A WARM WELCOME
Islanders Display Enthusiasm, Energy for Campus Life

CULTIVATING CREATIVE MINDS
Island University Receives Initial Funding for New Arts and Media Building

FLYING HIGH
City, State Invest Big in TAMU-CC Drone Technology and Innovation

#LUTZGO
New Era Underway for Islanders Men’s Basketball
Dear Islanders,

It has been a wonderful fall semester at the Island University! We welcomed everyone back to campus in August and it has been an overwhelmingly positive experience from the very first day. The energy and excitement of our students, faculty, and staff have been incredible, and the momentum keeps building.

A robust group of new students joined our Islander family with a 16% increase in both first-year Islanders and transfer students over the previous year. Additionally, new leadership arrived on campus with three new deans and a new vice president. Each of them brings experiences and an enthusiasm that will benefit all Islanders. We look forward to the contributions they will make here at A&M-Corpus Christi.

Waves of Welcome activities drew record numbers of participants and our inaugural Islanders Beach Bash was extremely successful. We also held our very first Islander Family Weekend in October and enjoyed meeting the families of many Islander students.

As you will see in this issue, our students get much more than academic and social enrichment while they are here. They receive cutting-edge, hands-on learning opportunities, including internships in the local community, that help them develop valuable, professional skills.

Our presence and impact in the community continues to grow. In this edition, you can learn about our partnership with the City of Corpus Christi and our Lone Star UAS Center for Excellence and Innovation. This partnership will further enhance economic development in the Coastal Bend and increase opportunities for our students and local workforce alike, in addition to supporting the revitalization of downtown Corpus Christi.

We remain focused on providing outstanding educational opportunities for our students and contributing to their growth and development. We are fortunate to have not only the support and commitment of the community, but also your support to aid in our efforts. With so many exciting events coming up this spring, we hope to see you soon at your Island University.

Sincerely,

Kelly M. Miller, Ph.D.
President and CEO
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi
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A Warm Welcome

Islanders Display Enthusiasm, Energy for Campus Life

A palpable resurgence of Islander spirit spread throughout Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi this fall as students filled classrooms, walkways, and opening events.

“I’ve never been more excited to be anywhere than right here,” first-year Islander, John Stevenson ’25, said.

Islander students came to campus eager to participate in events and traditions, meet new friends, and immerse themselves in the Islander experience.

This new group of Islanders, the Class of 2025, turned out to campus events in droves. From old favorites like “Rec the Night” and “Bondfire,” to inaugural celebrations like Islanders Beach Bash and Islander Family Weekend, the university saw record-breaking attendance at its events. The finale event to the university’s annual Waves of Welcome, which featured more than 50 unique events over a two-week period, Beach Bash debuted as a wildly successful new tradition, connecting students, faculty, alumni, and staff through games and food. A dazzling firework display, sponsored by the Islander Alumni Association, capped off the evening.

“It’s amazing to feel this sense of community again,” said Jeanine Del Castillo ’25, who attended Beach Bash. “I, without a doubt, feel like part of the Islander family.”

Islander Family Weekend, sponsored by CITGO, invited families to come to campus and see it through the eyes of their students. Participants enjoyed festivities like kite flying at Wind Jam, a fun run, a student film showcase, campus tours, and brunch with University President and CEO Dr. Kelly M. Miller. A highlight of the weekend was a laser lights show. Continued on page 6.
John Olivarez ‘25, Elizabeth Olivarez ‘24, and Alyssa Hinojosa ‘22 (left to right) enjoy a beach-side bonfire at Islanders Beach Bash.
Of the more than 400 families in attendance, first-year Islander and biomedical sciences major, Jayden Lessiker ’25, from Victoria, said she was eager to set an example for her younger siblings.

“I really want to make my family proud,” said Lessiker. “I hope this event encourages them to make more trips to visit me while I’m here.”

Brandy Reyes, Lessiker’s mother, says the event gave her an intimate look at the true Islander experience.

“This weekend gave me the chance to meet the friends she’s made, to see how she’s matured, and I couldn’t be more excited,” Reyes said.

For many students — new and returning — the fall semester marked their first-ever on-campus experience.

“I was enrolled last semester but only had online classes, so I’m really excited to be in-person,” said Lindsey Startz ’23. “This semester, I even got a job working in the University Center. I really want to be connected to everything TAMU-CC.”

Noah Gonzales ’24, a track and field student-athlete majoring in computer science, says the cornerstone of his fall semester was finding his place in the Islander community.

“I come from a small town, so I wanted to feel at home,” said Gonzales, who hails from Poteet. “I knew if I came here, I could make that happen. The university hosted some amazing events this semester that made it easy to meet new people and make new friends. So far, I’ve made a lot of memories, ones I’ll still be talking about in my senior year.”

Gonzales, who balances a rigorous course load and heavy practice schedule, noted the camaraderie among Islanders is unlike any other and is one more reason he chose TAMU-CC as his home away from home.

“When I saw this campus, I knew this was where I wanted to spend the next four years of my life,” Gonzales said. “Seeing the sunrise and sunset over the water is breathtaking, and to wake up every morning and realize I am living here is still surreal.”
John and Jonathon Conyers, a father-son duo who are both first-year Islanders, said the chance to stay connected with each other and meet their individual goals created a new purpose in their lives following a tragic family passing just weeks before the fall semester started.

“Before my wife passed away from cancer, her main priority was always making sure Jonathon got his education,” John Conyers ’25, a media studies major, said. “I’m here to make sure that happens, that her dreams come true and that I walk that stage with my son in four years.”

Jonathon Conyers ’25, an 18-year-old music education major, violinist, and Lichtenstein scholar, says he and his father are pushing each other to not just do their best, but to honor the memory of his mother. Jonathon says he and his dad are finding their new normal, one day at a time, here at the Island University.

“After my mom passed, I really wanted my dad to do something to make this time easier, so I asked my dad to come to school with me,” Jonathon said. “I’ve been really impressed with his late-night study sessions, and right now we’re got some healthy competition going on to see who can get the highest GPA by graduation.”

The duo says their journey to the Island campus would not have been possible without help from faculty and staff who now feel like family.

“From the staff in admissions, to the music faculty encouraging my son, we couldn’t be more grateful to be here,” the elder Conyers said.

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ISLANDER HOMECOMING
FEBRUARY 14-19, 2022
Return to the Island

As campus vibrancy and Islander spirit reach new heights, TAMU-CC prepares for an even brighter and more active spring 2022 semester. One of those much-anticipated events is Homecoming. The university and the Islander Alumni Association invite all graduates to “Return to the Island” to share in the energy and excitement of campus life.

Learn more at islanderalumni.org/hoco
The sky is not the limit for economic opportunity in Corpus Christi. Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi’s Lone Star Unmanned Aircraft System Center of Excellence and Innovation (LSUASC) and the City of Corpus Christi’s B Corporation recently signed a $4 million, five-year business incentive agreement to further grow economic development opportunities related to drones.

“This partnership is an incredible, positive milestone in the history of our city, our region, and the Island University,” said Dr. Kelly M. Miller, TAMU-CC President and CEO.

“It presents numerous exciting opportunities for our students, along with the diversification of the city’s innovation landscape in downtown Corpus Christi. We can create a technologically advanced workforce and, more importantly, we can retain this incredible talent in the Coastal Bend.”

The funding will be used to expand and support the modernization and infrastructural needs of LSUASC, including the build-out of a second mission control center (MCC) in the university’s building in downtown Corpus Christi. Technology in the current MCC is nearing a decade old. The new MCC will be modular, remotely accessible, secure, resilient, and scalable.

