

FOCUS ON RÍO

July 2020

College Celebrates Class 94 Fire Academy Graduation

RÍO IN THE NEWS:

The ceremony was videotaped and is available to watch at www.riohondofire.com.

Río Hondo Fire Academy celebrated a pandemic modeled graduation ceremony on July 9, recognizing 36 cadets in Class 94, which adopted the motto, "The First of its Kind" in recognition of the special, pandemic-focused training members received.

The ceremony was held at the College's Santa Fe Springs academy training grounds with Dean of Public Safety Mark Yokoyama and Fire Academy Director Andrew E. Grzywa joined by six instructors, staff and the cadets, who wore masks and practiced physical distancing during the event.

Class members included three female cadets – the most in 25 years – and two cadets who were offered positions by local fire departments and the U.S. Forestry Service. Most cadets are active EMT workers who were on the front lines of the pandemic fight during their instruction.

"As a group, this class overcame the extreme challenges that not only the fire academy presents, but the hurdles created by a major pandemic," Grzywa said. The members of Class 94 are strong and ready to serve the public."

Class 94 was amid instruction when the pandemic forced the switch to online instruction. Academy instructors also added guidance on physical distancing and other safety precautions during firefighting. Students underwent more than 700 hours of training over six months.

One of the graduating cadets, Rogner Jin Park, received the Brent Lovrien Leadership Award and the Stephen J. Masto Top Cadet Award. The leadership award is chosen by the cadets; the top cadet award is based on overall performance on the academy's five block exams in such areas as vehicle

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RIO HONDO COLLEGE



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Roadrunner Crew Activated to Assist with U.S. Forest Service Wildfire Battles

Río Hondo College's Roadrunner Hand Crew 77 was activated in June by the U.S. Forest Service to assist with national wildfire needs, backfilling behind "hot shot" crews normally assigned to the Angeles National Forest.

The crew began its 14-day minimum activation cycle on June 26 and could be assigned almost anywhere needed.

The crew, created by the College's Wildland Fire Academy, is staffed by a team of graduates from recent cadet classes, including Victor Apodaca, Aaron Arraiga, Nicholas Casimiro, Nicolas Demonte, Evan Espenoza, Yulfiano Gerwynaldo, Daniel Ingelmo, Jimenez Jesse, Marcus Ortiz Matney, Ilunga Mulongo, Diego Rodriguez, Alan Perez and Jesus Barbosa.

A Type II hand crew, the team assists with all aspects of fire monitoring, suppression and control, including digging fire containment lines. In past years, the crew has been called up multiple times a year to assist with firefighting across California, but rarely has it been activated this year. The crew has battled fires in Yosemite National Park and helped fight the devastating Ferguson Fire.

Each crew member must meet or exceed U.S. Forest Service requirements for seasonal wildland firefighters. Students also must pass an arduous physical fitness regime. Río Hondo College, which has fielded the crew since 2002,



is well known for its Wildland Fire Academy, which typically places every graduate from every class.

"As with all our California institutions, Río Hondo College's Fire Academy and Wildland Fire Academy are battling the challenges of COVID-19. But, despite these challenges, our highly trained firefighters continue to step up to support our community," said Chief Andy Grzywa, academy director. "Their actions instill pride in us all."

College Celebrates Class 94 Fire Academy Graduation

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rescue, ladder operations, safety and survival, as well as live-fire training and three physical fitness exams.

Class President Bao-An Nguyen spoke on behalf of her classmates.

"Class 94 stands here today surviving not only the Río Hondo academy, but also a

global pandemic," said Nguyen, who will work for the Glendale Fire Department. "Let this be a reminder of what we all signed up for. We chose this line of service to save those with unfortunate circumstances. We are public servants."

She told her classmates that their journey included failures and achievements in different magnitudes as they navigated a world in which the rules "changed by the hour."

"As Río Hondo graduates today, we have been provided the tools to create

change as we were forced to navigate through change," she said.

Cadet Austin T. Grego received the class physical fitness award based on her performance on rigorous tests.

The class Dedication and Motivation Award, chosen by instructors, was awarded to cadet Ryan Nicholas Mendez.

