

# OPPORTUNITY

# NEWS



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# NEWS FROM YOUR COLLEGE

## San Jac celebrates class of 2023

San Jacinto College held its spring commencement ceremony Friday, May 19, at NRG Stadium.

College faculty, staff, trustees, and administrators — along with 12,000 friends and family members — joined forces to watch the graduates walk across the stage to start the next chapter of their career journeys.

Of the 1,483 graduates walking, the youngest was 15, and the most senior was 75. There were also 42 veterans and 735 high school students earning their associate degree before their high school diploma. Congrats to the class of 2023!

View more photos: [bit.ly/SJCgradsMay23](https://bit.ly/SJCgradsMay23).

## Foundation donors give \$3.5M to students in 2022-2023

The San Jacinto College Foundation celebrated donors' life-changing impact during its Donor Appreciation Luncheon May 24.

Donors make dreams possible — dreams like student Aileene

Gallegos'. Gallegos, a luncheon speaker, is finishing her Associate of Arts degree to transfer to study interior architecture.

"Without the individuals who invest in students' education and futures, my dream would have been postponed and forgotten," she said.

From July 2022 through April 2023, donors gave almost \$3.5 million in cash and pledges to help students, and the

Foundation awarded \$2.7 million in scholarships and provided emergency assistance with meals, tuition, and books.

Gallegos learned the value of work from her father. After school, in 100-plus degrees, she helped him build fences and wielded sledgehammers to break concrete.

Despite her parents' hard work to provide food and shelter, Gallegos knew her college dreams came with a "real cost," so she worked in high school to pay for her dual credit classes. Foundation scholarships removed financial barriers, helping her focus on "creating better projects, writing stronger essays, and succeeding in my studies."

"My story is just one of many," Gallegos said. "So many young people have dreams they want to achieve but no idea how they will achieve them. Many of you here today are making it possible."

Learn how you can help students at [sanjac.edu/foundation](https://sanjac.edu/foundation). View event photos at [bit.ly/SJCDonorLuncheon23](https://bit.ly/SJCDonorLuncheon23).

After canvassing of the San Jacinto College Board of Trustees election results, Erica Davis Rouse has been re-elected to Position 1, and Dr. Michelle Cantú-Wilson elected to Position 2.

Davis Rouse founded Reach One 713 with her husband in 2016. She has volunteered with several non-profits — including Making It Better Texas.org, Yellowstone Academy, and Pasadena ISD — and is an advisory board member for the Smahrt Girl Foundation. Davis Rouse was first elected to the Board of Trustees in 2017.

Cantú-Wilson is the creative director for Marquee Consulting Inc. and oversees the Luxlead Institute. Previously, Cantú-Wilson served the College for nearly 10 years. Most recently, she was director of teaching and learning initiatives and special projects, functioning as the College liaison to external education partners.

On June 5, the Board of Trustees approved a resolution to name Dr. Ruede Wheeler as a trustee emeritus. Wheeler has served on the Board since 1986 and chairs the San Jacinto College Finance Committee. Wheeler, who practiced dentistry in La Porte for more than 40 years, is also a member and past president of the La Porte Rotary Club.

View more photos: [bit.ly/SJCNewBoard](https://bit.ly/SJCNewBoard).



Photo by Courtney Morris, San Jacinto College

## Davis Rouse re-elected, Cantú-Wilson elected to Board of Trustees



Photo by Courtney Morris, San Jacinto College



Photo by Melissa Trevizo, San Jacinto College



# RAVENS BASEBALL CELEBRATES THIRD ANNUAL CHALLENGER DAY

By **Melissa Trevizo**  
SAN JACINTO COLLEGE

The San Jacinto College Ravens baseball team partnered with the North Shore Little League Challenger Division to commemorate its third annual Challenger Day Sunday, April 16. The day was celebrated by fans of the Challenger Division and Ravens alike with special guest Ken Wimbley from the North Shore Rotary Club.

“The Challenger event is equally significant for our team

and community,” said Kory Koehler, assistant baseball coach. “Introducing our student-athletes to a world that accepts and appreciates children with special needs while sharing a mutual love for the game is vitally important.”

