

# OPPORTUNITY

# NEWS



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# NEWS FROM YOUR COLLEGE



Photo by Melissa Trevizo, San Jacinto College

## Central Campus theatre program honored as Exemplary Campus of Distinction

The Texas Educational Theatre Association recently named the San Jacinto College Central Campus an Exemplary Campus of Distinction. This honor recognizes the College's commitment to theatre education through achievement, resource curation, and theatre arts advocacy.

According to the release from the TxETA, "This remarkable achievement is a testament to the unwavering dedication, tireless efforts, and exceptional leadership Dr. Jerry Ivins [Central Campus theatre artistic director] has

demonstrated throughout his tenure. His unwavering commitment to providing an enriching and nurturing educational environment has resulted in San Jacinto College's well-deserved recognition by the TxETA Awards committee."

To earn the prestigious honor, colleges across the state were evaluated in different categories, including theatre course offerings, performance opportunities and venues, theatre curriculum, leadership, advocacy, technology, community service, and outreach.

"This recognition reflects the hard work of a dedicated group of artists who make the Central theatre program a premiere example of educational theatre in Texas," said Ivins. "Due to their commitment to excellence, our students earn recognition at numerous universities, leading to scholarship opportunities. Central's artistic team reflects the continued excellence of San Jacinto College."

In 2023, TxETA named Ivins the 2023 Higher Education Educator of the Year. Ivins has taught at San Jac for 29 years. He is also heavily involved in the University Interscholastic League one-act play competition as a judge, an adjudicator, and a licensed contest manager.

Since 2006, Ivins has served the TxETA as convention director for 13 years and served on the board of directors for five years.

The Central Campus was honored at an awards ceremony Sept. 28 at the Moody Gardens Convention Center in Galveston.



## San Jac once again vying for \$1M Aspen Prize

The Aspen Institute named San Jacinto College as a finalist for the 2025 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence. This \$1 million award recognizes the nation's top community colleges for student success and equitable outcomes.

The finalists stand out among more than 1,000 community colleges nationwide as having high and improving levels of student success, as well as equitable outcomes for Black and Hispanic students and those from lower-income backgrounds.

San Jac is often recognized because

of strong industry partnerships that influence curriculum development, facilities, student support, and employment. The College also offers a comprehensive transfer pathway and consistent advising that guide students through agreements, degree plans, financial aid, and scholarships.

San Jac has ranked as an Aspen Institute Rising Star (2017), Finalist (2019 and 2023), and Finalist with Distinction (2021).



Image courtesy of National Association of Town Watch

## National Night Out set for Oct. 8

Join the San Jacinto College Police Department for its National Night Out celebration Tuesday, Oct. 8.

The free event will be from 3:30-6:30 p.m. at the College's South Campus, 13735 Beamer Rd., Houston, Texas 77089.

This is a great opportunity for community members to meet the San Jac police and other departments in a fun, friendly atmosphere. There will be food, games, races, and prizes.

According to the National Association of Town Watch, the annual National Night Out campaign enhances the relationship between neighbors and law enforcement while bringing back a sense of community. For more information about the San Jac event, contact

[brandy.witsberger@sjcd.edu](mailto:brandy.witsberger@sjcd.edu).

# HOW 21 FORWARD PAVED THE WAY FOR ESCOBEDO'S MEDICAL CAREER

By **Melissa Trevizo**  
San Jacinto College

Allison Escobedo came to San Jacinto College two years ago as a recipient of the 21 Forward Scholarship. Now the alumna is pursuing a bachelor's degree in diagnostic medical sonography through MD Anderson.

21 Forward, a precursor to the Promise @ San Jac Scholarship, was funded through a generous \$30 million donation by MacKenzie Scott. The scholarship, which covered Escobedo's tuition at the College, became a pivotal factor in her academic path, freeing her to pursue her major without the burden of tuition costs.

"Getting the scholarship was such a big help. I could focus on my studies and get good grades," Escobedo said. "Not having to worry about those finances is a big deal."

Escobedo's early interest in the medical field was sparked by her upbringing, particularly her father's influence.

"Every time we saw a stray animal, we picked it up and nursed it until someone could take it home," she said. "I always wanted to take care of people and animals."

This nurturing instinct guided her to become a veterinarian. Despite coming from a family of engineers and scientists, Escobedo found her passion in science and health care and charted her own path. She completed her certification as a veterinary assistant at the Dr. Kirk Lewis Career and Technical High School. However, her hands-on internship led her to reconsider.

