leading the moment

HEAD BASEBALL COACH
MARK MARTINEZ ON GUIDING
HIS TEAM THROUGH
UNCERTAIN TIMES

WINTER 2021

SDSU MAGAZINE

11 COMMUNITY CHANGE AGENTS

A TRAILBLAZING CONTACT TRACERS PROGRAM

50 COVID-19 RESEARCH PROJECTS
living the Equity and Inclusion priority of SDSU’s strategic plan every day — and inspiring others to do the same.

CHANGE AGENTS
Meet the people on campus who are working hard to help people who may have been exposed to someone diagnosed with COVID-19. Funded by a $3 million county grant, the project focuses on underserved communities to address health disparities.

SDSU-EXPLORER
A Q&A with Head Baseball Coach Mark Martinez on guiding his team through uncertain times. Plus: His forecast for the upcoming season.

A FAREWELL, OLD FRIEND
The SDSU history calendar project focuses on underserved communities to address health disparities.

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HELLO — AND WELCOME TO YOUR NEW MAGAZINE! Long-time readers will notice this first issue of SDSU Magazine for 2021 has a fresh look and an old name, restoring the classic title used until spring 2003. The new content approach and design are more reflective of our one SDSU community. My hope is that the many moving stories, major news highlights and bold new graphics will inspire as much Aztec pride in you as it does in me.

After a year that will be remembered for its painful upheavals, change is also a theme of many of the articles featured inside. The centerpiece highlights 11 visionary agents of change who are working to improve the lives of others (p. 12). Their powerful ideas on equity and inclusion set examples of resilience and achievement for us all. They are boldly leading the moment — stepping up to important challenges, unwilling to leave the needed change to others. They are resilient, and they are powerful.

The same is true of our cover story subject, Head Baseball Coach Mark Martinez, who has a legacy of preparing athletes for professional teams and is sustaining a program with safety and care in the time of COVID-19 (p. 10). You will also see stories about philanthropists and alumni donors who have responded to today’s economic challenges with generous and impactful gifts (p. 7 and p. 26).

In these stories — and others throughout — I see connections with our new strategic plan and its priorities: SDSU as a premier public research and border institution, as a champion for sustainability, equity and inclusion, with students at our core.

Finally, change is in the air at SDSU Mission Valley, where we bid a fond and respectful farewell to the Aztecs’ old stadium (p. 20) and get a glimpse of what’s to come (p. 4). The pandemic may have complicated the 2020 football season, but it hasn’t slowed down our student-athletes. I look forward to the day (soon!) when we can all safely gather to cheer on all of our teams.

In the meantime, COVID-19 vaccines are rolling out nationwide as I write this, and I can’t help but feel confident for the year ahead. Welcome to 2021, and to a brighter future.
STATE LATELY

MISSION (VALLEY) ACCOMPLISHED

ONCE A CONCEPT, NOW A CONSTRUCTION SITE. SDSU Mission Valley, the university’s boldest expansion since moving to its present day campus in 1931, is well underway. First order of business was excavation and preparation of the foundation for a new 35,000-capacity stadium in the northwest quadrant of the former SDCCU Stadium parking lot. By mid-December the bowl itself was taking shape, on track to be ready for the Aztecs’ 2022 home opener. A river park, an innovation district, housing, a hotel and retail shops will follow over more than a decade of development, made possible by a 2018 public vote, approval from California State University and months of negotiations over the purchase from the City of San Diego. In an August ceremonial groundbreaking, SDSU President Adela de la Torre was thinking big. “We begin the work to expand SDSU’s educational, research and entrepreneurial missions,” she said. “It will become the signature project that defines the future not only for SDSU, but for higher education in California.” — Jeff Ristine

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, DEAR LOVE

THE MALCOLM A. LOVE LIBRARY TURNED 50 IN THE FALL. Librarians and library staff marked the milestone with a list of “50 Books SDSU Loves.” The campus community was invited to kick off the effort by submitting their personal favorites. The recommended reading that resulted was a mix of fiction and non-fiction from a diverse bench of writers. Topping the list: “Kindred,” by Octavia E. Butler, a 1979 novel of slavery and time travel. Other classics include “To Kill a Mockingbird” by Harper Lee and F. Scott Fitzgerald’s “The Great Gatsby.” For more modern tastes, there’s “Little Fires Everywhere” by Celeste Ng, published in 2017, and Michelle Obama’s 2018 memoir, “Becoming.” — Jeff Ristine

FIVE THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT SDSU GLOBAL CAMPUS:

1. It’s the new name for the College of Extended Studies, which has been helping students meet their career and life goals for more than 40 years.
2. Its mission is to bring SDSU to all learners — especially working adults — no matter where they’re located, through online courses, off-site programs and other non-traditional means.
3. It offers more than 40 degree and certificate programs.
4. Concierge-style service makes it easy to register for classes online without having to call around to various departments or fill out repetitive paperwork.
5. Alumni Lifetime Members get a 20% discount (contact alumni@sdsu.edu) on select professional development certificate programs such as project management, grant writing and the business of craft beer. Cheers!

NEW PROGRAMS AT SDSU IMPERIAL VALLEY

A FOUR-YEAR LIBERAL ARTS DEGREE WILL BEGIN IN FALL 2021, becoming the third full-time program the campus offers, along with psychology and criminal justice. Through the latter, SDSU Imperial Valley has supported and grown the area’s law enforcement workforce, with many alumni advancing in their careers with the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, California Highway Patrol, as well as local city and county law enforcement entities. Now they’ll have the opportunity to further grow their careers with a master’s degree program in homeland security, which also starts in fall. “Our goal is to give local students a chance to attend and earn a four-year degree or graduate degree at a top-tier university without having to leave the valley,” Dean Gregorio Ponce says. “Offering these new degrees will help us achieve our goal of doubling our enrollment to 2,000 over the next few years. This academic year we had a record breaking headcount of 1,075.” — Victor Nava

NEW PROGRAMS AT SDSU IMPERIAL VALLEY

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Top left photograph: Gary Payne. Top right: Scott Hargrove Photograph: Nicolas Hoffman

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A NEW PACT PAVES THE WAY FOR EXPANDED BINATIONAL COOPERATION AROUND A WIDE RANGE OF INITIATIVES.

