

Smoldering curtain prompts fire authority response

By Chris Treble and Geovanni Esparza

Published Oct. 15



Around 9:45 a.m., three fire trucks arrived, and firefighters were seen entering the building. Photo by Chris Treble / *el Don*

Orange County Fire Authority put out a smoldering curtain in Phillips Hall that was ignited by a shining spotlight just before 10 a.m. Tuesday. Nobody was injured, and the aging 60-year-old building was not damaged.

Around 9:45 a.m., Santa Ana College administrators called fire authorities after smelling smoke inside the performance space, which does not have an automatic fire alarm.

Three fire trucks responded and firefighters in full gear were seen entering the building and accessing the roof from two ladder trucks. While no flames were visible from the outside, students said they could smell smoke.

Officials said OCFA ventilated the area with their fans and equipment while District Safety personnel handled traffic control in the area.

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TOP NEWS STORIES FALL 2024

CURATED BY Geovanni Esparza, News Editor



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Kathy Patterson, retired English professor and former Honors Transfer Program coordinator, died July 26 after a long battle against rheumatoid arthritis and lung disease.

A dedicated English professor for 29 years and program coordinator for 24 years, it is hard to find someone who was not impacted by Kathy's passing.

Kathy was a teacher who devoted her life to her students and forged lifelong relationships. Many of her friends, "She didn't shy away from speaking her mind. She's just an amazing, awesome woman," said Axtell.

English student Mary Sarinana contributed her multiple scholarships to Kathy. "She pushed me to do better not only in class but also to sign up for things. That's my main memory of her.

As a passionate donor, Kathy's name is tied to nine scholarships in the SAC Scholarship Awards 2023-2024

Literature Matters, a scholarship "Awarded to students for outstanding achievement in English literature." Christina Romero, Executive Director of the SAC Foundation in charge of scholarship funds, hopes others will follow

Kathy's example of participating in student success, advocating and giving back to the SAC community. "She was relentless in her pursuit that the Honors Program was always front and center and that the college and the foundation knew its importance," said Romero. Those who were not Kathy's students knew her best as the coordinator of the Honors Program for over 2 decades. SAC alumni and member of the Honors Program, Minh Pham, remembered Kathy fondly as a mentor, sending out emails as late as midnight and writing countless letters of recommendation. "She encouraged every student to come back, be confident, focused and be successful," claimed Pham. The SAC Academic Senate and College Council presented and passed a recommendation to name the designated space in honor of Kathy Patterson.

The new location will be in D-101, which is easily accessible for students. This news is especially important as a new and permanent home for the Honors Program was something Kathy advocated for a long time.

Remembering Kathy Patterson

By Ash Mojica

Published Sept. 9



Lisa McKowan-Bourguignon (left) and Christina Axtell (right) were in Kathy's Shakespeare class in the summer of 1999. Photo courtesy of Christina Axtell

Letter from the Editor

An RSCCD board of trustees member violated the Brown Act and was not sanctioned after almost being removed from the board for a year. A charter high school began renting facilities on campus. A beloved and dedicated teacher passed away. The board approved an audit of an \$8 million slush account and the SAC Foundation Scholarship got a massive equity update.

The Fall 2024 semester was eventful and full of news coverage.

The reporters and editors at el Don worked late nights to keep SAC students and our community informed, which included attending district meetings and contacting and interviewing administrators and officials.

The reporting that went into these articles was among the finest that was produced this semester. Some of the articles that are included in this zine were produced after our big print edition came out, and we believe they deserved to live in a medium other than our website or our social channels.

If you find the information in this zine useful and would like to stay up to date with our coverage, take a look at our website and follow us on our insta.

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Board members decide not to sanction trustee

By Geovanni Esparza
Published Nov. 21



Board members argued and talked over each other while deciding whether or not to sanction Trustee Phillip Yarbrough after his Brown Act violation. Photo by Geovanni Esparza / *el Don*

A charter high school will continue to rent campus classrooms for its students until Rancho Santiago Community College District approves a lease for the second floor of the Digital Media Center.

Vista Meridian Global Academy outgrew its previous facility on Fairview and Fifth Street. After several failed attempts at leasing other properties during the spring semester, the school was able to take advantage of its existing relationship with Santa Ana College through dual enrollment lease agreement is long and bureaucratic and must meet certain criteria before the district executes it. One of these steps is the lease has to be published in a newspaper for three weeks before it can be made official.

