VALDOSTA STATE

UNIVERSITY MAGAZINE

MEET

Dr. Richard A. Carvajal

VSU's Tenth President

ISSUE 2 WINTER 2017

Valdosta State's 2016 homecoming theme was Blazin' 80s!

PHOTO **PAUL LEAVY**

The week was packed full of 80s throwbacks and exciting student-centered activities, including a carnival, Wild Adventures Night, and a Knockerball competition on the Front Lawn. The week wrapped up with our annual Black Light Pep Rally and Lip Sync battle, and a concert on the Front Lawn by Rubiks Groove, an 80s cover band.

Blazer Nation came out in full force on game day against Delta State University, showing their excitement at the homecoming parade and Blazer Walk before bringing home a win. Couldn't make it? Plan to join us in 2017, because it's sure to be even bigger and better than ever.

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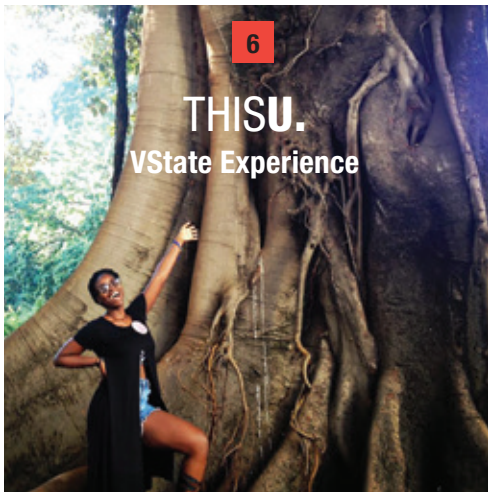

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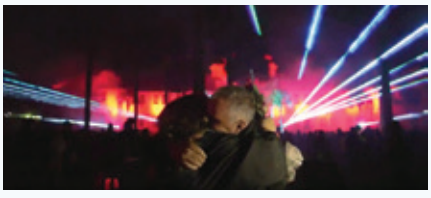
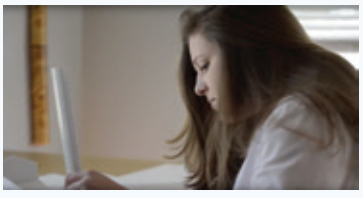
digital content

THE LATEST FROM VSU

From events like homecoming to student stories, find it all at:
www.youtube.com/valdostastateuniv





FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dr. Richard Carvajal

"There is a buzz about this place right now."
Those words, uttered recently by a long-time supporter, echo what many of you have told me regarding how you feel about Valdosta State. Others have told me that they sense excitement and hope.

No matter what you call it – it is certainly a great day to be a Blazer! As we all look for additional ways to contribute to the continuing pursuit of excellence, engaged faculty and staff lead the way with their innovative work in the classrooms and in the many administrative offices that impact student success. Meanwhile, VSU's alumni, friends, and other external supporters are stepping up in an unprecedented way as part of the Invest. Ignite. Inspire capital campaign.

Of course, our students are the biggest beneficiaries and their energy is contagious! Don't believe me? Try sitting with them at the Complex as they cheer our teams to victory!

I invite you to read on to learn about just some of these stories that make VSU such a special place.

Simply put, it is a true honor to be your new president, and I am humbled to have the opportunity to work with so many of you to advance South Georgia's comprehensive flagship university.

Go Blazers!

Dr. Richard Carvajal
President

Simone Register

VState Experience

Offering Student Life on Instagram

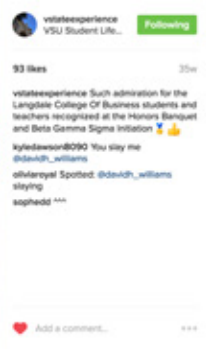
When prospective students are searching for their dream college, they try to figure out which campus may be a good fit for them. They search for colleges with the best financial aid, a beautiful location with amazing weather, or maybe even a school where they can continue a family legacy. But there are aspects to searching for the right school that every student considers: What is it like to be a student there? What will their residence hall look like? Where will they study? Will they find a solid group of friends? Should they join a club?