The non-binding memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the university, the Secretariat of Public Education of Mexico and the Secretariat of Public Education of Baja California will serve as a framework for future academic and research collaborations and other partnerships. It was announced at SDSU’s RE:BORDER binational conference in November.

“This is an historic moment for our university,” President Adela de la Torre says. “We’ve long embraced our proximity to the U.S.-Mexico border as a unique opportunity for mutually beneficial collaboration and partnership. This agreement builds on that success and sets San Diego State on a course to become the premier binational university in the U.S.”

The RE:BORDER conference itself served as the first collaborative project between the parties, El Colegio de la Frontera Norte and Universidad Autónoma de Baja California. The second annual two-day event, exploring mobility and migration in the transborder region, was held virtually because of the COVID-19 pandemic and drew more than 1,200 registrants. Organizers took full advantage of being limited to a virtual realm, offering real-time translation of English and Spanish for a truly bilingual conference. —Michael Klitzing

SDSU-MEXICO RELATIONSHIP GROWS

VIRTUALLY SUCCESS AT SDSU GEORGIA

THE CAMPUS, BASED IN TBLISI, HELD A VIRTUAL CAREER FAIR IN OCTOBER. The two-day event attracted 27 companies. Students did more than 100 interviews and some received offers and began working immediately.

A previous event was held in late spring. “One of our goals in hosting the virtual career fairs was to demonstrate to employers that they can continue to hire new employees—who can bring new ideas and resources to their organizations—during the pandemic,” says Dean Halil Quven.

HAL BROWN’S FIGHT CONTINUES

A $500,000 GIFT FROM SAN DIEGO PHILANTHROPISTS Malin Burnham and Bob Payne ($50 in December established the Hal Brown Career Learning and Understanding Biases (HB CLUB) program. Named for noted civil rights and community and economic development leader Harold K. Brown (’59), the program is designed to further the success of SDSU’s Black/African American students in becoming the next generation of community and business leaders.

The trio first teamed up on a program addressing biases in 1996 but disbanded their efforts after a few years. Then came 2020 and its series of high profile killings of Black Americans, most notably George Floyd. Paying special attention were Brown, Burnham and Payne, who soon reconnected. Burnham says, “I think that what we are doing here is an extension of what we came together to do more than 20 years ago.” —Travis Vaughn

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Students enrolled in SDSU Global Campus Microsite Degree Completion Programs at Southwestern College and San Diego Mesa College during the fall.

HOPEFULLY! IF WE TAKE IT ONE DAY AT A TIME. 2020 was hard. We used to say train wreck, but kids now refer to it as a dumpster fire. All our routines have been reinvented as enormous changes happened with the coronavirus pandemic. Add to that social unrest and political divisiveness, and life can feel out of control. When things feel out of control, it can cause stress.

Our research shows stressors do not necessarily lead to negative outcomes, and having a support network and some sense of control does reduce stress. Here are some tips for handling stress. Identify the source of stress (harder than it sounds), such as a heavy workload, then try to do something to address that directly. You can also work to alleviate the symptoms—with therapy or deep breathing techniques—which may not fix things but will make it manageable. Another technique is to change how we respond to stressors—mindfulness training, and reframing a stressor and putting a positive spin on it can help.

Reframing 2020 positively is beneficial: the world has slowed down, some folks have gotten more time with family, learned how to meet challenges and grow. But we can’t ignore the dark side: pressures of juggling work and family, losses, fear. It’s OK and quite normal to feel negative emotions. Just acknowledging and naming our emotions, and writing them down can be helpful. If you try to run away from it, that actually gives it more power. So take the time to feel it and process it.

When a day starts out badly, people want to write off the whole day or week. Our brains are designed to identify patterns. So when two bad things happen in a row, we tend to think it’s all going to go south. But we are basing this on very little data, and focusing too much on the negative. Just knowing this about ourselves is a start. Do a mood check.

If 2021 starts out challenging, don’t write off January or the whole year. Honor where you are, and start from there. Set tiny goals, give yourself grace when you falter, celebrate every small step. This is how we build resilience— as told to Padma Nagappan

Q

WILL 2021 BE BETTER?

WILL 2021 BE BETTER?

2020 was the worst! 2020 was the worst!

A

WINTER 2021

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Total research grants, including a $5 million National Institutes of Health-funded project to increase the uptake of testing in underserved communities.

$9.4 MILLION

344,137/ Pounds of food the Aztecs Rock Hunger food drive raised for San Diegans in need.

$127 MILLION/ Philanthropic gifts in 2019-20. A 10% increase over last year, despite the pandemic.

141/ Units of blood (impacting 423 patient lives) donated at the fourth annual Aztecs for Life blood drive held in November to benefit the American Red Cross.

137,437 emails, 10,900 calls, 25,786 texts/

The SDSU Connects team made since the COVID-19 pandemic began to proactively reach out to students to address concerns and provide resources.

99%

Percentage of student-athletes who registered to vote for the 2020 election.

Aztec standout guard Malachi Flynn went to the Toronto Raptors in the 29th pick of the NBA draft.

29
What is it like leading a team through the pandemic and these strange times for sports?

It’s been hard — for everyone — really since last March. To have everything slam stop was an emotional punch in the gut. It was difficult to tell our guys. “Our season’s over.” To see the faces of our seniors, and everybody, it was just heart-wrenching.

We did have a slice of normalcy during the fall with our afternoon practices. For our administration — from the president all the way through our athletic directors, our sports liaison, our training staff, everybody — to make that happen was a blessing. It’s a lot of moving parts and everything is different every single day.

We’ll find out what the spring looks like. There are plans to play. If we get that opportunity, that’s great. But ultimately you want to be safe and make sure everyone’s healthy.

How are you prioritizing health for your players?

