President’s Letter

It’s an exciting time for Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. As the new year approaches, we have a lot of “new” at the Island University: a new strategic plan for our Islanders Athletics; a new Vice President for Enrollment Management; new degree programs in civil and industrial engineering; a new building in downtown Corpus Christi; and a new, internationally-recognized faculty fellow honored with a Guggenheim Fellowship, to name a few. And with these new points of pride, we continue to build on the legacy of making an Islander Impact—distributing grant funds to our students who are still affected by Hurricane Harvey, leading oyster aquaculture advances at the local, state and national level, and earning innovative recognition for Corpus Christi as the only location in the nation for simultaneous manned and unmanned drone testing by NASA with our researchers and our students in the center of it all.

As you turn the pages of this issue, you will read about pride in our traditions, pride in our culture, pride for our alumni, and pride in our legacy. I hope you’ll be inspired by our achievements and our bold new initiatives, but please know that none of these achievements or initiatives are possible without the incredible teamwork of our students, faculty, staff, alumni, supporters, and donors.

Together, we are achieving incredible things. Together, we are making an Islander Impact!

With deepest gratitude,

Kelly Miller Quintanilla, Ph.D.
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Jennifer Garza-Cuen, who joined Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi’s art faculty in 2016, has been awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship by the Board of Trustees of the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. She is one of only 12 photographers in North America to receive the prestigious honor.

Garza-Cuen’s most recent series, "Imagining America," includes sweeping images, shot mostly in large format, of six towns where she either has lived or has family ties. She says she worked on the project for almost 10 years and that it calls into question the idea of geographic origin being central to a person’s identity: “One of my ques-
tions is, if we’re such a mobile society, then what does being ‘of a place’ mean?”

The highly coveted fellowship offers up to 12 months of support for Garza-Cuen’s work in photography. She says she will use the grant to visually document the trajectory of her family’s multigenerational migrations, as well as the two cities where each side of her family settled—El Paso, Texas, and Juneau, Alaska.

The Guggenheim Fellowship program was established in 1925 by former U.S. Senator and Mrs. Simon Guggenheim, in memory of their son, John, who died at 17. Since then, the Foundation has awarded more than $360 million to more than 18,000 artists. The list of Guggenheim Fellows includes Nobel Prize laureates, Fields Medalists, and Pulitzer Prize winners, and Foundation President Edward Hirsch says that those who are selected following the grueling application process “represent the best of the best.”

In addition to this latest honor and other numerous awards, Garza-Cuen recently completed a residency at the Robert Rauschenberg Residency in Florida and also has received fellowships to attend residencies at Light Work, Ucross, Oxbow, Brush Creek, and the Vermont Studio Center.
Andy Benoit should have been an educational statistic, faced as he was with many obstacles throughout the course of his academic career. A first-generation college student, neither of his parents spoke English when they started school. With the odds stacked against him, it would have been no surprise if he had dropped out of school a long time ago.

But Benoit had a few surprises of his own tucked away, and this year, he celebrates his 25th academic year in the business. While not fluent in English, those parents were fluent in work ethic, and they taught their son to pour his heart and soul into everything he did. When he began his college career at McNeese State University, he had his sights set on law school and politics, but dean of students Louis Riviere changed all that. He impressed Benoit and mentored him, teaching him the value of service to students; Benoit was hooked, and he was determined to pour his energies into serving the students and leaders of tomorrow. “Throughout my career, the service to students has sustained me, and it’s what has driven me,” he said. Helping Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi reach its potential through serving its students is his number one priority.

Benoit’s first-year goals are all about growth—growth of the student population and growth in the student population. “We have an extraordinary University that has a lot to offer students both in and outside of the classroom. Our efforts will be to help the University become a destination and concentrate on welcoming students who will come to the Island University and thrive.” He aims to grow the class of first-year Islanders, as well as increasing TAMU-CC’s number of transfer institution agreements and transfer populations. He has a plan to increase extended learning opportunities in the Coastal Bend, throughout Texas, and beyond into the surrounding states. He also intends to partner with alumni to extend the reach of the Island University far beyond its shoreline to every area of the country.

Benoit is well-equipped to undertake such an ambitious endeavor. Two years after Hurricane Katrina hit, he began working at the University of New Orleans (UNO) as Director of the Office of Admissions. Under his direction, the Admissions Office facilitated a 39% increase in freshman enrollment from fall 2007 to fall 2009 and transfer enrollment growth of 28% from fall 2007 to fall 2011. During this time, UNO sustained its enrollment to over 10,200 students when it had fallen dramatically after the storm. In his spare time at UNO, he started a college football team from scratch—with no existing equipment or players. Three years after its inception, he coached the team to a national championship at the club level.

His greatest impact would come in his service at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette where he directed growth efforts that saw the university reach its largest overall enrollment in 2014 and 2015, supported by the largest freshman class in the institu-
tion’s history of nearly 3,200 students in 2015. Following the success at UL Lafayette, Benoit served as Vice President for Enrollment & Access Management at Lander University in South Carolina where he led the institution to the largest enrollment in the 147-year history of the university for fall 2019 and successive years of enrollment growth from 2016 through 2019. In three concurrent years from 2017 to 2019, the university enrolled the largest freshman classes in its history.

