

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY-CORPUS CHRISTI

SPRING 2025

# the Islander



## SAILING TO SUCCESS

CROSSING THE  
FINISH LINE

RIPPLE EFFECT

FROM CLASSROOM  
TO CUTTING EDGE



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The Islander is published biannually by the Texas A&M-Corpus Christi Division of Institutional Advancement.

# DEAR ISLANDERS,



Dr. Kelly M. Miller has served as university president since 2017.

At Texas A&M-Corpus Christi, we know that making an Islander Impact begins with the confidence to set sail. And within the pages of this magazine, you'll find stories that reflect just that — Islanders embracing possibility and charting bold courses toward success.

You'll read about outdoor student clubs that leverage our one-of-a-kind coastal environment, encouraging connection, adventure, and wellness. It's a reminder that we're more than just a beautiful beach — we're a launchpad for growth, discovery, and meaningful experiences. This spirit of discovery continues at the Gloria Furgason I-Create Makerspace, a vibrant hub where ideas come to life through innovation, collaboration, and creativity. And you'll meet alumnus Moses Mostaghani '06, whose career voyage from aspiring attorney to successful land developer reflects the winding but rewarding paths Islanders often take.

One of the most inspiring examples of perseverance on our campus is the

Islanders Finish Initiative, a program that empowers former students to return, complete their degrees, and change the course of their lives. It's a reminder that it's never too late to achieve your dreams. This issue also marks a major milestone: 25 years of the Harte Research Institute. With a legacy rooted in protecting our Gulf Coast, advancing sound coastal policy, and training tomorrow's marine scientists, HRI's impact continues to ripple far beyond our shoreline.

Thank you for being part of this remarkable community. Together, we set sail confidently into the future, and we can't wait to see where the current takes us next.

Sincerely,

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



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## FEATURES

04

### I-CREATE YOU CREATE

Inside the Gloria Furgason  
I-Create Makerspace

08

### CREATIVITY UNDER CONSTRUCTION

New Arts and Media Building  
sets stage for South Texas talent



13

### FROM CLASSROOM TO CUTTING EDGE

Real-world solutions from the  
College of Engineering and  
Computer Science



16

### RIPPLE EFFECT

Harte Research Institute  
celebrates 25 years of excellence

20

### ISLANDER HOMECOMING 2025

There's no place like home,  
especially when home is  
Texas A&M-Corpus Christi

28

### SAILING TO SUCCESS

Student clubs anchored in  
Island life

32

### BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESS

Concrete plans with Island roots  
for Moses Mostaghani '06



36

### HITTING NEW HEIGHTS

Islanders Volleyball and their  
decade of success

42

### CLASS NOTES

Catch up on the big  
accomplishments, milestones, and  
adventures of our Islander alumni





## INSIDE THE GLORIA FURGASON I-CREATE MAKERSPACE

The Mary and Jeff Bell Library is a dynamic hub of learning, creativity, and collaboration, supporting student research while also welcoming the Corpus Christi community. One of its standout features is the Gloria Furgason I-Create Makerspace, a lab dedicated to turning ideas into reality. A recent gift from Dr. Robert R. Furgason, President Emeritus of TAMU-CC, established an endowment in honor of his wife, Gloria, to sustain the makerspace for years to come.

“The Gloria Furgason I-Create Makerspace fosters creativity not just in the arts but across many disciplines, including biology, nursing, and engineering,” said C. Derrik Hiatt, Interim Dean of University Libraries.

Designed as a resource for students, alumni, and the community, the makerspace provides access to tools and technology — including sewing and embroidery machines, CNC routers, a Cricut machine, soldering equipment, a large-format printer, and more — at a cost lower than what the public would typically pay. These resources support both academic and personal projects.

One student making full use of the lab

is Kyle King '26, a marine biology graduate student and research assistant in the university's Movement Ecology lab.

“For my study, I'm investigating whether a shark can be deterred by a magnet attached to a fishing line,” King said. “The I-Create Lab allowed me to 3D print a plastic replica of my magnet, which

helps me determine if the magnet works compared to a non-magnetic prototype.”

Beyond the 3D-printed replica, King has leveraged the lab to design a GoPro mount that attaches to his fishing pole, create custom stickers for outreach events, and print conference posters — essential tools for presenting his research.



Kyle King '26 uses the I-Create Lab's 3D printing capabilities to support his innovative research related to magnetic shark repellents.





Nichole Schiller '20 and her team at K Space Contemporary use the I-Create Lab for oversized art projects and podcast creation.



Dr. Robert and Gloria Furgason stand in front of the Dr. Robert R. Furgason Collection Exhibit located inside of the university's Furgason Engineering Building.



The I-Create Lab is a hands-on, multipurpose makerspace where users can learn, collaborate, design, and create.

David Jones, I-Create Coordinator at TAMU-CC, leads day-to-day operations of the lab.

"The creative and educational opportunities here are endless," Jones said.

Thanks to two other donations to the space, the university recently added a sublimation printer and heat press to the lab's offerings. This technology allows users to transfer high-quality designs onto T-shirts, hats, tote bags, and more — an affordable option for student organizations and nonprofits looking to create customized merchandise.

One local nonprofit, K Space Contemporary, regularly utilizes the I-Create Lab to bring its projects to life.

"We mainly use the large-format vinyl cutter to create business stickers and help with oversized projects," said Nichole Schiller '20, K Space Education Coordinator who earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts from TAMU-CC. "More recently, I've started using the recording studio for our educational podcasts."

K Space Contemporary also organizes the Día de los Muertos Festival, the

largest one-day street festival in the region. In preparation for the event, the nonprofit commissioned a 15-foot Catrina sculpture but faced challenges when constructing its massive fabric skirt. With no grommet machine on hand, manually hammering in 50 grommets felt like a daunting task. Schiller recalled that the makerspace had a grommet machine available, enabling her team to complete the project quickly and efficiently — while staying within the nonprofit's budget.

"The resources here have saved us so much money," Schiller said. "We've easily saved hundreds of dollars using the lab." •





Taylor Garcia '27 says the natural beauty of campus, small class sizes, professional development opportunities, and involvement in campus organizations are highlights of life as an Islander.



# ANCHORED BY OPPORTUNITY



## FROM PSA TO PROUD ISLANDERS

At Texas A&M-Corpus Christi, each semester brings a new wave of students eager to begin their college journey on the Island. Some come with a clear plan. Others, like J.R. Valentine '25, discover that the path they thought they'd follow takes an unexpected yet welcome turn.

Originally from Ohio, Valentine was part of a group of students participating in the Texas A&M Program for System Admission (PSA). This alternative pathway requires students to complete a year of study at another Texas A&M University System campus before transferring to College Station. Valentine's plans changed when he received a packet in the mail from TAMU-CC and caught a glimpse of the university's palm-tree-lined walkways and unique Gulf Coast charm. After one visit, he was hooked.



Valentine and his mother visited the Island University for Islander Launch new student orientation, where they went on a tour led by Islander Ambassadors. These student leaders serve as the welcoming faces of TAMU-CC, offering prospective students and their families an authentic glimpse into the university's vibrant community. During their visit, Valentine and his mother also made a stop at the beach — an experience that was rare for someone accustomed to Ohio's chilly weather, and one that changed everything.

"My mom called it," Valentine said. "She said, 'I don't think you're going to College Station. I think you're coming here.' And she was right."

Valentine fully embraced Islander life, from cheering on Islanders Basketball during March Madness, to playing recreational lacrosse, to performing with the university's pep band, both on campus and on the road. Inspired by the students he met during his first campus tour, he became an Islander Ambassador himself.

One of Valentine's favorite memories was traveling with the pep band to

Dayton, Ohio, when Islanders Men's Basketball earned a spot in the NCAA Tournament. The trip gave Valentine's Ohio-based family the opportunity to see him perform.

"This university has given me experiences I wouldn't have had elsewhere," said Valentine, an accounting major. "At TAMU-CC, I feel like I'm part of something special."

Houston native Taylor Garcia '27 also found her permanent academic home at TAMU-CC after entering the PSA program. Initially drawn by the beauty of Corpus Christi, she fell in love with the Island campus after her first visit.

"I'd heard about how beautiful Corpus Christi was, but seeing it in person was breathtaking," said Garcia, a mechanical engineering major.

Smaller class sizes, personalized attention from faculty, and distinctive opportunities made Garcia's decision to stay an easy one. Now in her second year, she's become an active and engaged member of the campus community. As a member of the American Society of

Mechanical Engineers, she is on the fuel team of a student-led rocket-building project — an opportunity she says would have been unlikely for a second-year student elsewhere. Beyond academics, Garcia serves as the community outreach chair for the Islander Catholic Student Organization. In her free time, she enjoys crafting, crocheting, playing frisbee golf, cooking, listening to live music, and collecting seashells.

"TAMU-CC's culture embraces student involvement," Garcia said. "I've felt like I've been a part of something meaningful since day one."

For both Valentine and Garcia, TAMU-CC's strong sense of community has been transformative. Surrounded by faculty who know them by name, tight-knit friend groups, and opportunities that match their passions, both students have found not just an education, but a true sense of belonging on the Island.

"There's a reason I have a big Islander flag in my room — I love being an Islander," Valentine said. "The community here is incredible." •

As an Island Ambassador, J.R. Valentine '25 has led over 50 tours to prospective Islanders.







## NEW ARTS AND MEDIA BUILDING SETS STAGE FOR SOUTH TEXAS TALENT

At Texas A&M-Corpus Christi, the arts are more than just a major. They are a heartbeat, a voice, a song, a story waiting to be told. Now, that creative spirit is about to soar to new heights.

Opening in 2026, the university's new Arts and Media Building is where dreams will be rehearsed, perfected, and performed — built not just with brick and mortar, but with imagination, passion, and purpose. Designed to elevate the university's nationally accredited music and theatre programs, this vibrant new facility cements the institution's role as the cultural cornerstone of South Texas.

At the center of the new academic building is a vision: to give students the tools and spaces they need to thrive in their crafts and careers. The two-story facility will include a 325-seat proscenium theatre outfitted with industry-leading technology, a 200-seat recital hall, a black box theatre, dance studios, practice rooms, and collaborative rehearsal and production areas. Each space will be well-equipped and acoustically optimized to match the demand of the Island University's expanding performing arts curriculum and will continue to inspire the next generation of creatives.

"The new Arts and Media building is a game changer," said Dr. Mary Thornton, Department Chair and Professor of Music. "It's a powerful investment in our students and their futures."

Jonathon Conyers '25, a music major and violinist, earned a Bachelor of Music in Violin Performance this spring. A lifelong Corpus Christi resident, he spent many of his formative years in the university's aging Center for the Arts as a member of the Corpus Christi Area Youth Orchestra. He selected the Island University after earning a spot in the prestigious Morris L. Lichtenstein, Jr.



Jonathon Conyers '25 was selected as the Spring 2025 Outstanding Islander Graduate for the School of Arts, Media, & Communication.