The VStateExperience Instagram is a place where current students share what a week in their life looks like at Valdosta State. A new host takes over the account each week and highlights their experiences every day. Anyone following the account has an insider's look at Valdosta State through the lens of a student.

Tevin Williams, a former host, describes the account as "a cohesive story of the students," where no story is the same, but every story boasts Blazer Pride. Tevin used his time as host to share his life as a cheerleader by posting behind the scenes pictures of the National Cheerleaders Association Nationals

TEXT **CAMILLE RALSTON**

Bryce France



Competition and his involvement as an employee at the Student Recreation Center.

Simone Register hosted the account during a study abroad trip to Australia. "I understand that taking the first few steps to studying abroad can be intimidating, but I wanted everyone to know that the opportunity and knowledge gained is worth it."

Bryce France, a photographer and art major, used his time as host to feature his photography, as well as showcase the facilities and resources within the Art Department. "It is a great way for students to see all of the other talented departments on campus. A lot can happen throughout a week, and everyone has a chance to see the processes unfold each day."

The VStateExperience Instagram shows the unique experience of each Blazer as they make the most of their journey at Valdosta State. Whether students share a behind the scenes look of their organization, feature their creativity, or bring followers around the world with them, they bring the student body together by highlighting their VState pride.

Tevin Williams

You can keep up with the lives of these inspiring students by following @VStateExperience on Instagram.

RIGHTNOW

Blaze FM

TEXT KEITH WARBURG

PHOTOS WVVS

AN OLD FRIEND RETURNS

WVVS
RADIO RETURNS TO THE AIRWAVES IN NEW FORM

After spending nearly three years off the air, the "Voice of Valdosta State" can again be heard throughout South Georgia. Many alumni may remember WVVS-FM as the epitome of college radio, offering students the opportunity to manage and host a working radio station while providing alternative and popular music to the community.

After three years of renewing construction permits with the FCC [Federal Communications Commission], the university was given the choice of rebuilding the station or giving up the license. The university's leadership understood that having college radio for students and the community was a worthwhile endeavor, so VSU renewed the license and started looking for a way to bring WVVS back to life. Thanks to a partnership with local radio leader Scott James, the station now has access to a tower with signal strength of approximately 30 miles, providing the largest reach WVVS has ever had.

WVVS will be an affiliate station of Georgia Public Broadcasting [GPB] Radio, filling a gap in GPB's South Georgia coverage area. Teya Ryan, president and chief executive officer of GPB, visited campus leaders in 2016 to discuss opportunities for WVVS affiliation, which will include professional news and production training for faculty and students as well as opportunities for internships with GPB in Atlanta.

"The partnership between WVVS and GPB will be an incredible opportunity for our communications students to funnel into competitive internships in Atlanta," said Phil Allen, Vice President for External Affairs. It's also possible that, with the training they receive from VSU and GPB, stories produced by VSU students could be picked up for state and national National Public Radio broadcasts.

The university isn't losing the old-school college radio mission. The university is exploring a two-tiered program, where students can produce on-demand content for the campus distribution and mobile podcasts at tier one, and produce high-quality news content for GPB at tier two. The plan is to air GPB news talk programming from 6 AM to 8 PM, and to air VSU-produced programming from 8 PM to 6 AM. VSU is also looking into the ability to stream the station live online and provide on-demand content for Blazers around the world.

For more information on WVVS, please contact magazine@valdosta.edu.

Tune in at Blaze FM 90.9 for both VSU and GPB programming

Above, vintage photos of the WVVS studio where students served as disc jockeys and producers over its more than 30- year history.

Carley Kuhns
Named Head Women's Basketball Coach

TEXT VSU ATHLETICS

The Lady Blazer basketball program turned the page to a new chapter as Valdosta State Director of Athletics, Herb Reinhard, announced Carley (Peterson) Kuhns as the new head women's basketball coach at VSU.

"I'm extremely honored to be the next head coach for such a great program as Valdosta State," said Kuhns. "I appreciate the trust that Mr. Reinhard has placed in me with this program, and I am thrilled that I have an opportunity to come back home to Valdosta State where both my husband and I played. I know from my experiences as a student athlete at VSU that I am going to be surrounded by great people and a great community, and I am looking forward to the chance to give back. This is a special opportunity for us and we are so excited to get back to Titletown."

