

COMMUNITY COLLEGE FOCUS

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Adam McManamy, student services coordinator at the Santiago Canyon College Veterans Resource Center, right, assists a student veteran on campus. Military Friendly, a national veterans-support nonprofit, recently ranked SCC No. 6 in the nation in the Small Community College category and named it one of the Top 10 Military Friendly Schools for the 2026-2027 academic year.

SERVICES

VETERANS RESOURCE CENTER'S STRATEGY MAKES SCC A MILITARY-FRIENDLY SCHOOL

Support helps students concentrate on their mission: Education

By Nicole Gregory
contributing writer

Southern California military veterans seeking a college education for themselves or their families are provided a well-rounded program of support at Santiago Canyon College, which has won recognition as one of the top six military-friendly colleges in the nation.

Tuition coverage, academic help, housing allowance, low-cost child care and counseling from specially trained therapists are just a few of the forms of support offered by SCC's Veterans Resource Center, said LaKyshia Perez, associate dean of student services, who supervises the programs for veterans.

"It really is a wonderful opportunity, so they can focus 100% on school rather than having to manage a job and school,"

she said.

Most veterans who enroll at SCC arrive right after four years, or more, in military service and are looking to transfer to a four-year university, Perez said. But a significant number of enrolling veterans are already on a career path, such as firefighting, and want additional education to qualify for a higher position.

The Veterans Resource Center provides a computer lab, a study lounge and academic counseling that's specifically geared to the needs of veterans. "This allows them to receive the support necessary from someone who's trained and understands how the VA education benefits work alongside their college experience," Perez said.

Thanks in large part to the Veterans Resource Center, Military Friendly, a national veterans-support nonprofit,

VETERANS » PAGE 4



PHOTO COURTESY OF GEOFF FROST

SCC student veteran Geoff Frost with his task-trained service dog Ringo



PHOTO COURTESY OF RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS

Two students in Santiago Canyon College's Umoja program review coursework in the B.L.A.C.K. Center. Umoja is hosting an academic tour of historically Black colleges and universities. The program's credit-bearing course helps students develop transfer plans while connecting their educational goals with the legacy and opportunities of HBCUs.

TRANSFER OPTIONS

Students to visit historically Black colleges and universities

Tour includes exploring communities, culture

By Larry Urish
contributing writer

Established long before the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, historically Black colleges and universities were created to educate African American students at a time when most institutions of higher learning refused to admit them. Today, professionals representing some of the 107 Black colleges in the U.S. band together to form "HBCU Caravans," visiting schools and communities throughout the nation to encourage enrollment and promote the many ways they assist students of color.

Thanks to a partnership between the California Community Colleges and select HBCUs, every year at least one such Caravan visits colleges in the Golden State.

This month, for the first time, Santiago Canyon College will proactively reverse the process, taking 12 SCC students on a tour of five historically Black colleges and universities. The Spring 2026 HBCU Tour is administered by the Black Scholars Network, powered by Umoja, a statewide program dedicated to enhancing the cultural and educational experiences of African American and other students. More commonly referred to simply as Umoja — the Swahili word for "unity" — it furnishes, among many other elements, academic counseling, mentoring and tutoring by fellow Umoja students, a variety of educational and motivational workshops, and a Liberation Library, composed of books on Black excellence and social justice. Most critically, Umoja also provides a sense of community.

"Traditionally, students of color, es-

TRANSFER » PAGE 5



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REGISTRATION

New accelerated 8-week courses begin April 13

RSCCD Communications

As the Spring 2026 semester approaches its midway point, enrollment is open for 8-week courses that begin April 13 at Santiago Canyon College.

SCC's accelerated online courses are designed to provide flexibility for students balancing school with work, family responsibilities, or other commitments. By offering a second start date within the semester, these accelerated classes give students another opportunity to enroll, explore new subjects, or add credits without waiting for the next term.

In the Division of Mathematics & Sciences, students can explore topics ranging from space to wellness. Course offerings include Astronomy 103 - Introduction to the Solar System, Biology 190L - Introduction to Biotechnology Laboratory, Geography 140 - California Geography, Kinesiology 106 - Stress Management, and Nutrition 115 - Nutrition.

