeremy Ruiz
Bottom A red-tailed hawk eats a fox squirrel on top of a bush located along Campus Drive directly behind the Campus Center.



Leaving the San Fernando Valley, students traveled to Malibu in search of aquatic life. Valley Professor Patrick Lyons took the lead on the expedition, showing students how to find and handle the elusive creatures of the lagoon. Sea hares, urchins, sea anemones and one sly octopus were discovered by the class.

The cohort returned to the classroom, trading back their lab coats and research instruments to explore internships and careers in the STEM field through seminars before transferring to 4-year universities.

Photos by Griffin O'Rourke

Top Left Nursing major Charles Navarrete examines a preying mantis he caught in Sepulveda Basin.

Top Right Microbiology major Anthony Ralf Villarreynacortez pins a dragonfly.

Bottom Right An osprey sits on a branch above the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve while a biology class is on a bird watching lab.

Bottom Left (L-R) Paola Villareal, Wesley Moore and Stephan Quispe watch for birds and listen to Professor Suzanne L. Baldwin talk about the habits of the birds at the Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve.

McMillan Rises to the Top

STORY BY Nicholas Orozco
PHOTO BY Griffin O'Rourke

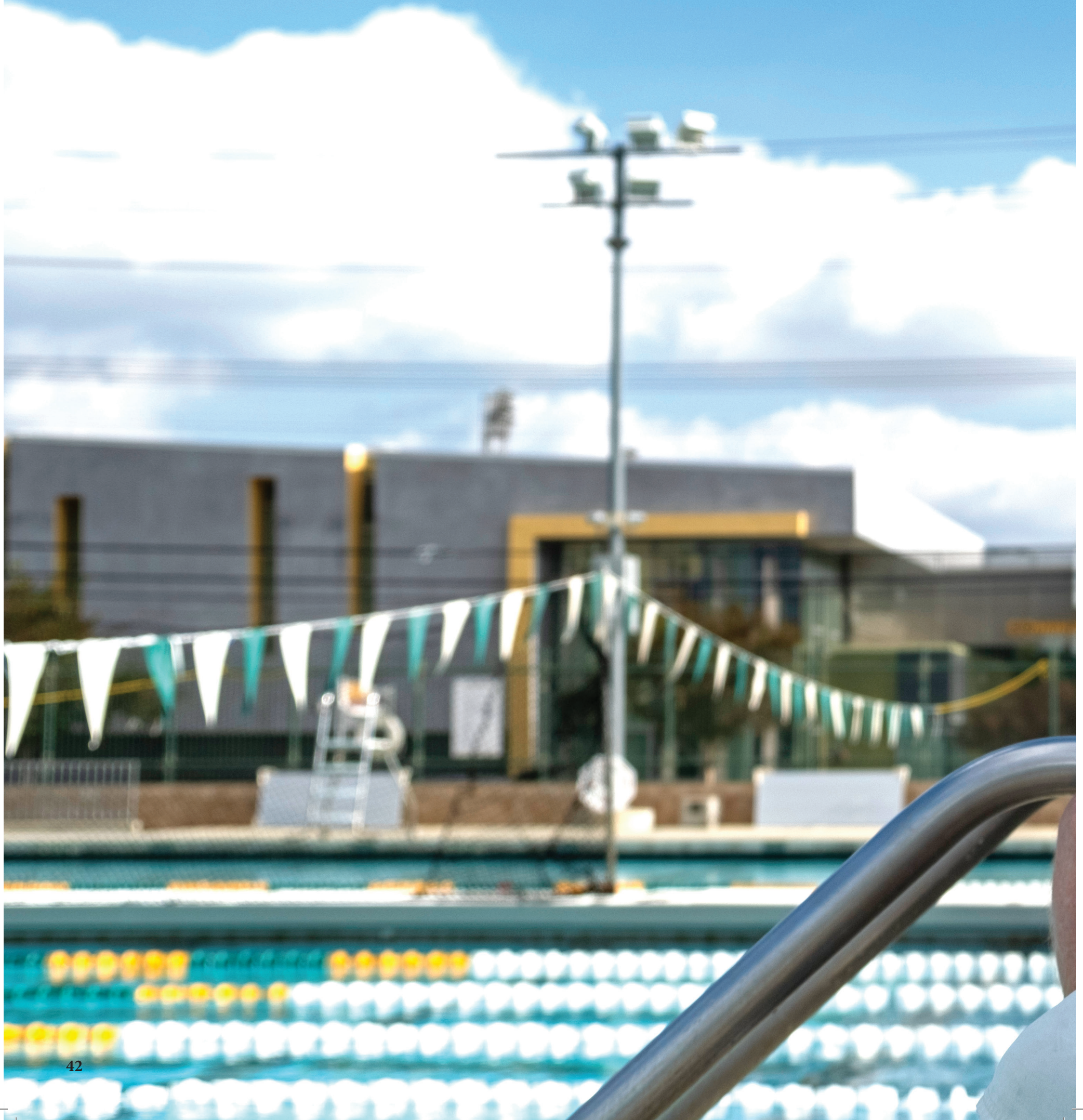






Photo by Griffin O'Rourke
Top (L-R) Sahak Abrahamyan, Sako Kaputikyan and Johnny Agazaryan float in the pool with Hakop Ansuryan.



