

SANTA ANA COLLEGE

ALUMNI

HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES

—2020—

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES

VERA JIMENEZ • FORTINO RIVERA • JIM STEINER • MIKE TALBOT



## A Message from the Santa Ana College Foundation

There's a song lyric that you've probably heard before that says, "It's not where you start, it's where you finish." That sentiment could not be more untrue for the Class of 2020 Alumni Hall of Fame inductees.

For Vera Jimenez (Class of '98), Fortino Rivera (Class of '84), Jim Steiner (Class of '85), and Mike Talbot (Class of '66), their Santa Ana College beginnings made their 'finish' possible.

Their days at SAC set their paths on fire to blaze trails that took them to new heights, honored their families, and brought hope to communities. Their start at the second oldest community college in Orange County and the second-largest in the state of California are the roots from which their professional dreams sprouted, their confidence was watered, and their plans for what lay ahead were nurtured.

Vera, Fortino, Jim, and Mike are bold leaders who are still daring to dream and willing to put in the work to form new realities. Their stories illustrate the profound spirit of excellence, perseverance, and promise seeded in every Santa Ana College student, present, past, and future.

Their journeys, life circumstances and academic pursuits are different, but their resilience, sense of self and pride in where they started, are the same. Their success showcases what is possible when students select SAC as their community college of choice. It demonstrates what we can do together, as a storied educational institution, as faculty, staff, community, and alumni, to develop the next generation of groundbreakers.

Their success is proof that beyond a shadow of a doubt, that we can do remarkable things. Hard things. Ceiling and boundary-breaking things. Legacy-enriching things.

### At Santa Ana College, beginnings matter.

Every day, we rise to meet the challenge of the future. We move forward with renewable energy and limitless tenacity for every student, to shape them for what awaits.

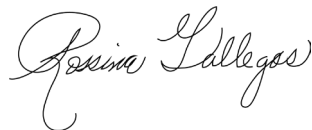
Our current world events have created a need to stay even more connected. It has proven that we are always Stronger Together. Thank you for standing strong with Santa Ana College. Together, we are powerful, power-filled, and purpose-driven. We hope you will continue to stay involved.

Please join us in congratulating the Class of 2020 Alumni Hall of Fame recipients. We are proud to call them family and look forward to celebrating their achievements in person when circumstances allow.

**Sincerely,**

**Rossina Gallegos**

President, Santa Ana College Foundation



**Christina R. Romero**

Executive Director, Santa Ana College Foundation





# Vera Jimenez

Meteorologist, KTLA

Emmy-Award Winner

Entrepreneur

Class of 1998

## To Thine Own Self Be True

Behind the glitz and glam identity of small-screen professions like television news personalities, Vera Jimenez is more than meets the eye.

Vera, born Elvira Jimenez, migrated to the United States along with her mother and five siblings when she was just three years old. Her humble beginnings from Mexico to Garden Grove, CA, is not something that summons shame. Vera fully embraces her unique circumstances, which have primarily influenced, but not wholly defined who she is today.

“Like many families during that time, we came here illegally. I share that candidly because I don’t mind people knowing that about me,” says the 10-year resident meteorologist at KTLA Los Angeles, entrepreneur, health and wellness enthusiast, and Emmy-award winner. “I think it is important to share for young adults and children out there who are going through that, to know there’s hope. I want to serve as an example that if you stay focused, have faith, put your nose to the grindstone, and don’t take anything for granted, that it [the path to citizenship] is going to come.”

## Good News Travels Fast

Long before Vera began delivering the weather forecast four times a night for KTLA 5, she dreamed of becoming a writer. “I didn’t know what I wanted to write about, but I always wanted to work in that media,” says Vera of her early career aspirations. After graduating from Bolsa Grande High School, her trajectory changed when she enrolled in Santa Ana College and took a class with journalism professor and current Chair of the Communications and Media department, Charles “Bud” Little.

“He was a major influence on me and how I ended up in television,” says Vera. By the time she entered SAC, she was working in radio as a traffic reporter. She interned at KIK-FM in Orange and later produced traffic for Shadow Broadcasting. “I thought I would scrape together a living writing for a newspaper or magazine and doing radio.”

That is until professor Little encouraged her to try television. “Because I respected and thought so highly of him, I said ok,” says Vera. “I tried it, and I didn’t like it,” she says of her first foray into television at SAC. “I said, I’ll never do this again. It’s all about hair and makeup.”

And that was that. Until it wasn’t.

“ People will forget what you said

People will forget what you did

But people will never forget how you made them feel.”

