

FALL 2020

the Islander



Update

Vol. 13, No. 2



Finally, 4-U!

CELEBRATING 4U-CC

The united effort that led to our four-year institution

\$2.8M GRANT

Expands STEM opportunities for Hispanic students

SCIENTIFIC EXPERTISE, CREATIVITY, COMPASSION

Island University helps counter the pandemic through partnerships



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

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Dear Islanders,

This year has been unprecedented in ways we could never imagine. In true Islander spirit, we worked to meet the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic head-on. But I am happy to report that we did more than just meet the challenges—we made an Islander Impact.

Over the summer months, teams from across campus worked diligently to prepare for a safe return to the Island this fall. To meet the needs of all Islanders, we offered options for face-to-face, hybrid, and online courses that met the various learning styles and preferences of our students. Faculty and staff, working both on campus and remotely, remained committed to every student's success. Over \$130 million dollars of financial aid and scholarships were packaged and awarded, ensuring Islanders can continue pursuing their dream of becoming a college graduate.

During 2020, the word unprecedented may have developed a negative connotation. However, we have experienced unprecedented, positive Islander Impact during this time. For example, from the time instruction moved fully online in Spring 2020, 99% of our students successfully completed their courses. We saw a record number of graduates over the last academic year, with an unprecedented increase of 11%. Individual faculty, staff, and students continue to receive national recognition, along with our academic programs. For example, in a recent national ranking, A&M-Corpus Christi was listed as one of the Best Accredited Online Colleges in Texas by learn.org. Additionally, we remain the top regional research institution within the A&M System, with our most recent accomplishments including a \$20 million grant to become part of a national center to explore artificial intelligence through a National Science Foundation partnership.

Islanders have gone beyond merely responding to this crisis, and instead, created lasting partnerships and built a strong foundation that will keep our community thriving beyond the pandemic. It has been both challenging and rewarding for everyone at the Island University, and we are grateful to share our success with you in this issue. Your integral support and commitment to this institution are vital as we continue to progress in service to our community.

Sincerely,

Kelly M. Miller, Ph.D.



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TOP RIGHT: The Island University welcomes students back to campus—but not without major changes. **ABOVE:** Former members of 4U-CC gather at the Woo Sung Lee Alumni Welcome Center. Read more on pg. 14.

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CONNECTED CAMPUS COMMUNITY CATAPULTS ISLANDERS TO SUCCESS

As a wave of Islander students adapted to a “new normal” this fall, they continued to flourish despite changes caused by COVID-19. Islander innovation was on display through the development of online and hybrid classes and both virtual and in-person campus events, to offer Islanders a holistic student experience.

“Each day at the Island University, we see people pushing the boundaries of what is known and familiar and embracing technology with courage and curiosity,” Dr. Michelle Singh '14, Associate Vice President for Teaching & Learning Technologies, said. “The commitment that our faculty and staff have to our students to create a culture

of digital progression is amazing to witness.”

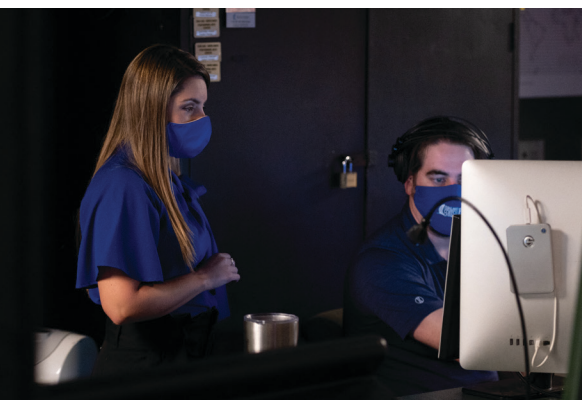
Responsible for the overall design of infrastructure for A&M-Corpus Christi’s online community, Singh—who earned a Doctorate of Counselor Education from the Island University—said that when it comes to supporting a student’s opportunities to succeed, the degree she earned prepared her for this very moment.

“My counselor education degree has served me so much in this interesting time. Many of the events that transpired due to the immediate switch to remote learning were more about patience and perseverance than technology,” Singh said. “Even though the Island University

had a long-held record of success in digital learning, the campus community needed to be reminded and reassured that we were more than prepared for survival—we were equipped to thrive.”

From starting the semester with online Waves of Welcome (WOW) events to ultimately being able to join classmates with the click of a button, Islanders everywhere have acclimated to new virtual experiences and opportunities—experiences that prioritize both safety and engagement.

Mia Gonzales '21, criminal justice and psychology double major, attended the WOW Drive-in Movie Night, which featured a blockbuster flick broadcast directly through a vehicle’s stereo system.



OPPOSITE: Islander students learn in a different type of classroom filled with plexiglass barriers, face coverings and seating to promote social distancing. **FAR LEFT:** Virtual learning becomes integrated in online and in-person courses. **LEFT:** Students wear face coverings and walk farther apart in between classes.

“Events like these show students that there is a place for them. This is so important during a time like this because you need people to lean on,” Gonzales said.

Challenged with upholding and modeling quality classroom constructs while also designing a hybrid curriculum to meet students’ needs—professors say they see this semester as an opportune time to showcase the importance of digital literacy.

“My colleagues and I have communicated more often about what we are teaching and how versus ever before,” Dr. Mikaela Boham, Associate Professor of Kinesiology and Director

of Athletic Training, said. “I think this has enriched our students’ experience as we have been able to teach in new and effective ways while also finding collaborative ways to weave content into multiple courses.”

While students adhere to social distancing and virtual learning practices, the professors work to increase communication and engagement in the hybrid classroom.

“Being flexible with one another is key,” Dr. Chelsie Hawkinson, '07, '09 Professional Assistant Professor and First-Year Seminar Coordinator, said. “We meet virtually one day a week and face-to-face the second day of the week.

I make it a priority to give my students a chance to have social engagement opportunities. All in all, I was thrilled to see that students in each class felt connected to the campus and each other.”

Throughout the last decade, A&M-Corpus Christi has solidified its reputation as a test-ground for the latest

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 6) ▶

MY COLLEAGUES AND I HAVE COMMUNICATED MORE OFTEN ABOUT WHAT WE ARE TEACHING AND HOW VERSUS EVER BEFORE.

- DR. MIKAELA BOHAM,
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF KINESIOLOGY AND
DIRECTOR OF ATHLETIC TRAINING



LEFT: Colin O' Donnell takes extra safety measures when preparing for his lab. **ABOVE:** To kick off the beginning of the semester, the Waves of Welcome event lineup included a drive-in movie night with Jumanji: The Next Level.

in innovation and technology. Keeping with that tradition, even in the midst of challenging times, the University is creating a new generation of leaders.

“Many digital learning professionals have been preparing for a situation like this – building an entire digital community of scholars and practitioners—for our entire professional lives,” Singh said. “We wanted the world to give digital learning a try to see how it could transform the way traditional

instruction is approached. We got that—but to the extreme! We know that digital information literacy is a skill set that will set us apart and make our Islanders globally competitive.”

While life has certainly changed for now, students say the Island University is unwavering in its support of student success and perseverance.

“We have a community of faculty and staff that is committed and dedicated—from our professors emailing us to

keep us engaged, to the IT staff making sure we’re able to connect to our resources,” Victor Perez '21, management information systems major, said.

“Community is the support system and a safety net to help us achieve our goals. My Islander community has helped me discover new ways to build relationships by finding different ways to connect with others.”

Helping in Difficult Times



- Izzy's Food Pantry hosted drive-up food distribution events serving more than 600 students fresh produce, groceries, and other essential items during the spring, summer, and fall semesters. Sponsors included the Coastal Bend Food Bank, the Coastal Bend Community Foundation, H-E-B, and Whataburger.
- The CARES Act provided more than \$10 million in funding to the University, with at least half of the money earmarked for emergency financial aid grants for students. More than 3,000 Islanders received CARES Act funding.