The Type B funds will also support the establishment of three new offices or centers, all related to drone technology, innovation, and economic development, and all to be housed in the downtown building. They include the Office of Economic Development and Industry Partnerships, the Innovation in Port Studies Institute (iPORTs), and the Center of Innovation in Emergency Management (CIEM).

The Office of Economic Development and Industry Partnerships will act as an innovation and technology transfer...
hub for South Texas with a mission of cultivating a culture of innovation by promoting business development and an entrepreneurial workforce. This work will be the seed for a drone innovation district (i.e. a collaborative industry/research work environment), the first of its kind in South Texas.

The mission of iPORTs is to promote the economic development of the region around port-related industries and the development of a skilled workforce for such businesses. LSUASC and iPORTs will work jointly on developing and deploying drone-related technologies related to air, land, and seaports, particularly the Port of Corpus Christi.

A first-of-its-kind Center of Innovation in Emergency Management (CIEM) will also be formed by TAMU-CC, and the Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM), in collaboration with the City of Corpus Christi and Nueces County. In addition to an Emergency Operations Center (EOC), this innovative facility will include an emergency management research and development center.

“Having an EOC in our downtown building, a building made of poured concrete that has survived numerous hurricanes, is a no-brainer,” Miller said. “The centralized location of the building, its sturdy structure, and the proximity to LSUASC’s mission control is paramount. Since its inception, LSUASC has actively participated in emergency response and recovery efforts. This center promotes and supports the resiliency of the Coastal Bend.”

Type B Board President Scott Harris says the project is beneficial for two main reasons.

“First is the opportunity for drone-related businesses to move to Corpus Christi; these new businesses would generate additional tax revenue and provide secondary economic benefits to the community over time,” Harris said. “Second, the downtown area of Corpus Christi desperately needs an economic catalyst to grow this area of the city again into what it should be — the center of the city’s economy. The board feels like we are part of something special for our community. We recognized this early and are confident this program will be a game changer.”

The investment from the city will also provide resources to conduct an airspace study to better classify airspace usage and act as a springboard for an FAA Certificate of Authorization (COA). Receiving the COA could potentially open doors to millions of dollars in federal funding for testing exercises within the Corpus Christi region.

LSUASC also received continued funding of $6.65 million from the Texas Legislature in 2021. The funding, to be distributed over the next two years, will help deliver research, testing, and commercialization of UAS. In addition, LSUASC received $3 million in emergency management funding from the state to help bring Texas to the forefront in the use of drones for disaster response and recovery purposes.

“UAS are taking a more prominent role as first responders attempt to make their jobs safer and more efficient,” Mike Sanders, LSUASC Executive Director, said. “UAS proficiency for disaster preparedness, response, and resiliency is also important at all critical infrastructure and key resources points of interest along the Texas coast.”

LSUASC is one of seven FAA-drone test sites in the United States and was established by the Texas A&M University System Board of Regents in 2013 with initial support from the Corpus Christi Business and Job Development Corporation. The center is a global partner for research, development, testing, and evaluation of drone technologies.

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To date, an initial investment of $600,000 of Type A funding from the City of Corpus Christi has resulted in $22.4 million in funding and investments,” Miller said. “The drone industry is valued at $100 billion worldwide, and Goldman Sachs projects those numbers will double by 2025. Our region is primed for attracting drone business and we’re proud to do our part.”

◆

**LONE STAR UAS 2021 FUNDING**

*Courtesy of the Texas Legislature*

$6.65M for UAS research, testing, and commercialization

$3M for emergency management, disaster and recovery response
Bridging the Gap
TAMU-CC Internship Program Connects Students to Employers

Key partnerships between Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and local industries are cultivating a vibrant South Texas workforce by connecting students and employers through internships, and ultimately, permanent employment.

Gabrielle Guerra ’21 (no relation to Gabe Guerra), who graduated from TAMU-CC with a Bachelor of Business Administration in Marketing, began her journey at Kleberg Bank as an intern. A year and a half later, Gabrielle transitioned into a full-time role as a digital marketing specialist.

“I am grateful to Kleberg Bank for making internships available to students like me,” said Gabrielle, a Corpus Christi native. “I came to work for Kleberg Bank as a college student and have now emerged as a professional working in my chosen area of study. The time I’ve spent at the bank has allowed me to grow in so many different aspects of my professional life.”

Gabrielle says the internship prepared her for her current role by pairing her with an industry mentor.

“Emily Barrera, Kleberg Bank’s Marketing and Communications Director, helped me gain integral skills,” Gabrielle said. “I wasn't initially familiar with the Adobe Creative Suite, and through the training and support Emily provided, I am now adept in its use. Having access to a mentor with years of experience is invaluable and has contributed positively to my growth.”

Islander student Ryan Cardin ’22 gained part-time employment as a Kleberg Bank software developer after completing his year-long internship.

“As an intern, I was given a lot of responsibility, but was supported throughout,” Cardin said. “I was guided along the way and my schedule was accommodated. I never had to worry about school interfering with work, or vice versa.”

Cardin, who is working toward a Bachelor of Science in Computer Science with a concentration in systems programming, says the transition from intern to part-time professional was seamless thanks to the guidance of Christopher Medrano, Chief Information Officer at Kleberg Bank.

“School gives you a very good idea of the basics of your job responsibilities, but an internship allows you to learn the specifics of what you're going to be doing,” said Cardin, a Houston native. “Most of what I know now is because of my internship, but school helped me have the foundational blocks to be able to add this information. They go hand-in-hand.”

The TAMU-CC Career and Professional Development Center offers many services beyond internship placement, including résumé assistance, job search strategies, mock interviews, and workshops on financial literacy. These services help students develop the skills expected by employers, explained LaMar Black, TAMU-CC Career and Professional Development Center Associate Director. It also aids Islander alumni, up to one year post-graduation, as they explore career options.
“Today’s employers are seeking certain career competencies, even in entry level roles, like communication, critical thinking, and leadership, and the internships and services we provide give students the opportunity to hone those abilities,” Black said.

Gabe Guerra attributes the successful partnership between the Island University and Kleberg Bank directly to the commitment from the leadership teams at both institutions. He challenges other local businesses to engage with the university’s brightest minds.

“It is truly rewarding watching these young people be inspired to do their best and be their best, and how we help build their professional confidence,” he said. “Whether the interns stay with Kleberg Bank, or move on to other jobs, I know we’ve made a difference in their lives. At the end of the day, it’s gratifying to see these young people say, ‘I love where I work and I’m just so happy I was given an opportunity.’”
Cultural heritage and identity are a critical part of the Islander experience, as a great deal of pride is demonstrated through its inclusion and belonging programming held throughout the year. These celebrations are a prime opportunity for a deeper dive into history, the issues behind current events, and a chance to promote greater understanding.

Hispanic Heritage Month

Hispanic Heritage Month (HHM), celebrated nationally Sept. 15 to Oct. 15, is the most expansive heritage celebration on campus. HHM 2021 featured a robust mix of more than 30 in-person and virtual events, including poetry readings, musical performances, cooking demonstrations, and discussion panels.

“We have a duty as an institution of higher learning to provide a space to have these discussions and ask questions,” said Andrea Montalvo-Hamid ’08, ’10, TAMU-CC Professional Assistant Professor of English and HHM coordinator.

