



PHOTOS COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS

A student operates an unmanned aerial system with surveying equipment on the Santiago Canyon College campus, illustrating hands-on training in the college's new bachelor of science program in digital infrastructure and location science.

## INNOVATION

# BACHELOR'S DEGREE WILL TRAIN THE NEXT GENERATION OF SURVEYORS

## Specializing in digital infrastructure, location sciences

By Lou Ponsi  
contributing writer

After a multiyear effort that included a rigorous application process, some pushback from state institutions and other challenges, Santiago Canyon College is offering its first-ever baccalaureate program.

Starting in 2027, SCC will offer a bachelor of science degree in digital infrastructure and location sciences.

The curriculum, which builds on the college's existing certificate and associate's degree programs in land surveying, is designed to equip students with foundational skills in construction surveying, remote sensing, plane surveying, construction surveying and geographic information systems, said Mark Counts, an adjunct professor in SCC's Surveying-Map-

ping Sciences department.

Counts, who is a senior transportation surveyor and chief of office surveying systems for Caltrans, spearheaded the effort and developed the curriculum for the new bachelor's degree, which will be offered completely online.

The degree is specifically designed to address workforce gaps in operations, maintenance, and asset management and connecting project delivery with ongoing infrastructure management — skills that are increasingly in demand, said Counts, senior transportation surveyor and chief of office surveying systems for Caltrans.

"We need a professional who can leverage all of the principles of land surveying and delivering it in a way where an enterprise like Caltrans can leverage it to make better decisions," Counts said. "Because we can't make these types of decisions without this type of surveyor. So that's the difference be-

tween the entry-level surveyor that's going through the two-year program. ...We're applying it in new ways now. Ways that are unprecedented."

A bachelor of science in digital infrastructure and location sciences qualifies graduates for careers in land surveying, with a pathway to licensure, infrastructure asset management and operations and maintenance analysis for public agencies and private firms, Counts said.

A 2014 California law allows community colleges to offer baccalaureate programs in order



Mark Counts is an adjunct professor in Santiago Canyon College's Survey-Mapping Sciences department.

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BACK TO SCHOOL PHOTOS, PAGE 3

PHOTO BY JEFF ANTENORE, CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

## CULTURAL AWARENESS

# Community group seeks to preserve the legacy of Lorenzo Ramirez

## Wider understanding of desegregation history in O.C. sought

By Larry Urish  
contributing writer

Eight years before the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision, when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional, a legal battle began in Orange County that helped set the stage for the Brown v. Board case.

In Mendez, et al v. Westminster School District, et al, five Mexican American families in 1946 challenged school segregation, claiming their children were forced to attend separate schools in the Westminster,

Garden Grove, Santa Ana and El Modeno (today Orange Unified) school districts.

They won, ending school segregation in the area.

"All of the families involved in the case did something fantastic," said Sammy Rodriguez, a retired Santiago Canyon College adjunct professor of ethnic studies.

Their courageous action continues to pay off today.

"As of last fall, 51% of the Santiago Canyon College student body is composed of Latinx or Hispanic students," said Aaron Voelcker, SCC's Dean of Institutional Effectiveness, Library & Learning Support

RAMIREZ » PAGE 5

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ARTS

# SCC's new music degree hits all the right notes

## Meeting requirements for CSU, UC transfers

By Jenelyn Russo, contributing writer

Santiago Canyon College has expanded its academic offerings with a new associate of arts degree for transfer in music, creating a pathway for students pursuing music studies to continue their education at four-year institutions.

The new degree addresses a gap in SCC's academic infrastructure and course sequence for students seeking transfer opportunities in music, a goal Eleanor Núñez, co-chair of SCC's Performing Arts department, has pursued since taking on the role in 2024.

"This was a vision I had," Núñez said. "I was looking at what we're offering, what other local programs offer and how we can better serve our students. The reality is our high school and middle school students in the region didn't have a local community college with a music program."

Núñez, with support from Alex Taber, SCC professor of economics and department co-chair, wrote the curriculum for 16 new music courses and secured CSU and UC transferability for an additional 16 courses, resulting in a two-year degree that satisfies lower-division music major state requirements for students who transfer to a four-year college.

"They will have already completed essentially half of their requirements," Núñez said of the degree.