Kuhns. a 2015 Blazer Athletics Hall of Fame inductee, took over at VSU following a six-year stint as an assistant coach at Belmont, where she helped lead the Bruins to an Ohio Valley Conference Championship in 2015-16 and the program's second NCAA Tournament appearance in the history of Bruin Basketball.

Kuhns went to the Bruins after completing a two-year graduate assistantship at Valdosta State. While with the Lady Blazers, she assisted with various components of the program. Within one month of joining the Bruin staff in 2010, Kuhns was named to the prestigious Gulf South Conference All-Decade Second Team for her stellar career on the hardwood at Valdosta State.

A former student-athlete at Valdosta State, Kuhns constructed her Hall of Fame career and received numerous honors from 2004 through 2008, including becoming the first Lady Blazer since 2001 to be named a Kodak/State Farm Women's Basketball Coaches Association Honorable Mention All-American. She also recorded 1,133 career points, the 16th-most in program history, and was a two-time First Team All-Gulf South Conference selection. Her 262 three-pointers earned the sharpshooter ownership of the school record in the category and placed her 5th all-time in Gulf South Conference history.

"I am very excited to have Carley returning to Valdosta State as our new women's basketball head coach," said VSU Director of Athletics Herb Reinhard. "It is rewarding when you have the opportunity to bring a Blazer alum back to the university. Carley will be the fourth former VSU student athlete to return to the university as a head coach, and with John Hansen, Tommy Thomas, and Chris Hatcher being the other three, we have certainly had great success with that formula. Carley was an outstanding student-athlete with the Lady Blazer basketball team, and she has been an integral part of the growth and development of a very good Belmont program."

The approach with Kuhns at the helm is expected to bring an energetic, fast-paced style of basketball with an effort to score quickly off the break on offense and put heavy pressure on the ball on defense.

"We're going to expect an up-tempo game from our players," added Kuhns. "We'll get up and down the floor and hopefully put a lot of points on the board, which will make us an exciting team to watch. We're going to defend, rebound, and put together a product that people will look forward to coming out to see."

Kuhns earned her undergraduate degree in health and physical education from Valdosta State in 2008 and completed her master of education degree in higher education leadership in 2010. She and her husband Matt, who also played basketball for Valdosta State, have two daughters, Carsten (2) and Kyler (6 months).

To meet Coach Kuhns in a more relaxed setting than the Complex, check out our Carpool Karaoke session at youtube.com/valdostastateuniv (search the channel for: Karaoke).

The Blazers concluded **homecoming** week with a defeat of the Delta State University Statesmen with a a 56-27 win over the Delta State Statesmen, which led to a **playoff appearance** under first year head coach, Kerwin Bell.

VSU's online MBA programs made the list of **2016 Best Value Online College** for Business Degrees by OnlineU.

VSU invested in student retention with the unveiling of a new artificial turf-covered **Student Recreation Sports Complex Multipurpose Field**.

Capital Campaign Surpasses $49 million

The University Advancement team has already raised more than $49.1 million through Valdosta State's first-ever comprehensive capital campaign—"Invest. Ignite. Inspire. The Campaign for Valdosta State University," which kicked off on July 1, 2014.

With the support of VSU's faculty, staff, students, alumni, and friends, University Advancement hopes to continuing gaining momentum as it strives to reach its working five-year campaign goal of $53,250,000.

The Campaign is the natural evolution of the university's bold strategic plan, which was developed in 2012 and represents a campus-wide commitment to the principles that underpin an innovative and engaged comprehensive institution like VSU. The campaign is also a tactical response to a new funding model for higher education that is expected to place greater weight on measurable outcomes like student retention and graduation rates.

With this effort, VSU is making crucial choices that will allow it to thrive in a new era for higher education in Georgia, taking the necessary steps to control its destiny.

"This is a strong statement by our donors that they have enormous confidence in the leadership of Valdosta State University," said John D. Crawford, vice president for University Advancement and chief executive officer of the VSU Foundation Inc. "I am confident that we will continue on the path to success as long as the VSU community continues to give voice to the remarkable impact being made by the gifts of our donors. Every gift that we receive is impactful, no matter the amount, and we appreciate each donor because of this."