## Realizing a dream

The local Challenger Division started six years ago as part of the national Little League Challenger Program. The division enables boys and girls with physical and mental

challenges, ages 4-18 or up to age 22 if still enrolled in high school, to enjoy baseball along with millions of other children who participate in the sport. More than 30,000 athletes participate in 950 Challenger programs worldwide.

“As a parent of a special needs child, you are faced with many unique challenges,” said Eric Kirchner, North Shore Little League president and Galena Park ISD program director of special education. “Some parents give up on the dream of



seeing their child participate in team sports. When Challenger began, that dream came true for our parents. They saw their children on the field playing baseball and being part of a team in a game designed for their success. Challenger changes the lives of everyone it touches.”

Kirchner believes “the college athletes gain a new perspective from participating with our league. The impact on others can be life-changing when you begin to see people differently. You start to look past the disabilities and see the child as a little ballplayer whose parents are cheering them on.”

Both the Ravens and the Galveston Community College Whitecaps acted as buddies during the game. The buddies assist the Challenger players on the field as needed. Whenever possible, players bat and make plays themselves.

“Being a Challenger buddy for two years was an experience I’m grateful for,” said Jose Torres, Ravens catcher. “This event has really marked something on my heart. Seeing the kids’ eyes light up and sharing a love for baseball together is something I’ll never forget.”

*Continued on page 4*



Photos by Melissa Trevizo, San Jacinto College

## SAN JAC HAPPENINGS

DATE	EVENT	TIME	SITE
July	Summer camps for kids and teens	Varies	sanjac.edu/summer-camps
July 4	Independence Day	Closed	All campuses and online
July 13	Promise @ San Jac Scholarship enrollment/registration deadline		sanjac.edu/promise
Aug. 28	Fall 2023 semester begins		Register at sanjac.edu.





# CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE BOOSTS CAREER MOTIVATION

By **Neesha Hosein**  
SAN JACINTO COLLEGE

For one San Jacinto College alumna, her life's eureka moment came one day while sitting near the water in San Leon, wondering what the future had in store. The sunlight cascaded a beautiful amber across the sky, and Joanne Jones realized her purpose.

"I was at an in-between stage, feeling like I'd completed a season in my life but didn't know what direction to go next," Jones said. "I'm sitting there, having a personal moment with God, thinking, 'Tell me what to do. I'm lost. I need help.'"

In the amber sky, the message was clear: "Start a business, name it Amber Skies, and devote your life to advocating for others."

While the moment seemed spontaneous, the inspiration began long before.

## Journey to discovery

Before earning her associate degree in general studies from San Jac in 2015, Jones was a busy working mother and psychology major with no plan. Aptitude and personality tests helped narrow her career focus.

"Cultural anthropology was a really good fit for me," Jones said. "I've always been intrigued by studies about how humanity evolved, why things exist as they are today, and where we're heading."

To Jones, education was a golden ticket. One San Jac course introduced her to short films, writing documentaries, story planning, storyboarding, and creating YouTube videos, giving her the motivation she needed.

"I was one of the two student leaders, and I learned about team building," Jones said. "I was a producer, and I wrote the storyline for a small film project. We delegated duties to other team members. It was well organized, and everyone fulfilled their roles. I had a great experience with leadership and self-accountability."

Jones credits her class experience and sales background for showing her there is a need for understanding "how people think, learn, and develop based on their belief systems and environment — all things that affect us greatly."

## Turning points

A pedestrian accident left Jones' mom with a severe leg injury. Jones was

her mother's primary caretaker while juggling her other roles as employee, mother, and student.

Long after her mother's recovery, Jones still felt the effects of her role. In an essay, she wrote about how difficult it was to be a caretaker while managing her own responsibilities. Moved by her story, a professor who owned a home health company offered an opportunity that would become a milestone in her career journey.

Jones became a community liaison for three years, learning about senior care services. She moved back and forth from home health to hospice with titles like marketing director for a skilled nursing facility and alternative administrator for personal care services.

It was then she found her calling in the amber sky.