String Quartet, which includes a full-tuition scholarship and opportunities to pay it forward by teaching free music lessons to area K-12 students.

"I am incredibly excited that the next generation of Islander musicians will have a beautiful space where they can fully immerse themselves in music and the arts," Conyers said. "The new building will help so many students grow faster and dream bigger."

Currently, many music, theatre, and student dance performances are held in the university's Performing Arts Center (PAC), a 1,350-seat venue whose size often overshadows the intimacy of student productions. After the opening of the new Arts and Media Building, student

performances will transition to this specialized academic space, allowing the PAC to host a broader range of events, from national touring acts to expanded community programming.

The expanded space offered by the new building will allow the university to potentially double its music major enrollment and significantly grow its already thriving theatre program. Over the past decade, theatre enrollment has doubled, and the program boasts a 100% employment rate for its theatre education graduates. It also means the Center for the Arts, built in 1978, will be repurposed to better serve other disciplines that don't need soundproof spaces.

"When I think about future students

performing on the stages of the new building, I know they will feel proud and inspired," Conyers said. "This building represents more than just new walls, it's where South Texas talent will be nurtured, celebrated, and launched into the world."

And it's not just music and theatre majors who will benefit — the new space will also support the university's dance program, which includes a minor and certificate that attract students from all disciplines, including Bailey Matthews '27, a kinesiology major minoring in dance. Because of limited space, many of her dance classes are held in the Dugan Wellness Center, located across campus from the Center for the Arts.

"Being in the Dugan often makes me feel disconnected from the creative atmosphere of the other arts disciplines," Matthews said. "Having a dance studio in the heart of this new building will help highlight the value of dance within the creative community. I feel incredibly grateful that I'll hopefully still be a student when this building is completed. I believe it will elevate our performance quality and help us step confidently into bigger opportunities."

Members of the public who wish to provide philanthropic support for the Arts and Media Building or Performing Arts Center can contact Jaime Nodarse Barrera, Vice President for Institutional Advancement, at 361.825.3320 or [jaime.nodarse@tamucc.edu](mailto:jaime.nodarse@tamucc.edu).



Construction is underway on the 85,000-square-foot, two-story Arts and Media Building, which is scheduled to open in 2026.







# CROSSING THE FINISH LINE

## A SECOND CHANCE AT SUCCESS WITH THE ISLANDERS FINISH INITIATIVE

For some students, the path to a diploma feels more like an obstacle course — full of hurdles that can sideline even the most determined runners. But at TAMU-CC, a \$600,000 boost from an anonymous donor is giving Islanders the power to rejoin the race, leap past challenges, and charge toward the finish line.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, approximately 40% of U.S. college students don't finish their degrees within six years of enrolling in a four-year university. The grant-funded Islanders Finish Initiative is stepping in as a powerful student support system, helping them pick up the pace and sprint toward degree completion.

"We've had students that needed to make money to help support family, forcing them to stop out and work

full-time," said Julie Shuttlesworth '19, Assistant Vice President of Enrollment Enhancement in the Division of Enrollment Management, who oversees the initiative. "Others have faced academic challenges, struggling with a few particularly tough classes."

While many universities have stop-out programs, Shuttlesworth believes the Islanders Finish Initiative is unique. Launched campus-wide in summer 2024, the initiative targets students who stepped away from their studies within the past six to 24 months. Students re-enrolling through the initiative benefit from a streamlined process, including a waived application fee and a shorter re-admission application. To be considered for the program, a student must have earned at least 60 credit hours and be in good

academic standing. As a first step in the process, Shuttlesworth and others on the team help re-enrolling students evaluate their degree plan, which may include a change of majors to better align with their goals.

"We've worked with students who are out of school, employed, and simply need a bachelor's degree to advance," Shuttlesworth said.

Previously, the university funded the initiative through funds provided by the Dean of Students' office, limiting aid to students with a balance of \$3,000 or less. Thanks to the new grant, which is split into \$300,000 per year for two years, the university can assist students with higher balances who were not able to re-enroll or qualify for financial aid.

"We don't want students to feel like

they are in educational purgatory,” said Dr. Andrew Johnson, Associate Dean for Student Success.

It was Johnson who came up with the original “Finish” idea in 2023 as a pilot program for the College of Business.

*“Life doesn’t just hand out freebies, but when I got that email, I knew that the school really cared.”*

#### DIEGO TABERA '24

“I was reviewing degree plans and noticed many students were leaving the university with just a few hours remaining,” Johnson said. “Recognizing that trend, I sought out data to better understand the scope of the issue, and I was truly surprised by what I found.”

The data revealed several reasons why students left the university, but a common theme emerged: life had simply gotten

in the way and made attending classes difficult, if not impossible.

“A lot of these students started families and careers or moved away from the Coastal Bend,” Johnson said. “A key advantage is that we’ve added online components to many of our degree programs, and we’ve used this initiative as an opportunity to inform students that these options are available to better suit their needs.”

Under the pilot program, Johnson reached out to approximately 300 former business majors who had left the university with less than a semester remaining to finish their degrees. Of those 300, around 30 re-enrolled, with about 90% choosing to take online courses.

“There’s a lot of maturing that happens with the passage of time,” Johnson said. “When you step away from school for a couple of years, so close to the end with so many sacrifices already made, you begin to realize the true value of a degree.”

Sixteen of the pilot program’s students earned degrees, including Diego Tabera '24. Tabera enrolled at TAMU-CC in 2016 and left in 2021, just six credits shy of his degree. Tabera got a job at H-E-B while attending classes and eventually

found himself working too many hours to succeed in the classroom.

“I prioritized work when I should have prioritized school,” Tabera said. “I fell so far into a hole I didn’t see a way out. I didn’t see myself ever coming back. I didn’t see myself graduating.”

Returning to the Island University was the farthest thing from Tabera’s mind when he received what he called a “golden ticket” in January 2024 — an email from Johnson offering him a path back to school.

“Life doesn’t just hand out freebies, but when I got that email, I knew the school really cared,” Tabera said. “They wanted me to prosper.”

Not only did Tabera prosper — he succeeded. Tabera finished his remaining courses and graduated in May 2024 with a Bachelor of Business Administration in Management.

“I have the degree that shows I finished school,” Tabera said. “It’ll take me as far as I want it to go. I now control my career path.”

Tabera was one of the first in what Johnson hopes are a long line of graduates who succeeded thanks to the second chance the initiative offers.

*Continued on next page.*



TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY  
CORPUS CHRISTI

## BUILD YOUR LEGACY WHILE CHANGING STUDENTS' LIVES

At TAMU-CC, student success is at the heart of everything we do. Supporters like you, who believe in creating opportunities, can make a lasting difference through thoughtful, tax-smart giving. By including the Island University in your will, retirement accounts, or life insurance policy, you help ensure that more students can access the education, support, and encouragement they need to reach graduation day. Your legacy becomes their future.

Planned gifts to **TAMU-CC** fuel scholarships, empower academic achievement, and remove barriers that stand in the way of a college degree. To learn more about how you can leave a lasting legacy, visit [plannedgiving.tamucc.edu](https://plannedgiving.tamucc.edu) or contact the Office of Development at **361.825.2639**.





“This is our mission, to graduate students and prepare them for a successful life and career,” Johnson said. “We have an obligation to do all we can to ensure that our students are well-served.”

Megan Cuda '26 is one of 47 students who has re-enrolled at TAMU-CC through the campus-wide Islanders Finish Initiative. Cuda first came to the Island University in fall 2023 as a non-traditional student restarting her education. After a semester on the Island, she transferred to another institution but soon realized that TAMU-CC was where she truly belonged. In her attempt to return, she encountered challenges in the transfer process but remained determined to continue her education as an Islander.

“It felt like one speed bump after another,” Cuda said. “But Julie Shuttlesworth stepped up and fixed everything. She’s an angel. She also helped

me change my major from nursing to psychology.”

In addition to helping clear financial barriers for students, the grant has also funded a new full-time staffer who will focus on identifying and contacting eligible students, encouraging them to return and complete their degrees.

“This new position is a really big piece of the puzzle,” Shuttlesworth said. “Rather than waiting for students to say they’re interested, we can actively call these students and tell them we can help get them back on track.”

With campus-wide expansion, a dedicated team in the Division of Enrollment Management, and support from the anonymous donor, the Islanders Finish Initiative is picking up speed and is ready to help dozens more Islanders cross the finish line. •

## LEARN MORE ABOUT THE ISLANDERS FINISH INITIATIVE

Email [finish@tamucc.edu](mailto:finish@tamucc.edu) for details.

### YOUR GIFT, DOUBLED

A generous donor has pledged \$150,000 in matching funds — but we need your help to unlock it! Every dollar you give will be matched dollar for dollar, bringing us closer to securing this crucial funding for Year 3 of the program. Double your impact today!

### CONTACT

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361.825.3320



A student wearing a welding mask and gloves is working on a metal piece in a workshop. Sparks are flying from the welding torch. The student is wearing a dark jacket with a patch that says "HARLEY-DAVIDSON". The background is a workshop setting with various tools and equipment.

# FROM CLASSROOM TO

# CUTTING EDGE

Sparks fly as Alison Tomlinson '26 gets to work in the mechanics shop on campus.

## REAL-WORLD SOLUTIONS FROM THE COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING AND COMPUTER SCIENCE

Walk through the halls of the university's Dr. Robert R. Furgason Engineering Building, and you'll hear the sounds of innovation in motion — keyboards clacking, drones buzzing, 3D printers humming, and the crackle of sparks as metal meets machine. These aren't just class projects, they're potential breakthroughs. In the College of Engineering and Computer Science, "groundbreaking" isn't just a buzzword; it's a promise.

*Continued on next page.*



“Our students are fearlessly engaging in bold, hands-on projects — from competing in Formula 1 car racing and building a full-scale rocket engine to excelling in cybersecurity competitions,” said Dr. David Ma, Dean of the College of Engineering and Computer Science. “Also, in the last year, our college secured 10 research grants totaling \$7 million, marking yet another historic milestone. This momentum has also led to the recent awarding of two U.S. patents.”

Among those leading the way on the innovation front is electrical engineering major Brenden Oller '25. With support

*“Being an Islander has developed my professional and technical skills beyond what I imagined.”*

BRENDEN OLLER '25

from a Texas General Land Office research grant, the 21-year-old has helped develop an early flood warning system. Now, for his capstone project, he's designing and building specialized drones — another step in a promising engineering career.

“My team and I are building a system of autonomous aerial and ground drones capable of reconnaissance and surveillance tasks for the Department of Defense,” Oller said. “Our drones will be capable of mapping an unknown terrain and identifying hazards and obstacles for military personnel, but this tech has uses in multiple industries.”