"Once I started my

internship, I was like, 'Maybe this isn't for me.' It was just too much sadness," she said. "I knew I still wanted to pursue medical and liked working with the ultrasound machine."

Escobedo decided to pursue a natural science degree at San Jac and graduated in May 2024. During this time, an advisor mentioned the ultrasound program at MD Anderson, which offers a bachelor's degree.

Encouraged by the potential for greater career opportunities, Escobedo applied to MD Anderson, even though the program only accepts 14 students each year. To her delight, she was accepted and began her studies this fall.

During her time at San Jac, Escobedo was involved in Phi Theta Kappa, an honor society that significantly enriched her San Jac experience. As the vice president of leadership for PTK, Escobedo had the opportunity to travel extensively, attending conferences throughout the U.S.

"Ohio was such a beautiful place, and it was the first time I went out of state," she said. "These experiences were not only educational but also offered me the chance to form lasting friendships and engage in meaningful community service projects."

Although she is excited about her new chapter at MD Anderson, leaving behind her role as a San Jac admissions administrative assistant is bittersweet. Her job allowed her to interact with students and staff daily, a role she cherished.

"I love that San Jac gave me not only a job but the college



Photo courtesy of San Jacinto College

experience that I always wanted without the financial

burden," Escobedo said. "I was able to meet wonderful people who challenged me and helped me reach my goal."

# POLICE DEPARTMENT OFFERS RAD PERSONAL SAFETY TRAINING

By Jacquelynn Conger  
SAN JACINTO COLLEGE

The San Jacinto College Police Department is now offering the free RAD (rape, aggression, defense) training to students, staff, and community members. This program provides you with self-defense techniques to protect against potential attackers and enhance situational awareness.

RAD covers both short-term self-defense education and physical skill mastery. You can pursue short-term training in a progressive building block format while enjoying RAD's trademark Lifetime Return and Practice Policy, which ensures you can return and practice for free, reinforcing your skills over a lifetime. RAD programs worldwide honor this policy.

"RAD is a program of proven self-defense tactics and skills to equip you with the knowledge and skill set to properly defend yourself and loved ones, if needed," said Sabrina Naulings, San Jac police chief.

Certified RAD instructors use specialized simulation techniques and

equipment. RAD is also the only self-defense program supported by the International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators, the National Academy of Defense Education, the National Self-Defense Institute, and Redman Training Gear.

Participants can attend a one-time class with the opportunity to attend additional training. Open classes are available to ages 15 and older, with opportunities for children's group classes. Participants will receive a student manual and should consider attending refresher courses regularly. While there are no differences in the levels of offerings, each class will present different scenarios with increasing intensity.

"Safety and survival require a clear-cut course of action," Naulings said. "RAD provides effective options for individuals to take an active role in their own self-defense and emotional well-being."

For more information about the training, contact Lieutenant Darrell Hollie at [darrell.hollie@sjcd.edu](mailto:darrell.hollie@sjcd.edu).



Photos by Melissa Trevizo, San Jacinto College

## REGISTER NOW FOR SPRING CLASSES!

SPRING 2025 CLASSES BEGIN JANUARY 13

5 CONVENIENT CAMPUSES AND ONLINE

CENTRAL CAMPUS  
8060 Spencer Hwy.  
Pasadena, TX 77505

SOUTH CAMPUS  
13735 Beamer Rd.  
Houston, TX 77089

NORTH CAMPUS  
5800 Uvalde Rd.  
Houston, TX 77049

MARITIME CAMPUS  
3700 Old Hwy. 146  
La Porte, TX 77571

GEN PARK CAMPUS  
13455 Lockwood Rd.  
Houston, TX 77044

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# PUBLIC SERVICE FUTURE STARTS WITH DEBT-FREE COLLEGE THROUGH PROMISE @ SAN JAC SCHOLARSHIP

By Courtney Morris

SAN JACINTO COLLEGE

What if you started each semester knowing your college tuition was covered 100%?

Matthew Malone may have stressed about studying for finals but not about paying for the classes themselves, thanks to the Promise @ San Jac Scholarship.

Covering tuition and up to \$600 in books each semester, the scholarship is available to every high school senior graduating from an in-district high school or living inside San Jacinto College's taxing district.

Promise @ San Jac made a difference for the entire Malone family. Matthew completed his criminal justice associate degree debt-free in 2022 and transferred to Sam Houston State University. And his parents, Dawn and Darryl, who both work at San Jac, applied his college fund to his university expenses instead.