Our new VP for Enrollment Management is a hands-on administrator with a green thumb for growth. He is committed to training and developing staff members to reach their potential so TAMU-CC can serve not only its students, but also the community-at-large. It’s exciting to ponder where he will have the Islander team in three years.
Only on the tennis court does love mean nothing. Off the court, love is the key ingredient which fuels the passion of Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi’s director of athletics Jon Palumbo: love for sports, student athletes, and the community. All three can be combined, he believes, in a campaign that will team up the Islanders with the community and have everyone winning in no time. For Jon, it began as he watched his father—a blue-collar, small-business owner—lead Bowie State University to a conference championship in 1996 as a part-time baseball coach. Jon’s subsequent experience in playing collegiate ball and then helping lead the athletics program at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU)
to sustained success as a mid-major breakthrough (where the VCU Rams became the city of Richmond’s own team) make him uniquely qualified to transform the athletics’ culture at TAMU-CC.

This new strategic plan is a guide of things to come, as well as a celebration of things we already see happening that are pushing this program forward in new and exciting ways. You may have read about the memorable legacy of the Islanders Athletics program in our last issue. And we continue to build on that success. Our new Islander Pavilion at Water’s Edge Park is a beautiful location that athletes and community members alike can enjoy and utilize. This goes hand-in-hand with the increased number of volunteer hours our student athletes are providing the Coastal Bend each year, reinforcing that the Islanders are “Your Team.” Your Islanders Women’s Cross Country and Islanders Men’s Tennis teams both brought home championships in the Southland Conference this past year. It’s no surprise this makes the 25th Southland Championship for the tennis program at A&M-CC.

While our student athletes are achieving great things on the court, field, and track, they’re also demanding excellence in the classroom. Student athletes have achieved a cumulative GPA above a 3.0 for the 11th consecutive semester. The Islander University has a lot to cheer for when it comes to the hard work of its athletics program, but no group cheers louder than our newly-created student section – “The Deep End.” This electric group of students supporting their peers as they compete in sports is exactly what being an Islander is all about, and their excitement ripples throughout campus.

The waves of this bold new strategic plan have already begun reverberating into the community, with student athletes now more engaged in volunteerism and service than ever before. There is no doubt that many are going to start feeling the love very quickly. And that’s something that can spill over . . . even onto the tennis court.

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**HIGH SURF ADVISORY**

**PALUMBO’S FIVE-YEAR PLAN ADDRESSES:**

**Winning** championships and tournaments

**Academic** success and athlete retention

**Viability** from a financial standpoint

**Engagement** of the campus and community

**Student-athlete** wellbeing and performance
The Engineering Department is busy finalizing the launch of our new civil engineering and industrial engineering programs, slated to begin in the fall of 2020. With the introduction of these new degree paths, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi is poised to become a premier university for engineering studies, serving not only the students who entrust their education to the Island University, but also to the booming coastal community that generously supports our academic mission.

“In addition to core curricula of civil engineering and industrial engineering, the proposed engineering programs at the Island University will offer certificate programs in coastal resiliency with civil engineering perspectives, and in autonomous mobility with industrial engineering perspectives,” said Dr. L. D. Chen, Director of the School of Engineering and Computing Sciences at A&M-Corpus Christi. “These are unique opportunities for students enrolled in the civil or industrial engineering program. The students will be able to earn certificate program credentials while working toward their bachelor’s degrees.”

Over the past several years, there have been many changes to our nation’s energy infrastructure. As a result, the Port of Corpus Christi has become the number one crude oil export port in the nation, and this is creating a regional demand for engineers—particularly, engineers that are invested in South Texas. This puts A&M-CC in a unique (and exciting) position, for our Department of Engineering is expanding at just the right time to be able to meet this burgeoning need.
**U.S. News & World Report** has ranked A&M-Corpus Christi as one of the best engineering programs of its type in Texas, and it’s easy to see why. The approval of the two new programs broadens the Island University’s engineering program to five undergraduate majors. Accredited mechanical engineering, electrical engineering and mechanical engineering technology degree programs are in place, and 483 degrees have been awarded since the programs’ inception. Since the programs began a decade ago, we have graduated hundreds of mechanical engineers, 80% of whom are employed either locally or within the state of Texas. We have recently graduated the first students from our electrical engineering program, which began in 2015, 75% of whom are employed locally. In addition to this, TAMU-CC graduates *three times* the national average of Hispanic engineering students, which adds further distinction to our illustrious program.