WITHOUT THE CARES ACT, MY EDUCATION WOULD HAVE BEEN POSTPONED BECAUSE I WOULD HAVE HAD TO MAKE THE DIFFICULT DECISION OF EITHER WORKING TO SUPPORT MY FAMILY OR GETTING AN EDUCATION. THANKS TO THE TEAM ON CAMPUS, I HAVEN'T HAD TO FACE MANY HARSHIPS. **MY ISLAND IS LOOKING OUT FOR ME.**

- ANUJA DHAKAL '21, NURSING MAJOR FROM HOUSTON



TOP LEFT: The daily cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces becomes vital within the Islander community. **FAR LEFT:** Faculty, staff and students are given free face coverings and disinfectant at the beginning of the semester. **LEFT:** RJ Loa visits the University Center to get more information from Communication Specialist, Julie Shuttlesworth.

FOR DONOR JESSIE FRANCES NEAL, IT'S ALL ABOUT THE STUDENTS

Creation of endowed chair supports College of Business students



FAR LEFT: Jessie Frances Neal is recognized at the 2019 President's Ball. **LEFT:** Dr. Dana Forgione is the first recipient of the endowed chair. **ABOVE:** Jessie Frances Neal poses with Islander students at her annual luncheon.

Over the years, scholarship donor Jessie Frances Neal has made a difference in the lives of dozens of students in the College of Business. The joy, pride, and satisfaction she receives through the relationships she develops with the students is evident—in her office, photographs of each group of Neal Scholars greet her each morning.

“For me, supporting hard-working, honorable students has brought me joy,” Neal said. “As a businesswoman, I find it an excellent investment. I see exactly where my money is going—every time I see their faces and review their grade point averages, it confirms that there is nothing else I’d rather support.”

That spirit of generosity and support for the next generation shines this semester with the establishment of the Neal-Coonrod Endowed Chair in Accounting.

“When I was told that creating the chair would benefit the master’s of accountancy degree in the College of Business, I thought this would help my students go even further,” Neal said. “Now they will have more opportunity to achieve a master’s degree.”

Neal is especially proud of the endowed chair’s focus under the guidance of Dr. Dana Forgione, first recipient of the endowed chair. Forgione said the support will help advance development of graduate programs in accounting as well as the MBA with a concentration in Healthcare Administration at the Island University.

“This is an exciting opportunity to offer new, rewarding educational experiences for students in the field of accounting,” Forgione said. “I look forward to working with Islander graduate and undergraduate students, especially when it comes to developing excellence in accounting. I will also help mentor junior faculty and provide leadership in the profession.”

The endowed chair builds on the legacy Neal has established through student scholarships. Phoebe Burkman, who plans to graduate this fall, has received a Neal scholarship since 2018.

“People like Mrs. Neal are the reason students like me are able to go to college and pursue their dreams,” Burkman said. “I am forever grateful for the investment Mrs. Neal put into my future, and I am eager to continue my education and carry on Mrs. Neal’s legacy.”

After graduating with a bachelor’s degree in accounting, Burkman plans to pursue a Master of Accountancy, then become a Certified Public Accountant.

Graduate Lailah Cobble '19, '20 received support from Neal for three and a half years.

“The scholarship instantly gave me the confidence that I could finish my education and not be burdened with heavy student debt. In fact, after my scholarships processed one particular semester, I only owed \$25,” Cobble said. “My last two years, I didn’t even have to take out any loans.”

Since graduation, Cobble has been



I WILL BE ETERNALLY GRATEFUL TO MRS. NEAL AND THE IMPACT SHE MADE ON MY LIFE.

- LAILAH COBBLE '19, '20

working at a consumer finance company. She was promoted in April to run her own branch and recently completed an MBA.

“I will be eternally grateful to Mrs. Neal and the impact she made on my life,” Cobble said. “She taught me what generosity is all about. It’s not just about giving away money; it’s about supporting dreams. My time at the Island University could not have been better.”



IN MEMORY OF ONE PROFESSOR'S VISION

New memorial scholarship honoring life sciences faculty member encourages cancer research through marine biology

Heather Moretzsohn's world, as it was, came to an end on Jan. 6, 2020, the day her beloved husband, Dr. Fabio Moretzsohn, died at home in Corpus Christi after a yearlong battle with lung cancer.

Dr. Moretzsohn, Professional Assistant Professor of Life Sciences, who specialized in mollusks, had spent much of 2019 traveling back and forth to MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston for treatment.

"His department chair, Dr. Cherie McCollough, was amazing," Heather said. "My understanding is she basically said, 'Focus on healing, focus on

getting well.' It was an amazing group of professors and friends, and even when he passed away, there was a train of food for a month being dropped off every day."

As part of her family's healing process, Heather—with financial assistance from her husband's colleagues—set up the Dr. Fabio Moretzsohn Memorial Endowed Scholarship in Cancer Research through Marine Biology for Islander students. Criteria include a minimum 3.0 GPA, pursuit of a life sciences degree, and engagement or the intention to engage in research on cancer through marine biology, among other stipulations.

"As a marine biologist, Fabio often

talked about marine organisms and how there are many untapped resources from the ocean that can and should be used for medical purposes," Heather said.

Heather, an immigration attorney, has written a book that documents the family's ordeal and explores alternative medical approaches to healing cancer, titled "Ocean of Possibilities: Maximize Natural Cancer Healing with Marine Organisms and Functional Medicine."

The loss of Dr. Moretzsohn has been a difficult one for the Department of Life Sciences. McCollough says she misses a gifted teacher, who was a gentle man with a calm, friendly demeanor. She remembers the



OPPOSITE: Dr. Fabio Moretzsohn and his family celebrate his oldest daughter's graduation. **LEFT:** Dr. Moretzsohn and his students share memories and a photo collage. **ABOVE:** Dr. Fabio Moretzsohn rings the bell three times to mark the end of a radiation treatment.

day he told her he had cancer.

"I just gave him a hug and cried—we just cried," she said. "I was so upset for him. About a month down the road, he told me he was starting cancer treatments in Houston and I put out an email to faculty, asking if anyone would be willing to teach his courses. Within an hour, it was taken care of—it was done. They stepped up, with no stipend, no reward. It was done in the spirit of supporting their colleague and our students."

Dr. Moretzsohn's impact at the Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies was equally immeasurable. In 2004, as one of the first employees hired by the Harte Research Institute, he played a critical role in the completion of important projects that established HRI as a serious scientific authority in the Gulf of Mexico.

"Professionally, Fabio became my go-to guy because I could always depend on him," said Dr. Larry McKinney, who served as HRI Executive Director for 12 years. "Personally, I appreciated his influence on my son, Patrick. It was only after Patrick took Fabio's zoology class that he decided to become a biologist. Patrick was so impressed with him. Everyone loved Fabio; no one could not."

Gail Sutton, HRI Associate Director Institutional Initiatives, Finance and Administration, is the longest-serving member of the HRI team.

"As a researcher, he was very methodical and a deep thinker. You could not speed him up because he followed a path and never took shortcuts," Sutton said. "Fabio never

took his family or friends for granted. He participated in life and really enjoyed himself. He was never scared to go places or do things. Mostly, he didn't wait for the right time—he just did it."

Heather said she is profoundly grateful for the support her family received from her husband's colleagues. The family held two celebration of life services—a private ceremony for immediate family and a public ceremony at the Performing Arts Center on campus.

"It was absolutely heartwarming," she said. "Student after student got up and said what an awesome teacher he was. I wasn't with him for the day-to-day interactions in his professional life and I didn't realize how much he was loved—it was very moving."

Dr. Moretzsohn's eldest daughter, Olivia, said what she remembers of the

service is how so many of her father's colleagues and students spoke of his kindness.

"A lot of his students said he was such a great teacher that he would inspire them to pursue biology—especially marine biology—and they wouldn't have otherwise done that," Olivia, a sophomore studying history, said.

