LIFE AT ISLAND U | A NEW DAY FOR ENGINEERING | ISLAND OF CHAMPIONS

HOW YOUR ISLAND UNIVERSITY IS INVESTING IN STUDENT SUCCESS
Dear Islanders,

As our Island begins the spring semester full of excitement and potential, I am extremely grateful for the success of our Islander community over the fall semester and throughout all of 2022. In this issue of your Islander magazine are stories that highlight our new strategic plan, The Islander Impact 2030. This plan builds on our past success while challenging us to expand our Islander Impact. As with everything we do, student success initiatives are at the forefront of this plan and remain our top priority as a university. Creating a stronger bond between our students and their Island through events like our annual Islanders Beach Bash allows us to engage our students in an even more intentional way.

By engaging our Islanders in our community and growing that sense of belonging for all, we enable them to focus on their dreams, and when we allow our students to invest in themselves, they can achieve anything. This past year, our Islanders continued to lead the way in innovative research. Between the great work of our Islander nursing students as they become experts in leading world class simulation technology to our successes in drone technology integration and research at the Lone Star UAS Center, our students are having a direct impact on our region and beyond.

With the development of new colleges and an expansion of our degree offerings, our campus continues to grow and attract the best and brightest to our shores. Seventy-five years and 56,000 alumni later, we continue to show the world what it means to be an Islander. Looking forward at the upcoming spring semester, I am eager to see what innovative ways our Islanders create to solve problems, effect change, and make their Islander Impact.

Go Islanders!

Sincerely,

Kelly M. Miller, Ph.D.
President and CEO
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi
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POISED FOR SUCCESS

Elevating Student Success with Equity and Belonging

Above: Jasmin Sotelo ’23 and Darryn Castillo ’25 meet with Associate Vice President for Student Success Dr. Jerel Benton to discuss peer mentoring. Opposite: Dr. Clarenda Phillips, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, welcomes a new class of students to TAMU-CC, setting the stage for their academic success.
How does one transform from incoming Islander to dean’s list recipient to honors graduate? It takes hard work and determination to earn a degree, especially with the various challenges that can arise.

Dr. Jerel Benton, TAMU-CC Associate Vice President for Student Success, and his team work every day to provide Islanders with resources to overcome those obstacles.

With equity and belonging top of mind, Benton wants to enhance academic advising and support services to ensure that students make it across the graduation stage.

“One thing I am passionate about is applying an equity lens to student success. As an institution of higher education, if we are going to say that we are successful, we need to ensure that it extends to all our students,” Benton said. “We want every Islander to thrive academically and nonacademically. That starts with removing barriers and making our students feel like they belong here.”

One of the most significant barriers to higher education is financial limitations. In 2022, Texas A&M-Corpus Christi created greater opportunities for students by doubling its Islander Guarantee income threshold for eligibility. For eligible students, the Islander Guarantee covers the cost of tuition and mandatory fees for up to eight semesters.

“When I first applied to TAMU-CC, I was very concerned about the amount of loans I would need to take out. At that time, I knew that my family would have to help pay them back, and I didn’t want to burden them with that,” said Jasmin Sotelo ’23, a first-generation Islander student majoring in kinesiology. “When the university offered me the Islander Guarantee, they told me they understood my circumstance and were more than willing to help me become an Islander. The Islander Guarantee was a huge help and made my decision to attend college much less stressful.”

Research shows that when students feel an increased sense of belonging to their university, it reduces anxiety and generally creates positive feelings and outcomes. Benton believes that having high-quality support structures in place helps students build connections that are integral to their success.

“THE ISLANDER GUARANTEE WAS A HUGE HELP AND MADE MY DECISION TO ATTEND COLLEGE MUCH LESS STRESSFUL.”
Jasmin Sotelo ’23
Texas A&M-Corpus Christi
One of the first interactions students have with the university is through academic advising. Benton envisions making the academic advising experience more significant to both students and advisors. Under his guidance, the university has created a first-year advising center to assist each incoming class more effectively. He has also consolidated the advising centers from each college into one centralized location.

“Advisors are more than just people who help students pick their classes; they also build meaningful relationships with their students,” Benton said. “It adds to the sense of belonging to have an advisor ask a student how they are doing outside of class, discover their needs, and help point them in the right direction to meet those needs.”

Since nearly 50% of Texas A&M-Corpus Christi students are classified as first-generation college students, the University has taken additional steps to provide these students support to overcome any uncertainty caused by lack of generational knowledge of post-secondary education.

That additional support made all the difference for Sotelo. Although she enjoyed a generous amount of encouragement from her family, Sotelo said she experienced difficulties in applying for college and in navigating her transition from high school to a university.

“My mom always pushed for me to attend college, but once I started trying to figure out how to do it, she wasn’t able to help me,” Sotelo said. “Through attending organization fairs on campus, I met other first-generation students going through the same things I was. Together we learned about the First Islanders Scholars Academy (FISA), and it made all the difference for me.”

FISA helps first-generation students acclimate to life on campus through weekly meetings and workshops with campus mentors who were also first-generation college students. Sotelo’s participation in the program sparked a strong desire to help other students in similar situations. She became a peer mentor for the program.

“Students are much more likely to ask their peers for help, so we put together a lot of training to support our peer mentors so they can effectively help our students,” Benton said. “Moving forward, we must continue to look
at the gaps and opportunities for growth we have, based on the changing demographics of our student body.”

Introducing students to college life early is another way TAMU-CC prepares students to thrive. The Navigate Summer Bridge Program is a five-week residential summer program designed to facilitate the transition from high school to college for conditionally admitted students and those who are identified as needing college readiness courses. Students are introduced to campus culture and services, and can get an early start building relationships with faculty and peer coaches. The program also provides guidance on financial aid and academic planning.

“The Summer Bridge Program really helped me make that jump from high school into college,” said first-generation student Darryn Castillo ‘25, a biomedical sciences major. “We were given workshops that taught us test- and note-taking strategies and how to maintain our mental health and wellness during stressful times. It also really helped me socialize with my peers. I found that many students were going through the same things I was, and it made me feel like I wasn’t alone.”

The Office of Student Success is also working to help Islanders make good use of their time and tuition dollars with its new Finish in 4 program. The program allows students the opportunity to take a pledge to utilize resources on campus to help them finish their degrees in four years. When they complete the program, not only do they spend less money on school, but they also enter the workforce sooner and can request a $1,000 tuition rebate upon completion.

“We are constantly looking at ways to help our Islanders be successful, and when I realized that it was taking our students more than four years to graduate, I knew we needed to act,” Benton said. “We identified the main obstacles students were facing and developed four pillars of support that, if utilized, will ensure they can enjoy the benefits of graduating on time.”

One of these four pillars is Math Success. A Math Task Force was recently established to create core principles that will help students progress through their majors with support and clarity.

“Math has traditionally been a major hurdle for students. We aim to break down that barrier through deliberate action,” Benton said. “It is not enough to enroll into a math course and hope to succeed. We need to do what is necessary to give our students the support they need to succeed and feel like they belong on this campus.”