"These accelerated courses give students the opportunity to dive into fascinating subjects while maintaining the flexibility many need during the semester," said Martin Stringer, dean of Mathematics & Sciences. "Whether students are curious about our solar system, interested in emerging biotechnology fields, or looking to build healthy lifestyle skills, these classes provide valuable knowledge in a focused format."

In the Division of Arts, Humanities, & Social Sciences, eight-week courses include ANTH-101 - Introduction to Physical Anthropology, COMM-C1000 - Introduction to Public Speaking, ENGL-102 - Literature and Composition, HIST-102 - World Civilizations since the 16th Century, and SPAN-115 - Practical Communication in Spanish.

"These courses encourage students to develop communication skills, explore global cultures and histories, and deepen their appreciation for literature



PHOTO COURTESY OF RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS

Students walk by the Rose Garden. As the spring semester reaches its midpoint, the college is encouraging students and community members to enroll in accelerated 8-week online courses.

and language," said Michelle Samura, dean of Arts, Humanities, & Social Sciences. "Eight-week courses are a great option for students who want to add a class mid-semester and continue making progress toward their degrees."

In the Division of Apprenticeships, Business & Career Education, courses include ACCT 100, an accounting for small business course as well as child development and education courses such as EDU 113 - Tutoring Reading in Elementary School. An interesting course from the Gemology program GEM 030- Antique and Period Jewelry explores the history and artistry of the adornments from the

past. Students interested in the creative industry can enroll in CIN 130 - Film Appreciation (online). The course explores the fundamentals of filmmaking, including story development, cinematography, editing, writing, set design, sound, producing, directing, and acting. Students who complete the class will earn the Film Production Savvy badge, and the course credit is fully transferable.

"Film Appreciation provides students with a comprehensive introduction to how movies are made and why they matter," said Denise Foley, dean of the Division of Apprenticeships, Business & Career Education. "It's an engaging online

course that blends creativity with critical thinking while offering transferable college credit."

"Eight-week courses are an important part of how we support student success," said Jason Parks, vice president of Academic Affairs. "They provide a flexible pathway for students who may have missed the start of the semester or who realize they still have room in their schedule. These classes help students stay on track toward completing their certificates, degrees, and transfer goals while maintaining the academic rigor and quality that Santiago Canyon College is known for."

Correction: Valerie Mora is a writer who attends California Baptist University and works for the Riverside County Department of Public Health. Because of a reporting error, she was mischaracterized in a story on Page 1 of the Community College Focus section in the March 15 edition of the Orange County Register.

Apprenticeship, Business and Career Education Programs

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Managing Editor: Jennifer Karmarkar
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Director of Communications: Caroline Wong

Have a story idea or comment for the section? Contact Caroline Wong at cawong@scng.com or 714-796-2202

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FUNDRAISER

Hawks Golf Tournament benefits student vets

Then-and-now photos of those who served posted on every hole.

By Larry Urish
contributing writer

Generous community members spent a sunny afternoon driving, chipping and putting for a wonderful cause when they participated in the annual Santiago Canyon College Hawks Golf Tournament on March 27 at the Arroyo Trabuco Golf Club. For the second year in a row, the event benefited the college's Veterans Resource Center, which provides all manner of support to veteran and military-affiliated SCC students.

"There is a lot of support for veterans in the community," said Kathy Jennison, executive director of the SCC Foundation, a nonprofit that raises funds and increases public knowledge of the college and all that it does for its students and the community. "Who doesn't want to support veterans?"

The tournament was created thanks to an idea from a local legend. "Former Rams NFL quarterback Vince Ferragamo, one of our Foundation board members, first recommended it," Jennison said. "He's friends with one of Arroyo Trabuco's general managers. Vince said, 'I love that course. We've had many good fundraisers there. It's a really beautiful venue.'"

In Mission Viejo, the 240-acre Arroyo Trabuco Golf Club was designed by PGA Tour professional Tom Lehman and local course architect Casey O'Callaghan. Trabuco Creek serves as a lateral hazard on seven of the championship-length course's 18 holes, and on-course lakes are located at three holes.