We’re asking them to exist in a bubble — to consider their roommate as their family pod and avoid gathering with others. It’s a big ask of 18- to 22-year-olds, because they’re very social and that’s part of their growth and development. They’re also doing daily wellness questionnaires, temperature checks and that’s part of their growth and development. They’re also

organizing patterns on the baseball field, so there’s not too much cross traffic or gathering. Baseball is kind of a socially distanced sport as it is, so we’re lucky in that sense.

We hear you have a “super team” this year. What’s your forecast for the upcoming season?

We’re a veteran team. We had built a really nice foundation into last year and the pieces were in place to become a Top-25 program. Because last season was shortened, we now have three super seniors in Ryon Orr, Jacob Cruse and Mike Jarvis. That’s a huge win. And we have a group of nine super talented signees coming in who need that leadership. We’ll see how it plays out. But I think we’re very talented. We’re experienced throughout the field and on the mound. We’ve asking our older guys to do what we had planned last year. Make some noise and break down the door of having San Diego State in the national conversation — not just short-term, but long-term. Their focus is getting to Omaha and playing for a national championship. Hopefully we’re on schedule to realize some great dreams.

How are you setting goals and expectations for players given all the uncertainty at the moment?

It’s the same message from when they come in the door, as freshmen: Each day, in itself, is a competition. You got to win each day. And if you win today, then you go to bed and you get up the next day and win the next day. And along the way, you can set yourself some mini goals. The other long-term things that you want to realize will take care of themselves.

So many of your players — including Casey Schmitt and Anthony Walters last year — have gone on to realize their dreams of being drafted. What’s the key to making it to that level?

There are guys that come in here with iber amounts of talent. The biggest thing is understanding how to harness that talent into a day-to-day process, and embracing the process and those things that help you grow as a young person. Guys like Stephen Strasburg, Greg Allen, Alan Trejo, Seby Zavala and Ty France, who are playing in the big leagues right now, epitomize what we’re trying to do — which is to have players understand that being a well-rounded person creates reward. The guys who struggle are the guys who really try to stay in that narrow path.

It’s just baseball. We try to create opportunities for those guys, and open that tunnel — whether it’s a broader focus on their academics, working on their social skills or doing community outreach. I tell our guys all the time, if you follow this path, there is unbelievable reward on the backend. And it’s not just being a Major League Baseball player.

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WE’RE GROWING YOUNG MEN. WHEN THEY LEAVE SDSU, WE WANT THEM TO BE PREPARED TO BE SUCCESSFUL AND TO BE LEADERS.”

You’re known for coaching your players both on and off the field. What’s your coaching philosophy?

We don’t coach baseball players, we coach people. We’re growing young men. When they leave SDSU, we want them to be prepared to be successful and to be leaders. We’re trying to take advantage of a very small window of opportunity in their lives to impact them and teach them life skills.

In the wake of the George Floyd killing and the widespread protests that followed you started an alumni group to address systemic racism. How did that get started and why is it important to you?

We all saw the images of the events taking place last summer. It ripped my heart out. I started calling baseball alumni who I consider close friends to say, “I love you, man.” We started meeting on Zoom. It’s myself, former Aztec players Tony Gwynn Jr., Chris Gwynn, Quintin Berry, Greg Allen, Alan Trejo, our Associate Head Coach Sam Peraza and Assistant Coach Joe Oliveira. We even had Adam Jones [five-time MLB All-Star and SDSU base- ball signee] join from Japan. We talk about: We have a family here and it’s very safe. But what happens when you leave Tony Gwynn Stadium? What is it like for a Black player to walk down the street at night after practice? It’s conversational, not confrontational. The mission is to make change and make the world better.

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Meet the doers.
Those at SDSU who are doing the hard work to bring about community change on and off campus.
They are creating opportunities for more voices to be heard.
Launching initiatives to help improve lives.
And working to diversify the workforce.

They are living the strategic plan priorities of Equity and Inclusion in All We Do and We are SDSU, taking responsible action with all communities in mind—and inspiring others to do the same.

As systemic racism became increasingly visible last summer, I became increasingly restless searching for ways to be active in the social justice movement while socially distancing. In a moment of fate, I was invited to a virtual PhotoVoice exhibit highlighting the experiences of mothers of children with medical complexities, and it inspired me to create a similar project to share and validate Black stories.

I proposed my idea to the researcher for the exhibit, Melanie Sonsteng-Person, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of California, Los Angeles, and her colleague Dominique Mikell, also a Ph.D. candidate at UCLA. Then I immediately shared my vision with my older sister, Samantha, who is a senior majoring in Women’s Studies at Washington State University. Since we were young, Samantha and I have had fascinating conversations about identity, and how its different aspects have shaped our experiences. Our conversations have allowed me to understand the multitude of Blackness that is often overlooked, and the experiences that are often invalidated. Together, we started to build our research team, and the Black Lives Matter All the Time project was born.

Our team is composed of six SDSU and WSU undergraduates, working alongside our UCLA colleagues. Since September, we have met weekly to discuss photos and experiences guided by five themes we encounter in our daily lives: identity, community, oppression, wellness, and resistance. Using our common focus to highlight the multidimensional experiences of Black students attending predominantly white institutions, we prepared and presented a virtual photo exhibit in November. Going forward, we aim to continue to use our voices to create recommendations for both SDSU and WSU to better support and allow Black students to thrive.

In a system that profits off of our silence, revolution is dependent on our voices. This project has shown me that by validating our voices and stories, we create spaces with a revolutionary capacity for healing, and a revolutionary vision for the future.
“Service to others less fortunate than yourself” was an important message I heard in my family and church growing up. Social justice was always a part of who I am, and the community I built became part of my chosen family.