The Corpus Christi Business & Job Development Corporation (Type A Board) and the Texas Legislature were both strong supporters of electrical and mechanical engineering, which allowed A&M-Corpus Christi to launch both programs and raise over $4 million in endowed scholarships for engineering students. The newly-approved civil and industrial engineering programs have received more than $4.3 million of support. Specifically, we have received $2 million in Type A funds for facilities and capital expenditures, as well as $2.3 million from the Texas Legislature, which will enable staffing the departments with outstanding civil and industrial engineering faculty. With such generous and forward-looking support, we are confident that TAMU-CC is poised to engineer a bright future—both on this Island and beyond.
It was Homecoming 1964, and the University of Corpus Christi (UCC) Homecoming Parade was making its way down Chaparral Street to the cheers of Corpus Christi citizens. An onlooker snapped a photo of the sophomore float, which ended up winning second place in the parade, as it passed by the J.C. Penney building. Little did they know that 55 years later, this very location would be the site for the Island University’s newest expansion into downtown Corpus Christi. This expansion was made possible thanks to Ernest “Buz” and Janet Maxwell, former building owners, who shared a vision of A&M-Corpus Christi helping to strengthen the downtown area. This building is over 70 years old and has survived a record six hurricanes. And it’s still standing strong, just like the Island University.

A year after that Homecoming parade photo was snapped, in the summer of 1965, Dick Tracy stepped out of a bus at the downtown Corpus Christi Greyhound station and made his way to the University of Corpus Christi. A bright, young scholar and future mayor of Hudson, New York, Tracy had come from...
the Empire State because there was something irresistible about the little, private university on Ward Island:
“There was something about the campus that had a magic effect on me that kept me wanting to come back,” he said. “We could’ve gone to other colleges closer to home, but it was some kind of magic that brought us back.”

Tracy, who graduated in 1971, says the University of Corpus Christi was a close-knit community where students who couldn’t always make it back home for the holidays became close and often celebrated together. But five years later, in 1970, Hurricane Celia made landfall, damaging the campus to such an extent that the school could not afford to rebuild.

When administrators approached the Texas Legislature for financial assistance to rebuild, a plan was approved to sell the school to the State, becoming a branch of Texas A&I University in 1973. That was the year Jackie Hannebaum, a now-retired elementary school teacher, graduated. She, like Tracy, recalls the same tight-knit closeness on campus, adding that then-president Dr. Kenneth Maroney would often invite students over to his house for hamburgers on Sunday nights, when dinner wasn’t served in the cafeteria.

Hannebaum, who is very active in the Islander Alumni Association, says she still thinks of the University with pride: “When local kids tell me that they are going out of the city to study, I say, ‘That’s silly. Stay here.’”

After UCC was sold to the State, it remained Texas A&I University at Corpus Christi (A&I) for a few years; then, in 1977, the University System of South Texas was created, and the University on Ward Island changed its name to Corpus Christi State University (CCSU), a title it retained for 12 years. In 1989, the University System of South Texas joined the Texas A&M University System and subsequently changed its moniker again to its current title: Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi (TAMU-CC).

Catherine Lutz, a Senior HR Manager with Cintas Corporation who graduated in 1995, says changing the name was a big deal: “When I started, it was CCSU, and by the time I got my degree, it had switched to TAMU-CC. I remember all the buzz about the name changing—having the name A&M tied to it and being part of the Texas A&M system brought with it all the branding and recognition.”

Lutz, who still carries a piece of TAMU-CC with her everywhere she goes in the form of her diploma cards, says that the family atmosphere on campus made the college experience memorable. She even recalled her favorite professor,

—continued on next page—
who is now the president of the University: “Kelly Miller Quintanilla was my favorite. I took a communication class with her. I just loved her enthusiasm and passion.”

It’s no secret that maintaining a staff of top-notch, highly qualified professors is one of the key reasons the Island University has thrived over the years, even in the midst of so many changes. Dr. Sandra Clement ’95, Executive Director for School Leadership at Corpus Christi Independent School District, noted that the support of University faculty was one of the main reasons she was successful as a first-generation college student. “I was able to achieve what many children of immigrant families thought was too hard to achieve,” she said, adding that three of her six children have now also attended and graduated from TAMU-CC.

Through her work, she continues to encourage scholars of all ages to pursue their dreams of higher education: “Embrace the challenge, make strong relationships with professors and students, and when it gets tough, don’t give up. Push yourself; ride that ‘Islander Wave.’ You will come out on top.”

The British poet John Donne once penned, “No man is an island.” This means, to a certain extent, that everyone needs someone else; nobody can live and thrive as an isolated entity. And the same is true of this Island University—we need you! According to Russell Wagner ’08, Executive Director for Alumni Relations, and the entire Islander administrative team, whether you were here when we were called UCC, A&I, CCSU, or TAMU-CC, you are a vital part of the continuing verve and vigor of this place, and we are eager to celebrate your place in our illustrious and diverse history.

That’s why, beginning this year at Homecoming, we are going to celebrate our first-ever Reunion Classes, starting with the Class of 1995, as well as a class reunion for all UCC alumni. As we reach back to connect to the legacy-makers of the past and reach forward to connect to the prospective scholars of the future, we hope you’ll bask in a sense of pride for the Island University that has weathered so many changes while remaining true to its heart of academic excellence and service.

It may be true that you can’t be an island, but you can be an Islander Forever!
We sat down with four alumni who attended Island University in different eras—Dick Tracy ’71, Jackie Hannebaum ’73, Catherine Lutz ’95 and Dr. Sandra Clement ’95—and asked them to reminisce and reflect on their experiences.