In addition to a round of traditional golf, the event included an array of separate challenges, including putting, longest drive and closest to the pin contests. "And every hole on the course included two photos of an SCC student veteran," Jennison said, "one from when they were in the service, in their military apparel, and the other showing how they appear as a student."

Along with primary presenting sponsor Merit Wealth Management, generous support came from F&M Bank, the Orange County Department of Education, the Vince Ferragamo Foundation and South Coast Plaza, as well as the L.A. Rams, Anaheim Ducks and Los Angeles Football Club. A variety of valuable items were auctioned off to help raise funds, including a football and a jersey signed by Rams quarterback Matthew Stafford and linebacker Jared Verse, respectively, a gift card from South Coast Plaza, wine from Vince Ferragamo Vineyards, tickets to Rams games, a Fan Appreciation Night package from the Ducks and much more.

Jennison stressed the positive impact of the funds raised by the tournament.

"For example, we had a student veteran with a young daughter who'd had his electricity and water shut off for two weeks," she said. "We used some of the proceeds from last year's tournament to cut him a check for a few thousand dollars, so he could focus on his school. Then there are situations where student veterans don't get their VA benefits during the gaps between semesters. So funds have been used to supplement those who can't afford to pay their expenses during this time."

Last year's Hawks Golf Tournament netted \$40,000 for SCC student veterans, and the venue was a big hit. "The Santiago Canyon College board of direc-



Ryan Cole hits a drive March 27 while participating in the Santiago Canyon College Hawks Golf Tournament at Arroyo Trabuco Golf Club in Mission Viejo.

PHOTOS BY JEFF ANTENORE, CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER



Celina Busbee, a Santiago Canyon College business student and retired U.S. Navy veteran, who served aboard the USS Stout, speaks about her experience with the school's Veterans Resource Center.



Eugene Briano, an alum and retired U.S. Army infantry leader, served multiple tours in Iraq and Afghanistan.



Steven Stenersen, coordinator for the Santiago Canyon College Veterans Resource Center, welcomes guests and thanks participants during a reception following the tournament.



Geoffrey Frost, a Santiago Canyon College psychology student and retired Marine, who served at the Marine Corps Air Station El Toro as a mechanic for an F18 squadron, speaks about the support he has gotten from the Veterans Resource Center.

tors were very happy with everything," said Alyson Gabaldon, Arroyo Trabuco Golf Club's catering director. "They said that everyone enjoyed the course, which was in mint condition, and they thought that the fundraiser was very

successful."

The SCC Foundation benefits far more than student veterans on campus. Along with funds that support students directly through scholarships for fees and books, the Foundation

helps support campus programs, services and projects that aren't typically funded by the state or need additional financial help. To give to the SCC Foundation, visit sccollegefoundation.org/ways-to-give.



Stenersen launches a golf ball with a giant golf gun on hole 12 during the competition.



From left, mayor of Anaheim Ashleigh Aitken, Tanya Bilezikjian, Kris Erickson and Amanda Garcia dance together before teeing off on a hole while participating in the tournament.



Teammates look on while Cole Henderson lines up a putt.



The Santiago Canyon College Foundation created the tournament, benefiting the Veterans Resource Center, held at Arroyo Trabuco Golf Club in Mission Viejo.

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

Ambar Nakagami honored by RSCCD Board of Trustees

RSCCD Communications

Santiago Canyon College employee Ambar Nakagami was recognized by the Rancho Santiago Community College District Board of Trustees during its March 23 meeting in honor of Women's History Month, which highlighted women whose dedication, leadership and commitment to service contribute to the success of the college community.

Nakagami joined SCC in 2018, bringing more than a decade of facilities and customer service experience from the private sector. She served as facilities coordinator for almost seven years and now works as executive secretary to the vice president of Administrative Services, a role she has held for the past year and a half.

In her current position, Nakagami supports the day-to-day operations of the college and collaborates with departments across campus. Her work helps ensure the college runs smoothly while supporting faculty, staff and students. She has also been an active participant in shared governance, serving on several participatory governance committees during her time at SCC and continuing her involvement with the Sustainable RSCCD Committee, where she contributes to campus sustainability efforts.

