

SUMMER 2021

# the Islander

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY-CORPUS CHRISTI



**A LOVE SONG FOR CORPUS CHRISTI**

THEATRE & DANCE PROGRAM SHOOTS MUSIC VIDEO  
AROUND COASTAL BEND



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Kelly M. Miller, Ph.D.  
President and CEO

## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Dear Islanders,

For more than a year, we faced very difficult times, but Islanders everywhere—our students, faculty, staff, alumni and partners—met each new challenge with innovative thinking and a commitment to continue moving forward.

As you will see in this edition of *The Islander Magazine*, the creativity our faculty and students have shown in adapting their coursework continues to be both amazing and inspiring. For example, when they could not stage a performance as they normally would, theatre students and faculty worked collaboratively with business owners across the city to produce music videos. It gave our students valuable experiences while highlighting our beautiful region. We hope you take the opportunity to watch the video; the link is provided in the story on page 15.

Another story comes from a student who continued to pursue her degree while simultaneously running a business she started just before the pandemic. The lessons she learned about finding and utilizing resources and marketing demonstrates her incredible resiliency. She is just one example of the tenacity of our Islander students.

This summer, we will welcome new faces to the Island. In this edition, we introduce you to two of them, the new dean for the College of Nursing and Health Sciences and the new men's head basketball coach. Each brings fresh experience and renewed enthusiasm to Corpus Christi, and we are excited to see all we can accomplish with their contributions. Additionally, we also expect to introduce you to new deans in the College of Liberal Arts and the College of Business, and a new Vice President for Student Engagement and Success in our next edition.

It is an exciting time for Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. Our work in research and innovation continues to grow exponentially, while our commitment to student success never waivers. We are thankful for the ingenuity and commitment that helped us succeed during the past year and look forward to continually discovering innovative ways to prepare our students for the future. With your help and dedication, we know anything is possible.

Sincerely,

Kelly M. Miller, Ph.D.



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*Disclaimer: Some of the photos in this publication were taken prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Please continue to follow CDC guidelines for masks and social distancing while in public.*



## UP, UP, AND AWAY

*Netting structure allows safer, more efficient drone test flights*

A new netting structure—as big as a five-story warehouse—is giving drone-operating experts at the Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Lone Star Unmanned Aircraft System Center of Excellence & Innovation a much greater ability to test drones safely and quickly at the center’s Flour Bluff headquarters.

The structure, made up of an 85-foot by 85-foot framework totally enclosed in netting material, was unveiled on April 13. It covers more than 6,700 square feet and encloses more than 322,000 cubic feet of airspace, giving drones as small as 18 square inches plenty of space to fly missions.

“This is an impressive addition to our scientific facilities at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi,” Dr. Kelly M. Miller, University

President and CEO, said. “The benefits are important to the Lone Star UAS Center as it works to advance technology and research with the FAA, NASA, and our many other partners.”

Unique in Texas, the structure provides a safe place away from pedestrians, roadway traffic, and military aircraft to conduct post-maintenance flights to check airworthiness of a drone. It’s an innovative opportunity for new pilots of Lone Star UAS fleet aircraft to learn, and it enables proficiency training for pilots using current National Institute of Standards and Technology requirements.

Lone Star UAS is reviewing what types of technology may be placed inside the structure to assist in conducting tests,

such as motion capture cameras, acoustic sensors, small-scale city mock-ups, GPS sensors, and more.

The structure helps the Lone Star UAS team save time and money by reducing travel that was previously required when such testing had to be done offsite—up to two hours away. Because of the center’s proximity to the Corpus Christi Naval Air Station, UAV flights were not permitted there before the netting structure was built. Planning began about three years ago, while construction took less than three weeks. Cost of the structure was about \$450,000.

“The netting structure allows Lone Star UAS to more efficiently utilize our space, location, and test capabilities to advance technology and research in several areas of interest for the Federal Aviation



**OPPOSITE:** KC Sealock, UAS drone pilot, prepares the drone prior to the test flight. **LEFT:** A community member takes cell phone video of the drone as it takes flight. **ABOVE:** Dr. Ahmed Mahdy (left), Michael Sanders, and Dr. Kelly M. Miller celebrate the inaugural drone test flight within the new netting structure.

Administration,” Michael Sanders, Lone Star UAS executive director, said. “While being an FAA-designated test site is how Lone Star UAS began, we continue to develop our relationships in the realm of research within TAMU-CC and institutions of higher learning across Texas. This netting structure supports research goals that will benefit the communities in our region.”

The structure will also broaden efforts to support student success and outreach to the community.

“Initially, we will open the net’s use to TAMU-CC faculty and students to support aeronautics research and class or student projects,” Sanders said. “Later, we’ll allow local schools to use the structure in support of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education.”

The netting structure also can be used for demonstrations of aircraft capabilities. Additional opportunities may be possible in the future.

**THIS IS AN IMPRESSIVE ADDITION TO OUR SCIENTIFIC FACILITIES AT TEXAS A&M-CORPUS CHRISTI.**

- DR. KELLY M. MILLER  
UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT AND CEO



**ABOVE:** During the open house event on April 13, Lone Star UAS representatives brief community members on the center’s history and what services it offers.



# GRACE UNDER PRESSURE

*Finance major Angela Murray '22 runs thriving ballroom dance studio*

Angela Murray '22, senior finance major at the Island University, grew up expressing herself on a maple sprung floor before becoming a competitive ballroom dancer at the age of 17. From the age of 3, the Corpus Christi native trained in ballet, tap, modern, contemporary, and jazz, before discovering ballroom dancing when she was 12.

"I did everything I was offered basically," Murray said. "As a member of Corpus Christi Ballet, I was in 'The Nutcracker' every single year from age 6 to 16; I was Clara in 2012. Also, I was an amateur ballroom dancer for four years—what we call 'pro-am' because you're an amateur dancing with a professional

—and then I turned professional when I was 17."

Today, Murray, now 22 years old, is an award-winning ballroom dancer, choreographer, and instructor who runs Ballroom by the Bay, which she launched with the help of seven independent contractors in fall 2019. As a business owner, Murray said she applies the knowledge she learns in the classroom to day-to-day bookkeeping activities at her studio.

"Owning a business and being a full-time student is challenging," Murray said. "It's time-consuming doing both, but I always say that it's good because I can contribute what I'm learning directly to my business instead of just saying,

"OK, I need to memorize this information so I can pass a test."

Murray was only a few months settled into life as a business owner when Texas officials ordered a lockdown in response to the COVID-19 public health crisis in March 2020. The lockdown forced Murray to close Ballroom by the Bay for three months, which required her to rethink her business plans for what was set to be a key year for market growth.

"I was able to get a little bit of help; my landlord worked with me so I didn't have to pay my full rent for those three months. I still paid my independent contractors—I got financial assistance from the Paycheck Protection Program through the Small Business Administration, but it was still

hard,” Murray said. “Any sort of capital we had set aside for advertising went to keeping the doors open. Not being able to generate any revenue for three months was rough, but luckily, we survived and reopened in June 2020.”

Murray said she is grateful for the support of the local ballroom dance community in helping Ballroom by the Bay, located on the southside of Corpus Christi, get back on its feet. She expects her business to enjoy significant growth as social distancing protocols are lifted.

“A lot of our most serious clients started with us last summer, and they are there for every class,” Murray said. “But still, some people don’t want to come in—they don’t want to dance with a mask; they don’t want to get out in general. You have different comfort levels, so that’s a big factor in terms of our traffic.”

Accounting adjunct professor Richard Bell said it is common for Islander business students to be involved in or help create a new business enterprise, but they typically pair off with another person, a subject matter expert, in a certain field. He says Murray is unique

because she brought those two skill sets together to fulfill a big dream.

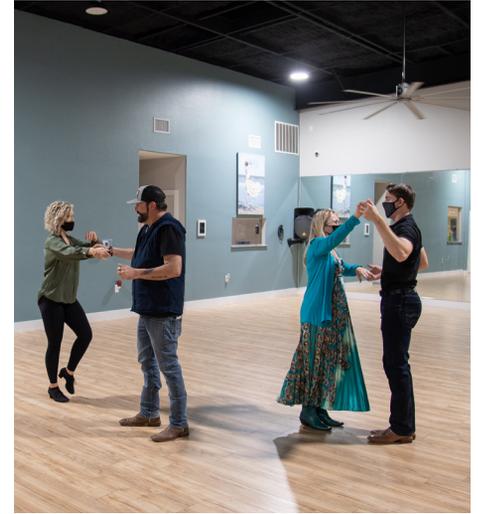
Bell describes Murray as a committed student who demonstrated her dedication to academic success early on in his classroom.

“Angela was in my 9 a.m. accounting class,” Bell said. “A very small number of students are willing to come in three times a week at that early hour (for college students) to engage in a subject some would call less-than-exciting, but Angela sat in the front—she was engaged and prepared. I am sure she puts the same principles into practice at her business.”

Murray said while she is looking forward to graduating in 2022, she has enjoyed her time in the classroom and made lifelong friends along the way.

“I met two of my best friends at the university and other good friends I still keep in touch with whether they’ve graduated or moved,” she said. “The university allows me to meet people that I look up to from a professional standpoint, like the professors, as well as be a part of a creative social group

filled with so many wonderfully awesome people.”



**OPPOSITE CLOCKWISE:** Angela Murray '22 demonstrates proper technique during a dance lesson. Murray has performed in many competitions across the country, including a 2016 performance at the Alamo Star Ball in San Antonio (photo by Steven Marino). Murray operates her business, Ballroom by the Bay, while taking courses full-time at TAMU-CC. Murray (right) with Thomas Waggoner, 7, at the 2016 Southeastern States Dancesport Championships (photo courtesy of Waggoner family). **ABOVE:** Murray takes the lead during a group dance rehearsal.