Student success is at the heart of the services offered at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. With a surge in programming that prioritizes a sense of belonging, Islanders will no doubt thrive in a campus community that encourages them at every stage of their academic career.
CATCH UP WITH HRI

Science-Driven Solutions™ for Gulf of Mexico Problems

Founded in 2000 by a generous donation from local newspaper publisher and noted conservationist Ed Harte, the Harte Research Institute (HRI) for Gulf of Mexico Studies at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi is home to researchers who have spent the last two decades working to ensure an ecologically sustainable Gulf of Mexico. The international research institute supports nine diverse research programs and 135 students, staff, and researchers. Catch up on the latest news from HRI.

BRINGING BAFFIN BACK

In collaboration with Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries Program, the Harte Research Institute launched the Bringing Baffin Back initiative in 2021 to help conserve and restore Baffin Bay. Often thought of as the jewel of the Texas Coast, Baffin Bay has long supported world-class fishing and remains a key habitat for multiple sportfish species. Over the last three to four decades, however, researchers, anglers, fishing guides, and landowners nearby have detected a significant decline in water quality and a deterioration in overall ecosystem health.

Bringing Baffin Back applies a whole-ecosystem approach to address the challenges facing Baffin Bay. The success of the initiative depends on the high-quality research that is being conducted by researchers and students at HRI and partner institutes. Beyond that, the program’s success relies on partnerships with interested, committed stakeholders, citizen scientists, and the public as HRI looks for solutions and resources to protect this iconic bay system.

Bringing Baffin Back was selected as a 2022 Conservation Wrangler by Texan by Nature, a program that catalyzes the very best Texan-led conservation projects occurring in the state. Selected projects are science-based and demonstrate a positive “Return on Conservation” for people, prosperity, and natural resources.

Join the Baffin Bay Stakeholder Group and stay updated on citizen science volunteer opportunities at BringingBaffinBack.org.

THE GULF STREAM PODCAST LAUNCH

After months of planning and anticipation, the Harte Research Institute launched the “The Gulf Stream” podcast in September. “The Gulf Stream” features insightful conversations with a variety of guests who all have the common goal of making the world a better place.

While some of the podcast’s ideas and topics may be complex, “The Gulf Stream” breaks down those ideas into simple concepts that are accessible to any listener. The inaugural episode featured HRI's Ambassador to the Gulf and world-renowned marine biologist, Dr. Sylvia Earle. “The Gulf Stream” can be found on most major podcast platforms as well as on YouTube.
Above: Dr. Sylvia Earle is the first guest on HRI’s new podcast, “The Gulf Stream.”

DEEP IN THE HEART
In collaboration with the Texas A&M-Corpus Christi Performing Arts Center, the Harte Research Institute hosted a public screening of the Texas wildlife film, “Deep in the Heart: A Texas Wildlife Story.”

“Deep in the Heart” is a visually stunning celebration of what makes Texas unique — its diverse landscapes and remarkable wildlife behavior that cannot be found anywhere else in the world. Told through the eyes of wildlife species ranging from the mysterious blind catfish to the elusive mountain lion, the story follows our ever-changing relationship with the natural world and showcases our ability to destroy, conserve, and recover wildlife and the habitat on which we are mutually dependent.

HRI acted alongside many Texas conservation organizations as a “Take Action” partner for the film, providing scientific expertise about the Gulf of Mexico and the wildlife species that call the Texas coast home. The film was shown in September as part of the university’s annual Furgason BRAVO! Series.

LEADERSHIP UPDATE
Harte Research Institute Senior Executive Director Dr. David Yoskowitz was named Executive Director of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department in October. Yoskowitz went to TPWD following a lengthy career at TAMU-CC and HRI. Yoskowitz was named HRI Senior Executive Director in July 2020; he previously served as the HRI Associate Director for Research, Policy, and Development and the HRI Endowed Chair for Socio-Economics. Dr. Greg Stunz, HRI Endowed Chair for Fisheries and Ocean Health and Center for Sportfish Science and Conservation Director, is serving as HRI’s interim senior executive director. 

Above: Drs. Larry McKinney, David Yoskowitz, and Bob Furgason, all former HRI senior executive directors, pose with Dr. Greg Stunz, HRI interim senior executive director.

More than 400 people attend the free public screening of “Deep in the Heart: A Texas Wildlife Story.”
A NEW DAY FOR ENGINEERING
Island University Launches New College of Engineering

This fall, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi announced the establishment of the College of Engineering. The new college — formerly part of the College of Science and Engineering — will continue to open doors for advancement in academics, research, and community partnerships.

The decision to split the colleges was influenced by many factors, including the growth of both the student body and faculty, along with local and regional demand for innovative engineers and scientists. The change also aligns with the university’s R2 designation by the Carnegie Commission of Higher Education.

The College of Engineering has two departments: engineering and computer science. It offers four ABET-accredited Bachelor of Science programs: electrical engineering, mechanical engineering, mechanical engineering technology, and geographic information science. Bachelor of Science programs in civil and industrial engineering were added in fall 2020 and will seek accreditation when they are eligible. In fall 2023, the College of Engineering will debut a Master of Science in Engineering.

“By creating a stand-alone College of Engineering, we are demonstrating to our students and to our businesses and industry partners that we are committed to educating the next generation of engineers that will lead Corpus Christi...
and the Coastal Bend in innovation and economic growth,” said Dr. Kelly M. Miller, TAMU-CC President and CEO.

Julie Romano ’24 is an electrical engineering major with an undergraduate degree in graphic design and anthropology from the University of Notre Dame. After working in the oil and gas industry, she was inspired to earn a second bachelor’s degree in a STEM field. As a member of the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers, Romano said she is thrilled to witness and benefit from the launch of the new engineering college.

“For me and my peers, this split is not only an investment in the college, but in us,” Romano said. “This is a chance for focused funding to go directly to engineering programs that will present more opportunities for conferences, research, and internships. Overall, it will raise the bar for both faculty and students alike.”

Romano has participated in numerous research projects and conventions during her time at the Island University and hopes to inspire other Latinas like herself to find passion in STEM.

“For someone who didn’t grow up tinkering on projects or knowing anything about complicated electrical systems, it’s empowering to study and learn skills within electrical engineering,” Romano said. “Striving to understand concepts in electrical engineering and seeing the results has brought a sense of agency in my life and confirmed that I chose this degree for a reason.”

Dr. David Ma was selected as the inaugural Dean of the College of Engineering. Most recently, Ma spent 17 years at the University of Hawaii at Mānoa, including five years as Associate Dean. Prior to entering academia, he worked as a structural engineer.

“I want the TAMU-CC College of Engineering to become the go-to place for solutions to engineering challenges,” Ma said. “Our college will be an innovation and technology powerhouse and education center that produces the finest engineers who will become the leaders in their areas of expertise. Students are the center of everything we do as a university. I will strive to ensure every engineering student has the opportunity to solve real-world problems through classes, research, and internships.”

Dr. Florencio Eloy Hernández has been named inaugural Dean of the College of Science. He arrives on campus in spring 2023.
THE FUTURE OF TEACHING

Educator Preparation Program Focuses on Recruitment, Retention, and Innovation

Above: Ariana Perez ’22 instructs an Early Childhood Development Center (ECDC) student. Perez is one of six teacher candidates in the Islander Residency program, which provides a yearlong, field-based teaching experience.
The College of Education and Human Development (COEHD) is focused on helping the teaching profession overcome challenges, including teacher shortages, resource limitations, and educator burnout. While certain aspects of education have become more difficult in recent years, this era has also brought opportunities to reimagine educator preparation. The Island University has focused on four major pillars — recruitment, retention, innovative programs, and preparation — as it equips teachers to respond to changing needs.