**BEST MEMORY**

Lots of campus activities, contests, and intramural sports. We were always busy.—DT

A summer course I took with Michael Moody, who opened our minds to service. He turned us into a family that summer.—SC

My freshman year, our basketball team went to an NAIA for small colleges. It was so neat being with a thousand other students.—JH

**FAVORITE SPOT ON CAMPUS**

I recall a beautiful, large tree near the library. It was a very relaxing place to decompress.—CL

I loved going to the Student Union building (now the Glasscock Center). There was a very cool tarpon above the fireplace.—JH

The library (now the Student Services Center). It was so pleasant to sit on the second floor and look out over the bay and the city.—DT

**ADVICE TO CURRENT ISLANDERS**

Stick with it. When it gets tough, don’t let go. You can do it.—JH

Enjoy the moment. Appreciate what is being offered and take advantage of it. I don’t think you can find much better than A&M-Corpus Christi. It’s a great place to get an education.—DT

College is an investment in yourself, and everybody is worthy of that investment. Don’t give up!—CL
Nights and days came and passed
and summer and winter
and the rain
And it was good to be a little Island
A part of the world
and a world of its own
all surrounded by the bright blue sea

MARGARET WISE BROWN
During the 86th Texas legislative session, *House Bill 1300*, sponsored by State Representative Todd Hunter, was passed, allowing the state to implement a program aimed at reinvigorating the cultivated oyster industry in Texas coastal waters. The legislation took effect September 1.

Shortly after passage of the bill, legislators, state officials, researchers, and restaurant industry leaders gathered at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi for the highly anticipated *Texas Oyster Aquaculture Summit—A New Industry for Texas*, hosted by State Representative Todd Hunter. The one-day summit was held on July 10, and attendees were treated to a host of presentations on topics such as the history and status of U.S. oyster aquaculture, legislation and regulatory environment, and perspectives on oyster culture. Of course, there was also oyster taste-testing.

Since the new law went into effect, TAMU-CC has emerged as an epicenter of the research, expertise, and education that will be necessary to support the development of the environment and workforce for this new undertaking. Many of our own Island University faculty sat on the summit’s expert panels or were involved in the presentations. Presenters included Dr. Jennifer Pollack, Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies (HRI) Chair for Coastal Conservation & Restoration and Dr. John Scarpa, Associate Professor of Aquaculture. Pollack and Scarpa have received Texas Sea Grant awards for their research.
focusing on oyster reef restoration. Their ongoing research will have a vital impact on the trajectory of this industry’s revitalization.

In addition, Dr. Joe Fox, the HRI Chair for Marine Resources Development and Professor of Mariculture, Environmental Science, Coastal & Marine System Science, has recently secured $750,000 funding for three new, related projects: two oyster hatcheries and a demonstration project. In addition to conducting vital research, these facilities will help support and train a new workforce to meet demand.

Richard Lomax, president of WaterStreet Restaurants, is sure the new oysters will be well-received by his customers, saying, “We like to eat Texas beef, we like to drink Texas wine, and we want Texas seafood.” They won’t have to wait long. Texas oysters are expected to begin making their way to the dinner tray by spring 2021.
UFOs*  
OVER CORPUS CHRISTI

At the end of August, the skies over Corpus Christi were suddenly filled with an uncommon sight—strange, robotic-looking aircraft. No, we hadn’t suddenly been transported to Area 51 in southern Nevada, and neither were the aircraft being piloted by aliens; there were no onboard pilots at all! Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Lone Star UAS Center of Excellence & Innovation, in conjunction with NASA’s Ames Research Center, was completing an exciting project five years in the making: testing and demonstrating a prototype Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) Traffic Management (UTM) system.

The project brought together seven UTM service suppliers, eight small UAS, and included the integration of small UAS technologies developed by NASA, industry, and faculty at both TAMU-CC and University of North Texas. The Island University was awarded $2.25 million by NASA in February to complete this project and was one of only two sites in the country selected for testing.

Even as recently as five years ago, drones were only being tested in rural areas where there were hardly any people. Now, as technology has advanced and many companies are eager to utilize drones for business, the FAA has been working toward safely integrating UAS into national airspace and urban areas. Market research suggests that, in the next 10 years, there will be upwards of one million drones operating in the airspace, with the sky literally being the limit on their potential use and impact—as package delivery systems, bridge or pipeline inspection devices, and even remotely-piloted air taxis.

The two-week testing event in August focused on drone communication, collision avoidance, safe landing, and safety in an urban landscape. These, and other relevant issues, are crucial to allow commercial drone companies to understand the opportunities and challenges posed by flying in a complex, multi-layered, and changing environment.

Flight crews were composed of Lone Star UAS staff, contractors, and students, with almost two dozen students participating during the peak of testing. There was also extensive municipal support, including more than two dozen police officers, two fire department flight crews, three dozen test range personnel, and the coordinated closure of many parks and streets. This crucial support helped TAMU-CC and NASA conduct 216 live flights involving 559 live operations and 1,179 simulated operations. A final report containing over nine million data models was submitted to NASA on September 30.