"Matthew will be able to start his career and post-college life debt-free, which is huge," Dawn said.

Matthew and Dawn share why the scholarship mattered to their family and how it could impact yours:

**Q: How did you learn about the Promise @ San Jac Scholarship?**

**MM:** During one of my Dobie High School classes, I remember being led to our library and instructed how to fill out the application. Everyone in my class knew about it and was excited to fill out the forms and apply.

**DM:** Dobie was one of the first handful of high schools that were the pilot for this opportunity, and it

just came up the year Matthew was a senior. We encouraged him to take advantage of this opportunity for a debt-free associate degree.

**Q: Why did you apply for the scholarship and start at San Jac?**

**MM:** At the time, the main reason I applied was the prospect of debt-free college. Though I was a naive high school student, I was smart enough to know college is an expensive prospect. When it came time to register and pay each semester, it was reassuring to know it would be covered — no stress at all.

**Q: What advice would you give current high school seniors and their parents who are considering this scholarship?**

**MM:** If you're a student, take this opportunity and run with it. Debt-free college is so worth it. Nothing bad comes out of taking a leap of faith and trying to get your degree. Why let that chance slip through your fingers?

**DM:** Parents, ask questions. Don't be afraid to ask early and often how to navigate the application, financial, aid/scholarship, and advising processes. And as often as you can, give your child the opportunity to make decisions and mistakes on their own. These "sideways" moments teach important lessons.

**Q: What's next for you, Matthew?**

**MM:** For as long as I can remember, I've felt a call to a life of service, which led me to pursuing degrees in criminal justice first at San Jac and now at SHSU. I haven't quite decided where and how I want to work, but I do plan on possibly working as a peace officer for a local police department. I know the South Belt/Pasadena/Clear Lake area well,

and this will always be home.

**Q: Anything else you want to add?**

**MM:** Because of Promise, I attained my dream of attending SHSU to continue my studies. I've made great friends here, and I'm getting a great education. Promise and San Jac were the catalyst for that because the transfer process was smooth, and the Promise Scholarship meant no debt carried from San Jac.

**DM:** San Jac Chancellor Dr. Brenda Hellyer has pointed out

that the Promise Scholarship is a two-way street. Students "promise" to go to school full time and make adequate academic progress, and the scholarship "promises" to support the student financially all the way through their associate degree or certificate. I'm so glad Matthew made good on his promise, and San Jac Promise absolutely made good on theirs!

Scan the QR code to learn more about the Promise @ San Jac Scholarship.



Photos courtesy of Dawn Malone, San Jacinto College

# PRACTICE WHAT YOU TEACH: CONERLY BRINGS SOCIOLOGY TO LIFE

By **Neesha Hosein**  
SAN JACINTO COLLEGE

To Dr. Tonja Conerly, sociology is not just a subject but a lens through which students can better understand the complexities of human behavior and the social structures that shape the world.

The San Jacinto College sociology professor believes this information is valuable to people in any industry as most jobs require at least some interpersonal communication, something she knows from experience.

## Finding purpose in academia

Conerly was a human resources executive in corporate America before starting her teaching career. The stars aligned when a friend, a Houston Community College department chair, asked her to step in for an adjunct professor who resigned on the first day of the semester.

“I knew I had a new career

upon entering that classroom. I felt exhilarated,” Conerly said. “It was a feeling I had never felt before. I continued to adjunct for HCC while working full time until I received a full-time job offer from San Jac in the sociology department.”

Conerly teaches open educational resources courses like introduction to sociology, which uses teaching materials and resources at no cost to students. Her other courses include marriage and family, social problems, and minority studies. Conerly has also included service learning opportunities in several of her classes over the last 10 years.

She has played an important role in Open Books since it started as a pilot program more than a decade ago. She served as the open educational resources director for several years under a grant San Jac received from Achieve the Dream. She continues to assist the College with reducing textbook costs for students as an open educational resources board member. Conerly attends open educational resource

events both nationwide and internationally and is a contributing author to Rice University’s OpenStax Introduction to Sociology textbook, third edition.

## Sociology at San Jac

Starting fall 2024, the College introduced the Associate of Arts in sociology degree.

“The informal definition of sociology is the study of people,” Conerly said. “This degree can be used in any field, not just careers in sociology, because what job doesn’t deal with people. Our courses in this degree plan allow our students to understand and respect the differences of people in our society.”

In these courses, students address topics such as religion, government, family, education, and the economy on the state, national, and global levels.