"Preparing the teaching workforce of tomorrow has never been more important than it is now," said Dr. David Scott, COEHD Dean. "The focused and transformative work within our educator preparation program, and in close partnership with multiple school districts in the area, has a tremendous influence on both the preparation of our teachers and the PK-12 students whom they will ultimately impact."

At the Early Childhood Development Center (ECDC), located on campus and operated in partnership with the Corpus Christi Independent School District (CCISD), the fall semester brought about a big change. After serving for more than 25 years as a dual language elementary school, the ECDC is now a PreK4 hub, with six PreK4 classes and one PreK3 class. The change is part of the district’s heightened focus on preparing students for elementary school.

With the change came significant renovations to the classrooms, providing a new immersive experience. Students rotate every four weeks through different classrooms featuring themes such as “On the Go,” where they are surrounded by colorful images of planes, trains, and air balloons. The playground received a complete renovation to better serve the needs of a younger student population.

Also new at the ECDC is the Islander Residency program. The program allows up to six TAMU-CC teacher candidates to be placed in classrooms with highly qualified mentor teachers to receive a rich, yearlong, field-based teaching experience.

Brianna Nevares ’23 is an elementary education major and ECDC Islander Resident. Nevares said she is following in the footsteps of her mother, stepmother, uncle, and grandmother, who are all teachers.

“I grew up in a classroom and always knew I wanted to be a teacher when I got older,” she said. “My experience as an Islander Resident has helped me become more confident in the management of my students and the curriculum that I’m teaching. I am also so thankful I get to work with so many amazing teachers this school year and can’t wait to learn more from them.”

This year, five Islander students have also been placed in a residency program at Gregory-Portland ISD’s Stephen F. Austin Elementary School.

Continued on page 14.
“The university and partner districts involved in the Islander Residency pilot program are committed to a transformational partnership centered on shared governance, positive student learning outcomes, and teacher recruitment and retention,” said Dr. Robin Johnson, TAMU-CC Associate Professor and Field-Based Experience Coordinator.

In fall 2023, COEHD will launch two new degree programs unique to the Coastal Bend — a Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood Education and a Bachelor of Science in Special Education. “These new programs will produce teachers prepared to provide high-quality instruction from day one in areas of critical regional need,” said Dr. Phyllis Robertson, TAMU-CC Associate Professor and Department Chair of Curriculum, Instruction, and Learning Science. “Our innovative early childhood education degree creates a firm foundation for elementary reading, while the focused special education degree helps prepare teachers to educate highly diverse learners in a field with chronic teacher shortages.”

TAMU-CC is also one of 19 Texas universities and Education Service Centers selected to the Texas Education Agency Principal Residency Grant initiative for 2023-24. Teachers in eligible districts will be chosen for full-time, yearlong internship positions as assistant principals, where they will receive on-the-job training and support while completing a Master of Science in Educational Administration and principal certification at TAMU-CC. The resident interns will also receive grant funding for up to $80,000 to pay for their salaries, tuition, and principal certification exams.

“We are honored to be among the elite
Other Island University Educator Initiatives

TAMU-CC Beginning Teacher Institute

- Inaugural institute in summer 2022 attracted Islander alumni working in 20 Texas school districts
- Aimed at helping new teachers create a positive learning environment and the value of self-care
- Spearheaded by Dr. Tracy Harper, TAMU-CC Assistant Professor of Reading and Barbara Silverman Professor of Literacy

School and University Partnership Conference of Education (SUPCE)

- Seventh annual conference in fall 2022 drew nearly 300 participants
- Focused on retention, literacy, technology, STEM concepts, leadership, and mentoring
- SUPCE is co-founded by Drs. Carmen Tejeda-Delgado ’98, ’99, ’04, TAMU-CC Professor and Director of the Transformative Alliances for Student Success, and Frank Lucido ’78, TAMU-CC Professor of Bilingual Education/ESL/Multicultural Education. After more than 50 years as an educator, Lucido plans to retire after the spring 2023 semester.

Transformative Alliances for Student Success (TASS)

- TASS relaunched in fall 2022 to unite Coastal Bend school districts, higher education institutions, and community organizations to advance student success through educational equity, social-emotional learning, health, wellness, and human development

Also starting in fall 2023, students in the M.S. in Educational Administration program will have the option to complete the degree in a fully online setting. Beyond working as a principal or assistant principal, graduates of the learner-centered program can also become teacher leaders, department heads, and central office administrators.

Above: Jessica Riojas ’23 provides instruction to a group of ECDC students as part of her Islander Residency program duties.
LIFE AT ISLAND U

Islanders showed up in droves to kick off another academic year. The traditional Waves of Welcome activities drew record crowds, as did the second annual Islanders Beach Bash. Later in the semester, Islander Family Weekend, sponsored by CITGO, and Islander Lights: Powered by AEP Texas also drew record-breaking crowds with students, families, alumni, and community members joining in the Island University’s festivities.
Waves of Welcome
Texas A&M-Corpus Christi hosted its 16th annual Islander Lights: Powered by AEP Texas on Nov. 18. The beloved university tradition welcomed Islander students, faculty, staff, and the community to enjoy photos with Santa, a petting zoo, train rides, arts and crafts, and holiday music. The evening culminated with a tree-lighting ceremony, which cast a blue and green glow throughout Woo Sung Lee Plaza.
Coming off its first championship season in program history, the Texas A&M-Corpus Christi Beach Volleyball program will host a pair of prestigious tournaments this spring at Water’s Edge Park in downtown Corpus Christi.

A&M-Corpus Christi will hold its annual Conni & Jay Wise Islander Classic on Friday, March 31, and Saturday, April 1, against in-state opponents Stephen F. Austin, Houston Christian University, and Texas A&M-Kingsville. The Islanders will follow it up by hosting the 2023 Southland Conference Beach Volleyball Championships on May 5-7, where they will look to defend their tournament title.

Continued on page 22.
We are so excited to be hosting these tournaments in Corpus Christi this spring,” said head coach Gayle Stammer, the reigning SLC Coach of the Year winner. “It’s a tremendous opportunity for us to showcase our program in front of the city and we encourage everyone to come out, support our team, and cheer on our student-athletes. There’s no better place for beach volleyball than the Island University and we want these events to be a blueprint for both the city and university.”

Admission is free to both events.

“Our Beach Volleyball program truly epitomizes what Islanders Athletics is all about — a championship team led by a championship coach, played on the beach overlooking the Corpus Christi Bay and downtown Corpus Christi skyline,” said Interim Director of Islanders Athletics Adrian Rodriguez. “We are thrilled to be able to bring this caliber of beach volleyball to the Island campus and to put it on display for our entire Corpus Christi community.”

The Islanders are coming off a historic year where they made their first-ever NCAA Tournament appearance. TAMU-CC earned the league’s automatic bid after defeating HCU 3-2 in the championship match.

The Islanders went on to play against No. 2 Texas Christian University in the first round of the NCAA Tournament in Gulf Shores, Alabama.

“I’m extremely proud of how my team played during their first appearance at the NCAA Beach Volleyball Championship,” Stammer said after the match. “We didn’t win the dual against TCU, but we played without intimidation. This tournament will give us the experience we need to elevate our level of play to return in 2023.”