In addition to the scholarship at the Island University, Heather is in the process of launching a nonprofit called drmolusk.org as well as writing a children's book. She said the purpose of the nonprofit and both books are to promote a general awareness of functional medicine as a natural healing option and how marine organisms can play a role in cancer and chronic disease healing.

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 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.

For more information about our Endowed Scholarship Council or creating an endowed scholarship, please call 361.825.3320.



SCIENTIFIC EXPERTISE, CREATIVITY, COMPASSION

Island University helps counter the pandemic through partnerships

In the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, the University's immediate steps were to ensure safety for all Islanders. This fall, Islanders are using their expertise, creativity, and innovative work to continue the response to the most serious health crisis of this century. From data experts at the Conrad Blucher Institute for Surveying and Science providing vital information to local officials, to students receiving diplomas and traditional leis in a unique, virtual graduation ceremony, the University remains focused on responding to the needs of our Island community and the Coastal Bend at large.

"Our Island University community faced these unprecedented challenges with determination, innovation, and a strong desire to make a difference and to help others," said University President and CEO Dr. Kelly M. Miller. "We not only answered the call to help; we anticipated the needs, met them, and looked for more ways to help."

SCIENTIFIC EXPERTISE

Soon after the COVID-19 pandemic began to escalate in March, Islander experts began contributing to the fight. To help meet the critical need for more

information, the Coastal Bend COVID-19 Joint Task Force was formed. Task force members from A&M-Corpus Christi, the City of Corpus Christi, Nueces County, hospital systems, and regional health authorities launched a comprehensive response of assessing and predicting the spread of the virus, providing analyses to city and county leadership, and making weekly presentations to the public.

"The task force members fully dedicated themselves to this endeavor," said Dr. Philippe Tissot, Interim Director of the Conrad Blucher Institute and task force leader. "We felt a responsibility to use our expertise to help people understand what



OPPOSITE: Dr. Chris Bird provides local statistics and information on the COVID-19 pandemic at one of the City of Corpus Christi public health briefings. **ABOVE:** Nursing students engage in class via online instruction. **LEFT & FAR LEFT:** Virtual simulation labs are set up and allow nursing students to participate remotely.

is happening, and for many weeks, task force members worked until late at night and through weekends to ensure we were able to deliver relevant graphs and maps that illustrated the challenge facing our community. We also had to be flexible, changing the type of maps and graphs we created depending on the evolution of the pandemic.”

Early iterations of a map tracing the spread focused on how the Coastal Bend compared to other areas with higher numbers of infections. The modeling team, led by Dr. Chris Bird, Associate Professor of Biology, continuously increased the sophistication of the analyses and predictions of the impact of the pandemic on our community and hospitals. Later, after dramatic increases in local cases, the task force looked at cell phone data to help people understand how their behavior and travel patterns in and out of the Coastal Bend were affecting the progression of the pandemic and their chances of becoming infected.

Nueces County Judge Barbara Canales said the University has been an essential help throughout the pandemic.

“From health sciences to data modeling to unmanned aerial systems and beyond, TAMU-CC has been an outstanding partner in our effort to understand and fight this disease,” Canales said. “I am grateful and proud to have come together with TAMU-CC; together, we are making progress and succeeding!”

INTELLECTUAL CAPITAL, INNOVATION, AND CREATIVITY

As the task force began its work, experts in disciplines across the University began to think of new, innovative ways to contribute.

Faculty in the College of Nursing and Health Sciences developed a new, pandemic-ready curriculum for Bachelor of Science in Nursing students and practicing nurses thanks to a grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration. Now researchers are studying factors like workplace stress of nurses, the consequences of limiting visitors to sick patients, the preparedness of nurses to manage a pandemic, and

the impact of COVID-19 on nursing students to better inform teaching strategies.

Across campus, the College of Education and Human Development designed a remote learning environment for teachers and students and Dr. Jim Lee, Regents Professor of Economics and South Texas Economic Development Center Director of Research in the College of Business, analyzed patterns in the Coastal Bend economy.

“We must be ahead of the game, or else the region will stay behind the rest of the nation on the way to full recovery,” Lee said.

CELEBRATING SUCCESS

Adapting to unprecedented times meant finding a new way to celebrate the hard work and accomplishments of Islander graduates. As the summer ended, the Island University created a virtual commencement ceremony, diploma pick up parade, and Islander lei drive-through event to commemorate the time-honored tradition of wearing

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 12) ►

leis at commencement and welcomed soon-to-be graduates to the Islander alumni community.

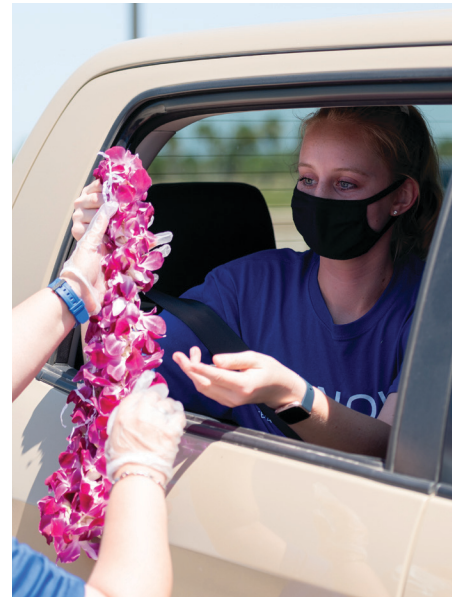
AN EXAMPLE FOR THE FUTURE

While the Island University continues to take steps in response to the pandemic, the long-term impacts are still being assessed throughout the nation and world. Researchers from

TAMU-CC will continue to be a part of that process and University officials will look for additional ways to assist students and the community. The steps taken thus far serve as an example of the University's vital role in the community in research and analysis, emergency response, training of our community's next generation of front-line workers, and preparation for the future.

"I am proud of the resourcefulness

and perseverance shown by our faculty, staff, and especially students in responding to this crisis, and I know we will continue to ensure we make the most of our expertise, creativity, and resolve," President Miller said. "Together, we demonstrated a collective resiliency that will lead us through this pandemic and will benefit the community and our students for many years to come."



TOP LEFT: A student receives his diploma at the summer graduation parade. **LEFT:** Members from the Islander Alumni Association welcome and celebrate graduating Islanders picking up their diplomas. **ABOVE:** A student receives her lei at the drive-through lei pickup event.



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 our 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 event programming and correspondence from Dr. 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



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



LEFT: Dr. Margaret "Peggy" Lara '98, '01, '12 attends last year's Homecoming Week to show her Islander Pride. **ABOVE:** The Islander Alumni Association participated in an inaugural diploma drive-through parade for graduating students.

ISLANDER ALUMNI ASSOCIATION THRIVES IN VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT

Alumni tune in to connect with people, places, and events in new digital age

Despite logistical adjustments due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the National Islander Alumni Association continues to expand its impact through its Texas chapters and members. In spring 2020, the Alumni Association welcomed new president, Dr. Margaret Lara '98, '01, '12.

"Because COVID-19 has changed so much of our world, it's so easy to sit on your hands and say, 'Well, that's it, there's nothing we can do'—but we didn't stop working. It's important to move with purpose and determination," said Lara. "We've taken this time to revamp and spin an unpleasant situation into opportunities to reach fellow alumni and bring our chapters together in new ways."

From hosting virtual alumni events on social platforms—like *lotería*, trivia night, and mixers—to coming together to celebrate spring and summer graduates through new events like a drive-through diploma parade and lei distribution event, the Alumni Association went above and beyond the call of duty to celebrate students, alumni, and treasured Islander traditions.

"We had students come by with their parents, children, friends, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and several brought their pets," Lara said, referring to the drive-through diploma parade. "I was so incredibly happy to be there to keep the Islander spirit alive and let our graduates know how proud and humbled we were to share in their experience."

As the organization bolstered its efforts to give back to its members and the community, it drew recognition from the Chronicle of Philanthropy and the Council of Alumni Marketing and Membership Professionals (CAMMP).

