President’s Message

Dear Río Hondo College community,

September is a month that will always be remembered here at Río Hondo College, as we commemorated the 60th anniversary of this institution with a full day of festivities on September 15. I want to thank everyone who came out for what was an unforgettable celebration of Río Hondo’s history and impact. I came away inspired to carry on this important work of providing our students with an excellent education and reaffirming our shared commitment to uplifting our community.

We had an eye on the future during the 60th anniversary celebration, as we unveiled the College’s new look and logo to the community and kickstarted a new fundraising campaign. Embracing change and progress, our new logo reflects our commitment to innovation and a fresh vision for the future. The Río Hondo College Foundation is selling personalized bricks to be used in an upcoming LOVE RÍO installation on campus, with the proceeds supporting student programs and scholarships.

While we paused to reflect on Río Hondo College’s accomplishments since its doors first opened in 1963, our students and staff continued achieving amazing things, which can be seen throughout this month’s Focus on Río.

I want to congratulate the entire Río Hondo College community for contributing to our College’s success over these last 60 years and a fantastic start to this historic year. I cannot wait to see what lies ahead for Río in the coming years.

Thank you.

Dr. Marilyn Flores
Superintendent/President

Río Hondo College Commemorates 60th Anniversary with Full-Day Celebration

The Río Hondo College campus bustled with activity as live music, international cuisine and laughter filled the air on September 15, as the community celebrated the College’s 60th anniversary and its history of service and commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility and anti-racism. A giant inflatable archway in bright Río Hondo gold welcomed the entire community — from College students, staff, the Board of Trustees and REX the Roadrunner to local dignitaries and the general public — to share in the milestone event. Many in the crowd wore commemorative 60th anniversary...
Río Hondo College Commemorates 60th Anniversary with Full-Day Celebration

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Superintendent/President Dr. Marilyn Flores started the evening festivities by sharing a brief history of Río Hondo, announcing the College’s new logo and affirming the institution’s unwavering commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility and anti-racism.

Río Hondo College honored Yoshio “Yosh” Nakamura with a Lifetime Achievement in Service and Philanthropy award. Nakamura was one of the original three faculty members hired and served as the first Department Chair of Fine Arts when the College first opened its doors in 1963.

t-shirts with the new College logo on the front and “#see my color, #see my identity, #see all of me” on the back.

Guests were treated to a diverse display of live cultural performances, including mariachi, Native American dancers, Japanese drummers, African musicians, ballet folklórico and an El Grito contest. A wide array of complimentary food was offered from vendors from Camila’s Tacos, Golden Sun Mediterranean, RJ’s Southern Home Cooking, Cortina’s Italian and Gelato Go.

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Río Hondo College Receives Funds to Address Housing and Food Insecurities

Río Hondo College will continue addressing students experiencing housing and food insecurities with the help of a $20,000 donation from Janice Hahn, Chair of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, ensuring every student has a chance for success.

Hahn presented her donation to Río Hondo College and other Whittier area K-12 school districts to assist in meeting the basic needs of students at a Whittier Area Schools Trustees Association mixer on September 21.

“We are honored to have such an incredible partner supporting us in our goal to enable all students to fulfill their highest educational potential,” Superintendent/President Dr. Marilyn Flores said. “All students deserve the chance to receive a great education.”

Funds will go toward supporting the Río Source Room, a basic needs resource for students, which is located on campus. Students can access a food pantry, housing referrals, diapers and infant supplies, financial aid assistance, mental health referrals, a computer lab and CalFresh and Medi-Cal application assistance at the Río Source Room.

“It is crucial for our campus to provide resources to students experiencing housing insecurity, food insecurity or other challenges,” Dr. Flores said. “The funds we received will allow us to continue supporting our students’ basic needs to help them achieve their personal and educational goals.”

School board members and superintendents said they were looking forward to using the money to address homelessness.

“It’s something that we have acknowledged and the fact that the supervisor is fully aware of the deficiencies and inequities in our community and she brought this great surprise for us to tackle through housing insecurity, school supplies and the range to be able to use it is pretty big,” said Oscar Valladares, vice president of the Río Hondo College Board of Trustees and chair of the Whittier Area School Trustees Association.

The Whittier Area School Trustees Association uses a regional approach to identifying inequities while advocating for resources, according to Valladares.

“I’m glad more resources are coming into our community,” he said.
Stephanie Ramirez’s fascination with science and math began in elementary school. She maintained that sense of wonder in high school when girls typically gravitate away from science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields. And she remained unfazed while a student at Río Hondo Community College, despite the male-dominated atmosphere in her STEM courses.