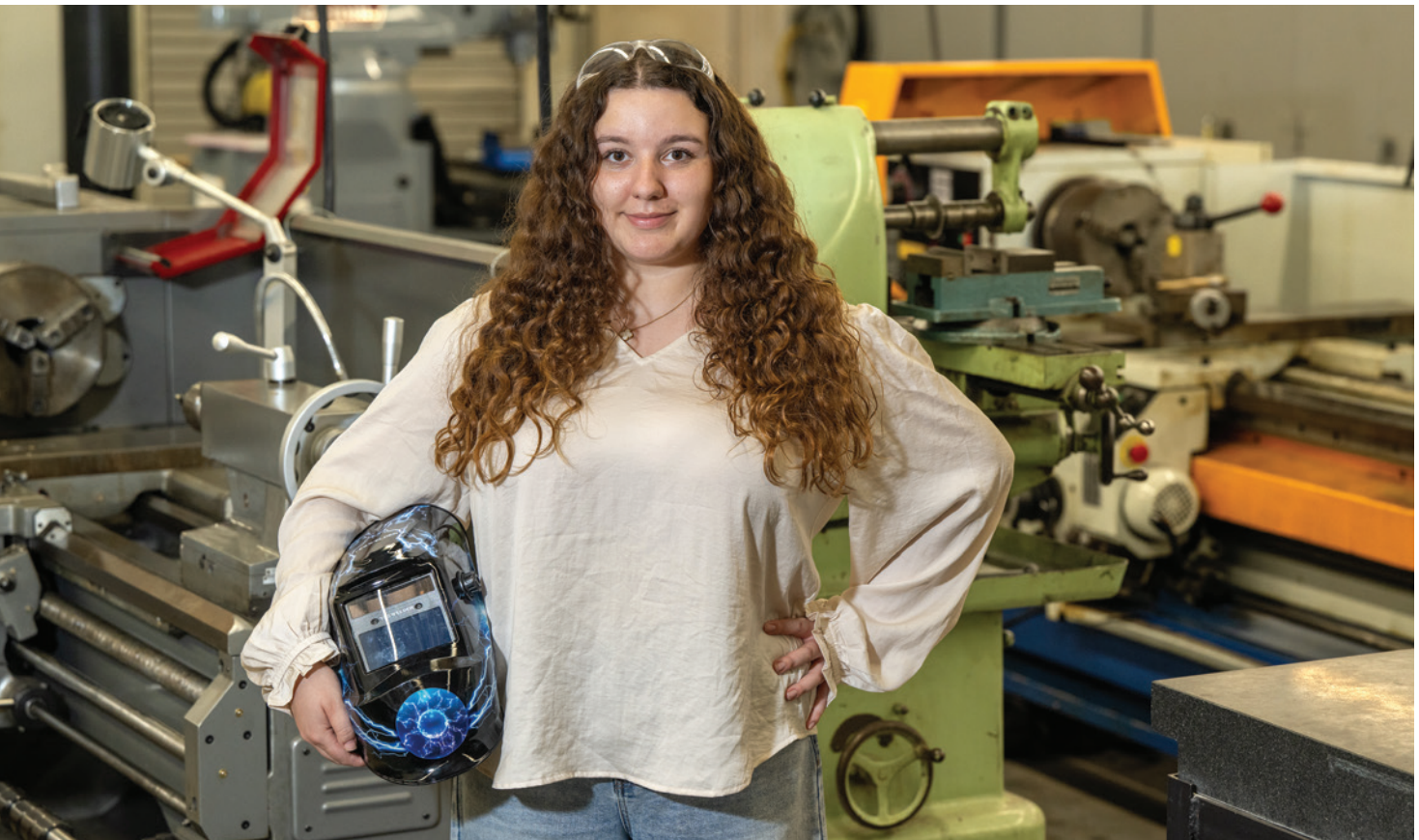
Oller said his time at TAMU-CC has been transformative.

“Being an Islander has developed my professional and technical skills far beyond what I imagined,” Oller said. “As president of both the Islander Energy Club and the Islander Engineering and Computer Science Council, I've gained leadership experience to help me in my next steps after graduation. In fact, I've already accepted a job as a product engineer with Texas Instruments.”

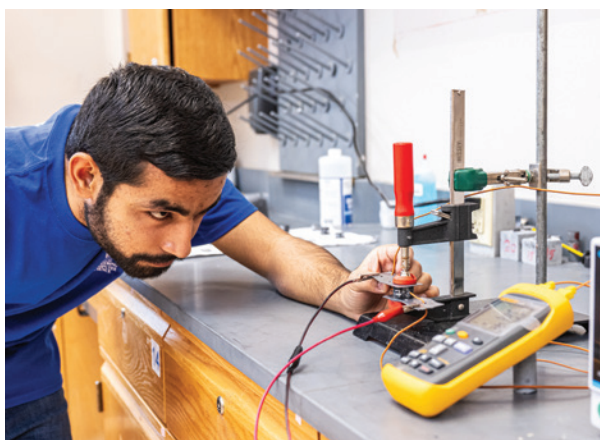
Groundbreaking work is also being done in the university's Advanced Materials for Sustainable Infrastructure Laboratory (AMSI), led by Dr. Nancy Soliman, Assistant Professor of Civil Engineering. There, you'll find Mazen Hassan '25 and Fazal Hussain '25, civil engineering master's students working to develop sustainable, energy-efficient construction materials.

“I hope this research will lead to the widespread use of smart concrete in real-world infrastructure that can self-regulate its temperature and store renewable energy,” Hussain said. “For example, roads made with self-heating concrete could prevent ice formation in cold climates, reducing accidents and maintenance costs. Similarly, buildings with energy-storing foundations could directly integrate solar energy, to reduce dependence on fossil fuels and lower carbon emissions.”

The pair, with help from Soliman, recently established the American Concrete Institute student chapter at TAMU-CC, with the goal of driving innovation, sustainability, and growth



Alison Tomlinson '26 plans to pursue a career in automotive engineering.



The Islander Cyber Society (above) has garnered international attention since its inception in 2024. Fazal Hussain '25 (left) is helping to create an energy-efficient concrete. Mazen Hassan '25 (right) works in the university's Advanced Materials for Sustainable Infrastructure Laboratory.

within the concrete industry to ensure it maintains its relevance and success for future generations.

Mechanical engineering major Alison Tomlinson '26, a Houston native, has made her mark at TAMU-CC by founding and leading three student organizations: the Society of Automotive Engineers, the Society of Women Engineers, and the American Academy of Environmental Engineers and Scientists. Additionally, she serves as the event coordinator and director of external affairs for the Islander Engineering and Computer Science Council.

"Building these organizations wasn't just about creating clubs — it was about creating opportunities," Tomlinson said.

The College of Engineering and Computer Science now boasts 23 student organizations, a threefold increase from three years ago.

A clear sign of the college's growing impact is the success Islander students have achieved at national competitions. Leading the charge are the students of the Islander Cyber Society, a student

organization founded in 2024 that's already establishing itself as a force to be reckoned with on the national stage.

"When I arrived on campus, I noticed there wasn't yet a dedicated cybersecurity student group. So, we rolled up our sleeves and started one," said Lewis Heuermann, a TAMU-CC computer science adjunct professor. "It's been incredible watching the students come together and shape it into something special."

In its short tenure, the Islander Cyber Society has earned top-tier national and international recognition. Most recently, the team ranked 13th out of more than 500 colleges and universities in the spring 2025 season of the National Cyber League Competition, making it the highest-ranked school in Texas. The club also placed in the top 7.7% of over 8,000 teams worldwide in the Hack the Box CTF competition, a global hacking event where they competed not only against fellow students but also against seasoned professional security testers and hackers.

"I always believe our students here are

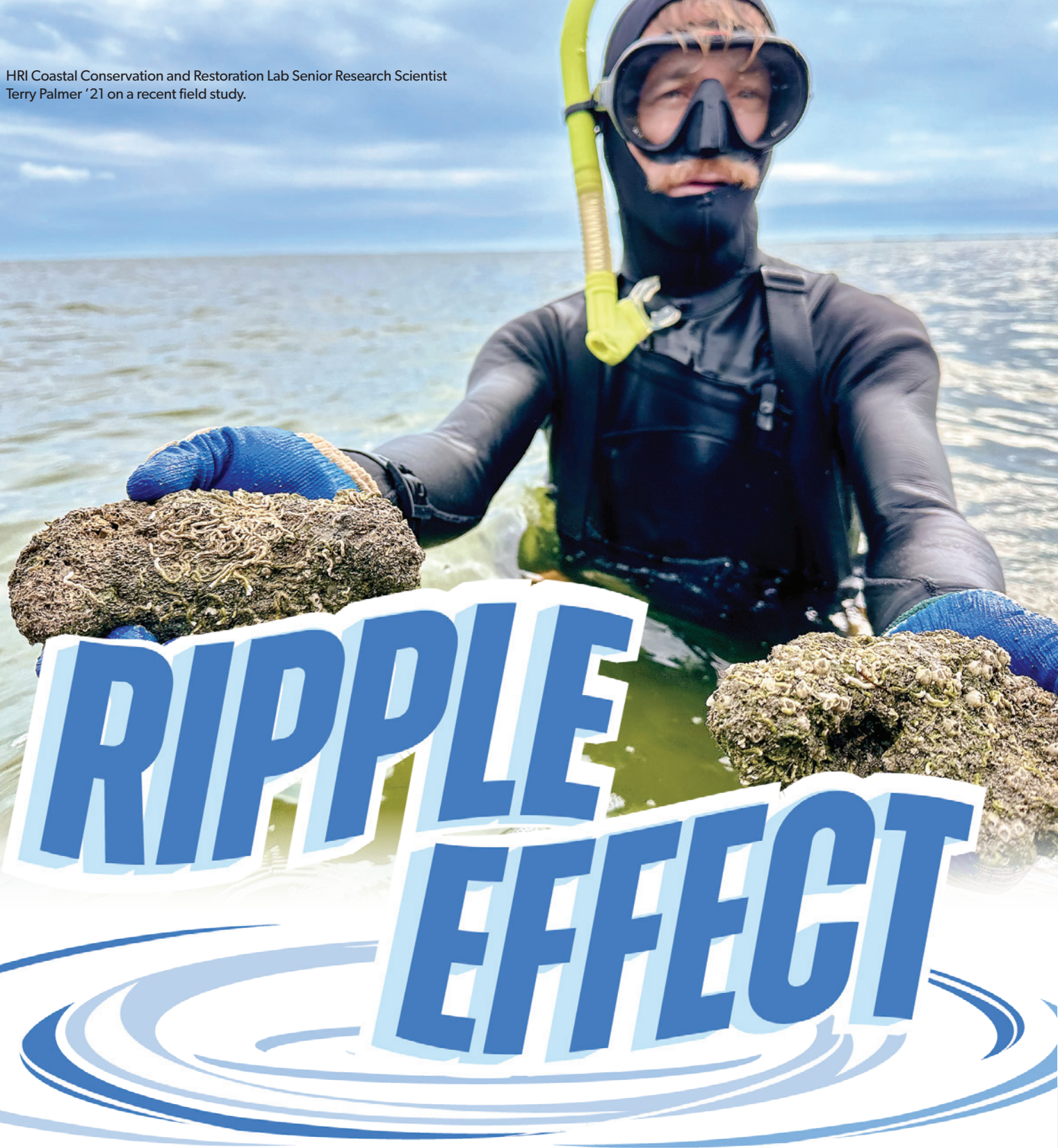
equal to if not better than students going to MIT and other top schools," Ma said. "The talent level is high, and the success at these competitions proves it."

