

OPPORTUNITY

NEWS



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NEWS FROM YOUR COLLEGE

San Jac recognized among nation's top community colleges

San Jacinto College has been named a Top 200 community college in the nation by the Aspen Institute, a prestigious honor that highlights the College's strong student success and outcomes.

This national ranking honors San Jac's commitment to academic excellence, equitable support services, and measurable results that help students complete credentials and advance their careers.

San Jac joins a select group of colleges nationwide whose programs and practices demonstrate high performance in areas such as completion rates, transfer pathways, workforce preparedness, and student support.

This distinction reflects the collective work of faculty, staff, and leadership to remove barriers, strengthen pathways, and expand opportunities for learners of all backgrounds.

Three named to strategic leadership positions

San Jacinto College announced key leadership changes as part of a strategic realignment of its executive team.

Dr. Laurel V. Williamson, deputy chancellor and College president, plans to retire in August 2026 after nearly two decades of service. Dr. Alexander Okwonna, current North Campus provost, has been named her successor and will continue leading the North Campus while his replacement is selected.

Central Campus provost Van Wigginton has retired, and Dr. Rhonda Bell — a 20-year College veteran and former dean of nursing and imaging — has been appointed as the new Central Campus provost.

At the Generation Park Campus, Dr. Christopher Wild has been named provost. He brings more than 15 years of experience at San Jac, including leadership in biotechnology and workforce programs.

These transitions support the College's mission and strategic direction,



Dr. Alexander Okwonna

Dr. Rhonda Bell

Dr. Christopher Wild

Photos courtesy of San Jacinto College

reinforcing leadership committed to student success and regional impact.

San Jac's online learning earns national recognition

San Jacinto College has been recognized as the No. 6 and one of America's Top Online Colleges by Newsweek and global data research firm Statista, highlighting its excellence in online education and digital access.

The College ranked among the top institutions nationally for offering flexible, high-quality online programs that support diverse learners, working adults, and students balancing life and work commitments.

This honor reflects San Jac's long-standing commitment to expanding access to education and innovative online learning — a journey that began with its first online courses and has grown through intentional investment in student support, instructional design, and technology.

The recognition underscores San Jac's role in broadening opportunity across the Greater Houston region and beyond, serving students wherever they are while maintaining strong academic standards and outcomes.

SAN JAC HAPPENINGS

DATE	EVENT	TIME	SITE
Feb. 5	College Community Day		No day or evening classes
Feb. 6-7	Artists for Hope	7 p.m.	South Campus, Flickinger Fine Arts Center, Proscenium Theatre (\$15.151)
Feb. 16	Summer registration opens		
Feb. 18-22	"W;t"	Varies	Tickets: \$10 Central Campus, Slocomb Auditorium (C13)
Feb. 19	Discover San Jac	5-7 p.m.	Learn about majors and resources. Central, North, & South Campuses
Feb. 26	10th Annual History Talks Conference: Space City in the Shadow of the Challenger	8:30 a.m.-12 p.m.	North Campus, Grant Fine Arts Center (N1.103)
Feb. 26	Live at the Apollo	6-8 p.m.	North Campus, Student Center, Monument Room (N12.200)
Feb. 26-28 & March 5-7	"The Secret Menu"	Varies	Tickets: \$10 (sjcstheatreilm.ludus.com) South Campus, Flickinger Fine Arts Center, Proscenium Theatre (\$15.151)

All times and event schedules listed are subject to change. For more information, visit sanjac.edu/calendar.

COUTURE FOR A CAUSE: AN EVENING OF STYLE, COMMUNITY, AND LIFE-CHANGING IMPACT

By Jacquelynn Conger
SAN JACINTO COLLEGE

Every two years, the San Jacinto College community gathers for an evening where philanthropy, fashion, and futures take center stage.

In 2026, this tradition continues with the Sinor Family and San Jacinto College Couture for a Cause Gala, presented by the Meador and Torrison Families — a signature event that blends runway glamour with real, life-changing opportunities for local students.