The course work is structured in a four-tier sequence. The first tier of studies includes theory and musicianship courses, or what Núñez calls "the grammar of music." Classes like Music Theory 1 guide students through concepts such as diatonic and secondary dominants, four-part writing and multiple-voice exercises, including singing and dictation.

Levels 2, 3 and 4 of theory and musicianship courses increase in complex-

ity and feature concepts such as four-part voice writing, chromatic harmony and other 20th century techniques.

"What's interesting about our Level 3 and 4 theory courses is that they are equivalent to upper division theory classes at the four-year universities," Núñez said. "So, it's actually really quite advanced, and it's pretty advantageous for the students to take them at community college because it's so much cheaper."

The second tier of studies in the program includes the course sequence that satisfies all piano requirements. The third tier focuses on applied lessons, or private lessons, and the way Núñez designed this coursework is unique to SCC.

Typically for college-level music students, their first two years of private instruction are offered in 30-minute lessons. But all SCC music major students will be receiving hourlong lessons with their instructors.

"I wrote the class in such a way here at SCC that it's a full lecture hour for the student and the instructor, so they're receiving 16 one-hour lessons," Núñez said. "It is the most intensive and best education for the student. ... We're really lucky to have the support of our administration on this."

The fourth tier of the program is students' participation in large performance ensembles. SCC has traditionally offered choir, but will now also offer concert band, jazz band, orchestra and guitar ensembles.

The degree was completed and approved within one year and began accepting students into the full two-year track last fall. The program is for all music majors, regardless of their instrument of specialization, and requires an audition for ac-



PHOTOS COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS  
Eleanor Núñez, co-chair of SCC's Performing Arts department



Alex Taber, SCC professor of economics and department co-chair

ceptance. "Students need to demonstrate proficiency on their instrument because we're taking them to the professional level," Núñez said. "We prep them to transfer, and we are working on getting them job ready."

Some of the career paths open to students who earn degrees in music include public or private school teaching, military musician, professional performer or the entrepreneur track, which could include positions such as private lesson instructor, music studio owner, producer, engineer or instrument sales.

"The reality is that most musicians do a little bit of everything," said Núñez, whose own career has followed a similar path. "It's really important for our students to see that you can get a career in music and your career is really multifaceted."

Students in the new Associate of Arts degree program will benefit from the small class sizes and instructor access found in all SCC departments.

"Compared to the higher cost of going to a four-year (university) for your first two years,

it's just a great opportunity to be in a class where you have very easy access to the instructor because their primary focus and their primary responsibility is for the students," Taber said.

Some of the degree courses are offered through the SCC Early College Program, a dual enrollment option that allows middle and high school students in the district to take classes such as music fundamentals and vocal training.

Núñez's goals for students pursuing the performing arts at SCC do not stop with music studies. Her next steps include developing similar degree plans for theater and dance, and she envisions future facilities that would bring the music, theater, dance and visual arts programs together into one campus location.

"That's the long-term vision," Núñez said of SCC's Performing Arts department, "building a comprehensive arts environment on this side of eastern north Orange County."

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BACK TO SCHOOL

# SPRING SEMESTER

Approximately 8,000 students returned to Santiago Canyon College the week of Feb. 9, marking the start of the spring 2026 semester. Students of all ages, ranging from 11 to 88, began the term on campus and in virtual classrooms. On the first day of classes, students shared their excitement and goals for the new semester.

## BY THE NUMBERS

### ENROLLMENT BY AGE GROUP:

<b>UNDER 18</b>	<b>18-24</b>
<b>11%</b>	<b>59%</b>
<b>25-29</b>	<b>30+</b>
<b>11%</b>	<b>19%</b>