"I'm beyond proud of the board's drive and determination. When they toss new ideas around, I say, 'Let's go, ¡vámanos!'" Lara said. "They are the glue that holds the Alumni Association together. The entire board was so impressed that we gained national attention from the Chronicle of Philanthropy and CAMMP."

With a career in education and deep family roots in academia, Lara currently serves as curriculum advisor for Haas Middle School in the Corpus Christi Independent School District.

She acknowledges the importance of a community surrounding students at every age and education level. Lara credits her family with instilling her pride for academics, student success, and philanthropy—all highlights of the legacy she hopes to leave behind.

"Going to school is a privilege that shouldn't be taken for granted. Growing up, my 'Ma Grande' had photos of all her children in their caps and gowns, proudly displayed in her living room, and that was my inspiration," Lara said. "My whole nuclear family is supportive. I hope that I model that same support for our students and alumni."

Looking ahead to continued expansion of the Islander Alumni Association, Lara says she hopes both students and alumni recognize that building connections can catapult them into success.

CAMMP Recognition

- The Islander Alumni Association's Great Islander Trivia Battle (GITB) was recognized as one of the top five virtual alumni events at the 2020 Virtual Conference of the Council of Alumni Marketing and Membership Professionals (CAMMP). The GITB was a series of 6 virtual events in June in which alumni from different geographic areas were invited to play trivia games. Winners from each night were invited to a championship round, in which one ultimate winner was named.
- Through a popular voting process, based on success of the event, branding, execution, and marketing, the GITB was selected as top virtual event with 44% of the vote. Texas A&M was second, with 33%. Other schools represented in CAMMP's recognition included University of Central Florida, and Mary Baldwin University.
- CAMMP has more than 450 members representing nearly 200 alumni associations.



CELEBRATING 4U-CC

The united effort that led to our four-year institution

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi was scrawled into existence on a yellow notepad by two 30-year-olds over steak and beer with three established Kingsville businessmen in 1989.

That dinner meeting, a give-and-take session between supporters of the region's existing four-year university and those who wanted to add another, was a critical piece in getting Governor Bill Clements' signature on a bill to establish the university later that year. But in accordance with the details hammered out over dinner, the new university wouldn't admit its first freshman class until 1994.

It all started in 1986 when Gary Bushell, president of the Corpus

Christi Area Economic Development Corporation, invited David Birch from Boston to speak at a luncheon. Birch told attendees, including local author Jim Moloney, who would later be among the leaders in the effort to create this new institution, that without this type of university, Corpus Christi would not be able to attract big companies and talent for the local workforce.

At the time, Corpus Christi State University was an upper-level institution offering courses at the junior, senior, and graduate levels. About 200 people heard Birch's message, but three local businessmen decided they needed to do something about it.

R.C. Allen, Lon Hipp, and Marvin

Collins created 4U-Corpus Christi, also called 4U-CC, a nonprofit foundation to promote the establishment of a four-year university. The foundation united people from the business and education sectors of the Coastal Bend. The group had numerous fundraisers and organized meetings to build community support.

"This really was a team effort," Fred Heldenfels IV, one of the then 30-year-olds at the now historic dinner, and a former 4U-CC president, said. "Everyone that got involved was important along the way."

Former Corpus Christi Mayor Luther Jones became what some described as the coach or general manager of 4U-CC and led numerous meetings to assign roles

to anyone who was interested. Several key leaders in the region today got their start in public service by volunteering for 4U-CC.

But the effort wasn't just on the part of longtime residents and leaders. In October 1987, Pat Rousseau had just moved to Corpus Christi when she came across a newspaper article about 4U-CC, which invited people to the next meeting.

"I had just moved here from working at the University of Denver and I was amazed that a city this size did not have a four-year university," Rousseau said. "I read the article and thought, 'I am joining that group.'"

Rousseau, now an Aransas County commissioner-elect, ended up serving as treasurer for 4U-CC and meeting lifelong friends like Moloney. She recalls handing out small slips of paper to anyone she came across as a way to request membership in and donations for the organization's efforts.

By 1989, when the young Heldenfels and Mark Scott '91 made the drive to Kingsville to negotiate conditions for Corpus Christi State University to become a four-year institution, the stars were aligning.

Leadership from the Texas A&M University System in College Station had expressed a desire to absorb the South Texas campuses in Laredo, Kingsville, and Corpus Christi. The Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund also had sued the state of Texas for discrimination against Mexican Americans in South Texas saying there hadn't been adequate funding of higher education in the region. While the jury didn't find the state guilty of discrimination, it did note that the area lacked the opportunities offered in other areas of the state, which was a benefit to the 4U-CC effort.

The key to the 4U-CC efforts was getting support from the region, which included Corpus Christi's two-year Del Mar College and backers of Texas A&I University, a four-year institution in Kingsville.

Heldenfels and Scott were tapped by Jones to attend the meeting along with prominent Corpus Christi attorney Paul Pearson, who could not attend at the last minute.

"Mark and I were the young whippersnappers for 4U-CC at the time," Heldenfels said. "There were a handful of us that Luther (Jones) had called 'the marketing committee' and we had come up with an action plan identifying who the key entities and people were that needed to be influenced and what the best way to bring them to the table would be."

4U-CC knew they needed to meet Kingsville leaders in Kingsville. They knew they should send someone like Scott, who had grown up in Kingsville, whose dad was a professor at the University and who had met his wife, Carol, while they were students there. They also realized there would need to be some give and take in order to see all of the Coastal Bend institutions succeed.

After several hours of negotiating and jotting notes on a yellow notepad, the outline to what became House Bill 358 authored by State Rep. Eddie Cavazos and Senate Bill 122 authored by Sen. Carlos Truan was created.

Heldenfels and Scott were excited about the words on the yellow notepad.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 16) ▶

THIS REALLY WAS A TEAM EFFORT. EVERYONE THAT GOT INVOLVED WAS IMPORTANT ALONG THE WAY.

- FRED HELDENFELS IV



OPPOSITE: Former members of 4U-CC, a group established to promote the establishment of a 4-year university in Corpus Christi gather at the Lee Welcome Center to look at memorabilia that was created in the late 1980s. **FAR ABOVE:** Aransas County Commissioner-Elect Pat Rousseau points at her signature on a resolution that led to the formation of a 4-year institution in Corpus Christi. More than 70 community leaders from Corpus Christi and Kingsville signed the resolution. **ABOVE:** State Rep. Todd Hunter holds a poster of former Corpus Christi Mayor Luther Jones that was used in the late 1980s to promote support for the 4U-CC group.

Among the deals that were made:

- THE FIRST CLASSES AT THE FRESHMAN LEVEL COULD NOT COMMENCE UNTIL 1994 (FIVE YEARS FROM WHEN THE BILL WAS SIGNED)
- FRESHMAN ENROLLMENT WAS CAPPED AT 400 STUDENTS IN 1994 AND 500 STUDENTS IN 1995
- INCREASED ACCESS TO GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL PROGRAMS SUCH AS DOCTORAL PROGRAMS AND A PHARMACY SCHOOL FOR KINGSVILLE.

So were community leaders who, soon after that meeting, celebrated the agreement South Texas style with officials from Corpus Christi and Kingsville gathering at Joe Cotten's BBQ in Robstown for a ceremonial signing of the resolution and barbecue, naturally.

"Sometimes you don't stop and celebrate civic, intercommunity achievements and that night at Cotten's really felt like a celebration," Heldenfels said. "Everybody who had been involved in any facet was there burying the hatchet over brisket. It was a pretty big deal."

But the work was not done yet.

People like Jones, his wife, Dorothy, and Joe Moseley, an engineer with expertise on Coastal Bend public policy issues and many contacts in Austin, worked tirelessly and without compensation to gain support of a four-year university from state lawmakers.