Gifts and pledges raised through the campaign will aid in the development of five key areas—scholarship support, faculty enhancements, programmatic opportunities, athletics excellence, and facility upgrades.

Dr. Vincent A. Miller
Vice President
Division of Student Affairs

VSU welcomes Dr. Vincent Miller to the Division of Student Affairs from Georgia Southern University, where he served as associate vice president for the Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management as well as director of the Student Union. He has more than 15 years of experience in higher education, including progressive leadership responsibility in the areas of student life, Greek life, career services, orientation, parent and family programs, and admissions recruitment at both Georgia Southern University and Louisiana Tech University.

"VSU has been a welcoming community filled with wonderful faculty and staff committed to doing the best for students," he said.

Miller said the most rewarding part of his position is working with VSU students and watching them take their lessons beyond the walls of the classroom.

"We have capable student leaders who are working and serving all over the university to deliver the programs and services students expect," he added. "We could not be successful without the passion and dedication of these student leaders. If you want a glimpse into how bright our future will be, watch these students in action every day."

Miller has already established the Department for Student Diversity and Inclusion and plans to announce the Department of Student Leadership and Volunteer Services in Fall 2017. This new department will provide students with opportunities to enhance their leadership skills and give back to the community through participation in volunteer programs and services.

The Class of 2020 has officially settled in and found their home

First-Year Growth

1,387 FALL 2015

1,458 FALL 2016

Freshmen Enrollment 5%

Average SAT

510	494	1004
Critical Reading	Math	Total

Enrollment by College

- Arts & Sciences 43.1%
- Nursing & Health Sciences 21.8%
- Education & Human Services 12.6%
- Business Administration 12.1%
- The Arts 10.4%

3.18 Average H.S. GPA

Top Five Majors: 1. Nursing | 2. Biology | 3. Business Administration | 4. Psychology | 5. Athletic Training

The campus welcomed **Moi Enomenga**, head of Huaoroni People of Ecuador.

Valdosta State University and **Florida Gateway College** established a new educational partnership designed to better serve currently enrolled and future students at both institutions of higher education.

A group of Valdosta State University **potters** donated their time and talent to help end the hunger crisis in South Georgia.

SPOTLIGHT
The Department of Student Diversity and Inclusion

Committed to expanding services and resources for all students, the Division of Student Affairs announced a new Department of Student Diversity and Inclusion at Valdosta State University, naming Dr. Gerald Williams as interim director.

Williams is a three-time graduate of VSU, with a Bachelor of Arts in legal studies, a Master of Public Administration degree, Master of Education in higher education leadership degree, and a Doctor of Education in higher education administration degree. He was named director of the Office of Career Opportunities in 2013.

"It will be important to build and foster strong partnerships throughout the university community — including academic departments, faculty, staff, and students — to support successful implementation of purposeful, diverse, and inclusive programs. I also invite our many student organizations, including religious life organizations, the LGBTQ organizations, and our minority student organizations, to be actively engaged in the department as we build programs and services for all students."

Williams said each student experiences the university through a different lens and hopes the Department of Student Diversity and Inclusion will bring these varying perspectives together and provide each student on campus with a well-rounded college experience.

The department held the first meeting of the Diversity Programming Board during the fall semester. The board works to promote a community of inclusion by providing educational activities that honor and support students in the areas of gender, religion, ability, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, culture, and sexual orientation. The department also started a program called Diversity Peer Educators. Students participating in the program will be trained to facilitate small group discussions on issues such as racism, sexism, classism, and privilege among the student body.

Pathways Program

Valdosta State University has signed additional Pathways Program agreements with 21 Technical College System of Georgia institutions of higher education.

The Pathways Program centers on the priorities of Complete College Georgia, an initiative developed to increase the number of Georgians earning a four-year college degree. This collaboration between VSU and the Technical College System of Georgia partner institutions allows students with approved Associate of Applied Science or Associate of Applied Technology degrees to maximize the transfer of credits in order to complete a bachelor's degree in two years or less.