President's Circle is a special opportunity for community members to get involved with their Island University, and support the vision of our faculty, staff, and of President and CEO, Dr. Kelly M. Miller. Thanks to member support last year, President's Circle was able to designate \$100,000 in funds for direct student support. Despite this challenging year, our members continue to be integral champions for our students and community.

#### MEMBER BENEFITS

Members of President's Circle receive an insider's look into the university with exclusive, virtual, and in-person event programming and correspondence from President Miller to keep you updated on the current happenings on campus. We hope you will join us in our commitment to student success and make your Islander Impact!

[presidentscircle.tamucc.edu](http://presidentscircle.tamucc.edu)

**MEMBER LEVELS:** *Bronze Circle: \$1,000 | Silver Circle: \$2,500 | Gold Circle: \$5,000*



**TOP LEFT:** Dr. David Yoskowitz (right) meets with Dr. Vanessa Vázquez Sánchez, a biology professor at the University of Havana, over the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the two institutions to work together on Gulf of Mexico science issues. **ABOVE:** HRI Geospatial Analyst II Marissa Dotson (left) and Yoskowitz review maps showing potential sea level rise impacts to the Texas Coast. **BOTTOM LEFT:** Pictured Dr. David Yoskowitz.



The Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies is celebrating its 20th year on campus, and it's been a time of transition for the busy marine research and policy institute. With a new Senior Executive Director at the helm—Dr. David Yoskowitz, an economist with a background in implementing social science initiatives in marine research at the highest levels of the federal government—the institute is poised to begin an ambitious new era of expanding its reach in the scientific community, and its impact across the state of Texas and beyond.

Yoskowitz was chosen to lead HRI after a national search and took up the mantle on Aug. 31, 2020. He has strong ties to both HRI and Texas A&M-Corpus Christi and has held faculty and administrative positions during his 18 years on campus.

Yoskowitz previously served as HRI's Associate Director for Research, Policy, and Development and is the founding HRI Endowed Chair for Socioeconomics. In addition, he also held the position of Chief Economist for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric

Administration in 2014-2015, where he co-chaired an interagency task force that developed a research agenda around coastal green infrastructure and ecosystem services. He also helped develop the agency's first social science vision and strategy.

"Transitions provide opportunity," Yoskowitz said, "and as we move forward, there are several areas that we will be focusing specific efforts—beyond what we're already doing—that will amplify our impact. It's more important than ever to ensure we can deliver work that is impactful. The institute is in great health thanks to the work by [former Senior Executive Director] Dr. Larry McKinney, and we want to stay that way."

Some of Yoskowitz's areas of focus for the institute's future include: strengthening and deepening HRI's science, delivery, and impact; building lasting connections with the TAMU-CC family; focusing on internal excellence; developing and implementing a branding and marketing initiative; and expanding the institute's engagement opportunities, locally and statewide. Possible expansions of the institute's focus include integrating engineering into HRI's effective interdisciplinary research model. Yoskowitz is also moving forward on the institute's new Center for

Environment and Economy.

Expanding that vision of HRI's mission—science-driven solutions for Gulf of Mexico problems—is the goal of the new center, which Yoskowitz describes as a solutions design studio that will be headquartered in a new university property located in downtown Corpus Christi. Stakeholders from government, commercial entities, nonprofit organizations, and other community partners can come together with campus experts to solve critical regional problems.

"The only way this works is if members of the community are working with us to solve the problem," Yoskowitz said. "That's why it's in a location that takes us off campus and into the community-at-large."

Yoskowitz has deep experience with HRI's vision of interdisciplinary work. As one of the original social scientists on staff, he was brought on board to

## AMPLIFYING OUR IMPACT

*Dr. David Yoskowitz assumes HRI senior executive director role*

WHEN PEOPLE THINK ABOUT THE MOST PRESSING ISSUES OF THE DAY WHEN IT COMES TO WATERSHED, COASTAL, AND MARINE PROBLEMS, WE WANT THEM TO THINK OF US.

- DR. DAVID YOSKOWITZ  
HRI SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

help breathe life into HRI's mission to integrate science with the human dimensions that would allow it to steer marine and coastal policy. HRI gave Yoskowitz an opportunity to integrate his work as an economist with his natural science colleagues to examine critical environmental and resilience issues of the Gulf of Mexico.

Integrating an engineering component into HRI's research programs, whether through partnerships on the campus

or with other institutions, will also add a new dimension to the Institute's interdisciplinary research strategy—pushing HRI toward a transdisciplinary approach, Yoskowitz explained.

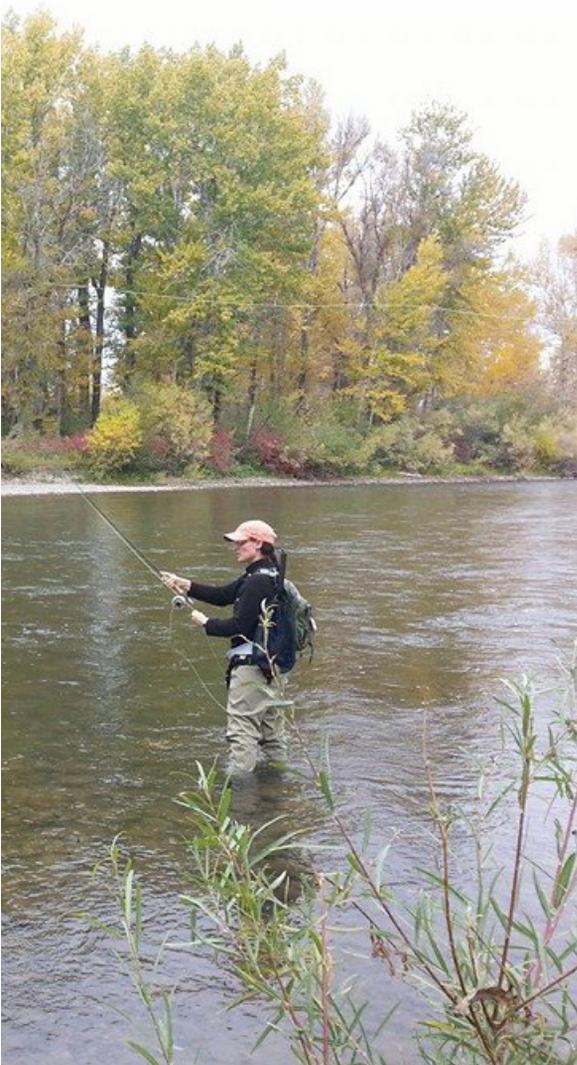
Yoskowitz said he also hopes to build HRI's brand as the institute celebrates its 20th anniversary, creating a "strong emotional connection" between the institute and its community, stakeholders, and partners.

"We've grown quickly even beyond

the original ideas and expectations for what HRI was going to be," Yoskowitz said. "When people think about the most pressing issues of the day when it comes to watershed, coastal, and marine problems, we want them to think of us. We can take our science-driven solutions and apply them worldwide. Ed Harte gave us the gift and the vision, and we want to take that and continue to amplify our impact."



**ABOVE:** A pod of American white pelicans float along Baffin Bay. **LEFT:** Dr. Jen Brown fly fishes on the Gallatin River in Montana (photo by Jes Brown).



## ‘THE GULF’ PODCAST TELLS STORIES OF A LESSER-KNOWN COAST

A new podcast and oral history project shares the stories of the Coastal Bend, Gulf of Mexico, and the surrounding community grounded in maritime industries. “The Gulf” was created by Dr. Jen Brown and is sponsored by the Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies.

Brown is the Joe B. Frantz Associate Professor of History at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and an environmental historian who studies the history of fly fishing, conservation, and natural resource policies. Her first book, “Trout Culture: How Fly Fishing Forever Changed the Rocky Mountain

West” (University of Washington Press, 2015), received critical acclaim and she is currently writing a new book, “The Fantastically Strange Cold War History of Dolphins,” which examines how the Cold War and space age shaped the environmental movement.

New episodes are released monthly and can be found on most major podcasting platforms. Past episodes of the podcast cover topics including brown pelicans, art inspired by nature, the morphology and mating behavior of marine mammals, oyster reefs, and the Kemp's Ridley sea turtle.



ABOVE: Kat Williams '21 embodies an indoor soccer player in the 2019 production of "The Wolves." RIGHT: Pictured Kat Williams '21.

# KAT IN MOTION

## *A day in the life of theatre major Kaitlyn "Kat" Williams '21*

Kaitlyn “Kat” Williams '21 knows the work required to stage a production better than most—she has spent ample time both behind the scenes as well as on the stage during her time as a student at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. Williams is a senior theatre major who grew up in Connecticut before she moved to Texas and graduated from Bishop High School in 2017.

Williams initially chose to study at the Island University following an audition at a conference while in high school; she credits Theatre Professor Kelly Russell with inspiring her to choose A&M-Corpus Christi.

As an Islander, Williams was a member of the build crew for “Hands on a Hard Body,” and was stage manager for “Mr. Marmalade” in the 40-Minute Play Festival in spring 2019. Her acting credits include roles in “The Wolves,” “What Every Girl Should Know,” and “The Love of the Nightingale.” In spring 2021, she served as director of the Bess Wohl play “Small Mouth Sounds” and was a student teacher for both virtual and in-person students at Mary Carroll High School in the Corpus Christi Independent School District.