Rather than feeling discouraged, she has always felt motivated to dive deeper into her studies as one of just a few women in her STEM class and a first-generation college student.

“It drives me because I want to be the person who changes the future for me and my family,” she said.

Ramirez is bucking the odds. According to a 2018 report by Microsoft Philanthropies, 40% of high school-aged girls lose interest in pursuing a career in STEM, and that number jumps to 58% beginning in college. The reasons vary, but gender expectations, a male-dominated culture and limited women role models loom large as discouraging factors.

Dreams do come true

Despite her strong desire to pursue STEM studies, when it was time to apply to college, the prospect of attending a four-year institution presented financial obstacles that seemed insurmountable for Ramirez. Community college was her only option, so she chose Río Hondo, which was close to her home.

While there, she worked part-time as a tutor while her single mother cleaned houses in Los Angeles to make ends meet.

Stephanie’s journey, as a Hispanic woman aspiring to establish a career in STEM, took a fortunate turn when she came across flyers posted at Río Hondo advertising USC’s Transitions and Research Across Interfaces program (TRAINS).

The brainchild of Peter Chung, assistant professor of physics and astronomy and chemistry at USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences, and his counterpart at Río Hondo, Chris Vaca, TRAINS aims to recruit students from critically underserved communities, like Ramirez, into STEM fields.

Chung and Vaca emphasized the pivotal role community colleges can play in rectifying the underrepresentation of Latinos and women in STEM fields. Compelling statistics support their argument.

According to a Río Hondo report, 398 students enrolled at the college in the 2017–18 academic year declared STEM majors. Nearly 92% of those students identified as Hispanic. However, less than 5% of them, a mere 19 students, finished with a STEM degree within four years and only a third remained enrolled in college at the end of their fourth year.

Labs are key

According to Chung, this decline can be attributed to the absence of hands-on research experience. He contends that engaging students in laboratory work is essential for sustaining their interest in STEM disciplines.

“Without daily lab experiences and mentorship, students’ STEM interest dwindles significantly,” he said.

Through TRAINS, now in its second year, Chung wants to counter that trend by offering community college students an opportunity to work in a research lab at USC.

A collaboration between USC, Río Hondo and the University of California, Santa Barbara Center for Science and Engineering Partnerships, TRAINS is funded by a $1 million, five-year grant from the National Science Foundation’s Division of Equity for Excellence in STEM.

The hands-on lab experience and mentorship program also provide each student with a $10,000 stipend over their 15-month participation in the program. Mentors, typically PhD students or post-docs, receive a $2,000 stipend per cycle.

For Ramirez, being paid to conduct research in biophysics and biological engineering under faculty mentors at USC enables her to transition from Río Hondo to USC Dornsife. As a new transfer student majoring in biological sciences, her long-held dream of becoming a dentist is now within reach.
Twenty-five Río Hondo College Theatre students performed in front of a 500-person audience at the Hispanic Outreach Taskforce’s (HOT) Scholarship Fundraiser in celebration of Mexican Independence Day at Whittier High School’s Auditorium on September 10.

Students performed an original play called “El Grito de Dolores” that was created by theatre students and written by former student Andrea Lopez, who co-directed the play along with Río Hondo College Theatre Professor William Korf. The play explains how the revolt against Spanish rule began and led to independence for Mexico, and was also performed during the College’s 60th anniversary celebration on September 15.

On Sept. 14, the Credit Union of Southern California presented Río Hondo College’s Cooperative Agencies Resources for Education (CARE) Program with a $10,000 check to provide students in need with educational support services.

Río Hondo’s CARE Program, part of the College’s Extended Opportunity Programs & Services (EOP&S) Program, currently serves 63 students. The CARE Program is committed to providing compassionate, innovative and above-and-beyond services to students facing economic and educational challenges. The Program is open to welfare-dependent, single parents. Students have access to a number of services through Río Hondo’s CARE Program, including workshops, agency and county referrals, case management and advocacy, CARE grants, gas cards and more above-and-beyond services.
**Río Hondo’s Maria Bejines Named State Player of the Week**

Fresno City College sophomore outside hitter Druegan Davis and Río Hondo College letterman outside hitter Maria Bejines were named the Week #4 selections as California Community College Women’s Volleyball Coaches Association (CCCWVCA) State Players of the Week (POTW).