- Maya Angelou

After graduating, Vera set out on her hodgepodge radio-journalism career. That is until a radio friend convinced her to audition for an on-air position at ABC in Glendale. “I sent a picture and some audio, but I didn’t get hired. Once again, Vera settled back into her behind the camera path, and then, ABC called again. This time, she asked producers to tell her why she did not get the job before so she could better prepare. She took their advice and landed more than just a job; she found her purpose.

“God put me on this planet to share good news and hopefully brighten people’s day,” says Vera of meteorologist position. It’s one she ‘plays’ so well that it’s led her to two Emmy Award wins, but for Vera, it’s not about the trophies. “They’re great, but they don’t really define who I am.”

They make her proud, but the real victory, she says, takes place off-camera, with the viewers, some who have followed her since her early traffic reporting days. “It keeps me going and makes me want to continue to work hard and stay on top of my game,” Vera says of the support she gets from the community.

## Sunny with a Good Chance of Entrepreneurial Spirit

After earning a religious studies degree from California State University, Long Beach, then a meteorology certificate from Mississippi State University while working at KCBS-TV, Vera still gives SAC the honor of being the institution that holds a special place in her story and her life. “I loved SAC,” says Vera. “Community colleges are the most underrated institutions. They are a great resource, and they are often overlooked [as a place to go].”

SAC gave Vera perspective and put career-defining people in her path. People like professor Little. For an immigrant whose mom, like all moms, dreamed of a better life for her child, Vera is proof of a dream not deferred. And she is still dreaming and achieving as a small business owner.

In the fall of 2020, after five years serving up chowder and fish tacos as co-owner of the Hermosa Beach Shop, Vera closed the eatery’s doors. “I liked being a small business owner,” says Vera, who

saw running the operation as another way to give back to the Southern California family that has given so much to her.

While the business she saved up for since she was 17 years old shuttered, Vera’s entrepreneurial spirit is still very much open. Although she has no plans to leave the KTLA job she loves, she spends her spare time running a home-based business, helping people on their health and wellness journeys.

Whether in front of the camera or behind the scenes, when it comes down to it, Vera is in the sunshine business.





# Fortino Rivera

CEO, Staffing Solutions

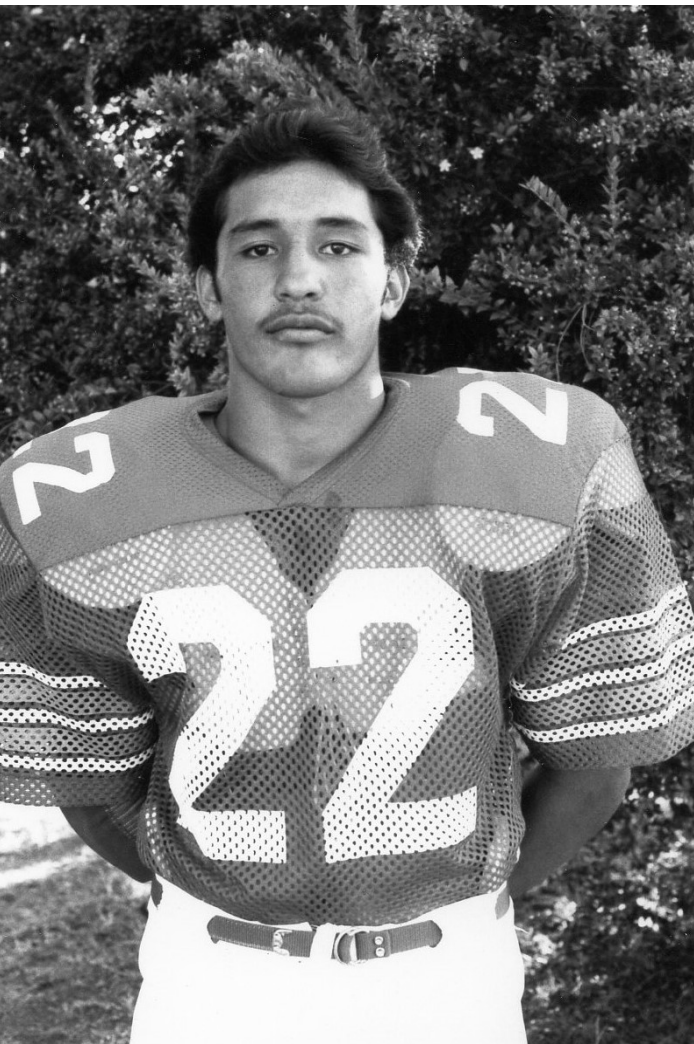
Community Leader

Dedicated Volunteer

Class of 1984

## Fame and Football

Fortino Rivera has always been a hometown Santa Ana hero. Some might even say a legend. That is if you count pulling off one of the most epic senior high school pranks in Santa Ana High School history. “At the time, the principal claimed it was the best he’d seen in 30 years,” recalls Fortino. What exactly did he do? Let’s just say it involved the Southern California-founded



burger restaurant, Bob’s Big Boy, and a pyramid.