“In the beginning, even just taking attendance for both virtual and

in-person students was daunting, but I’m getting the hang of things,” Williams said. “While virtual teaching (and learning) was not my favorite way of doing things, it was my favorite way to keep people safe.”

While Williams spent most of her early years on campus, the senior spent much of spring semester in her student teaching role, returning to the Island University mainly to attend meetings and rehearsals.

Williams, who plans to teach high school theatre after graduation, provided an in-depth view of the schedule of a busy theatre major who adjusted to a life framed by health protocols required as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

### WEDNESDAY, FEB. 22, 2021

#### 7:30 A.M.

I leave my house and head to Carroll High School. I am student teaching Theatre 1, 2, 3, 4, Tech, and Production. I enjoy teaching high school because by this time, most students know whether they like theatre or not. We get a great mix of students who are very into it, and others who are still testing the waters. It makes for some great interactions and teaching moments about everything in the world of theatre.

#### 8:15-8:50 A.M.

I prepare the lesson for the day. This includes setting up the smart board, logging into any accounts used throughout the day, sanitizing chairs (which I do after every class), and welcoming the students. In the classroom, COVID-19 protocols have been an evolving conversation about why it’s important to keep sanitizing and what things might look like in the future when more people have been vaccinated.

#### FIRST PERIOD

My cooperating teacher, who is the full-time teacher who teaches students in the class, teaches first period. The students seem like they are still sleepy. Once the students and I get into the lesson, they are more attentive. It is so much more motivating when the students are engaged. It lets me know that they are interested in formulating new ideas rather than staying stagnant.



**TOP LEFT:** Kat Williams '21 prepares for the next class period. **BOTTOM LEFT:** Williams (right) demonstrates Foley sound design to her students at Mary Carroll High School.



### 5-6:30 P.M.

My co-student teacher and I are helping our cooperating teacher direct a one-act play titled “The Diary of Adam and Eve” so we assist at rehearsal. My favorite part about my career is being able to create a community built within shows for my students.

### FIFTH PERIOD

This is my second day to teach fifth period. It is also the first time I am observed by my cooperating teacher. I am working towards a teaching style that best suits my fifth period students. Every class is unique! This class is more interested in the costuming and makeup side, so I focus my examples to their interest.

### 7-10 P.M.

I’m back at the Island University to rehearse “Small Mouth Sounds.” I am excited to learn that set construction has begun. We run the full show today. My actors are going through school, the pandemic, and an ice storm all at the same time. They still never cease to amaze me. Becoming one working mind is beautiful, especially when you see the final product.

### SECOND PERIOD

My cooperating teacher teaches second period as well. I listen intently to find things I can use to teach the next class. The students are more engaged when the lesson is taught like a conversation rather than a lecture. I will be using this tactic.

### SIXTH PERIOD

I help my cooperating teacher teach this class because the students are more advanced. These students have been doing theatre for a while and are involved in more productions. It is a higher-level class altogether.

### 10:30 P.M. TO MIDNIGHT

I catch up on emails, finish my homework, and start lesson planning for next week. I try to fall asleep while watching TikTok videos. It’s a way to rest my brain instead of it running around at 300 mph in four different directions.

### THIRD PERIOD

Third period is the first class my co-student teacher and I teach on our own. I have grown a special connection to the students in this class. They are the first class I ever taught. It means a lot that they are involved in my learning to be a teacher. I have spent a lot of time connecting with them and finding out new things about myself in the process. After class wraps up, I eat lunch.

### 4-5 P.M.

During a teacher conference period, my cooperating teacher goes over the results of my observation. I learn the meaning of “differentiating instruction” and now I need to learn how to use it well and often. Every day seems to bring a new challenge to overcome. I welcome the feedback. My evaluations have been especially helpful in terms of pre-planning for my classes. I receive helpful tips on how to keep my lessons more structured while also keeping conversations moving.

### MIDNIGHT TO 12:45 A.M.

I think about all the things I didn’t get done today and make a mental list to accomplish them tomorrow. Then I finally fall asleep. Theatre isn’t easy, and neither is teaching, but both are so much more rewarding than you could ever imagine!

# DR. DON TRAHAN, JR. '08, '10

*Islander makes his mark across globe*

For Islander alumnus Dr. Don Trahan, Jr. '08, '10, life changed direction completely after attending Island Day at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.

"I felt at home when I arrived in Corpus Christi," the native North Texan said. "There was a vibe that came over me in general with the city. When I got to campus—in addition to the beauty, the school spirit, and the way faculty helped me engage with the curriculum—it was an amazing overall experience."

As a high school student, Trahan had plans to become a professional R&B singer, and in 2004 following graduation, he enrolled at Midwestern State University in Wichita Falls, Texas. At MSU, Trahan thrived academically, but began to struggle with depression. Looking to change gears, Trahan signed

up for Island Day in April 2006. It's an experience he said set the foundation for the rest of his academic journey.

As an undergrad studying psychology, Trahan was eager to join activities on the Island campus. He was instrumental in the relocation of the Rho Psi Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha, the first intercollegiate historically African American Greek-lettered fraternity, from then-Texas A&I University to the Island University. As an Islander, Trahan was also involved in African American Cultural Society, Order of Omega, Golden Key Honour Society, and the Psychology Honor Society.

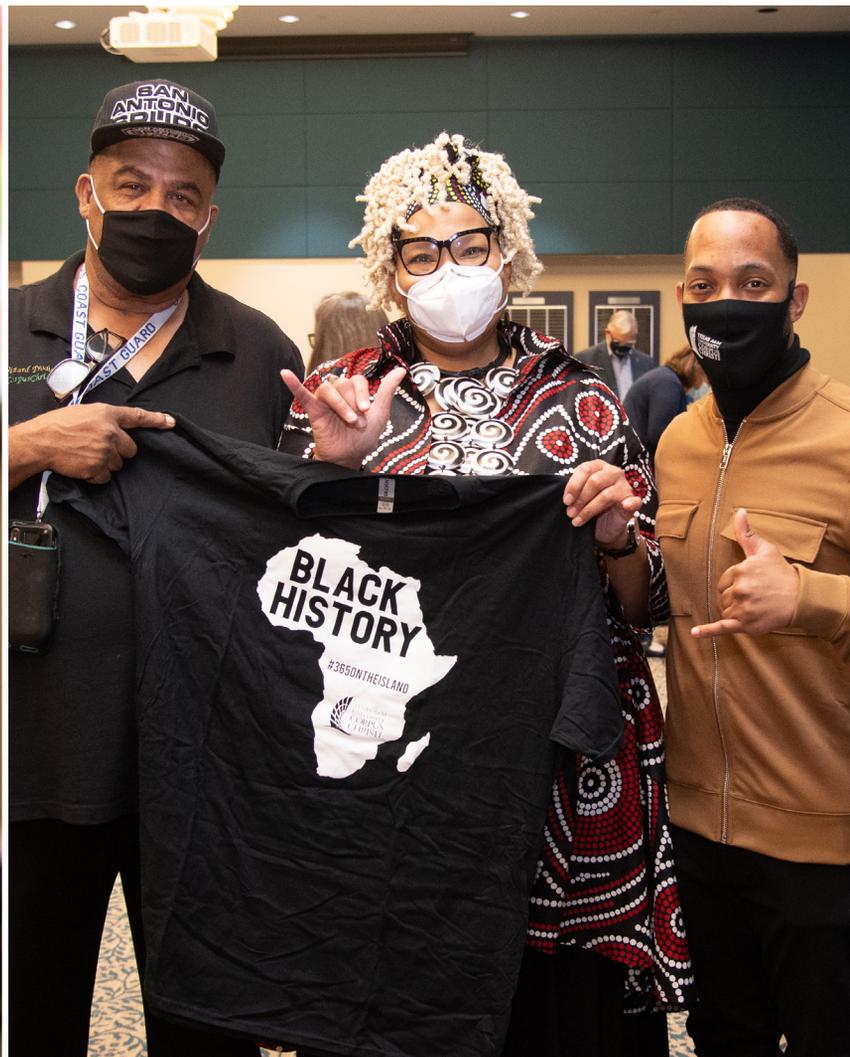
Trahan, who is now based in Washington, D.C., was invited back to campus in spring 2021 to serve as keynote speaker for the annual

Black History Month kickoff luncheon. During his talk, he shared details about his higher education journey, which includes a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and a Master of Arts in Clinical Psychology (both earned at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi); a Master of Arts in Educational Leadership: Community and Organizational Leadership concentration; and a doctoral degree in counseling from The University of New Mexico.

In addition, he defended his dissertation as a Doctor of Business Administration candidate at the University of Maryland Global Campus in early March and graduated several weeks later.

Trahan credits the support he received at A&M-Corpus Christi as being instrumental to his success.

"I know for a fact, and can say without



question, that I would not be who I am today academically if it were not for me being a student at A&M-Corpus Christi,” Trahan said.

Today, Trahan is a global diversity practitioner and professional keynote speaker who has worked in the higher education, government, corporate, and nonprofit industries. He has expertise in many areas, including executive leadership development, executive coaching, strategic planning, evidence-based research, and diversity, equity, and inclusion infrastructure development and implementation.

Trahan said his opportunity to expand internationally came about in 2017 after he received an invitation to speak at the World Diversity & Inclusion Congress, held annually in Mumbai, India.

“I’ve been on four different continents working with hundreds of organizations,” he said.

In addition, Trahan is a licensed professional counselor, national certified counselor, approved clinic supervisor, and a professor at the University of Southern California. He is currently at work on his first book, “You Think You Know Me But You Have No Idea: Journey to Ph.D. and Beyond.” He plans to self-publish it in early 2022.