Before I became a professor, I had another life as a community organizer. I organized in solidarity with people in California prisons and helped to build community responses to violence that don’t rely on bars and cages. My involvement in social movements for justice was an education all on its own, intertwined with the education I received in school. I am now working to pass on the knowledge to others. This starts in my classroom and goes beyond. I recently collaborated with Anne Guanciale and Wesley Palau from the Pride Center, and colleagues Catherine Clune-Taylor and Amira Jarmakani to design a working group in my Department of Women’s Studies on racial justice and community engaged pedagogy. In pursuit of justice and liberation, we share resources and deepen our skills to address anti-Black racism in our curriculum and in the classroom.

I use my teaching skills to return to the community to offer popular political education. I participate in Free Them All San Diego, a coalition that formed early in the pandemic to advocate for releasing migrants from detention centers.

There are hundreds of ways to be a part of movements for change. We need all kinds: dreamers and artists, teachers and people willing to learn, organizers and people willing to show up in the streets, healers and parents. It doesn’t matter how you show up—it just matters that you do.

Professor Alvarado Waipuk

Howl! I am IPA Kumeyaay from the village of Ahmnakattali, known as San Pasqual Reservation. I came to SDSU straight from the rez and graduated in 2014. As a student, I understood there was a lot of work to be done on our campus to be more inclusive to our Indigenous population because at the time we were nearly invisible on campus. So I was motivated to start teaching here in 2018 and to become the tribal liaison in 2020. In my role, I build relationships with local tribes, American Indian and Indigenous populations and create pathways for Indigenous students to succeed in higher education. I want all our American Indian, Indigenous students to feel welcomed and at home when they step foot on our campus. Since being here, we have passed a new resolution to help accomplish that goal. These include raising the Kumeyaay Nations flag on campus forever, including SDSU’s Land Acknowledgement on our syllabi on our San Diego and Imperial Valley campuses and opening up our new Wi Hahma Native Resource Center.

We have also created a Kumeyaay Committee to guide the creation of the Kumeyaay Mural and Sculpture. I am very excited about this, and so are our elders. This project involves the entire Kumeyaay Nation, and whatever we create will be here forever. Anyone who walks on our campus should know the land they step upon is the land of the Kumeyaay Nation.

To honor our people now, is to honor all the hardship and sacrifice that we have gone through. We must not be forgotten—our history, identity, and stories must be remembered and told from our perspective. We re the prayers of our ancestors, answered, and I carry them very close to my heart and I know this is what they wanted me to do. Euyor x Humn. (My heart is good.)

Professor of American Indian Studies and Ph.D. Candidate

At the Center for Intercultural Relations, we focus on academic support, retention and basic needs support for historically marginalized students. So my role is to connect students with resources for their success. I got into this work while I was getting my master’s in postsecondary educational leadership and student affairs at SDSU. I always knew that I wanted to be in some sort of helping profession. My job at SDSU and the students are my priority. But I think it’s really important that we, as SDSU leaders, not only invest in the institution, but within the local community. The work—especially around racial inclusion and social justice—doesn’t necessarily stop at SDSU. Many students stay in San Diego after graduation and become a part of the community.

I moved to Pacific Beach (PB) about a year ago and was looking for people to connect with in the community. I realized that our PB community organizations and social media pages were not really geared toward people of color (POC). So I started an Instagram account, @blackbrownpb, to highlight Black, Indigenous and POC businesses, history and events. With the rise of this pandemic and police brutality, I wasn’t quite sure where I could go if I’m having a mental health issue or if I want to connect with a group of like-minded Black folks outside of SDSU. Inspired by the work of the Economic Crisis Response Team on campus, I compiled and publicly shared a Google Doc with resources for Black San Diegans. Last summer I also co-started an online petition to rename a community park in PB after Black educators. Nearly 3,000 people have signed and the initiative is moving forward.

I’m just trying to get more involved with my community in PB, so I’ll be running for a board seat for one of the community organizations too.—as told to Lion Haney

Professor Jess Whatcott

Assistant Professor of Women’s Studies, Increasing Inclusivity for Trans and Non-Binary Students

It doesn’t matter how you show up—it just matters that you do.
REKA Barton
AN EDUCATION PH.D. STUDENT RESEARCHING HOW YOUNG BLACK STUDENTS PROCESSED 2020

I taught elementary school for a decade, mostly in my hometown of Alexandria, Virginia. During that time, I saw Black and Latinx students being taught from a curriculum that just wasn’t culturally relevant to them. It made me wonder: Why are we using this, and how does this impact achievement? Ultimately, these questions led me to SDSU. As a doctoral student, I’m motivated to center and amplify the voices of children who have been overlooked or dismissed in the past.

2020 was a bizarre year. The first few weeks of COVID-19 followed immediately by incidents of racial injustice nationwide, were exhausting for me. I thought: “If I’m feeling this, how are kids feeling?” That’s what inspired my current research. I’m working with the amazing Dr. Marva Cappello, professor and director of the program, for a study on visuals in crisis — specifically how young Black students are processing this moment.

We’re asking our first-through-sixth-grade participants to describe “2020” in their own words, and then draw their description using art supplies we’ve provided. In the next phase, we’ll capture images from 2020 that correspond with the themes of their drawings. Then we’ll engage the students in a conversation about the selected images. So far, we’re seeing that these students miss their friends. They are not in a conversation about the selected images. Then we’ll engage the students in a conversation about the selected images. So far, we’re seeing that these students miss their friends. They are not in a conversation about the selected images. Then we’ll engage the students in a conversation about the selected images.

I feel that, when I do my work on campus now, in a way I’m doing it in memory of my mom and dad. I help support and assist students who are undocumented — or have family members who are — with any type of immigration questions they have, and assist them with navigating the maze of higher education. I also work closely with the Emergency Crisis Response Team to help students who are having an immediate food or housing crisis. And I work with my legal partners at the Jewish Family Services of San Diego to assist students with immigration questions, applying for DACA or steps for naturalization.

Being so close to Mexico, there are a large number of Mexican individuals, but we also have folks from Asia, Canada, Europe, and Central and South America. They share a fear of revealing their status — a fear of being bullied, or separated from their family, or having violence aimed at themselves or their family members. Many feel alone.