Bejines, a 5-foot-9 performer from South El Monte High School, had a monster week to grab the SoCal POTW Award as she helped Río Hondo open South Coast Conference play with victories over Cerritos and Pasadena City colleges. She is a returning All-South Coast Conference First Team player.

Bejines totaled 40 kills and was at her best in the Roadrunners’ upset over PCC when she blasted a season-high 22 kills with just two errors in 53 attempts (.377) while adding premium defense on 25 digs. She leads RHC in kills, digs and aces through 10 matches.

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**Río Hondo College Foundation Raises $65,000 Through Annual Golf Tournament**

The Río Hondo College Foundation raised more than $65,000 in funds during its annual golf tournament, hosted at the scenic Candlewood Country Club in Whittier on September 22. The event drew more than 100 guests who enjoyed friendly competition over a round of golf and delicious food. A lucky few also came away with prizes during the full day of fun. Several golf holes were specifically designed for fundraising, stocked with snacks, refreshing drinks and entertaining games. The funds raised will support Río Hondo College programs, students and scholarships.
During the September 13 Board of Trustees meeting, Río Hondo College approved four new clinical affiliation and instructional service agreements. The Health Science Nursing Department has been approved to partner with Children’s Hospital Los Angeles (CHLA) and Pomona Valley Hospital Medical Center to give Río Hondo students opportunities to receive training and direct patient care experience at both sites. The City of Sierra Madre Fire Department and Falck Mobile Health Corporation were also approved to provide vocational education programs to eligible Río Hondo students.

Río Hondo College Fire Academy cadets held a ceremony outside of the Río Hondo Fire Training Center to commemorate and remember the fallen first responders from 9/11 on September 11. Río Hondo College Board of Trustees Clerk Oscar Valladares and Member Rosaelva Lomeli attended the ceremony.

Río Hondo College Police Academy honored the life and legacy of fallen El Monte Police Sergeant Michael Paredes with a ceremony on September 12. Paredes’ name was placed on the Police Academy’s memorial wall. Paredes, who was a member of Río Hondo College Police Academy’s graduation Class No. 158, is the 27th Police Academy graduate to be placed on the Academy’s memorial wall to ensure his name, his life and ultimate sacrifice are never forgotten.

Río Hondo College Superintendent/President Dr. Marilyn Flores and Board President Kristal Orozco shared a few words and expressed condolences to the Paredes Family. Board of Trustee Member Rosaelva Lomeli, executive cabinet and several staff members across different divisions and departments also attended the ceremony.

The Río Hondo College Board of Trustees also voted to accept a $180,255 grant from the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office (Workforce and Economic Development Division) during its September 13 meeting.

The funds will be used to help increase student degree completion through student tutoring and support services and updating instructional equipment and supplies.
Mission Statement
Rio Hondo College is an educational and community partner committed to advancing social justice and equity as an antiracist institution that collectively invests in all students’ academic and career pathways that lead to attainment of degree, certificate, transfer, and lifelong-learning goals.

October is...Domestic Violence Awareness Month

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10 a.m., Friday, October 13
California State University, Fullerton
Campus Tour. Stop by TRIO SSS (SS 140) to fill out a permission slip and secure a spot.

Week of October 16:
Undocumented Student Action Week

9 a.m., Tuesday, October 17
Immigrant Visas and How to Access
In-State Tuition (Zoom Event)

1 p.m., Tuesday, October 17
Anti-Racism: A Student Plan of Action
(Zoom Event)

9 a.m., Wednesday, October 18
Championing Equity through AB 540:
Increasing Access for Undocumented
Students (Zoom Event)

1 p.m., Wednesday, October 18
Our Stories Are One: We Support
Undocumented Students (Zoom Event)

3 p.m., Wednesday, October 18
From the Shadows to Advocacy in Action:
A Case Study on Creating Student-Informed Policy with Undocumented Students (Zoom Event)

6 p.m., Wednesday, October 18
Rio Hondo College Board of Trustees Meeting

9 a.m., Thursday, October 19
Cultivating Belonging for Undocumented Students in Teaching & Learning Spaces (Zoom Event)

1 p.m., Thursday, October 19
Advocacy in Action: Strategies for Local, State and Federal Advocacy (Zoom Event)

9 a.m., Friday, October 20
Renewing the Dream – Making Financial Aid Accessible through Policy and Practice (Zoom Event)

6 p.m., Wednesday, November 8
Rio Hondo College Board of Trustees Meeting

6 p.m., Wednesday, December 13
Rio Hondo College Board of Trustees Meeting

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