Message from the Chair

Dear SRJC supporters, alumni and friends,

On behalf of the Santa Rosa Junior College Foundation Board, I would like to thank you for your support of SRJC students and to highlight once more the difference your contribution can make to a student in need. For nearly a century, Santa Rosa Junior College has changed the lives of generations who build their futures on the solid foundation of education. The commitment SRJC’s faculty, staff and administration make to student success is always increased by the support we receive from our local community.

Students of all ages attend SRJC to find their way to professional achievement, prepare to transfer to four-year universities, or train for vocational positions. Too often, they are overwhelmed by financial needs, working several jobs, studying full-time, and trying to make ends meet. In 2013-2014, 37% of students received financial aid, Board of Governors fee waivers or scholarships. The Scholarship Office receives moving essays from students talking about many years of struggle between the desire to go to school and the necessity of meeting a budget. Hardship can be seen at every age: the College has young students who are homeless and do homework while living in a shelter, students in their 40s and 50s who need to make a career change, as well as first generation students who never thought possible a higher education because their parents and grandparents did not have one.

Charlie Briones is one example of a struggling student. His touching story centers around a work accident that left him disabled in the prime of his life and how SRJC helped him retrain and build a new career. Charlie worried constantly about financial issues but applied for awards and worked hard to maintain a high GPA. The College awarded his performance with scholarships that made his dream possible. He gives back to others, tutoring and mentoring many of his peers, and praises SRJC with saving his life and giving him new goals and dreams. After three years of studying at SRJC, Charlie is graduating this year with three Associate degrees. And he’s pursuing the dream of becoming a math teacher.

There are so many stories like Charlie’s I could share. But you understand the need. Please join me in committing to an even brighter future for all students who attend SRJC, as our support helps them create better lives through education.

Paul E. Yeomans, Chair, SRJC Foundation Board of Directors
Since the District’s founding in 1918, many lives have been intertwined with Santa Rosa Junior College. Some start taking classes here and remain close to the college, finding job opportunities here. Jack Farmer, retired SRJC custodian, is one of them.

Originally from British Columbia, Canada, Jack Farmer moved to the United States in 1959 with his father and established roots in Santa Rosa, California. In the early 1960s, after graduating from Santa Rosa High School, young Jack started taking law enforcement classes at the JC, thinking he might become a police officer one day. He first got a job in the SRJC cafeteria, “in the Bears’ Den, washing pots and pans,” as he fondly remembers, and lived in the old World War II quarters, the “barracks.” SRJC history instructor Brook Tazzer, later dean and the District’s first academic vice president, was Jack’s academic advisor, guiding him through the requirements of the major. When Jack was drafted to go to the army, it was Randolph Newman, the College’s Superintendent/President at that time, who encouraged him to go to serve his country, but to make sure to come back to SRJC to finish his studies. Jack remembers returning to campus on a two-week leave, right before being deployed to Stuttgart, Germany, visiting with his classmates and instructors and proudly wearing his military uniform.

Returning from the service, Jack struggled for a while to find work and to find reasons to go further with a law enforcement major. His interest moved toward liberal arts and he began taking music, science and geography classes. He got a part-time job with the Disability Resources Department at SRJC, as an assistant for a disabled friend he was helping to get to college. Later, the federal Work Study Program qualified him for financial aid to help pay for his studies. Faculty and staff provided further guidance, showing genuine interest in seeing him succeed.

When the John Lounibos Center was completed, Jack learned about a full-time opening as a custodian, was encouraged to apply, and got the job. For nearly 28 years, until his retirement, Jack Farmer worked hard to keep everything spotless. “It was a lot of hard work, cleaning the cement floors of the Trade Technology area of grease and oil, waxing floors, doing a lot of sanitation, but I kept up the speed and the pay was good,” he recalls. His colleagues and supervisors appreciated his skills and work ethic and the College was like a second home for him.

Guided by the professionals in the Human Resources Department to make wise retirement decisions, Jack was able to make a significant annuity gift to the College. He hopes his gift will help future students in need, much as he was helped. His contribution comes with gratitude for the way he was always treated as a part of the SRJC family, even after retirement. Still wearing his old SRJC shirts or caps, Jack often bikes or walks through the campus, visits with old friends, and stops and looks at the plaques bearing his name, by the Bear’s Den Café in the Lawrence A. Bertolini Student Center and in the B. Robert Burdo Culinary Arts Center.
Jonny Gomes was a natural fit as the SRJC nominee for the California Community Colleges Distinguished Alumni Award. In discussing the nomination with SRJC Baseball Coach Damon Neidlinger and Dean of Kinesiology, Athletics and Dance Ronald Myers, Jonny clearly exemplified the necessary qualities for selection. With his recent World Series win and his long standing dedication to community service, both locally and nationally, we were honored to have Jonny represent the best of SRJC and win this award.

A Petaluma native who became a major league baseball outfielder, Jonny was recognized and awarded for his career achievements, contributions to the community, and diligence at the college where he worked in order to realize his educational and professional goals.

Jonny comes from a modest background and endured many trials before he became successful in his career. His parents divorced when Jonny and his older brother Joey were toddlers, and the boys were raised by their mother Michelle, who struggled to make ends meet. The family underwent years of hardship, including living briefly in a homeless shelter. Jonny and Joey dedicated themselves to sports, finding that the discipline and camaraderie of baseball gave them a chance to rise above everyday hardships.