"Having Luther as an unpaid lobbyist was key," Scott said. Scott

said it didn't matter if Jones didn't know a particular state representative because he would find a connection to the Coastal Bend even if it was that the state representative's sister-in-law was a graduate of Corpus Christi State University.

Holly Osborn, Senior Vice President of MDR Advertising, is an example of 4U-CC using the talents in the community to further its efforts. She helped design and create some of the brochures that Jones, Moseley, and others would use at the Capitol.

"They told us that the only way this was going to happen in Austin is if people here came together and got on board and that is what we did," Osborn said.

The message was heard loud and clear in Austin.

"It took a lot of shoe leather but people were willing to listen to us because we were just a bunch of unpaid citizens trying to better our community," Heldenfels said.

State Rep. Todd Hunter was in his first year as a lawmaker when the bill that made Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi official was signed on May 26, 1989, by Gov. Clements.

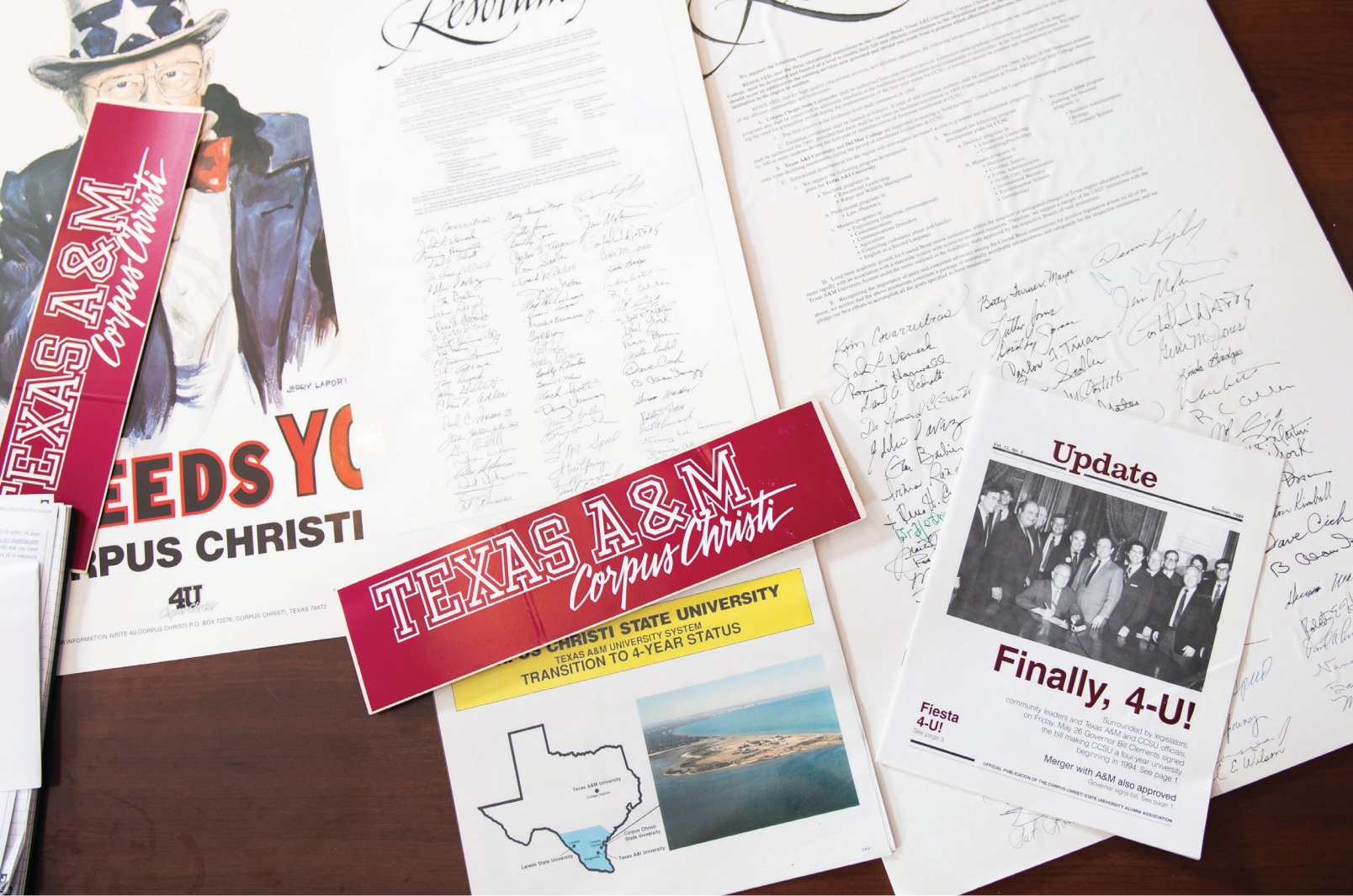
"The Coastal Bend was united, the delegation was united," Hunter said.

More than 25 years after the first freshman class came to campus, Texas A&M-Corpus Christi has grown from 5,500 to approximately 11,500 students with 44 bachelors, 31 masters, and nine doctoral or terminal degrees offered. It contributes about \$540 million to the local economy and provides 9,360 jobs, according to Dr. Jim Lee, Regents Professor of Economics. This is proof that the vision of leaders from the mid 1980s has come to fruition.

"It (university) has made a major difference for the community," Moloney said. "It has brought in a lot of smart people here, both professors and students. Back then people were not coming here to go to school like they are now."




ABOVE: Fred Heldenfels IV, Pat Rousseau, Mark Scott, and State Rep. Todd Hunter pose with the signature Islander Shakas Up. The entrance to the four-year institution they helped create is in the background. **NEXT PAGE:** Posters, bumper stickers, and brochures about 4U-CC were created to help build community support for a four-year institution.



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ALTHOUGH I HAD A FULL RIDE
TO SEVERAL UNIVERSITIES,
**STAYING IN CORPUS CHRISTI
WAS THE BEST THING THAT
HAPPENED TO ME...**

- CONSTANCE P. SANCHEZ '88

STILL IN LOVE WITH HOME

Born and raised in Corpus Christi, Islander alumna Constance P. Sanchez '88 steers the city's economic direction as CFO

In the middle of her first year as Chief Financial Officer for the City of Corpus Christi, Constance P. Sanchez '88 has experienced what no CFO in city history can lay claim to: managing the organization's fiscal services in the middle of a pandemic.

As one of two Corpus Christi natives on City Manager Peter Zanoni's executive leadership team, Sanchez's life story is inextricably interwoven with the history of the city she loves. Her grandfather, George H. Plomarity, was a native of Greece who chose to plant roots in Corpus Christi because the beaches reminded him of home; he founded Manhattan Café in downtown Corpus Christi. Her father, Harry G. Plomarity,

worked for the Port of Corpus Christi for 41 years and served as Executive Director for nearly two decades before retiring in 1994.

"I feel humbled to continue a life of service for which my father and grandfather laid the foundation," Sanchez said.

A gifted scholar, Sanchez was valedictorian of her class at Incarnate Word Academy in 1984 and graduated summa cum laude with an Associate of Arts in Business Administration from Del Mar College two years later. She enrolled at Corpus Christi State University, now Texas A&M-Corpus Christi, to complete a Bachelor of Business Administration in fall 1988.

"Although I had a full ride to several universities, staying in Corpus Christi was the best thing that happened to me," Sanchez explained. "Not only did I get an outstanding education, but I also met my husband."

After graduating magna cum laude from CCSU, Sanchez took a position in the auditing division of the Corpus Christi office of Big Four accounting firm KPMG and became a Certified Public Accountant.

In 1991, Sanchez was hired by the City of Corpus Christi. Over the past 29 years, she served as assistant auditor and auditor in the Auditing Office, and held several leadership positions in Financial Services, including chief accountant,

assistant director, and director. Sanchez was appointed CFO by Zanoni in August 2019. As CFO, she oversees seven departments: Finance and Business Analysis, Management and Budget, Contracts and Procurement, Asset Management, Communication, the Gas Department, and Information Technology.

