

# the Islander

A woman with long dark hair is wearing a black HTC Vive VR headset and two black hand tracking devices. She is looking upwards and to the right, with her right hand raised and her left hand pointing towards the camera. The background is a solid light blue color. The word "the" is written in a small, white, sans-serif font to the left of the word "Islander", which is written in a large, white, serif font.

## ISLANDER INNOVATION

Machine learning-enabled technologies create realistic experiences that complement traditional instruction methods

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# Dear Islanders,

The fall semester has been incredibly exciting, and within the pages of this Islander Magazine, you'll catch a glimpse of that excitement created through the research, creative activity, and innovation that takes place every day on this beautiful campus.

Islanders are fearlessly embracing the ever-changing landscape of technology and harnessing its transformative force for the greater good of our community. Whether it is deploying cutting-edge artificial intelligence to protect our cherished beaches, pioneering magnetic nanotechnology for revolutionary at-home dental care, or leaving an indelible mark on the downtown Corpus Christi art scene and advancing quality of place, there is no denying that Islanders are making an impact.

This edition of the Islander Magazine takes you on a journey to protect and preserve our community's rich history and invites you to join us as we bring that mission to life. You will learn about the triumphant story of Christina Campos '14, '16, whose summer at NASA's Johnson Space Center exemplifies her dedication to inspiring her students, as well as her own family, to reach for the stars.

Texas A&M-Corpus Christi is more than just a place of higher learning; we are a community where dreams are nurtured, innovation is fostered, aspirations are fulfilled, and memories are made.

As you turn the pages of this magazine, you will see example after example of the



passion, innovation, and drive that defines what it truly means to be an Islander. Thank you for all you do to support your Island University and advance our Islander Impact.

Sincerely,

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



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# *Tomorrow's Technology,* **TODAY**

EXPLORING THE FUTURE OF INNOVATION AT THE ISLAND UNIVERSITY

*Machine learning-enabled technologies create realistic experiences that complement traditional instruction methods*

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Across the Island University, the influences of artificial intelligence (AI) and extended reality (XR) are reshaping the landscape of learning and training. Just as AI-XR has ignited global discussions about its seemingly boundless potential across economic and academic sectors, so have these conversations permeated the various facets of Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. AI-XR has catalyzed a paradigm shift, as daily discussions continue as to how these technologies could revolutionize the future.

*Continued on the following page.*











## IMMERSIVE REALITY LAB

This summer, the Island University unveiled its Immersive Reality Lab (IRL), located in the Mary and Jeff Bell Library. Using the latest in XR software and virtual reality (VR) headsets, the lab offers unique opportunities for Islanders to explore cutting-edge and interactive learning experiences.

The IRL also features Cave Automatic Virtual Environment (CAVE) technology, a three-wall, wrap-around, highly immersive projection space, which, when used with stereoscopic glasses, offers users near-complete freedom of movement and the ability to view rendered 3D objects from individual points of view.

“Institutions that offer XR lab space and training not only fosters student innovation, but helps to prepare them for careers in fields such as engineering, gaming, health care, and more,” said Joseph Doan, IRL Coordinator.

Dr. Callie Shaw, Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice, is one of the first faculty members to implement the use of XR content into her classroom pedagogy. It allows her students to step into virtual environments that closely replicate real-life scenarios.

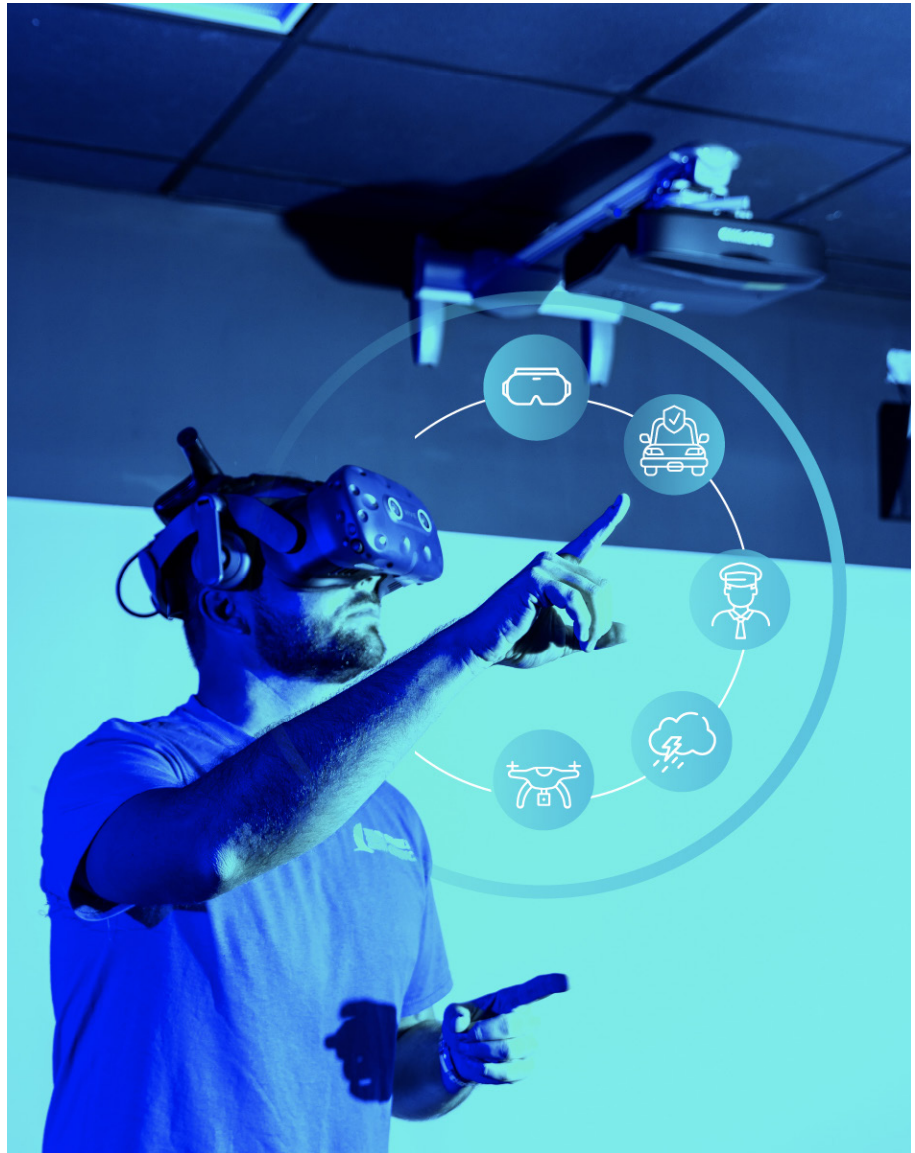
“Traditional methods of teaching and learning in criminal justice often rely on theoretical concepts and hypothetical scenarios, which can sometimes feel detached from the reality of actual law enforcement situations,” Shaw said. “By leveraging the IRL’s immersive technology, we see an opportunity to provide our students with a more realistic and experiential learning environment.”



## SMART CARS

In the College of Engineering and Computer Science, a trio of researchers is on a quest to fortify the future of autonomous vehicles, also known as Smart Cars, against the looming specter of cyberattacks. Fueled by a \$500,000 grant from the Department of Transportation, the team is working to uncover ways to safeguard our roadways and ensure the integrity of connected autonomous vehicle (CAV) systems.

“We are conducting research on the use of AI-powered voice assistants for handling accident management policies for Smart Cars,” the researchers said. “These next-generation assistants will



leverage chatbots, which will summarize and retrieve large amounts of information pertaining to the security and safety of mission-critical CAV settings. The result is a more efficient and convenient experience for Smart Car riders.”

The team consists of Dr. Carlos Rubio-Medrano, Assistant Professor of Computer Science and CYBER-CARE Associate Director of Education and Workforce Development; Dr. Mehdi Sookhak, Assistant Professor of Computer Science; and Dr. Wenlu Wang, Assistant Professor of Computer Science.



## POLICE TRAINING

The University Police Department has adopted a cutting-edge police training simulator to enhance the preparedness of its officers for real-life incidents. This simulator offers immersive

scenarios that delve deep into human performance, applying insights from cognitive neuroscience and human physiology, to police training techniques. The scenarios dynamically evolve based on the decisions of the instructor, trainee, or the entire team, delivering a comprehensive and adaptive training experience.

“Our new immersive reality training modules cover a wide range of scenarios, from routine traffic stops to high-stress situations. This versatility allows for valuable learning opportunities,” said Lt. George Herrera. “In addition, we are able to receive instant feedback and performance metrics for our officers to track and improve their progress over time.”





## FORECASTING THE FUTURE

AI is hardly a new concept for the seasoned researchers at the Conrad Blucher Institute for Surveying and Science. CBI has used artificial intelligence for nearly 25 years to predict and better understand the environment. As one of the first institutes in the nation to use AI to make environmental predictions along the Gulf Coast, CBI co-leads one of the five inaugural national AI institutes established by the National Science Foundation (NSF).