## Finding life's purpose

With a passion for senior services, Jones started her own business in 2022, Amber Skies Solutions, specializing in Medicare, small-employer group insurance, and individual and family insurance. With 20 years in the health care industry, Jones has learned "life is a lot shorter than you think it is."



Photo courtesy of Joanne Jones

"I've learned you have to have a passion for what you're doing to be successful," she said. "In this business, you see the value of life. Before you know it, 75 years can pass. That's 75 Christmases, 75 birthdays. Minus childhood and early adulthood, only about 35 of those are spent working. If you don't start becoming successful until your mid-40s and 50s, you've got 25 years to get some substantial things in place so you can retire comfortably."

Jones believes people should follow their passion.

"Don't let fear stop you because we're not promised tomorrow," she said.

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## Challenger Day origins

The day was inspired by Koehler's son Keaton, who was born with brain deformities. Doctors told the Koehlers their baby would not live more than 10 hours without oxygen. Keaton survived and has been diagnosed with Desmosterolosis, a condition on the cerebral palsy spectrum. The 11-year-old now competes with the other 70 athletes in the Challenger Division.

"My wife, Erika, and I couldn't be more grateful for the opportunity to involve our son and the Challenger League into our spring schedule of events," Koehler said. "Challenger Day provides tremendous life lessons to our

student-athletes while putting joy in the hearts of families that endure the struggle daily. If for just a few hours, it provides a world's worth of smiles to those who need it."

With three years under their belt, the organization plans to continue the tradition for many years to come.

"The Challenger event always significantly impacts our student-athletes — maybe even more than the children we support," said Koehler. "They are greatly moved, and it's an honor to represent our College in a way that gives back to our community."

To learn more about the Challenger Division, visit [facebook.com/NSLLChallengerDivision](https://www.facebook.com/NSLLChallengerDivision).



Photo by Melissa Trevizo, San Jacinto College



# ANATOMY PROFESSOR PRESENTS GOLDEN APPLE TO CHIROPRACTIC COLLEGE PARTNER

By **Melissa Trevizo**  
SAN JACINTO COLLEGE

Anatomy and physiology professor Dr. Robin Wright has been teaching at San Jacinto College since 2017 — first as an adjunct, then a year later as a full-time professor. A philosophy she lives by?

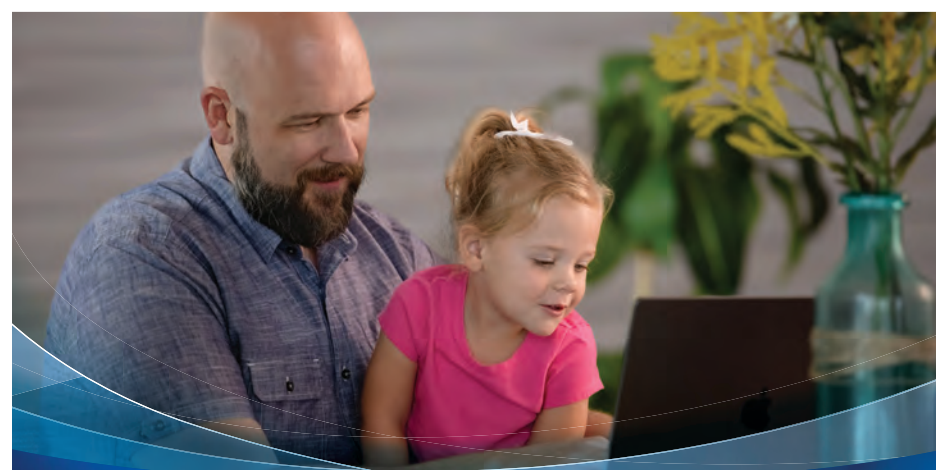
“I believe in recognizing people who go out of their way to help others, especially if they are the kind of person who wouldn’t go out and toot their own horn,” Wright said.

That’s why this year she developed the Golden Apple Award. The award was inspired by a colleague from one of San Jac’s partner institutions, Texas Chiropractic College. Dr. Patricia Moore, a TCC anatomy professor, manages the college’s cadaver lab.