The college's expansion continues to grow with the new and recent launch of the Coastal Bend Midstream Program, an initiative designed to forge strong partnerships with the midstream energy sector. This program has already led to the creation of new scholarships for Islander students and is paving the way for future research collaborations between industry and academia.

"The industry that surrounds us provides our students with invaluable hands-on experience in the very environments where they will eventually work," Ma said. "You don't become an engineer by simply reading about bridges — you build them, test them, and learn from the process. That's where true understanding takes root. Ultimately, learning becomes meaningful when it leads to action — when it empowers students to create, innovate, and lead with purpose." •



HRI Coastal Conservation and Restoration Lab Senior Research Scientist  
Terry Palmer '21 on a recent field study.

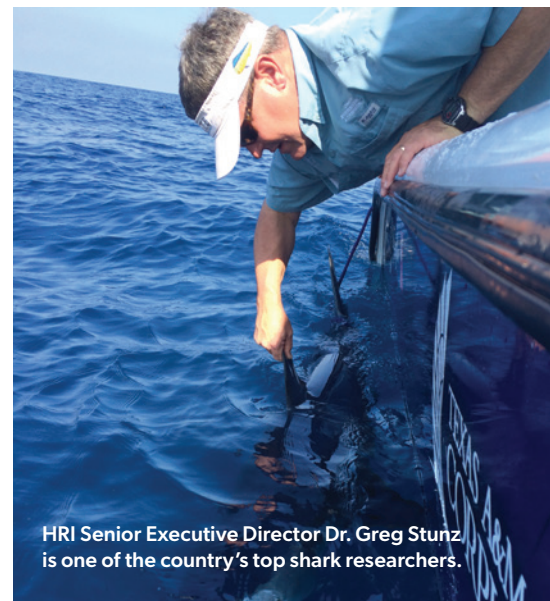


## **HARTE RESEARCH INSTITUTE CELEBRATES 25 YEARS OF EXCELLENCE**

At sunrise on Baffin Bay on a crisp spring morning, a group of graduate students carefully collects water samples to help scientists monitor changes in water quality. Meanwhile, out in the Gulf, doctoral students don dive gear at the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary, studying coral health and working to preserve one of the Gulf's unique and vibrant underwater ecosystems. Farther out in the Gulf, researchers and students are tagging mako sharks, collaborating on conservation efforts that extend well beyond Texas' shores.



The Harte Research Institute, a 57,000-square-foot facility, is one of the first buildings to greet campus visitors.



HRI Senior Executive Director Dr. Greg Stunz is one of the country's top shark researchers.

Learning about marine science doesn't just happen in a classroom — it happens with students' hands in the water, their feet on the deck of a research boat, and their minds focused on real-world challenges.

"The classroom laid a strong foundation, but the lab was where everything truly came to life," said Daphne White '22, '28, a graduate research assistant in the HRI Coral Reef and Ocean Health Lab.

As the Harte Research Institute marks its 25th anniversary in 2025, hands-on, immersive experiences have become a hallmark of education at TAMU-CC. These opportunities are not just enriching these students' academic journeys, they're shaping the next generation of

marine scientists, conservationists, and environmental leaders.

Miles Jordan '26 is a marine biology graduate student and research assistant in the HRI HydroEcology Lab. His current research focuses on zooplankton community structure in Coastal Bend Estuaries, and his mentor is Dr. Paul Montagna, HRI Endowed Chair for HydroEcology. Jordan is also a CCME-II scholar, an elite group of graduate students sponsored by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

"While working on my thesis research, I learned various data analysis techniques," Jordan said. "These hands-on experiences taught me specific skills, including

scientific writing, community ecology data analysis, and multivariate data analysis."

When Ed Harte made his visionary \$46 million gift in 2000, it did more than establish the Harte Research Institute — it sparked a transformation. It reimagined what it means to learn, explore, and drive meaningful change in the world.

"Not only did the gift allow our coastal and marine sciences programs to earn an international reputation for excellence, but it affected the entire university," said TAMU-CC President and CEO Dr. Kelly M. Miller. "We became a university focused on how we could have broader, global impacts."

*Continued on next page.*

## THE HISTORY OF THE HARTE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Over the past 25 years, the Harte Research Institute has grown from a bold idea into a global leader in marine science, thanks to Ed Harte's transformative \$46 million gift in 2000. Since then, HRI has led impactful projects to protect the Gulf, attracted top-tier talent, and shaped future leaders in coastal and marine research. The following timeline traces HRI's journey and offers a glimpse into its promising future.



2000

Inspired by Dr. Sylvia Earle's book "Sea Change," Edward H. Harte donated \$46 million to establish a Gulf-focused research institute at TAMU-CC. Harte partnered with then-university president Dr. Robert R. Furgason to create an endowment supporting research chairs, graduate fellowships, and operations.

In 2005, HRI staff and students moved into a new \$15 million facility at TAMU-CC. Furgason, who secured the building's funding during the 2001 Texas legislative session, stepped down from his role as university president to become the inaugural HRI Executive Director.

2005



Dr. Larry McKinney was named HRI Executive Director.

2008



2007

The Trinational Initiative was launched to enhance collaboration and conservation among Cuba, Mexico, and the United States.







From left: Miles Jordan '26, Kalie Tovar '24, and Dominic Burch '10 collect water samples on Baffin Bay.



From left: Maddi Piasecki, Daphne White '28, Stacy Trackenberg, and Terry Palmer '21 work on a project with HRI's Coastal Conservation and Restoration program.

HRI's cutting-edge research, focusing on the Gulf's ecosystems, economies, and policies quickly became one pillar of the university's broad identity. As HRI flourished, so did TAMU-CC's reputation as a research powerhouse. The vision behind HRI blends a deep commitment to coastal and marine sustainability with a focus on interdisciplinary collaboration and community engagement — principles that continue to shape its success today. As HRI grows, it remains uniquely positioned as a marine research institute embedded within a vibrant university campus, where

science intersects with a wide range of academic disciplines.

"The university's growth at all levels has enabled HRI to take on more multidisciplinary projects, to bring together experts from different fields to work on challenging and more complex environmental problems," explained Dr. Ahmed Mahdy, TAMU-CC Executive Vice President for Research and Innovation. "It's a perfect example of how a positive feedback loop should work."

From public outreach and research showcases to hands-on conservation

efforts, each anniversary event in 2025 has highlighted the institute's far-reaching impact. It began with Oyster Bake in March, a celebration of oyster conservation featuring local farmers and HRI research, followed by Sink Your Shucks community bagging activities. This summer, HRI's shark research will once again reach a wide audience through re-airings on Discovery's Shark Week. The celebration will culminate in a November anniversary event, spotlighting HRI's transformative work and its significance over the past 25 years.

The Sink Your Shucks™ program was launched to recycle oyster shells from local restaurants into new reefs. Working with school children and other volunteers, over 45 acres of new reef have been created from recycled shells.

2009



2010

The Deepwater Horizon spill, caused by the explosion of a BP-operated oil rig off Louisiana, released nearly five million barrels of oil before being capped five months later. Over the next decade, HRI scientists led research on the spill and recovery efforts.

HRI established its first research center, the Center for Sportfish Science and Conservation (CSSC), with initial funding of \$500,000 from the Coastal Conservation Association.

2013



GRINDC, a multidisciplinary data repository based out of HRI, was established. The information legacy promotes continual scientific discovery and public awareness of coastal and marine ecosystems.

2013

The Bringing Baffin Back™ initiative began when 18 citizen scientists were enlisted to help study Baffin Bay's water quality.

2013







The HRI Oyster Resource and Recovery Center provides training in hatchery farming and business development as oyster aquaculture grows along the Texas coast. DJ's Oyster Company in Palacios, pictured here, is one of many emerging farms.

"If you look at other institutions that have research activities going on, they've been developed over a period of 50 or 100 years," said TAMU-CC President Emeritus and former HRI Executive Director, Dr. Robert R. Furgason. "Our institute has made a dramatic impact on the Gulf in 25 years. You can never be certain how a seed will grow, but this one has truly flourished. It's something the entire university community can look back on with pride and say, 'We were a part of that.'" •



Jacob Aparcio and Gabe Garcia, who work with the Oyster Bros LLC, shuck oysters at this year's Oyster Bake.

After a lengthy career at TAMU-CC, David Yoskowitz was named HRI Senior Executive Director. He left HRI in 2022 to become the Executive Director of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Dr. Keisha Bahr was selected as HRI Chair for Coral Reef and Ocean Health, bringing the field of coral reef ecology to the institute.

2015

For the first time, HRI was featured on Discovery's Shark Week, marking a major milestone in the institute's outreach and visibility.



2020



2023

Dr. Greg Stunz, HRI's Endowed Chair for Fisheries and Ocean Health and Director of the CSSC, was named HRI Senior Executive Director.

2024

The Oyster Resource and Recovery Center was launched and is a premier initiative offering comprehensive training in oyster hatchery, oyster farming, and business development.





ISLANDER

HOMECOMING



2025

## THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME...

...especially when home is Texas A&M-Corpus Christi!

During Islander Homecoming 2025, alumni from near and far returned to relive cherished memories, reconnect with lifelong friends, and celebrate the homecoming traditions that make TAMU-CC unforgettable.

Homecoming honors not only the achievements of today but also the legacy of the past. From athletes and alumni to students and community members, every Islander adds to the vibrant story of the Island University.



## "OG" Alumni Status

"TAMU-CC is my favorite place to be. I try to make it to every basketball game I can."  
O.B. Garcia '54



## Shakas Up!

"Coming back for the tailgate party is a lot of fun because I get to reminisce. All these memories pop up. Not only do I get to hang out with my old friends, I get to make new friends."  
Mayra Zamora '10, '14



## Block Party Vibes

"Everything always feels right at Homecoming, and I always feel like it grounds me. I think of my college experience; the good times, the tough times — all of it. TAMU-CC is 'home,' and I'm so fortunate to have the opportunity to come home."  
Jordan Baylor '22



## CITY-WIDE BLUESDAY TUESDAY

The Islander spirit shone brightly across the community during Islander Homecoming city-wide Bluesday Tuesday! From local businesses and schools to newsrooms and council chambers, Islander supporters proudly wore blue to celebrate this colorful homecoming tradition.