Working with other educational partners and entities like IBM, Google, and National Laboratories, CBI researchers and students are developing trustworthy AI to address weather, climate, and coastal hazard predictions. Using big data and satellite imagery, AI models are helping to anticipate and better understand beach inundation, which can affect businesses, residents, and activities along the coast. Similar AI models are being used to predict coastal fog, allowing planes and ships to transport goods and passengers more safely and efficiently. AI models are also helping to forecast cold-stunning events that impact sea turtles, giving response and recovery efforts more time to mobilize.

“With the growing interest and advancements in AI, CBI continues its endeavors to build trustworthy AI that improves lives and preserves resources and

ecosystems along the Gulf Coast,” said Dr. Philippe Tissot, CBI Chair for Coastal Artificial Intelligence.



## NEXT-GEN DRONES

At the headquarters for the Texas A&M-Corpus Christi Lone Star UAS Center for Excellence and Innovation (LSUASC), drone pilots undergo training using advanced VR simulators. This new technology seamlessly blends live, tangible equipment and simulated aircraft to recreate scenarios such as traffic incursions and congested airspace, providing an immersive training experience.

Multiple aircraft operations, or MACOPS, are tightly controlled, closely choreographed events that require each pilot to implicitly trust themselves, and their fellow pilots. The XR simulator allows pilots to see other aircraft, helps them to identify their own aircraft, and keeps their sense of situational awareness during operations.

“This is especially helpful when running simulations and training for specific research missions and even disaster response operations,” said Tye Payne, LSUASC Assistant Director of Operations, Testing, and Evaluation. “Each crew knows exactly what they are supposed to do, what it should look like, and how they need to conduct themselves.”

LSUASC spent two years developing the

concept, and following a competitive bid process, worked closely with the winning organization’s engineers to build out the \$2 million simulator.

“This virtual capability is the first step in our larger vision of creating a synthetic environment which also supports research, development, and testing for faculty and students, as well as state and federal agencies, and commercial operators,” said Mike Sanders, LSUASC Executive Director. •

*“By leveraging the immersive technology available at the IRL, we saw an opportunity to provide our students with a more realistic and experiential learning environment.”*

**JOSEPH DOAN**, Immersive Reality Lab Coordinator



## Join us in our commitment to student success and make your Islander Impact!

President’s Circle is a special opportunity for alumni and community members to get involved with their Island University and support the vision of our faculty, staff, and President and CEO, Dr. Kelly M. Miller.

### MEMBER BENEFITS

Members receive an inside look into the current happenings on campus, with exclusive event programming and correspondence from President Miller.

[PresidentsCircle.tamucc.edu](https://PresidentsCircle.tamucc.edu)



JOIN TODAY!

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



# MAGNETIC SMILE

## *TAMU-CC Researchers Work to Revolutionize Dental Technology*

In our state-of-the-art labs, Islander researchers are using groundbreaking technology on a project that could change our dental care routine as we know it.

The research, funded by an initial \$256,000 grant from the National Science Foundation, makes use of an interactive remote-controlled toothpaste/toothbrush combination called MNT SHINE that uses highly magnetic and anti-bacterial properties to target gums, cavities, and hard-to-reach tooth crevices.

MNT, or Magnetic NanoTechnology, SHINE will treat existing plaque and bacteria and is predicted to prevent the growth of harmful biofilms that are responsible for an estimated 80% of all oral microbial infections. These bacteria can cause cavities, tooth decay, gingivitis, periodontitis, and gum disease. Gum disease contributes to tooth loss, which is a major cause of disability, while gingivitis and periodontitis are linked to serious health conditions including diabetes, cancer, Alzheimer's disease, and cardiovascular disease, and can lead to a buildup of plaque in the heart and arteries. The product could also assist people with hard-to-clean braces or other orthodontic devices.

Spearheading the project is Dr. Leisha Armijo-Martin, Nanomaterials Engineer and Nanotoxicologist. Martin is working closely with co-investigator Dr. Wei Xu, Associate Professor of Life Sciences, and a group of all-female Islander students.

“TAMU-CC has provided me with a diverse, talented group of students and the opportunity to offer these students mentorship in STEM and uniquely female struggles,” Martin said. “Our group is able to discuss challenges and successes in an informal setting among others who can relate to them.”

Kimberly Lopez '22, '28 is a student in the Coastal and Marine Science Systems doctoral program who started working with Martin in 2021 during her undergraduate program in mechanical engineering technology. Martin describes Lopez as her “right hand.”

“Working with Dr. Martin has been inspiring,” Lopez said. “She found a way to improve dental health, is doing research, and started a company to produce a product for the people. She works on the project day



### DEAN WELCOME

Dr. F. Eloy Hernández was announced as the inaugural dean of the College of Science in spring 2023.

*“I am excited to join a new college that will impact the region through research and innovation, teaching and learning, and community engagement.” •*





in and day out with hardly any rest. She's a fighter. She fights for her family, work, and students. I am proud of everything she has done."

Other collaborators include MNT Support Solutions, LLC., the University of Texas at Austin, the University of New Mexico, and the University of Bristol in England.

The team is currently using mice as test subjects, with testing so far shown to eradicate infections and reduce inflammation in the gums of the mice. In compliance with U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations, the team is required to perform additional safety testing, including testing on a nonrodent species, before proceeding to human clinical trials.

The research has earned high praise,

including being selected for the Ocean Optics Young Investigator Award from the SPIE Photonics West conference group. The research also received a letter of support from Dr. Howard Tenenbaum, DSS, Ph.D., Dip. Perio., dental professor and highly esteemed expert in periodontology. Tenenbaum was formerly the Dentist-in-Chief at Mount Sinai Hospital.

"The impact of this [research] is, quite frankly, enormous," Tenenbaum said. "Dr. Martin's system ... represents one of the best tools I've seen so far that can be used to deliver interventional care. The clinical potential of this system is almost unlimited."

Dr. Marcos E. Garcia '14, who earned a Bachelor of Science in Biomedical Science from TAMU-CC and is a

periodontist at South Texas Periodontics & Implants, also showed support for the emerging technology.

"It is very exciting to see this innovative work being done at my alma mater," Garcia said.

Once MNT SHINE is FDA-approved, it will be marketed to orthodontic patients with the goal of landing on local store shelves within the next two years.

"At the end of the day, this project is about improving the quality of care available to everyday people," Martin said. "Toothpaste should move, it should scrub — our high-tech, interactive toothbrush and toothpaste combination is the dental care routine of the future." •



CHRISTINA CAMPOS '14, '16

# TAKING EDUCATION TO NEW HEIGHTS





In the West Oso Junior High School classroom of Christina Campos '14, '16, the walls come alive with vibrant displays of inspiration. Paper-cut astronauts, planets, and rocket ships take flight alongside uplifting messages, creating an atmosphere of limitless possibilities. Amid this cosmic backdrop, an Islander flag hangs proudly, serving as a beacon of academic achievement.

As Campos guides her students through their educational journeys, she surrounds herself with reminders of her own accomplishments. The collection of degrees and graduation photos pinned to her bulletin board are a testament to her hard work and dedication. Yet, it is the pictures of her family that hold the greatest significance to her.

The two-time Islander alumna, who works as a West Oso Junior High science teacher and STEM campus coordinator, was the only Coastal Bend teacher selected to attend the 2023 LiftOff Summer Institute, a weeklong teacher workshop at the NASA Johnson Space Center in Houston. There, she interacted with NASA researchers, participated in hands-on activities, networked with other educators, and met famed Apollo 13 astronaut, Fred Haise.

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*“I felt empowered ... to bring these experiences back to my students. I am forever changed.”*

**CHRISTINA CAMPOS '14, '16,**  
West Oso teacher

“At the beginning of the trip, I felt like I was not deserving. I felt like, because of my background, some other teacher was smarter than me and should have been asked to go in my place,” she said. “As the days went on, I found my place in this NASA experience. I felt empowered, not just for myself, but empowered to bring these experiences back to my students. I am forever changed.”

Campos' path to teaching is one of resilience and determination. She grew up on the west side of Corpus Christi in a tight-knit yet underserved community.

As a child, she lost her older brother to leukemia. Faced with an unexpected pregnancy, she dropped out of Moody High School in the 11th grade. She eventually earned her GED and worked several entry-level jobs before the same courage she summoned to leave an abusive relationship ignited her drive to go back to school.

As a newly single mother of two, Campos found employment as a program specialist at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi in 2010. She attended Del Mar College in 2011, then transferred to TAMU-CC where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in Communication in spring 2014. In September 2014, she married the love of her life, Jose.

“The professors knew that I was a single mom, that I was really working hard, and I was a first-generation student,” she said. “They often checked in with me to ask me how I was doing or if I needed anything. I am still friends with my professors, and we have these amazing partnerships now.”

Campos' initial career aspiration was to become a sports broadcaster, but after giving birth to a child with special needs, she set her sights on a new goal — becoming a teacher. She earned a Master of Science in Instructional Design and Educational Technology from TAMU-CC in 2016, and two years later, she landed her dream job at West Oso Junior High.