Born and raised in Santa Ana along with his four brothers and two sisters, Fortino, the youngest of a working-class, tight-knit family, has always been, as he proudly exclaims, “tied to my roots.” The future Entrepreneur came up through the Santa Ana school system, and even though he was sought out by four-year state colleges for his football prowess, Fortino opted to stay close to home and attend Santa Ana College.

He was familiar with SAC because of his family ties - a few of his siblings were students - but ultimately, his decision to attend was shaped by the athletic program. “The football coach [Dave Ogas] really wanted me to attend,” recalls Fortino, who was ultimately convinced to call the campus home because of the coaches and professors. “You could tell they wanted you to do well [both on and off

the field,” recalls Fortino. “Coach Ogas was probably the best influence on me. He was very strict, but fair,” He would often say, “you’re going to do things, you’re going to go somewhere and be somebody, so start [applying yourself] now.”

With a young family to care for, Fortino gladly welcomed the support. “I already had my firstborn when I entered my first year at SAC,” he says. When Fortino’s wife became pregnant with their second child, after completing two summers and a full year at SAC, he took a job putting the electronics knowledge he gained at SAC to work.

## A Little Goodwill Goes a Long Way

After SAC, Fortino attended the National Institute of Technology and soon after graduating, landed a job at the imaging and electronics services company, Ricoh. Later, he took on another role as an international sales representative, which required him to travel throughout Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean. “It was a lot of time away from home, but I got to learn a lot and experience a lot,” says Fortino. But it was the job he held right before the sales role that matched his love of volunteering – which began during his high school years and continued after college—with his entrepreneurial destiny.

At Goodwill, Fortino paired candidates with positions that suited their abilities and interest. “I would find out their strengths and weaknesses and try to find them a job, make a resume, and give them interviewing classes,” he recalls.

By the time Fortino struck up a partnership with a former colleague to form Staffing Solutions, he’d received an education on how to build a successful company. “I was always good at sales, marketing, and talking to people,” says Fortino, who also credits his experience on various boards in Orange County for helping him sharpen his leadership and business skills. “The beautiful thing about working with other companies is that you see how people operate. Seeing the good and the bad, I could tell the difference,” he says.

Fortino leaned on his observations to build his company into a powerhouse staffing firm with two successful locations. Sixteen years later, the business has soared and survived through rough times like the 2008 economic downturn, and most recently the Coronavirus pandemic, due to Fortino’s goodwill, heart to serve, and a stellar reputation for quality service. “You have to be like a detective and give clients good candidates because other people are knocking on their door,” he says.

Along with his wife and three children, one of whom also attended and played football at Santa Ana College, and with the memory of his mother at the forefront, Fortino continues to rely on his family to ground him. “Running the business is difficult, and it takes a lot of time, energy, and effort,” says Fortino, “but when it’s all said and done, I feel a lot of satisfaction in knowing that my business, is making a difference in the lives of our workers and the community at large.”

“Whether it’s your family, children, or people in your industry, you have to trust and believe that you’re guiding them in the right direction,” says Fortino.

Spoken like a true hometown hero.



# Jim Steiner

Retired Fire Fighter, City of Corona

Mayor, Corona, CA

Dedicated Husband and Father

Class of 1985

## Humility. Humor. Honor.

Within minutes of talking to Jim Steiner, it's vividly clear that he is different—in a good way. A comfortable and comforting way; a disarming and distinct way; a defining way. Jim is an 'everyman' type of guy with the rare ability to make you feel like you have known him for a lifetime, or wish you have.

"You know, I've never been the smartest. I've never been the scholar. But I've always been the hardest worker in the room," he says when asked about the significance of his 2020 SAC Hall of Fame induction. "This [honor] is proof that you can accomplish anything you want in life with a community college [education] as your foundation."

The Corona, CA mayor and former celebrated Corona firefighter has spent more than 30 years proving that you can do whatever you want with a giving heart, a supportive community, a never-give-up work ethic, and a reliable sense of humor.