Photo by Jeremy Ruiz
Left The Valley College men's water polo team plays a game of flag football as a team-building exercise. Photo taken within Monarch Stadium.

Photo by Chris Dreadson
Bottom The Valley College water polo team continues to practice months after the season.

Surrounded by walls covered in certificates from Valley College's 54 All-Americans sits Jim McMillan. Reclining in his high-back chair, the former semi-pro reminisces on the athletes he's elevated as he admires his latest edition to the wall – 2023 swim coach of the year.

McMillan began his collegiate career in a similar fashion as the athletes he coaches now, at junior college in Santa Ana. His stint at community college was short-lived, as he transferred into coastal college Pepperdine University soon after. As his eligibility was running out, another opportunity arose 8,000 miles across the Pacific – in Australia.

"It was another league," said the decorated coach. "When my eligibility ran out, I wanted to keep competing. They contacted me and said, 'you want to come down?'"

Having a small window of opportunity with a six-month visa, he played at the semi-pro level for three months and spent the remainder of the time traveling the country down under.

Once returning stateside, he was invited to coach the water polo club team at Loyola Marymount University by a former teammate. As a 25 year old, the switch from player to coach was difficult for him — he wanted to continue competing within the water.

"I needed a job and took it," said the All-American. "After one year, I convinced the school to turn it into a division one program."

Transforming the once club team sport into the division one program seen today, McMillan spent four years as the head coach for the Lions.



Photo by Nicholas Orozco
Right Monarch men's swim head coach Jim McMillan cheers on Hakop Ansuryan and Erik Yoon as they compete in a race.

Photo by Chris Dreadson
Bottom Hakop Ansuryan winds up to take a shot on goal during a practice in the off-season of water polo.

He later returned to his alma mater, Pepperdine.

Starting out as an assistant coach before eventually becoming co-head coach of the program, McMillan spent 12 years with the Waves. Under McMillan's stewardship in 1997, the team took home a NCAA national championship title after defeating metropolitan college, USC.

After leaving the Christian college by the sea, another opportunity arose for the All-American: coaching Valley's water polo team.

"I had never been to the valley my whole life until I came here to interview," said the kinesiology professor.

After being hired in 2004, McMillan whipped the program into shape by beginning training months before the fall season, with workouts carrying throughout the entire summer, as well as practicing twice a day.

The Huntington Beach native drew from his experience playing and coaching at high levels and instituted changes at Valley that turned its water polo program into a force to be reckoned with. Understanding what it takes to win at



high levels, he had to adapt to only having his players for two years.

“He’s always done a really good job with his team,” said Athletic Director Dave Mallas. “His boys are very disciplined and they play very hard.”

From 2014-18 he led his team to five consecutive Western State Conference titles. On top of being conference coach of the year in 2014 and 2018, he also was awarded state coach of the year in 2018.

While being highly decorated, McMillan doesn’t focus on winning. His main drive is to make an impact on his athletes’ lives through sport.

“One of the best coaches I’ve ever had,” said sophomore Sargis Kaputikyan. “He teaches being a better person, being kind to everybody and sportsmanship.”

Nearly two decades into his time at Valley, he has transformed 54 men into All-Americans, including three this past season: Hakop Ansuryan, Sargis Kaputikyan and Johnny Agazaryan. In the spring swim season, he was announced as the 2023 Swim WSC coach of the year. He expresses that his latest award is just another addition to the collection on his wall. It shines among the many accolades that his athletes have picked up.

“I try to teach them life lessons through athletics. Responsibility, dedication, hard work, effort, teamwork, great commitment, all those buzzwords that are wonderful,” said McMillan. “My job is to help them move on.”



Photo by Griffin O’Rourke
Top (L-R) Hakop Ansuryan, Sako Kaputikyan and Johnny Agazaryan lean on the side of a pool at Valley College’s aquatics center.

Photo by Chris Dreadson
Left Ethan Francis prepares to shoot a ball towards the net during practice.

Photo by Griffin O’Rourke
Right Water polo coach Jim McMillan watches his players practice at the Aquatics Center.



“I try to teach them life lessons through athletics. Responsibility, dedication, hard work, effort, teamwork, great commitment, all those buzzwords that are wonderful. My job is to help them move on.”

-Jim McMillan, head coach of Valley Waterpolo and swim





Photo by Griffin O'Rourke