“Peter Zanoni came from San Antonio and brought innovative ideas with him,” Sanchez said. “He is forward thinking and challenges his staff to continue to do more. I am excited to be a part of the leadership team that will take our beautiful city to the next level.”

Sanchez credits her family—Gilbert, her husband of 22 years, and her college-age children Demetri and Sophia, her parents Harry and Thalia Plomarity, and her older sister Olga '84—for providing the solid foundation at home while she put in long hours at work.

“In addition to my family, my strong upbringing and faith as a Greek Orthodox Christian helped mold me into who I am today,” Sanchez stated.

Many have taken note of Sanchez’s dedication and leadership skills. In March, Sanchez was one of eight women honored for making a significant impact in their career field at the 40th annual Y Women in Careers Awards Banquet.

Sanchez has also maintained her connection with the Island University through years—she currently serves on the College of Business Advisory Board.

“Our University is one of the flagships of our city. Not only is it a beautiful campus, but I’ve heard so many positive things about the education that people get,” she said. “We’ve had interns who have graduated with their MPAs from the Island University who have come to us at the city and they are outstanding. It is really a big asset for Corpus Christi to have such a high-caliber university here.”



TOP RIGHT: Constance P. Sanchez '88 is a proud member of the Corpus Christi and Island communities.
ABOVE: Sanchez displays her Islander Pride outside of Corpus Christi City Hall.



ISLANDERS ALUMNUS HEADS TO EUROPE TO PLAY PRO BASKETBALL

May 2020 grad Tony Lewis, Jr. signs one-year deal with Portuguese club

It's official! Island University graduate Tony Lewis, Jr. '20 is overseas, continuing his basketball career as a member of the Futebol Clube Barreirense basketball team in Portugal. The 6'10" former Islanders forward signed a one-year contract with the club after playing in the Eurobasket Summer League in Dallas.

Lewis left for Portugal in early September to join his new team, with game play slated to start a few weeks later.

This is a thrilling development for the San Antonio native who graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Communication Studies in May. Lewis spent two seasons as an Islander, after a year playing at Blinn Junior College in Brenham, Texas. As a freshman, he played for the Broncos at Santa Clara University in California.

"This is a great opportunity for me," Lewis said. "People in Portugal love basketball; this club has been around for over a century so they have a deep championship tradition and they're looking to get back to a place where they can live their glory days."

Lewis said his family is excited about

his opportunity to play professionally. He is the son of Dawn Lewis and Tony Lewis, Sr. and stepmom Michelle Lewis. He has nine brothers and sisters.

"They're just proud of everything I've accomplished throughout my college career and being able to graduate and go to play overseas," Lewis said. "They're ecstatic, even though they're a little sad that I'll be gone for nine to 10 months."

Willis Wilson, Islanders Head Men's Basketball Coach, said Lewis was a stellar teammate with contagious positivity. He appeared in 32 games for the Islanders.

"When you have a guy with his physique who establishes an inside presence, it opens up the floor for the four other guys on the court, and that's what he did for us night in and night out," Wilson said. "You could count on Tony for a certain level of production on a very consistent basis. He was a terrific player for us."

Lewis said one of his favorite memories as an Islander is helping Wilson become the winningest coach in Island University history and beating Stephen F. Austin University on their

THEY'RE JUST PROUD
OF EVERYTHING I'VE
ACCOMPLISHED THROUGHOUT
MY COLLEGE CAREER AND
BEING ABLE TO GRADUATE
AND GO TO PLAY OVERSEAS...

- TONY LEWIS, JR. '20



FAR LEFT: Tony Lewis '20 shows off his Islander Pride all the way from Portugal. **LEFT:** Lewis dribbles his way to the net. **ABOVE:** The Islanders Men's Basketball team huddles up for a victorious game.

home court—not once—but twice. Wilson said the time in Portugal will provide valuable experience both on and off the court.

“Athletes who have international experience get to see things most people their age don’t get to see,” Wilson said. “Living in Europe and learning other languages provides a different perspective and insight.”

On the court in Portugal, Lewis said he’s had to adapt to playing a more to fundamental style of the game.

“In the United States, we see a lot of athletes playing ‘above the rim,’ with lots of dunking,” he observed. “In basketball overseas, you see more fundamentally sound basketball, played as a team, versus an individual highlight reel.”

Lewis said he feels blessed to have the

opportunity to play pro ball right out of college—for a club with a history of championship wins no less.

“F.C. Barreirense recruits players from all over the world, so to have the opportunity to play for their organization speaks highly of what they think about me and the trust that they’re putting in me,” he said.



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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, Class of 2018
Islanders Men's Basketball
2018 NCAA Slam Dunk Champion

*Scholarships
change lives.*

Invest in our student-athletes and **change a life.**

TOP NEWS

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi

1



LONE STAR UAS CENTER PARTNERS FOR MULTIMILLION-DOLLAR PROJECT

The Lone Star UAS Center of Excellence & Innovation (Lone Star) is part of a multimillion-dollar, multiyear partnership with the HSU Educational Foundation in Okaloosa County, Florida.

The partnership will develop the HSU Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) Center of Excellence (HSU Center) to create a highly trained and certified UAS workforce and provide research, development, and testing of unmanned aircraft, sensors, and related technologies for industry partners.

To advance these goals, Lone Star will assist the HSU Foundation in designing and implementing a UAS-focused schoolhouse to train and certify UAS aircrews, maintenance technicians, and ecosystem developers, which will stimulate workforce development in Okaloosa County and create a workforce in support of the rapidly growing UAS industry.

While Texas A&M-Corpus Christi has developed similar partnerships along the Gulf of Mexico coastline, the project marks Lone Star's first collaborative effort with an out-of-state educational entity.

Lone Star expects the UAS research project to be complete in March 2023.

2



4



3



5



2 A&M-CORPUS CHRISTI RECOGNIZED FOR ONLINE EDUCATION, SUPPORT OF VETERAN AND ACTIVE DUTY STUDENTS

The Island University ranked 18th on the Learn.org list of Best Accredited Online Colleges in Texas recently. Learn.org ranked each institution based on program variety, availability, and flexibility. Tuition rates and percentage of students receiving financial aid were also highlighted in the ranking list.

In addition, Texas A&M-Corpus Christi was recently named a Yellow Ribbon Program school by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The program is designed to help students avoid paying out-of-pocket expenses for tuition and fees by allowing the Island University and the Department of Veterans Affairs to fund—partially or fully—the costs of a college education.

The program will benefit 10 undergraduate, 10 graduate, and 10 doctoral students every semester. Currently, more than 1,400 Islanders are utilizing some type of veteran's assistance, between state and federal resources.

3 A&M-CORPUS CHRISTI AND DEL MAR COLLEGE PART OF NEW \$20 MILLION NATIONAL ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Hailed as a “historic milestone in environmental science,” the National Science Foundation (NSF) has announced an overall investment of more than \$100 million to establish seven inaugural national centers across the country to further explore how to best develop Artificial Intelligence (AI) to benefit our society.

Dr. Amy McGovern, University of Oklahoma professor, leads the NSF AI Institute for Research on Trustworthy AI in Weather, Climate, and Coastal Oceanography, which received \$20 million of the NSF funding. The partnership is made of multiple academic institutions—including Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and Del Mar College (DMC)—along with two national laboratories, and private industry partners including Google, IBM, and NVIDIA.

The program will also create unique workforce retraining modules to engage users in learning AI for environmental applications. The local impact includes a first-of-its-kind pilot AI certificate program between Texas A&M-Corpus Christi and DMC that will teach AI to a community college audience and create a pipeline for underrepresented students through internships and mentoring platforms. Developing coastal AI models to better predict and understand beach inundation and nesting sea turtle patterns will be one of the current goals of the inaugural AI center.

The AI certificate program – slated to begin in fall 2021 – will be the first AI certificate in geosciences in the nation.

