



PHOTOS COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS

Santiago Canyon College student veterans assist in assembling The Wall That Heals at Grijalva Park on Sept. 30 in Orange. The exhibit was on display Oct. 2-5.

COMMUNITY

'WALL THAT HEALS' WORK GIVES STUDENT VETS A SENSE OF PURPOSE

Constructing memorial a way to give back

By Lou Ponsi
contributing writer

When Steven Stenersen, coordinator for the Veterans Resource Center at Santiago Canyon College, got word that the Wall that Heals was coming to the city of Orange, he saw it as an opportunity for SCC's student veterans to be of service to their fallen brothers and sisters and the veteran community as a whole.

The Wall that Heals, which was on display Oct. 2-5 in Grijalva Park in Orange, is a three-quarter scale replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. that bears the names of the more than 58,000 U.S. service members who were killed or lost during the Vietnam War.

A group of nearly a dozen members of the SCC chapter of Student Veter-

ans of America helped to construct the traveling exhibit, which consists of 140 numbered panels, support structures, sliding panels and foundations.

"When they served, they had that sense of purpose," said Stenersen, himself a Marine Corps veteran. "And when they get out, that's something they lose. And so that's something I'm trying to bring here. They love to give back. They love to help others."

The student veterans handled much of the physical labor involved in piecing the wall together and securing it to the ground.

More than 5,000 people paid their respects at the wall, which was available to visitors 24 hours a day while it was in town, said Doug Redding, president of the Wall that Heals - Orange, the nonprofit formed for the sole purpose of raising the funds needed to bring the wall to the city of Orange.

WALL » PAGE 5



SCC students worked alongside members of the American Legion Post and the Elks Lodge to construct the memorial.



PHOTO COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS

Counselor Macey Lachman supports students participating in the CSU Transfer Success Pathway program.

ACADEMIC ROADMAP

Transfer Success Pathway paves the way to 4-year schools

SCC ranks in state's top 5 in program

By Larry Urish
contributing writer

While many students attend community college to gain the knowledge and skills to land a good job and start a fulfilling trade or career, a two-year college also serves as a streamlined, cost-effective springboard for those interested in moving on to a four-year university.

To that end, the California Community Colleges and the Cal State Univer-

sity system have partnered to create the Transfer Success Pathway, a dual-admission program that guarantees qualified students a place at the CSU and the major of their choice while still enrolled in community college. A leader in this endeavor, Santiago Canyon College was recently named one of the top 5 of the 116 California community colleges for student participation in the program.

Students who enter the pathway receive support from the Cal State system through pre-admission counseling from CSU staffers and access to the Transfer Planner Portal, an online resource that assists in the process of moving to one of the 22 CSU schools. SCC has been

TRANSFER » PAGE 2



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Transfer

FROM PAGE 1

equally supportive, thanks to its Transfer Center, which assists students seeking to transition to four-year universities.

Although the CSU Transfer Success Pathway is geared for those entering community college straight out of high school, “It’s not just for those who graduated last June,” said Macey Lachman, SCC counselor and faculty lead of the Transfer Center. “However, we’re focusing our outreach and marketing on the 2025 graduates because they meet the eligibility.”

Along with students who have never earned any college credit, other eligible students include those who took dual-enrollment coursework while still in high school, as well as those who took college courses during the summer immediately after high school graduation.

Students who enter into the TSP agreement with the Cal State system — within a prescribed “agreement cycle” that runs annually from Aug. 1 to Oct. 31 — must meet the above criteria and, within three years, complete the requirements specific to the chosen CSU school and selected major.

“The required coursework for this program varies according to which agreement they’re entering into,” Lachman said. “Some schools have very specific classes the student has to take to be eligible for the Transfer Success Pathway. ... For students starting this semester, they’re on track to transfer as late as the fall of 2028 if they want to be within the TSP criteria.”

Applications for admission into a CSU school are done through Cal State Apply (calstate.edu/apply). Since this could be a daunting task, SCC’s Transfer Center furnishes related workshops and one-on-one help.