“Spotlight on Latina Women: The Stages of Leadership” was an HHM signature event. It included a panel of established Latina leaders including
Barbi Leo ’98, co-host for “Domingo Live” and KIII-TV 3 news co-anchor; Katia Uriarte, KRIS-TV anchor; Savannah Garza, Brand and Social Media Coordinator for the Downtown Management District; and Victoria Hinojosa, 2021 Miss Texas USA.

HHM extended well into October with a mariachi and folklórico showcase and a recognition of Día de Los Muertos, which featured an ofrenda (an altar with a collection of objects) for lost loved ones.

LGBT History Month

In October, Islander Cultural Alliance (ICA) led the campus in a National Coming Out Day Festival featuring the “coming-out door” and activities facilitated by the University Counseling Center, I-TEAM Peer Educators, and Islander Spectrum of Sexuality and Gender (ISSG), formerly known as the TAMU-CC Pride Alliance.

ISSG consists of about 50 members of the LGBTQIA+ campus community, according to ISSG President Jason Santhanam ’22, a business management major from San Diego, California.

“We’d like for everyone to realize that we’re here — no matter what room or space you’re in, there’s probably someone who is a part of our community with you,” Santhanam said.

Elise Hinojosa ’23, TAMU-CC history major and ISSG member, noted the particular importance for LGBTQIA+ students to find their niche.

“College can be an intense time for many first-year Islanders, so finding community can be so comforting,” Hinojosa said. “Having that support makes you feel protected; it makes you feel heard.”

Disability Awareness Month

Also in October, the university hosted a forum focused on invisible disabilities as part of Disability Awareness Month. The conversation was led by the university's new chief diversity officer (CDO), Dr. Chris Navia, with a panel of faculty and staff experts, as well as students who shared their personal experiences living with an invisible disability.

As the university’s first CDO, Navia serves in a senior leadership position prioritizing and championing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and works in collaboration with academic and administrative units across the university.

Black History Month

Black History Month (BHM), celebrated each February, continues to grow each year. Angela Walker, TAMU-CC Associate Dean of Students and BHM planning committee member, said beyond a healthy slate of springtime events, the university is working toward adding yearlong support to better address the needs of Black students.

“We started Black Islanders Meet and Greet in September 2019 and close to 100 people showed up,” Walker said. “The event is a way to connect Black students to Black faculty, staff, and key administrators. It’s a way for Black students to feel welcome, supported, and heard.”

Brian Owens ’23, TAMU-CC management information systems major, was the lead student organizer for the Black History Month Kick-off Celebration in 2021.

“It was a lot of responsibility because Black history is so vast,” Owens, an Atlanta native, said. “I had to hit all the angles — American culture, African culture, and Afro-British culture. It was a beautiful experience to have our school celebrate all the great things Black people have done throughout history.”

Women’s History Month

At the Island University, Women’s History Month (WHM), celebrated nationally each March, is organized by Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program co-coordinators, in collaboration with ICA, the Islander Feminists, Islanders for Social Justice, and ISSG.

“Expect a mix of virtual and hybrid events in March 2022,” Dr. Beth Robinson, TAMU-CC Assistant Professor of History, said. “We plan to continue the practice of invited talks from scholars who focus on women, gender, and sexuality in South Texas, activism, and movement-building in the borderlands, and/or Latinx experiences.”

Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month

Held on campus for the first time in spring 2021, Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month featured more than a dozen events. While AAPI Heritage Month is recognized nationally in May, it’s celebrated on most college campuses in April to reach students before summer break.

Dr. Sining Kong, TAMU-CC Assistant Professor of Communication and Media, gave the keynote address at the ICA “A Celebration of Culture: Focus on China” event.

“In these events, we can remove a lot of stereotypical thoughts and grow more knowledge on what Asian is,” Kong said.

Most culturally diverse campus events involve support from ICA, a departmental student organization within the Division of Student Engagement and Success (SEAS).
For the Birds

Avian Ecologist Dr. Dale Gawlik Brings Everglades Conservation Experience to ‘Birdiest’ City

It’s no secret we love our birds in South Texas. Corpus Christi has been known as “America’s Birdiest City” for more than a decade. These birds live in a coastal environment shaped by humans — fishing boats zip past mangroves full of roosting herons, waterfowl nest on islands created by the dredging of ship channels, and our beaches are crowded with happy vacationers racing into the water alongside wading birds.

Dr. Dale Gawlik is an avian ecologist leading the new Conservation and Biodiversity Lab at the Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies (HRI) at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, where he studies the interplay between birds and people.

“When you’re out somewhere like the Padre Island National Seashore, it’s such a wild, desolate place that you feel like you’re in the wilderness, but there’s still so much evidence of past human use. It’s just a reminder that there are really no places left on Earth untouched by humans,” Gawlik said. “But the good news is that birds are resilient. Some are in trouble, but many of them are figuring out ways to survive in this new environment.”

Gawlik received his Ph.D. from Texas A&M University and has since focused his career on applied natural resource management and conservation work. After graduation, he took a position as a senior research scientist with the South Florida Water Management District, creating a restoration plan for the Everglades. There, he also developed state-of-the-art management tools to determine how the movement of water through the sensitive habitat would affect bird populations. Later, he went to Florida Atlantic University, attaining the rank of professor and director of their environmental sciences program. Attracting a team of students who were also interested in applied conservation, they built models to predict outcomes for bird species under different restoration scenarios.

“I’ve always tried to study things that would make a difference,” Gawlik said.

“I’ve always tried to study things that would make a difference,” Gawlik said. “So many species are in trouble already. I’ve never felt I had the right to research questions that aren’t leading to benefits for these birds. I want natural resource managers to use my research to make decisions on the ground.”

Gawlik, who joined the TAMU-CC campus in January 2021, said he decided to begin the next phase of his career at HRI because, in his experience in the natural resource management and restoration world, it took teams of people from across disciplines to build successful projects. HRI’s model puts people from across the academic spectrum together — specialists in ecology, chemistry, geosciences, policy, and socioeconomics — to facilitate interdisciplinary research to solve problems.

In these early months at HRI, Gawlik has been on what he calls a “listening tour” across the bird world of coastal Texas, asking natural resource managers about their biggest management challenges. Some things have come up repeatedly, including an issue on waterbird nesting. Waterbirds in Texas tend to nest on islands, some of them manmade, like the abundant islands that dot the coast. These islands are created by dredge spoil pulled from canals cut for shipping and oil and gas production. They are attractive to birds because they’re close to feeding grounds, but they are feeling the impacts of erosion
from storms and sea level rise. Also, they are often found along boating channels, making nesting birds vulnerable to human disruptions and contaminants from oil or chemical spills.

Gawlik and colleagues have a new project they hope to get off the ground called the Colony Island Network Design and Implementation (CINDI), a decision tool to help managers decide which of the islands have the most potential to benefit waterbirds and are therefore the highest priority, so natural resource managers can make the best decisions about which habitats should be preserved and restored. Happier birds make for a healthier ecosystem, and a better coast for the humans that love them.

“One great thing I’ve noticed so far is that people in South Texas have a fairly sophisticated understanding of how unusually good this place is for birds, and just how special that is,” Gawlik said.

Dr. Dale Gawlik (right), Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies Endowed Chair for Conservation and Biodiversity, and Ro Mirzadi ’22, biology graduate student, coast along the Padre Island National Seashore in search of birds.
Leading the Way

TAMU-CC Conrad Blucher Institute Leads State, National Efforts

Strong interdisciplinary research, a strategic coastal location, and an ecosystem of innovation at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi are creating opportunities at the national and state level. The university was recently selected to host one of seven national centers used to explore how to best develop Artificial Intelligence (AI) to benefit our society, with a focus on environmental science.