“A lot of people see the success or the ‘end result’ as I call it, but they don’t know the story of the journey that’s associated with the success—the tired moments and the sacrifice,” he said.

Through it all, Trahan has maintained a deep passion for music and is now stepping into the role of mentor as the manager of an emerging vocalist.

“Once this young man graduates from college, we can aggressively work on endeavors to manage, mold, and advance his career, and I’m so excited,” Trahan said.

As a devoted Islander alumnus, Trahan has made it a priority to stay connected. He visited campus in 2015 and again in 2018 before returning for this spring’s event.

“As an alumnus, being able to share the experiences, being able to give examples, being able to sit and just serve as a role model of ‘Hey, I went to class in Bay Hall, I went to class in Center for Instruction, I was in the UC,’” he said, “those are things that students can connect with and they really do look at you and think, ‘Wow—if he can do these things, so can I.’”

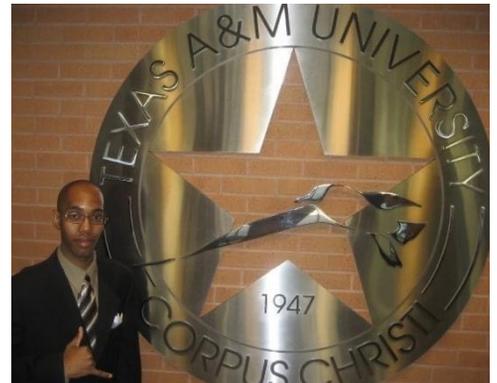
With an educational resume that includes two doctoral degrees, Trahan has shown a lifelong commitment to learning. He plans to establish an endowed scholarship at TAMU-CC that will serve to thank the institution that spearheaded his career trajectory while creating educational opportunities for young people.

## Higher education journey of Dr. Don Trahan, Jr.:

- BACHELOR OF ARTS IN PSYCHOLOGY (TEXAS A&M-CORPUS CHRISTI)
- MASTER OF ARTS IN CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY (TEXAS A&M-CORPUS CHRISTI)
- MASTER OF ARTS IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP, COMMUNITY AND ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP CONCENTRATION (UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO)
- DOCTORAL DEGREE IN COUNSELING (UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO)
- DOCTORAL DEGREE IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION (UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND)

I KNOW FOR A FACT, AND CAN SAY WITHOUT QUESTION, THAT I WOULD NOT BE WHO I AM TODAY ACADEMICALLY IF IT WERE NOT FOR ME BEING A STUDENT AT A&M-CORPUS CHRISTI.

- DR. DON TRAHAN, JR. '08, '10  
GLOBAL DIVERSITY PRACTITIONER



**OPPOSITE:** Dr. Don Trahan, Jr. '08, '10 speaks at the TAMU-CC Black History Month kickoff event and takes a photo with attendees. **ABOVE LEFT TO RIGHT:** Trahan, Jr. celebrates his first commencement ceremony. He supports his fellow Islanders by attending a graduation ceremony and snaps a commemorative photo in front of the university seal.

# A LOVE SONG FOR CORPUS CHRISTI

*Theatre & Dance program shoots music video around Coastal Bend*



ABOVE: Islander students perform on the rooftop of the university's building in downtown Corpus Christi.

Thinking beyond the tried and true has been the norm for the Department of Theatre & Dance at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi since the earliest days of the COVID-19 pandemic, starting with the transition to livestream performances.

This spring, the department ventured beyond the world of theatre with the production of its first music video—an homage to the Island University's host city. The video was shot at a variety of iconic Coastal Bend locations including the downtown Bayfront, Whataburger Field, the Harbor Playhouse, and Heritage Park. Fittingly titled "A Love Song for Corpus Christi," the video debuted in late April to much fanfare.

In any other year, the department would have staged an end-of-semester, Broadway-inspired musical in the Center for the Arts building, according to Alison Frost, department chair and associate professor of theatre.

"I was supposed to direct a production of Disney's 'Newsies,' and I just didn't

know how to direct that show with masks and social distancing while remaining happy and connected to the project," Frost said. "So, we amended our regular season to produce a safer, streamable video production that allowed our students the experience of producing a musical event predominantly in the open-air environment around Corpus Christi."

The project was an all-hands-on-deck affair involving 12 student performers, along with recording technology support from Dr. Brian Thacker, professional assistant professor of music. Costumes were designed by Rosa Lazaro, theatre professor, and organized by Kyle Everett, costume shop supervisor. Kevin Loeffler, theatre associate professor, and Jordan Bohl, technical director, provided scenic and prop supervision. Philip Johnson, theatre professor, provided video camera supervision.

Stage Manager Jaydn Johanson '23, a theatre arts sophomore, said the project

helped him and his fellow Islanders connect with Corpus Christi on a deeper level.

"I've lived here for about two years, and honestly haven't had a lot of time to explore the city," Johanson, a North Texas native, said. "This is the first project that required me to dive more into my surroundings. Being able to see the art and history the city is filled with made me really happy."

Miranda Dean '22, a theatre major specializing in acting/directing with teacher certification, held roles in "Mamma Mia!," "Hamlet," and "A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder" during her time on campus. In "A Love Song for Corpus Christi," Dean was a soloist for "Faith" and "Footloose."

"This production is a gigantic honor to be a part of. We were able to collaborate with new departments on campus to create art that is unique and special to everyone involved," Dean said. "We are showing off Corpus Christi in ways that



### *Featured in the music video:*

- "YOU CAN'T STOP THE BEAT" FROM "HAIRSPRAY"
- "SARAH" AND "THE HONOR OF YOUR NAME" FROM "THE CIVIL WAR"
- "PERFECT FOR YOU" FROM "NEXT TO NORMAL"
- "TEACHER'S PET" FROM "SCHOOL OF ROCK"
- "SING, SING, SING" FROM "SWING!"
- "HELPLESS" FROM "HAMILTON"
- "FAITH" FROM THE MOVIE MUSICAL "SING"
- "FOOTLOOSE" FROM "FOOTLOOSE"

**WATCH THE  
MUSIC VIDEO AT  
[tamucc.edu/lovesong](http://tamucc.edu/lovesong)**

**TOP LEFT TO RIGHT:** Performance locations included the Texas State Aquarium and the university's building in downtown Corpus Christi. **LEFT:** Students used Whataburger Field, home of the Corpus Christi Hooks, for their music video.

shine a beautiful light on our city. After all, all the world's a stage. We hope you laugh, smile, and enjoy the sights as we sing and dance our hearts out for you, Corpus Christi!"

Jacob Martinez '22, a theatre major specializing in acting/directing with teacher certification, appears in most of the selections.

"After filming outside from early morning to late afternoon two days in a row, I had a bad sunburn! And lip syncing accurately is quite the challenge," Martinez said. "With a bit of practice and some sunscreen, however, we easily overcame these challenges."

River Thompson '22, a theatre major specializing in acting/directing with teacher certification, served as assistant director and choreographer for "Faith,"

which was recorded at Whataburger Field, the Texas State Aquarium, and the Art Museum of South Texas.

Thompson said representatives from all the filming locations were open to the idea and willing to participate.

Like his fellow Islanders working on the video, Martinez was excited to participate in a groundbreaking project and hopes the video resonated with Corpus Christi residents.

"I think it is advantageous to participate in something that challenges and pushes the artform forward—especially during a time when change has been so prevalent," he said. "We have worked hard to make this an experience for people to get away from the clutter of this world and appreciate what we have around us. I hope Corpus Christi sees

how much we care about them."

Corpus Christi Mayor Paulette Guajardo '00 said she wholeheartedly supported the efforts of this next generation of leaders and influencers who are highlighting the Corpus Christi community through theatrical performance.

"The arts are a great medium to spotlight our wonderful city," Guajardo said. "As an Islander alumna, I am extraordinarily proud of the collaboration that has produced what is certain to be an iconic song and video in 'A Love Song for Corpus Christi.' The creativity and imagination in producing an artistic treasure about our coastal city is a source of great inspiration to me."

# PASSION FOR RESEARCH

*Dedicated faculty drive Island University's research development*



**ABOVE:** Limpets, a marine snail found in the Hawaiian Islands, are displayed on a tabletop in Dr. Chris Bird's lab. **BELOW RIGHT:** Ashley Hamilton '19 (left) and Bird focus on changes in the appearance and development of a species of limpets.

The evolution of Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi as a research institution is a step-by-step process of setting optimistic goals and obtaining consensus and support from an array of stakeholders. One of the most critical elements is attracting dedicated, innovative, and inspired faculty members to help bring the process to life. But what is it that inspires a person to pursue a profession in research, and how does the Island University help cultivate an environment that supports meaningful research opportunities?

Dr. Chris Bird has become well-known in the Coastal Bend due to his work with the COVID-19 task force, made up of City of Corpus Christi, Nueces County, and university representatives. Bird's role was recognized late last year when the associate professor was selected by the Corpus Christi Caller-Times as Newsmaker of the Year.

But while Bird has been willing to

step to the plate to help the community with his knowledge and experience, the population geneticist and marine biologist is far more comfortable searching a shoreline for marine mollusks than standing in front of a camera for one of his many media interviews regarding the pandemic.

"I'm keenly interested in the effects of overharvesting on marine populations and promoting the sustainable extraction of marine resources," Bird said. "I was an avid fisherman until I went to college and I spent a lot of time in my childhood clamming and crabbing in Connecticut. There was a noticeable decline in the marine resources, and that interested me."

After a semester of chemical engineering at Georgia Tech, Bird realized that it wasn't for him.

"I reapplied to universities with more investment in ecology programs and never looked back," Bird said.