As we head into a future where drones are no longer simply “on the horizon,” TAMU-CC is flying high; the Island University was recently named one of the 10 best places in the country to study unmanned aircraft systems.
1,000,000
the number of drones expected to be operating in U.S. airspace within the next 10 years
helping out

AFTER HARVEY

Ensuring education isn’t blown away by the winds of change.

It’s been more than two years since Hurricane Harvey blew into the lives of South Texans, but in many ways, the recovery process is still ongoing. This isn’t surprising, considering Harvey began as a horrific wind event as it made landfall, quickly becoming an unprecedented 1,000-year flood event, with two feet of rain falling in the first 24 hours.

When a hurricane hits, most people think of the immediate damage that can be caused to homes, cars, animals, and people. But often, after the storm has moved on, damage appears in other ways—communities altered because residents don’t return, companies changed because the demand for jobs and commodities has shifted, and students’ dreams curtailed because the sudden loss of housing or employment has made a return to school implausible. This was the case at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, as more than 100 Islanders were unable to return to school following the storm.

Many hands reached out to offer help, including the Rebuild Texas Fund and the Qatar Harvey Fund. Through their generous support, TAMU-CC awarded more than $173,000 in scholarships to 131 hurricane-affected students during the fall 2019 semester, with additional grants to be awarded during the spring 2020 semester.

In order to most effectively utilize the grant monies received, the University em-
ployed a thorough, three-tiered process to identify qualified students and determine the amount each would receive. The process brought students and administrators closer together as the students shared stories of the ordeals they faced and the rebuilding process in which they were engaged. “It was inspiring not only to hear their stories, but to hear how much they focused on the needs of others, often minimizing their own losses if it meant someone else would receive assistance,” said Ann DeGaish, Associate Vice President for Student Engagement and Success & Dean of Students, who oversaw the implementation of the application and awarding process.

TAMU-CC is grateful for the generous help provided by the Rebuild Texas Fund and the Qatar Harvey Fund to our worthy scholars. Their resilience in the face of catastrophe and continued commitment to their education makes us proud to call them Islanders.
"It was inspiring to hear how much [the impacted students] focused on the needs of others."

ANN DEGAISH
DEAN OF STUDENTS
On September 20, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi held its first *Las Muralistas* Community Painting Event, where members of the community were invited to participate in painting a mural which had been designed by three Islander alums—Mayra Zamora ’10, ’14; Sandra Gonzalez ’11; and Monica Marie Garcia ’11, ’14. “The mural was inspired by the scenery and beautiful sunsets at the University, the unique culture of Corpus Christi, and the bird of paradise,” said Garcia, who was commissioned by the University (along with Zamora and Gonzalez) to create the unpainted mural.

Once the design was complete, the women (who are known in the community and on social media as *Las Muralistas*) began to spread the word about the opportunity for others to help in the creation of the final masterpiece. “It is important for people to see the process of the mural creation,” Garcia said. “It takes a lot of teamwork to get this huge project going. It is not just one thing or one way; it is the process that is special, and it is part of something that will last a lifetime.”

Andrea Montalvo ’08, ’10, who chairs the Hispanic Heritage Month Committee, wanted to bring the experience to A&M-CC after watching *Las Muralistas* work on the large mural on the side of the YWCA building in Corpus Christi. “In order to complete this mural, they had several community painting days in which anyone could attend and help contribute to the mural. My daughter participated and had such a great time, which led me to think about bringing an event like this to campus.”

The mural was unveiled at a reception on September 27 as part of Hispanic Heritage Month. It is currently on display in the University Center, where the high amount of traffic and continuous accessibility will ensure it receives the most attention.

Garcia says she is grateful to the University, not only for helping her to achieve her dream of becoming a professional artist, but for allowing her the opportunity to give back to her alma mater in such a special way. Not only was the mural created by the community she loves, but she says it was “fully inspired by everything that is the Island.”

providing

MURAL SUPPORT

New artwork inspired by the Island University is a stroke of genius.
The Definition of Legacy

Alumni and donors work together to bring the Island University to the next generation.

When Celine Batt enrolled at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi this fall, she became a “legacy student” — a student who is not the first in his or her immediate family to attend the Island University. Celine is the granddaughter of Corpus Christi At-Large Councilman Rodolfo “Rudy” D. Garza, who graduated from Corpus Christi State University (CCSU) in 1989 and Melinda Garza, who graduated from TAMU-CC in 2014. After experiencing exceptional educational opportunities on the Island, both Rudy and Melinda were hoping Celine would become an Islander as well.

“I was praying that she would come to the Island University,” Melinda confessed. “As a grandparent, you don’t want to overwhelm your grandchildren with your knowledge. Since Rudy and I were both graduates from the University, and knowing all the benefits she would have from attending here, we tried to step back and allow her to make a decision. And she made the right one!” Melinda added that she hopes Celine will take full advantage of the school’s resources—technology, staff, and social opportunities—to assist her in reaching her goals.