“No one in my family ever graduated high school, or college — ever. I was the first to break the cycle,” Campos said. “I knew that coming to West Oso was the right choice for me. I'm changing lives here. I wake up every morning super passionate about what I do.”

At West Oso, Campos' days are filled with all things STEM — from curriculum development and teaching, to extracurricular activities like Robotics Club, STEM Girls Club, and preparation for STEM-related competitions such as the science fair. Many of her students aspire to be the first in their families to attend college, just like Campos.

“Mrs. Campos is inspiring me to be a better student by showing me things I can do through STEM and how things can change for me,” said Ava Garcia, a West Oso eighth grade member of the STEM Girls Club.

Campos takes pride in being one of the few Texas teachers accepted to the Society for Science. Each summer, she



#### LIMITLESS SPACE INSTITUTE

Campos '14, '16 touring the Limitless Space Institute while attending the 2023 LiftOff Summer Institute.

embarks on an educational pilgrimage to the organization's Washington, D.C. headquarters to eagerly immerse herself in continuing education that equips her with fresh and captivating teaching strategies. This year, she successfully secured funding through the organization to take some of her students to the prestigious Regeneron International Science and Engineering Fair, the world's largest pre-college science fair. Campos was also chosen as a Society for Science Lead Advocate, one of 100 selected, and the only one from Texas.

“For college, I'd probably like to go to TAMU-CC, just like Mrs. Campos,” said Juan Aviles, an eighth grader at West Oso. “I really want to be an aerospace engineer. She's inspired me because of her story. She didn't get the opportunities that we have. So, I make sure I'm taking advantage of what I have right now for Mrs. Campos.”

Campos is thrilled to have broken the cycle of missed educational opportunities. Her oldest daughter graduated from TAMU-CC in 2021 and is a STEM teacher in San Antonio. Her oldest son, a senior at Corpus Christi's Moody High School, is involved in a mentorship program through the TAMU-CC College of Engineering and Computer Science. Her husband Jose is a first-year psychology major at TAMU-CC this fall.

“I'm growing a family of proud Islanders,” she said. “TAMU-CC is one of my favorite places in the whole world. It's a place that I'll always call home.” •

Bell Library is home to an immersive and interactive Islander-themed mural that was designed by students.



# INSPIRING A VISUAL *revolution*

*The innovative graphic design program at the Island University has made a lasting impact through its unique format combining service-learning, community outreach, and transformative design.*



## REDESIGNING *downtown Corpus Christi*



### TEXAS STATE AQUARIUM

- Designed merchandise and social media graphics



### RITZ THEATRE

- Highlighted history and untapped potential of the building
- Encouraged donor support
- Raised awareness for renovations



### CORPUS CHRISTI HOOKS

- Designed interactive murals that incorporated augmented reality activation via Instagram filters

## HANDS ON *learning*

### MEXICO STUDY ABROAD

- Learned fundamentals of Risograph printing and digital illustration
- Explored art, culture, and architecture



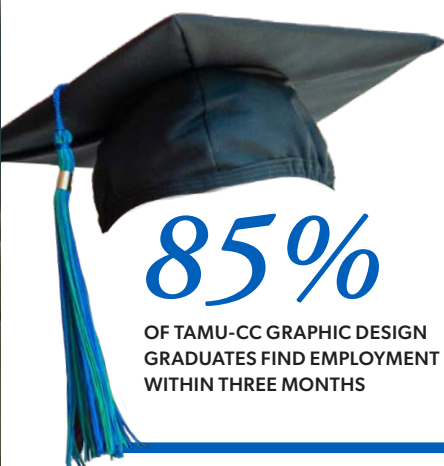
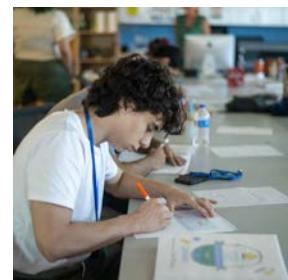
### AAF ONE DAY EVENT

- Paired with local nonprofits and volunteer creatives, including Islander alumni
- Created no-cost marketing campaigns



### CAMP DPI

- Graphic design summer camp for prospective students
- Provided mentorship and enhanced diversity in the arts



# 85%

OF TAMU-CC GRAPHIC DESIGN GRADUATES FIND EMPLOYMENT WITHIN THREE MONTHS



**NO. 5**  
*Top 10 Graphic Design Program in Texas (2022)*



**NO. 7**  
*Top 10 Graphic Design Program in Texas (2022)*



**NO. 8**  
*Best Graphic Design School in Texas (2021)*



# ACCESS THROUGH ARCHIVES

## *Unveiling the historical treasures of the Island University's Special Collections and Archives*

While libraries are universally recognized institutions, the role of Special Collections and Archives within a library is one that is often overlooked, despite its vital significance. At Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, the Special Collections and Archives at the Mary and Jeff Bell Library serves as an invaluable repository of historical records, housing a diverse array of rare books, correspondence, and precious artifacts. These items, characterized by their fragility, uniqueness, and immense value, require specialized skills and meticulous preservation procedures.

“The archivists within Special Collections and Archives at TAMU-CC function as the caretakers of critical community and cultural history from a wide spectrum of perspectives,” said Dr. Cate Rudowsky, Dean of University Libraries. “Our archival collections are used by historians not just to study and research history, but to write it as well.”

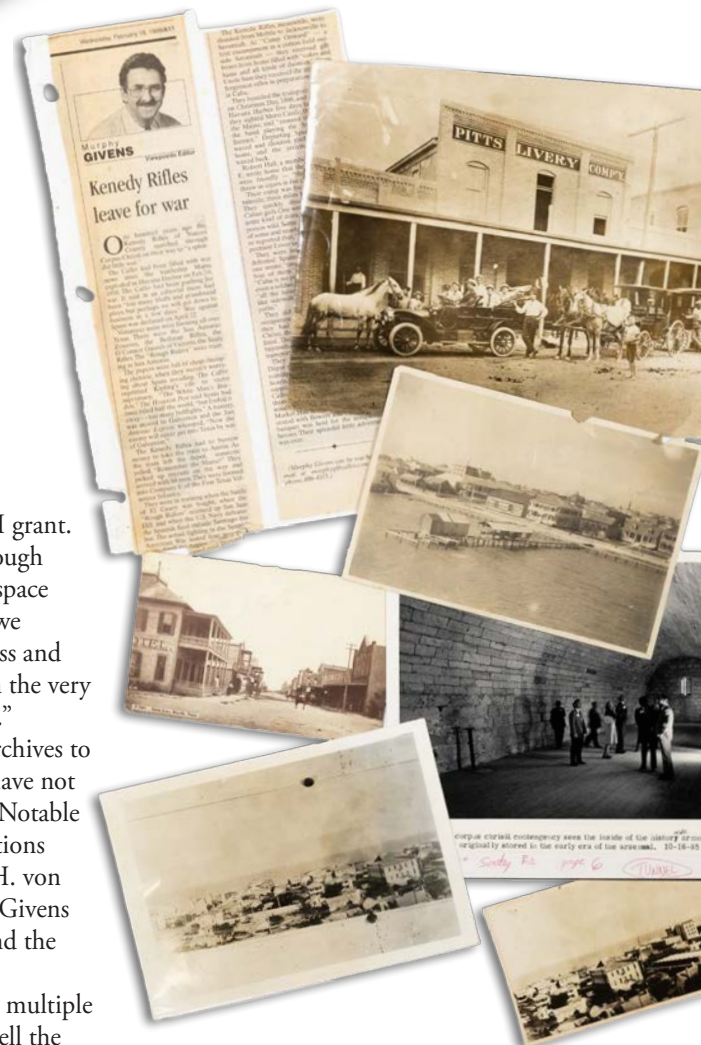
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Artifacts from the Charles F. H. von Blucher Family Papers including photographs of Charles and Mary's children, his mother, Maria von Blucher, and his daughter, Marie von Blucher.



The Murphy Givens Papers contain research and columns from his work at the Corpus Christi Caller-Times and focus on the history of the Coastal Bend.

While preservation of archives is a top priority, ensuring access to these historic records is equally important. The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) recently awarded the Island University a three-year \$500,000 federal matching funds grant to initiate the relocation of the archives from the Bell Library to the university's downtown mixed-use building. The five-story building, located at 223 N. Chaparral St., was purchased in 2019. Current plans for the space include converting the second floor into the new Special Collections and Archives area.

The Island's archival space has now reached capacity, and the transfer to a larger, purpose-built facility will provide enhanced long-term storage options, including improved hurricane protection and environmental controls. Moreover, the new state-of-the-art space will incorporate a dedicated digitization lab, cold storage for the preservation of film and photographs, and an exhibition space, the latter of which will showcase numerous collections to better engage the community and share its rich history.