**TAMU-CC DIRECTLY AND INDIRECTLY PROVIDED ME WITH THE NECESSARY RESOURCES TO ESTABLISH THE FIRST MODERN GENOMICS RESEARCH LAB ON THE ISLAND.**

- DR. CHRIS BIRD  
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF BIOLOGY





**ABOVE CLOCKWISE:** Dr. Dara Orbach (right) is leading a study of the common bottlenose dolphins that inhabit Corpus Christi Bay, Aransas Bay, and other bodies of water. With her is undergraduate honors student and intern Audra Clute '22. Dolphin photos courtesy of National Marine Fisheries Service, Permit #23203.

That interest in marine environments is shared by Assistant Professor of Marine Biology Dara Orbach, who feels working and living by the ocean is essential to her happiness.

A Toronto native, she was eager to leave harsh winters behind. She did her undergraduate work on Canada's west coast—Vancouver.

"I fell in love with living by the coast and the idea that people bike to work in their business suits and go for picnics and have just a happier way of life," Orbach said. "So, I decided that I wanted a lifestyle by the coast where it just brought out the best in me and I was in my zen zone."

Her path to the study of marine mammals had a less direct route. She earned two degrees as an undergraduate: animal biology and classic, near eastern and religious studies. She then set her sights on a research-focused profession. She first studied echo-location in bats

as a way to develop expertise that could eventually open doors to marine mammal research.

**I DECIDED THAT I WANTED  
A LIFESTYLE BY THE COAST  
WHERE IT JUST BROUGHT OUT  
THE BEST IN ME.**

- DR. DARA ORBACH  
ASST. PROFESSOR OF MARINE BIOLOGY

While working on her Ph.D. in Galveston, she was introduced to the Texas Gulf Coast. Finding a job at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi was when everything aligned: a welcoming university community, a Hispanic-Serving Institution, and "dolphins, right here in the bay."

For Assistant Professor of Geophysics Mohamed Ahmed, growing up in arid Egypt was accompanied by the

understanding that water was a precious resource. Attempts to locate and monitor underground freshwater are never easy, complicated by incomplete data, delays, and discontinuity.

"Additionally, these observations are sparse and do not adequately represent the entire hydrogeologic system under investigation," Ahmed said. "This inspired me to integrate geophysics, remote sensing, numerical modeling, and GIS data and approaches to investigate a wide range of complex hydrological, geological, and environmental problems in arid and semi-arid environments."

From inspiration to application, scientists across the university are developing research specializations that bring Texas A&M-Corpus Christi new prominence as a research institution, and create new opportunities for students.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18 ▶



**ABOVE LEFT TO RIGHT:** Dr. Mohamed Ahmed (left) works with geochemistry major Loren Walker '19 during a field exercise. Ahmed and his geophysics class engage in outdoor learning in a grassy patch near Ocean Drive.

“TAMU-CC directly and indirectly provided me with the necessary resources to establish the first modern genomics research lab on the island,” Bird said. “This involved acquiring the laboratory instruments, expertise, and computational resources. The Research Office and College of Science and Engineering were instrumental in facilitating the establishment of the Genomics Core Laboratory, which provides services to researchers worldwide. They were active in acquiring a supercomputer necessary to process genomic data, which is also useful in several other disciplines such as geospatial computing sciences and atmospheric sciences.”

Orbach is getting support for the development of her lab—the Functional Anatomy and Behavioral Ecology of Marine Mammals lab—which initially will focus on the study of local dolphin populations. Researchers will travel by boat and use unmanned aerial vehicles to help identify these dolphins by markings on their dorsal fins. No substantial study of area dolphins has been done for 30 years, and Orbach’s particular interest in the mating behavior of marine mammals is a research focus for her group that will fill critical gaps in our knowledge of

cetacean reproduction.

Ahmed sees the Island University as a place with a tradition of cross-disciplinary collaborations.

“TAMU-CC is second to none in investigating research challenges with a team-based approach, bringing together a vast array of world-class expertise and facilities,” he said.

Ahmed said TAMU-CC provides ideal circumstances to collaborate with top scientists from geology, physics, chemistry, atmospheric science, and coastal sciences disciplines.

“This environment exposes me to new disciplines and ideas,” Ahmed said. “TAMU-CC provides real opportunities to integrate the classroom, research labs, and field experiences, something that is not available in many other institutions. This type of integration definitely enhances students’ engagement, performance, and employment prospects.”

Ahmed is pleased to see the university’s focus on research continue to develop.

“I’m very proud to be a member of TAMU-CC,” Ahmed said. “I see the huge efforts made by TAMU-CC to grow as a research university. I totally support that. I’m also very thankful for the entire

Division of Research and Innovation for the continued support that they provide to all in the TAMU-CC community.”

Bird agrees in the importance of growing research at A&M-Corpus Christi.

“More research earns more funding and support for the university,” he said. “This, in turn, attracts more students and provides an improved diversity of opportunities to those students. TAMU-CC graduates are well prepared and competitive in today’s workforce. If research grows enough, a critical mass can be achieved where some of those graduates will start building new businesses and industries here rather than leaving. That’s good for the whole community.”

**TAMU-CC PROVIDES REAL OPPORTUNITIES TO INTEGRATE THE CLASSROOM, RESEARCH LABS, AND FIELD EXPERIENCES, SOMETHING THAT IS NOT AVAILABLE IN MANY OTHER INSTITUTIONS.**

- DR. MOHAMED AHMED  
ASST. PROFESSOR OF GEOPHYSICS





ABOVE: Dr. Hassan Aziz visits the Island University and tours nursing program facilities.

## WELCOME TO THE ISLAND

*Dr. Hassan Aziz will serve as College of Nursing and Health Sciences Dean*

The Island University welcomes a new leader to campus this summer. Dr. Hassan Aziz will serve as dean of the Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi College of Nursing and Health Sciences. Aziz officially joined the university on June 1, 2021. Aziz said he is impressed with the college's legacy and is excited to be part of its next chapter.

"I was drawn to Texas A&M-Corpus Christi because of the reputation of the institution, diversity of academic programs, visionary campus leadership, active student body, and impressive history," Aziz, former executive associate dean for academic, faculty, and student affairs at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center, said. "A&M-Corpus Christi is a comprehensive institution that houses high-quality professional programs and supports a balanced distribution of teaching, scholarship, and service."

As the president-elect for the American Society for Clinical Laboratory Science (ASCLS) and the 2019 recipient of the prestigious American Society for Clinical Pathology (ASCP) Lifetime Achievement Award and the ASCLS Distinguished Author Award, Aziz says he is a forceful and passionate advocate

for those under his watch.

"I look forward to working with faculty and staff to articulate a vision for the college that encompasses innovation, collaboration, diversity, interdisciplinary exploration, and high standards," he said. "As for students, I will actively and strategically guide them to thrive, grow, and improve qualitatively."

His strategies also include collaboration with the TAMU-CC Development Office to increase community support that will enable more opportunities for student and university success.

"It's critical that we effectively communicate to donors and external partners how the teaching, research, and clinical practice conducted by the college's faculty directly impacts population health in our community," he said.

Aziz says bridging the gap from "town to gown" not only supports the university's potential for economic development, but also the opportunity for students to participate in collaborative and field-based learning opportunities within Coastal Bend.

Dr. Sherdeana Owens, clinical assistant professor and health sciences

coordinator, said having a dean whose expertise lies within the health sciences field is beneficial to both nursing and health sciences students, as the need for health professionals in various facets of the medical field has increased following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"From public health planners, long-term care administrators, supply chain managers, finance specialists, health educators and case managers, the need for these specialists has never been greater," Owens said.

Aziz hopes to build upon the legacy of strong, skilled, and compassionate health care professionals while serving the college and the community through new and exciting curricula, programs, and outreach opportunities.

"The vocation of helping to grow a large, complex organization such as a college is, to me, an exciting opportunity for sharing vision and working collaboratively with a team of dedicated individuals who ultimately want to achieve the same goal—to give our students the very best," he said. "My goal is to lead by way of shared governance and consensus-building, effective mentoring at multiple levels, and perhaps most importantly, through my own example."



# TRAINING THE NEXT GENERATION OF NURSES

*Simulation exercises, volunteerism part of holistic approach to nursing program*

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of healthcare professionals, and further emphasized the ever-growing shortage of skilled healthcare experts across the nation and the need for innovative solutions.

Through newly-organized simulation modules, volunteerism, and education on the importance of mental health and work-life balance, the Island University's College of Nursing and Health Sciences is working to prepare the next generation of healthcare workers to serve the Coastal Bend community and beyond.

"A&M-Corpus Christi is looking towards the future," Brayton Amidon '15, '19, CONHS simulation lab coordinator, said. "As the focus of healthcare shifts from disease management to preventative healthcare, the college is adapting to meet the needs of both

nurses and communities."

Preparing the next generation includes preparing pandemic-ready healthcare professionals. Islander nursing students made history this semester as they volunteered to aid in the disbursement of nearly 10,000 COVID-19 vaccinations. Students say their time spent volunteering created a novel opportunity to engage with the community and stand by their fellow nurses.

"We're being trained to get out there and help. We're the next crop of nurses, and for many of us, this is our potential client population," Elizabeth Seabolt '21, nursing major, said. "These are unprecedented times and we're aching to be able to get out and help however we can."

In addition, college faculty and staff reorganized and launched new

curriculum structures including a vast array of simulation and telehealth modules. The college also debuted a new apartment-style simulation lab for home-health/primary care training with scenarios that incorporate patient assessment, education, and culture competencies. Complete with a kitchen, living room, and dining area, the new apartment simulation lab focuses on the importance of preventative healthcare aimed at an aging population.