The Island University has always been adept at offering flexible resources for its students. Rudy remembered that, even though he was working and had a family, “the school had such great offerings for working students. I had no trouble getting classes in the evening to keep me on track. I even graduated a semester early, thanks to the accommodating course offerings.” Rudy attributes the advances in his career in management to the skills he learned in his courses, which he developed and applied in the workplace at both Lambda and Sunbeam. When Lambda was acquired by Simtek, Rudy was recruited back to the company for his superior skill set and former knowledge. He remained there until his retirement in 2001. He currently owns and operates Garza Rentals, which specializes in home and apartment rentals. He was elected to the Corpus Christi City Council in 2012. Just as he served his employers and colleagues with his work ethic and knowledge, he serves the people of his community and provides a voice for them through his work on City Council. When asked what he loves most about serving on City Council, he said, “I love being able to make an impact. You can’t fix everything, but you fix what you can.”

More than 20 years after Rudy attended CCSU, when Melinda was pursuing her degree in management, she discovered that her academic program was not only accredited, providing the highest quality in
learning, but also flexible with many online options. “When I was studying, I took summer classes every year,” she said, “even while traveling for vacation. It was nice to never have to choose between one or the other.”

The Garzas believe that it is the commitment to high-quality learning opportunities coupled with a student-success focus that keeps TAMU-CC at the top of the list for legacy students. Alumni are eager for their children and grandchildren to experience all that the Island University has to offer. Additionally, they are excited to see how much A&M-CC has grown in size, course offerings, traditions, and more with each passing year.

“In terms of the facilities we had back in the day, I was grateful for them,” said Rudy, “but I see the University doing such great things now and expanding facilities and tools for faculty to share with students. It’s so cutting edge with the research from HRI (Harte Research Institute), the environmental sciences program, and the new engineering programs that provide great opportunities for our graduates. I hear they are being scooped up right after graduation to be hired by a line of people!”

But Celine’s experience as a legacy student does not end with her grandparents. Her education has also been impacted by the legacy created by Dr. Jessie Frances Neal, as Celine is one of the recipients of The Jessie Frances Neal Scholarship. This generous, endowed scholarship program annually supports five, full-time students pursuing a bachelor’s degree in business who have a minimum 3.0 cumulative grade point average.

Celine stated her favorite memory of A&M-CC so far is traveling to Laredo with the other new Neal scholarship recipients to meet Mrs. Neal for a luncheon. It was during this luncheon that Celine and her fellow Islanders shared with Mrs. Neal how much her support means to them and their families. “Everyone could see how much Mrs. Neal cares about all her scholars and believes in their dreams,” Celine said. “It is truly an honor to be part of the Neal scholar legacy.”

Our alumni and our donors, through their hard work and achievements, leave a legacy for future generations. This is just one example of the success that can be achieved when determination and quality education merge at just the right place. The Island University continues to thrive today, thanks to the commitments of the generations that have come before. Islanders have the privilege of standing on the shoulders of giants and are paving the way for legacies of their own with future generations.
A beautiful servant leaves behind a legacy of love.

CELEBRATING OUR FRIEND

Linda Benavides ’88, ’92

What can you say about a person like Linda? One need look no further than her name—“Linda” means beautiful, and “Benavides” means servant. And Linda’s life was definitely a life of beautiful service lived out to her family, her friends, and her Corpus Christi community. In fact, earlier this year, Linda was recognized as the 2019 Distinguished Alumnus for her service both to Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and the community-at-large.

Outside of her family, Linda’s two great passions were volunteerism and community service. She went above and beyond in all her endeavors, living out her belief that the best way to effect change was to become involved in the team or community and serve. She won friends and influenced people by her selfless and tireless devotion to the many groups she served, from the TAM-CC Foundation Board to the Westside Business Association to the United Corpus Christi Chamber of Commerce.

No matter where Linda went, she always worked to leave a place better than she found it. It’s no wonder, then, that she received many awards, including the Westside Business Association’s Community Leader Award in 2012 and CITGO’s Hispanic Heritage Honoree in 2016. She was listed in the Texas Monthly roundup of “Top Ten Philanthropists” shortly before creating the Rogelio “Roger” Benavides Chair in Engineering and Technology at A&M-Corpus Christi to honor her late husband.

There is no doubt that Linda’s passing will leave a hole in the fabric of our Island, but her legacy of education, service, and generosity will remain. Her memory will continue to inspire a new generation of Corpus Christians to roll up their sleeves and put in the hard work needed to achieve a better community for all.
Myrta Veach '59 retired from Lifeway Christian Resources. Veach graduated from Seminary in 1965 and served churches in Oklahoma and Texas as a youth minister before moving to Tennessee. the Drama Director and Speech and Debate coach for Worland High School in Wyoming. Dorn was voted Coach of the Year for his contributions to the state-recognized Worland drama team and speech team.

Transformational Principal in the U.S.

Jorge E. Hinojosa '04 is the Campus President at the Tulsa Welding School in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Dan Owen '04 was named President and CEO of Goodwill Industries of Kanawha Valley in Charleston, West Virginia. Dan was previously COO of Goodwill Industries of South Texas.

Jonie Petitta '06, '13 has joined the Nueces County Attorney's Office as an Assistant County Attorney.

Holly Ewing '07 is currently working as Contract Administrator for Texas A&M University-Kingsville. Ewing has been certified as a Procurement Manager and Contract Manager by the Texas Comptroller.