Graduates also include: Daniel R. Almaraz, Nicholas A. Barajas, Victoria L. Brown (Long Beach Search & Rescue), Dajon Bentley Curtis, Marcus David Delgado, Kyle Adolf Uson Dojillo (class color guard, West Covina Fire Department), Brett L. Eddington, Breana Angel Facundo, Noah Andres Fox (Santa Fe Springs Fire Rescue), Martin Vicente Gaspar, Christopher Gau, Justin Matthew Gibson, Austin T. Grego, Andy Gutierrez, Jeffrey A. Held, Troy H. Le (Montebello Fire Department), Marcus D. Lewis (Yermo-Calico Fire Department), Nathan S. Magdaleno, Francisco Marquez Jr., John Brian Murphy (class vice president), David A. Nuno, Christopher R. Perez, David Khiem Duc Pham, Robert Ramirez, Bret J. Roberts (Santa Fe Springs Fire Rescue), Matthew Mikey Santa Rosa, Nicolas Rene Tovar (class color guard), Matthew Phillip Trujillo, Jared Tucker, Charles T. Tullius (class color guard, Monterey Park Fire Department), Jacob L. Valdez, Justin J. Wright (class color award), Daniel H. Zepeda (class treasurer).

District Update

Members of the Board of Trustees accepted the resignation of a board member, revised the College mission statement, received a building program update and acknowledged the retirement of a staff member during their July 8 meeting.

Board member Norma Edith García, first elected in 2008 and most recently re-elected in 2018, stepped down after receiving a promotion to become director of the Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation.

She had served Trustee Area 1, which includes the city El Monte.

The trustees will discuss how best to fill her seat at the regular Board meeting on Aug. 12.

The new College mission statement, in the works since April, reads: "Río Hondo College is an educational and community partner committed to advancing social justice and equity as an anti-racist institution that collectively invests in all students' academic and career pathways that lead to attainment of degree, certificate, transfer, and lifelong-learning goals."

The College's building program is currently focused on completing Phase 1 of seismic upgrades to the "L" Tower, the tallest building on campus. The project is about 55% complete with 98% of structural steel beams in place. Work continues on structural buckling restraining bracing, structural steel plumbing and alignment, structural steel beam/column bracing connections, among other tasks.

Board members also bid farewell to Naomi Banuelos, secretary in the Admissions and Records office. Banuelos was hired in 2004 as a clerk/typist and was promoted to secretary. She served the College for more than 16 years.

Students Win Automotive Scholarships

Four Río Hondo College students have received scholarships from the California Automotive Wholesalers' Association, among 14 across the state to receive the honor.

"Once again, CAWA is proud to assist these young people in pursuing their education and careers in the auto care industry," CAWA President and CEO Rodney Pierini said.

Río Hondo College recipients are:

- Anthony Liang – Mort Schwartz Award, \$1,250
- Duminda Edirisinghe, \$1,000
- Esteban Terrazas, \$1,000
- Ndubuisi Ajiduah, \$1,000

"Once again, CAWA is proud to assist these young people in pursuing their education and careers in the auto care industry."

CAWA is a regional auto care trade association representing auto parts jobbers, warehouse distributors, retailers, manufacturers, manufacturer representatives and program groups. The association provides education, legislative, regulatory and business support to the industry and its membership. It is one of the largest trade associations of its kind in the United States.

Virtual First Year Family Night Draws 229

Río Hondo College welcomed 229 students and their families for a Virtual First Year Family Night, held July 13, discussing college expectations and holding virtual workshops on student life, success, special needs, health services, financial aid, career planning and transfer protocols.

The videos are available for students to review:

Student Life:

[Virtual Campus Tour](#)

Financial Aid:

[The next steps in financial aid](#)

Student Success:

[What student support services & programs does RHC offer?](#)

DSP&S:

[Do you have a disability and need accommodations?](#)

Student Health & Psychological Services:

[How Can I Practice Self Care?](#)

Center for Career:

[How do I choose a major and/or career?](#)

Transfer Center

- [CSU transfers](#)
- [UC transfers](#)
- [Private college transfers](#)

Student Life: Student Experiences

- [Pricilla Mendoza](#)
- [Ashely Sanchez](#)
- [Emily De Luna](#)
- [Steve Pacheco](#)
- [Eddie Estrada](#)
- [Sierra Smethurst](#)
- [Jose Rodriguez](#)

Virtual CTE Career Exploration Camps Engage Area Public School Students

Río Hondo College took its CTE Career Exploration Camp into the virtual world this summer, partnering with local school districts to provide hands-on projects for 166 students to work on at home while engaging in online courses.

The program ran from July 6-10 for 70 students from Little Lake City School District, July 13-17 for 48 students from El Rancho Unified School District and July 20-24 for 48 students from El Monte City School District.

Modules included first aid/CPR/public health, MapCraft and STEMify Your Summer, and were created by Río Hondo College faculty and credentialed high school teachers. College students assisted with the modules.