"Even in high-pressure or stressful situations, Ambar maintains a calm, professional demeanor," said Arleen Satele, vice president of Administrative Services at Santiago Canyon College. "She never lets external stress affect her focus or her willingness to help. In fact, she often becomes a steady force for others, someone who brings clarity, patience and grace into moments that might otherwise feel overwhelming. Her presence alone is reassuring, and her professionalism helps others rise to the occasion."

Nakagami credits much of her drive and perspective to her parents, who emigrated from Ecuador and worked tirelessly to build a life for their family in the United States.

"My parents immigrated from Ecuador and worked tirelessly to build a life for our family in a new country, teaching us perseverance, resilience and the importance of believing in ourselves," Nakagami said. "My mother, despite not being a college graduate, rose to supervisory and managerial positions, never believing in barriers and making sure my siblings and I didn't either. I am grateful that my parents have been able to see their sacrifices come to life as both of my siblings and I earned our degrees, built our careers and found success in the country they came to with so much hope."

Nakagami said her experience working in Administrative Services has allowed her to see firsthand how collaboration across campus supports the success of the entire college community.



PHOTO COURTESY OF RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS

Ambar Nakagami, center, joins colleagues after being honored in celebration of Women's History Month for her contributions and leadership in the community.



Rancho Santiago Community College District Trustee David Crockett, right, presents a certificate and award to Nakagami during the RSCCD Board of Trustees meeting on March 23 in Santa Ana.



Ambar Nakagami with her husband, David Nakagami, and their daughter, Madeline

"I feel fortunate to have begun my public sector experience in Administrative Services because it allowed me to see a different side of how people and their work are appreciated," Nakagami said. "Our department collaborates with every area of the campus, and we play a role in supporting the college in many ways. I am truly grateful to be part of a team that contributes to the success of the entire college community."

Nakagami holds a bachelor's degree in health science with a concentration

in community health from Cal State Long Beach. Outside of work, she enjoys traveling and spending time with her husband, daughter and their dog.

Asked what advice she would give to women beginning their careers today, Nakagami encouraged them to trust in themselves and the opportunities in front of them.

"Don't doubt the opportunities you're given," Nakagami said. "I've often been the youngest person in the workplace and, early on, felt the need to constant-

ly prove why I belonged in my roles. Over time, I realized that if you're given an opportunity, it's because someone already sees your potential. I'm naturally a quiet and laid-back person, but those qualities have helped me stay calm and focused on challenging situations. When things go sideways, preparation and a level-headed approach make all the difference. Be confident in what you bring to the table and trust that you're ready for the opportunities in front of you."

Veterans

FROM PAGE 1

named Santiago Canyon College a Top 10 Gold Military Friendly school, as well as a Top 10 Military-Spouse Friendly School.

One former SCC student vet sang high praise for the college and its Veterans Resource Center.

"I worked at the VRC as a work-study, kind of like a paid internship, through the Veterans Administration," said Eugene Briano, who served 11 years in active duty in the U.S. Army and another 11 as a reserve in the National Guard. "It was a great experience; everyone was super. They truly cared about the veterans coming in and out of school."

"And it's great that the college itself is such a veteran-friendly school," Briano said. "When I was there, student veterans and a panel of professors would regularly meet to talk about what the vets needed and where they struggled. The college works hard to understand what student veterans go through."

SCC also offers a VA work-study opportunity, which enables veterans to work part time in the Veterans Resource Office, where they can be another source of peer support for other student veterans, Perez said.

This is important because transitioning from life in the military to an educational environment is not always easy. And it's why SCC works with the Los Angeles-based nonprofit Outside the Wire, a group of therapists and marriage and family counselors who specialize in helping veterans, particularly those who are enrolled in college. Outside the Wire therapists come to SCC once a week and also offer support for families of veterans, who might also be facing challenges.