The Coastal Bend team is led by Conrad Blucher Institute's interim director, Dr. Philippe Tissot, while the DMC team is led by Dr. Phillip Davis, Computer Science Professor. The local team is supported by \$3.2 million over the next five years.

4 ISLAND UNIVERSITY AWARDED \$2.8M DOE GRANT TO EXPAND STEM OPPORTUNITIES TO HISPANIC STUDENTS

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi has been selected to receive funding from the U.S. Department of Education, under its Title V-Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI) Program. The grant, funded at \$561,711 for the first annual budget period, is anticipated to be renewed four more years for a total award of \$2.8 million.

The Island University's HSI project is titled STEM Operation Success (SOS) and it will identify, recruit, and prepare eligible high-need undergraduate students in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) through several interactive components. Programs for Academic Student Support, better known as PASS, will administer the SOS program.

5 UNIVERSITY COUNSELING CENTER PARTNERS WITH ISLANDER GREEN TEAM FOR NEW SENSORY GARDEN

Working together to bring a new self-care and mental health resource to Islander students, the University Counseling Center (UCC) and the student-led Islander Green Team have teamed up to install a new Stress Relief Sensory Garden on campus. The garden, located just outside the University Counseling Center in the Driftwood Building, features more than two dozen plants that spark interest through unique colors, aromas, and textures.

“Research has shown that spending time outdoors in the fresh air and sunshine can boost mood and improve health,” said Dr. Theresa Sharpe, UCC Director. “Spending even one minute gazing at a flower, or rubbing some rosemary between your fingers and inhaling the fragrance, allows you to pause and slow down and savor the moment. Regular mindfulness practice can help calm and focus the mind.”

The UCC and Islander Green Team plan to grow the space with benches and additional flower beds.

CLASS NOTES

1970s

Marian Tajchman '79, '08 retired from Del Mar College's Dental Hygiene Program as Associate Professor in December 2019 after 23 years as part-time and full-time faculty. Tajchman presently serves as President of the Texas Dental Hygienists' Association.

1980s

Deborah Bustamente '82 returned to her beautiful rural hometown of Nixon, Texas, and is serving as the City Secretary.

Juan "JJ" Adame '83, '01 has been appointed Fire-EMS Chief and Emergency Management Coordinator of Kingsville, Texas.

Deborah Curry, CPA, CGMA '84 has joined the National Association of Corporate Directors as an individual member pursuing comprehensive education for boardroom members.

Janet Culton '85 has visited over 80 countries and all seven continents. She also completed major bucket list trips such as a safari in Kenya, sailing the Galapagos Islands in a barquentine, sky diving at 15,000 feet in Australia, and hot air ballooning in Turkey and Kenya.

1990s

Mike de Laurier '91 is celebrating 14 years as a video conferencing engineer at The University of Central Missouri.

Nelida Ortiz '93 recently moved from Corpus Christi to Round Rock, Texas,

in order to be closer to family and her only grandson.

Vivian Garza '94 is Executive Vice President and CFO of Argosy Aviation. She is also one of several flight instructors and corporate pilots for the company located in Tyler, Texas.

Ray Ramos '94 is a proud father of an Islander who will graduate in 2021.

Dr. Jada Vaughan '95 has opened a private practice in Orlando, Florida, specializing in couples therapy.

Pam Neven's (Van Loan) '97 youngest son, Reece Neven, was accepted into Texas A&M-Corpus Christi for fall 2021.

Tonya Khan '98 loves her career as a physician assistant—16 years and counting.

Lisa Forrest '99 has made a career move from a microbiology lab supervisor at NorDx to an associate systems analyst position in IT for Mainehealth.

2000s

Edward H. Kyle III '01 published a scholarly article establishing the grounds for standing in civil rights cases involving exposure to governmentally endorsed symbols of racial supremacy in the *Michigan Journal of Race and Law* (25 Mich. J. Race & L. 77).

Lyndsey Gammara '04 was recently named Principal at Northrich Elementary for Richardson Independent School District in Richardson, Texas.

Gabriel Llamas '04 and his wife are going on two years of fostering four children and they are hoping to adopt them soon.

Crystal Mendez '04 has been promoted to Professor of Environmental Toxicology at Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio, Texas.

Lyndsie Valenzuela '04 has just celebrated her 5-year anniversary as a professional development leader. She will also be presenting at an upcoming national conference.

Jason Slocum '04, '12 and **Mary Slocum '05** gave birth to their son, Hunter Slocum, on May 9, 2020. Future Islander, Class of 2042!

Christina Alfaro '05 was recently promoted to assistant manager.

Daniel Canales '05 and **Leah Canales '07** are expecting their second child this November. They currently have a 3-year-old son named Brantley, and are excited to be welcoming their baby girl soon!

Hannah Adams '06 is currently living in New Braunfels, Texas. Married to **Kyle Adams '07**, they enjoy adventures through the eyes of their son, Park.

Adam Lopez '06, '16 has accepted a position as a corporate trainer for Frost Bank and relocated to San Antonio, Texas, in March 2020.

Yvette Maldonado '06, '09 is a first-year school counselor at Wrenn Middle School in San Antonio, Texas.



Christina Griffith '07 has been accepted into Leadership Corpus Christi, Class XLIX.

Jason Reed '07 was accepted into Texas A&M School of Law to pursue his Master of Jurisprudence in Risk Management.

In 2018, **Natalie Garcia '08** and her husband founded Champion Pediatric Therapy in San Antonio, Texas. This September, they were awarded a San Antonio Business Journal Resilience in Business Award.

Teresa Razo '08 is an elementary dual language educator for the San Antonio Independent School District. Razo will be presenting virtually at La Cosecha Dual Language Education Conference in November.

Johnny Reyes '08 is celebrating his 10-year work anniversary with The University of Texas.

Since earning her degree, **Lisa Whelchel '08** has worked in the field of allergy, asthma, and immunology.

Sarah Armendarez '09, '16 of Fort Worth, Texas, is enjoying life as a neurology nurse practitioner.

Guinevere Guerrero '09 and family just purchased their forever home.

2010s

Benjamin Acevedo '12, '15 has been named Chaplain (Ministry Associate) at the Baylor University Beauchamp Addiction Recovery Center in Waco, Texas.

Brenda De Leon '12 was hired by Citgo Petroleum Corporation in Corpus Christi as an Industrial Hygiene Specialist.

Amelia Hunter '12 landed a permanent position within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at the Austin Ecological Services Field Office serving as a listing and recovery biologist for petitioned and listed macroinvertebrates in Central and West Texas.

Lupita Ramirez '12 will begin her dream job for STCH Ministries in December 2020.

In August, **Kristen Ruggles '12, '15** earned an MFA in Creative Writing from Eastern Kentucky University.

Sheila Salil '12 recently relocated to the mountains of Colorado Springs.

Steven and Sarah Silvas, both class of 2012, welcomed their baby boy, Jackson, into the world April 8, 2020. He weighed 7 lbs., 13 ounces.

Callie Byerly '13, '19 just earned her master's.

Jose Chica '13 and Michelle (Pagano) Chica '12 gave birth to their second son and future Islander, Milo Edward Chica, on Aug. 20, weighing 7 lbs., 4 oz. Brother Benni loves his baby Milo!

Robert Cruz '13 and wife Elizabeth Pierce joined hands in matrimony on Aug. 29, 2020.

Laura Drewry '13 has been named HR Generalist II-HRIS for Williamson County in Georgetown, Texas.

Valerie Ferdin '13, '15 married Alejandro Coronado on October 10, 2020 at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic Church in Corpus Christi, Texas.

Sean Koch '13 has been named Valedictorian at South Texas College of Law - Houston.

Miguel Lugo '13 began his second year as a seventh grade Texas history teacher at Hartman Middle School in Houston, Texas.

Stephanie Resendez '13 works for a mental health facility where she assesses patients and provides them with resources they may need.