The Islanders return six starters and six All-Conference honorees from that squad. It includes senior Giuliana Poletti Corrales ’23 who was distinguished with an American Volleyball Coaches Association (AVCA) Top Flight Award after being part of a Court One team that was ranked No. 12 in the nation in
Above: Giuliana Poletti Corrales ’23 finished as part of the No. 12 pair in the nation in the final 2022 rankings. She’s a two-time All-Conference selection on court one.

the final PABLO Ranking system.

Corrales is joined by five other 2022 All-Conference selections coming back who look to repeat as champions including Tori Johnson ’24, Jade Bennett ’25, Kiley Lewis ’25, Shea Slusser ’23, and Kela Moreno ’25. Not only did an experienced Islanders squad win the conference tournament but they also went 11-0 against SLC opponents last year.

Lewis was one half of a championship pair that clinched the deciding match at the SLC Tournament. She and Migle Mazurkeviciute ’22 earned national recognition after the win and were distinguished as the AVCA/CBVB Pair of the Week after remaining unbeaten against the league.

Furthermore, the Islanders are 18-0 against conference opponents in regular season under the direction of Stammer, who is in her seventh season at the helm. Stammer has built a championship program as a coach after playing professionally as both a beach and indoor player.

Stammer has experienced the highest levels of beach volleyball both as a player and coach. She spent 13 years on the professional beach circuit including three years in the Italian Professional League before playing on the AVP Tour. Stammer was an alternate for Team USA in its first official Olympic appearance in 1996.

Stammer, the winningest coach in program history, will look to continue her championship pedigree with an Islanders squad that has four seniors on the roster this season. It includes Division I transfers Chloe Tome ’23 from Missouri State and Ashlyn Power ’23 from Weber State who added more depth and athleticism to the team.
CELEBRATING 35 YEARS
Conrad Blucher Institute Honors its History and Looks Toward the Future with New Director

In spring 2022, Dr. Richard Smith ’03, ’09, took the role of executive director of the Conrad Blucher Institute for Surveying and Science at TAMU-CC.

With a focused history on coastal applications, the Conrad Blucher Institute for Surveying and Science (CBI) at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi has played a vital role in protecting citizens and property along the Gulf Coast since 1987. In 2022, the institute not only celebrated its 35th anniversary but also welcomed a familiar face as its new director, Dr. Richard ’03, ’06. Looking forward, the institute continues to build on the advancements in science and technology that have expanded its global reach while it honors those who came before them.

The Conrad Blucher Institute was established on May 6, 1987. Its namesake, Conrad Meuly Blucher, was a prominent surveyor who, along with his family, produced some of the earliest maps and surveys of Corpus Christi and the surrounding area. Established with funding provided by the Blucher family, CBI is an inclusive research environment that utilizes geospatial science to support data-driven decision making. Researchers at CBI push the boundaries of geospatial science by applying cutting-edge technologies to map, measure, collect and manage big data used to predict the physical environment. The institute’s research laboratories develop innovative solutions informed by precise measurements that honor the legacy of the Blucher family and its commitment to surveying and science.

Though CBI was initially a research-focused institute, Dr. Gary Jeffress, who served as CBI director from 2006 to 2019, championed the creation of several related academic programs like Geographic Information Science (GIS), Geospatial Systems Engineering, and Geospatial Computer Science.

As a result, TAMU-CC now offers the premier Geomatics and GIS undergraduate, graduate, doctoral, and post-baccalaureate degrees in the United States.

Dr. Philippe Tissot led the institute as interim director from 2019 to 2022. During those years, Tissot oversaw the institute’s groundbreaking work on predictive modeling used to track the spread of COVID-19 in South Texas. Tissot was also at the helm when the institute was awarded funding by the National Science Foundation to establish one of seven inaugural national centers to explore Artificial Intelligence, and when the institute’s Texas Spatial Reference Center was selected to lead the state’s efforts to modernize the fields of surveying, cartography, and land-use planning.

The institute hired Smith in early 2022.
to serve as its new executive director. While pursuing his GIS degree at the Island University, Smith made a name for himself at CBI as an undergraduate student and research assistant by earning two lucrative internships — one with a seismic company on the North Slope of Alaska and another with NASA. During his time with NASA, Smith spent three months with the mishap investigation team mapping the Columbia space shuttle tragedy, which consisted of a massive debris field in east Texas.

“I remember walking into this room as a third-day intern,” Smith said. “There were astronauts, senior military personnel, and FEMA officials, among others, and I was placed in the middle of the room. Within a few hours, I made my first map, put it on the wall, and watched as everyone started using it to plan recovery operations.”

Smith was hired as a CBI research assistant in 2006, where he developed software for high-precision geodetic leveling for the Texas Spatial Reference Center. He also designed strategies for dissemination of real-time scientific data to the geospatial, scientific, and public sectors. He earned his Ph.D. in Geography from the University of Georgia in 2012.

In 2017, Smith accepted an opportunity with bp. He rose to the position of Staff Data Manager for bp’s Global Geospatial Team before returning to CBI as its executive director.

Smith said a key priority for CBI is to attract a diverse student body primed to enter the fast-growing geospatial science field or become registered professional land surveyor (RPLS), a high paying yet poorly understood profession in need of new surveyors to help replace its aging workforce.

One such student is Larissa Freguete ’22, an international student from Brazil who earned a Master of Science in Geospatial Systems Engineering from TAMU-CC.

“[I] have seen some changes in the industry; more and more companies have hired personnel of different backgrounds, ethnicities, and genders and they are implementing programs for improving their awareness of diversity, equity, and inclusion,” Freguete said.

Smith also seeks to increase CBI’s visibility in the local community and beyond. In August 2022, the institute announced its new CBI Chair for Excellence in Hydrographic and Coastal Surveying, James M. Naismith, and in October 2022, CBI held a 35th anniversary celebration. The event was attended by more than 150 guests, including members of the Blucher family.

“CBI will be the ‘point of beginning’ for a new generation of land surveyors and geospatial scientists, and the quality benchmark for spatial research in Texas,” Smith said. “Thanks to the tireless efforts of our researchers, staff, students, and supporters, we have accomplished a great deal over the last 35 years. CBI is robust and resilient, and we will continue to push the boundaries of geospatial science and surveying while honoring the Blucher family legacy.”
ANSWERING THE CALL

Kenedy Memorial Foundation Provides Islander Nursing Students with World-Class Simulation Technology

Founded in 1960 by Sarita Kenedy East, The John G. and Maria Stella Kenedy Memorial Foundation has been a loyal supporter of Texas A&M-Corpus Christi for decades. The foundation has donated more than $1 million in support of multiple educational grants and scholarships, including funding state-of-the-art technology.

In 2022, the foundation donated $15,000 to the TAMU-CC College of Nursing and Health Sciences (CONHS) for the purchase of two HoloLens Mixed Reality Headsets. The holographic visualization headsets, used in tandem with a high-tech mannequin, enhance labor and delivery simulation through hands-on training.

Emma Gibbs ’23 said practice with the mixed-reality headsets has exposed her to critically important scenarios that don't come up often during clinical rotations.

“Because of the Kenedy Memorial Foundation’s donations, my cohort and I have been allowed to learn, and more importantly, make mistakes without risking anyone’s life,” said Gibbs, who is working toward a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN).