Pathways Program students can expect 51 or more transferable credit hours to be applied to either of two articulated programs, a Bachelor of Science in organizational leadership or a Bachelor of Applied Science in human capital performance, both of which are offered completely online.

By 2020, it is projected that over 60 percent of jobs in Georgia will require a certificate, associate degree, or bachelor's degree. Approximately 42 percent of Georgia's young adults currently meet these requirements. Georgia must not only maintain current graduation levels but also produce an additional estimated 250,000 graduates in upcoming years to remain competitive.

Alma Young, VSU CAMP Director

TEXT HALLE ZIMMERMAN
PHOTOS PAUL LEAVY

GROWING futures

EXPANDING OUR REACH INTO THE MIGRANT FARMWORKER COMMUNITY

For migrant families whose farms sustain their livelihood, the idea of earning a college degree seems out of reach. They can't begin to consider obstacles like paying for college when their help is needed to provide for their families. Thanks to a $2.1 million College Assistance Migrant Program grant awarded to VSU by the United States Department of Education Office of Migrant Education, students from migrant communities can now make their college dreams a reality.

Students accepted into CAMP will receive scholarships covering the cost of room and board, tuition and required fees, academic supplies, and necessary transportation, as well as a small monthly stipend.

Valdosta State has long recognized the contribution the migrant community makes in the quality of life in South Georgia and North Florida. The university has taken an active part in the wellness of this community by delivering health care and counseling services through Migrant Farmworker Clinic, LLC in Lake Park, Georgia. Students collect food and clothing for migrant families and host campus events that bring awareness to various social issues within the community. Nursing, social work, and sociology students volunteer to meet a variety of needs ranging from basic case management for affordable medicine to referrals for further medical appointments and educational materials to counseling for more advanced mental health needs such as substance abuse, depression, and anxiety.

Now, Valdosta State is able to expand its reach to the migrant community by offering workers and their families the opportunity to receive a college education. In September, VSU earned a $2.1 million competitive grant from the United States Department of Education Office of Migrant Education. The grant awards the university $424,833 per year for five years to establish and maintain a College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) on campus. These funds will be used to identify, recruit, and retain students who are migratory or seasonal farmworkers—or their children—and build a bridge to higher education.

Students accepted into CAMP will receive scholarships covering the cost of room and board, tuition and required fees, academic supplies, and necessary transportation, as well as a small monthly stipend. Additionally, they will have access to a host of support services including tutoring, mentoring and counseling. The program will serve a total of 25 students each year and give them the tools necessary to be a productive and successful member of the university throughout their VSU career.

"As reflected in its mission statement, VSU is committed to meeting the educational needs of the region's diverse population in order to sustain economic growth and advance the standard of living for everyone," said Dr. Anthony Scheffler, interim associate vice president of academic affairs and professor in the James L. and Dorothy H. Dewar College of Education and Human Services, and principal investigator on the grant. "The university has demonstrated this commitment by actively exploring innovative pedagogies and working to enhance its recruitment and student support processes in order to accommodate all students, regardless of their circumstance."

This was the university's second attempt at applying for CAMP funding. "We did our homework, we listened to their critiques, and we reapplied. We had to," said Kerry Morris, who oversees research and grant strategies for VSU's Office of Sponsored Programs and Research Administration. "Student support is critical, and this grant has given us the motivation we need to pursue an even larger piece of the federal funding pie."

Once funding was secured, it was time to find a strong individual to successfully lead this new initiative. The team in search of this leader found strength and more in Alma Young.

Young moved to the United States at the age of 11 and settled in a migrant community in the Texas Valley. Both her mother and stepfather were migrant workers, so her family was constantly moving for work. Eventually, they moved to Vidalia, Georgia, where her parents remain today. Young admits her family's migrant lifestyle posed difficulties at times, but she couldn't have predicted that other obstacles would lie ahead.