According to Dr. Julie Fomenko '17, former assistant professor and director of the Simulation and Clinical Learning Center, the work of nurses is rapidly expanding to home-based care, hospice and palliative care, and home-based education.

"These simulated patient encounters help broaden the experience of our students and show them other areas where nurses make



**OPPOSITE LEFT TO RIGHT:** Ashley Granados '21 administers the COVID-19 vaccine at a drive-thru vaccination clinic. Ananda Salinas '21 (right) provides patient care in an apartment-style simulation lab. **ABOVE CLOCKWISE:** KayLynn Mireles '21 (left) and Amine Khodja '23 volunteer at a vaccination event. Kaela Davis '21 preps supplies at a vaccination event on campus. Drew Jemeyson '21 reads an ingredient list to his patient.

**THE PROGRAM HAS GIVEN US THE OPPORTUNITY TO EARN OUR RIGHT INTO THE PROFESSION... IT HAS TAUGHT US RESILIENCE DURING THESE TOUGH TIMES, MAKING US STRONGER AS INDIVIDUALS.**

- SHANE FULP '21  
NURSING MAJOR

such a huge impact on the health of a community,” Fomenko said.

At a national and global level, job burnout and moral distress have caused a tremendous amount of turnover in the nursing profession. According to a 2021 study done by the U.S. National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health, 54% percent of nurses suffered from moderate burnout, with emotional exhaustion scores increasing by 10% and cynicism scores increasing 19% after one year.

Taking note of current concerns among healthcare professionals working under exceptional circumstances, the college has adapted its pedagogy to include a more holistic approach.

“I always like to remind students that if we don’t take good care of ourselves,

it will eventually become very hard to take care of others,” Fomenko said. “The pandemic and lockdown pulled this clearly into focus as we saw the increase of mental health issues facing healthcare workers. We hope to demonstrate to our students that by caring for them and ourselves, we can normalize mental health treatment and be more comfortable with discussing it in the open.”

Nursing major Dyana Saenz '21 said her professors are preparing her to think in broader terms.

“The time we spend considering psychosocial aspects of care has been extremely valuable,” Saenz said. “Our professors offer their time to talk about everything from clarifying lessons, to career advice, to mental health

considerations. We are learning how nurses should prioritize the care of patients—and their own families—during this crisis.”

Islander students say it is because of supportive faculty and a flexible educational environment that they now have the tools to revolutionize the future of patient care. The nursing program is one of the most popular on campus.

“The program has given us the opportunity to earn our right into the profession,” Shane Fulp '21, nursing major, said. “The program itself has taught us resilience during these tough times, making us stronger as individuals. The program is truly one of a kind.”

# CELEBRATING ISLANDER ALUMNI HONOREES

*Giving back to campus and community*

An extraordinary group of Islander alumni are being recognized and awarded following their continued acts of philanthropy, professionalism, and Islander pride.

Alumni Ed Cantu '81, Joey Carson '89, and Kristina Leal Jewasko '16,

were selected as the 2021 Alumni Award Honorees. It's a recognition traditionally bestowed during the Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Alumni Honors Banquet where the titles of Outstanding, Distinguished, and Young Alumni are presented to

the recipients with friends, family, and colleagues in attendance. As a result of an unprecedented winter storm, the banquet was canceled, though this year's honorees will be recognized alongside a new class of distinguished alumni at the 2022 Alumni Honors Banquet.



ABOVE LEFT TO RIGHT: Distinguished Alumnus Ed Cantu '81 interacts with fans at an Islanders basketball game. Cantu (left) poses with Sierra Priest '18 at a commencement ceremony. Cantu talks to a prospective employee at a career fair.

## *Distinguished Alumnus—Ed Cantu '81*

Honored with the Distinguished Alumnus award, Ed Cantu earned a bachelor's degree in business administration and has owned Ed Cantu Insurance Agency and Financial Services, a top-performing, award-winning company, for 36 years. Fellow Islander alumnus and colleague Pat O'Boyle '86 says it is Cantu's passion for the Island University that truly stands out.

"From the days he walked these halls as a student, to the great business leader he's become, this university has molded him into the person he is today," O'Boyle said.

Known as "Mr. Islander," Cantu has worked continuously through leadership roles in multiple agencies and organizations to give back to the university, including roles as immediate past president of the Texas A&M-Corpus Christi National Alumni Association, immediate past-chairman of the Leadership Corpus Christi Alumni Association, and chair-elect of the Texas A&M-Corpus Christi Athletic Fund, along with numerous local boards and committees. He is also a best-selling author.

"Ed is shakas up in every aspect of his life," O'Boyle said. "He's active at this university because he knows it will benefit future generations. He's brought so many people to the Island. He's mentored so many students, and even provided jobs for them post-graduation."

Cantu has created numerous opportunities for students through internships, scholarships, and mentorship as part of the Texas A&M-Corpus Christi's Islander Mentorship Program.

## Outstanding Alumnus—Joey Carson '89

Honored with the Outstanding Alumnus award, Joey Carson earned a bachelor's degree in business administration and has spent the last 25 years as a leader and innovator in the media and entertainment industry. He is the current CEO and president of ELEVATOR Studio. Carson's colleague Dan Fleishman says it's his creativity and tenacity that has made him a role model.

"I believe Joey embodies the Islander spirit," Fleishman said. "He has played a vital role in the success of ELEVATOR Studio and has enabled us to harness our entrepreneurial vision and bring us to the next level as a major force in digital marketing."

As a pioneer in reality television, Carson's television credits include multiple productions for networks, including MTV, HBO, A&E, FOX, ABC, NBC, Oxygen and the multi-E Emmy-Award-winning documentary "Autism: The Musical." Carson also sits as a board member for the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences and serves



as a member of the Hollywood Radio & Television Society, the Youth Mentoring Collection, and the Texas A&M-Corpus Christi Islander Mentorship Program.

"Joey has continuously supported our employees as a mentor and educator—much like he does for students at TAMU-CC today through the mentorship program," Fleishman said. "His selfless service and mentorship are evidence of his loyalty and respect of the profession."

BELOW LEFT TO RIGHT: Outstanding Alumnus Joey Carson '89. Carson (second from right) and his team at ELEVATOR Studio present at a live event.



Carson currently donates to multiple organizations within his local community, including Model Citizen—an organization that provides backpacks to the homeless in Los Angeles. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, he expressed excitement and interest at the chance to host an Islander Alumni Dinner Series, along with interest in helping with podcasts, panel discussions, and classroom presentations within the College of Business.

## Young Alumna—Kristina Leal Jewasko '16

Honored with the Young Alumna award, Kristina Leal Jewasko earned a master's degree in public administration before setting her sights on helping those in need as a Corporate Giving Manager for H-E-B. Former professor and mentor Toby Futrell says it was Jewasko's articulate and compassionate character that defined her as a true "steel magnolia."

"Kristina is so kind and supportive in nature, but she's also intellectually curious which makes her a great problem solver," Futrell said. "Real leaders have empathy, they care about the work, they care about the people, and she's got all of that in spades."

Named as one of the Young Business Professionals of Corpus Christi Under 40, Jewasko served on the Women's and Men's Health Services Board of Directors, the Toastmasters Aqua Vitae Chapter Executive Board, the Incarnate Ward Academy Alumni Advisory Council, and the Junior League of Corpus Christi Christmas Tree Forest Committee.

Jewasko works with multiple statewide nonprofits such as March of Dimes, Feeding



Texas, and the United Way of Texas. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Jewasko aided front-line healthcare workers by providing meals to COVID floors, emergency rooms, and hospitals across the state. She also helped pilot a new coupon program for nonprofits, sponsored by H-E-B, to distribute fresh foods to those in need. As an H-E-B employee, she planned and executed Thanksgiving box distributions and helped Hurricane Laura victims in August 2020.

BELOW LEFT TO RIGHT: Young Alumna Kristina Leal Jewasko '16. Jewasko distributes Thanksgiving meals to people in the community.



"Kristina is proud. She's proud of her university and proud of her hometown and she carries that with her wherever she goes," Futrell said.

Jewasko is a regular attendee at Islander Alumni events and has served on the National Alumni Association Board of Directors, donating to scholarships and other university programming. In fall 2019, she also assisted alumni relations staff in revamping the Islander Alumni Houston Chapter.

# TOP NEWS

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi

1



## TAMU-CC RECEIVES \$1.15 MILLION NSF AWARD TO HELP TRAIN STEM TEACHERS

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi has been awarded a \$1.15 million National Science Foundation grant to recruit 24 students and help prepare them to become middle and high school teachers for high-needs school districts in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and math.

The project is being led by Principal Investigator Professor Cherie McCollough, chair of the Department of Life Sciences in the College of Science and Engineering. Her co-principal investigators are Professor and Director of Clinical Experiences and School and University Partnership Field Experiences Carmen Tejada-Delgado, Professor Cilla “Faye” Bruun, and Assistant Professor Robin Johnson, all of the College of Education and Human Development.

The project includes a partnership with Del Mar College and the West Oso Independent School District. It is part of the NSF’s Robert Noyce STEM INSPIRES (Infusing Social Programs in Residential Education Scholars) project, a working title initiated by the PIs.

Along with empowering students to become culturally competent critical thinkers and effective STEM educators, the project incorporates service-learning and self-efficacy building experiences, with an emphasis on relationship building with a diverse community.

McCollough said the project will also address declines in the numbers of college students in STEM programs, particularly those who want to become STEM teachers.