At the ERC, we offer them programs and activities to continue to grow a strong connection to each other as well as the SDSU community. I am honored to work with a group of students who are resilient and my heroes. I see them as my kids and there is such a feeling of fulfillment when I see them graduating and being successful. — as told to Aleah Jarin

CYNTHIA Torres
UNDOCUMENTED RESOURCE CENTER DIRECTOR

My mother, Maria del Socorro, came to the United States undocumented in the early ’50s. She met my dad, Benjamin, who was born in National City and worked at the Dr. Pepper soda company. With time, my mother became a citizen. I remember as a kid going with her to her classes to learn English.

Looking back, I really appreciate how much my mom went through and how far she came, not just distance wise, but she only had a sixth grade education. Yet she took that risk to come here to a foreign country and become a hard worker. After my dad became disabled, my mom got trained to open a childcare facility from our home. She took over as the head of household. She and my dad were humble, hard workers who wanted a better life for their children.

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Bartartoonn

My mother, Maria del Socorro, came to the United States undocumented in the early ’50s. She met my dad, Benjamin, who was born in National City and worked at the Dr. Pepper soda company. With time, my mother became a citizen. I remember as a kid going with her to her classes to learn English.

Looking back, I really appreciate how much my mom went through and how far she came, not just distance wise, but she only had a sixth grade education. Yet she took that risk to come here to a foreign country and become a hard worker. After my dad became disabled, my mom got trained to open a childcare facility from our home. She took over as the head of household. She and my dad were humble, hard workers who wanted a better life for their children.

I feel that, when I do my work on campus now, in a way I’m doing it in memory of my mom and dad. I help support and assist students who are undocumented — or have family members who are — with any type of immigration questions they have, and assist them with navigating the maze of higher education. I also work closely with the Emergency Crisis Response Team to help students who are having an immediate food or housing crisis. And I work with my legal partners at the Jewish Family Services of San Diego to assist students with immigration questions, applying for DACA or steps for naturalization.

Being so close to Mexico, there are a large number of Mexican individuals, but we also have folks from Asia, Canada, Europe, and Central and South America. They share a fear of revealing their status — a fear of being bullied, or separated from their family, or having violence aimed at themselves or their family members. Many feel alone.

At the ERC, we offer them programs and activities to continue to grow a strong connection to each other as well as the SDSU community. I am honored to work with a group of students who are resilient and my heroes. I see them as my kids and there is such a feeling of fulfillment when I see them graduating and being successful. — as told to Aleah Jarin

JERRY McCormick
JOURNALISM LECTURER (LEFT) AND STUDENT (RIGHT); FOUNDERS OF THE NEW NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BLACK JOURNALISTS CHAPTER

McCORMICK: The San Diego Association of Black Journalists and I have been trying to get a NABJ student chapter at San Diego State for a long time. What we found was that there weren’t a lot of Black students in the journalism department. Now the right people have come together at the right time. Look at 2020; diversity is definitely needed in this country. Especially now that we’re in a virtual world, it’s more important than ever for students to stay connected and NABJ/SDSU is a way for that to happen. I think [Alleah] was the right person to lead this effort, she [NABJ] seemed to be super passionate and hardworking like I am. I think together, and with the officers in the group, we’re going to make this successful.

JARIN: When I first came to SDSU in fall 2019, I began to feel discouraged not seeing many people who looked like me within the School of Journalism and Media Studies. Once I learned SDSU had never established an NABJ chapter, I knew this had to change. I saw a need to create a space where other aspiring Black journalists could be supported, seen and heard. Diversity is always needed, especially in today’s age. Jerry has been like a mentor to me and I cannot thank him enough for all his help with starting this club. I’m honored to be a part of history by creating this chapter and I’m so happy future Black students interested in journalism now have the opportunity to join this historic organization at SDSU. I encourage others to always create the content you want to see. We need more resources like those to encourage diversity and inclusivity and to give people a sense that they belong.
Brandon Lim

'20 Alumnus; Co-Coordinator, The SDSU Social Justice Summit

Looking back at 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic, the Black Lives Matter movement and party politics were among the sociopolitical events that dominated public discourse. They exposed systemic inequities across race, class, gender, public health and industry. While my academic background and extracurricular involvements informed my social justice advocacy, these events helped me merge that passion with purpose. I collaborated with Claudia Martinez and Eunice Flores in Career Services for the inaugural SDSU Social Justice Summit, funded by an Artic Pasyuta Fund grant, in November. In March, they approached me seeking input from social justice-minded student leaders. After submitting a workshop proposal, I reconnected with Claudia in October, and she graciously asked me to volunteer. I helped co-coordinate the summit because I believed in its mission — to help students facilitate conversations around social justice and how it intersects with career, everyday life and society. In my summit workshop, I was honored to share my lived experiences as a proud member of the Asian Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDA) and LGBTQIA+ communities. I reflected on how, as students developing our careers, we can leverage our cultural capital to create meaningful social change.

I hope that we continue that dialogue as a society. I believe we have a collective responsibility to develop the narratives of people from historically marginalized and underserved communities — people who have cultural resources that can be drawn upon to help effect social change. Only then can we restore justice in the spirit of diversity, equity, inclusion and community solidarity.

"We can leverage our cultural capital to create meaningful social change."

Ann Huynh

A School Psychology Graduate Student Working to Defund the Police in Schools

As an educator, I believe it is my duty to fight for social justice at every level — whether it’s through advocating for a child on a micro level or advocating for policy changes on a macro level.

In response to systemic racism sustained by ongoing police violence, students and educators across the nation have organized to call for the defunding of police in schools. In San Diego, a group of Black youth has spearheaded the movement to defund school police in the San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD). After attending at the students’ actions and seeing the lack of educators supporting the movement, I felt it was imperative to rally the support of faculty and students at SDSU.

As educators, we have the power to advocate for policies and practices that protect safe, equitable and just schools. As such, I led the effort to send a letter to the SDUSD superintendent expressing our solidarity with Black youth organizers and supporting the call to divert school police and its associated services that will serve the needs of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students. A total of 50 SDSU educators signed the letter, including 15 faculty members from the College of Education and 35 graduate students from the school psychology program.