Jennifer (Cummings) Neimeier '07 and her husband will be welcoming a baby boy in November of 2020. This will be the couple's second child; they have a beautiful 18-month-old daughter, McKenzie.

Anthony C. Perez '07 has been named Associate Director of Ad-
missions for Texas A&M University – San Antonio.

**CLASS OF 2009**

**Melva Perez ’09** works for Southwest Key Programs as a Program Director/Legal Counsel. Perez recently made the move from Austin to Brownsville, Texas and is loving her new home in the Rio Grande Valley.

**CLASS OF 2010**

**Ashley (Dawes) Voltz ’10** and **Kevin Voltz ’06** welcomed their first child, Wyatt Alan Voltz, on September 26, 2019. Their hearts are full of love over this little boy!

**CLASS OF 2012**

**Regina Grant ’12** is set to receive her doctorate degree in Education from Liberty University in May 2021. Her two sons, Kahlil and Malik, are following in their mother’s academic footsteps with Kahlil graduating from Liberty University in May 2020 and Malik about to graduate from high school.

**Karla (Trevino) Halcopaska ’12** celebrated seven years of employment at the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

Ashley and **Nicholas Peacock ’12** welcomed their second child, Vivian. In addition, Ashley has joined Cox Business Convention Center as their Senior Event Services Manager. She also earned her Certified Venue Professional designation from the International Association of Venue Managers.

**CLASS OF 2013**

**Eliud Aleman ’13** has accepted a position as Production Tech for OrganCare in Austin, Texas.

**Miranda Garcia ’13** is now a second-year high school Biology teacher in South Georgia. Garcia thanks TAMU-CC for giving her the tools she needed to become successful.

**Roxanne Gonzalez ’13, ’17, ’20** started a new adaptive education program at Orange Grove Junior High this academic year.

**CLASS OF 2014**

**Sondra Nicholson ’14** is currently a member of the C.diff Best Practice Team in Temple, Texas. Her team was recently awarded a Top 5 Bill Aston Quality Award at Baylor Scott and White Health System.

**CLASS OF 2015**

**Sonya Cortez ’15** and **Steven Trevino ’13** were recently engaged on July 1, 2019, on Black Bear Pass in Lake Tahoe, California. Bianca (Hernandez) Enriques ’15 and Abram Enriques gave birth to their daughter, Ava Grace Enriques on January 10, 2019, weighing 6 lbs 7 oz. She has been the light of their life and they hope to share lots of Islander traditions with her.

**Ciara Gaitan ’15** will be graduating from TAMU-CC with her master’s degree in Spring 2020.

**Ashlee Hernandez ’15, ’18** has recently accepted a teaching position for sixth grade World Culture at the School of Science and Technology in Corpus Christi. Hernandez also welcomed the arrival of a baby girl, and future Islander, Kenzington Lee, in 2019.

**Latisha Hull ’15** was named Community Relations Manager for Legacy Community Health.

**CLASS OF 2016**

**Gabrielle Amaya ’16** recently graduated from St. Mary’s University School of Law. Amaya also passed the Texas Bar Exam and was sworn in as a licensed attorney.

**Yvonne Cabeso-Trevino ’16** recently started work as an accountant after receiving her bachelor’s degree in Business Administration from TAMU-CC.

—continued on next page—
Melissa Fry ’16 and her husband moved to Santa Fe, Texas and are expecting their first child. Fry is currently working as Assistant Director of Annual Giving and Alumni Relations for the University of Texas Medical Branch.

Scott Rios ’17 was promoted to Relationship Banking Officer at Frost Bank in Corpus Christi, Texas.

Richard Schreiber, MPA ’17, ’19 has been hired to be an Operations Research Analyst for the Federal Acquisition Service in Washington D.C. The Washington Monument is the current view from his new office, but Schreiber says he will never forget the beautiful beach view at the Island University.

Tyler Woody ’17 was promoted to H.pump Project Management Engineer for Baker Hughes in the Permian Basin. He continues to look back fondly on his years as an Islander and is grateful for the education he received on the Island.

CLASS OF 2017

Arianna Alfaro ’17 was accepted to the Feik School of Pharmacy at the University of Incarnate Word. Alfaro is currently in her first year of pharmacy school.

Dr. Julie (Schwein) Fomenko ’17 was named Director of Simulation and Clinical Learning Center within the College of Nursing and Health Sciences at TAMU-CC in January 2018.

Amber Mastrobattista ’17 began work as a Proposal Administrator for the Texas A&M Engineering Experiment Station. Mastrobattista is excited to use her education in Graphic Design that she attained at TAMU-CC to create figures for proposals submitted by the engineering faculty.

CLASS OF 2018

Alison Gallegos ’18 is working as a nurse in the Cardiac Intensive Care Unit at the Children’s Medical Center in Dallas, Texas.

Andria Hernandez ’18 was accepted into graduate school at the University of Texas at San Antonio. Hernandez will be working towards becoming a Licensed Clinical Social Worker. She is currently working as an advocate for victims of domestic violence.
Haley (Janda) Herrera ’18 was promoted to Educational Diagnosti- cian.