Marine Corps veteran and SCC student Geoff Frost said that interacting with employees who are veterans and relate to him as a peer makes him feel welcome and understood. "These guys are veterans. They know veterans and they can speak military to people," he said.

At age 57, Frost is in his second semester and has plans to transfer to Cal State Fullerton to get his bachelor's degree in human services. He credits the support he's received at the Veterans Resource Center for inspiring and encouraging him to pursue his education goal. "I love school, and I would not be going to



PHOTO COURTESY OF RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS

The Santiago Canyon College Veterans Resource Center was recognized by Military Friendly for its support of veterans, military spouses and their families.

school, and I would not be doing as well as I am if it were not for the center."

Frost said he appreciates the fact that Veterans Resource Center employees let him know about grant applications and have connected him with academic support. When he once had a panic attack related to his post-traumatic stress disorder, another veteran who worked there immediately helped calm him down, he said.

It's this holistic approach to veteran students that makes SCC's program successful, Perez said. Funding comes primarily from the state of California — the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office has specifically allocated money to all 116 community colleges for veteran support.

This wasn't always the case, Perez noted. Twenty-five years ago, most colleges

did not have a veterans support center and veterans had to seek guidance from financial aid offices.

It became apparent that veterans needed more support in their journey "from soldier to scholar," Perez said. She and her team currently work with about 450 veterans, mostly men, and family members of veterans. The child development center, for children ages 2 to 5, in the Veterans Resource Center, is an important part of the support. "We have one vet who brings his kid to this office," said Perez. "He does his homework while his kid is there coloring and watching TV."

Perez said she's seen many SCC's veteran-students secure scholarships at four-year universities, launch into careers and establish stable lives for themselves and their families.

With so many military bases in California, a lot of military personnel choose to stay in the state after their service.

"When you're in the military, typically the last year to six months of your exit, they have what they call a Transition Assistance Program, or TAP," she explained. "They start helping people transition out of the military by providing resources, and colleges go on base to promote their school and programs. We definitely participate in TAP," she said, adding that a visit to Camp Pendleton is scheduled for next month.

Santiago Canyon College has earned its recognition as a top military-friendly college due to support from SCC leadership as well as the passion and dedication of the team at the Veterans Resource Center, according to Perez.

"This is a united front," she said.



PHOTO COURTESY OF RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS

Roshan Uma, head coach of the Santiago Canyon College esports program, speaks with prospective students at an SCC esports outreach event on campus.

COMPETITION

SCC to host SCE High School esports invitational

RSCCD Communications

Santiago Canyon College will host its first high school-only esports tournament, the Santiago Canyon Esports Invitational, on April 25, bringing student gamers from across Southern California to campus for a day of competitive play.

The one-day event will feature 16 high school teams competing in two popular esports titles, League of Legends and Valorant, with eight-team brackets for each game. The tournament is open to both established esports programs and emerging school gaming clubs interested in representing their high schools in regional competition.

The invitational has received event support from Riot Games, the developer of both titles, and Rally Cry, a tournament organizer known for supporting national esports competitions. Through sponsorship, participating students will receive official merchandise and event giveaways.

The tournament is designed to create opportunities for high school students to experience in-person esports competition while connecting with other players and programs from throughout the region.

“Regional competition is the lifeblood of any level of esports,” said Roshan Uma, head coach of the Santiago Canyon College esports program. “It’s easy to play someone online from across the country, but the real magic happens when players come together as a community under one roof. Our



PHOTO COURTESY OF RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS

A Santiago Canyon College esports player reacts during a Valorant match on campus. The college will host its first high school tournament April 25.

goal is to create experiences that bring students together, allowing them to share their passion for gaming while

building connections with others who enjoy the same games.”

Registration is available for both

League of Legends and Valorant teams and is open to any high school team able to travel to the campus.

Transfer

FROM PAGE 1

pecially Black and African American students, don’t have the highest success rates,” said Amanda Campbell, SCC assistant professor of counseling. “So building a community like Umoja, a place to support them and help ensure that they’re progressing forward in a positive manner, is an essential goal.”