It is my hope that my colleagues will continue to stand in solidarity with youth and actively work to dismantle systemic racism and invest in BIPOC communities. I am currently completing my school psychology internship in Los Angeles and have joined a group called Students Unite! This student-led group has already succeeded in defunding the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) police budget by $25 million, and we are continuing to organize to fully defund the LAUSD school police. As students and educators working together, we are working toward this goal through rallies, speaking at school board meetings, phone banking, education and other actions.

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"We can leverage our cultural capital to create meaningful social change."

Kaye Sweetser

Professor of Public Relations Working to Increase Diversity in PR

I have the honor of serving as the director of SDSU’s Glen M. Rector Center for Professional Development in Public Relations, which is committed to improving the PR profession. A major area of focus is increasing diversity and inclusion. The PR profession has attracted only 10% of its total force to be diverse. As communicators, we can’t do our jobs if we don’t have the voices of all people among us. We’re working to move the profession so that it can catch up with the nation’s demographics. Until then, we will work to help students see that there is a place for them within this profession.

The center has a Black Mass Communication Scholars database and the Broom Speakers Bureau, both of which make it easier for professors to bring underrepresented voices into their classrooms. We’ve promoted this tools nationally to 250 media schools so far. The center also supported six students from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Hispanic-Serving Institutions (including SDSU) in the class of 2020 as they transitioned into their careers. Further, the Broom Student Fellows program is expanding to an HBCU campus this spring. The “Broomie” fellows at SDSU will welcome a cadre of PR seniors from Hampton University in Virginia.

After listening and reflecting on social injustice last summer, we were ready to take further action. In August 2020, the center put on the Scrub Your Syllabus webinar. Nathian Shae Rodriguez, PR seniors from Hampton University in Virginia.

After listening and reflecting on social injustice last summer, we were ready to take further action. In August 2020, the center put on the Scrub Your Syllabus webinar. Nathian Shae Rodriguez, assistant professor of media studies, and I shared ideas and asked attendees to consider questions, such as: "Are you using inclusive language? How many readings or assignments highlight successful cases, scholars or professionals from communities of color?" PR faculty from 67 universities and 31 states attended. We were encouraged to see these ideas spreading across the nation.

Personally, I am motivated by trying to reverse generations of inequity that some Americans have experienced. I know that I cannot make up for the deeds of the past, but I know that change can begin when one person stands up.

--as told to Gabriela Romano
FAREWELL, OLD FRIEND
SAN DIEGO STADIUM, JACK MURPHY STADIUM,
QUALCOMM STADIUM, SDCCU STADIUM (1967-2020), RIP

IT OPENED IN 1967 AS PLAIN OLD SAN DIEGO STADIUM
and closed 53 years later after three name changes, three
NFL Super Bowls, two World Series and MLB All-Star Games
and sold-out tour stops by The Who, the Stones and Beyoncé.
And, of course, hundreds of Aztec football games.
Ken Ables was there for the first game in 1967 (16-8 win over
Tennessee State) — and the last time the Red and Black took the
field in 2019 (13-3 win over BYU). “I went to my first season there
when I was 10 and went to my last season there when I was 62,”
Ables says. “I took my wife there when we were first dating, and
brought my kids to their first games.” He also watched hundreds
of games with his father, renowned Aztec superfan Tom Ables,
who attended 788 home and away games from 1946 until his
death in 2017. “We had the same seats [in Mission Valley] from
start to finish: Club Level, section 36,” Ables says.
Together they wrote the book — “Go Aztecs!” — on SDSU
football history, so Ables is pretty much a stadium historian as
well. “I can remember when it was brand new,” he says. “In its original configuration it really was quite nice. It was expanded a couple of times, and it kind of lost a little bit of its charm each time, and it just got neglected.”

By the end, the stadium’s two original major-league tenants — the San Diego Chargers and the Padres — were both long gone. With the Aztecs temporarily relocating to Carson for home games, demolition of SDCCU Stadium got underway in November 2020 in order to accelerate construction for Aztec Stadium and SDSU Mission Valley.

There’s plenty of anticipation for the new stadium that will be built in time for the 2022 season. “I’m excited for a right-sized stadium that will be completely packed with Aztec fans, and the energy that that’s going to bring for our student athletes,” says John David Wicker, director of intercollegiate athletics. Football Head Coach Brady Hoke agrees. “It’s going to be a great venue,” Hoke says. “Something that will really stick out in our recruiting.” Still, he took a moment to recall the 2010 Poinsettia Bowl (35-14 win over Navy) on a heavily rain-soaked field as a favorite highlight, and to give the stadium its due reverence. “It was home, it felt like home,” Hoke says.

Ables says, “It had a fun run.” — Jeff Ristine

Photographs by Sandy Huffaker
ABIGAIL LOPEZ CALLED A WOMAN WHO HAD BEEN IN CLOSE CONTACT WITH SOMEONE WHO TESTED POSITIVE FOR COVID-19, to advise her to quarantine for two weeks. The news was the last straw and the woman broke down, crying.

“The single mother of three children earned money cleaning houses and had already lost clients who didn’t want to let her inside during the pandemic. Struggling to make ends meet, she desperately needed money for that month’s rent. Two weeks without work would hurt mightily. And now there was the added stress she might have the novel coronavirus.

It was the kind of heartbreakingly but all too familiar situation contact tracers like Lopez encounter on a daily basis as they make calls to try to stem the spread of COVID-19: overwhelming need, job loss, high anxiety.

Lopez, like the woman she called, identifies as Hispanic and speaks fluent Spanish. She was able to form an instant rapport with the woman, assuring her that contact for rent assistance. As she continued to check in on the woman during the quarantine period, she realized the difference she was making in her life. “She had someone to talk to, to unburden herself and to find the financial support she needed,” Lopez says. “A lot of people are really grateful when we call them.”