Jonny attended and played baseball at Casa Grande High School in Petaluma, and then at Santa Rosa Junior College, before being drafted by the Tampa Bay Devil Rays in 2001. Since then, he has played for the Cincinnati Reds, Washington Nationals, Oakland Athletics, and the Boston Red Sox. In 2005, he finished third in the American League Rookie of the Year voting. In 2013 as a member of the Boston Red Sox, Jonny hit a crucial three home run on the road in Game 3 of the World Series, and finally captured the World Championship that had eluded him his whole career. He has been described often as a mentor and leader on and off the field, helping to coach his teammates and constantly inspiring and motivating them to achieve success.

Interviewed for JC Connect about his experience at SRJC, Jonny recalled fondly the atmosphere, the small size of classes, and the small student-faculty ratio: "My experience there, from the first day I've been to classes to playing baseball there, was awesome. Northern California is a unique area as far as the culture, the atmosphere, the real family feel, the togetherness. It was a true honor to go to SRJC and to represent the Bear Cubs and the athletic side of the college." Jonny mentioned the excellence of SRJC’s athletic programs over the years and that he is “still in touch with the baseball family” here. Through the years, he supported and mentored many talented younger players at SRJC and from his hometown, Petaluma.

His athletic milestones and dedication to the game have been widely published and awarded, making him a role model for other players. His passionate charity work completes the picture of a committed, caring young man who gives back to many causes dear to his heart. In Petaluma, he has sponsored Little League teams, as well as Camp For A Cure, Inc., an annual charity baseball camp that raises funds for cancer research. He has donated to Boys and Girls Clubs and activities in many cities he has played in, supported nonprofits dedicated to lupus and diabetes research, is active with military charities, and, after the Boston Marathon bombing, he asked the entire Red Sox team to sign bats so he could auction them off for a charity related to the tragedy.

Jonny feels that his charitable contributions throughout Northern California and across the nation "kind of come with the job description of being a professional athlete. The outlets are at my fingertips and I am able to reach so many people. It is truly the right thing to do: when you are at the highest level and have the highest voice, open these avenues to people who don't have that access.”
Julie Halmayr dreams about food. While some dream of going places, or about their careers, Julie dreams about ice cream, Danish pastry, cheesecakes, casseroles, pasta, cooking and baking. Even if she can’t taste what she is baking, because of her diabetes, she asks for help from her classmates and instructors to perfect her recipes. Julie Halmayr is one of most humble and grateful students in Santa Rosa Junior College’s Culinary Arts Program, always counting her blessings, always keeping in mind how hard she has worked to surpass adversities, and how much she has accomplished so far.

Julie said she was “raised differently” than many of us. Born in California, she had a difficult childhood in an abusive family and, at 13 years old, ended up as a foster child in Utah. She started working during high school, first as a restaurant janitor, then doing kitchen prep and later waiting tables. She had a great foster family during her teenage years, yet she struggled and she thought, more than once, that she might not “make it.” Among other problems, she got pregnant and had her first child during her senior year in high school.

Right out of school, Julie took her daughter and left Utah, hoping a return to California would help her to find a better life and build a future. It did not work out as planned. Young and dealing with her difficulties, she turned to drugs and alcohol to escape. Several years later, when her mother was diagnosed with cancer and was given six months to live, Julie knew it was time to start the hardest battle: setting her life on a clean, straight path.

Julie counts now over 14 years of sobriety, with the help of her faith, her community and the wonderful pastor at Potter’s House Christian Fellowship in Santa Rosa. That is where she first turned to find strength to deal with life and health issues like diabetes, and a brain injury due to a car accident. During times when she was stressed out or could not stop worrying about things, she stepped into the kitchen, where she also found relief cooking and baking. Her son, daughter and little granddaughter stood as the pillars of her life. “Beside my faith, they are my foundation, my hope and dreams,” Julie said.

Her daughter Brandy encouraged her to take culinary classes at SRJC. Brandy took nursing classes at the College and knew about the quality of an SRJC education. The Culinary Arts Program was a perfect choice for Julie, who always cooked for others, took care of elderly people and often compassionately brought meals and cakes for people in need, “just to put a smile on their faces,” as she said.

Julie started taking classes at SRJC in June, 2013, and she has loved every moment of it. She found here a “culinary family” of classmates who helped by tasting her food or cakes she could not touch because they contained alcohol or they were sweet: “I hand them food and there’s a smile on their faces. That does something to my heart, it makes me happy, and it makes me feel successful.” She said she was absolutely in love with her instructors: “I love Chef Kathy, we are bread, cake, and pastry sisters. And I really admire Chef Shelly and Chef Michael, too.”

Julie earned her Baking and Pastry Certificate at the end of 2014 spring semester, then she enrolled to take more classes for a Culinary Arts Certificate. She enjoys her studies at SRJC, and keeps having these sweet dreams where she bakes and cooks, putting a smile on others’ faces.
With gratitude to our remarkable supporters who have given so generously to further the educational opportunities of Santa Rosa Junior College students.

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