"I love coming to Homecoming and running into different people and friendly faces. Once an Islander, always an Islander!"  
- Beatrice Blomquist '98, '13

"Since my time on campus, it's amazing to see all the new buildings and how much the university has expanded. It makes me proud that we are moving forward, and we are here to stay!"  
- Leanne Mulholland '08, '11



**Go Islanders!**

"I'm proud to be an Islander because of the university's phenomenal growth. I was impressed to see everyone on City Council wearing blue for this year's Homecoming Bluesday Tuesday!"  
- Rosie Vela '79, '80

"I enjoy attending the doubleheader Homecoming Basketball games, especially watching the Islanders Women's team play! The girls do an amazing job and are an amazing team!"  
- Veronica Vela '02, '06



## ISLANDER ALUMNI HONORED AT HOMECOMING HONORS BANQUET

They left the Island University with a degree in hand and aspirations for greatness; they returned to campus to be celebrated for fulfilling that potential. Three remarkable Islander alumni and an outstanding Islanders Athletics team were honored at the annual Homecoming Honors Banquet. This year's distinguished honorees include:



### DISTINGUISHED ALUMNUS

"A commitment to lifelong learning has resulted in being blessed with purpose and has led to worthwhile work and service to others."

**Dr. Gerardo "Jerry" Flores '02**  
Senior Vice President - CHRISTUS Health  
System Chief Nurse Executive



### OUTSTANDING ALUMNUS

"TAMU-CC has been instrumental in my life. I encourage all students to continue their education and never stop, even if it takes longer than you expected."

**Sandra Alvarez '12**  
Alvarez Business Consultants



### YOUNG ALUMNUS

"Taking classes at TAMU-CC taught me to dig deeper into business topics to understand how to bridge the gap between theory and practice while stretching me out of my comfort zone."

**Dr. Jordan Thurston '20**  
Senior VP and Senior Audit Manager - Citi

## HALL OF HONOR

### 2016 ISLANDERS WOMEN'S TENNIS

The 2016 Islanders Women's Tennis Team is the first Islanders Athletics program to go undefeated during the regular season and Southland tournament. The team earned nine Southland Conference Awards and posted the best record in the history of the conference.







UNIVERSITY

YOU KNOW IT'S ISLANDER HOMECOMING WHEN...



...the Sparkle Squad shows up!



...the Homecoming Court shines in style!



...the "Big I" lights up the night sky!



...the Islander Pep Band pumps up the crowd!

ISLANDERS



...Izzy cuts loose!



...Islander babies race to the finish!

UNIVERSITY- CORPUS CHRISTI SHAKAS UP!

ISLANDER HOMECOMING

2025



...the Anchor gets a makeover!



...Islanders Women's Basketball takes home the W!



...and Islanders Men do too!



...President Miller rides a mechanical unicorn!







# LIFE AT ISLAND U

Islander spirit shines bright during Homecoming Week — a vibrant celebration of tradition, pride, and connection. All week long, the campus pulses with energy, from the beloved Anchors Aweigh painting and the spirited Lighting of the I pep rally, to the crowning of Islander royalty, the downtown block party, and the Islanders Basketball game. No place blends time-honored tradition with tropical flair quite like the Island University.











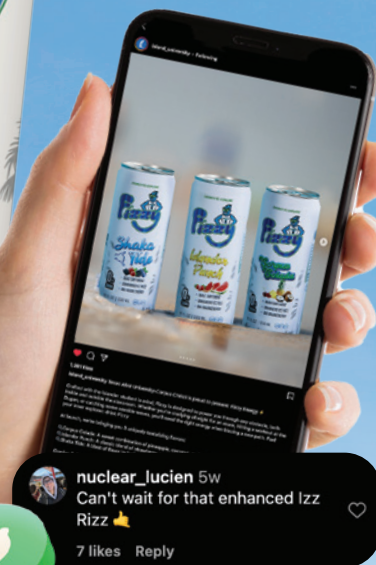
IzzFest, Texas A&M-Corpus Christi's annual concert and food truck festival, drew a record-breaking crowd of more than 5,100 fans in its fourth year. Held at Concrete Street Amphitheater in downtown Corpus Christi, this year's event featured rising country star Braxton Keith.





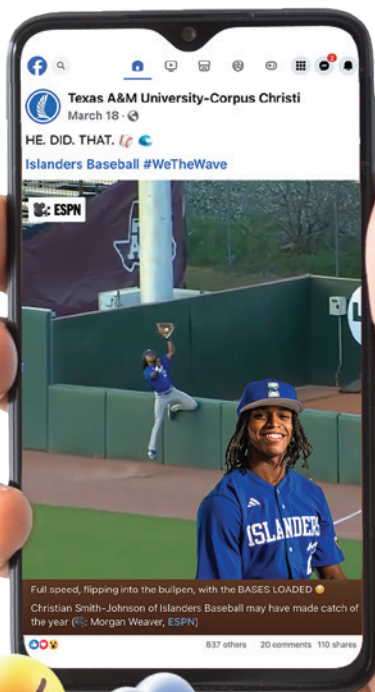


# VIRAL MOMENTS



What do penguins, dolphins, and an imaginary energy drink have in common? They've all helped Islanders make a splash on social media! Over the last few months, Texas A&M-Corpus Christi's social feeds have been bursting with unforgettable moments, from penguins making an appearance during a once-in-a-lifetime Antarctic research expedition, dolphins grabbing headlines alongside serious conversations about the health of our waters, and even a prank so good it had people craving a fake new Islander energy drink — Fizzy, anyone?

Social media isn't just a place to scroll — it's where Islander spirit comes to life. From viral videos to headline-making news, it's your front-row seat to all things bold, bright, and blue. Make sure you're following us on all our social media channels to keep up with every exciting Islander moment.



Rebekah Lane  
Cool — or cold — research.

## FOLLOW US

@island\_university /islanduniversity @IslandCampus







# SAILING TO SUCCESS

## STUDENT CLUBS ANCHORED IN ISLAND LIFE

At Texas A&M-Corpus Christi, island life isn't just a backdrop — it's a way of life. Surrounded by the salty breeze and the endless blue of the Gulf, students here dive into more than just academics. From sailing through coastal winds and exploring vibrant marine ecosystems to rescuing sea turtles and protecting delicate shorelines, campus clubs at TAMU-CC bring the Island's natural beauty and adventurous spirit to life. These hands-on, water-infused experiences reflect a student community deeply connected to the environment and each other.





Members of the Islander Sailing Team gather on the dock at the Corpus Christi Yacht Club during a regatta.

## RIDING THE WIND WITH THE ISLANDER SAILING CLUB

The waves of Corpus Christi Bay are vastly different from the stillness of the North Texas lakes that Maddy Lee '27 often cruised.

"My family had a motorboat, but there's something about sailboats that I always found fascinating," Lee said. "I always wanted to learn to sail."

Finding a university near the water was at the top of Lee's college wish list. Her final decision came down to two coastal contenders: Texas A&M-Corpus Christi and a school in Florida. Ultimately, the Islander Sailing Club — and its competitive counterpart, the Islander Sailing Team — tipped the scales.

"The other team's dues were out of my price range as well, while here, team participation is affordable," Lee said.

Not long after arriving in Corpus Christi, Lee found herself on a sailboat. Though she had no sailing experience, she quickly took to the sport — surprising even herself. Her background in competitive high school volleyball, it turned out, gave her the balance, coordination, and team mindset needed to navigate the wind and waves with ease.

"I caught on immediately," said Lee, a sophomore biology major. "A big part of volleyball is timing. I was a setter and had to develop timing with my hitters. On the sailing team, we use two-person boats, so you need footwork, timing, teamwork, and the ability to communicate."

Lee is now president of the Islanders Sailing Club. She has taken a part-time job at the Corpus Christi Yacht Club,

the sailing club's home base, to spend as much time on the water as possible. Competitively, Lee skippers one of the sailing team's boats in Southeast Interscholastic Sailing Association regattas, with hopes of making waves at the Inter-Collegiate Sailing Association national championships.

"It gives me great joy to see the Islander Sailing Club grow and have more students excited to sail," said Dr. Lon Seiger, kinesiology professor and the club's faculty advisor. "Under the direction of Coach Joe Hanco, our sailing team continues to place well in regattas, demonstrating a strong commitment to representing the university in a positive light."

*Continued on next page.*



## UNDERWATER ADVENTURES WITH THE SCUBA AND SNORKEL CLUB

While the Islander Sailing Club spends its time on top of the waves, the Scuba and Snorkel Club is devoted to exploring the vast and mysterious world that is just below the water's surface.

"There are a lot of underwater stone quarries in Texas, which are great for adventuring," said Dominic Burch '11, staff advisor. "About an hour up the coast, there's one with a sunken B-52, a fire engine, even NASA satellites."

Burch's involvement with the Scuba and Snorkel Club began in 2009 when he was an environmental science major. At the time, it was simply known as the Scuba Club.

"I saw a flyer hanging somewhere on campus — back then, that's how word was spread," Burch said. "I started diving about a year earlier and already had my certification. I knew immediately that it would be the club for me."

What Burch didn't know at the time was just how long his connection to the club would last. By the time he graduated, he had served as the club's president. After earning his degree, Burch remained at the Island University and joined the staff at the Conrad Blucher Institute for Surveying and Science and then the Harte Research Institute, which allowed him to dive into his new staff advisor role.

"Our club is a great outlet for Islanders who are passionate about marine



Members of the Scuba and Snorkel Club check their gear and prep for a day of diving during a weekend trip to Canyon Lake.

conservation," Burch said. "Members regularly volunteer their time cleaning lakes and local beaches, and we often host guest speakers who share their dive experiences from around the world. Of course, we also organize as many dive trips as possible each semester for hands-on underwater exploration."

While members are responsible for their own scuba certifications, the club recently

introduced snorkeling opportunities for non-certified students, making it accessible and affordable for more Islanders to join the underwater fun.

"I'm really happy to see more students get involved," Burch said. "We've been seeing 30-50 people at each meeting. I love watching this community grow."



Kaden Mabey '28 strikes a pose atop a sunken platform during a dive with the Scuba and Snorkel Club at Canyon Lake.



Scuba and Snorkel Club members float in the waters of Canyon Lake as they get set to snorkel.





Jessica Thompson '27, president of the Sea Turtle Club, cares for a rescued turtle while volunteering at the Texas Sealife Center.

## PROTECTING THE PLANET WITH THE SEA TURTLE CLUB

Another long-standing, outdoor-oriented club at TAMU-CC is the Sea Turtle Club — a student-led group dedicated to raising awareness about sea turtle endangerment. Like many student organizations, membership naturally ebbs and flows as students graduate, but the club has seen a strong resurgence in recent years. Thanks to a dedicated group of officers, including biology major and club president Jessica Thompson '27, its

membership has grown from fewer than five to nearly 20 active members.

“We’ve put in a lot of effort to help the club grow and thrive again,” Thompson said. “I’m excited to keep spreading awareness and welcoming more students who share our passion for sea turtles.”