"History belongs to everyone and increasing access allows the university's Special Collections and Archives to provide an important service to the community," said Rudowsky, who is the

primary investigator on the NEH grant. "By expanding our footprint through engaging exhibits and multi-use space in the new downtown building, we can increase community awareness and encourage their engagement with the very history they are helping to create."

The move will also allow the archives to highlight many collections that have not received the notice they deserve. Notable among the more than 300 collections and counting are the Charles F. H. von Blucher Collection, the Murphy Givens Papers, the L.H. Gross Papers, and the Dan E. Kilgore Collection.

The Blucher Collection houses multiple generations of records that help tell the story of the growth and construction of the area. While the men served the community as surveyors, the women were avid writers and had the forethought to ensure their story was preserved. The collection holds many community connections in the multitude of maps and letters — from matriarch Maria von Blucher, to records concerning Charles' daughter Marie, who was hired as Corpus Christi's first librarian in 1914.

"The efforts of the Blucher women were instrumental in providing us with a woman's perspective of pioneer life," said Dr. Rick Smith '03, '06, Executive

Director of the TAMU-CC Conrad Blucher Institute. "Maria was really a frontierswoman. While Felix was away surveying, Maria shouldered the burdens of maintaining their homestead, while also teaching piano, writing, and language



to their five children and others. The letters she wrote to her parents in Prussia span nearly three decades and give us insight into her extraordinary experience as a German immigrant in early Corpus Christi. Later, it was the efforts of her granddaughter, Marie, that helped preserve those letters and arrange for their translation from German to English so we could gain from their historical value.”

*“History belongs to everyone and increasing access allows the university ... to provide an important service to the community.”*

**DR. CATE RUDOWSKY,**  
Dean of Libraries

One of the newer acquisitions for the university’s archives is the Murphy Givens Papers. Givens, who passed away in 2020, was a longtime Corpus Christi Caller-Times reporter, historian, and author who contributed significantly to the understanding of the history and culture of South Texas. In 2022, his family donated his legendary accounts of local and state history to the university.

“He put his blood, sweat, and tears into these papers, and while Murphy was very self-effacing, he took every comment and compliment about his work personally,” said Karen Givens, Murphy’s wife of 40 years. “We’re very proud of his works and we hope it encourages everyone who sees it to think critically and ask questions.”

Alongside the Givens papers are many photographs, which have been digitized by the Bell Library to provide accessibility to those who cannot visit the library in person.

“Having a state-of-the-art digitization lab in the new building will ensure even greater preservation and access to the collections, and will ensure that fragile documents can be seen and experienced throughout the world,” Rudowsky said.

“It opens history up beyond those able to visit physically and expands awareness of our unique South Texas history and the rich stories that history holds.”

The downtown building also allows for better protection from storms. The 77,000-square-foot building, built in 1947, is made of poured concrete and has survived six hurricanes. The new space has the added protection of the surrounding seawall that will aid in defense against both rain and storm surges.

It is interesting to note that both the Gross Papers and the Kilgore Collection hold hundreds of records regarding hurricanes. The Gross Papers include picture postcards that document the 1919 Hurricane, while the Kilgore Collection includes books and papers that depict the

damage left behind by Hurricane Celia and other hurricanes. The weather log for Corpus Christi in 1919 is also part of a rare book collection in Special Collections and Archives, and gives a firsthand account of the storm and its impact.

“The archives are anything but a dusty forgotten storage room of records; they help bridge the community and university through their work,” Rudowsky said. “Archives tell the stories of our past, which are essential to understanding our present and planning for our future. They ensure that no moment in time is forgotten and that our futures are better informed.” •



*Hurricane records that include publications from the Dan E. Kilgore Collection, postcards from the L.H. Gross Papers, and the 1919 Weather Log.*





# ISLAND OF SERVICE

## *Community Engagement through the Island University's Collaborative Projects*

In the heart of Corpus Christi, where the city's vibrant energy and the pursuit of knowledge converge, stands Texas A&M-Corpus Christi. A connector of aspirations and opportunities, TAMU-CC proudly occupies the intersection of higher education and the community it serves.

Through countless partnerships, the Island University — its students, faculty, staff, and alumni — remains dedicated to utilizing its intellectual capital in service to the community. Each partnership not only creates a profound Islander Impact for those directly involved, but also sends forth a far-reaching ripple that resonates with countless others.

Across the Coastal Bend, one need only look to the Texas State Aquarium, Valero Energy Corp., and Corpus Christi International Airport — three of the best-known names in the region — as enthusiastic collaborators with the Island University, striving to realize important objectives for the greater good.

*Continued on the following page.*



*“It’s great to see the university’s investment in us as students and alumni, and now, as we lead the country in saving endangered species.”*

JESSE GILBERT '07, '14, '22, Texas State Aquarium President and CEO



## WILDLIFE

The Island University has recently embarked on a pioneering initiative for a new national model for wildlife rescue and rehabilitation. At the core of this endeavor is the Texas State Aquarium’s Wildlife Rescue Center, a 26,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art center, which opened in spring 2023. It is the largest coastal wildlife rescue facility in Texas and the only one in the state permitted to treat marine mammals, raptors, shorebirds, and sea turtles. It can accommodate thousands of animals at any given time.

The center includes a Wildlife Response Operations Center (WROC), which acts as a centralized hub for gathering information, mobilizing resources, and facilitating effective decision-making

during wildlife-related crises. As part of the WROC, the Island University provides experts who engage in disaster and wildlife response planning, research and development, training and testing, data collection and analysis, resiliency modeling, and workforce development. Emergency response entities at the state and federal levels are also part of the cooperative. Ultimately, the goal is to utilize the expertise within the WROC to not just respond to emergencies, but to act as a proactive mechanism for the prevention of wildlife disasters.

Texas State Aquarium President and CEO Jesse Gilbert '07, '14, '22, expressed his enthusiasm for solidifying the longstanding partnership between his alma mater and the aquarium.

“I’m proud to be one of many from the Texas State Aquarium who have earned degrees from TAMU-CC,” Gilbert said. “It’s great to see the university’s investment in us as students and alumni, and now, as we lead the country in saving endangered species.”



## EDUCATION

Residents from Corpus Christi’s Westside are no strangers to the year-round slate of activities and educational resources offered by the Antonio E. Garcia Arts and Education Center, which has been under the auspices of the TAMU-CC College of Education and Human Development since 2004.

Since its inception in 1993, the Garcia Center has provided programs to its



technologies to bolster ongoing research in autonomous aviation. “Corpus West” is the first of a planned set of six corridors to be developed throughout South Texas — five of which would be within the Coastal Bend region.

“We hope that building this type of range complex in the Corpus Christi area, as well as working closely with the Corpus Christi Regional Economic Development Council, will bring in manufacturers and other organizations that want to test their autonomous aviation systems within the corridor and cement our community as the Intellectual Capital of South Texas,” said Tye Payne, LSUASC Assistant Director of Operations, Testing, and Evaluation.

*“We appreciate being able to work hand-in-hand with community leadership to expand our capabilities and outreach across our stretch of Texas.”*

**MIKE SANDERS**, LSUASC Executive Director

LSUASC has submitted two Certificates of Waiver or Authorization (COA) to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) in relation to this project. Upon approval, the COAs will clear LSUASC to conduct day or night operations within the 12-mile-long “Corpus West” corridor. The initial COA was approved in October and will span a two-year period, with future provisions and approvals still pending. •



surrounding neighborhood, which has been categorized as low-income and high-risk. Its association with and funding support from TAMU-CC and the City of Corpus Christi has allowed it to operate through tough economic times.

Over the years, the Garcia Center has introduced programs that helped enrich PK-12 students with art, fitness, gardening, nutrition, literacy, math, science, technology, and cultural activities. One key program that has been instrumental in the center’s success and exposure is the Islander Academy Enrichment and Learning Program, which combines after-school programming with summer camp programming to offer an ongoing, holistic array of learning opportunities. In 2021, the program received \$30,000 in support from Valero Energy’s Benefit for Children; in 2022, Valero doubled the amount; in 2023, Valero raised their support to \$100,000.

“Valero’s support has been a transformative force for the Garcia Center, enabling us to provide scholarships to an astounding 90% of participants in our VIK Camp and Teens Building for Tomorrow program,” said Esmeralda Teran ’11, ’16, ’21, Garcia Center Director. “Many of our center’s children, who are predominantly Hispanic and hail from migrant families, have found a gateway to mind expansion and creativity that otherwise might not have been attainable. Valero’s support has illuminated pathways to exploration, enrichment, and growth for the young minds we are privileged to serve.”