Hailed as “historic milestone in environmental science,” the partnership is funded by the National Science Foundation and seven other federal agencies, which have invested more than $100 million in the project.

The Coastal Bend team, which is supported by $3.2 million over five years, is led by researchers at the Conrad Blucher Institute for Surveying and Science (CBI).
Goals include the development of Coastal AI models using big data and satellite imagery to better predict and understand beach inundation, which impacts beachgoers and nesting of sea turtles. Local researchers will also focus on ways AI models can help better manage the environment and the economy.

“In thanks to [the legislators’] tireless work that we have achieved this unique and innovative opportunity, bringing further national recognition to our campus,” President Miller said.

In addition, in collaboration with Del Mar College, the university has launched the first-of-its-kind Artificial Intelligence in Geographic Information Science Occupational Skills Award to develop a pipeline of GIS students, specifically Hispanic and first-generation students, for the growing AI field.

CBI experts are also leading the way in Texas as part of a national technological update that will transform the fields of surveying, cartography, and land-use planning.

Efforts are underway to improve the National Spatial Reference System (NSRS), a system that defines latitude, longitude, height, scale, gravity, and orientation throughout the United States, and the university has a role in that, too. The U.S. National Geodetic System will introduce a replacement for the NSRS with help from CBI’s Texas Spatial Reference Center (TSRC). The TSRC was appointed the official resource to the NSRS during the 87th Legislative Session.

Coastal Bend elected officials moved quickly to secure passage of the bill appointing TSRC as the official resource. Gov. Greg Abbott signed Senate Bill 1072 into law as written on June 7, 2021. The bill also defined the international foot as the standard unit of measure.

“The Island University is thankful for continued support from our legislators, especially Senator Juan ‘Chuy’ Hinojosa, Representative Todd Hunter, and Representative Abel Herrero,” said Dr. Kelly M. Miller, TAMU-CC President and CEO. “It is thanks to their tireless work that we have achieved this unique and innovative opportunity, bringing further national recognition to our campus.”
Adrian Rodriguez Welcomed as VP of Student Engagement and Success

Vibrant Student Life through Extraordinary Student Experiences is Top Priority

Full of excitement and passion for student life and campus vibrancy, Adrian Rodriguez joined the Island University’s campus leadership team in August 2021 as Vice President for the Division of Student Engagement and Success (SEAS).

An alumnus of Texas A&M University and Texas A&M University-Kingsville, Rodriguez says he is honored to remain engaged with the A&M System as a voice of advocacy and a leader for students, especially those with who are first-generation college students like himself.

“I have a great familiarity with the anxieties and excitement of being on campus for the first time as a first-generation student,” Rodriguez said. “For me, I had people along the way who lent their support and helped me be successful. Now, I have the opportunity to do that for our Islander students. To help them accomplish their goals and be part of their success — it’s a huge part of why I chose this path.”

“IF A VIBRANT STUDENT LIFE IS YOUR PRIORITY, THEN IT HAS TO BE YOUR PASSION,” RODRIGUEZ SAID.

Rodriguez is a member of numerous academic associations, including the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, National Association for Behavioral Intervention and Threat Assessment, and the Texas Association of Chicanos in Higher Education.

With a comprehensive knowledge of student involvement activities, as well as more than 20 years of excellent service to students and campus communities alike, Rodriguez plans to expand student engagement by immersing himself in the Islander experience.

“If a vibrant student life is your priority, then it has to be your passion,” Rodriguez said. “Our focus in SEAS is to create a vibrant student life through extraordinary student experiences that build spirit and tradition. We know this is critically important to the development of student connectedness and campus pride, and is a pathway to graduation.”

Rodriguez leads a team of nine departments with more than 70 staff members. In his inaugural fall on campus, Rodriguez and his team organized numerous signature events, including Islander traditions like Anchor Camp, Waves of Welcome, and the 15th annual Islander Lights Celebration.

Rodriguez says the chance to not only engage, but support Islander students is an invaluable opportunity; one he is taking with the utmost care and consideration.

“This is a first-choice destination university, and we have a story to tell,” he said. “You can’t get what this university has to offer in West Texas, East Texas, or in the middle of the country. Islanders have a chance to be a part of a unique campus and have access to vast opportunities. Our goal in SEAS is to be leaders in student engagement and to support Islander success.”
Adrian Rodriguez is a first-generation college graduate and alumnus of Texas A&M University and Texas A&M University-Kingsville.
Dr. Shawnrece Campbell Welcomed as
College of Liberal Arts Dean

College to Create New Pathway for Success, Expand Experiential Learning Opportunities

Dr. Shawnrece Campbell says she was searching for a role where she could support student success while also being a creative entrepreneur who could build meaningful relationships with community and alumni. She found that opportunity in her new position as Dean of the College of Liberal Arts at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi.

“I’m thrilled to be at TAMU-CC, where there is innovation happening everywhere,” Campbell said. “I’m excited to lead the college in a way that incorporates my sweet spot of entrepreneurship in academia.”

For the last two decades, Campbell has amassed a strong academic record in teaching, scholarship, and service with a focus on student success, experiential learning, leadership, creativity, innovation, and inclusive excellence.

“I’m fascinated by people and the diversity that we bring to the table,” Campbell said. “Being able to bring people together from the grassroots up, while also making sure we have support from administration down, is key.”

Campbell now leads the university’s largest college, in both number of faculty and students. The college consists of nine departments, including the newly formed Department of Interdisciplinary Studies (DINS), where Campbell points to an opportunity for growth.

DINS consists of the university’s First-Year Learning Communities Program, the Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences (BAAS), Mexican American Studies, Latin American Studies, and Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies programs as well as the University Studies (UNVS) degree.

“With assistance from Workforce Solutions of the Coastal Bend, we hope to align the needs of the business community with not just college curriculum, but also with K-12 education, to ensure the entire pipeline works,” Campbell said.

The School of Arts, Media, and Communication (SAMC) is also housed within the college. Campbell applauds SAMC faculty and students for their tenacity as they transition back on-stage after more than a year of virtual performances due to COVID-19

protocols.

Campbell said she is also looking to expand experiential learning opportunities — where students learn by doing and then reflect on the experience — at the undergraduate and graduate level.

One of the college’s most successful graduate programs is the Master of Public Administration (MPA). The MPA is designed to prepare students for managerial careers in the government and nonprofit sector; accordingly, most of its degree-seekers study part-time and work full-time.

Kenneth Erben ’18, Assistant Fire Chief of Operations for the Corpus Christi Fire Department, is an MPA graduate who was part of creating a mobile COVID-19 vaccination program for homebound residents. Dubbed “Save Our Seniors,” the SOS team targeted elderly residents already enrolled in the Meals on Wheels program. Erben’s team, with support from both city and county leaders, was so successful that Gov. Greg Abbott announced that the Corpus Christi program would be a model for the state.

“Every class I took in the MPA program had some sort of nugget that helped me do my job better,” Erben said.
President’s Circle is a special opportunity for community members to get involved with their Island University, and support the vision of our faculty, staff, and of President and CEO, Dr. Kelly M. Miller. Thanks to member support last year, President’s Circle was able to designate $100,000 in funds for direct student support. Despite this challenging year, our members continue to be integral champions for our students and community.