On Friday, April 24, 2026, the LyondellBasell Center for Petrochemical, Energy, & Technology will transform into a dazzling stage for couture fashion, fine dining, and community celebration. But beneath the shimmering lights and elegant atmosphere lies a deeper purpose: supporting the San Jacinto College Foundation and the Promise @ San Jac Scholarship, a program that is reshaping educational opportunity for generations of families in the College's taxing district.

For many local graduates, the Promise @ San Jac Scholarship has become a vital gateway to higher education. As a last-dollar scholarship, it is open to all high school seniors who live within the College's taxing district — regardless of GPA or family income. Students simply pledge on time, apply to the College, complete all financial aid requirements, and enroll by the deadlines. The result is transformative: a debt-free pathway to a certificate or associate degree that allows students to focus on learning rather than financial strain.

"The Promise Scholarship has given me an amazing start and the opportunity to pursue higher education that otherwise would have been too expensive," said Christopher Soza, current Promise Scholar and biotechnology student. "It allowed me to attend full time and afford the books and supplies I needed to be successful."

Stories like Soza's represent the heart of the program — students whose lives change because of community support.

Since 1996, the Foundation has provided thousands of scholarships, emergency assistance, and student success initiatives, ensuring that financial hardship never stands in the way of potential. Donors often express pride in knowing their support builds a stronger local workforce and uplifts families in their own neighborhoods.

This year's Couture for a Cause theme promises an evening of runway-worthy fashion, elegant décor, and a vibrant program celebrating Promise Scholars and community supporters. Guests will enjoy a spirited fashion show, meaningful student stories, and opportunities to directly invest in the futures of local youth.

Tickets go on sale this month, and sponsorship opportunities are available now. Whether you attend, sponsor, or simply help spread the word, your involvement creates brighter futures and strengthens our community for generations to come.

Scan the QR code to learn more about the **gala**.



Photo by San Jacinto College



**LIVE UP TO
YOUR PROMISE!**

PROMISE @ SAN JAC SCHOLARSHIP

BY FEB. 28, 2026:

Complete the Promise pledge and apply to San Jacinto College.

BY APRIL 30, 2026:

Complete and submit the FAFSA.

BY JUNE 30, 2026:

Complete all enrollment steps and register for fall classes.



**SCAN TO
LEARN
MORE**

**SAN JACINTO
COLLEGE**

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HOW KAYLIN NELSON FOUND CONFIDENCE AND A CAREER IN PROCESS TECHNOLOGY

By **Melissa Trevizo**
SAN JACINTO COLLEGE

For years, San Jacinto College process technology student Kaylin Nelson did what she thought she was supposed to do. She worked two jobs, pursued a nursing degree, raised her two young daughters, and kept pushing forward.

It took a divorce to make her stop and ask a question she'd been avoiding: Was this what she wanted or just what she thought she should want?

"I thought, 'You know what? I don't know that I want to do nursing,'" Nelson said. "I needed to figure out what I wanted for myself."

The Deer Park native started at San Jac as a dual credit student. She earned a life science associate degree from San Jac in 2021 and a business degree the next year with all the credits she'd accrued. But it wasn't until someone suggested process technology that she found her calling.

"I never thought that as a female I could go into that kind of work," she said. "I thought it was only a man's world. There's no place for me out there."

Her best friend's father had worked at a chemical plant, so Nelson knew the money and lifestyle were there. As she prepared for life as a single

mother, she needed a career that could provide for her kids.

Last fall, she enrolled in San Jac's process technology program. Her confidence grew during her second semester in equipment class when she experienced the 8,000-square-foot glycol plant at the LyondellBasell Center for Petrochemical, Energy, & Technology, also known as CPET.

"I realized I was picking it up really fast," Nelson said. "People were asking me questions, and I was helping other students."

As Nelson gained confidence, she started volunteering for outreach events. One trip took her to work with high school girls, teaching them how to break lines — a hands-on introduction to the skills operators use in the field.

"It was really cool to show these girls career paths beyond nursing and teaching. To show them they have options in the trades," she said.

The experience resonated with Nelson, and that passion led her to become vice president of the process technology club and start a GroupMe for women in the program.

"It can be intimidating," she said. "We hop on and chat if we need anything or want to ask questions without being judged. They can encourage each other there."