“Our assistance goes beyond the application and deals with the next steps,” Lachman said. “I like to think of our help as ‘translating.’ For example, we translate emails. We help students understand what’s being communicated and what’s being asked of them. Maybe they need to send transcripts or verify certain information. That’s a big part of how our center helps students.”

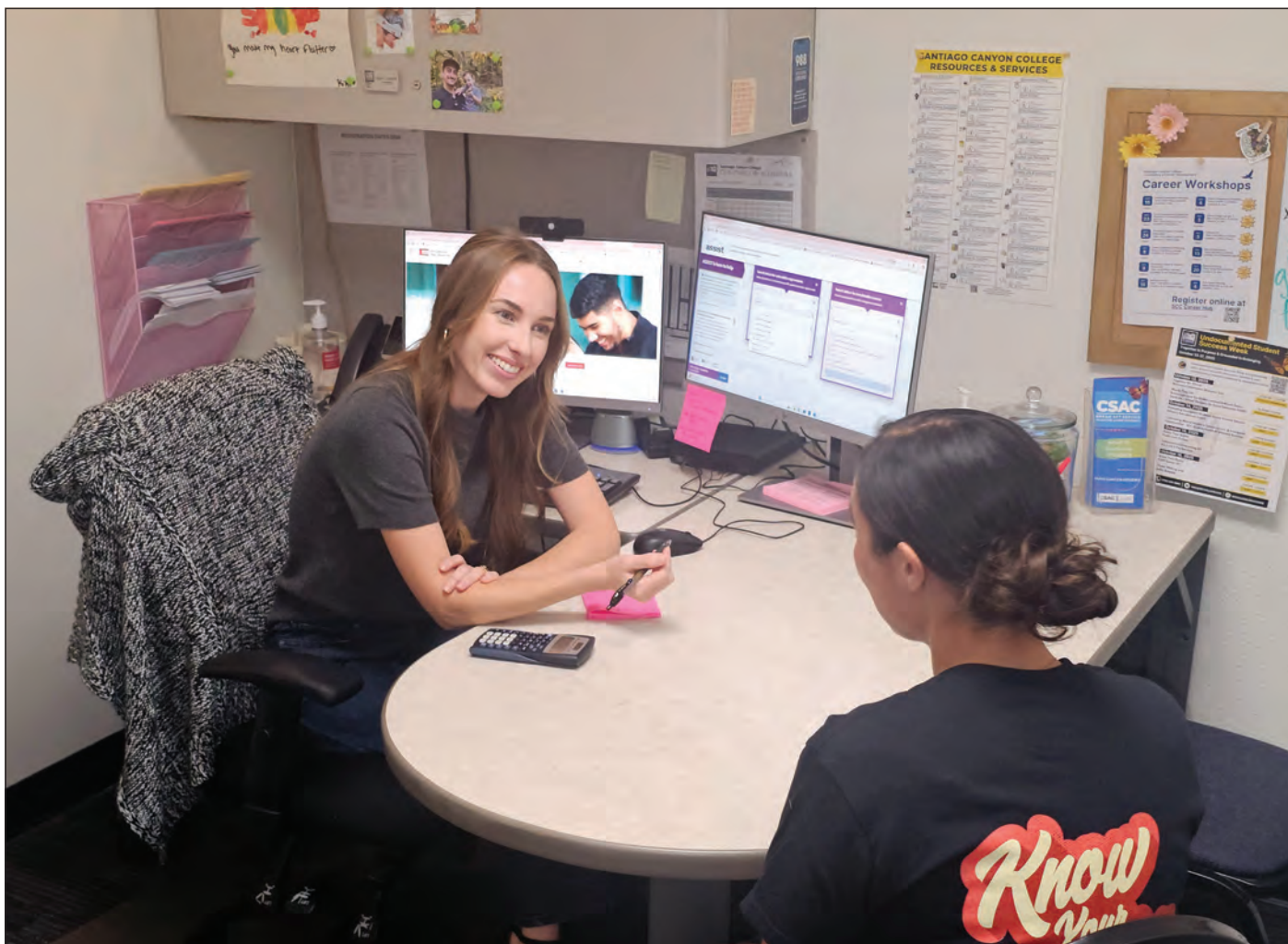


PHOTO COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS

Counselor Macey Lachman meets with a student to provide transfer guidance through the CSU Transfer Success Pathway program.