2



3



## 2 TAMU-CC, DMC TO SHARE \$650K TEXAS RESKILLING GRANT TO SUPPORT LOCAL WORKFORCE DEMANDS

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and Del Mar College, partners dedicated to enhancing educational access and opportunity for students throughout the Coastal Bend, are proud to share a \$650,000 Texas Reskilling Support Fund Grant through the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. The money is part of the CARES Act of 2020.

The grant supports displaced Texas workers who need to reskill or upskill to get back into the workforce and Texas students who have previously “stopped out” of higher education institutions without completing a postsecondary credential.

The \$650,000 will support 250 students each at TAMU-CC and DMC, along with a full-time program coordinator who shares a joint appointment to the financial aid directors at the institutions.

The programs and degrees that benefit from this funding include those that most align with Workforce Solutions of the Coastal Bend’s targeted occupation list for 2019-2021 which directly correlate with high employment demands in six career areas including business, healthcare, occupational health and safety, engineering/computer science, public service, and professional skills/trade industry.

## 3 STEVE LUTZ ANNOUNCED AS ISLANDERS HEAD MEN’S BASKETBALL COACH

Steve Lutz was announced as the new Islanders head Men’s Basketball coach in April. Lutz spent the last four seasons as an assistant coach at Purdue University. During that span, the Boilermakers reached every NCAA Tournament including an Elite Eight in 2018-19 and a Sweet 16 in 2017-18.

“It is with great honor that I accept the offer to become the next head men’s basketball coach at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi,” Lutz said. “This is the realization of a dream, and I look forward to working diligently to build a program that will make Islander fans proud.”

Lutz has roots in the state of Texas and a proven track record of success at all levels, including the Southland Conference. The San Antonio native also had highly successful stops at Creighton, Southern Methodist University, Stephen F. Austin, Incarnate Word and Garden City.

“I am thrilled to welcome Steve Lutz, his wife Shannon, his daughters Caroline and McKenna, and his son Jackson, to the Islander family,” Jon Palumbo, Islanders athletic director, said. “We had interest from a lot of great coaches from across the country, but Steve stood out as a perfect fit. He has been instrumental in several highly successful programs that have made deep NCAA tournament runs, has proven himself as one of the best recruiters in the country and will bring a relentless work ethic to the Island. Most importantly, he is a man of character who will continue our tradition of molding young men into great players, students, and people.”

Lutz replaces Willis Wilson, who announced his retirement from coaching in March 2021 after a 39-year career in the game of basketball.

# ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP COUNCIL

Establishing an endowed scholarship is a meaningful and permanent way to help Islander students pursue their educational goals. The commitment of your gift ensures that future generations have access to a world-class education.

The Island University established the Endowed Scholarship Council in recognition of donors making significant gifts to endowed scholarships and hosts an annual Endowed Scholarship Banquet offering endowed scholarship recipients the opportunity to meet with their generous benefactors.

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For more information about our Endowed Scholarship Council or creating an endowed scholarship, please call 361.825.2639.



LEFT TO RIGHT: David "Itchy" Burts '20, Luke Marbach '20, and Mike Williams '20.

## SUPER SENIORS

*Islanders Baseball benefits from new level of experience*

Three seasoned student-athletes on the Islanders Baseball team are not letting the COVID-19 pandemic keep them from excelling both on and off the field.

The players, all from Texas, are David "Itchy" Burts '20 of League City, Luke Marbach '20 of New Braunfels, and Mike Williams '20 of Rowlett. All three are now in graduate programs in the College of Business. Because all NCAA spring sport student-athletes received an extra year of eligibility from the NCAA to make up for their lost 2020 season, these three team leaders are now being called "super seniors."

"They are all very good students and baseball players. They're also team leaders who have been the heart and soul of our baseball program this year in a lot of ways," said Islanders Athletic Director Jon Palumbo.

Coach Scott Malone agreed.

"I've always valued older players—juniors, seniors—and now we've got this extremely unique group," Malone said. "The value of that has shown up for me every day. These guys are comfortable

communicating the standards. If we take care of the details, the winning will follow. They have been through some great times and some lean times so they understand the rollercoaster, the ups and downs, and I think they're doing a great job of keeping us on an even keel."

Burts, who plays right field, earned a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering and is pursuing a master's in business administration. He has always excelled in math and science and felt engineering was a good fit. He hopes to work in oil and gas, or at a power plant.

"Being a 'super senior,' I feel that I'm almost a player and a coach at the same time. I feel a responsibility to encourage younger players to stay focused," Burts said. "I try to be a good role model."

He said he got the nickname "Itchy" after emulating his favorite professional baseball player, Ichiro Suzuki. In summer 2021, Burts was named Baseball America's "Best Name in College Baseball" for the fourth straight year, and the Corpus Christi Hooks celebrated the accolade by hosting "Itchy Burts Night" at Whataburger Field. Burts said being

an Islanders athlete has changed his life.

"The culture we have here, with all the guys who have been here as long as we have, we're pretty much brothers," he said.

Marbach is an infielder for the team. He earned a bachelor's degree in kinesiology before starting his MBA.

"It's a beautiful campus, a beautiful school. One of my favorite things about this university is the low student-to-professor ratio," Marbach said. "I've been able to build good relationships with my professors, and those relationships help you grow."

After graduation, Marbach plans to be in the sports industry, either on the field as a coach, or on the business and administrative side of professional baseball.

Williams, a left fielder, earned a bachelor's in business administration and is also pursuing an MBA, with a specialization in finance.

He said the opportunity to get a good education in the A&M System was an important factor in deciding to attend the Island University, as well as recommendations from friends and the welcome feeling he received from others



**CLOCKWISE:** The Islanders Baseball team celebrates a victory. David "Itchy" Burts '20 prepares to hit one out of the park. Luke Marbach '20 throws out an opposing base runner. The Islanders Baseball team watches a game from the dugout.



**THEY'RE ALSO TEAM LEADERS WHO HAVE BEEN THE HEART AND SOUL OF OUR BASEBALL PROGRAM THIS YEAR IN A LOT OF WAYS...**

- JON PALUMBO  
ISLANDERS ATHLETIC DIRECTOR

he met here. One of his most impactful experiences while at A&M-Corpus Christi has been his association with the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee. As a member of the SAAC executive board, Williams has been a part of growing the organization and taking on new challenges, such as community service through beach clean-ups, reading to elementary students, and establishment of the SAAC Wellness Committee.

"We started this committee this year to meet the needs of student-athletes and help them better handle their different emotions," Williams said. "With the pandemic and people being inside, not able to go places, and perhaps struggling mentally, they may need someone to talk to."

Williams said the committee will continue to serve student-athletes, even beyond the pandemic.

After graduation, he hopes to work in the financial department for a professional sports team.

Coach Malone sees good things in the future for both the team and his "super seniors," especially the consistency made possible by having seasoned players.

"They understand the opportunity. They're going to play well. They're going to lead for me every day," Malone said.

**ISLANDER**



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Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi impacted my life in ways I wouldn't have imagined. It's a place that became a second home for me, and relationships that I created here will last a lifetime.

Joe Kilgore '18  
Islanders Men's Basketball  
2018 NCAA Slam Dunk Champion

**SCHOLARSHIPS  
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# STRONG SPRING SHOWING

*Islanders Athletics post multiple championships in spring*

Texas A&M-Corpus Christi teams shined in the Southland Conference going into NCAA Championships this spring.

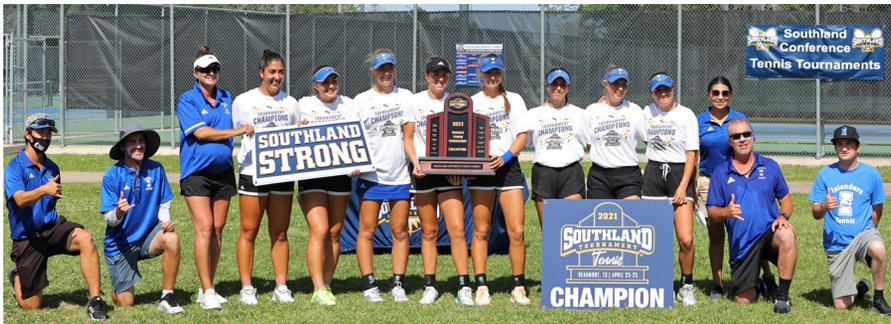
Volleyball concluded a spectacular season with an appearance at the NCAA Tournament. The Islanders rode a seven-match win streak heading into

the program's third appearance at the tournament, including knocking off the No. 1 and 2 seeds in the Southland Conference Tournament to earn the automatic bid. Their season ended in the first round with a loss to San Diego. The Islanders finished the season with a 14-5 record.

Beach volleyball ended the year as runners up in the first-ever SLC Beach Volleyball Championship. It was a pair of 3-0 sweeps which led the Islanders into the finals. Third-seeded Houston Baptist pulled out a 3-1 decision at Water's Edge Park in Corpus Christi to end an impressive run by the Islanders. They finished the season with a 9-1 record against SLC opponents.

The top-seeded men's tennis program earned the automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament after beating the host and second-seeded Lamar 4-1 in the finals of the Southland Conference Championship. It marked the 20th SLC Championship and ninth NCAA Tournament appearance for men's tennis.

The fourth-seeded women's tennis program also won the SLC Championship and earned an automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament. The women's team swept the host and seventh-seeded Lamar 4-0 in the SLC finals. It marked the eighth SLC Championship and the fourth NCAA Tournament appearance for women's tennis.



**TOP TO BOTTOM:** The men's tennis program celebrates its 20th SLC Championship. The women's tennis team poses with their eighth SLC Championship trophy and the volleyball team holds up their SLC Championship trophy after winning at home.