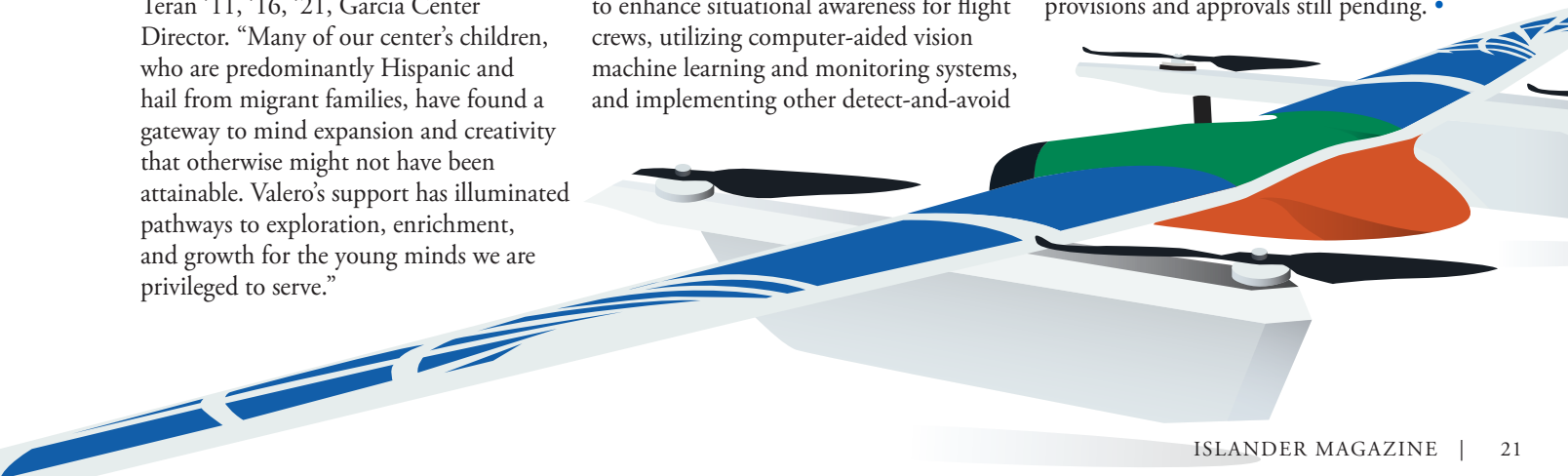


## INNOVATION

With approval from Corpus Christi City Council, the university’s Lone Star UAS Center for Excellence and Innovation (LSUASC) is embarking on a significant expansion of its offsite operations. This expansion involves establishing a hangar facility at Corpus Christi International Airport (CCIA). Simultaneously, LSUASC officials are actively engaged in the development of a dedicated drone testing corridor that will link CCIA to the Nueces County Airport, located in Robstown. This designated corridor has been dubbed “Corpus West.”

“Over the last five years, the Lone Star UAS Center at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi has built amazing relationships with the city and the county, particularly in terms of advancing technology,” said Mike Sanders, LSUASC Executive Director. “We appreciate being able to work hand-in-hand with community leadership to expand our capabilities and outreach across our stretch of Texas.”

The “Corpus West” corridor project encompasses various objectives, such as conducting trials for remote drone identification, testing advanced technology to enhance situational awareness for flight crews, utilizing computer-aided vision machine learning and monitoring systems, and implementing other detect-and-avoid



# LEGACY OF DR. LARRY MCKINNEY HONORED THROUGH ENDOWED CHAIR

As the leader of the Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi for 14 years, Dr. Larry McKinney played a pivotal role in advancing HRI's international programs. His efforts included holding three major Gulf of Mexico Summits that brought together leaders from the United States, Mexico, and Cuba, and his integral role in guiding stakeholders and scientists through the Deepwater Horizon disaster, which solidified HRI as a beacon of excellence on the world stage. McKinney was also responsible for fully integrating the "HRI Model," a unique, interdisciplinary way of combining science with economic policy and sociological expertise.

Despite his retirement from the institute in August 2023, McKinney's impact on HRI will be felt for years to come, not just for his leadership, but also thanks to a considerable gift of \$1.5 million from the Will and Pam Harte family and the Harte Charitable Foundation for an Endowed Chair position that will help fund research to improve the health of the Gulf. The Larry D. McKinney Endowed Chair for Coastal Conservation and Restoration honors McKinney's efforts to advance HRI and his ongoing commitment to a healthy and sustainable Gulf of Mexico.

"By establishing this endowed position, the Harte family continues to create a legacy that extends beyond their lifetimes," said Dr. Greg Stunz, HRI Senior Executive Director. "This opportunity will have a profound impact and will shape the future of HRI in perpetuity."


Endowed Chairs are hallmarks of leading research institutions; Dr. Jennifer Pollack, who leads the institute's Coastal Conservation and Restoration group, was recognized as being an ideal fit for this position. Pollack's lab examines how estuarine habitats like oyster reefs are affected by changing conditions, along with how to efficiently restore these vital coastal habitats.

"Dr. McKinney hired me as an HRI Chair back in 2018 and has since provided invaluable mentorship and support to guide my development as a scientist," Pollack said. "Holding the Larry D. McKinney Endowed Chair for Coastal Conservation and Restoration is a source of deep pride for me, and I am incredibly humbled and honored to carry forward his extraordinary legacy of conservation of the Gulf of Mexico."

McKinney served as Director of Coastal Fisheries for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department before being named the Senior Executive Director of HRI in 2008. In 2020, McKinney became HRI's Chair for Gulf Strategies.

Through his education and experience, McKinney examined multiple unique perspectives to balance a healthy Gulf and economy, and he developed a reputation for taking on difficult and controversial environmental issues like endangered species conservation, water resource development, and habitat loss throughout Texas.

"Of my 52-year career studying the Gulf of Mexico, what I enjoyed most was my association with the Harte Research



*"I've had the opportunity to work all around the world, but I keep coming back to the Gulf..."*

**DR. LARRY MCKINNEY**, Former HRI Executive Director, Retired Aug. 2023

Institute," McKinney said. "I've had the opportunity to work all around the world, but I keep coming back to the Gulf, where I started and finished my career, as it remains one of the most beautiful places in the world and has so much that's worth saving."

McKinney also led the Morris Deal Commission, a national effort to reform the management of recreational fisheries, leading to the publication of "A Vision for Managing America's Saltwater Recreational Fisheries." These recommendations provided the policy guidance for the Modern Fish Act, which was signed into law in late 2018.





The act modernized the management of the more than \$18 billion a year industry and assured continued economic and conservation benefits could be derived from saltwater angling for the foreseeable future.

In 2019, McKinney was one of only a hundred leaders invited to participate in the White House Ocean Summit to set new priorities for ocean exploration, development, and conservation in the United States. McKinney is also a member of the National Academies of Science Gulf Research Program's Committee on Long Term Environmental Trends in the Gulf of Mexico, a two-year effort initiated

in August 2020 to assess the effects of the restoration efforts following the Deepwater Horizon industrial disaster.

“Even though I’m leaving HRI, it will never be out of my heart,” McKinney said. “To everyone who’s part of HRI, I just want you to know what a rare thing you are — I’ve never been around a group of people who are so willing to work together to a common end, and it’s been my distinct pleasure to be a part of that.” •



#### ENDOWMENT IMPACT

Learn more about endowments and how to give at [tamucc.edu/your-gift](http://tamucc.edu/your-gift)

## 14 YEARS OF SERVICE

### HRI MODEL

McKinney played a pivotal role in fully implementing the HRI model and made key Endowed Chair hires.



### DEEPWATER HORIZON

McKinney guided stakeholders and scientists through the Deepwater Horizon disaster, solidifying HRI as an international leader in marine science.



### INTERNATIONAL REACH

McKinney helped advance HRI's international programs, hosting three major Gulf of Mexico Summits that brought together Gulf leaders from the United States, Mexico, and Cuba.





# *Rec Sports* **CHAMPIONS**

*Inspiring Student Stories from  
Nontraditional Athletes*

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Involvement in Recreational Sports plays a vital role in promoting physical, mental, and social well-being among college students, helping to create a holistic, enriching, and vibrant campus environment. At the Island University, many of our Rec Sports athletes find great success in regional and national competitions and gain valuable life lessons in teamwork, leadership, sportsmanship, and resilience as they proudly represent Texas A&M-Corpus Christi.



This spring, Viren Patel '24, a Table Tennis Club member, became the first Islander to qualify for the National Collegiate Table Tennis Association Championships. He competed among 250 players from approximately 50 colleges and universities for national titles. Patel has played competitively in his native India since he was 13 years old and is currently ranked in the top 8 in Texas.

"Participating in the club and representing the university at competitive tournaments makes me proud," said Patel, a computer science master's student. "It has made me more disciplined and focused. I have developed leadership skills and learned better time management, which benefits both my academics and gameplay."

This summer, marine biology major and Islander Rugby Club member Jeremy Romo '24 was invited to the U.S. Rugby Combine to compete for a roster spot on the USA National Rugby Team. Romo has his sights set on becoming a professional rugby player someday.

"The experience at the combine was amazing," Romo said. "I got to meet people from all over the nation and see several different styles of play. It helped me realize my strengths, and it made me love the game even more."

Sports management major Tristan Hullett '24, president of Islander Rugby, noted that in the 2021-22 season, the team was the division champion and placed third in nationals. During the season, Hullett was also awarded All-American Honors as one of the best players in America. In 2022, five Islander Rugby players were selected for the Lone Star Conference All-Star team and traveled internationally to play rugby.