Looking ahead, the club is excited to revive some of its signature activities such as beach cleanups, crafting events, and participation in local turtle release

programs. Thompson finds fulfillment in volunteering with the Texas Sealife Center, a local nonprofit dedicated to the rescue, rehabilitation, and release of injured or stranded coastal and aquatic wildlife.

“It’s amazing to be part of something bigger than yourself,” she said. “Seeing a turtle return to the water after everything it’s been through — that moment stays with you.” •

## FROM ISLANDER TO ISLANDER, MAKE YOUR WAVE OF IMPACT.

Make A Gift Today!



As a proud Islander, you know firsthand how TAMU-CC shaped your journey. Now, you have the unique opportunity to pay it forward. The Islander Annual Fund is crucial in ensuring that our students receive the highest-quality education, access to scholarships, and the tools they need to succeed. Join us in making an impact that will last for generations.

To make a gift, scan the QR code or call Chelsea Lanzener '19, '22 at 361.825.3552.







# BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESS

## CONCRETE PLANS WITH ISLAND ROOTS FOR MOSES MOSTAGHASI '06

Moses Mostaghani '06 didn't wait for the perfect opportunity, he built it — one home at a time.

In sweltering South Texas heat, hammer in one hand and textbooks in the other, Mostaghani wasn't just building homes, he was building a future. As a student at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi, he balanced his studies with blueprints, running his own home-building business before earning his diploma. Today, the Islander alumnus is a successful land developer, transforming the landscape of the very city that helped build him.

With a story like Mostaghani's, one might assume his degree was in engineering or business, but you would be wrong. He graduated with honors from the Island University with a Bachelor of

Arts in Political Science and a minor in criminal justice.

"I became a home builder and land developer accidentally," Mostaghani said. "I wanted to be a lawyer, but when I was

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*"The education I received at TAMU-CC gave me a real-world perspective on life. I'm honored to give back."*

**MOSES MOSTAGHASI '06**

19 years old, my parents asked me to figure out how to build them their first home on a piece of property they owned. I figured it out and fell in love with the entire process."

Mostaghani's parents never moved into that home — instead, he sold it, and in the process, launched a real estate empire.

"A retired builder bought it from me because he wanted to spend his remaining days looking at the first house he ever built," Mostaghani said. "So, one home turned into two, two turned into four, and 22 years later, I've now built more than 1,200 homes."

Those numbers made Mostaghani the largest custom home builder in Corpus Christi, until two years ago, when he shifted his focus entirely to



Moses Mostaghani '06 stands proudly at one of his company's developed lots, a symbol of his journey from student entrepreneur to leading land developer.



land development. Today, with more than 3,000 lots developed, his company, Coastal Bend Lots, is now the area's largest land developer. Not a bad outcome for someone who once imagined his future would unfold in a courtroom.

"I had to make a tough choice, putting my law career on hold to focus on my business," Mostaghani said. "Fortunately, it paid off."

As a Corpus Christi native, Mostaghani emphasizes the importance of being an active member of the university's alumni community. A valued member of the College of Business Dean's Advisory Council, he's also a familiar face courtside at Islanders Basketball games. Recently, Mostaghani demonstrated his commitment to the community by gifting the city a half-acre of land to help expand an existing fire station. His generosity extends further as he plans to donate additional land to the London area in southwest Nueces County, supporting public services such as fire and police stations.

"I try to stay involved," Mostaghani said. "The education I received at TAMU-CC gave me a real-world perspective on life. I'm honored to give back."

Mostaghani's advice to current and future Islanders is to maintain an open mind and engage with people who see the world differently.

"Beyond communication, having relationships is one of the biggest keys to being successful," Mostaghani said. "And whether a relationship is big or small, cherish it. I've valued all the relationships I've had with people from several different walks of life." •



Moses Mostaghani '06 visits Texas A&M-Corpus Christi, where he laid the foundation for a career built on vision, grit, and community commitment.





# CAREER CONNECTIONS

## THE IMPACT OF THE ISLANDER MENTOR PROGRAM

Success isn't just about what you know — it's also about who's in your corner.

At Texas A&M-Corpus Christi, the Islander Mentor Program empowers students by connecting them with alumni and community leaders who offer real-world insight, career guidance, and unwavering support. These mentors are more than advisors — they're champions, helping turn college aspirations into achieving career accomplishments.

Since its launch in 2019, the Islander Mentor Program has built powerful, lasting connections between students and their mentors, who meet regularly throughout the academic year to navigate classroom to career — together.

"I want to help people make connections they may not have been able to make on their own," said Sandy Rodriguez '18, a first-time mentor. "I only wish this was available when I was an undergrad."

Rodriguez, an environmental advisor with ExxonMobil, graduated from the Island University with a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Science. She was paired with Justin Lara '26, a first-generation college student from Corpus Christi. Lara, a junior studying physics, has an interest in quantum physics

research, and while Rodriguez is not an expert in physics, she was able to open doors for Lara by connecting him with colleagues who share similar interests.

"Sandy has introduced me to a lot of her coworkers from Exxon, which is a great step into getting a job with the oil and gas industry," Lara said. "One of the main things she's showed me was that just because I might get a job in industry doesn't mean that I can't also do research."

Rodriguez also helped Lara better prepare for the job search that awaits him after graduation.

"She helped make my CV more concise and cleaner," Lara said. "She also helped me set up a LinkedIn profile."

Ila Pridgeon '23, who earned a Bachelor of Arts in Communication and Media Studies, was paired with Islander Mentor Darcy Schroeder, Public Affairs Manager for Valero Energy Corporation.

"My experience with the Islander Mentor Program provided me with invaluable insights and guidance," Pridgeon said. "Darcy's wealth of experience, deep knowledge, and passion for the profession were instrumental in broadening my horizons and strengthening my skills. What set Darcy



Ed Cantu '81, owner of Ed Cantu Insurance Agency, has proudly participated in the Islander Mentor Program each semester since its inception in 2019.





Mentor Sandy Rodriguez '18 (left), an environmental advisor with ExxonMobil, has opened doors in the oil and gas industry for her mentee, Justin Lara '26.

apart as a mentor was her unwavering commitment to my growth and development. The mentorship was not limited to formal meetings or professional discussions; it was a holistic experience.”

Pridgeon is now studying to earn a Master of Arts in International Relations at St. Mary's University and she and Schroeder stay connected via LinkedIn.

“Ila has a very bright future,” Schroeder said. “She’s a hard worker and a go-getter, and I’m excited to see where she lands in the next few years.”

Ali Ibrahimov '20, '22 was invited to be a mentee while he was earning his MBA at TAMU-CC. He was paired with Ricardo de los Santos '20, Chief Financial Officer at Eagle Pass Pediatric Clinic, who transitioned their mentor-mentee relationship into a close friendship. Now a financial analyst at the Island University, Ibrahimov continues to pay it forward by serving as an Islander Alumni Mentor to Shreyash Chede '25, a computer science graduate student.

“I’m in a good place in my career and I’m excited to give back to my Island community,” Ibrahimov said.

Not only do they share a passion for business, but Ibrahimov, originally from

Azerbaijan, and Chede, from India, have the shared experience of being international students.

“Ali knows all the hurdles that I’m going to face, and he’s been able to navigate me through it accordingly,” Chede said.

Ibrahimov has also connected Chede with another mentor, Ruben Barrera, President of Barrera Business Ventures, a conglomerate that owns and operates technology companies in the Coastal Bend.

“Ruben and I have a shared interest in information technology and cybersecurity,” Chede said. “From him, I’ve learned more about industry trends and how to stand out during the job interview process.”

Beyond helping Chede in his job search, Ibrahimov believes the pair have

forged a bond that will continue beyond their time in the program.

“Whether he likes it or not, I’ll still bug him and do my best to mentor him in any way that I can,” Ibrahimov joked. “I’d never say, ‘you’ve graduated, you’re on your own.’ I’m going to bet all the other Islander mentors feel the same way.” •

The Islander Mentor Program is jointly sponsored by the Islander Alumni Association and the TAMU-CC Career and Professional Development Center.

To be considered as an Islander Mentor, applicants must have completed three or more years of professional experience after earning their first undergraduate degree from any institution.

*Learn more and apply now!*



Ali Ibrahimov '20, '22 (left) was a mentee in the Islander Mentor Program as a graduate student. He now pays his experience forward as a mentor to Shreyash Chede '25.





# HITTING NEW HEIGHTS

## ISLANDERS VOLLEYBALL AND THEIR DECADE OF SUCCESS

Success is nothing new for the Islanders Volleyball program, but every season requires its own path to get there. For the 2024 team, the journey began with high hopes and a talented roster packed with seniors who had seen a championship ending before. Yet even seasoned teams face adversity, and early in the season, the Islanders found themselves in unfamiliar territory with the program's eighth potential championship on the line.





Head Coach Steve Greene, the program's most winning coach, poses with the 2024 SLC Championship Belt after leading Islanders Volleyball to its fifth tournament title.

For a program consistently finding comfort at the top, the challenge facing the 2024 team was a tough stretch, including back-to-back losses to open Southland Conference play.

"It was a reminder that we were entitled to nothing and that every year is different," said Islanders Volleyball Head Coach Steve Greene. "Just because we've had success in the past doesn't mean we were going to have continued success. We had nine seniors on that team, and we knew we were pretty good. But we still had to prove it."

Prove it, they did. They would close the regular season with three straight wins, earning the No. 2 seed in the Southland Conference Tournament. A victory over No. 1 Southeastern Louisiana completed that quest and secured yet another Southland Conference Championship — their fifth tournament title and eighth overall. Six of those championships were earned under the watch of Greene, the program's winningest coach. With now five NCAA Tournament appearances to their name, it's clear this is a program hitting its stride.

"When we recruit, we're not just looking for good athletes, we look for good people who want to be here," Greene said. "We are not a fallback choice. We want this to be a place where players can see themselves and see themselves grow. When you build a team full of those kinds of players, winning is relatively easy."

Winning didn't come easily for Islanders Volleyball in the early days. Established in 2000, the program posted just one winning season in its first decade. The tide began to turn under Coach Tony Graystone, who led the Islanders to their first Southland Conference Championship in 2015. The following year, Steve Greene arrived on Ward Island.

"It was a whirlwind back in 2016," Greene said. "I was learning to be a head coach while getting to know a new team. I'm really proud of that first group — they helped me get my footing and shaped the coaching style I still use today."

*Continued on next page.*



## FIT CHECK, GREENE EDITION

You know the saying — look good, play good. Islanders Volleyball Head Coach Steve Greene clearly got the memo. Greene is easy to spot courtside in some of the most eye-catching, Islander-themed polos this side of the Gulf.

"It started with weekend matches," Greene said. "Just throwing on a fun tropical shirt. Then it kind of took off. My family keeps my collection going, and it makes game day fun."

Greene said he's got about a dozen shirts in his rotation — but it's his shoe game that's really spiking the style meter. With close to 50 pairs of kicks, Greene says he wore a different pair for every match last season. The collection even earned its own display in his office.