Support also includes assistance with the CSU Transfer Planner. “Because this is a newer tool, sometimes it has sticking points that can be confusing,” Lachman said. “We’ve realized that students can benefit from support in getting them signed up and then walking them through it.”

Along with general transfer advising and university application assistance, SCC’s Transfer Center furnishes one-on-one counseling, workshops and appointments with four-year-university reps (in person and via Zoom), transfer fairs, help with university research and campus tours.

For example, last month the Transfer Center facilitated a tour of Cal State Fullerton, including transportation to and

from the university.

A key factor behind SCC’s top 5 placement in Transfer Success Pathway student participation has been the college’s commitment to increasing program awareness.

“In the past, we’ve sent out emails and text messages to students,” Lachman said. “But our numbers were still not where we wanted them to be. So this year, the Transfer Center has partnered with SCC’s Outreach Team, which hosts the Summer Advantage Academy, a conference-style event for new students every August where they attend sessions based on their interest or major. In our workshop, we helped students apply for their TSP with Cal State.”

The college has also taken a more

hands-on approach in helping students throughout the process. “This year, we’re going to be case managing this cohort of students, those entering into the TSP agreement this fall,” Lachman said. “We’re already developing comprehensive education plans for them, helping to build out their two-year roadmap of what classes to take so they can meet their goal of transferring to their chosen Cal State school in their particular major.”

“And we’re reaching out to students, not just waiting for them to come to us, to let them know about the resources available and to get them in for counseling. Cal State will also host related events, and we’ll be keeping students updated about those as well.”

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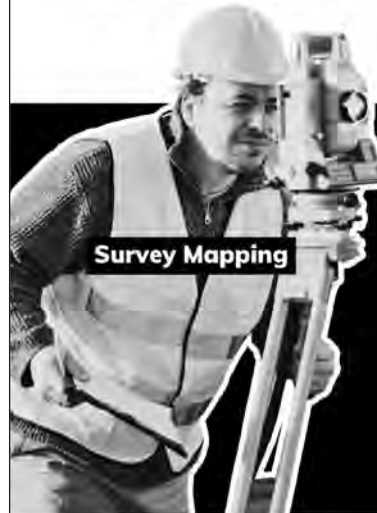
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STANDOUT ALUM

Launched to law school and a career at tech giant

Philip Wu found direction at SCC

By Greg Mellen
contributing writer

On paper, Phillip Wu had all the requisites needed to go straight to a four-year college when he graduated from high school. He was in the top 25% of his class, came from an educated family and had already been accepted to UC Riverside.

However, Wu was just going through the motions, checking boxes, but not really engaged. And, frankly, he was a little scared.

"I wasn't ready – at least not mentally. In high school, I lacked a clear sense of direction," he said. "I didn't know what I wanted to study or what kind of career I wanted to pursue. I even questioned whether college was the right fit for me at all."

Naturally introverted and shy, the idea of the sprawling campuses, big-school pressure and large, impersonal lecture halls was intimidating.

Santiago Community College became the perfect answer, a place where Wu blossomed and charted a path that led to degrees at UC Berkeley, the University of San Francisco School of Law and a job at tech powerhouse NVIDIA, where he helps ensure compliance with global data protection laws.

For his achievements, Wu will be recognized by Santiago Canyon College at its 25th Anniversary Gala in November.

"Choosing SCC was one of the best decisions I've made," Wu said. "It gave me the time and support I needed to grow, explore my interests and build confidence in myself. It wasn't the path most people expected me to take, but it was the one that helped me find my way."

Wu graduated from high school in 2003. At the time, Santiago Canyon College was just three years into its independent accreditation after having been a satellite campus in the Rancho Santiago Community College District.