### ENROLLMENT BY ETHNICITY (TOP 5):

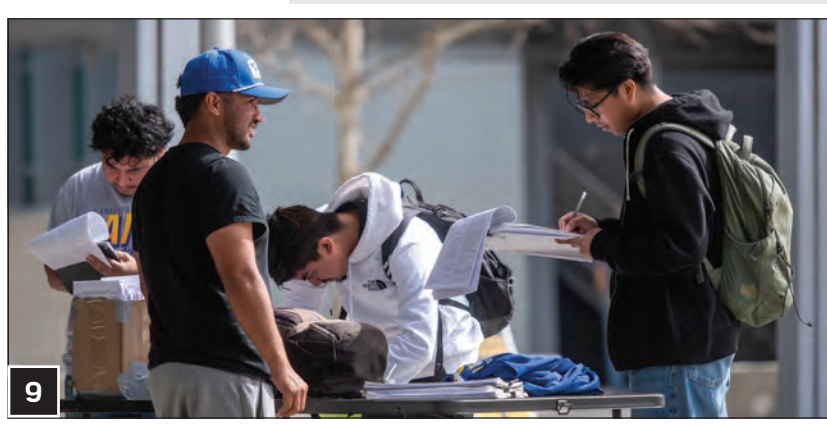
<b>MEXICAN/CHICANO</b>	<b>WHITE</b>	<b>HISPANIC, OTHER</b>
<b>49.8%</b>	<b>29.3%</b>	<b>9.3%</b>
<b>BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN</b>	<b>VIETNAMESE</b>	
<b>4.5%</b>	<b>3.8%</b>	

Source: \*Data as of 2/6/26. Based on students enrolled in college credit courses, excluding students enrolled in apprenticeship courses.



**Photos by Jeff Antenore, Contributing Photographer**

1. A student walks to class during the first day of the spring semester Feb. 9 at Santiago Canyon College.
2. Student clubs and organizations line the paths welcoming students onto the SCC campus.
3. A club offers up information and snacks to prospective members.
4. A student passes by the bookstore on his way to class.
5. Associated Student Government volunteers show off some premium swag at their information table.
6. Questions and answers are found at the Student Help Desk.
7. A student finds help at the Admissions & Records desk.
8. Students arrive on campus through a giant SCC arch during the first day of the spring semester at Santiago Canyon College.
9. Forms and sign-up sheets are passed around at the first day of classes on the SCC campus.
10. Students socialize and share schedules between classes.



CAREERS

# New lab will enhance popular classes in water technology

## Systems, utilities need operators

By Nicole Gregory  
contributing writer

A new, modernized water technology classroom is in final planning stages for the Santiago Canyon College campus that will feature state-of-the-art equipment to help train students for well-paying careers in water districts throughout Orange County and beyond.

The workings of water systems are largely hidden from public view, yet the everyday functioning of water taps, toilets, fire hydrants and irrigation systems depend on fully operating equipment and skilled workers to maintain them. Jobs in this area are in high demand. "Our need for water is not going away, and these are six-figure-salary jobs with pensions," said Jason Parks, SCC's vice president of academic affairs.

The new lab will enhance SCC's substantial Water and Wastewater Technology program. "Water technology is one of the most popular programs in the division of business and career education," said Denise Foley, dean of the division. "It's one of the few and largest programs in the state that teaches water operations in treatment and distribution."

Students completing classes offered by the department are prepared to take and pass state certification exams, which can lead directly to employment with regional utilities and water districts such as the Orange County Water District.

An already-existing space on the campus will be converted into the new lab and will include equipment for backflow prevention assembly — a system of valves and relief valves that prevent contamination of drinking water.

"With different varieties of backflow assembly devices in this classroom, students will be able to identify them, manually test them and troubleshoot them," said Hisham Elmishad, who is a registered environmental health specialist and water quality supervisor at Orange County Health Care Agency, Environmental Health. The new lab will also accommodate more students.

Once certified as backflow prevention assembly testers, students in SCC's "Water 145" class may go on to work as journeyman plumbers, plant maintenance operators and water utility operators at various water districts or even open their own backflow assembly testing businesses, Elmishad said.

Classes in this program are taught by faculty who are industry professionals and cover water distribution, water reuse and water reclamation, as well as practical application of treatment techniques. Currently, one of the lab classes takes place outdoors on the campus, which means equipment needs to be set up ahead of time and then removed and stored afterward.

The new space will be designed to fulfill the needs of the class with no need to spend time setting it up. "Water technology classes are wet, with water spraying everywhere," Foley said. "The new lab will be set up so that water will



PHOTOS COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS  
An instructor works with a student on water systems equipment at Santiago Canyon College. The college plans to build a water science lab with support from a \$1 million earmark secured through Rep. Young Kim's office.



Jason Parks, Santaigo Canyon College's vice president of academic affairs

not cause damage and will drain appropriately." Because it will be fully outfitted with necessary equipment, including sinks and running water, valuable classroom time will be saved.