Like most high school graduates, Jim didn't know what to expect when he entered Santa Ana College in the fall of 1983. But from day one, he felt comfortable at SAC. "I immediately felt connected," says Jim of the time he spent in the Fire Sciences program. The teachers were relatable and knowledgeable and shared their experiences in a light-hearted way that resonated with him. Although it took Jim thirteen years to get his SAC degree after graduating from the fire academy, he did it. He took a course or two every semester, worked construction full-time, juggled family life, and joined the Corona Fire Department, but he did it. "I wanted to get my degree," he says.

## The Community Champion

There's a song called 'The Champion.' The lyrics, in part, go like this: "When they write my story, they're gonna say that I did it for the glory. But don't think that I did it for the fame. I did it for the love of the game." For Jim, firefighting was never about glory. It was always about the greater good.

The son of a social worker father (William) and a loving mother (Nancy), Jim and his four siblings learned the lesson and value of service the old-fashioned way: by example. "My dad was so full of love," says Jim, recalling the influence his father's work, in which he often literally brought home in the form of foster children in need of refuge, had on his personal and professional life.

Being a firefighter was as much about snuffing out flames, as it was about restoring hope and putting smiles on as many faces as possible. It was about being a servant. With a magic wand. "It's something that every firefighter has in their pocket that comes with the job," says Jim. "It can be used for inspiration to lift people's spirits, to show love and compassion, and go the extra mile."



During his firefighting days, Jim used that wand countless times. There was that time he made a call to a crew at the Fire Department of New York that resulted in a girl with epilepsy getting the ride of her life: an airport escort fit for a queen to the hospital for brain surgery. Along with his station brethren, Jim flew to the east coast at his expense, making it in the nick of time to lend support before the Corona residents' life-saving surgery. Then, there was that time he organized a crab boil on the fly to raise \$40,000—in one day—to provide food and rent for a mother and son stricken with cancer at the same time. For an entire year.

Then there was that time. The truth is, there were many 'that times,' Jim went above and beyond while donning his firefighter hat and waving his magic wand.

In return, but not in any way expected, Jim has been honored numerous times for his service. "Citizen of the Year", "Father of the Year", "Two-time "Firefighter of the Year," "Heart of a Hero." The accolades stack up high, but Jim takes it all in stride. "As I look back on my career, knowing that I used that magic wand to the fullest extent [makes me proud]."

## The Man. The Myth. The Clipboard.

They say that the quickest way to lose half of your support is to run for politics. Still, that didn't stop Jim from literally walking door-to-door to connect with voters when he decided to run for Corona City Council. "I could only play so much guitar and make so many crafts in my woodshed," he says jokingly about deciding to run for office. Well-worn hobbies aside, Jim still had a purpose. "I felt like the public would appreciate my communication style as a neighbor who was willing to work his butt off to try and improve things."

With that mindset, Jim set out with a clipboard and pounded the pavement for eight months to visit 5,000 homes of likely voters. Twice. "I knocked on every door and talked to whoever was willing to open," he says.

The knocking, long days, would-be-dog attacks, and sometimes unopened doors, all paid off. Jim won the election, but during campaigning, he got more than he bargained for: a reminder that no good deed goes unnoticed. It all happened on the last day of canvassing, at the very last door he knocked on. That day, he was accompanied by a family, including a five-year-old supporter that offered to help him pass out literature.

By the time the group reached the last apartment on the top floor, Jim was mentally and physically exhausted. When the door swung open, a woman opened and responded as if she had just seen her favorite celebrity. It turns out, Jim saved her daughter's life after a car wreck. As the mom recalled the details of the accident and thanked Jim for his actions, the pair cried. The family cried. The woman told Jim that she had never voted in any election in her entire life, but that she registered to vote so that she could vote for him. It was a powerful moment that reminded Jim that he made the right decision to run for public office and that just maybe, he had a little "magic left in his wand."

As a politician, he says, "I'm still fighting fires, just in a different way now." With the support of his wife Beth and his three children, Jim is again doing exactly what he should be as a community champion. In addition to his day job, Jim also moonlights as a proud parent. His youngest daughter is a bank examiner, his oldest daughter is a choreographer and world traveler, and his son, go figure, is a paramedic firefighter.

"They're good human beings," Jim says. One doesn't have to wonder how they turned out that way.



# Mike Talbot

CEO and President, Universal Space Lines LLC

Attorney at Law

Film Producer

Military JAG Officer

Class of 1966

## Renaissance Man

Have you ever cracked open a book with so many fascinating, meandering, and meaningful moments that you struggled to rank them in order of most pivotal? Well, that, in a nutshell, is Mike Talbot's story. Rich with life-changing mentors, a world-renowned astronaut, military airplane flying, and more, it is an absolute page-turner.