"Once we reach an agreement and VM signs the lease, it will go to the Board of Trustees for approval, and if the board approves, then it will be executed by the district," said Hoffman.

While the lease is being drafted and approved, the high school uses SAC's facilities in buildings A, C, D, and H, costing nearly \$23,000 by the end of the fall term.

as early as October; however, it could take some time for the high school to move in. The second floor of the DMC was once home to the small business development center, which occupied the space until the past few months. "There could be some improvements they might need to make to the facility that might prevent them from moving in sooner rather than later," said Vice President of Administrative Services Bart Hoffman.

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High schoolers move in

By **Geovanni Esparza**

Published Sept. 19



At the end of their school day Vista Meridian students line up to take the bus home. Photo by Geovanni Esparza / *el Don*

At the final board meeting of the semester, members were torn about whether or not they should sanction Trustee Phillip Yarbrough after he violated the Brown Act in May.

"Trustee Yarbrough decided to have a closed session meeting that was not agendized," said Tinajero, who did not run for reelection. "I tried to talk to him because, I am responsible to make sure that all committees are following the rules...I'm leaving after this, so what you decide to do is up to you."

Early in the meeting, Tinajero motioned to move item 8.3, which would immediately remove Yarbrough from all committees and prohibiting him from holding a board officer position for one year. Trustee Zeke Hernandez immediately motioned to table the item which Tinajero rejected.

When Tinajero explained why they needed to discuss the item sooner, Yarbrough tried to interject and say Tinajero was out of order. Tinajero suggested that Yarbrough "go to the FPPC and file a report."

"As I understand it, the committee went into executive session, and the staff was there. In fact, our chancellor was there. I don't know why anyone did not stop or say to the committee they should not go into a closed session," said Hernandez.

Trustee Tina Arias Miller was on the ad hoc committee formed to investigate the Brown Act violation and said the committee didn't meet officially and that the conversation "just felt disjointed."

Trustee John Hanna believed the sanctions were unfair because the current board will not meet again.

"A current board cannot bind a successor board, and what that means is that whatever we do today, our power ends... when the new board meets in December," said Trustee Hanna.

Hernandez suggested an external investigation occur to find out what the ad hoc committee discussed so they can make the correct decision.

Tinajero was adamant that something should be done as Robert's Rules of Order were not being followed.

"I am responsible to make sure that all committees are following the rules. In my 22 years of service, I have never seen a standing committee run by the Brown Act and Robert's Rules of Order to then violate that," said Tinajero.

Board approves audit of slush fund

By Chirs Treble
Published Oct. 30



Board president Sal Tinajero and financial audit chair Phillip Yarborough discussing the audit.
Photo by Chris Treble / *el Don*

Scholarship applicants no longer need a letter of recommendation to access their share of a \$400,000 funding pool. Starting with this current cycle, the Santa Ana College Foundation's Scholarship Program requires students to complete a detailed application while making a professional reference optional. Officials recognize that not every student at a two-year college has forged relationships with professors or campus staff. "We are trying to make this an equitable and accessible process for our students," says Melissa Felter, the director of Special Programs, Development & Alumni Relations of the Santa Ana College Foundation. First-year elementary education major Lilian Duran had never heard of the SAC Scholarship Program, but as a self-described "shy" person, understanding the struggle of getting a letter. "It would encourage students to apply because it is one less thing to worry about," says Duran. "Maybe some people don't have a teacher to ask or don't want to get the letter of recommendation." Noah Mendieta, a second-year English major,

was familiar with the scholarship program but was unaware of the change. "I never applied," admits Mendieta. "I wanted to last year, but then I said 'I'd do it next year.'" Mendieta also believes the change can help students. "A lot of people don't apply in the first place," says Mendieta. "Maybe this will encourage more students to apply." The push for a more inclusive and accessible application process was voiced at the 2024 National Scholarship Providers Association Annual Conference. According to Xochitl Swenson, scholarship coordinator of the Santa Ana College Foundation, the change is a test to see if more students will apply for scholarships. "We would like to see scholarship funds in more students' hands," claims Swenson. The change is not permanent, and numbers will likely affect the decision on whether or not letters of recommendation will continue to be a part of the application process. When applying for the scholarship program, applicants will still have the option to provide a letter of recommendation. Students have until Feb. 24 to submit applications.