The foundation also donated $20,000 to CONHS in 2021 for an airway and lung compliance simulator. The simulator teaches nursing students how to treat significant respiratory issues that could require a patient to be mechanically ventilated.

Adrian Rosales ’23, a BSN student, says his experience with the airway simulator has helped build his confidence.

“Caring for an intubated patient is a daunting task,” Rosales said. “Through simulation, we can practice and hone our skills in a risk-free environment. I want our donors to know their generosity not only elevates the quality of our nursing education, but prepares
us to become more competent, confident, and compassionate nurses.”

Lisa Snell ’21, TAMU-CC Assistant Clinical Professor and Manager of the Simulation and Clinical Learning Center (SCLC), said the new technology helps bridge the gap from theory to practice.

“Simulation is used to foster assessment techniques, psychomotor skills, and most importantly, the development of critical thinking and clinical judgment skills,” Snell said. “Without the Kenedy Memorial Foundation’s support, the student experience would be limited.”

The new technology also helps the university’s nursing program stay on the cutting edge of an industry that is complex and fast-moving.

“We take pride in the integrity of our simulation program and are constantly looking for ways to improve while maintaining standards of best practice. The Kenedy Memorial Foundation has made it possible for us to have additional innovative technology,” said Ashley Dominguez ’14, ’24, SCLC Laboratory Supervisor.

Like Rosales, BSN student Ariana Mata ’23 said the simulation experience has built her confidence as a future frontline worker.

“From the bottom of my heart, I say ‘thank you’ to the donors who see the importance of investing in the educational experience of future nurses,” Mata said.

The new technology also benefits the local nursing community. Obstetric and neonatal nurses from CHRISTUS Spohn and Corpus Christi Medical Center have been invited for simulation training and skills practice.

Sylvia Whitmore ’77, Kenedy Memorial Foundation CEO, said the partnership with TAMU-CC aligns with the foundation’s philanthropic goals and creates opportunities that benefit the entire Coastal Bend.

“To be a nurse or work in any facet of health care is truly a calling,” Whitmore said. “Our foundation is proud to support the next generation of Islander health care professionals with the technology they need to be successful. We are grateful to be part of the Islander community.”
Since its inception in 2014, the Island University’s Lone Star Unmanned Aircraft Systems Center of Excellence and Innovation (LSUASC) has demonstrated pioneering efforts and successes in drone technology. As one of only seven Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) test sites in the nation, LSUASC continues to forge new industry partnerships and is supporting the next generation of leaders through its robust internship program.

While LSUASC employs nearly 30 full-time staff members, they also employ a cohort of a dozen undergraduate interns and graduate student assistants who gain hands-on, real-world experience, which is crucial to their professional success after graduation.

“We are one of the largest employers of TAMU-CC undergraduate interns on campus, and while I am certain our students learn a lot, our full-timers also benefit from the unique skills and perspectives this generation of young professionals brings to the table,” said Mike Sanders, LSUASC Executive Director.

Intern Bright Nnadi ’23 is making the most of his time as an Islander in the Electrical Engineering program. He says the incredible experience he has received as an intern under the direction of Luis Hernandez ’15, ’24, Lone Star UAS Research Engineer Associate II, has been a bonus.

“Interning with Lone Star UAS has helped me develop my troubleshooting skills,” Nnadi said. “When I encounter a problem, Mr. Hernandez doesn’t just give me the answer, he encourages me to continue trying on my own. When I do find the solution, I feel so accomplished.”

Nnadi was instrumental in the development of a remote weather station that is now used in all LSUASC’s drone operations. The technology provides up-to-the-minute localized weather data.
data for field drone operators and those working in the mission control center.

“My time with Lone Star UAS has been amazing, and I have been able to add an impressive list of skills and accomplishments to my resumé,” Nnadi said.

Finance major and LSUASC intern Madison Mann ’23 said gaining experience outside of the traditional classroom has prepared her for the workforce in ways she didn’t expect.

“Some people might think that an internship is just making copies, but at Lone Star UAS, I’ve been challenged to grow my problem-solving skills,” Mann said. “I’ve helped gather information, edit a research paper, create executive briefings, and got to take part in staff meetings.”

The center has greatly benefited from Mann’s efforts. She developed a variety of systems that have streamlined the daily processes of Lone Star UAS.

While LSUASC continues to work with high-profile agencies like the FAA, NASA, and Embry Riddle Aeronautical University to evaluate the integration of large autonomous UAS into complex environments, LSUASC is also utilizing its expertise and equipment to serve the people of Texas.

In 2015, the center provided support to Wimberly, Texas, in the aftermath of a devastating flood. LSUASC drones also took to the air to provide recovery aid after Hurricanes Harvey, Hanna, and Michael.

“As important as the search and rescue phase of an emergency is, post-disaster assessment is vital to recovery,” Sanders said. “The initial assessment of damage provides the basis for requesting recovery dollars. For example, we supported the inspection of Bob Hall Pier by drone, which allowed the engineering team to conduct a damage assessment without having to risk physical harm by climbing around the damaged structure.”

The Texas Legislature approved an Exceptional Line-Item request in 2021 for $3 million to help LSUASC respond to statewide emergencies. LSUASC is working with the Texas Division of Emergency Management to develop and sustain a structured UAS response force that can be called upon for rapid and coordinated efforts in the wake of natural disasters.

Using funding given during the last legislative session in 2021, LSUASC synchronized its efforts with multiple local agencies to host a simulation exercise in fall 2022 in downtown Corpus Christi. The three-day joint exercise involved emergency management teams from the City of Corpus Christi and Nueces County, along with city police and fire representatives.

The exercise presented the joint crews with a variety of scenarios that might occur during a weather-related disaster. Drone operators performed simulated search and rescue operations along the coast, surveyed sections of the city for damage, and coordinated all efforts through LSUASC’s centralized command and control center. The training showcased the center’s value as an asset for first responders throughout the state of Texas.

Selected Partners
Since its inception in 2017, Izzy’s Food Pantry at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi has provided nearly 90,000 no-cost meals to Islander students. What started as a 100-square-foot pantry stocked with donations from faculty and staff has since tripled in size. Students can now receive 15 items per week, up from 10. Additionally, the pantry hosts monthly grocery giveaways featuring fresh produce, breads, and sweet treats.

New this academic year is the pantry’s SNAP-application assistant program. Thanks to a continued partnership with the Coastal Bend Food Bank, SNAP, the state’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, regularly invites a caseworker to campus to assist eligible students with intake paperwork, saving them a trip down to the local SNAP office.

In addition, the Dean of Students office plans to beta test a new program that would send a text message to pantry users when a campus event ends with surplus food. An initiative that has seen great success is the Hot Meal Program, where dining dollars are added directly to a student’s SandDollar$ ID card so they can purchase food from one of many campus food options, including the Islander Dining Hall.

The pantry has strong community support from the Coastal Bend Food Bank, along with corporate sponsorship by H-E-B. Support for Izzy’s Food Pantry is also provided by grants from the Coastal Bend Community Foundation.