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

presidentscircle.tamucc.edu

MEMBER LEVELS: Bronze Circle: $1,000 | Silver Circle: $2,500 | Gold Circle: $5,000
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi welcomes its new College of Business Dean, Dr. Brian Tietje. Tietje comes to the Island University with an impressive curriculum vitae spanning more than 40 years of combined experience in teaching, higher education leadership, business consulting, and sales. As dean, he looks to continue the outstanding work of the College of Business with a particular passion for providing support to first-generation students.

“As a first-generation student myself, the opportunity to attend college and earn a degree made all the difference in my life,” Tietje said.

Leveraging the experience of Corpus Christi’s business leaders as mentors is one way Tietje plans to support first-generation students, who may be unfamiliar with the “unwritten rules” of career and personal success. As Tietje reflects on those who have mentored him throughout his career, he says he understands the profound value of having a mentor as a guide through critical moments of professional growth.

“My vision is that every one of our students has the opportunity to have a mentor to help them find internships, navigate the interview process, and then parlay that relationship building into their career and life success,” Tietje said.
Current Master of Business Administration student, Tana Neighbors ’11, ’23, says she is thrilled to serve as a mentor to Islander undergraduates. Neighbors, who earned a Bachelor of Business Administration from the Island University and currently serves as Executive Assistant to the Chief Executive Officer of the Port of Corpus Christi, said she recently joined the Islander Alumni Association Mentor Program to provide personal experiences to those just starting their professional careers. Neighbors was paired with Danielle Garcia ’22, a criminal justice major.

“My vision is that every one of our students has the opportunity to have a mentor to help them find internships, navigate the interview process, and then parlay that relationship building into their career and life success,” Tietsje said.

“By providing real world knowledge, job experiences, and encouragement, students can make a successful transition from the classroom to the workforce,” Neighbors said. “I am completely in awe of Danielle’s drive, dedication, and tenacity. I hope to help Danielle in her next steps, but I am also looking forward to learning from her.”

Tietsje says he was drawn to the Texas A&M University System by a deep appreciation for its pride and traditions. Additionally, Tietsje believes that Corpus Christi and the Coastal Bend are poised for economic growth and prosperity to which the College of Business can contribute, through its students, faculty, and programs, both at the Island campus and at the RELLIS campus, located in Bryan, Texas.

Through collaboration with faculty, community, mentors, and others, Tietsje wants to ensure the College of Business remains a catalyst for positive change in each student’s life. ♦

Endowed Scholarship Council

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

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

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

Island University Teams Up with Alumni-Owned Coffee Business

For many college students, coffee is an essential supply to power through the day. It’s the drink that fuels a frenzied morning, steadies a hectic afternoon, and sustains an all-nighter. Coffee connoisseurs can now enjoy ethically sourced, specialty brews at the Island University, while also supporting an alumna-owned business, thanks to a new partnership between Islander Dining (operated by Chartwells Higher Education) and Driftwood Coffee Company.

Driftwood Coffee Co. began as a hobby, and has since flourished into a thriving coffee roastery and tasting room under the leadership of Randi Carroll ’09 and her husband Steven. The Carrolls started the Corpus Christi-based business in 2013 after returning from a yearlong Christian mission trip to Kazakhstan. The business has a storefront on Alameda St. in Meadowbrook Plaza.

“Our coffee roastery grew out of a love for our community and for ethically sourced coffee,” Randi Carroll said.

“We also realized this business could be a great way to stay connected internationally and support programs that are doing good in developing countries.”

According to Carroll, a first-generation college student who majored in studio art, her time at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi helped her gain the skills she would need as a small business owner, such as communication, time management, and confidence.

“TAMU-CC had the kind of vibe that facilitated and encouraged exploration,” Carroll said. “I fell in love with the campus and the faculty. I felt celebrated for following my heart.”

Carroll said the support of her professors and peers helped her find her creative voice and entrepreneurial spirit.

“My professors balanced this beautiful tension of believing in me and also inspiring me to push deeper into my creative process,” she said. “This new partnership with TAMU-CC has allowed me to give back to the space and people who supported me in a season of my life where exploring my dreams and how they intersected with reality was most pivotal.”

“I WANT STUDENTS TO KNOW THAT THERE ARE SO MANY WAYS TO SERVE AND GROW AND BE SUCCESSFUL IN CORPUS CHRISTI. STAYING HERE AFTER GRADUATION AND USING THE SKILLS THEY ACQUIRED WITHIN THIS COMMUNITY CAN BE FULFILLING AND BEAUTIFUL,” CARROLL SAID.

Carroll says that providing students with flavor through a sustainable local product is an aspiration actualized. Carroll hopes her product will inspire Islander students to give back to her hometown of Corpus Christi.

“I want students to know that there are so many ways to serve and grow and be successful in Corpus Christi. Staying here after graduation and using the skills
they acquired within this community can be fulfilling and beautiful,” Carroll said. “The opportunity is here. This city needs the incredible skills they possess to see new ventures explored and developed and old systems revamped and reimagined.”

Driftwood coffee is now served at the campus market located in the O’Connor Building and at Hemispheres Café in Island Hall. It is also exclusively served at events catered by Islander Dining. The brew comes in a variety of roasts, including light, dark, and decaffeinated, along with a signature medium blend only offered on the island.

“Serving our coffee on campus and creating a custom blend just for Islanders is a dream come true,” Carroll said. “It took our coffee to another level of being able to connect with students where they live, study, and grow. I hope our product helps Islanders have meaningful conversations that lead them to their purpose and their joy.”

For Emily Delaune ’25, a first-year Islander studying communication, the relationship that Islander Dining has formed with Driftwood Coffee Co. makes her decision to choose their coffee over corporate-owned competitors an easy one to make.

“I want to spend my money on a good cause with a local tie,” Delaune said. “I’ve never heard of an alumna-owned business on campus, so I think it’s really cool that she has the opportunity to give back to her alma mater.”
New Era Underway for Islanders Men’s Basketball

Islanders Athletics has brought in a new coach with Texas roots and a proven record of success. The Steve Lutz-era tipped off the start of 2021-22 men’s basketball season.

Lutz, from San Antonio, arrived in April 2021 after spending four seasons at Purdue as an assistant coach. During that span, the Boilermakers reached every NCAA Tournament, including an Elite Eight and a Sweet 16 appearance. Lutz also had highly successful stops at Creighton, SMU, Stephen F. Austin, Incarnate Word, and Garden City.

“It was with great honor that I accepted the offer to become the head men’s basketball coach at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi,” Lutz said. “This was the realization of a dream, and I look forward to working diligently to build a program that will make Islander fans proud. I was very eager to get to town and get started on the task of building a championship program.”

Lutz’s hiring was just the beginning of the revamped Islanders. Soon after, he filled out his staff with three new assistant coaches (Ralph Davis, Cole Dewey, and Jim Shaw), a new director of operations (Donald Reyes), a new video coordinator (Kevin Jewell) and a pair of graduate assistants (Ethan Jacobs and Jonathan Bell).

With staff in place, the group quickly hit the recruiting trails hard and ultimately brought in 11 newcomers from all over the country. They were also able to bring in local talent with eight student-athletes on the roster who either played high school or college ball in Texas. In total, the Islanders signed nine transfers and a pair of high school recruits.

The Islanders kept a few familiar faces. They returned three student-athletes, all of whom were starters last year.