"Being a leader in my sport is my pride," Hullett said. "My friend and I even got a tattoo of the club's logo on our legs. Rugby is a huge part of my life, and I will always love being an Islander because of it."

Powerlifting Club member and criminal justice and sociology major Shelby Wilson '23 is involved in several Islander student organizations, works as a camp counselor, and is a student supervisor at the Dugan Gym. Still, she finds time to participate

in intramural sports like dodgeball, volleyball, and softball. In December, she plans to compete in her third powerlifting competition, the 2023 USA Powerlifting Collegiate Cup.

"Powerlifting has broadened my Islander experience into the world of competitive sports and has allowed me to meet some great people and create unique memories at the university," Wilson said. "It has provided me with a community of like-minded people with similar physical goals to provide support and motivation, increase my self-confidence, and empower me as a woman in and out of the gym."

Fellow Powerlifting Club member Alysha Rodriguez '23 competed in the 2022 USA Powerlifting Texas Open, where she placed third, and the 2023 USA Powerlifting East Texas Open, where she placed first.

"The challenges and discipline required in powerlifting have helped me develop resilience, focus, and determination," said Rodriguez, a biomedical sciences major. "This mental strength complements my physical gains and contributes to an overall sense of well-being and confidence in both mind and body."

Another club sport unique to campus is angling. The Islander Anglers group competes in fresh and saltwater fishing tournaments and even hosts their own tournament two times a year. The club brings in world-class anglers and rod manufacturers from across the Coastal Bend as guest speakers to share their knowledge and techniques.

"I have become a better fisherman thanks to the knowledge and experience of other members," said John Neblett '24, business major and Islander Anglers president. "This club has also helped improve my public speaking and marketing skills as we work to grow the club."

Islander Anglers also helps to preserve the area's natural resources by participating in the catch, tag, and release program run by the Center for Sportfishing Science and Conservation at the Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies.

"I have made so many new friends in the Islander Anglers," said business major Megan Little '24. "The number of connections you can make through this club is very high, and the best part is that if you like to fish, it's a perfect conversation starter."

Under the Division of Student Engagement and Success (SEAS), the TAMU-CC Recreational Sports program is a member of the National Intramural and Recreational Sports Association. The university provides the facilities, equipment, and opportunities to participate in a variety of sports, recreational, and social activities for all ages, skill levels, and interests. In fact, if students fail to find a club that interests them, they are encouraged to start their own. •



Carl Hilliard '23

*Pickleball, the nation's fastest-growing sport, is steadily gaining popularity at the Island University. An intramural league is regularly hosted at the Dugan Wellness Center, and net sessions are often available during open recreation times. TAMU-CC is also home to national pickleball champion and computer science major, Carl Hilliard '23, who, as of July 2022, was ranked No. 91 in the world in men's professional pickleball singles. In April 2023, Hilliard competed in the prestigious U.S. Open Pickleball Tournament, and in July 2023, he competed in the APP NextGen Tournament, an elite tournament for players under the age of 24, where he earned the gold medal in men's singles.*

*In addition to giving pickleball lessons at the Corpus Christi Country Club, Hilliard recently completed a successful internship as a cybersecurity analyst at the Port of Corpus Christi. He is also currently working part-time as a cybersecurity analyst at the Maritime Transportation System Information Sharing and Analysis Center (MTS-ISAC). Post-graduation, he hopes to continue this work at MTS-ISAC, along with progressing his pickleball career at the national and international levels.*

#### OPPOSITE PAGE:

John Neblett '24, Tristan Hullett '24, Jeremy Romo '24, Megan Little '24, Viren Patel '24, Atal Safi '26 (clockwise from top left)





2022-23  
MEN'S BASKETBALL

60

2023

WOMEN'S TENNIS TOURNAMENT

CHAMPION

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

TEXAS A&M  
CORPUS CHRISTI

20

23

5.0  
SOUTH TEXAS  
WOMEN'S TENNIS  
Champion

TEXAS A&M  
CORPUS CHRISTI

4





*Get ready,*  
**ISLANDERS...**  
*We're just getting started!*

The past season proved to be a historic one for Islanders Athletics, with eight Southland Conference Championships won — namely two championships in men’s basketball, women’s tennis, and beach volleyball; and one in women’s basketball and men’s tennis. In addition, men’s basketball cinched a win during March Madness, while beach volleyball won its first NCAA Tournament matchup. “Coming off the winningest year in Islanders Athletics history is a true testament to the dedication and commitment to excellence of our elite coaches, world-class athletes, and exemplary athletics staff,” said Adrian Rodriguez, Vice President of Intercollegiate Athletics.

But we can’t keep bringing up the glory of one historic season forever — and we don’t intend to.

*Continued on the following page.*

Our athletics teams — our champions — are in the midst of a new season and are taking it by storm. Day in and day out, match by match, game by game, they show their fans that they are more than a single historic season; they are here to dominate and represent their Island campus and Coastal Bend community.

And what better motivation, than their supporters cheering them on?

Islanders student-athletes are no strangers to hard work. Their days consist of achieving academic excellence, fortifying physical and mental resilience, balancing their responsibilities, and growing their ambitions — all the while, giving back. In the last year, our student-athletes volunteered nearly 3,000 hours of community service — proving themselves to be proud ambassadors both on and off the playing surface.

“Student-athletes do it all,” said Reese Drezins ’24, a senior on the Islanders women’s golf team and Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) President. “At A&M-Corpus Christi, we show tremendous dedication to both our sport and schoolwork every day. Through SAAC and other community volunteer efforts, it is incredible to watch student-athletes engage with our school as well as our local community. I love seeing fellow student-athletes around our campus always giving their absolute best for our university.”

Here on the Island, we consider our Islanders Athletics to be the front porch of our university. Just as the front porch of a home invites visitors and sets the tone for their experience inside, our

athletics program serves as a gateway to the vibrant community that is Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.

Islanders Athletics also aims to inspire the next generation of Islanders — whether they are athletes or not. Islanders Athletics is about coming together as a community to celebrate the spirit of competition, sportsmanship, unity, and Islander pride. Whether you’re a lifelong Islander fan or a new supporter, you are a valued part of our Islander family from the moment you step through the doors of our athletic venues.

As we commence this new athletic season, one truth remains abundantly clear: Our Islanders student-athletes are more than just champions; they are role models for dedication, determination,

## THANK YOU TO OUR FANS!

*30% increase in attendance at basketball games*



### SPECIAL RECOGNITION FOR ISLANDERS STUDENT-ATHLETES

*Cumulative 3.0+ GPA*  
18 STRAIGHT SEMESTERS

*4.0 GPA*  
57 STUDENT-ATHLETES

*Southland Commissioner's Honor Roll*  
130 STUDENT-ATHLETES

*Community Service*  
2,815 HOURS

### MARCH MADNESS WATCH PARTY

Islander fans gather at Brewster Street Ice House to cheer on Islanders Men's Basketball. From left: Albert Ordunez, Donna DeGaish, Corpus Christi Mayor and Islander Alumni Board Member Paulette Guajardo '00, Dr. Corinne Valadez '93, '95, and Islander Alumni Board Member Dr. Ralph Silva '85, '91, '08.



and community spirit. They show us every day that excellence extends far beyond the confines of the field or court; they embrace the values of academic achievement, community service, and the unwavering pursuit of their dreams. And the support of our wider Islander family is what drives our success — so wear your Islander shirt with pride, buy season tickets, cheer us on from the stands, watch us on ESPN, or follow us on social media to stay connected.

In the heart of Corpus Christi, Islanders Athletics draws people from all walks of life onto our Island. When our fans rally behind us, they not only help ignite the flames of victory, but they also light the path for future Islanders, illustrating that here, on our Island, dreams are within reach and success knows no bounds.

Together, we will continue to make history, season after season, as we proudly represent our Island and foster generations of Islanders to come. •



**COMMUNITY SERVICE**

Islanders student-athletes volunteer at numerous community events, including the Conquer the Coast bike ride, where they hand out water to cyclists.

**A NEW RECORD!**

*8 Southland Conference Championships*

**REGULAR SEASON**

- Men's Basketball*
- Women's Basketball*
- Beach Volleyball*
- Women's Tennis*

**TOURNAMENT**

- Men's Basketball*
- Women's Tennis*
- Men's Tennis*
- Beach Volleyball*

# ISLAND OF CHAMPIONS



Men's Basketball

Women's Tennis

Beach Volleyball

Men's Tennis

Women's Basketball

**2022-23 CONFERENCE CHAMPIONS**

# INVEST IN FUTURE CHAMPIONS

JOIN THE ISLANDER ATHLETIC FUND TODAY!