Coach Greene is showing that when you bring the heat, on the court and in the closet, you're not just building a winning look, you're building a winning culture. And here on the Island, style is part of a winning strategy.







Islanders Volleyball at the 2024 NCAA Division I Volleyball Championships in Austin, Texas, facing the #7 Texas Longhorns in the First Round.

In nearly a decade at the helm, Greene has coached 31 SLC All-Conference selections, including four Players of the Year, seven Setters of the Year, one Freshman of the Year, four Liberos of the Year, and one Newcomer of the Year. He also developed three American Volleyball Coaches Association All-Americans in back-to-back-to-back seasons: Faith Panhans '22 (2021) and Kyndal Payne '24 (2022 and 2023).

"Islanders Volleyball is a big family," Payne said. "My teammates became my best friends. They made me a better student and a better player. I owe a lot to Islanders Volleyball."

Payne's place among the all-time greats in Islanders Volleyball is undeniable. A quick glance at the record book says it all. The North Texas native finished her career ranked first in program history in both career kills and total attacks, second in kills per set and solo blocks, and sixth in digs. After a historic four-year run on campus, Payne took her talents overseas, signing a professional contract with team Pölkky Kuusamo in the Finnish Women's Volleyball League.

"I feel so lucky to have found a place (TAMU-CC) that has helped me

grow into the volleyball player, leader, friend, and person I am today," Payne said. "Coach Greene has given me the confidence to chase after something I have always wanted, and I really couldn't have done it without him and the rest of the coaching staff."

Payne's impact extended beyond the court. A biomedical science major, she graduated with a 3.66 cumulative GPA and was named to the Southland Conference All-Academic First Team in her senior year. She was joined on the list by two teammates, Alex Hoglund '24 and Leah Stolfus '24.

"Our standard is a 3.5 GPA or better, because we believe academic success opens doors beyond the court," Greene said. "On the sports side, when you're on top of your studies and have your internships lined up, playing volleyball becomes a lot easier. If you're not stressed about school, you're already ahead of the game."

The building blocks of a winning program are easy to spot, but hard to secure. As Greene enters his 10th year as head coach, the foundation he's laid is one of sustained success, and it shows no signs of slowing down. Just ask redshirt sophomore Brooklyn Jaeger '26, who



Kyndal Payne '24 has led Islanders Volleyball to two SLC Championships and is etched in Islanders history as the first player in the program to earn two AVCA All-America Honorable Mentions, SLC Player of the Year, SLC All-Conference First-Team, and SLC All-Academic First Team.



earned a spot on the 2024 SLC All-Academic Second Team as well as the SLC All-Tournament Team. Jaeger, from the small Texas town of Fayetteville with a population of just 246, is fully aware of the big shoes she has to fill.

“I grew up watching Islanders Volleyball because my uncle went to college here, and I always looked up to this university,” said Jaeger, a kinesiology major. “Getting the offer to come here was incredible. Being part of this program and its winning tradition is a dream come true. It’s amazing now to have my name mentioned alongside some of the players I used to watch as a little girl.”

This summer, Islanders Volleyball will continue to inspire the next generation of young athletes through a series of skills camps for students from second grade to high school seniors. The Islanders will host 12 home matches this season and open their schedule with a road game on Friday, Aug. 29. •



**ISLANDER SUMMER CAMPS**  
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Brooklyn Jaeger '26 (light blue jersey) celebrates the 2024 Southland Conference Volleyball Tournament Championship with teammates.

ISLANDERS



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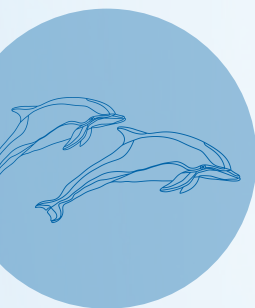
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# WAVES OF DISCOVERY

Texas A&M-Corpus Christi is making waves in research, surpassing \$50 million in annual research expenditures in 2024 — an impressive 84% increase since 2017. This surge solidifies the university's role as the region's intellectual hub and highlights its growing research prominence. While proudly holding an R2 designation, TAMU-CC is achieving milestones comparable to R1 institutions. Islander students gain hands-on research experience alongside their professors from day one, fueling a culture of innovation and discovery that is shaping the future like never before.



## DOLPHINS AND DRUGS

### AN UNLIKELY CONNECTION

Fentanyl and dolphins are rarely mentioned in the same sentence, until now. A team of faculty and student researchers, led by Dr. Dara Orbach, Assistant Professor of Marine Biology, and Dr. Hussain Abdulla, Associate Professor of Chemistry, has detected traces of pharmaceuticals, including the highly addictive opioid, in the blubber of 30 common bottlenose dolphins, both live and deceased, in the Gulf. This accounts for one-third of the dolphins tested.

Contamination levels were highest in dolphins from heavily urbanized and industrialized areas, underscoring the urgent need for large-scale pollution assessments. To expand their findings, the researchers will analyze more than 300 blubber samples collected since 2012, which will test for nearly 200 commonly used chemicals.

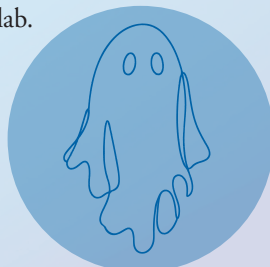
The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and Precision Toxicological Consultancy are partners on this project.

## DISAPPEARING ACT

### THE HAUNTING EFFECTS OF DIGITAL GHOSTING

Ever suddenly lose contact with a friend or romantic interest? Chances are, you were ghosted. Dr. Darcey N. Powell, Associate Professor of Developmental Psychology, is investigating the growing phenomenon of ghosting in digital communication. Her study reveals that while ghosting is often used to avoid confrontation, it can lead to emotional distress for both parties. Powell's research highlights ghosting's prevalence across romantic, platonic, and professional relationships, emphasizing who tends to be more or less likely to ghost or be ghosted.

Powell collaborated with Dr. Gili Freedman from St. Mary's College of Maryland on this project. Powell supervises and mentors students to assist her in her lab.



## UNDIAGNOSED AND OVERLOOKED

### THE SILENT BATTLE OF DEMENTIA

Did you know that, as of 2021, an estimated 41 million people worldwide were living with undiagnosed dementia? Dr. Xavier Gonzales '01, Research Associate and co-investigator for the BASIC Cognitive project, contributed to a University of Michigan-led study revealing that four out of five individuals with probable dementia in Nueces County remain undiagnosed. Hispanic participants were 19% more likely to be unaware of their condition. The study underscores the significant burden on caregivers and emphasizes the need for better dementia screenings, enhanced physician training, and culturally competent care to ensure affected individuals receive the support they need.



# NEWS FROM AROUND THE ISLAND

## THE FUTURE OF FLIGHT

The TAMU-CC Autonomy Research Institute (ARI), on behalf of the Texas A&M University System, will lead the FAA's new Center for Advanced Aviation Technologies (CAAT), a \$140 million initiative authorized by Congress. The CAAT will drive the advancement of next-generation unmanned aviation technologies and ensure their safe integration into the national airspace.

The CAAT will result in the establishment, management, and operation of a new laboratory in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. The initiative also includes five flight testing corridors around the state.

The CAAT is projected to create thousands of high-paying jobs and stimulate the Texas economy through billions in new investments.

## ISLAND EATS

When the fall 2025 semester kicks off, so will a brand-new dining experience. The Islander Sandbar and Grill is set to open in late August in the University Center, just behind the food court. Blending island vibes with the feel of a neighborhood sports bar, the space will feature TVs for game day and a rotating menu of fan favorites like burgers and wings. Alcohol will be served during special events and in the evenings. A unique highlight: a dedicated entrance for the public, making it a welcoming spot not just for students but for alumni and the community alike.

Also coming this fall, Burger 361, located in The Cove, will be reimaged as a grab-and-go market offering fresh wraps, sandwiches, and more.

## SUPPORTING STUDENT PARENTS

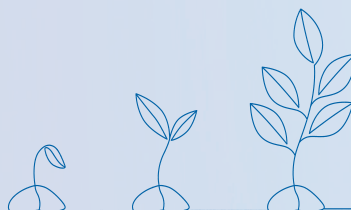
Balancing parenthood and college can be challenging, but a new program is here to help. Islanders Caring for Parenting Students (ICPS), funded by a two-year grant from the Texas Higher Education Board, offers basic needs assessments, support services, emergency financial aid, and connections to helpful campus and community resources.

Islander parenting students are encouraged to complete the Pregnant and Parenting Self-Identification Form to access coordinated support.

## JED CAMPUS JOURNEY

Texas A&M-Corpus Christi, in collaboration with the Texas A&M University System, has launched a four-year initiative to become a JED-designated campus. This partnership with the JED Foundation aims to assess and strengthen mental health and suicide prevention resources for students and employees.

Founded by Phil and Donna Satow after their son Jed's tragic death by suicide in 1998, the foundation works to improve campus well-being nationwide. In spring 2025, a survey of Islander students, faculty, and staff was conducted to better understand mental health challenges. The results will shape future programs and services that support the entire campus community.



## ISLANDER LEADERSHIP UPDATES



**DR. BRENDA HARMS**

Vice President for Enrollment Management



**DR. ERIN MULLIGAN-NGUYEN**

Associate Vice President for Planning, Analytics, Institutional Research, & Strategic Initiatives (PAIRS) and Chief Data Officer



**BEN SOTO '99, '05**

Associate Vice President for Information Technology and Chief Information Officer



# CLASS NOTES

## 1970s

**Dr. Stephen G. Yanoff '70** recently published his 15th history book, "Wonder of the West," which was selected as one of the Top 100 Books of 2024 by the Shelf Unbound Literary Awards. To date, Yanoff has won over 40 national and international book awards.

## 1990s

**Walter Kilgus '90** retired after almost 35 years with SET Environmental, Inc. Kilgus started his career with the company as a chemist and was promoted to general manager.

**Kimberly Cook '94** who serves as president of the National Islander Alumni Association, will present at the International CureSMA Conference in California this June. Her presentation, "Navigating the Special Education/504 Process," educates parents, students, and professionals regarding laws, expectations, and realities of public school systems.

**Belinda Muñoz '94** received the NACADA Region 7 Excellence in Advising award for Two-Year Institutions at their New Orleans conference, where she also presented a session. A proud former Islander orientation leader, Muñoz has served as the first primary advisor for Del Mar College's Nurse Education Department for six years.



**Dr. Heather Robertson '96** published her second book, "Integrating Telemental Health Practice into Counselor Education Training," with the American Counseling Association. The book focuses on teaching and training professional counselors in ethical and effective telemental health practice.



## 2000s

**Jennifer Storm '00**, CEO of the Buda Economic Development Corporation, was appointed by Governor Greg Abbott to the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority Board of Directors. Storm is also a board member of the Hays Caldwell Economic Development Partnership and the Greater Buda Chamber of Commerce.