SAC scholarship gets an update

By Ash Mojica

Published Nov. 21



The SAC Scholarship Program is a competitive scholarship that students can apply for online. Illustration by Ash Mojica / *el Don*

District trustees voted 6-1 Monday evening in favor of auditing a newly discovered \$8 million financial account while postponing the scheduled sanctioning of board Fiscal/Audit Review Committee chair Phillip Yarbrough for code of ethics violations until the next meeting.

"I don't really think there is any fraud going on in our district, but I always applaud looking at the numbers because, at the end of the day, we're here to make sure that our taxpayer dollars are well spent," said Rancho Santiago Community College District Board Vice President Daisy Tong.

Board approval was not unanimous. Board President Sal Tinajero initially voiced support of the audit during the Board Comments item.

"I don't think there's anything wrong, but I think the public needs to know the truth. And so that is why today I'll be supporting that item," said Tinajero. Later in the evening, however, he was the only dissenting vote.

With no comment or explanation, the trustees decided to postpone the planned sanctioning of Fiscal/Audit Committee chair and 28-year board member Phillip Yarbrough, who is accused of ethics violations related to calling a closed session to inform the board of the account.

Every year our district and those of over 130 other schools districts across the state pay insurance premiums. Companies like ASCIP negotiate with medical providers for favorable rates and handle the accounting of those contracts.

If the premiums paid exceed the

cost of the coverage provided then a rebate is retired to the district. According to ASCIP, most schools would use that extra to pay down the next year's coverage or withdraw it back into their general fund for reallocation. This was not the practice of the RSCCD board, as they claim they were never made aware of the money's existence and the fund grew to over \$8 million before the board requested a refund check in June.

Yarbrough brought the existence of the fund to the board's attention earlier this year and said in public statements at the Oct. 14 meeting that the attempt to sanction him is a retaliation. It was initially expected that the board would review and decide on the motion to approve sanctions to strip Yarbrough of all committee positions for a year.

"No one is retaliating against our trustee," said Tinajero. "Everyone serves on those committees at my discretion. So I have the right to remove or keep someone in any committee. To say that it's because he is a whistle-blower is so far from the truth."

New automotive degree coming Fall 2026

By Chris Treble
Published Sept. 23



A third bachelor's program is coming to Santa Ana College in 2026—the most of any community college in the state. Photo by Chris Treble / *el Don*

Starting Fall 2026, Santa Ana College will be the first community college in Southern California to offer a bachelor's degree in Automotive Technology. This addition will bring SAC's total to three bachelor's degrees, the highest number offered by any community college in California. "To be employed at an automotive manufacturer, you need to have a bachelor's degree," said Automotive Technology

department chair professor David Roper. "You can only go so high in the dealership unless you want to own it. The other path is to work for the manufacturer. Go work for Toyota or Honda or BMW and from there all kinds of different opportunities open."

If you find yourself behind the Johnson student center be on the lookout for the low, unassuming J Building. One step inside, and you are transported to a large, professional vehicle service center. The machines expected to care for wheels, brakes and engines are neatly arranged so that groups of students can observe and practice their skills. The smells of engine oil and the sound of hammering fill the tall classroom-turned-service center. Everyone wears proper safety equipment, eye protection, gloves, long pants and safety shoes are a must, even in the sweltering heat. SAC currently offers an

associate's degree in automotive technology designed to build the skills essential for finding a

career with local auto dealerships. The new bachelor's program is being developed by Roper and his faculty colleagues working directly with Mercedes, Ford, General Motors among others. "It's becoming more popular to become a service technician. As you know, the car industry is going to keep going forever, and it's never going to stop," said second year automotive major Samuel Bucio. "At Santa Ana College, we are proud that we are the only community college in the state that will have three bachelor's programs," said Jeffrey Lamb, vice president of academic affairs. "We didn't go for this degree out of nowhere. We did years of research and talked with industry partners. As we develop the curriculum, we'll look to those partners to develop courses and programs that will serve the automotive industry."

Santa Ana College began offering Occupational Studies bachelor's degrees as part of the initial pilot program in 2015, following the passage of CA Senate Bill 850. The goal of these programs is to address gaps in industries such as healthcare, biotechnology and automotive technology not covered by the CSU and UC systems.