In the CPR module, students learned how to recognize and properly respond to an emergency, how to dress a wound, apply a tourniquet and use an automatic external defibrillator. Students received first aid kits to use at home and were encouraged to practice on their siblings.

Nicki Carrillo, an eighth-grader at Potrero School in the El Monte City School District, said she was pleasantly surprised by how engaging the CPR module was for students.

"Originally, I only wanted to do the STEM class, and my mom said I should try out the CPR class and see if I like it. I ended up loving it – the teacher and aides are so into it that it makes you want to do more," Carrillo said.

"I learned how to put on a tourniquet and yesterday we learned how to do CPR. I want to become a doctor, so it was all pretty exciting for me," she added.

Priscilla Palencia, an eighth-grader at Durfee School in El Monte City School District, echoed Carrillo's praise for the CPR module. She said she was encouraged to bring her sister, Durfee fifth-grader Tatiana Palencia. She also practiced her life-saving techniques on Tatiana.

"It is very interesting and entertaining. I'm really enjoying myself. I like the teacher and the class," Palencia said.

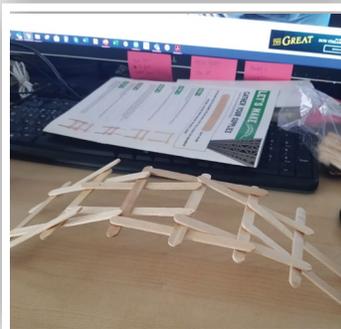
The CPR module was taught by Gabriel SoloRío with aides Nia Bertino and MaRío Jaramillo. As the online class began, SoloRío enthusiastically welcomed each student by name. Bertino and Jaramillo reinforced verbal lessons with written information in the Zoom group chat.

Later, the aides took the lead in the module, answering questions and guiding students as they tackled projects.

The MapCraft module was offered during the first two sessions. Students became spatial detectives, exploring the 1854 cholera outbreak in London and using mapping tools to find patterns and correlations for issues such as pollution and illness in San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Palencia said she also enjoyed building projects for the STEM class. Students received kits with material for daily projects involving science, technology, engineering and math. Projects included a catapult and a moveable race car.

"I like building the different projects because I've done some class projects in



engineering," Palencia said. "I was voted best engineer in sixth grade."

Priscilla's mother, Blanca Palencia, said she urged her daughter to take both modules despite how much time they would take from her summer vacation. She said she liked how much her children learned not only about CPR and STEM, but about college options.

"The class aides are very engaging and they talk about college. They have such a strong rapport with the students," she said. "Every time she finishes her class, she has so much information to share."

Dean of Career Technical Education Mike Slavich said Río Hondo College was pleased with how well the combination of online instruction and hands-on projects worked for students.

"We are incredibly pleased with how our virtual summer program has worked," Slavich said. "The students and the instructors have had a wonderful time exploring new concepts. It has opened the door to possible new careers."

Student Spotlight: Javier Ramirez

Javier Ramirez earned an associate degree in business administration for transfer from Río Hondo College, praising the College for providing him with a strong foundation for his continuing education at the University of Southern California.

Ramirez said he came from a low-income family that was unsure of its ability to support his college dreams.

"I have proven them wrong; most importantly, I have proven to myself that I can achieve whatever I set my mind to," Ramirez said. "I have worked hard to achieve a 3.8 transferable GPA."

He credited Río Hondo's support systems and faculty for helping him achieve success.

"The networking environment at Río Hondo has allowed me to meet great professors and other like-minded individuals who want to continue their education just like myself. They are critical resources who inspire me, and I believe in my own way, I motivate them to chase after their own dreams," he said.

Ramirez said he started Río Hondo by attending the Summer Bridge program, which assists students in learning to navigate the College and improve their placement in core classes. The Extended Opportunity Program and Services, which supports low-income students, and First Year Success Center, connected him with counselors who understood his situation. He also benefitted from College programs that support students with learning disabilities.

Still, his personal situation made his first year a true challenge.

"I was homeless with my family for a long time and was moving from hotel to hotel and, often, we found ourselves sleeping in our cars. But we lived through it and continue the necessary fight," he said. "My poverty has not broken me; I am stronger because of it."



Alumni Profiled for Data Science Contributions

Río Hondo College alumnus Jose Zamalloa has been featured in a [special profile by Johnson & Johnson](#) for his work in using data science to help patients.