“Dr. Moore has opened her lab to at least 500 of my anatomy students since



From left: Andy Rodriguez, Dr. Robin Wright, Dr. Patricia Moore, Sakia Hodge, and Naazy KhodaParast  
Photo by Melissa Trevizo, San Jacinto College



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I’ve been at San Jac,” said Wright. “Even after COVID when the lab was only available to visitors for limited hours, she would make sure to include my students. This was a huge enrichment to the curriculum and my students’ education. She is an excellent professor and extends herself and her classroom to my students as if they were her own.”

Wright — along with her supplemental instructors Sakia Hodge, Naazy KhodaParast and Andy Rodriguez — surprised Moore with the award in April. Moore, who has been at TCC since 2010, sees inviting students from other learning institutions as just part of the job.

“I enjoy sharing my lab with students who are the future of health care professions,” said Moore. “I would open these doors for anyone who is willing to learn more about anatomy. I am shocked and honored to receive the award Dr. Wright has given me.”

Wright’s students include those pursuing degrees in massage therapy, nursing, occupational therapy, physical therapy, radiology, and other health care professions, including pre-med transfer students.

Hodge, a nursing student at San Jac, describes the cadaver lab experience as “amazing.”

“Many of the donors we studied helped educate us firsthand about a variety of diseases, such as lung disease or congestive heart failure,” said Hodge. “Unless you go to medical school, it is rare you will get to see cadavers and learn from them. It was an honor and privilege to be able to attend. As students, we are very grateful for people who chose to donate their bodies to science not only for our learning purposes but for the future of research and finding more cures to diseases that impact our everyday life.”

Wright plans to continue visiting the TCC cadaver lab as long as possible, calling it “an invaluable experience for my students.”

“When they enter the lab, they jump right in, and I start quizzing them,” she said. “It’s different when you get to touch and feel what the curriculum is showing you. The student can feel what different health conditions are like, and everything starts to connect for them.”



# AUDIO ENGINEERING ALUMNUS TUNES OUT NOISE TO LISTEN TO HEART

By **Courtney Morris**  
SAN JACINTO COLLEGE

Matt Teel's challenge was having too many passions.

Growing up in mountainous Northern California, Teel would stretch out under the stars, pondering the universe. This fascination translated to how everyday things worked too. As a teen, he tinkered with the audio equipment inside his stepdad's home recording studio, curious how sound is recorded and manipulated.

With a buffet of options after high school, he sampled this and that.

"I had a broad range of interests that caused me to bounce around," he said.

Today, 20 years later, Teel has gone from bouncing around to blending his passions into a multifaceted career.

## Facing the unknown

While his science passion persisted, Teel dealt with constant change growing up. He navigated his parents' divorce, multiple moves, and 13 different schools before high school. He struggled deciding what to do next after finally landing in Houston with his dad.

In 2004, Teel started at San Jacinto College — the first in his family to attend college. Although the first semester challenged him, honors classes turned things around his second semester. He began making friends and even went on an honors camping retreat.

"It gave me the catalyst to believe in myself," he said.

While on this retreat, Teel met professional rapper Byron Holman, who sparked his interest in music recording.

## DIY recording

Taking a break from San Jac, Teel followed Holman's suggestions to set up his own studio. He bought all the essential equipment and taught himself through industry books and magazines.

Soon he was recording poetry rap sessions and friends jamming on their instruments, and others began asking him how much he charged.

Teel worked odd jobs to supplement the income from his studio work. A year later, he met two artists in San Jac's audio engineering program who suggested he try it too.



## Refining studio skills

Teel was serious from the moment he signed up for Audio Engineering 1. Not only did he learn about acoustics, physics, recording, mixing, and special effects processing, but he also learned about his own limitations and relational skills.

"He was communicative, easygoing, and personable — all important qualities for an audio engineer," Angela Beyer, audio engineering professor, said.

His professors' passion helped him engage and consume all he could. Although he almost finished an audio engineering degree, Teel graduated in 2016 with a general studies associate degree, planning to transfer someday.

## Reimagining future

After San Jac, Teel entered a slump. Although continuing to record, he struggled with depression and ADD.

While working at a machine shop, Teel spent his downtime reading cosmology and math books. Audio engineering had sparked a deeper interest in the math and theory behind acoustics and digital signal processing.