Although students do not need a degree to enter this field, certification from the California State Water Resources Control Board is required, and SCC fully prepares students for those certification exams, Parks said. A job developer also helps position students for internships that are available with local water districts and utilities by re-



A student studies water systems components during hands-on training.

viewing their resumes, practicing interviewing skills and providing guidance in filling out applications.

Federal funding will pay for part of the cost of the new lab.

"Water security is fundamental to Southern California's future and directly tied to affordability and quality of life for families across our region," said Rep. Young Kim (CA-40). "That's why I was proud to secure \$1 million in federal funding to support Santiago Canyon College's new water science and career training lab. This investment will mod-

ernize facilities, align training with real workforce needs and prepare Orange County students for good-paying jobs in critical fields like water management and biotechnology."

Looking ahead, Santiago Canyon College has applied to the state to offer a bachelor's degree in applied water and wastewater technology, Foley said. This degree would allow water industry professionals to move up to supervisory or leadership roles. "The water agencies are asking for this. It would be great for the students and great for the industry," she said.

EXHIBITION

# Faculty member presents Project Mindwell at SCC Art Gallery

RSCCD Communications

The opening reception for Project Mindwell, a new exhibition by faculty member Fernando Del Rosario, 4-6 p.m. Tuesday at the SCC Art Gallery is open to the public. The exhibition showcases an original design project that explores the connection between public media, creativity, and personal well-being through imaginative visual storytelling.

Del Rosario, a creative director, graphic designer, agency owner, and educator, has long engaged with programming from National Public Radio and Public Broadcasting Service. Drawing inspiration from years of listening to podcasts and programs centered on curiosity, empathy, and informed conversation, he sought to use his professional skills to highlight the everyday value of thoughtful media engagement.

Project Mindwell reimagines public media programming as metaphorical wellness products, including supplements, vitamins, herbal teas, and energy drinks. Through playful yet intentional package design, the project suggests that regular exposure to meaningful

storytelling and journalism can support mental clarity, emotional balance, and intellectual growth. These designs are conceptual rather than literal, encouraging audiences to tune in, reflect and view listening as part of a healthy daily routine.

To bring the project to life, Del Rosario activated his nonprofit creative agency, CREATIVE AID, assembling a collaborative team of designers who worked together to develop the exhibition. The show features work from nine designers, each contributing original designs that balance humor with sincerity while celebrating insight, awareness, and human connection. Proceeds from the

project support the continued sustainability and growth of public radio.

The opening reception is free and open to students, employees, and members of the public. Guests will have the opportunity to experience the exhibition, meet the artist and engage with the creative concepts behind the work.

Project Mindwell will be on view at the SCC Art Gallery from Feb. 11 through March 3. Gallery hours are 11 a.m.-1:30 p.m. Mondays, noon-3 p.m. Wednesdays and Thursdays, or by appointment.

## OPENING RECEPTION February 17th | 4pm - 6pm

Exhibition Dates: February 11 - March 3  
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PHOTOS COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS  
A package design from Project Mindwell, an exhibition by Santiago Canyon College faculty member Fernando Del Rosario, reimagines public radio programming as a metaphorical wellness product.

Promotional artwork for Project Mindwell, a design exhibition by Santiago Canyon College faculty member Fernando Del Rosario, highlights playful, wellness-inspired reinterpretations of public media programming. The exhibition is on view at the SCC Art Gallery from Feb. 11 through March 3, with an opening reception on Feb. 17.

# Ramirez

FROM PAGE 1

Services. “As a designated Hispanic Serving Institution, the college is eligible for a number of grant opportunities. We couldn’t get where we are today had this court case not happened.”

Lorenzo Ramirez, one of the plaintiffs in the 1946 case, lived with his family in El Modena (today called “El Modena”), a historic barrio in Orange. In July 2014, Santiago Canyon College named the campus library after Ramirez, and in February 2016, the college installed a sculpture in his likeness. In addition, the library is home to a display case showcasing archival items related to Ramirez and the lawsuit.

Why, then, do some people want SCC to do more?

Led by Rodriguez, a community group based in El Modena – just a few miles from the SCC campus – maintains that the simplified Mendez v. Westminster reference to the lawsuit doesn’t paint an accurate historical picture. They seek to widen the recognition of the other families that also sued to end Latino school segregation.