Learn more about Izzy’s Food Pantry at tamucc.edu/food-pantry.
ART MUSEUM OF SOUTH TEXAS-turns 50

The Art Museum of South Texas, an affiliate of Texas A&M-Corpus Christi, turned 50 last year. The museum hosted an exciting selection of exhibitions and educational programs in 2022 to celebrate its legacy. This also included free admission for all museum patrons from May 1-Dec. 31, 2022, generously underwritten by H-E-B.

A record number of community members took part in the museum’s signature fundraising events, artRageous and ARTball, during its golden anniversary year. Both events support various youth programs and exhibitions.

One such exhibition is “Warhol, Johns and Stella: Revisited,” which recreated the inaugural exhibition curated by David Whitney in 1972 when Andy Warhol and Jasper Johns both graced the museum with their art and attendance.

The museum, a nonprofit facility, relies on community support to continue its mission of advancing the awareness, knowledge, appreciation, and enjoyment of the visual arts through education and exhibitions.

Learn more at artmuseumofsouthtexas.org.

NATIONAL RECOGNITION FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Texas A&M-Corpus Christi been recognized by the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge (ALL IN) among the 2022 ALL IN Most Engaged Campuses for College Student Voting. TAMU-CC joins a group of 394 colleges and universities recognized for making intentional efforts to increase student voter participation.

Islanders increased campus engagement through a new campaign called I-Vote — an awareness campaign aimed at students, faculty, and staff. Events included assembling voter information bags, setting up voter registration tables, and organizing debate and election night watch parties.

In addition, TAMU-CC’s Alpha Delta Eta chapter of Pi Sigma Alpha, the National Political Science Honor Society, earned the Best Chapter Award for 2021-2022. The group’s faculty advisor, Dr. Sanne Rijkhoff, TAMU-CC Assistant Professor of Political Science, was also awarded Pi Sigma Alpha’s Best Chapter Advisor for the same term.

Pi Sigma Alpha consists of nearly 850 chapters nationwide, and this year, 23 chapters and five advisors were recognized. The Island University was the only university in the Texas A&M University System to receive national recognition this term.
Where do Islanders go after they graduate? Everywhere! While many choose to stay in Texas, you can find Islanders making an impact across the globe. Take a look at where more than 56,000 alumni live.

*Map not to scale*
HEALTH SCIENCES
6,321
ENGINEERING
3,085
MULTI-DISCIPLINE
730

LIBERAL ARTS
15,291
EDUCATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
12,521
BUSINESS
12,512
NURSING AND HEALTH SCIENCES
6,321
SCIENCE
5,717
ENGINEERING
3,085
MULTI-DISCIPLINE
730

Hey there, Islander Alumni!

Update your info
Check out the Alumni Association newsletter and other communication about alumni programming and activities
islanderalumni.org/update
MEET THE LEADERS
NATIONAL ISLANDER ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

Keeping alumni connected to the Island University is a top priority for the National Islander Alumni Association leadership team. The team is led by Dr. Haysam Dawod ’85, who is joined by several chapter presidents who work year-round to establish lifelong connections with fellow Islanders. Get to know these leaders and join them at their next event!

**NATIONAL ISLANDER ALUMNI ASSOCIATION, PRESIDENT**

**DR. HAYSAM DAWOD ’85**
Bachelor of Science in Biology
Owner and Doctor of Dental Surgery at Dawod Dental Center

FIRST CAMPUS EXPERIENCE
I first walked onto Corpus Christi State University (CCSU) in fall 1982. I was mesmerized by the beauty of the water view. Following a campus tour, I walked across the street and sat on the rocks. I caught myself shifting my view between the sparkling water and the campus, and at that moment, I knew this was the place I wanted to finish my degree. I am so happy I made the right choice.

BEST MEMORIES
I spent several wonderful years at CCSU. I met my wife during my first semester, and we still love to drive on campus and reminisce.

My favorite story stems from registration day in spring 1983. I was a foreign student on a student visa, and one of the admission requirements was a score of 525 on a standardized English proficiency exam. I had taken the exam three years earlier, with only two years in the United States, and had scored 512. Due to those 13 points, I was denied admission. But my advisor, the late Dr. Bart Cook, was successful in convincing Dean Ruth Baake to grant me conditional admission. Everything good in my life since then was a result of that moment. Dr. Cook’s actions were not merely an isolated event — they reflect the culture of this university from its beginning — a culture of helping students achieve their dreams.

SERVICE HIGHLIGHTS
I have had the honor of serving on the Islander Alumni Association Board since 2014. I am proud of how far the organization has come in such a short time. This is a testament to the leadership and staff that have worked so tirelessly to bring about the growth and success we are seeing today.

Here are the accomplishments I consider most significant:

- Establishing our scholarship fund with the TAM-CC Foundation. There is no greater gift than the gift of an education to a student in need. We still have more work to grow this fund.
- Our Islander Mentor Program is an invaluable resource to our students and a great way to engage our alumni. Elvia Aguilar ’17, TAMU-CC Interim Executive Director of Alumni Engagement, has done a remarkable job leading this program and I believe it will only grow and get bigger.
- The expansion of our chapters into other markets will only make the Islander Alumni Association a stronger and better serving organization.

**AUSTIN**

**SARAH FINLEY ’18**
Bachelor of Arts in Sociology
Care Coordination Manager at Urban Alchemy

BEST ISLANDER MEMORY
My best university memory was living in campus housing my freshman year and playing soccer in the halls of Surf and Jetty.

FAVORITE PROFESSOR
It’s a tie between Mr. Tom Murphy and Dr. Bilaye Benibo. I enjoyed Tom Murphy’s dry humor and wit so much that I enrolled in three of his classes over the years. Dr. Benibo is the reason I became a sociology major and is by far the best professor I had.

CHAPTER PRESIDENT HIGHLIGHT
I enjoy being able to connect with new friends to keep the Islander spirit alive.

CHAPTER VISION
I hope we can grow the chapters so more alumni are aware and involved.
SARAH CROWE ’11
Bachelor of Arts in Communication and Media Studies
Marketing Communications Manager at the Institute for Innovation and Entrepreneurship at The University of Texas at Dallas

BEST ISLANDER MEMORY
I lived in campus housing all four years of my undergraduate degree. When people in my hometown of Dallas asked what it was like at the university, I told them that I went to class on what felt like an island resort.

FAVORITE PROFESSOR
Dr. Ethan Thompson, Dr. Michelle Maresh-Fuehrer, and Dr. Bill Huie. Dr. Huie was one of the kindest professors I’ve ever met. I wasn’t a film major, but I took just about every course he offered. His love of film history was infectious.

CHAPTER VISION
An alumni organization is only as valuable as its members. I hope we can work toward creating stronger chapters with great alumni so that current students look forward to being a part of a chapter once they graduate.

TYEISHA L. LAWSON ’15
Bachelor of Science in Kinesiology
Middle School Counselor for the Houston ISD

BEST ISLANDER MEMORY
I was part of a high school prep program which allowed me to earn college credits while attaining my high school diploma. The experience was motivating and transformative. As a first-generation college student, I felt encouraged to proceed forward with becoming academically successful and career driven.

FAVORITE PROFESSOR
Dr. Frank Spaniol — I am thankful for his support, encouragement, and belief in my abilities. Dr. Spaniol suggested I apply for the McNair Scholars Program. I was accepted and had many opportunities to present research and network. Professors like Dr. Spaniol and initiatives like the McNair Scholar Program are why I will always be an advocate for TAMU-CC.