A MODEL PROGRAM

Lopez is one of dozens of tracers in the Community Fighting COVID! contact tracing program, a partnership between SDSU and the County of San Diego Health & Human Services Agency (HHSSA) that began in June 2020. The university produces the lists of people to call, recruits and train contact tracers from the very communities they will serve — Latinx, Black, Tapatíol and Arabic-speaking. Most are bilingual and receive training as community health workers. “When health workers really understand the nuances of cultural aspects they can relate better to people,” says Hala Madanat, interim vice president for research and innovation at SDSU and a leading public health expert. “Our community health worker tracers are able to make a bridge and to de-escalate situations when contacts are y’re not taking the health guidelines seriously. Older adults are often grateful to speak with someone who is Black, she says. McAfee finds it’s important to meet each person where they’re at.

One particular family stands out in her mind. A young man had been living with his 100-year-old grandmother until she tested positive for COVID-19 and was hospitalized. He moved in with his aunt’s family, but to keep the peace he isolated himself in their garage, which had no access to running water or a bathroom. While visiting the family, McAfee observed how stressed the aunt was. “It was palpable in different directions between her elderly ill mother and her nephew who had no place to go.”

Over and over, Lopez and other contact tracers see some common problems with which their community members struggle. “This program exemplifies that in a way that gets to what we are proud of about this country, which deploys health workers into the community for home visits. Tracers like Lopez make home visits for such cases, and they have a success rate of 100% in some communities, and about 80% with others, for getting people to quarantine. “These are people who would have been lost to tracing,” Madanat says. “But we were able to reach them because we have people who are linguistically and culturally concordant.”

OVERWHELMING NEED FOR BASICS

One day, Lopez overheard a group of young men talking about sharing a common problem with the idea of organizing a food drive. SDSU program managers and faculty helped them make it happen by fast-tracking the approval process, and spreading the word via outreach to public health faculty and students, through SDSU social media channels, and also via the county’s own tracers and employees who donated food. They also received other types of donations from other community members, such as running water or a bathroom.

With the idea of organizing a food drive.

Empowering our community is a way to foster a greater sense of belonging,” Lopez says. “You could see it in her face. It’s the best feeling in the world to have a work day like that.”

When she made the follow-up call on day 15, she learned the grandmother had recovered and was back home and cooking for everyone. The nephew said he was grateful for all the help — the free hotel room program comes with three meals a day, internet access and daily nurse check-ins — she arranged. Afterward, McAfee broke down crying, moved by the emotional story and palpable relief before calling her program manager to share the happy news. Moved by the impact her work is having, McAfee, who took communication courses at SDSU in the past, is now considering pursuing a degree in public health.

THESE ARE PEOPLE WHO WOULD HAVE BEEN LOST TO TRACING, BUT WE WERE ABLE TO REACH THEM BECAUSE WE HAVE PEOPLE WHO ARE LINGUISTICALLY AND CULTURALLY CONCORDANT.” — HALA MADANAT

EMBODYING SDSU VALUES

McDaniels-Davidson oversees the day-to-day operations of the program and acts as liaison with the county. She helped build the training program and revises it as the program evolves, offering ongoing training to tracers to keep up-to-date on the latest COVID-19 research.

McDaniels-Davidson and her team vet tracer candidates for their willingness to serve their community, their language and familiarity with the barriers their communities face, and their communication skills and empathy. “Our tracers are able to de-escalate situations when contacts are upset, and persuade them to comply with quarantine,” she says. “This isn’t just a job for them, the help they offer feeds their souls.”

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Designed and launched to answer the need of the hour, the contact tracing program has since evolved to back the values SDSU embodies. “SDSU at its core is about community,” McDaniels-Davidson says. “This program exemplifies that in a way that gets to what we are about — we are here to teach, we are here to do research, and improve the lives of San Diegans.”

In a pandemic, it’s crucial not to lose people to follow-up. Madanat emphasizes. As the SDSU program proved its effectiveness, the county shifted contacts who failed to respond after three attempts to the university, which deploys health workers into the community for home visits. Tracers like Lopez make home visits for such cases, and they have a success rate of 100% in some communities, and about 80% with others, for getting people to quarantine.

“The care that people have for each other, for their neighbors,” Lopez says. “That shows the power of community.”

“IT CAN BE SO COLD, BUT IF YOU REALLY GRATEFUL — ABIGAIL LOPEZ

WHEN YOU’RE GATHERING DATA IT CAN BE SO COLD, BUT IF YOU TURN IT INTO A CONVERSATION, IT CAN BE MORE FRIENDLY.” — CRISTA MCAFEE

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Photograph by: Graphic Harbor

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THE DONORS: Peggy Johnson (’85, B.S. electrical and computer engineering) and Eric Johnson (’86, M.S. electrical and computer engineering)

THE GIFT: $3.1 million cash

THE PURPOSE: Creates the fred harris* Chair in Digital Signal Processing (DSP), named after harris, a professor emeritus who taught electrical and computer engineering at SDSU for more than 50 years. The gift will fund a worldwide search and hiring of a prominent DSP expert, as well as their educational and research activities. It is one of only five endowed College of Engineering faculty positions and the largest cash gift in the college’s history.

ABOUT THE JOHNSONS: They met at SDSU and have been married for more than 30 years. Peggy is CEO of Magic Leap, a wearable spatial computers company, and a former executive at Microsoft and Qualcomm. Business Insider named her the No. 1 Most Powerful Female Engineer of 2017. Eric was the founder and CEO of the successful start-up Tourmaline Networks and is now an angel investor in tech start-ups.

WHY THEY WANTED TO GIVE BACK: Most of us — if we were lucky — had a professor who profoundly influenced us. For Eric, that professor was harris. “He was very good at making very difficult concepts understandable,” Eric says. Tasked with designing an aspect of satellite communications at his first job, Eric was able to take a theory harris taught him and easily apply it. “Within six months we had a satellite communication system up and running,” he says.

Peggy never had harris in class. “But Eric never stopped talking about him,” she says. “He still talks about how something fred taught him has stuck in his head. Those are the teachers that we need to celebrate.”