As a result, like Wu, Santiago Canyon College was also discovering its own identity.

In particular, Wu credits Carolyn Motokane, a retired counselor at the school, for helping him find his way.

"Carolyn was more than just a counselor – she was a mentor, a guide, and a constant source of encouragement," he said. "Her guidance played a huge role in helping me transfer to Berkeley within two years."

Wu was also able to take classes outside his major and prerequisites that allowed him to learn about the broader world.

"One that stood out was sociology. It helped me understand how life outcomes are shaped not just by personal



PHOTO COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS

Philip Wu credits choosing SCC over a 4-year college to continue his education as one of the best decisions he ever made.

effort, but by larger social and institutional forces," he said. "That insight changed how I think about success – not just as something earned, but also as something influenced by the systems around us."

Santiago College is also where Wu learned how to be a college-level student, from critical thought to study techniques that would be foundational in law school.

"SCC reshaped my relationship with learning," he said. "In high school, I did just enough to get by. But at SCC, I found myself genuinely engaged with the subjects I was studying and developed a growing curiosity about the world around me."

The education and confidence Wu first developed at SCC helped carry him forward both through law school and in the professional world.

"Law school was tough. It attracts a lot of driven, high-achieving 'Type A' personalities. I definitely felt the pressure," Wu said.

And while there were times he considered dropping out, Wu persevered.

"Once things began to click, I gained the confidence to tackle new subjects and trust my ability to learn," he said. "Law school didn't just teach me legal theory – it taught me how to think. It trained me to break down complex problems, analyze them from different angles, and find practical solutions."

That has helped guide Wu professionally. Not surprisingly, Wu arrived at NVIDIA via an unusual path.

In 2019, after working in family and financial service law, Wu was looking for a new direction.

He learned of a temporary contracting job in data privacy compliance at NVIDIA, which was surging in the tech world.

"The pay wasn't great, but I saw it as a potential gateway," Wu said, betting on himself although he knew little about the language of tech or the challenges in the industry.

And it paid off. "As the company's needs evolved, I was asked to take on responsibilities beyond data privacy," he said. "Saying yes – even when I wasn't entirely sure

I was ready – proved to be a good decision."

Wu is also flexing some of the concepts of social responsibility he learned at SCC.

He helps head up the company's LG-BTQ+ employee resource group known as "NVPrize."

"It's a safe place for like-minded people to share experiences and resources," said Wu, adding that it also allowed him to make meaningful connections with colleagues across business units with which he might not otherwise engage.

It was through NVPrize that Wu was able to meet NVIDIA CEO and cofounder Jensen Huang at NVPrize's Summer Celebration & Silent Art Auction.

As Wu looks ahead to where his career may lead, he now knows to trust his instincts and not always do what's obvious or expected.

He said, "I've learned that sometimes, the best opportunities come when you're willing to be flexible, take a different route and trust yourself."

DEBATE COMPETITION

Forensics team earns top honors at regional tournament

RSCCD Communications

The Santiago Canyon College Forensics Team earned multiple top honors at the 2025 Pacific Southwest Collegiate Forensics Association Warm-Up Tournament held Sept. 28-29 at El Camino College. Competing against colleges from across Southern California, SCC students stood out for their preparation,

poise and performance.

In the Open IPDA Debate category, Vincent Tran earned first place after defeating competitors from Cypress College, Moorpark College and Palomar College. Now in his second semester, Tran competed in the Open Division—a category typically reserved for second-year students.

Brittany Roque also captured a first-place award in Novice IPDA Debate, outperforming students from Moorpark

College, Los Angeles Valley College and Cypress College.

Aaron Piffer secured wins in two of four rounds, and Ryan Midani, who posted two wins in four rounds of competition. Team president Cassandra Ceballos Gomez led the team, and Gabriel Parra and Joshua Pal made their competitive debuts for SCC.

"We are proud of our students' strong start to the season," said Ralph Castellanos, one of the team's coaches. "Their work ethic, collaboration and commitment to excel-

lence continue to reflect the values of Santiago Canyon College."