“This new degree has been aligned with upper-level colleges for easy transferring opportunities to a four-year college,” she said. “It is very

easy because our students are partnering with an advisor to assist them in this transition.”

The courses are more than just college credit.

“Our courses help students deal with the parameters of living in our society,” Conerly said. “I believe our goal and responsibility at the College is to make each one of our students a productive member of society, whether they are seeking a certification or degree, and our courses in sociology prepare them for that.”

Conerly believes many disciplines could find value in studying sociology, especially those that work more closely with people like criminology and nursing.

## Above and beyond the classroom

For 15 years, Conerly has enjoyed the best of both worlds at San Jac as an educator and a leader and is never bored by the range of opportunities her career provides. She wears many hats, including distinguished faculty member,

leadership, and administrative roles. She is a member of the common reading committee and the service learning council and represents the College at conferences.

“San Jac is unique because we are so innovative,” Conerly said. “We have led the collegiate world in so many areas with student success, faculty contributions, and development. That is why we have been selected by the Aspen Institute so many times.”



Photo courtesy of Tonja Conerly, San Jacinto College

## SAN JAC HAPPENINGS

| DATE                        | EVENT  | TIME           | SITE   |
|-----------------------------|--|----------------|--|
| Oct. 8                      | National Night Out                                 | 3:30-6:30 p.m. | Food, games, and community booths   South Campus   |
| Oct. 9-Nov. 6               | Guest Artists: Vanessa Monokian and Tina Hernandez | Varies         | Central Campus Gallery, Davis Library (C21.163)   Contact <a href="mailto:carmen.champion@sjcd.edu">carmen.champion@sjcd.edu</a>                               |
| Oct. 11                     | Generation Park Fall Fest                          | 4-7 p.m.       | Generation Park Campus   |
| Oct. 16-19                  | “The SpongeBob Musical”                            | 7:30 p.m.      | \$15 general admission   Central Campus, Slocomb Auditorium (C12)  |
| Oct. 20                     | “The SpongeBob Musical” matinee                    | 2:30 p.m.      | \$15 general admission   Central Campus, Slocomb Auditorium (C12)  |
| Oct. 24-26 & Oct. 31-Nov. 2 | “The Pits” World Premiere                          | Varies         | Free tickets at <a href="http://sjcstheatrefilm.ludus.com">sjcstheatrefilm.ludus.com</a>   South Campus, Flickinger Fine Arts Center, Black Box Theatre (\$15) |

All times and event schedules listed are subject to change. For more information, visit [sanjac.edu/calendar](http://sanjac.edu/calendar).

# THIS MONTH *IN* SOCIAL MEDIA



## Facebook

Keyla Ramirez, a first-generation college student, felt excitement bursting inside her. She had made it into a new year-long research program in Puerto Rico that would start immediately after she finished her bachelor's degree. Although the idea of moving was intimidating, she decided to go after it and gained hands-on experience working in a breast cancer research lab. "I'm glad I took this opportunity to see what could happen," Ramirez said.



113 Reactions | 40 Comments | 6 Shares



## Instagram

We know many are struggling after Hurricane Beryl. Here's a reminder that the San Jac Marketplace is here for our students and employees! If you're currently enrolled in at least one class, you can receive up to 30 pounds of free groceries per week. The Marketplace offers frozen meats, pantry goods, toiletries, and household necessities. Stop by and sign up!



484 Likes | 92 Shares | 44 Saves



## LinkedIn

When Irene Villatoro graduated from San Jac's pharmacy technician program, she never imagined that 22 years later she would be directing the North Campus program and celebrating her daughter Jacquelyn's completion of the same training. "Overall, the program has given me confidence, independence, and clarity regarding my future endeavors," Jacquelyn Villatoro said.



36 Reactions | 56 Post Clicks | 3 Shares

# YOUR GOALS. YOUR COLLEGE.



## SAN JACINTO COLLEGE<sup>SM</sup>

### NORTH CAMPUS

5800 Uvalde Rd., Houston, TX 77049

### CENTRAL CAMPUS

8060 Spencer Hwy., Pasadena, TX 77505

### SOUTH CAMPUS

13735 Beamer Rd., Houston, TX 77089

### MARITIME CAMPUS

3700 Old Hwy. 146, La Porte, TX 77571

### GENERATION PARK CAMPUS

13455 Lockwood Rd., Houston, TX 77044

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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.

## 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. For more information about San Jacinto College, visit sanjac.edu.