Along with visits to Morehouse College, Morris Brown College, Clark Atlanta University, Fort Valley State University and Spelman College, the Spring 2026 HBCU Tour, April 6-10, will include stops at civil rights landmarks and cultural museums, as well as expose SCC students to communities and cultures in which the schools thrive.

“Seeing the actual campuses will be very helpful for the students,” said Yuri Betancourt, SCC’s director of special programs, who oversees Umoja at the college. “They’ll get to have a lived understanding of what it is to be in a place where students look like them, something that they’re familiar with. We want to show them cultural differences between Orange County and life in the South. For example, this region is completely different than Atlanta.”

The tour will also include a class taught by Campbell, Counseling 106, a comprehensive look at skills assess-

ment, goal development, academic planning, study techniques and academic-major selection. “Amanda will also help them process information about transfer planning, college comparisons and related financial literacy,” Betancourt said. “And at the end of April, our students will do a presentation for the entire SCC community, based on their experience touring HBCUs.”

In addition, the 12 touring students will learn about college transfer and enrollment options, including a look at the HBCU Transfer Guarantee, a structured pathway that lets California Community College students secure guaranteed admission to more than 30 HBCUs by maintaining a minimum 2.0 GPA.

“While the Transfer Guarantee is separate from the Umoja program, we make our students aware of this important resource and encourage them to visit our campus Transfer Success Center,” said George Parker, coordinator of Umoja at SCC. “It’s critical that they know about this opportunity.”

Parker, who will be joining the students on the tour with Campbell, reiterated the importance of exposing the Santiago Canyon College students to more than just HBCU campuses. “We want to give them an alternative experience of place and culture,” he said. “Other programs take students on campus tours, but they usually go to the big-name UCs, the more popular Cal States and some of the more prominent private schools, including those on the East Coast. But they never visit any HBCUs.”

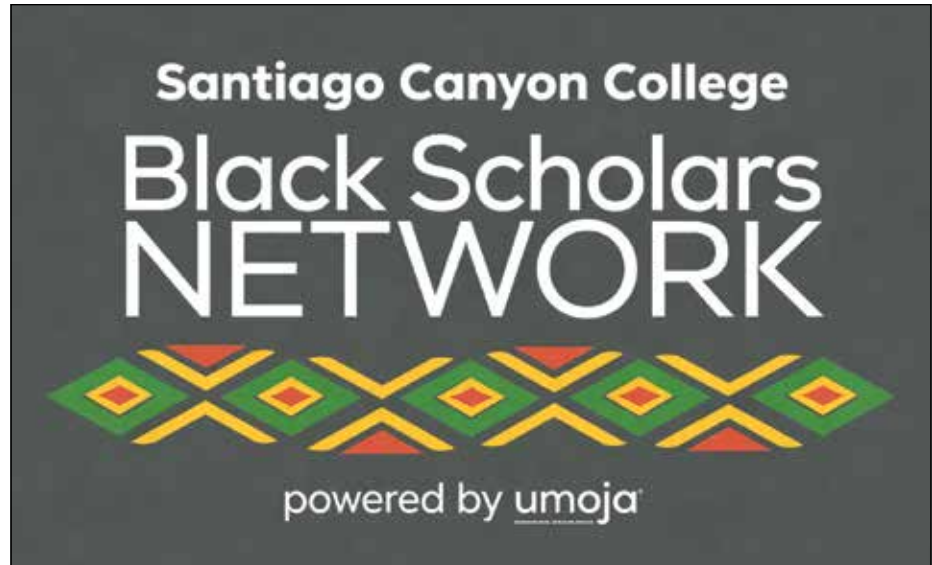


PHOTO COURTESY OF RSCCD COMMUNICATIONS

The Black Scholars Network at Santiago Canyon College will visit 12 historically Black colleges and universities and include a class taught by SCC assistant professor of counseling Amanda Campbell on skills assessment, goal development, academic planning, study techniques and academic major selection.

Distinguished people who benefited from their time at historically Black colleges and universities include civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., Justice Thurgood Marshall, film director Spike Lee, former Vice President Kamala Harris and media mogul Oprah Winfrey. The HBCUs furnished them, and thousands of other students of color through the decades, with a sense of belonging.