The team is coached by Castellanos, Rita Rafael and George Talavera. Judges for the event included Emily Pogosova, Alex Rolison and Vanessa Galang.

The PSCFA Warm-Up Tournament marks the beginning of the 2025-26 forensics season. SCC's early success sets the tone for a competitive and inspiring year ahead.



PHOTO COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS

Members of the Santiago Canyon College Forensics Team join their coaches after their top finishes at the 2025 PSCFA Warm-Up Tournament at El Camino College.

U VILLAGE EVENT

Esports team kicks off first season with Super Smash

RSCCD Communications

Santiago Canyon College's Esports team launched its first season as an officially recognized sport with a singles Super Smash Bros. tournament on Sept. 19, in the college's new Esports Lab at U Village.

The event drew approximately 75 players and fans from across Southern California, including competitors from Orange Unified School District, Anaheim Union High School District, Orange Coast College, UC Irvine, San Diego State University, CSU and Cal State San Bernardino.

Out of 55 competitors, SCC earned 17th place in its debut tournament.

"This was a strong showing considering this was the first tournament that many of my students have ever played in," said Esports Coach Roshan Uma. "We are always going to aim to get to Top 16 each tournament, with more tournaments slated throughout the semester."

The SCC Esports program, which opened its dedicated space in the U-Village earlier this semester, provides students with competitive opportunities while building teamwork, strategy, and digital skills. The program joins a growing list of recognized collegiate Esports initiatives across California.



Monitors display the tournament setup in Santiago Canyon College's new Esports Lab at U Village.

PHOTOS COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS



Santiago Canyon College Esports coach Roshan Uma speaks to participants during the Super Smash tournament.



A player competes in the tournament on Sept. 19.

IN ORANGE COUNTY

SCC ranked top Hispanic-Serving Institution among community colleges

RSCCD Communications

Santiago Canyon College has once again been recognized as a leading Hispanic-Serving Institution, earning the No. 1 ranking among HSI community colleges in Orange County for the second year in a row, according to Niche.com's 2026 rankings.

SCC is also ranked:

- No. 12 HSI in California among both 2- and 4-year institutions
- No. 7 HSI community college in the nation

"These rankings reflect the impact of SCC's ongoing efforts to expand access, opportunity, and support for Hispanic and Latine students through innovative programs and federally funded initiatives, such as our \$3 million HSI STEM Grant and our \$1.7 million Title V Nuestro Lugar Latine Center Grant," said SCC President Jeannie G. Kim. "This recognition is a testament to the dedication of our faculty, staff, and community partners who continue to make SCC a model for student success and equity in higher education."

SCC's HSI designation allows the college to apply for and receive federal grants that support students through paid internships, peer mentorship programs, academic counseling, and culturally responsive support services.

In addition to HSI rankings, Niche.com recognized SCC as:

- No. 1 community college in Orange County
- No. 7 community college in California
- No. 19 community college in the United States (out of 673 surveyed)

The rankings are based on academic quality, diversity, student life, and institutional data from the U.S. Department of Education, including the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) and Office of Postsecondary Education.



Santiago Canyon College's E Building houses the computer lab.

PHOTO COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS

NONPROFIT

Operation Helping Hands: Enabling students to stabilize, succeed

\$1,000 scholarships help with housing

By Nicole Gregory
contributing writer

Operation Helping Hands, an Orange County nonprofit that offers scholarships to unhoused or housing-insecure community college students in Southern California, is set to expand.

Over the past four years, Operation Helping Hands has worked with Santiago Canyon College and seven other community colleges, awarding scholarships of \$1,000 a month for housing to 15 students who were unhoused or housing-insecure. Due to its recent first successful fundraising effort, it will now be able offer scholarships to many more.

Fernando Romero Cruz, 20, a graduate of Santiago Canyon College, is one recipient of the Operation Helping Hands scholarship. He'd been living with his sister and her small children, as well as other family members, and was sleeping in her living room while struggling to keep up with school work and holding down a campus job.