CHAPTER VISION
With student engagement and insight, the Islander Alumni Association can become an exemplary model for other organizations to follow.

LORA A. AYALA ’10
Bachelor of Science in Nursing
Utilization Review Nurse Supervisor at 90 Degree Benefits/Medical Helpline, Inc.

FAVORITE PROFESSOR
My statistics professor, Dr. Alexey Sadvoski, was patient and kind. He didn’t just give me the answer — he made me put my pencil down on paper and work the problems out.

FAVORITE CLASS
I honestly can’t choose just one favorite class. These classes helped me build my foundation for the rest of my nursing career and I can’t choose just one!

CHAPTER PRESIDENT HIGHLIGHT
My favorite thing about being a chapter president is getting to meet some really great alumni and cultivating lasting friendships.

CHAPTER VISION
I hope we can inspire and encourage other alumni to be lifelong Islanders and show their pride in our amazing university by actively engaging and getting involved in our respective communities.

PUT A RING ON IT.
SHOP AT BALFOUR.COM/TAMUCC.
CLASS NOTES

1960s

Andy M. Griffin, Jr. ’61 was inducted to the Texas High School Coaches Association Hall of Honor on July 16, 2022.

1970s

Terry Burrowes ’70 is retired and relocated from New Jersey to North Carolina. He is enjoying being a retiree.

Dr. Rebecca Palacios ’76 of Corpus Christi was featured in People en Español for Hispanic Heritage Month.

1980s

Carol Mauch ’80 was awarded the KRIS 6 News inaugural Angels Award in February 2021 for community service.

Laura Davis ’81, ’90 retired from Driscoll Children’s Hospital after 39 years and has since moved to the Texas Hill Country where she works as a substitute school nurse for the Kerrville and Center Point Independent School Districts.

Lori (Evancho) McIrvin ’86 retired from the Air Force in 2006 and stayed in San Antonio for 14 years as a registered nurse pediatric case manager working with military families with special needs children. In 2021, she retired again — this time for good! Lori is married to Tim Engberg, and they have three golden retrievers.

1990s

James Burnett ’92 recently retired after a 35-year career in government service, which included 20 years active duty in the United States Navy, 12 years with the Department of Defense, and three years with Veterans Affairs.

Jacqueline (Richenberg) McEnulty ’92 taught for 30 years and retired in 2014.

Betty McQueen ’92, ’95, ’21 graduated in July 2022 with a Doctorate in Educational Leadership from Trident University International. She is enrolled in an art therapy program at Lindenwood University. McQueen lives in George West.

Charlie Switzer ’92, ’98 has been inducted into the Texas BMX Hall of Fame (TXBMXHOF). Charlie represents the first generation of pioneers that started the sport Bicycle Motocross.

Melinda (Gonzales) Finch ’93 and her husband, Bill, launched a mobile stage rental business last year and recently added a mobile luxury trailer rental.

Kathy Yarbrough ’94 is now living in Bloomington, Indiana, and retired in November 2022. She is looking forward to spending more time with her family.

Laura Munoz ’97 recently retired from the Corpus Christi Police Department Victim Assistance Program after 23 years of service and seven years of service with the state, marking a 30-year commitment to the Great State of Texas.

2000s

Roger Fortner ’00 resides in Orange, California, and is employed at Atradius Trade Credit Insurance in Irvine, California.

Jami Bryce ’02, ’14 has now been an ICU registered nurse for the last eight years.

Diane LaGrone ’02 retired from teaching, after a much-too-short career spanning 35 years.

Jason Harris Dubose ’03, ’09 and Johanna Raye Garcia DuBose ’04, ’07 celebrated 15 years of marriage this year.

Brandey Wade ’97, ’17 works as an instructional technology specialist for the Corpus Christi Independent School District. As part of an amazing team, she provides meaningful and engaging teacher professional development, which leads to enhanced student learning. As a young teacher, this was her dream job. Dreams do come true!

Rosa Valdez ’98 is serving as president of the Volunteer Services Council for the Corpus Christi State Supported Living Center. She coordinates fundraising efforts with local business and social clubs in the community for the sole purpose of enriching the quality of life for the school’s residents.

Valdez

Mauch

Valdez

Mauch
Pat (Jordan) Nunn ’03 has been named the director of product development at EVG Extracts in Evergreen, Colorado. EVG Extracts specializes in premium hemp/cannabis extracts and health-focused foods and supplements.

Beverly Hetrick ’04 gave birth to a son, James, on Feb. 18, 2022.

Eliseo Hernandez IV ’05 recently retired from the United States Navy after 25 years of service.

Crystal (Whitmire) Rau ’06 has been named Best Financial Planner in her hometown of Midland, Texas. She is the founder and CEO of Beyond Balanced Financial Planning, a registered investment advisory firm founded in 2017 that serves women, families, and young professionals.

Jennifer Niemeier ’07 and her family welcomed their third baby on Aug. 15. He joins his proud big sister and brother.

Chris Thompson ’07 was named Texas’ Managing Broker for the fastest-growing real estate company in the country, Real Broker, LLC. He credits much of what he learned while in Dr. Cunningham’s classroom for the leadership used to care for nearly 1,300 agents.

Heather Dorn ’08 went on to earn her Ph.D. in English. Now a lecturer in The Writing Initiative at Binghamton University, she recently became the editor-in-chief for “Binghamton Writes: A Journal of First-Year Writing.” Her first book of poems, “How to Play House,” is forthcoming in March.

Sarah Raffay ’08 was accepted into the nursing program at Del Mar College.

Pongthorn Asawaniwed ’09 is the director of the Center for International Affairs at the Faculty of Education, Mahasarakham University, Thailand, a role he’s held for five years. He is also a lecturer. Soon, he will be promoted to head of the Bachelor of Education in English program.

2010s

Lora Ayala ’10 has been working for Medical Helpline, Inc. for 11 years — 10 years as an RN case manager and three months as the new utilization review supervisor.

Carlos Garanzuay ’10, ’13 graduated from Kansas State University with an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership from the John E. Roueche Center for Community College Leadership. His dissertation was titled, “Improvise. Adapt. Overcome: Identifying Military-Acquired, Non-Cognitive Attributes Guiding Student-Veteran Success in Community Colleges.”

Monica Garcia ’10 was welcomed back to Texas A&M-Corpus Christi as Pre-K teacher at the Early Childhood Development Center. She has worked in education for 12 years.

Amber Bright ’11 was named the 2020-2021 Elementary Teacher of the Year for Bastrop Independent School District. She completed her first book this past summer, “When All Else Fails, Reasons Why I Stay in the Classroom, and How You Can Find Your Why.”

Adriana Knight ’11, ’12 recently joined the AEP Transmission Outreach team as a project outreach specialist. In this role, she supports transmission projects across Texas.

Ben Acevedo ’12, ’15 is a behavioral tech at I Am Boundless, Inc. in Dayton, Ohio.

Chelsea Roberts ’12 was promoted to quality management nurse consultant for the Central Texas Veterans Healthcare System in March 2022. Chelsea was also selected from more than 50 applicants to take the Central Texas Veterans Affairs 2022 LEAD (Leadership, Effectiveness, Accountability, Development) course.

Vanessa Ruiz ’12 won Teacher of the Year for Kaffie Middle School and was a semifinalist for the Secondary Teacher of the Year for Corpus Christi Independent School District.