Zamalloa, an immigrant from Peru, started his higher-education journey at Río Hondo College before transferring to UCLA, where he studied biochemistry. He later earned a Ph.D. from Princeton in quantitative and computational biology.

His current focus is on lung and prostate cancer.

In the piece, he describes himself as the "proud product" of the community college system in California.

Student Spotlight: Thavit Phorn

Río Hondo College graduate Thavit Phorn earned an Associate of Science in business administration for transfer, helping to propel him to a job as a tax accountant.

Phorn, who started at Río Hondo College in 2013, went on to obtain a Bachelor of Science in business administration-accounting from Cal Poly Pomona and a Master of Arts in professional accountancy from UC Irvine in 2019.

"I am fortunate to have been a part of accounting program at Río Hondo College. It enabled me to have an enjoyable college experiences and a strong foundation

in business and accounting. It has always been absolutely an amazing experience from the professors that I have met, friends and classmates that I have made, and supportive staffs and academic counselors that I have reached out for help," he said.

"I could not have asked for a better experience here at Río Hondo College."



Connect with Us on Social Media



Serving the communities of

- El Monte
- Santa Fe Springs
- South El Monte
- Whittier
- Pico Rivera

and portions of:

- Norwalk
- East Whittier*
- Downey
- South Whittier*
- La Mirada
- West Whittier*
- City of Industry
- Avocado Heights*
- Los Nietos*

*Unincorporated communities within our District

Mission Statement

Río Hondo College is committed to the success of its diverse students and communities by providing dynamic educational opportunities and resources that lead to degrees, certificates, transfer, career and technical pathways, basic skills proficiency, and lifelong learning.

College Praised for Management of Bond Funds for Key Capital Projects

Río Hondo College's Citizens' Oversight Committee commended the College's staff and leadership on July 8 for management of Measure A tax dollars, which have been used to transform the campus into a modern academic facility over the last 16 years.

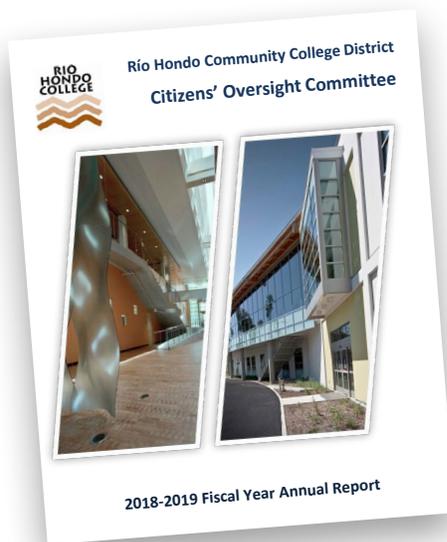
RÍO IN THE NEWS:

Read more about the College's bond fund management in the [Greenleaf Guardian](#).

In its [2018-19 annual report](#) to the Board of Trustees, the Committee said the College met all fiduciary responsibilities in managing funding provided by the community in 2004 as part of a \$245 million bond measure.

"The support and generosity of local citizens should be applauded," Committee Chairwoman Dr. Monica Sanchez said. "Programs like this will ensure Río Hondo College remains a premier institution of higher education in our region for generations of students and families. I want to thank members of the committee for their dedicated service."

The College, which had \$24.4 million in Measure A assets as of June 30, 2019, has completed a slew of projects, including improved facilities for police, fire and nursing, new Student Union and Student Services buildings, a modern Learning Resource Center and Applied Technology building, regional education centers in Pico Rivera, El Monte and South Whittier, critical campus information technology upgrades, an expanded bookstore and print shop, new pedestrian bridge and walkways, and a new Physical Education complex.



The College is currently completing a \$36 million seismic upgrade of its landmark L Tower – the tallest structure on campus. The project will be finished in fall, allowing the College to launch into its \$10.1 million, phase 2 project to improve the facility for the return to academic use.

Other planned projects include a \$37 million renovation of the Wray Theater and Music Building, construction of the \$8 million Río Plaza Transportation Center and development of a \$26 million, 38,000-square-foot Fine Arts Complex.

Oversight Committee members include Josefina E. Canchola, Leonel Barrera, Jr., Carolina Jauregui, Yasmin Graciela Ferrada, Alicia Marie Lopez, Jaime Valencia Lopez, Margie Rodriguez and Alejandro Robles.



Save the Date

Through Friday, Aug. 14:
Fall Semester registration

8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Friday, Aug. 14:
Fall FLEX Day,
Río Hondo College

Saturday, Aug. 15:
Fall Semester begins