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# Life at ISLAND U

A sea of students dove into an exciting fall semester at TAMU-CC. The highly anticipated Waves of Welcome helped new and returning students transition to life on the Island with more than 60 events. The third annual Islanders Beach Bash saw record-breaking crowds and was capped off by a spectacular fireworks show, courtesy of the Islander Alumni Association. On a blustery weekend in October, students shared their college experience with their loved ones at Islander Family Weekend, which included a laser light show sponsored by CITGO. In spring 2024, students can look forward to the third annual Izz-Fest, a concert and food truck festival; this past year's highly successful Izz-Fest was headlined by indie pop artist, Dayglow.

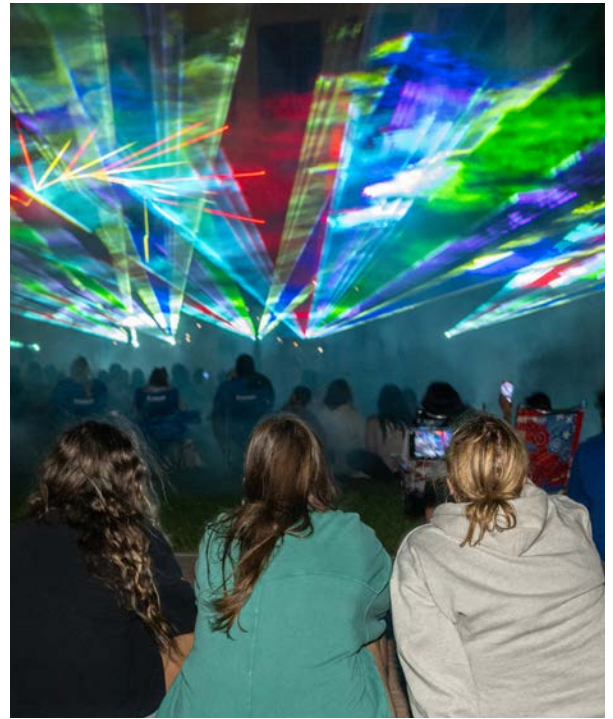
Islander Family Weekend



Waves of Welcome









Islanders  
Beach Bash







Izz-Fest  
Concert and Food  
Truck Festival









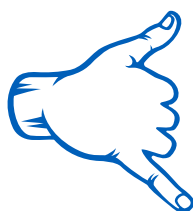
# Islander TRADITIONS

Although no path to the Island University is the same, it's our shared student experience that binds us together. From the first time we step on campus (or log into that first online course) to the triumphant final walk across the commencement stage, there is a profound sense of unity and shared purpose in knowing that we are all an integral part of the Islander family.



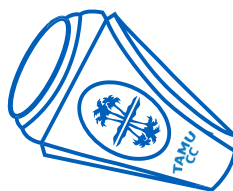
## Anchor

A replica modeled after one that was left on our campus more than 50 years ago, the Anchor gives homage to our Naval history and represents a tether to our students and alumni long after graduation.



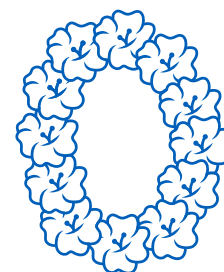
## Shaka

The Shaka is our official university greeting that is also used as a symbol of school spirit, unity, and pride. It's easy to do — make a fist, point your thumb and pinky out, and shake!



## Ring

Designed by Islanders and passed down for generations, the Islander Ring is a lasting symbol of a student's accomplishments and their time here on the Island.



## Lei

Constructed from over 120 fresh flowers, the double-Thai orchid Islander Lei adds vibrancy to graduation and represents the beauty of our Island campus. It also serves as an official welcome to the National Islander Alumni Association.

## SUPPORT ISLANDER PRIDE AND TRADITIONS

Are you looking for a way to support student participation and inclusivity in pride and tradition-based initiatives? A donation to the Dr. Andrew Johnson Endowed Pride and Traditions Award does just that.

Established in 2021 by Dr. Andrew Johnson, TAMU-CC Associate Dean of Student Success and Associate Professor of Business Management, the endowment supports the purchase of Islander Rings and Leis, and is an investment in a student's entire university experience. These traditions forge a deep connection between our students and our campus that lasts long beyond graduation.



### ENDOWMENT IMPACT

Learn more about the impact created through traditions and how to give at [tamucc.edu/your-gift](https://tamucc.edu/your-gift)



# CLASS NOTES

## 1970s



**Richard Wheat '73**, Professor of Chemistry, has retired. Wheat has multiple first-place finishes in sailboat regattas over the past 15 years. He was awarded honorary Richard Wheat Day in Waco, Texas, and was commissioned Admiral in the Texas Navy by George W. Bush.

## 1980s

**Adrian Dansby '84, '90** has been promoted to Program Specialist IV - Veterans Services Coordinator with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice in Corpus Christi. He previously retired from Brownsville ISD with 30 years of service as a teacher and administrator in the Texas public school system.

**Haysam Dawod '85** was awarded a Community Advocate award by the Dr. Hector P. Garcia Founding Chapter and Dr. Cleo P. Garcia Women's Chapter of the American GI Forum of South Texas. Dawod serves as the President of the National Islander Alumni Association.

## 1990s

**Linda Landreth '95, '99** and her husband are retired and had the honor of traveling to see their oldest grandson graduate from Mississippi State University in May. They also traveled to Florida to reunite with college friends.

**Sonya Rodriguez '95** retired from Corpus Christi ISD on May 31, 2023, after 28 years of teaching. Rodriguez taught at Alternative High School, Solomon M. Coles High School, and Metro Elementary School of Design.

**Tonya Khan '98** celebrated 19 years as a physician assistant with 11 years specializing in her passion of dermatology. She is a patron of the arts and food scene in Fort Worth/Dallas and enjoys traveling. She is also a member of The Tarrant County Medical Society Alliance.

**Tricia Barksdale-Garza '99** celebrated her 24th year as a teacher.

## 2000s

**Patricia A. McKenna '01** retired after 10 years as the Corpus Christi ISD Carroll High School Library Media Assistant. She is enjoying retirement on Padre Island.

**Manuel C. Cruz '02** launched his own media channel, New Century Theatre, on YouTube. His content consists of short segments based on his Theatre Appreciation lecture class for Dallas College and Tarrant County College.

**Mili Price '03** accepted a promotion to General Schedule (GS)-14 with the United States Air Force in Arlington, Virginia. She has been a dedicated federal civil servant for 20 years and is now achieving her lifelong dream of working at the Pentagon.

**Amy Gonzales '04** graduated from the University of Texas at Austin with a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Policy. Gonzales is a first-generation college student and is grateful for her time at TAMU-CC.

**Elizabeth Ruiz '04** ended her 19th year of teaching as Teacher of the Year for her campus. She looks forward to her 20th year at North East ISD.

**Herlinda Martinez-Longoria '05** retired from Harlandale ISD in San Antonio after 28 years as a teacher and administrator. She has also been appointed the Campus-Based Program Director of Girls Incorporated.

**Dr. Anthony Avila, PT '08** is CEO and founder of Avila Physical Therapy and is opening a second clinical location in Kingsville.



**Christine Cashion Lamb '08** was promoted to Associate Professor at Del Mar College with tenure. She is a Licensed Professional Counselor and has worked at Del Mar College for more than 20 years.

**Chase Waterwall '08** was elected to serve on City Council in Nassau Bay, Texas.

**Dustin Carter '09, '16** published his third novel in November 2023.

**Wm. Davey Edwards '09** is the 2023 president-elect for the National Society of Professional Surveyors and will serve as president in 2024.

**Omar Garcia '09** was awarded the 2023 Corpus Christi Caller-Times South Texas Basketball Coach of the Year.

## 2010s

**Courtney Durham '10, '12, '14** has been named the Organizational Development Manager for the City of Corpus Christi.

**Elvia Rodriguez '11** works at Wharton County Junior College as the Title V HSI Engagement and Communications Facilitator.



**Ilaria Reyes '16** was nationally recognized by the American Association of Nurse Practitioners with the 2023 Advocate State Award for Excellence for Texas. She continues to serve as the Texas Nurse Practitioners Policy Chair and is Past President of the Coastal Bend Advanced Practice Nurses group.

**Cynthia Hopkins '12, '13, '18, '22** was named as the Corpus Christi ISD Secondary Teacher of the Year for 2023.

**Angelina Garcia '14** has been selected as Executive Director for the American Red Cross - Coastal Bend Chapter, which serves 19 counties.

**Valerie Perez '14** was selected to play on the USA Women's Baseball Team.

**Victoria Gonzalez '16** was promoted to Juvenile Probation Officer in McLennan County. She recently celebrated her 30th birthday in London, England.

**Tiffany (Alcala) Hector '16** has joined the inaugural team launching the new Office for Youth Engagement at Texas A&M University.

**Randy Almaguer '17** was hired as Compliance Officer at the Corpus Christi Regional Economic Development Corporation.

**Ruma Chatterji '17** won the Best Poster Presentation Award at the 10th International Crustacean Congress held in New Zealand. She also recently graduated from the Preparing Future Faculty program and, in addition, won the Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award from the University of Cincinnati.