Siddharth Mankad ’18 has recently began in the role of Senior Technical Product Manager with Unity Technologies in Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

Edgar Ramirez ’18 was promoted to Senior Project Manager at AR Construction.

Erika Rivera ’18 is working in her field of interest as a Communications Assistant for KCS Public Relations in Corpus Christi, Texas.

Marissa Ruiz-Cerro ’18 has been recently promoted to Dietary Manager at Brookdale Patriot Heights in San Antonio, Texas. She will be graduating in December from Texas State University and will become a Licensed Nursing Home Administrator.

Class of 2019

Alexandra Allen ’19 received her first teaching position in Georgetown, Texas as a high school Biology and Aquatic Science teacher.

Daniel Briones ’19 started working for Nordex in Management and Administration shortly after graduating from TAMU-CC. Bri-

ones says that he uses what he learned on the Island every day in his career.

Dulce Garcia ’19 was named Animal Care Program Supervisor at the Texas Wildlife Rehabilitation Coalition (TWRC) in Houston, Texas. TWRC is a non-profit organization for animal rehabilita-

tion.

Jaclyn Maldonado ’19 is currently finishing her first semester in the Counseling graduate program at TAMU-CC.

Myra Sanchez ’19 has been named Digital Content Producer for Tegna Media in Corpus Christi, Texas.

Have you recently earned an exciting promotion? Perhaps you welcomed a new child, or maybe even won an award? If you have exciting news, WE want to hear about it! Submit your news at IslanderAlumni.org/ClassNotes
symbol of SUCCESS

Islander Ring tradition continues to grow after 20 years.

When Linda Landreth graduated with her bachelor's degree in 1995, there was no official Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi ring, so she designed her own. Four years later, when she was preparing to graduate with a master's degree, the University unveiled an official ring and announced that the first 100 would be uniquely numbered.

"I jumped on it when I heard about the opportunity," said Landreth. "I was proud, and still am, to get number 40." Although the ring has remained the same, she recalls the ring ceremony being a bit different in 1999: "It was brand-new at the time, very informal compared to how they do it now. Dr. [Eliot] Chenaux gave a short talk about graduating and how proud you should be of your University. I'm extremely proud to get the ring and grateful that I could be part of such a special time in the University's history."

Dr. Chenaux, who was Vice President of Student Affairs and Dean of Students in 1999, was instrumental in establishing the tradition of the ring ceremony. "The ring is such an important part of the collegiate career," he said. "It is a symbol of sacrifice and should be a reminder every day of what you did to earn your education."

In the 20 years since the ring was introduced, it has become a powerful symbol of the beloved Island University. "It's been two decades with the same ring design intact, and the creation process has largely stayed the same," said Russell Wagner '08, Executive Director of Alumni Relations. "Each ring takes eight weeks from start to finish, and are completely made by hand. They are a complete work of art and are uniquely constructed for each recipient."

The design of the ring incorporates the island sunrise (which symbolizes a graduate's bright future) and the alumni seal (which symbolizes an alumnus' enduring connection to his or her alma mater). The design is one that will never be changed, ensuring that alumni of the past and graduates of the future will be joined together by this unique emblem of achievement.

"I've always been a big believer that the ring symbolizes different things for different alumni," Wagner continued, "but at the end of the day, it allows the wearer to be part of something that's bigger than themselves. It's truly special when you can start a conversation with a stranger because of the band you each have around your finger."

This tradition has helped the Islander Ring become one of the best-selling in the state of Texas. "I would have never guessed it would grow the way it has," said Chenaux. "To see the way the campus has flourished is nothing short of unbelievable. All I can do is just look back with a smile."
SAVE THE DATE

HOCO 2020

FEBRUARY 24-29, 2020

You’re invited to reminisce, reunite and celebrate Texas A&M-Corpus Christi’s 2020 Homecoming. More details and tickets available at IslanderAlumni.org/Homecoming
FEBRUARY 1 & 15
ISLAND DAYS

FEBRUARY 20
FURGASON BRAVO SERIES—GLEN MILLER ORCHESTRA
Performing Arts Center (PAC)

FEBRUARY 22
FURGASON BRAVO SERIES—SYBARITES
Performing Arts Center (PAC)

FEBRUARY 28
ISLANDER ALUMNI HONORS BANQUET
University Center (UC)

FEBRUARY 29
HOMECOMING | UCC CLASSES REUNION | CLASS OF 1995 REUNION

MARCH 2-7
DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE & DANCE PRESENTS
"A GENTLEMAN’S GUIDE TO LOVE AND MURDER"
Center for the Arts (CA)

MARCH 7
FURGASON BRAVO SERIES—"CALL OF THE WILD:
ILLUSTRATED EDITION"
Performing Arts Center (PAC)

APRIL 4
ISLANDER RING CEREMONY
Performing Arts Center (PAC)

APRIL 14-19
DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE & DANCE PRESENTS
"MARIE ANTINOETTE"
Center for the Arts (CA)

MAY 9
MARIACHI FESTIVAL
Performing Arts Center (PAC)

MAY 16
SPRING COMMENCEMENT
American Bank Center