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FOR MORE INFO: GOISLANDERS.COM

CONTACT US: 361.825.BALL (2255)
TICKETS@TAMUCC.EDU
Headlining the roster is senior guard Myles Smith ’21. The Klein native led the team in scoring in 2019-20 with 13.5 points per game and was second on the squad last year with 9.1 points, 4.3 rebounds, and 2.6 assists per outing.

“It’s been a welcoming experience with all the new guys that we brought in — they’re all really good guys and are here for the right reasons,” Smith said. “I have high expectations. I want to help put together a championship season and go out with a bang in my final year.”

Also returning are senior guard Simeon Fryer ’22, who hails from Orlando, Florida, and senior forward De’Lazarus Keys ’22, from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, who was the team’s leading rebounder last year with 8.9 points and 7.1 rebounds per game.

“It’s been going really well since day one this summer. Everyone on the team bonded really quickly and it’s really been like a family,” Keys said. “These new guys are hungry. They’re in the gym every day trying to get better and we’re staying focused on our goal of winning a Southland championship.”

The season is currently underway for the Islanders and the full schedule is online at goislanders.com. The men will compete in the SLC Preseason Tournament in Katy on Jan. 6-8 before beginning Southland play and will host UIW in the conference opener on Jan. 15 at 3:30 p.m. at the American Bank Center.

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

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

SCHOLARSHIPS CHANGE LIVES.
Invest in our student-athletes and change a life.
Cultivating Creative Minds
Island University Receives Initial Funding for New Arts and Media Building

The Island University is brimming with creative talent, and that talent and energy are shared beyond campus and into the surrounding community. From art walks to art shows, to local theatre performances and musical showcases, student-artists from Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi contribute greatly to the cultural offerings in our community.

Currently, Islander students in programs related to arts and media take most of their classes in the Center for the Arts, a building that has served the institution since 1977. Through the decades, the Center for the Arts has provided practice space for music majors, studio space for art majors, a graphics lab, space for firing kilns and pottery smelters, and an instrumental ensemble room in a two-floor, 84,000 square-foot facility. It’s home to the Warren Theatre, the Wilson Studio Theatre, and the Weil Art Gallery.

However, the School of Arts, Media, and Communication, better known as SAMC, has grown dramatically in recent years, and is operating in a building that was designed more than 40 years ago for a quarter of its current enrollment.

“Simply put, the university has outgrown the space, not just physically, but also the building is no longer fit to serve students of this modern, creative era,” said Dr. Kelly M. Miller, TAMU-CC President and CEO.

These challenges will soon be a thing of the past, thanks to passage of a Capital Assistance Project, or C-CAPS, in the Texas Legislature, Senate Bill 52 by Texas Sen. Brandon Creighton and Texas Rep. Greg Bonnen authorized $3.35 billion in total projects statewide, including $45 million for Texas A&M-Corpus Christi’s Arts and Media building. The funds will cover roughly half of the cost to build a new, yet-to-be-named Arts and Media building.

The bill was championed by Sen. Juan “Chuy” Hinojosa and Reps. Todd Hunter and Abel Herrero. The Texas A&M University System, team made up of Chancellor John Sharp, Vice Chancellor Jenny Jones, and Associate Vice Chancellor Luis Gonzalez, provided government relations advocacy for this long-running legislative priority for the Island University.

In addition to accommodating more students, the new Arts and Media building will provide state-of-the-art studio, theatre, rehearsal, and classroom space along with increased opportunities for incorporating the arts into innovative STEM research, known as STEAM. The new building will also include an exhibit area to showcase the work of National Medal of Freedom Recipient, Dr. Hector P. Garcia. Future plans include repurposing the Center for the Arts into much needed classroom and office space.

Having risen up the ranks over the past 27 years from an assistant professor at TAMU-CC to university president, Miller knows firsthand the need to replace the Center for the Arts.

“Having had an office across the hall from the band room for 12 years, I can tell you, when they practice, it sounds like they are in your office. The sounds resonate everywhere,” Miller said. “Our two theatres can’t have performances at the same time because so much sound escapes. The new facility will allow us to modernize with the goal of helping our students be more successful.”•
News Briefs

NURSING PROGRAM RECEIVES MULTIPLE ACCOLADES | College receives top honors in 2021

The Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi College of Nursing and Health Sciences (CONHS) scored top marks in 2021.

EduMed.org gave CONHS high praise in online education in the following categories:

- Best MSN in Nursing Administration
- Best MSN in Nursing Education
- Most Affordable DNP Program
- Most Affordable MSN Program
- Most Affordable Nurse Practitioner Program

Honors were based on a combination of online learning opportunity, affordability, and student support. Only 8% of U.S. postsecondary institutions earned a 2021 EduMed ranking.

In addition, TAMU-CC made the Study.com list of 2021 Best Degrees in Nursing. Study.com selected the Island University based on academic and career resources, the quality of education, faculty, and more.

U.S. News & World Report also recognized TAMU-CC on the Best Nursing Schools — Master’s list for 2021.

TAMU-CC BUSINESS FACULTY PENS UNIVERSITY HISTORY BOOK | Text released in advance of university’s 75th anniversary

Institutions of higher learning often have long and storied histories, and Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi is no exception. That history is captured in a new book, “The Island University: A History of Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi,” by Dr. Andrew Johnson, TAMU-CC Associate Professor and Associate Dean for Student Success for the College of Business.

The book provides a thorough look at the university’s 75-year existence. More than just a historical record, Johnson said the book offers readers a glimpse of how the Island University developed into what it is today and contains important stories for alumni, students, faculty, staff and future generations of Islanders.

The book is available at islanderalumni.org and where other books are sold. All profits from book sales will benefit the Dr. Andrew Johnson Endowed Pride and Traditions Award fund.

The book was created with support from all corners of the Islander community including President Emeritus Dr. Robert Furgason; Dr. Paul Orser, former Vice President for Planning and Institutional Effectiveness; and members of Institutional Advancement, the Mary and Jeff Bell Library, and the Marketing and Communications team.
In Memoriam

Joseph Lee Galloway, Jr.


Galloway, a native of Refugio, was the only civilian awarded the Bronze Star medal for valor during the Vietnam War. He received the honor for rescuing wounded soldiers under fire. He later co-authored the best-selling book, “We Were Soldiers Once… and Young,” which was made into the movie “We Were Soldiers,” starring Mel Gibson.

Galloway, who was interviewed in 2012 about being TAMU-CC’s Journalist-in-Residence, enthusiastically talked about his career, which spanned more than 50 years of covering conflicts in war-torn countries. In addition to his posting in Vietnam, Galloway covered combat operations in Kuwait and Iraq.

“When the opportunity presented itself to join the vibrant community… at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi, it was a no-brainer,” Galloway said. “I’ll tell the stories and draw the lessons and try to help [students] understand an increasingly complicated and difficult world. I look upon this appointment as an opportunity to give something back to my profession and to the larger Gulf Coast area where I grew up and where I chose to come home to in 2006 after my retirement.”

As Journalist-in-Residence, Galloway served as an advisor/consultant on the development of the university’s journalism and new media programs. He also worked with student journalists writing for the Island Waves campus newspaper, lectured to communication classes, and participated in university-sponsored events.

Iris Seldin Lehrman ’98

Iris (Seldin) Lehrman ’98, who fought a courageous battle with cancer, passed away peacefully Sept. 15, 2021.

Education was important to Lehrman, and after spending nearly two decades in the workforce, many of those as a successful fundraiser, she enrolled at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and earned a Bachelor of Arts in Communication in 1998.