"There were 11 people in the apartment," Cruz said. "My nephews were 6 and 8 and 12, and most of the time they were going to sleep at midnight, and I could not sleep until they were asleep." He would wake up at 6 a.m. and walk 40 minutes to his classes at SCC.

His boss at the campus job told him about the Operation Helping Hands scholarship and Cruz applied. When he was awarded the scholarship, he was able to rent a room closer to campus and finally have peace and quiet to study and to sleep through the night.

"I was able to sleep eight hours — it made a big impact in my academics," Cruz said. "I wasn't tired going to school anymore." With a regular sleep schedule, Cruz challenged himself to get a 4.0 GPA — "And I did!"

He graduated from SCC last May and is now at UCLA, studying Spanish and linguistics while he also works at a job.

"I am the living proof that when students' basic needs are met, they can incredibly perform academically," he said. "Basic needs for students are a big factor in their academics." He hopes to be a community college professor.

Kim Valentine, the founder of Operation Helping Hands, which works out of her law firm, said that students who are awarded the scholarships must meet specific criteria. "They have to be enrolled in nine units and have a cumulative GPA of 2.9 or above," she said.

Other factors are considered, too. "We look at their likelihood to transfer to a four-year university because they have a set career plan or they are going to be able to graduate with what is necessary to get a job in a field such

as computer science," Valentine said. She works with the colleges to identify potential scholarship candidates among their students.

Another consideration is how many other people might be positively affected by a student's academic success — like the 11 members of Cruz's family, many of whom are children.

"I am the first in my family to go to college, so I am the image for my nephews and siblings," Cruz said. "They can picture themselves going to university. No one in my family has done it."

Valentine looks for students who are also likely to pay their success forward. "We ask if they won the lottery and never had to work, what would they do with their time. The majority of students who are in difficult life situations are very automatic in saying 'I would finish my degree and start a nonprofit or find a way to give back,'" she said.

Operation Helping Hands, which began 16 years ago, also coordinates high school students to fill thousands of backpacks full of hygiene items each year to distribute to homeless people in several Southern California counties. The nonprofit's recent first gala was attended by 400 people, raising funds that will be used for more scholarships to community college students.

Valentine is open about the fact that she experienced homelessness as a teenager, which is one reason why this program is so important to her. "Our general public has this perception that most (homeless) are just drug addicts and alcoholics who've made really horrible choices, and certainly there is a percentage of that," she said. "But there are also these diamonds in the rough, some incredibly amazing people."

She sees her work as offering students an opportunity to help themselves. "I don't look at it like we're saving students," she said. "They still have to show up and persevere and maintain their GPA and do nine units. And every one of these students is holding down multiple jobs. The juggling they're doing in life is so much harder than most people recognize. I want the credit really to go to them — they're saving themselves."



PHOTO COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS
Kimberly Valentine, founder and president of Operation Helping Hands, awards Santiago Canyon College student Fernando Cruz a housing scholarship.

Wall

FROM PAGE 1

"I had no idea it was going to be as large as it was, and that surprised me the most," said Adam McManamy, student services coordinator for the resource center's TRiO Veterans Program, which provides a variety of services to student veterans. "It was just incredible, and it was really powerful to see some of the data. I think it said that a couple fathers and sons were on the wall, how many brothers were on the wall and how many nurses were on the wall."

McManamy has been working with veterans for 10 years, including the past four at the Veterans Resource Center at SCC, and while not a veteran himself, he comes from a family with two generations of veterans.

His father served in the Air Force, and both of his grandfathers served in World War II, including one who was a prisoner of war.

"I feel like I had a duty to serve in some capacity," he said. "And so, this is kind of how I see that working out."

Along with the SCC student veterans, fire academy students from Santa Ana College also volunteered during the three-day event, Redding said.

In total, more than 250 volunteers contributed to the event. Most are residents from the community who signed up through Love Orange, a local nonprofit that provides a free volunteer management service, Redding said.