“The families were individually fighting the school districts from the different cities,” Rodriguez said. “And when their (class action) attorney got on board, he said, ‘We need just one name.’ And he arbitrarily chose Mendez.”

The efforts of the community group, informally called the Ramirez Committee, came to a head in 2018, when they objected to a talk on the SCC campus given by Sandra Robbie, a filmmaker who, they claim, focused her documentary about the landmark case entirely on the Mendez family. They maintained that the other families had been forgotten by history.

Despite the protest, SCC leaders and faculty decided to let Robbie speak on April 11, 2018. “When Robbie goes out and talks about her documentary, she says ‘Mendez v. Westminster’ only,” said Rodriguez. “Would it kill Robbie if she instead said ‘Mendez, et al v. Westminster, et al’? ... So, the day she spoke, a group of us from the El Modena barrio entered the building and protested.”

Ivonne Gonzalez-Franco, then a student in Rodriguez’s Chicano Studies class, attended the protest. “I first heard about the discrimination case in 2016,” she said. “That’s when I first found out about Orange County’s dark past. It really hit home, since I’ve experienced discrimination myself.”

Rodriguez believes that SCC faculty at the time made a public relations blunder. “They said, ‘We have the right to bring in any speaker we want.’” Today the Ramirez Committee believes that the college needs to do more.

Nearly seven years after Robbie’s talk, SCC President Jeannie Kim sent a letter to the Ramirez family, stressing the college’s goal to rebuild the family’s trust. Rodriguez later met with her.

“I was impressed with President Kim. She was just great, really gracious,” Rodriguez said. “She wasn’t even at SCC when Robbie spoke, but she still wanted the opinion of faculty members (who,



PHOTOS BY JEFF ANTENORE, CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

Sammy Rodriguez and Ivonne Gonzalez-Franco stand together inside the Lorenzo Ramirez Library. The library’s display of historic documents will include the Board of Trustees’ resolution honoring Lorenzo A. Ramirez.



Rodriguez and Gonzalez were part of a community group who worked to recognize the wider historical action fighting school segregation in the El Modena barrio in the 1940s.

years later, maintained their position about choosing campus speakers). So, give her kudos for standing up and for sending a letter of apology, not only to the Ramirez family, but to me representing the (El Modena) barrio.”

Voelcker acknowledged the efforts of Rodriguez, the Ramirez Committee and the Ramirez family. “They’ve campaigned

hard to get the recognition the family deserved,” he said.

Moving forward, what can SCC do? “Shine the light more on the Ramirez family on campus,” Rodriguez said. “Today there’s little mention of Lorenzo Ramirez at Santiago Canyon College or, for that matter, nothing in the history books of the Orange Unified School District.”

Gonzalez-Franco concurs. “Nobody has acknowledged what happened,” she said. “People don’t know why the library is named after Lorenzo Ramirez. And I’d like the voice of the Latino-Chicano community at the school to be louder.”

“We in the barrio at El Modena are the protectors of the Lorenzo Ramirez legacy,” Rodriguez said.

# Bachelor

FROM PAGE 1

to provide more accessible and affordable pathways to career-specific bachelor’s degrees, leading to higher wages and social mobility.

With a total student cost of less than \$12,000, compared with thousands more at a Cal State or UC, affordability is a huge benefit for students wanting to pursue the bachelor’s degree at SCC, said Denise Foley, dean of business and career education at SCC.

“Not only is there a job waiting for them, they are not going to be in debt,” Foley said. “Because from start to finish, if they pay for the whole thing, it’s going to be less than \$12,000 for the degree. So, it really kind of helps give people a leg up if they choose this path.”

According to the 2014 law, a bachelor’s degree program at a community college must not duplicate existing degrees offered by the California State University of California systems.

For that reason, Cal States and UC’s need to sign off on the proposed bachelor’s degree at a community college.

The bachelor of science degree had the support of SCC administration and the backing of multiple organizations that could potentially hire the SCC graduates.

Multiple organizations, including Caltrans submitted letters in support of the specialized degree.