Lehrman was well-known and respected in the Corpus Christi community for her volunteer work with many organizations including Clowns Who Care at Driscoll Children’s Hospital, the Jewish Community Center, where she served as president, Congregation Beth Israel (CBI) Board of Trustees, as well as president of the CBI Sisterhood. She was also a university donor.

According to University President Kelly M. Miller, who had the honor of serving as her professor for many courses, “Iris was a joy to have in the classroom. She inspired and befriended everyone she met.”
Dr. Samuel ‘Sammy’ Logsdon

The Islander community mourns the loss of Dr. Samuel “Sammy” Logsdon, who devoted more than 40 years as an educator, mentor, and music director. Logsdon passed away Aug. 27, 2021.

Logsdon first joined Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi in 1980 as a professor of music and was named professor emeritus of music after his retirement in 2011.

“As I review the truly great souls that I have had the privilege to know in my life, Sam is at the top,” said Flicka Rahn, TAMU-CC retired Professor of Music. “My life as a musician, teacher, contributing faculty member, and a person was touched by ‘Sam Magic.’ Nothing was beyond his magic, and his students and peers always felt safe and secure.”

Logsdon cultivated a close-knit community amongst the student body and faculty, who frequently referred to the music department as "The Village," with Logsdon designated as mayor.

“He carried the title of mayor with dignity and gratitude,” Rahn said.

According to Dee Donasco Thompson ’08, who double-majored in biology and music performance, Logsdon inspired her love of music and supported her decision to pursue singing despite a lack of prior formal training.

“He told me there are no limits,” said Thompson, who is now a professional musician at the Murfreesboro Academy of Music in Tennessee. “I’ve done so many things in my career that I never thought I could do because Dr. Logsdon believed in me.”

Thompson said besides music education and performance, Logsdon had one other passion — his wife, Rose Logsdon.

Rose, who passed away in 2017, was a registered nurse for more than 40 years. To honor her life and career achievements, the Logsdon family established the Rose Marie Logsdon Memorial Endowed Scholarship in Nursing for TAMU-CC students.

In memory of the couple, the family encourages donations to the endowment.

Lena Coleman-Wilson

Both a pioneer and a pillar to the Coastal Bend community, Island University friend and supporter Lena Coleman-Wilson died Sept. 8, 2021.

Coleman-Wilson moved to Corpus Christi in 1976. The Seguin native quickly made her mark throughout the Coastal Bend with her humanitarian efforts to improve the lives of those most vulnerable. Coleman-Wilson was an entrepreneur who founded two businesses: Lena Business Management and Consultant Firm and the LC Foundation Inc., the latter of which helped people with disabilities find permanent jobs. She also founded two housing communities geared toward helping senior citizens.

She held leadership positions in multiple local organizations including the NAACP, United Way, Chamber of Commerce, and League of Women Voters. She earned numerous awards and accolades in her lifetime and was an active member of her church.

In August 2010, the philanthropist presented Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi with $100,000 to help fund student scholarships, faculty enrichment, and programs focused on community engagement.

In 2012, Coleman-Wilson made an additional $200,000 donation to TAMU-CC to establish the Lena Coleman-Wilson “Hope Scholarship.” The scholarship helps local students with financial need, including Islander Cassandra Martinez Lopez ‘22 — a first-generation college student majoring in accounting.

“Receiving the Hope Scholarship has not only alleviated my financial burdens but has also helped my mental health,” said Martinez Lopez. “I have done everything that I can to reduce my financial liability. I worked three jobs this summer and did odd jobs.”

In 2020, the university recognized Coleman-Wilson’s cumulative gifts, which placed her in its Platinum Wave level ($500,000+). Her generosity to Islander students is memorialized with a plaque in the University Center’s Legacy Hall.
Junadeen Howard ’62 and Joe Howard ’63 now live in Denton. They enjoy their four children, 11 grandchildren, and 16 great grandchildren (with two on the way).

Cantrell (C.E.) Bryan ’65, ’76 enjoyed a 26-year career with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Coastal Fisheries.

Marlana Beatley Thomas ’70 retired from Texas schools in 2012. Marlana is also awaiting a second great-grandchild in December.

Linda Retzloff ’70 of Pleasanton, is retired after a rich and rewarding career in education. Linda volunteers at the local, district, and state level for the Texas Retired Teachers Association, advocating for improved benefits for all education retirees and promoting the well-being of its members.

Denis Afshar ’71 met his wife Stephanie at the University of Corpus Christi. The couple happily celebrated 50 years of marriage.

Gary Galyas ’72 welcomed twin great-grandsons into the family. The boys join their sister, who is two years old.

Charlotte Hackman ’78 retired from teaching and has published several books. Her first was published under the pen name, Jo Henry, and titled “The Strength to Let Go.”

After completing a 20+ year military career, James Hedges ’84 went on to work for a major Corpus Christi construction company and later for Texas Workforce Commission, from which he retired. He now resides in Georgetown.

Brian L. Lenhart ’86 is a doctoral candidate at Texas A&M University-Commerce, with a projected graduation date of 2022.

In 2016, after 27 years of service, Noe Pena ’87 retired from state service from the Texas Department of Family Protective Services and is currently enjoying retirement.

Maxwell Ivey ’90 was selected as a mentor in the Blind Leader Development Program operated by the American Foundation for the Blind.

Grany Cooper ’92 graduated from the family nurse practitioner program at Arizona State University in 1994 and today runs a thriving family practice.

Francisco R. Trevino ’92 released the new album, “Nowhere to be Found,” by Steven Garcia. The album was released through Love Sick Dog Publishing.

Dr. Candace Zepeda ’00 is the chair of the Department of Undergraduate and Graduate English and the school director for the Ruben M. and Veronica-Salazar Escobedo School of Mass Communications and Theater at Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio. Candace is also a tenured associate professor of English.
Grace M. Hudson ’03 (Van Arsdol) earned a master’s degree in nursing from Minnesota State University, Mankato, in July 2021. She currently works as a labor and delivery registered nurse at United Hospital, St. Paul, Minnesota.

In June 2021, Jason Pruett ’05 joined international technology company, Jabra, as senior product marketing manager for video collaboration solutions. He works for the Danish brand remotely from San Antonio.

Sean Britt ’06, ’09 was awarded the Faculty Excellence in Service Award from Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi for the 2020-2021 academic year.


Gregg Birdy ’07 owns a third-generation family real estate and property management firm. The firm was recognized as a 2021 Top Workplace by the San Antonio Express-News.

Dr. Nicholas Huffeldt ’08 will start as a Marie Sklodowska-Curie Research Fellow at Lund University, Sweden, in January 2022, and will continue working on global change biology and Arctic animals.

Tonya Delk ’09 married Brian Claunch in July 2021.

2010s

Alyssa Barrera Mason ’10, ’12 became a Certified Economic Developer (CEcD) at the annual International Economic Development Council (IEDC) Conference in Nashville, Tennessee. With just 1,100 worldwide, the CEcD is the most prestigious designation in the economic development profession.

Rebecca Belcher ’10 was promoted to head of client success at a prominent IT company in the UK, after having worked as a client project manager for three years. She works with clients throughout the globe, from Canada to Singapore, and even in Texas.

Captain R.J. Sanchez ’10 received his commission as an officer from the Islander Army ROTC program in 2010. He is currently deployed overseas in support of Operation Spartan Shield. He is also a teacher and first assistant basketball coach at Edison High School in San Antonio.

Elvia Rodriguez ’11 is an academic advisor for Tyler Junior College in Tyler. Elvia continues to be involved in the higher education field because she loves the environment and really enjoys working with students.