Emily Johnson '14 has been selected as the technical director for LEE (Legacy of Educational Excellence) High School in San Antonio, Texas.

Chinaz Koch '14 has graduated from Thurgood Marshall School of Law and passed the Texas Bar Exam. She is now an associate at a prestigious Houston personal injury law firm.

Shehryar Niazi '14 is working on a startup clothing brand, Balkhy Punsin.

Matthew Podschelne '14 has just moved to Hawaii for his wife's career in the United States Army.

Victoria Tijerina '14 of Corpus Christi recently graduated with her Master's in Educational Administration from Lamar University.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 26) ►

2010s Continued

After meeting on campus, **Hannah Wilson '14 and Kelby Wilson '14** were married on May 12, 2020, in Crystal Beach, Texas. Kelby is a pharmacist at Premier Pharmacy in San Antonio, Texas, while Hannah began physician assistant school at Fort Sam Houston for the United States Army.

Alexis Arriaga '15 has started her fifth year of teaching and her first year as a sixth grade science teacher.

Briana Corley '15 recently started a new career in education.

In 2019, **Cheri Lindley '15** met the love of her life, Cameron. The two have just announced they will be getting married in summer 2021 in Hawaii.

After finding the love of his life, **Francisco Olguin '15** recently proposed to **Genelle Fernandez '14** in Eagle Pass, Texas. Despite the current pandemic, true love always prevails.

Tiffany Hector '16 recently accepted a job offer as Honors Program Coordinator for the University Honors Program at the University of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio, Texas.

Gina Avalos '16 married her love, Brandon, in July 2020. They have moved to Portland, Oregon.

Michelle Calzada '16 has just completed her first year as a case manager at STSARS.

Carly Hester '16 and fiancé, Anthony Thomas, welcomed their first son, Julius Grady Thomas, into the world on Aug. 3, 2020.

Jarret Ortmann '16, '19 and **Mahogany Tas Echevarria '18** were married on May 25, 2019, in Corpus Christi.

Taylor Peterson '16 received a clinic pin, which signifies entrance into her final year of outpatient clinic at Sherman College of Chiropractic.

Erica Thompson '16 has officially decided to venture away from staff nursing and enter the world of travel nursing!

Jo Vaughan '16 has been working for Texas Parks and Wildlife in the Coastal Fisheries Division with the Corpus Christi Bay team for two and a half years.

Clinton Yates '16 has accepted a new role with global investment firm, Sixth Street, and has joined their Portfolio Accounting team in Dallas, Texas.

Kaci Bolechala '17 is now cancer free!

Miranda Garcia '17 has just purchased her first home.

After meeting in their environmental science courses in 2015, **Richard Slegler '16 and Kelli Holt '17** became engaged in June 2020.

Gus Ladwig '17 has been promoted to Project Land Surveyor for Manhard Consulting in the Woodlands, Texas.

Kayla Lopez '17 started a new position as Financial Aid Outreach Coordinator at Del Mar College in Corpus Christi.

Marissa Marciel '17 won Teacher of the Year and Teacher of the District in elementary schools.

Samuel Palmer '17, '20 started a new position as Regional Executive Manager with CannLiv Safety.

Amanda Rangel '17, '19 married Zachary on Feb. 22, 2020. Amanda currently works for Memorial Hermann Hospital and Zachary is a rescue swimmer for the United States Coast Guard.

Angelica Sanders '17, from Corpus Christi, now teaches Hawaiian and Pacific Studies in Honolulu, Hawaii.

Becca-Lee Thomas '17 has accepted a full-time teaching position at Somerville Elementary in Somerville, Texas.

Irma Torres '17 is expecting a future Islander in January 2021.

Daniel Cochran '18 has been promoted to Senior Analyst and Portfolio Manager for The Carta Group in Syracuse, New York.

Carla Cortez '18 recently graduated from Cornell University with a master's degree in parasitology.

Kelsey Durham '18 and Brian Allec '16, '18, met on campus in 2014. They are now engaged and will be married in December 2021.

Justin Garcia '18 just celebrated one year at SWCA Environmental Consultants.

Andria Hernandez '18 has continued her education in graduate school at UTSA and will graduate this May as a licensed master social worker.

Melissa Hernandez '18 has been promoted from Admissions Specialist for Freshmen to Graduate Applications Analyst for Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.

Samantha Landeros '18 is a high school teacher at Por Vida Academy in Corpus Christi and is working toward a master's degree in school counseling.

Karla Morales '18 recently began a job with United Healthcare. She is also recently engaged and planning to marry in April 2021.

Alex Perez '18 has opened a lawn greeting business which creates signs for special occasions.

Marissa Ruiz '18 has taken on the role of Healthcare Administrator at Brookdale Trinity Towers in Corpus Christi.

Paige Saenz '18 is currently two years into her Clinical Mental Health Counseling graduate program at the University of Houston-Clear Lake (UHCL). She will be starting her internship at the Career Services Center at the UHCL campus. She is also working part time with Alvin ISD.

Patricia Walker '18 has taken a position with Partners In Primary Care in Port Arthur/Beaumont, Texas.

Lexi Archer '19 of Crestview, Florida, is attending Texas A&M University School of Law.

Kaylee Bowers '19 is now a full-time crisis worker in Corpus Christi.

Arianne Chapa '19 just received her Licensed Professional Counselor-intern license to practice counseling in Texas.

Aaron Duelm '19 and **Erin Tuttle '18** were recently married in New Braunfels, Texas.

Allison Francis '19 began a Master's in Health Education program at Texas A&M.

Dulce Garcia '19 now works as an animal care specialist at Friends for Life Animal Shelter, a no-kill shelter in Houston, Texas.

Rick Garcia '19 is proud to announce that he has officially opened up his own digital marketing agency serving small businesses in the Coastal Bend.

Victoria Gilcrease '19 of San Antonio, Texas has recently been accepted into a Vision Care Technology program.

Brandon Hayat '19 is a project engineer at an HVAC company in San Antonio, Texas.

Gerardo Hinjosa '19 is currently in his second semester in the MPA program, with a healthcare administration concentration. He is expected to graduate in fall 2021.

Jasmin Lira '19, started working at Texas Biomedical Research Institute in San Antonio as an animal caretaker for rodents.

Destiny Lopez '19 just started training to be a case worker, helping families in need find housing.

Megan Martinez '19 recently started a new position in sales for a start-up company called Policy Fuel in Austin, Texas.

Kayla Massey '19 was accepted to and is attending the University of Houston's graduate program.

Erin Morales '19 celebrates seven years in healthcare sales and management.

Cecily Niles '19 is now a first grade teacher at Dr. Rodriguez Elementary in Harlingen, Texas.

Christopher Potter '19 has been awarded with H-E-B's Innovation Award for the company's San Antonio region.

Roel Rodriguez '19 just purchased his first home in Alice, Texas.

Cassandra June Scheick '19 and **McCarley Beal '19** welcomed their son, Oliver Beal Scheick, on Nov. 9, 2019, weighing 8 lbs., 7 oz. Oliver was born on his father's birthday. The family now calls Waco, Texas, home.

Rebecca Taylor '19 recently accepted the position as Director of Communications and Community for Ingleside ISD.

Analissa Tomlin '19 recently started a full-time job with BlueSprig Pediatrics in San Antonio, Texas.

Isabel Zapata '19 is now teaching pre-K in San Antonio, Texas.

John Castaneda '20 now runs Texas Sales & Insurance in Corpus Christi.

2020s

Lindsey Laskowski '20 created Magnolia Moon Media Management, a small business which specializes in social media management.

Lesley Simental '20 recently accepted an offer to work with the Texas A&M Transportation Institute Headquarters in Bryan, Texas.

Emma Vrana '20 is a first-year first grade teacher in Corpus Christi.

George Woods III '20 is a Health and Physical Education Specialist for Corpus Christi ISD.



HAVE YOU RECENTLY EARNED AN EXCITING 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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