Suddenly, something clicked. Teel went from railing at himself to realizing his purpose.

"In five years," he told his dad, "I'm going to be five years sober and have a physics degree."

This dream demanded intense focus, and his family encouraged and supported him along the way. Five years later, Teel had not only stopped drinking but also graduated with a bachelor's degree in physics from University of Houston-Clear Lake. In 2022, he earned his master's.

## Tuning out everything but heart

Teel sums up his journey in four steps: explore, fail, pick yourself up, repeat. Although hyperfocus on education meant sacrificing a social life and traditional career for years, now he aims for stability while blending two fields he's passionate about.

Recently he worked for a startup company on a project combining acoustics, physics, and programming. Besides continuing to record, he plans to design studio technology someday, devoting his diverse background to more audio and non-audio applications.

Teel took almost two decades to tune out external noise and listen to his heart, but the journey was worth it.

"If you find what makes you light up, you might feel selfish pursuing it," he said. "But you'll develop something you can share with others later."



Photos courtesy of Matt Teel



# THIS MONTH *IN* SOCIAL MEDIA



## Instagram

Today's GOAT YOGA session with Goats on the Bayou Farm! Thank you to everyone who joined us at Central Campus, we hope you had a blast!  
@sanjacseas



183 likes, 47 comments, 9 saves



## Facebook

"Every student that walks through that foyer was me in 1978. So what's my favorite thing about working for a community college? Helping — because I can't pay the people back that helped me in 1978. But I can help the people today who come to this place." — Randy Snyder, North Campus Department Chair | Art & Design, Child Development, Education, Music, and Speech



461 Reactions, 43 comments, 19 shares



## Twitter

More than 3,500 of you voted on a name for the San Jac Raven! We're super excited to say our new College-wide mascot has officially arrived — say hello to POE!!! #WeAreRavens



10 likes, 2 retweets, 37 clicks



## LinkedIn

Innovation in San Jac's programs, facilities, and resources is a priority for us because it's what our students have come to expect and what they need. Technology changes so fast. If San Jac gets left behind, then so do our students and industry partners — and we're not letting that happen! In all corners of the College, individuals are working to make sure we stay at the forefront of innovation. Here are just a few examples of what we've been up to.



46 reactions, 5 comment, 100 clicks



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## VISION & MISSION



**Vision** — San Jacinto College will advance the social and economic mobility of all members of our community. We will be known for our excellence in teaching and learning, our intentional student-centered support, and our commitment to every student. We will be the preferred workforce and economic development partner in the region and a champion for lifelong learning. San Jacinto College will inspire students to explore opportunities, define their educational and career paths, and achieve their goals and dreams.

**Mission** — San Jacinto College is focused on student success, academic progress, university transfer, and employment. We are committed to opportunities that enrich the quality of life in the communities we serve.

## SUPPORT STUDENT SUCCESS



A gift to the San Jacinto College Foundation transforms lives, enriches our community, and provides tomorrow's community leaders. For more than 25 years, the Foundation has helped thousands of students reach their goals. Our former students and graduates have filled vital roles in hospitals, classrooms, executive offices, manufacturing plants, and laboratories across our region and beyond. They have also won the World Series and NBA championships, starred in major motion pictures, and created major theatrical productions. Help our students today with the gift of education. Contact the San Jacinto College Foundation at 281-998-6104 or visit [sanjac.edu/foundation](https://sanjac.edu/foundation).

## COMMUNITY IMPACT



Surrounded by monuments of history, evolving industries, maritime enterprises of today, and the space age of tomorrow, San Jacinto College has served the people of East Harris County, Texas, since 1961. The College is one of the top 10 community colleges in the nation as designated by the Aspen Institute and was named an Achieving the Dream Leader College of Distinction in 2020. The College is a Hispanic-Serving Institution that spans five campuses, serving approximately 41,000 credit and non-credit students annually. It offers more than 200 degrees and certificates across eight major areas of study that put students on a path to transfer to four-year institutions or enter the workforce. The College is fiscally sound, holding bond ratings of AA and Aa2 by Standard & Poor's and Moody's.