As of fall 2021, Christina Vourcos ’11, ’17 has accomplished three years of teaching and is currently an English as a Second Language instructor for the Education Service Center Region 2 Crossroads Adult Education and Literacy Program. During her free time, she is working on her debut novel.

Dr. Megan Arnold ’12 and Joshua Gilliam were married in April 2021. Megan has been practicing in Spring, Texas, since graduating in May 2018 from Texas A&M University’s College of Veterinary Medicine.

Pamela Pettis ’13 is the head physical education/health teacher at Zavala Elementary in the Corpus Christi Independent School District, a certified group fitness instructor, certified fitness nutritionist specialist with ACE PROGRAM, and was recently certified as a Zumba instructor.

Dr. Alma Williams ’13 was hired as the literacy specialist in the Aransas Pass Independent School District and is also the district’s reading academies comprehensive cohort leader for all kindergarten through third grade teachers.

Anastasia Fillmore ’14 was accepted to the master’s level social work program at Texas A&M University-Kingsville.

Clinton Yates ’16 joined the CLO client accounting team at Oak Hill Advisors, onboarding with The Bank of New York Mellon as a manager, fund/client accountant.

After meeting their freshman year through Fraternity and Sorority Life, Karson Foster ’17 and Jordan McDaniel ’19 were married on Sept. 25, 2021, in Liberty Hill.

After two years teaching in Hawaii, Alyssa Garcia ’17 followed another dream and became a flight attendant at a major airline. She now spends her days traveling the world, one country at a time.

Sarai Garza ’17 is the section leader for a kindergarten team in the Corpus Christi Independent School District. She is currently teaching English-language learner students and instilling the love of learning during some challenging years.
Meagan Harris ’17 earned a master’s degree from Texas A&M University in 2020. She is using her newly earned degree to start her career in academia at Coastal Bend College-Pleasanton, teaching English.

Kiara (Kiki) Marshall ’17 accepted a position with UNATION as the content lead for the San Antonio team.

Andrea Rodriguez ’17 represented Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and the Mexican Consulate of Austin in Mexico’s Volunteer and Cultural Immersion Program in Mexico City and Hidalgo, along with 80 other young adults of Mexican descent from the United States and Canada.

Kelsey Jae Barrera ’18, ’20 was accepted into the doctorate program in counselor education at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. Kelsey is excited to continue her educational aspirations as an Islander.

Sammi Bivens ’18 was named a finalist in The UPS Store Virtual 2021 Small Biz Challenge. She participated in a virtual competition with celebrity judge and TV star Carla Hall.

Jasmine DeLeon ’18 and Joseph Guevara ’18 got married in March 2021. They met while taking a philosophy course together, then realized they were neighbors! Jasmine recently accepted a position at the Empowerment Center at San Antonio College and Joseph was recently promoted to lead his software development department.

After meeting at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, Noah Margate ’18 and Meredith Lee ’18 were engaged on Feb. 27, 2021. They will get married in May 2022.

Heather Mckoy ’18 bought her first home!

Wyatt Page ’18 was named 2021 Green Profit/The Garden Center Group Young Retailer of the Year. He currently works at Gill Garden Center + Landscape Co. in Corpus Christi.

Dr. William Pate ’18 was appointed by Gov. Greg Abbott to serve as Chair of the Texas Radiation Advisory Board. The board advises the state on radiation issues and reviews the rules, policies, and programs of state agencies that regulate radiation.

Morgan Gawlik Reyes ’18 is working at a local hospital and pursuing a Master of Science in Nursing at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. Her goal is to become a family nurse practitioner and help others in her community, one patient at a time.

Erica Trujillo ’18 begun a career with the Department of Family and Protective Services in Austin.

Bobby Villarreal ’18 was promoted to Account Manager 3 at Adlucent in Austin.

In fall 2021, Joseph Eberhardt ’19 started his dream job and returned to his high school alma mater, Glenda Dawson High School in Pearland.

Alexie Galeas ’19 was accepted to Texas Tech University graduate school.

In only her second year of teaching, Jeanette Gonzalez ’19 was named the Partnerships in Comprehensive Leadership lead for her fifth grade English Language Arts team at a school in Bastrop.

Garrett M. Hodge ’19, ’21 graduated with a Master of Business Administration and was recently hired as a market specialist with AEP.

Mathile Hornback ’19 completed a master’s degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling at Colorado Christian University in December 2021 and will begin her dream career in January 2022 as a clinical mental health counselor.

Thomas Keller ’19 landed a dream job as a Software Developer for Halliburton Drill Bits and Services.

Richard A. Schreiber ’19 earned three awards in the past year: the Special Act Award for exemplary contributions through the creation of a new tool, the Shining Star Award for leadership on a special project, and the Administrator’s Award for exemplifying excellence through innovation.

Max Smith ’19 was hired as the Digital Marketing Specialist at the Region 10 Education Service Center in Richardson.

Razan Valle ’19 of Fort Worth, has been using the knowledge she gained via her Master of Science in Instructional Design and Educational Technology to initiate a new Associate of Applied Science (AAS) at Tarrant County College in the field of Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI). This will be the only AAS in MRI in the North Texas/DFW Metroplex.

Austin Vallejo ’19 is working as a permanent government employee for the Department of Defense, earning multiple promotions, and was awarded a commander’s coin by a 4-star general. He also recently became a first-time homeowner.
After meeting as first-year Islanders in Dr. Judy Metcalf’s biology class in spring 2017, Kevin Arellano ’20 and Isabella Moon ’20 started dating. In December 2020, the couple married in Corpus Christi.

Sarita Deleon ’20 purchased a new house and will be welcoming a new child next year.

Cindy Gutierrez ’20 of Houston, recently moved to New York City to launch her professional career in medical marketing.

Caitlyn Hagans ’20 is a facilities engineer technician for an oil and gas company.

Melissa Palacios ’20 was named volunteer coordinator for the Buccaneer Commission and will oversee the Buc Days Port of Corpus Christi Leadership Program. She is also a new contributing writer for Coastal Bend Mom Collective.

Layla Perez ’20 is working for the healthcare software company, Cerner. She is a learning leader, on the federal team, coordinating training efforts for clients across the United States, and soon, internationally.

Samuel Roelke, ’20 of Bryan, is working at Hidden Falls Salmon Hatchery for Northern Southeast Regional Aquaculture Association, Inc. on Baranof Island, Alaska.

Jordan Thurston ’20 was named senior vice president, global head of production operations governance for Citigroup, Inc. in Irving.

Tia Wigley ’20 was named program coordinator of Brain Balance Achievement Centers in San Antonio and New Braunfels, all while pursuing a master’s degree in counseling and development.

Sarah Baker ’21 works for AYTM, a remote survey and marketing company.

LeeEllen Crider ’21 of Ingram, recently purchased a house!

In fulfillment of her career dreams, Erica Huerta ’21 teaches fifth grade at Galvan Elementary in the Corpus Christi Independent School District. After this year, she plans to return to Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi to obtain a master’s degree in education.

Sofia Lara ’21 is pursuing a Master of Science in Food Science at Texas A&M University.

Jennifer Raatz ’21 was accepted to an accelerated Bachelor of Science in Nursing program.

Minas Tsambounieris ’21 attended Hellenic College Holy Cross where he received a master’s degree in divinity in May 2021. He currently is a youth director for the Greek Orthodox Church of the Annunciation in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.
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