"All funding and volunteer support came directly from Orange and surrounding local communities, an important detail that was part of our mission statement," he said.

Stenersen learned about the Wall's visit to Orange and the opportunities to volunteer from the Veterans Resource Center's partnership with American Legion Post 132 in Orange.

The original Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington D.C., was completed in 1982 and is in Constitution Gardens, just northeast of the Lincoln Memorial.

The original memorial measures nearly 500 feet long and more than 10 feet high at the apex, decreasing to ground level at each end.



PHOTO COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS
Student veterans got a chance to serve by helping to construct The Wall That Heals, a traveling scale replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C.

Names are listed by the day of casualty.

Debuting in 1996, The Wall That Heals is 375 feet long and stands 7.5 feet high at its tallest point.

Elks Lodge 1475 in Orange applied to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial

Fund, the nonprofit that built and manages the wall in Washington, D.C., and maintains The Wall That Heals, to bring the replica wall to Orange.

Observances included an opening ceremony on Oct. 2 and a special ceremony recognizing those impacted by

Agent Orange, a highly toxic defoliant used during the Vietnam War.

After the closing ceremony on Oct. 5, City of Orange Fire Department cadets assisted with disassembling the wall and staging it into the semi-truck for departure.

REPORT

SCC recognized for pioneering apprenticeship-degree model

RSCCD Communications

Santiago Canyon College has been recognized in the newly released national report *Making Apprenticeship Degrees Work at Scale by Apprenticeships for America*, which highlights 24 institutions leading the integration of real-world job training with higher education. SCC is one of only a few colleges nationwide cited for its decades-long commitment to connecting traditional trade apprenticeships with college degrees.

The report features SCC in its section on Model 1: Apprenticeship-Linked Degrees, describing the college as a national example of how to align union- or industry-sponsored apprenticeship training with college credit. Specifically, the report states:

“Several colleges in the study—such as Macomb Community College, Santiago Canyon College, and Columbus State Community College—have implemented this model for several decades.”

In this model, students complete their apprenticeship training — typically provided by external Training Trusts or unions — and may earn college credit for the Related Technical Instruction, referred to as Related Supplemental Instruction in California. General education courses required for a degree are taken separately, often after the apprenticeship is complete. While the degree is optional, the model is valued for its flexibility, affordability, and accessibility for working learners.

This long-standing structure at SCC has served thousands of students in the building and construction trades, offering them a way to “earn while they learn” and build toward upward mobility—often debt-free. By recognizing the rigor of apprenticeship training and awarding academic credit for it, SCC creates pathways for students to earn associate degrees that enhance career and leadership prospects.

“Our success in apprenticeship education is the result of decades of work by our dedicated faculty, the Training Trusts, and the leadership of Dean Elizabeth Arteaga and her team,” said SCC President Jeannie G. Kim. “Their efforts have created opportunities for students to access high-quality, work-based education that aligns with both college credentials and career growth.”

The report calls out the national relevance of SCC’s model, especially as California and the country push to expand earn-and-learn options. According to *Apprenticeships for America*, “this model



PHOTO COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS

By aligning union or industry-sponsored apprenticeship training with college credit, Santiago Canyon College enables students to earn degrees and prepare for the workforce.

provides an opportunity to expand [college] student base without the burden of independently developing and managing apprenticeship programs, which are often resource-intensive.” It is especially effective for students in the trades seeking long-term career advancement or managerial roles.

SCC’s work aligns closely with Cali-

fornia’s strategic priorities outlined in Vision 2030 and the Governor’s Master Plan for Career Education, both of which emphasize work-based learning, equitable access, and awarding Credit for Prior Learning. The college’s apprenticeship programs directly support the state’s goal to scale to 500,000 registered apprenticeships by 2029, ensuring students

don’t have to choose between a paycheck and a diploma.

“SCC’s model proves that you can build strong academic programs without losing the hands-on, industry-centered experiences that make apprenticeships so valuable. It’s about opening doors for students and honoring the learning they’re already doing,” Kim said.

Please join us as we celebrate



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