Nelson attended the 2025

CPET career fair with a mission: land a full-time job before graduation. She arrived early to help set up, networking with company representatives as they prepared their booths.

One recruiter from Linde introduced her to plant colleagues. Later during the fair, as she was networking and sharing her resume, he approached her again.

"I told him I was talking to other companies but that Linde was my top choice," Nelson said. "I wanted him to know where I stood."

About a week later, she got a call inviting her to tour the Linde plant. The company created two new positions for CPET students, one specifically for Nelson.

She started her new role two weeks before graduation. She now works as a nitrogen loader, moving tanks and trailers around the property, with plans to eventually work her way up to an operator.

Getting to this point meant balancing full-time work, full-time in-person classes, and raising two daughters alone. Summer classes were especially intense: six hours a day, three days in a row.

"I had to have friends and family watch the kids," Nelson said. "I explained to my girls that I am doing this for us. I have to go to class. I have to put my all into it."



Photo courtesy of Kaylin Nelson

Nelson graduated in December, and for the first time in three degrees, she walked across the stage.

As for her long-term goals, Nelson wants to be more than just an operator. She hopes to work in industry outreach, bringing opportunities to students who might not know this path exists.

"I want to give back," she said. "I'll take opportunities as they come. I mean, it's led me here."

Scan the QR code to learn more about the **process technology program**.



Photo by Melissa Trevizo, San Jacinto College

STUDENT FINDS INSPIRATION IN SAN JAC'S BIOMANUFACTURING TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM

By **Neesha Hosein**
SAN JACINTO COLLEGE

Christopher Soza chose psychology because it felt like the surest way to do what mattered most to him — help people.

“I learned about San Jac in Dobie High School and became a Promise Scholar, which made it possible to start college right after graduation,” Soza said. “I was set on becoming a psychiatrist, ready to spend at least 12 years in school.”

Then a random encounter at an event at the San Jacinto College South Campus sent him in an unexpected direction.

One afternoon after a tough biology lab practical, he headed downstairs in the science and allied health building, where a career fair was underway.

“I saw lots of tables with pharmaceuticals, physics, and just a bunch of different stuff,” Soza said. “I noticed biotech was the only one that wasn’t busy or as flashy as the others, except for a mannequin dressed up in lab gear.”

When Soza approached the table, Dr. Nicole Bradley, biotechnology program director, was ready to answer his first question: What is biotechnology?

After getting his first glimpse into the field and a flyer about one of the San Jac’s newest programs, Soza was intrigued.

“I went home and Googled ‘What is biotech? What does biotech include? What are the benefits for me?’” he said. “I learned that it is a rising field, which means more job opportunities are opening up.”

Soza was excited to learn that biotechnology offered a way to join the medical field and learn science much faster than his original major. Better yet, he could do so without direct patient care and still fulfil his dream of improving the lives of others.

“I realized it’s behind-the-scenes work, and that was appealing,” Soza said. “They make medicine for people. It’s cell and

gene therapy, vaccine development, tumor and cancer research, and I realized this is something I really want to do because this work is extremely important.”

Life-changing decision

Within two weeks, after a follow-up meeting with Bradley and biotechnology instructor Kevin Rodriguez, Soza decided to change his major and join the program’s first cohort.

“Everything is a little different from your typical biology lab or normal science class,” he said. “But you’re getting hands-on experience, which they told us is the equivalent to industry-level training.”

Students learn amino acids, peptides and pH balance — familiar chemistry concepts Soza always enjoyed — and the instructors simplify the material, making it easy to understand.

They also learn to use industry-specific equipment like biological safety cabinets, micropipettes, bioreactors, and roller machines, along with strict aseptic techniques and contamination control.

That part surprised Soza.

“I learned how easily something can get contaminated and compromise products,” he said. “Imagine ruining a cure for someone or a drug, making it not as strong or potentially harmful.”

Professors are great motivators

For Soza, the faculty have helped make a new field seem doable.

“Dr. Bradley, she’s amazing,” he said. “She engages with everybody in the classroom and makes sure we’re understanding all the material. She breaks down all the technical information and keeps the point clear.”