“The impact that San Diego State has had on both of our lives — we can’t overstate it,” Peggy says. A chance visit to the College of Engineering building changed the course of her education and career. As a first-year business student, she was delivering mail as part of the campus job she had to help pay for her education. Two women in the office — visibly excited to see a female student — asked if she was there to talk about engineering, Peggy says. “No one had ever said, ‘What about engineering’ to me,” she says. “Not my high school counselor, not my math teacher.” The next day she changed her major. “Even though there were very few women at the time it was a very welcoming department,” she says.

Peggy went on to become not only a top engineer but a business leader. “Everything I learned in engineering from a problem-solving perspective helps even today to solve business problems,” she says. “From Qualcomm to Microsoft — and even today at Magic Leap — I’ve used that cognitive ability.”

It’s that solid engineering foundation that formed the basis of their success that the Johnsons hope the fred harris Chair will continue to bring to future students. “I believe engineers are a direct path of making life easier and better for everyone,” Eric says. “I view this gift as a way of promoting more talented engineers from San Diego State.”

“I WOULD LIKE TO THANK PEGGY AND ERIC JOHNSON FOR THIS TRULY TRANSFORMATIONAL GIFT THAT RECOGNIZES THE LEGACY OF FRED HARRIS’ 50+ YEARS OF SERVICE TO THE COLLEGE.”

—EUGENE OLEVSKY, Dean of the College of Engineering
These Aztec couples found creative ways to safely celebrate their unions in 2020.

LOVE IN THE TIME OF CORONAVIRUS

1. Myra Jurado (19, B.A. interdisciplinary studies) and Zaide Diaz (19, B.A. interdisciplinary studies), married on June 12 at a friend’s home near SDSU. (Photo at Presidio Park.) 

2. Ido Moscovici (’13, B.A. journalism) and Kathleen Fernando (’16, B.A. communications), a graduate student at UCLA, met during the pandemic lockdown in the U.K. 

3. Zander Keig (’19, B.S. psychology) and Maggie McCormick (’19, B.S. recreation and tourism management) met on July 8 in Glorietta, California.

4. Ruth Schneider (’18, M.A. communication; M.S. biology) published two new novels: “Demon Slayer” and “A Hero’s Journey.”

5. Roland Schneider (’81, B.A. interdisciplinary studies) and Cindy Cosio-Reyes (’11, B.A. international business) met during the pandemic lockdown in the U.K.

6. Andrea Aschbrenner (’91), Deserae Rasmussen (’09), and Taylor Schwab (’05) are partners in their company, which received a Best in Show award from the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) and a Bronze Remmy Award from the National Association of Broadcasters.

7. Dylan M. Aste (’00, B.S. computer science) recently received the Younger Federal Lawyer Award from the Federal Bar Association and was named to SD Metro’s “40 Under 40.” He is an assistant United States attorney serving as the civil opsperson.

8. Verónica Polnick (’98, B.S. hospitality and tourism management) and attorney at Jackson Walker law firm in Houston, was named to Super Lawyers’ “2020 Rising Star” and The Best Lawyers’ “Onces to Watch.”


10. Randy Reyes (’17, B.S. business) and Joseph Dodson (’16, B.A. psychology) were married on Nov. 6 in San Diego.

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WNEVER A BORING DAY IN SDSU HISTORY
Contribute your favorite moments to a 2022 calendar project.

By Seth Mallios

When you’re an archaeologist who loves to dig and your summer excavation is canceled because of COVID-19, you spend a lot of time staring at the calendar and thinking about next year. When you’re a historian who delights in searching collections of old documents and the archives are closed because of COVID-19, you spend a lot of time staring at the calendar and thinking about next year. When you’re a curator who’s poised to unveil the most important artifacts of a 20-year research project and your exhibition is postponed until the spring because of COVID-19…well, you get the point.

All of this staring at calendars had a silver lining. I pondered whether something significant happened every calendar day in San Diego State University history. Fueled by this query and challenge, I set out constructing the Today in San Diego State History: 2022 Daily Calendar, pulling memorable moments from Jan. 1 to Dec. 31 over the last 124 years.

I aimed for a mix of entries showcasing student life, academics, athletics, alumni and campus events. Some were obvious; they were the undeniable milestones of the institution. March 13, 1897 — when California Governor James Budd signed the bill authorizing the creation of the State Normal School of San Diego — was the starting point for San Diego State and this project. There were momentous campus visits by global dignitaries: President John F. Kennedy’s commencement address at Aztec Bowl (June 6, 1963) and the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s protest speech in the Open Air Theatre (May 29, 1964). Likewise, the beginning of the nation’s first Women’s Studies Program at SDSU (Feb. 2, 1970) was absolutely integral.

Sports fans will appreciate Marshall Faulk’s 386-yard rushing game (Sept. 14, 1991), Stephen Strasburg’s no-hitter in his final home appearance (May 8, 2009), volleyball star Laurel Brasser’s debut as the first woman to play a men’s Division I college sport (Feb. 8, 1974), and many others.

Meanwhile music lovers can debate how to rank campus concerts including Ella Fitzgerald at Peterson Gym (Oct. 1, 1961), the Canned Heat/Grateful Dead/Santana/Lee Michaels proto-Woodstock mega-show at Aztec Bowl (May 11, 1969), Bob Marley at the OAT (July 24, 1978), Adele at Viejas Arena (Aug. 18, 2011) or any one of Jimmy Buffett’s 28 concert appearances from Sept. 3, 1975 (The Backdoor) to March 10, 2012 (Viejas).

It is worth emphasizing that even though the calendar includes the day that Ted Giannoulas (‘76) first donned a chicken suit for a Padres game — the April 9, 1974 KGB radio gig that would evolve into a career as the world famous San Diego Chicken — it’s only 90% complete. It is missing a most critical element: you!

Send a detailed description of the most important dates in your SDSU history my way at smallios@sdsu.edu before March 1, 2021. If I use your unique submission, I’ll send you a free calendar.

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