**Marjorie Boudreaux '01** graduated from Goodwill Industries International's Executive Development Program. The program is designed for aspiring Goodwill CEOs. Boudreaux currently serves as Chief Operating Officer for Goodwill Industries of South Texas.

**Jennifer O'Brien Stogner '02** is a new partner at the law firm Abraham, Watkins, Nichols, Agosto, Aziz & Stogner in Houston. Stogner and her colleague are the firm's first female partners. Stogner is a former president of the South Texas College of Law Houston Alumni Association and continues to serve on its Alumni Board of Directors. A fellow of both the Houston Bar Foundation and the Texas Bar Foundation, Stogner was named to the Texas Rising Stars list in 2018 and has been recognized as a Texas Super Lawyer every year since 2019.





**Virginia Garcia '02, '08** was named Coordinator of Systems and Licensing for the University of the Incarnate Word libraries in San Antonio.

**Derrick Murphy '04** was selected for induction into the Illinois Basketball Coaches Association Hall of Fame Class of 2025.

**Rachael Bradley '08** is currently pursuing her Ph.D. in special education. She is married to fellow alumnus **Michael Bradley '07**, and they have two boys together.

**Benjamin Leal '08** is a church service and music leader at Primera Iglesia Bautista in Sinton, Texas. He credits TAMU-CC for the communication foundation that has helped him with his military career and church calling.

**Mario Martucci '08**, Vice President of Process Engineering at Citi, is teeing up a new venture this summer with the opening of S2G Golf, an indoor facility in Corpus Christi featuring tour-level golf simulators.

## 2010s

**Rob Boscamp '10, '12** joined KEDT-South Texas Public Broadcasting as a staff announcer and news editor. He is also an announcer for Islanders Baseball and Softball.

**Tyler Moody '10** met fellow real estate broker and **Islander Lilibeth Olvera-Moody '24** at a REALTOR® expo, and by 2020, they officially became a couple. In 2024, on the day Olvera-Moody graduated with her MBA from TAMU-CC, Moody surprised his love with a marriage proposal, after secretly seeking the blessing of her parents and 15-year-old daughter. Olvera-Moody, who has been a REALTOR® since 2013, was recently named the 2025 President-Elect of the Board of REALTORS® in Arlington, Texas.

**Elvia Rodriguez '11** is an Academic Success Coach at St. Edward's University in Austin, where she has spent more than five years supporting students and collaborating with them to achieve their academic goals.

**Juan Sebastian Garzon '12, '13** was named the San Antonio Business Journal's 40 Under 40 Man of the Year. Under Garzon's leadership, Alamo Angels has grown to become one of Texas' largest investment groups, establishing important connections throughout the United States and Latin American venture communities.



**Allison (Andrews) Cruger '13 and Travis Cruger '14, '16** welcomed their daughter — **Holland Jean** — to the family on Jan. 2, 2025, weighing 7 pounds and 7 ounces.

**Matthew Westmoreland '15, '23**, former Islanders Tennis player, recently joined the National Islander Alumni Association Board of Directors. As Director of Racquets at the Corpus Christi Athletic Club, he invites all Islander alumni to check out the club's new, state-of-the-art indoor pickleball facility.







**Tiffany Alcalá Hector '16** was selected as a 2025 Anne Naman Fellow for the Texas Association for College Admission Counseling (TACAC) annual conference, a competitive program that supports professionals serving underrepresented students in resource-limited settings. Hector also recently completed TACAC's Middle Management Institute — a professional development program for emerging leaders in college access and admissions.

**Miranda Garcia '17** joyfully married Andrea Chipinski on New Year's Day 2025. The couple celebrated with an intimate ceremony, surrounded by close friends and family, and rang in the new year and the start of their life together.

**Dr. Isabel Meijering '17**, Doctor of Acupuncture and Herbal Medicine, opened Main Street Yoga, her second business located in Bastrop, Texas, in October 2024.

**Andrew Crane '18** started Save The Wave Tackle, a business born out of a project in his social entrepreneurship class at TAMU-CC. Save The Wave Tackle partners with local beach cleanups to collect plastic waste and manufacture fishing lures, cutting boards, sunglasses frames, and more.

**Justin Garcia '18** and **Brittany (Esparza) Garcia '21** welcomed their second child this year, Alessia Sofia, on Jan. 11, 2025.

**Captain Robert Nguyen '18** was recently featured in the publication "Korean Army Times" for his work in strengthening the U.S.-Republic of Korea alliance and partnership through combined operations at the Korean Combat Training Center.

**Sandy Rodriguez '18** was named the 2024 Coastal Steward Professional by the Coastal Bend Bays Foundation as part of their Conservation and Environmental Stewardship Awards for her work with ExxonMobil at the Gulf Coast Growth Ventures facility in San Patricio County.

**Isabella Rosas '18** celebrates her first anniversary this summer working at the Bexar County Sheriff's Office in the courthouse. She began working in the jail in 2020 and transferred to law enforcement in 2024.

**Taylor Tucker '18** and **Taylor (Bright) Tucker '19** found joy in bringing their son, Camden, to the Island University campus for his first visit!



**Whitney Copeland '19, '23** was named a Teacher of the Year semifinalist for Corpus Christi ISD and was honored as the Mayor's Teacher of the Month in March 2025. She is passionate about creating engaging, student-centered learning experiences and fostering a love of literacy in young learners.







**Joe Velasquez '19** and **Delylah Henry '20** met while working at the Island University, bonding over their shared love of sushi and board games. Their friendship quickly grew into romance, leading to a memorable proposal on Dec. 24, 2024.

## 2020s

**Harley Mathews '20** will present a paper at the International Thomas Merton Society Conference in Denver this June.

**Savannah Spears '20, '24** presented her master's research project, "How Leadership Styles in the Oil and Gas Industry Influence Positive Emotional Culture and Employee Advocacy Behaviors," at the International Public Relations Research Conference in March 2025. The research was completed under the guidance of Dr. Sining Kong.

**Andrea Garcia '21, '22** was promoted to Audit Supervisor of Internal Audit for American Bank in Corpus Christi.

**Dominique Cuellar '21, '24** and **Dr. Ada Uzundu '23** hosted a round table discussion at the American Counseling Association conference in Florida. The discussion focused on the use of reality therapy on children and adolescent survivors of sexual abuse.

**Araceli Murillo '21** was accepted into veterinary school at the University of Illinois. She recently earned her white coat and will graduate with her doctorate in May 2026.

**Layla Donis '22** married her wonderful husband in October 2024. The couple wed in a beautiful Hill Country setting, surrounded by family and friends, and celebrated with love and joy.



**Matthew Meza '22, Brianna Sandoval '23,** and **Dominique Damian** won a 3CMA Savvy Award at the City-County Communications and Marketing Association's annual conference for their work on the City of Corpus Christi's 2024 calendar, "Rescued & Ready."

**Amanda Moya '22** received her master's degree from Colorado Christian University and is pursuing a doctorate at Liberty University. She is currently the Outreach Coordinator for ChristLife Church, which meets at STARK Seminary adjacent to the TAMU-CC campus.

**Jennifer Rodriguez '22, '24** earned her MBA in Business Administration in December 2024.

**Anna Whetstine '22** shared her insights on using career mapping to reduce anxiety during her presentation at the American Counseling Association conference in March 2025.

**Luke Tschritter '23** and **Madeleine Tschritter** welcomed their daughter, **Finley**, in February 2025, weighing 8 pounds, 1 ounce.

**Justin Moreno '24** served as a guest speaker at this year's Festival de Mariachi, where he presented his research on the history of mariachi and the cultural impact of mariachi music.

**Katelynn Phelan '24** received a Gold ADDY Award from the American Advertising Federation for her invitation design for the TAMU-CC 2025 President's Ball, themed "Into the Blue." As a graphic designer, she plays a pivotal role in crafting the institution's visual marketing collateral within the university's Marketing and Communications department. Her award-winning design will compete at state and national levels.



**Isabel Santos '24** successfully defended her recent dissertation, "Exploring the Impact of Coping Self-Efficacy as a Moderator for Perfectionism and Burnout Among BIPOC Counselor Education Doctoral Students."

**Karina Marroquin Ruiz '25** celebrated National Athletic Training Month by serving as a preceptor for a master's student trainer at Texas Lutheran University. She credits TAMU-CC for equipping her with the skills to mentor future professionals as a preceptor in her field.

## KEEP UP WITH US!

### SHARE YOUR NEWS

Visit [islanderalumni.org/classnotes](https://islanderalumni.org/classnotes) to submit your stories.





## A REAL PEOPLE PLEASER

### IZZY'S IRRESISTIBLE CHARM

Imagine having the kind of presence that turns heads, lights up faces, and triggers spontaneous smiles — just by walking through a door. That's everyday life for Izzy the Islander, Texas A&M-Corpus Christi's beloved mascot and all-around crowd charmer.

Izzy is not just a mascot; Izzy is a vibe. With bold green-and-blue hair and iconic black-rimmed shades, Izzy has a heart full of Islander spirit. From hyping up the crowd at Islanders Athletics games to spreading sunshine at schools, nonprofits, and community events, Izzy brings the party wherever he goes.

It's no surprise that Izzy's biggest fans just might be his tiniest ones. Whether it's high-fives, hugs, or happy dances, kiddos light up when Izzy is around. And for the ultimate young fans, there's a special way to show their Islander spirit: Izzy's Kids Club! Designed for fans 12 and under, Izzy's Kids Club is packed with perks.



## MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

### PERKS

Cost is \$35 per child with a discount for additional children in the same household.

- Free admission to all home Islanders Athletics games
- Access to exclusive giveaways and surprises
- Membership card, T-shirt, and swag bag
- Monthly Izzy's Kids Club newsletter
- Birthday shoutout from Izzy



### IZZY CAMEO

If you're a kid at heart and want to add a splash of Islander energy to your birthday bash or business event, invite Izzy for a cameo! Mascot rental rates start at \$50/hour.



Book Izzy for  
your big day.





# SPLASH FROM THE PAST

## A LOOK BACK AT A BELOVED ISLANDER TRADITION

In South Texas, the sound of splashing water signals the start of summer — and for students in the late '70s and early '80s, it also meant Splash Day had arrived. Cheering crowds and even the occasional crab scuttling across campus marked the opening of the university pool and a day of pure fun.

Splash Day began in the mid-1970s as Seagull Spring Spree, an event hosted by the President's Student Advisory Council at what was then Texas A&I-Corpus Christi. Held each April, the event featured free food, live music, dancing, and activities like swimming, archery, and tennis.

After the university became Corpus Christi State University, the event was renamed Splash Day, and the games got even more creative. Alongside volleyball and swim relays, students competed in egg tosses, tug-of-war, and crab races — yes, students brought their own crabs! Winners earned bragging rights and a commemorative T-shirt.

Though the campus would eventually transform into what is now known as Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, and Splash Day morphed into other events and traditions, the memories remain. The pool still draws students seeking relief from the heat, and the joyful sound of summer splashes lives on. •







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