Soza appreciates how Rodriguez, a San Jac graduate himself, keeps the lab environment upbeat.

“He makes labs so much fun, a lot less stressful,” Soza said. “He makes it seem

exciting. He really cares about all of us and whether we’re learning. It’s comforting to know he’s been in our shoes, and he knows how to approach teaching from a student’s perspective.”

The future looks promising

On track to graduate in spring 2026, Soza is already looking ahead to industry opportunities.

“I already have a potential internship lined up,” he said. “I’m excited about it and eager to use all the stuff I’ve learned in the

program in the real world.”

Whether he ever circles back to psychology or keeps moving forward in biotech, Soza said San Jac helped him find a path that feels right.

“I’m excited about the future, knowing I’ll be helping others in a way that really matters,” he said.

Scan the QR code to learn more about San Jac’s

biotechnology program.



Photo by Neesha Hosein, San Jacinto College

A CLINICAL ROTATION THAT SPARKED WEDDING BELLS

By Courtney Morris
SAN JACINTO COLLEGE

Lisa Brown wasn't expecting to meet her future husband when she started her first clinical rotation at Pasadena's Southmore Hospital.

The 27-year-old San Jacinto College respiratory care student was shadowing Jimmy Brown, a "sweet and cute" respiratory therapist.

Both expected a straightforward mentoring relationship, but like all good love stories, life would surprise them both.

San Jac start Jimmy and Lisa's paths began years apart at San Jac.

After too many sweltering summers in the construction industry, Jimmy, a single dad, turned to the College's respiratory care program in 1989 for a better career.

Seven years later, Lisa followed. A newly single mom of three, she wanted a career that offered stability and meaning. When her 3-year-old daughter was hospitalized with croup, she had watched respiratory therapists at work — skilled, calm, compassionate — and could see herself doing the same.

At San Jac, both found a rigorous program centered on hands-on learning. Instructor Larry Vandiver, known as "MacGyver," pushed students to diagnose problems fast. Was it a ventilator problem or patient issue?

"You don't have a lot of time to figure that out when you're dealing with critical patients," Jimmy said.

The program prepared them well. What it didn't prepare them for was a surprising turn of events.

Match in the making When Jimmy and Lisa met during the clinical rotation, they both felt sparks. Although mentoring came first, their relationship would soon deepen.

Just months after the clinical rotation, Lisa showed up at Southmore Hospital to visit her mom, a nurse there, and to look for Jimmy.

"I thought he was cute," she said. "Everyone was teasing him that I came up there because I liked him."

They traded numbers, and soon marathon phone conversations turned into dates. In November 1997 — six months after exchanging numbers — they were exchanging vows.

"What attracted me to Jimmy was he was sweet, a nice guy," Lisa said. "He had primary care in raising his daughter. He was hard-working, and everyone liked him."

"I also looked better 30 years ago," Jimmy added, laughing.

With "I do," the two respiratory therapists blended families, careers, and lives.

Evolving careers Change was a constant in the years ahead, but so was their commitment to each other.

"It's helped in a lot of ways being in the same field [as Jimmy]," Lisa said. "We could work our schedules around each other and share the good and the bad of our jobs."

While Jimmy worked in critical care, intensive care, and emergency settings before shifting to pediatrics, Lisa worked across adult care, pediatrics, and neonatal intensive care.

Right before COVID, Jimmy was serving as the lead therapist at Bayshore Hospital, a role he'd held for 15 years. The pandemic stretched him to his limits, though, so when transfers were allowed again, he moved to the Woman's Hospital of Texas, where Lisa worked.

Working with newborns to teens, Jimmy leaned on experience to calm anxious parents.

"Parents are just scared," he said. "I'm good about communicating with them, letting them know what's happening."

Lisa developed deep bonds with neonatal intensive care families, walking alongside them from life-threatening moments all the way to graduation ceremonies when their babies were released from the hospital.

"I would connect on a personal level with family and parents," she said. "You fall in love with them."

Now retired from the hospital, she works with senior patients in pulmonary rehab.



Photo by Courtney Morris, San Jacinto College

Family legacy Jimmy and Lisa's shared passion for respiratory therapy influenced their daughter Sarah Reilly to follow in their footsteps.