This sense of community is a critical element of Umoja, Bettencourt said.

“What we’re trying to do with the Black Scholars Network, Powered by Umoja is to help students thrive not just academically, but also personally and professionally. And we want to instill them with a sense of cultural pride, so that they feel they belong in the space that we’re creating for them. One Black student at SCC once told me that she didn’t find enough Black students here, that she felt out of place. Well, we want to help create that sense of belonging for everyone.”

EARLY COLLEGE ACADEMY

Right moves pay off in classroom, on wrestling mat

Orange High scholar wins state championship

By Lou Ponsi
contributing writer

When Estefany Caballero first stepped onto a wrestling mat as a freshman at Orange High School, the sport was simply something new to try.

Three years later, Caballero, a junior, made history, becoming Orange High School's first-ever CIF state champion.

Caballero, who wrestles in the 190-pound weight class, defeated Emily Carvalho of Redwood, 10-3, on Feb. 28 at the Dignity Health Event Center in Bakersfield to win the championship.

On the road to the state championship, Caballero won the CIF Southern Section Masters Championship and Southern Section Eastern Division championship.

Caballero pinned 12 opponents on the road to the state championship.

"I got more confident as the season progressed," Caballero said. "Based on the results and what I was able to do in practices, I got more confident after every tournament and after every match, that I could do this."

She wasn't done yet.

Caballero went on to finish second at the NHSCA High School Nationals, the premier school wrestling tournament in the nation, March 27-29 in Virginia Beach, Va.

"At first, it was just fun," Caballero said of the sport. "I never knew what I could do because I was new. But now, actually winning it — it feels right. My hard work has paid off."

While the sport of wrestling demands more dedication than many other sports, the mat isn't the only place where Caballero's commitment and hard work have paid dividends.

Caballero carries a 4.4 GPA and is taking college classes while still in high school through the Santiago Canyon College Early College Academy.

Through a partnership between Orange High School and Santiago Canyon College, the four-year program requires students to take multiple college courses each year in addition to their high school workload.

Students earn free transferable college credits and can also fulfill a high school graduation requirement.

Balancing elite athletics with college-level academics was not easy at first.

"At the beginning, it was hard to do both," she said. "I would go home very



PHOTO COURTESY OF RICHARD ARREOLA

Estefany Caballero turned a fun new experience into a CIF championship. The Orange High School student placed first in her weight class at the Feb. 28 event, the school's first-ever CIF champion.

tired."

Over time, Caballero said, she found her rhythm, developing a strict routine and prioritizing her time between school, practice and homework.

The structure, she said, helped her adapt to the demanding schedule and eventually excel in it.

Tania Pelayo, Caballero's Early College adviser at Orange and her AP precalculus teacher said Estefany is "one in a million."

"She has brains, strength and the kindest heart," Pelayo said. "Stef gets to school early every day; she comes into my class and works on homework or studies every morning before heading off to 0 period."

The Early College Academy requires a four-year commitment.

Students must take two Early College

courses in their freshman, sophomore and junior years and then four in their senior year.

Caballero is taking communications and geography courses this year and will take biology, biotechnology, English and statistics as a senior.

"She has a strong work ethic, turns in all of her work and takes her responsibilities seriously," Pelayo said. "She has never been the kid to have excuses. She always shows up and gives it her all!"

Caballero is the youngest of four, with three older brothers, and credits her entire family for providing support and instilling in her the attributes she will need to succeed in school, sports and life.

"They taught me how to be physically and mentally strong, and I think that is what got me into (wrestling), based on

what they taught me about life, and just in general," Caballero said of her brothers. "They knew that one day I was going to be on my own, so they taught me a bunch of life lessons."

Caballero, who was a young child when she emigrated to the U.S. with her family, will be the first person in her family to attend college and envisions running a business in the future.

Unfortunately, her parents work long hours and are unable to attend most of her matches.

Still, Caballero feels their love every time she steps onto the mat.

"I know they're rooting for me wherever they are," she said. "They sacrifice so much for me to be here. To take me to every practice, making sure I'm eating good. They show me a lot of love."



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