“Caltrans firmly believes that graduates of the “Digital Infrastructure Location Science” program will play an instrumental role in helping us deliver projects using Building Information Modeling for Infrastructure ...,” wrote Scott Martin, deputy division chief in the Division of Right of Way and Land Surveys for Caltrans. “Building Information Modeling ... for Infrastructure is one of the core Caltrans’ Strategic Goals for implementing its Strategic Plan. The success of this Strategic Goal will be highly dependent on cultural change. Graduates from programs such as this will be key leaders to embracing that cultural transformation.”

Counts first raised the idea for a bachelor’s degree in the field about five years ago.

The process involved a lengthy application phase, along with attempts to



PHOTO COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS

A student stands beside surveying equipment on the Santiago Canyon College campus, demonstrating hands-on geospatial training offered through the college’s new bachelor of science program in digital infrastructure and location science.

coordinate with state universities.

But after some pushback from four-year state schools, a third-party assessment was ultimately made before the program was given the stamp of approval from the Board of Governors.

“The third-party assessors came back

and said that we are actually a very unique program,” Counts said. “There’s just such minimal overlap between us and any other program in the CSU. So, then that was their report, and then they recommended us.”

A second baccalaureate program of

fering a bachelor of science in water science, is also making its way through the approval process.

Foley anticipates more bachelor’s degrees in the future, reflecting the college’s evolution to meet workforce needs and support returning students.

**RUNNING**

# SCC to host annual Hawk's Flight 5K on March 21

*RSCCD Communications*

Participants can lace up their running shoes for the second annual Hawk's Flight 5K Run/Walk, set for Saturday, March 21 at the college.

Santiago Canyon College will welcome runners, walkers, and families to campus for the event. The 2025 race drew approximately 250 participants, raising scholarship funds and setting high standards for competition.

The men's winning time was 16:47, set by Jesus Retiguin, while Alyssa Armendariz claimed the top female time of 17:57, finishing third overall.

"Last year's Hawk's Flight 5K surpassed all expectations. The energy on campus was incredible. We had a great turnout and people really embraced the course, the cause and the atmosphere," said Nicho DellaValle, assistant director of Athletics & Sports Information. "The

inaugural run showed how powerful community involvement can be. We're looking forward to building on that momentum and we're excited to grow this tradition."

This year's event features the same fast, runner-friendly course that begins and ends in Lot 7. The course is paved and accessible, designed to accommodate both competitive runners and casual participants.

All proceeds from the Hawk's Flight 5K benefit a scholarship fund for one male and one female student from a local high school. Each registered 5K participant will receive an official event t-shirt, and all children participating in the Hatching Trot will earn a finisher medal.

Awards will be given to the top three male and female finishers in the following age groups: 30 and under, 31-40, 41-50, and 51 and above.

To register and learn more, visit: <https://bit.ly/2026HawksFlight5K>.



PHOTO COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS

Participants cross the finish line during the inaugural Hawk's Flight 5K in 2025 at Santiago Canyon College.



PHOTO COURTESY RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS

A participant tees off during the 2025 Santiago Canyon College Foundation Golf Tournament. The 2026 tournament is scheduled for March 27 at Arroyo Trabuco Golf Club.

**FUNDRAISER**

# 2026 Golf Tournament benefits Veterans Resource Center

*RSCCD Communications*

The Santiago Canyon College Foundation will host its annual Golf Tournament on March 27 at Arroyo Trabuco Golf Club in Mission Viejo. Proceeds from the tournament will once again benefit SCC's Veterans Resource Center, which supports student veterans and their families as they transition to civilian life and pursue higher education.

The SCC Foundation, the college's fundraising arm, hosts the tournament each year to advance student success through scholarships and targeted support initiatives. In 2025, the event raised over \$80,000, its highest total to date, with the Veterans Resource Center selected as the sole beneficiary.

"Following the strong response to last year's tournament, the Foundation Board voted to continue supporting the Veterans Resource Center as the beneficiary for the 2026 event," said Chad Zimmerman, Treasurer of the SCC Foundation Board. "Maintaining this focus allows us to build momentum and maximize the impact of the tournament, while continuing our broader commitment to supporting students across campus."

The Veterans Resource Center serves more than 450 military connected students annually and has earned multiple Military Friendly® designations, including a Top 10 Gold ranking for 2024 to 2025.

Registration for the 2026 Golf Tournament is now open at <https://SCCVETS2026.givesmart.com>.



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