# CLASS NOTES

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## 1950s

**Dr. Don Rogers '58** recently retired as Executive Director of the Texas Rural Education Association. This concluded a career in public education that began in 1959. He served as Superintendent of the Eanes (Westlake) ISD in Austin, Executive Director of the Texas Association of Community Schools, and TREA.

## 1970s

**Rodolfo Garza '77** of Laredo, TX, who taught social studies at Martin High School for 35 years, retired in 2012.

## 1980s

**Maurry Wells '85** was appointed Director for International Programs at L3Harris Military Training Solutions. He is responsible for establishing the business relationship and contractual arrangement for international opportunities in more than 30 countries.

**Christine Mitchell Custer '86** has begun her 48th year as a wildlife biologist (research) with the federal government. Find something you love to do and stick with it!

**Bruce Varley '86** of beautiful Brenham, TX, is working for Petrel Associates LLC.

**Stephanie K. Dickinson '89** released her true crime memoir, "Razor Wire Wilderness," on May 18.

## 1990s

After serving as the lead chemist at the Corpus Christi Army Depot for 26 years, **Corando Gallegos '94, '97** is

now attending Texas A&M University-Kingsville to obtain his Ph.D. in Environmental Engineering.

**E. Scott Gisler '95** and **K. LeAnne Gisler '95** celebrated their son's May graduation from TAMU-CC!

**Heather C. Robertson '96** published a book, "Telemental Health and Distance Counseling: A counselor's guide to decisions, resources, and practice," available from Springer Publishing Company and Amazon. The book addresses ethical and effective practice of distance counseling in the COVID-19 era.

**Stefanie Delmastro '97** of Oxford, Mississippi, recently graduated from The University of Mississippi with a Master of Arts in Higher Education/Student Personnel.

**Anna Villarreal Major '97** is with the Tennessee College of Applied Technology in Jackson, Tennessee, working in their Student Services area with student recruitment and retention.

**Patricia Garcia '99** transitioned from the business world to education, and became a certified middle school social studies teacher. She is currently working in elementary education with kindergarten students.

**Marie Lammers '99** married Jeremy Pitz on April 1, 2021, in Las Vegas, Nevada. Marie just celebrated 19 years with the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, and was promoted to Environmental Supervisor within the last three years. Together, Marie and Jeremy share five children and enjoy sharing their love of sciences.

## 2000s

**Veronica Ramirez '01** of Laredo, TX, is beginning her fourth year as choir director for the Diocese of Laredo and is preparing for the rededication of the renovated cathedral in summer 2021.

**Manuel C. Cruz '02** has recently written and published his first book on the craft of acting and his journey as a Chicano actor.

**Sherry Bowers '03** was awarded the highest professional certification, the Advanced Certified Fund-Raising Executive (ACFRE), from the Association of Fundraising Professionals, which is the largest community of professional fundraisers in the world. She is one of 114 in the world and one of four in Texas with the credential.

**Jesse Buttler '03, '09**, high school history teacher and coach at Flour Bluff ISD, and **Luisa (Martucci) Buttler '05**, TAMU-CC Director of Communications, welcomed twins Henry and Josephine in November 2020. Big brother Benjamin is thrilled not to be an only child anymore, although he still wants a dog.

**Courtney Melbourne '05** continues her 15th year in elementary education in the greater Houston area. 2020-2021 brought many challenges from COVID-19 to "Snovid." Between masks up, social distancing, online and face-to-face teaching, pivoting, quarantining, and hyflex learning—she is proud and going strong! Shakas up!

CONTINUED ON PAGE 30 ►

**Jason Pruett '05** of San Antonio, TX, is the proud father of a 2021 kindergarten graduate. He is also a senior product marketing manager with Austin-based video communications company Lifesize, and an emerging expert in the NFL Draft media community with his independent website, DRAFTPLEX.

**Cassandra Self '05** and Zebulah Houston of Fort Worth, TX, welcomed Carter Everest Houston on Jan. 13, 2021. Even though he was 5 weeks early, he came into the world weighing 6 pounds 8 ounces and was 19.5 inches long. Cassandra also graduated from Texas Tech Health Science Center with her Master of Science in Healthcare Administration in May. She is currently a Supply Chain Manager at Texas Health Resources in North Texas.

**Kristi (Weikum) Stolzenberg '07** moved to the Washington, D.C. area with her husband, Matt, and two children after three years in Japan. Kristi is now working in Legislative Strategic Communications for the Secretary of the Air Force.

**Danielle Whiteside '09** is currently working as an elementary teacher in Victoria ISD and was named the district's Elementary Music Facilitator for 2020-2021.

## 2010s

**Jenn Kotzur '10** of Stockdale, TX, received a 4.0 GPA her first semester in her Curriculum & Instruction Ph.D. program at Keiser University Flagship Campus in West Palm Beach, Florida, while serving as the first-ever Ph.D. student-athlete as the Keiser Spirit Squad's Seahawk Baton Twirler and Graduate Team Manager.

**Jason Salazar '10** currently works as a process owner for USAA and will soon begin studying for his Certified Project Manager certificate.

**Amparo K. Diaz '11** joined the Walton Family Foundation as a program officer and will be based out of San Antonio, TX.

The Jacksonville Business Journal selected **Jennifer Kennedy '11** as a 40 Under 40 honoree for 2020. The honorees were picked from a record number of nominees and represent a range of industries and backgrounds committed to making the Florida's First Coast a better place to live, work, and do business.

**Heather Arnold '12** and her husband, David, doubled their family size from three to six with the adoption of their three sons, David Jr., Jordan, and Steven.

**Ann Alaniz '14, '18** and **Rick Zastryzny '15** were married in Corpus Christi in December 2019. They currently reside in Corpus Christi with their dog, Oreo.

**Miranda Martinez '14** has earned her Master of Fine Arts degree from Florida State University, class of 2021.

**Alexia Avila '16** has accepted a position as an Aquarist I with SeaWorld Parks and Entertainment, her dream job. She will be caring for a variety of fish, invertebrates, and reptiles.

**Esmeralda Herrera-Teran '16** has been named Director of Academic Success of the Antonio E. Garcia Arts and Education Center at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.

**Samantha Baumgardner '17** has been named a DonorsChoose Teacher Ambassador and Advocate, bringing classroom funding to her district and community. Backpacks, books, pencils, and snacks! Fueling tomorrow's success one interactive activity at a time!

**Esteban Hiracheta '17** was selected to start with CITGO Corp. at their Corpus Christi refinery as an Operations Technician in January 2021, after

operating in a hybrid role for the refinery laboratory as the CITGO Fuels Program Coordinator for one year.

**Kristina Ubina '17** recently accepted a position as business manager for STX Glass Co. in Harlingen, TX.

**Natalie De Los Santos '18** just celebrated a year at the CITGO refinery laboratory in Corpus Christi.

**Kevin Raglin '18, '20** and **Phebe Leach '19, '21** met on campus in 2017. They are now engaged and will be married in July 2021.

**Ariana Rodriguez '18, '20** has been awarded the Marianne Alexander Outstanding Alumnae Award from the Public Leadership Education Network.

**Kelsie Starry '18** has been able to reach a new market by instituting a stronger online presence for her family's small business. Her digital marketing skills have been key in this success!

**Anyssa Villanueva '18** recently received a promotion within her first year of working at USAA.

**Tanzil Bawani '19** has been promoted to a Care Coordinator position at Prescription Lifeline.

**Jaylen Bowman '19** is now a Licensed Professional Counselor-Associate in the state of Texas and was hired as an intake counselor with the Nueces Center for Mental Health and Intellectual Disabilities.

**Justin Bustos '19, '20** has accepted a position as an Associate Team Leader for H-E-B Corporate in the Manufacturing, Warehouse & Transportation Division in San Antonio, TX. In addition, he and his wife, Victoria, welcomed daughter Sophia Marie on June 21, 2020, (Father's Day) weighing 8 pounds, 8 ounces.



Dulce Garcia '19 has been promoted to Adoption Coordinator at Friends for Life Animal Shelter in Houston, TX.

Rick Garcia '19 recently acquired Arbitrage IT Solutions, a business in the technology industry. This is in conjunction with running GSM Solutions, his first business in social media content creation for small businesses.

Giuseppe Lara '19 recently started working at Brown and Caldwell.

Guillermo Matthew Martinez '19 of Corpus Christi was recently accepted to Creighton University School of Law. Guillermo was awarded the Frances M. Ryan Diversity Scholarship!

## 2020s

Hayley Bennett '20 received the lead teacher position in a kindergarten classroom at a lovely Catholic school in Corpus Christi.

Kayla Gilmore '20 was hired by Aransas County ISD and works as a teacher in Rockport, TX.

Ashley Marion '20 received a program assistant position at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Lone Star UAS Center of Excellence and Innovation.

Elexis Martinez '20 has been promoted to an assurance associate at RSM-San Antonio.

Audie Tacito '20 has been honored with the H-E-B Women of Distinction Award for 2021 for her store.

Matt Taylor '20 won the award for Best Documentary Short Film at the Rockport Film Festival (2020).

Haley Youngblood '20 of Victoria, TX, recently started graduate school for a Master of Science in Natural Resource Management at Sul Ross State University.

Rachel Arneson '21 has been a traveling nurse to help stop the spread of COVID-19.

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**HAVE YOU RECENTLY EARNED A PROMOTION? PERHAPS YOU WELCOMED A NEW CHILD, OR MAYBE EVEN WON AN AWARD? IF YOU HAVE EXCITING NEWS, WE WANT TO HEAR ABOUT IT!**

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# STORIES

*from the Island*

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