**Meagan L. Harris '17** is pursuing a Ph.D. in psychology, specializing in industrial Organization, from Northcentral University. She completed a Master of Science in Educational Human Resource Development from Texas A&M University.

**Johnny Bernal '18** was promoted to Senior Project Manager at Tesla in Austin.

**Chad Culpepper '18** started a new job as an attorney with the IRS as part of their Honors Program for newly hired attorneys.

**Chandler Fielder '18**, and wife Kali Deans-Fielder, welcomed their son, Dean James Fielder, on Feb. 25, weighing 7 lbs. 10 oz.



be a part of the  
**TRADITION.**

[BALFOUR.COM/TAMUCC](https://BALFOUR.COM/TAMUCC)

**Derrick Majchszak '18** was appointed CEO of the Corpus Christi Regional Transportation Authority.

**Kelsie Starry '18** finished her second annual American Petroleum Industry Audit after serving 1.5 years in her position as the Quality Systems Manager for Superior Weighting Products.

**Ashley Wilkins '18** obtained a Master of Science in Microbiology and Immunology in 2019. She was accepted into LSU Health Shreveport's Microbiology and Immunology Doctoral program in fall 2019 and received an Ike Muslow Predoctoral Fellowship.

**Trevor Wulff '18** completed his first year as a Training and Technical Assistant Specialist to provide specialized contract work, advocacy, and support for federal initiatives. Wulff stays connected with his Islander community by serving as the Houston Alumni Chapter President.

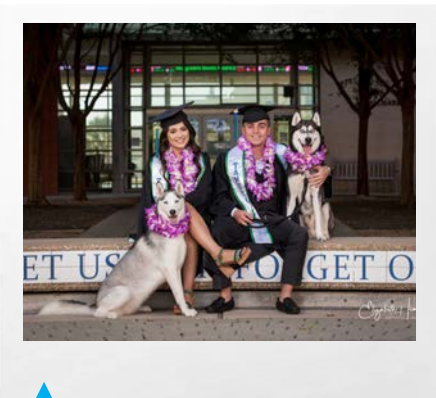
**Kelsey Beilstein '19** graduated with her Juris Doctor degree from the University of Baltimore School of Law in Maryland. She graduated Magna Cum Laude and is preparing to take the bar exam.

**Jasmin Lira '19** started a new position as an In Vivo Research Assistant at XenoStart.

**Brenda Martinez '18** was presented a five-year service pin in recognition of her employment at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi!

## 2020s

**Madison Delgado '20** began a master's program in Business Administration with a focus in Data Analytics at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi.



**Crystal Cortez '21 and Caleb Fletcher '21** just bought their first home!

**Anitra Brennan '21** became a partner in her firm thanks to a graduate MBA degree from TAMU-CC.

**Jackson Gray '21** joined Gray and Associates Certified Public Accountant firm as a project manager.

**Apria Valenza '21**, is working toward her Ph.D. in Integrative, Comparative, and Marine Biology at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington as a Fisheries Scientist and Researcher.

**Meagan Pendleton '22** was accepted into the Ph.D. program in sociology at The Ohio State University.

**Julia Carter '22** was hired as the assistant volleyball coach at TAMU-CC. She is happy to give back to the program that she enjoyed being a part of as a student. Go Islanders!

**Jacob Money '22** has been promoted to Laboratory Technician at AmSpec Group in Corpus Christi.



**Courtnei Lopez '22** qualified for the CrossFit Games 2023 - Adaptive Division. She competed in the worldwide competition in Madison, Wisconsin, in August.



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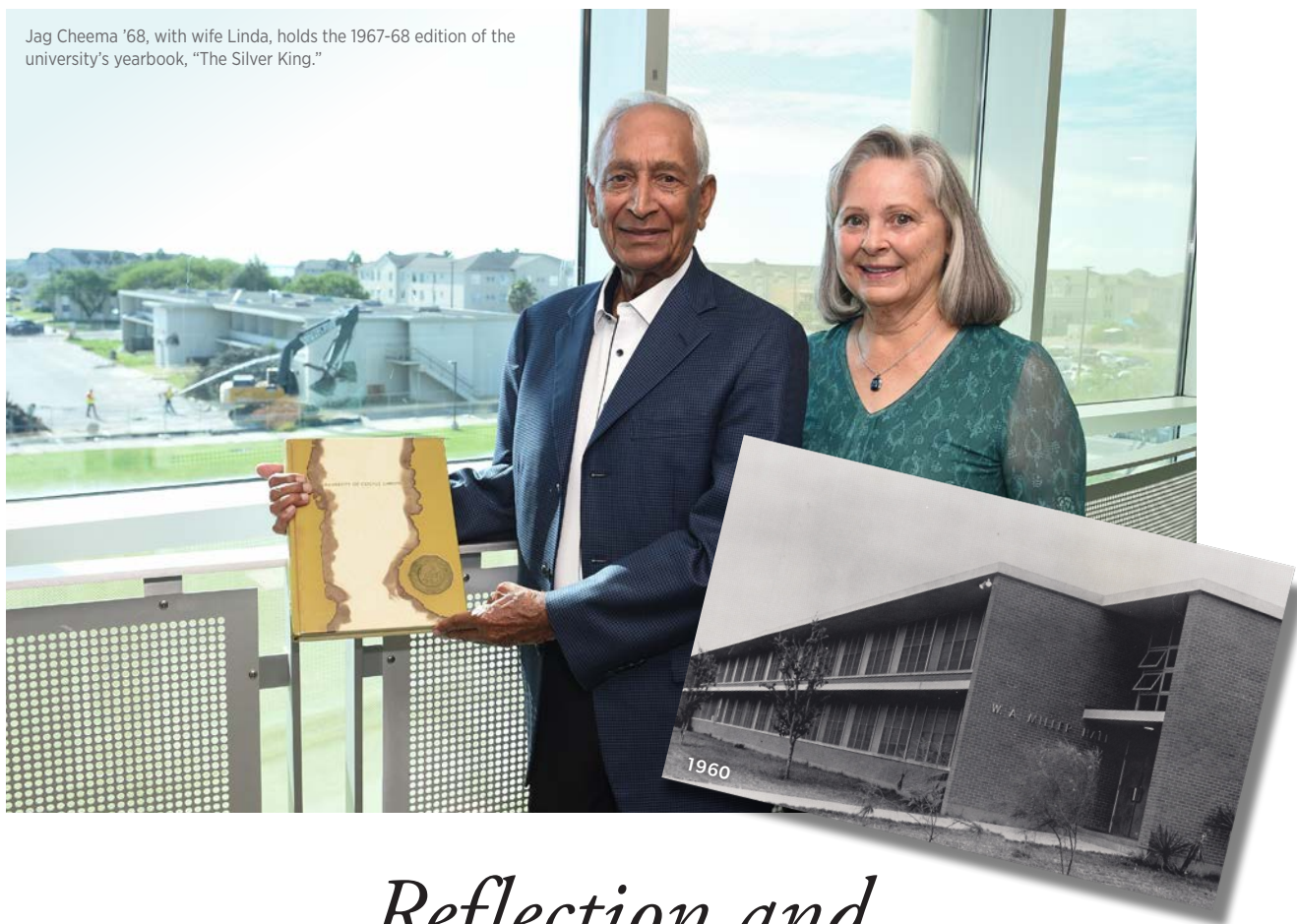
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Jag Cheema '68, with wife Linda, holds the 1967-68 edition of the university's yearbook, "The Silver King."



## Reflection and PROGRESS

On a sunny September afternoon, Jagdev “Jag” Singh Cheema '68 returned to campus to watch the final intact moments of his former dormitory. Cheema, joined by his wife Linda, peered on as a large bulldozer tore away brick, steel, and cement from the building he once called home. Back then, Classroom East was called the William A. Miller Hall Men's Dormitory.

“We’re looking out at the last piece of what was ours and it’s emotional,” Cheema said. “Even though I’m sad to see it go, sentiment cannot stand in the way of progress. It’s the start of something beautiful for our next generation of students.”

The building demolition is the next step in constructing the university’s new Arts and Media Building. Groundbreaking is expected in spring 2024.

As the couple, who met while students on campus, watched the building walls crumble away, Cheema revealed a smile as he recognized the hidden red brick that had been the original color of the dormitory.

“I’m honored to be here to watch it go, and I’ll be here to walk the halls once again when the new building is ready,” Cheema said.

Cheema, who earned a business degree from the University of Corpus Christi and was also a UCC tennis player, recently retired from an illustrious career in finance. The couple has supported numerous Islander first-generation business students through an annual scholarship, and they have also pledged money to an account

specifically for students experiencing significant hardships due to sudden emergencies. They also support Islander student-athletes through two endowed scholarships and have helped Islanders Athletics secure equipment for the athletics field house weight room. In recognition of their generosity, this space was renamed the Jag and Linda Cheema Sports Performance Facility.

“We’re proud to support our Islanders in any way we can, and we hope that one day, as alumni, they’ll remember us and do the same,” Cheema said. •



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