Continued on page 38.
Angela De La Cruz Duran ’13 and Evan Duran ’14 welcomed their daughter, Lizette, in September. The couple visits the Island University often and hopes to have a little Islander join the university one day!

Miguel Lugo ’13 started a new job as a special education teacher at Sinton Middle School.

Caleigh (Rhew) Theriault ’13 and husband, David Theriault, welcomed their first son, Tripp Nalu Theriault, in January 2022.

Rene Zamora ’14 has been promoted to director of undergraduate recruitment at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi.

Daniel Ray Mares ’15 recently earned a Master of Education in Administration from Lamar University.

Tyler Buttle ’16 transitioned careers from project manager at Kiewit Offshore Services to North Texas estimating manager at Ferguson Waterworks.

Kyle Moulder ’16 earned his Certified Safety Professional certification from the Board of Certified Safety Professionals in April 2022. This credential is considered the gold standard for safety and health professions.

Justin Ruiz ’16, ’21 accepted a nurse management position with Corpus Christi Medical Center during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Erica Thompson ’16 officially surpassed five years of service as a registered nurse. The last two years were spent traveling across America during the pandemic and related nursing shortage. Erica now plans to focus on self-discovery to decide the next step in her career.

Jake Alexander ’17 joined the Utah Geological Survey as an economic geologist in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Diamond Jackson ’17 recently moved to Colorado Springs, Colorado, and now works as the director of school support services at Atlas Preparatory School.

Quinn McColly ’17, ’20 finished his doctoral work at the Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi and is now working with the Austin-based nonprofit Texas Water Trade. In this capacity, he works to restore habitat around Texas and has helped procure thousands of acre feet of water for environmental benefit.

Joey Holzer ’18 is attending Texas Tech Health Science Center School of Medicine and will be graduating in 2026. He looks forward to one day working as an emergency medicine physician or anesthesiologist.

Shawn Jackson ’18 now serves as the Arkansas State climatologist and Arkansas National Flood Insurance Program state coordinator. She is honored to be working with John Nielsen-Gammon, Regents Professor and Texas State Climatologist, and the great staff of the Federal Emergency Management Agency Region 6 in Denton, Texas.

Amanda Kowalski ’18 has been named assistant librarian, digital archivist for Texas A&M-Corpus Christi.

Emerald Rodriguez ’18 lives in San Antonio and works with a financial institution where she was promoted to supervisor.

Alyssa Uresti ’18, ’22 earned the Licensed Professional Counselor, Associate (LPC-A) title.

2020s

Justin Bustos ’19, ’20 started a new position as a production control supervisor for Tesla in San Antonio.

Karen Elkowitz ’19 has been named the nursing program manager of vaccines for Harris Health System in Houston.

Dulce Garcia ’19 started a new journey as a veterinary technician and client service representative at North Channel Animal Hospital in Houston. She’s excited to enter the veterinary medicine industry after working in the animal shelter world for almost three years.

Mathile Hornback ’19 and Jordan Smith ’20 were married on Aug. 8, 2022, in Liberty Hill. The couple, who met on campus during Baptist Student Ministry free lunch events and dated for three years, now reside in Denver, Colorado, and cannot wait to visit the beach again.

Baeleigh Kelly ’19 is the assistant manager for a steelhead hatchery in Shelton, Washington.

Cathryn Martinez ’19 has been awarded Outstanding Diversity Champion by the Houston Business Journal.

Sofia Rodriguez Oropeza ’19 accepted a new job as Specialist III of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi.
Ashlee (Salazar) Bacy ’20 married her longtime boyfriend, Jalen Bacy, on Oct. 7, 2022, in Castroville, Texas.

Alyssa Brodeur ’20 started production on their first short film in October 2022.

Mariana (Nguyen) Cady ’20 and Andrew Cady ’21 gave birth to their second son, George Ignatius Cady, on Feb. 16. George weighed 8 pounds, 10 ounces.

Anessa Fernandez ’20 earned a Master of Science in Kinesiology from Texas A&M-Corpus Christi while working full-time as a graduate assistant for the kinesiology department.

Brady Fisher ’20 was recently promoted in his position as software engineer at TimeClock Plus Software. In February, Brady married the love of his life, and fellow alumni, Rhiannon Howard ’20 in West Texas where they have purchased their first home.

Amanda Macias ’20 has begun her journey in graduate school at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi in the professional counseling program. Amanda also recently accepted a position as a career counselor at a local community college.

Carlos Olvera ’20 is newly engaged to Jasmine Leal, also from Corpus Christi. They are planning to be married on Dec. 21, 2023.

Ariana Ruiz ’20 began the fall 2022 school year as part of the inaugural class of the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) School of Podiatric Medicine (SOPM). UTRGV SOPM is the first podiatric medical school located in Texas and only the 10th in the country.

Sofia Alvarez ’21 is now a high school biology teacher. In the past two months, she got her own apartment to share with her tortoise and recently added a dog to the family.

Skally Benitez ’21 and Art Montiel ’22 welcomed their son, Miguel Angel Montiel, on July 30. Miguel weighed 8 pounds, 14 ounces.

Ellese Garcia ’21 successfully completed the first semester of her Doctoral Occupational Therapy program at Texas Woman’s University-Dallas with a 4.0 GPA. Only eight semesters left!

Matthew Glen-Walker ’21 graduated with his MBA in Data Analytics and was hired at FINRA, the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority, as an associate principal analyst in its Market Regulation, Trading Analysis Department. He is helping to further FINRA’s mission of investor protection and market integrity.

Elvia Manzano ’21 and her husband welcomed their son, Cameron O’Connor, on May 19. Elvia works at a Corpus Christi hospital and is planning to buy a house in the area. She is also planning to start her master’s degree in spring 2023.

Ashley Menchaca ’21 pursued a career in recruiting and has been promoted to talent acquisition recruiter.

Anthony Ortiz ’21 recently became an assistant general manager for American Campus Communities. He was formerly a resident assistant during his time as a student.

Autumn Redmon ’21 works at The Boys and Girls Club of San Antonio as a branch director.

Matt Rolfes ’21 was recently hired by Metro Sales, Inc. as a technology consultant.

Niles Doerksen ’22 and Megan Doerksen welcomed their son, David William Doerksen, on May 2. David weighed 6 pounds, 6 ounces, and measured 20 inches long.

Courtnei Lopez ’22 obtained a promotion working as a middle market underwriter for a Fortune 100 insurance company in San Antonio.

David Maldonado ’22 joined the San Patricio Juvenile Probation Department in July after 20+ years in law enforcement. He hopes to make a positive impact on kids in his community.

Amanda Munoz ’22 just started her career in Austin.

Jasmine Samuels ’22 was hired as a fifth grade English Language Arts teacher — all thanks to TAMU-CC.
CONNECT WITH US

See the latest news, updates, and events by following us on social media!

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TAMU-CC

YOUR LEGACY.

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi is committed to the educational pursuit and success of each Islander student and support from alumni and friends of the institution is imperative in this promise.

Naming TAMU-CC as a beneficiary in your will can benefit Islander students and leave a lasting legacy. You will also be eligible for inclusion in the University’s esteemed Heritage Society.

To learn more about planned gifts please contact 361.825.2639.