In one chapter, Mike's playing football in 100-degree heat for Santa Ana College, the next, he is a 17 year-old SAC student, taking on odd jobs to make ends meet. The plot thickens when the underdog student makes it big at USC law school. It is a storied account of the making of a man who took life by the horns and rode it all the way to the house he designed and built in Cliff Haven.

Here it goes.

Back in 1963, Mike Talbot was a self-proclaimed military brat and recent Tustin Union High School graduate with his whole life ahead of him. After being talked into going to Santa Ana College by a teammate's older brother who convinced Mike and his friends that they could follow in the team's footsteps as Rose Bowl champions, Mike enrolled. "We walked into the worst fall with two-a-day practices in 100-degree heat," recalls Mike of the practice sessions he endured. And it got worse. The team had the first losing season at SAC since 1949. It is safe to say things didn't start well. But wait, there's more.

Shortly after the failed season, Mike's father, a career Marine, was transferred to Denver, Colorado for recruiting duty. With hopes of a football conference win in his future, a budding relationship in play, and a job, Mike pleaded with his Dad to stay at SAC. His father reluctantly agreed. Then, less than a month later, Mike lost his job. "That's where Santa Ana College came through." After sharing his circumstances with the coaches, they set him up with assignments on campus - handing out towels, working in the cafeteria and the library, cutting shrubs - whatever they could find to help him out. He was also a lifeguard and swimming instructor at the SAC pool for two summers.

Then one day, Mike was summoned to the office of the assistant dean. "I thought, oh my God, what have I done now?" What he had done was make an impression. The dean quizzed him about his school progress and asked if he owned a suit and tie. Mike said yes, and then before he knew it, he was on an interview at the largest law firm in Orange County, in line for an office clerk job.

The role led him to law school at the University of Southern California, where he graduated at the top of his class, in addition to being on the Board of Editors of the Southern California Law Review.

“It was one of the other highlights of Santa Ana College making a way for me,” says Mike about how the kindness he was shown impacted his career trajectory. “Some of the teachers at SAC changed my whole life for the better.”

## The Next Frontier

Mike learned a great deal at SAC, thanks to the teachers who looked out for him and gave him lessons beyond the classroom that endure to this day. Teachers like the “tough” William K. Barry, who taught geology and geography and listened to Mike’s dreams of becoming an astrogeologist. “I asked him one time, I said, Mr. Barry, why are your exams so hard?” His response, “If I don’t push you, you’ll never do half of what you could accomplish,” explains Mike. Then there was Ted Hallahan, who encouraged Mike to stay at SAC one more semester before moving on to Long Beach State. The reason: he needed to mature a bit more before leaving campus. Mike took the advice, and it paid off.



After Long Beach State and USC Law, Mike went on to enjoy a successful career as a corporate attorney, before shifting gears into a stint as a movie producer. He wrote, produced, directed, and was one of the five main actors in ‘The Reunion’, a feature film that was distributed in 1978 by World Wide Films before deciding Hollywood life was not for him. Once his moment in the spotlight was over, he returned to law at Stradling Yocca Carlson & Rauth, the largest firm in Newport Beach.

Later, after what started as a simple subscription to Aviation Week and Space Technology out of curiosity about making a transition out of the legal profession, Mike ended up at a meeting with Pete Conrad, the naval officer, NASA astronaut, and the third man to walk on the moon. Long story short, Mike went on to meet and befriend Pete and become the CEO and President of the parent company of Universal Space Lines LLC, an aerospace solutions company that provided Flight Management Systems, the “brains of space launch vehicles.” USL worked on numerous NASA, DARPA, Air Force, and Naval Research Lab programs, including four Space Shuttle replacement programs and also partnered with large aerospace companies like Boeing, Northrop Grumman, Lockheed Martin and others.

After decades at Universal Space Lines, following in the footsteps of his father, who was a Marine, and his uncle who was also in the military, Mike dusted off his law license to serve as a Judge Advocate Officer. Today, he is a Lieutenant Colonel in the California State Guard “I’m about done now,” he says

## Serviceman by The Sea

Nowadays, Mike spends his time between his home in Cliff Haven and Pittsburgh, where he gets to dote on his beloved 19-month-old grandson.

So much of Mike’s life has been about flying high, learning, growing, and achieving goals that were born at Santa Ana College. Now, it appears, the eagle has landed.

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1530 W. 17th Street, Santa Ana, CA 92701

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