After graduating from San Jac's program, Reilly worked with her parents at the Woman's Hospital of Texas. Today, she also teaches at San Jac as an adjunct.

"It's been such a privilege to work with them," she said. "They've been a positive influence not only with me but many others as well."

Lives shaped by San Jac Jimmy and Lisa credit San Jac — and respiratory care — for reshaping their futures.

"I've never regretted my decision to do respiratory care," Lisa said.

She calls meeting Jimmy "divine intervention." Coming out of a painful divorce, she never expected to find someone so steady.

"We understand each other and love each other," she said.

Jimmy agrees.

"Early in our marriage, we had some hiccups," he said. "Once you get past that, you look at marriage differently. You realize you're together. Then you realize you want to be together."

Scan the QR code to learn more about San Jac's **respiratory care program**.



Sarah Reilly with her parents Lisa and Jimmy Brown (photo courtesy of the Browns)

THIS MONTH *IN* SOCIAL MEDIA



Facebook

Chad Burke, President and CEO of the Economic Alliance Houston Port Region, has been appointed by the San Jacinto College Board of Trustees to fill Trustee Position 5. The Board of Trustees voted on Monday, Nov. 3, to appoint Burke to fill the unexpired portion of the current term for the position vacated by the late John Moon, Jr.



110 Reactions | 14 Comments

11,130 Impressions | 379 Engagements

IMPORTANT DATES IN DECEMBER 2025

Dec. 4	Payment Deadline for Winter Mini 2025
Dec. 5	Late Start (13B) and Third Five-Week (5C) Classes End
Dec. 6-7	Banner Maintenance (SOS Unavailable)
Dec. 7	Thirteen-Week Weekend Full-Term (1W) and Seven-Week Weekend (7BS) Classes End
Dec. 12	Full Semester, Second 12-Week (12B), Ten-Week (10), Second Eight-Week (8B), Fourth Four-Week (4D) Classes End
Dec. 12	College-Wide Commencement
Dec. 15	Winter Mini Term Classes Begin
Dec. 22-Jan. 1	Winter Holidays – Admin. Offices Closed
Dec. 25	Winter Mini Holiday (No Classes Held)

Instagram

View all important dates and deadlines:
<https://www.sanjac.edu/academic-calendar>



233 Likes | 19,412 Impressions | 287 Engagements

LinkedIn

 November is National Career Development Month!

It's the perfect time to focus on your goals and take the next step toward the career you want. Our bachelor's degree programs are built to help you grow, level up, and move forward with confidence.



30 Reactions | 113 Post-Link Clicks

3,525 Impressions | 149 Engagements



CONTINUE YOUR JOURNEY

BACHELOR'S DEGREES

With a bachelor's degree from San Jacinto College, you can land a high-wage job or advance in your current career.

Bachelor of Science in Nursing

Bachelor of Applied Science in Education
Emphasis in Early Childhood Education

Bachelor of Applied Technology in IT
Emphasis in Cybersecurity

Bachelor of Applied Technology in Logistics and Supply Chain Management

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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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sanjac.edu/online

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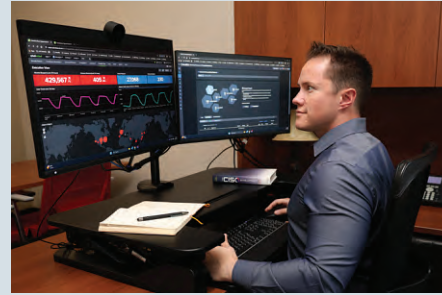
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VISION & MISSION



Vision — Together with our community members and business and industry partners, San Jacinto College sets the standard for educational excellence, economic growth, and social mobility characterized by innovation and responsiveness.

Mission — We change lives through education, community engagement, and partnerships.

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 ranked second in the nation among more than 1,100 community colleges, as designated by the Aspen Institute and was named an Achieving the Dream Leader College of Distinction in 2020. As a Hispanic-Serving Institution that spans five campuses, plus an online college, San Jacinto College serves approximately 45,000 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+ by Standard & Poor's and Aa2 by Moody's.

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