When Young was 16 years old, she was involved in a car accident in which she suffered a traumatic brain injury. It took a few months, but she was able to recover and return to school. Soon, she began struggling in class and having difficulty in tasks as simple as writing her name. Discouraged, she made the decision to drop out of high school. During her time away from school, her younger brother was able to continue his education and attend Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College (ABAC), where he became a member of their CAMP grant program. Young's brother understood the

CAMP Director Alma Young works to develop relationships with students and families in the migrant communities of South Georgia.

opportunities this type of program could offer his sister, and he encouraged her to complete her General Education Development degree (GED) and follow him to ABAC for CAMP. Young completed her GED and began attending ABAC as a member of CAMP. Because of the grant, Young was able to live on campus and enjoy college activities as any traditional student would. Once her first two years of the program were complete, CAMP mentors began encouraging her to complete her undergraduate degree. Although she was nervous, she made the decision to transfer to a regional university and complete her undergraduate degree. She then returned to ABAC, where she began her first job working with scholarship programs for Hispanic students. After serving ABAC for eight years, she has now made her way to Valdosta State to serve as the Director of CAMP.

Since securing the grant in August, two students have already been enrolled in the program and are receiving benefits. Young plans to have 25 students enrolled in the program by May, so they can begin taking classes in the fall. To get started with recruitment, she has sought out current VSU students who are eligible to receive benefits from CAMP and educated them on opportunities associated with the grant. By doing this, she hopes to provide support to local students and give them the best college experience possible.

Recently, Young hired a recruiter to target local migrant communities in Brooks, Echols, Colquitt, Coffee, and other regional counties. Within these communities, Young and the recruiter plan to target students who would live on campus as well as those who would commute. Young looks forward to offering commuter students the same opportunities available to traditional students.

Young wants to provide students with a learning community where they experience social growth from attending seminar classes with fellow CAMP members. She also plans to incorporate activities such as trips to museums, aquariums, and businesses to

Since securing the grant in August, two students have already been enrolled into the program and are receiving benefits. Young plans to have 25 students enrolled in the program by May.

foster intellectual growth inside and outside of the classroom. In addition, Young plans to emphasize communication with parents to alleviate misunderstandings regarding the requirements and responsibilities associated with CAMP. Instilling transparency into these relationships will build trust and result in personal growth for the students.

"Building a bridge between the parents and the university will not only prove to be a benefit for the student, but it also gives parents peace of mind and someone they can call if they have any questions," said Young.

Through CAMP, Young and her team look forward to establishing stability, a sense of community, and cultural appreciation for their students. The overall goal is maximizing each student's success throughout college and preparing them to find employment after graduation. With recruitment, strategic communication, and a lot of heart, Young plans to spread the news of this great opportunity and provide students with educational support for years to come.

Jose Delgado, a freshman studying computer science at Valdosta State, recently received a scholarship through the College Assistance Migrant Program.

Jose Delgado was raised in a small agricultural town called Statenville in Echols County. There, he spent much of his youth living a migrant lifestyle with his family, which meant missing out on after-school and weekend activities with friends.

Jose dreamed of one day getting his education, but knew it would be difficult. However, his cousin, who was a member of CAMP's program at another college, informed him that Valdosta State had recently received a CAMP grant and encouraged him to research the program. It was then he realized that achieving his dream might not be as impossible as it had once seemed.

Before receiving benefits, Delgado's family was unsure if they would be able to afford a housing and meal plan, so they decided he would live at home. Since beginning classes in August, he has been making a 35-minute commute to and from class every day. However, since being selected for the scholarship, he has been given a waiver for housing and a stipend for meals. This spring, he became a traditional student and lives on campus.

For Delgado, CAMP not only provides an opportunity to attend college, but it also provides him and those with similar backgrounds with a community to rely on and have with them on every step of their journey.

Delgado plans to graduate and begin a career as a security analyst. He has no doubt that he will succeed, because he has the best motivation behind him: his family. Delgado is grateful to have a chance to build a better life and give back to those he loves. He plans on utilizing this gift to encourage others from migrant backgrounds to seek educational opportunities and never give up hope.

PROJECT INNOVATE UPDATE

VSU Leadership Academy

TEXT JORDAN WEST

The VSU Leadership Academy is one of 24 projects funded by the Project Innovate grant. Valdosta State University has worked for more than a century to equip students with the tools they need to change the world. Educating future generations to be nurses, teachers, counselors, business leaders, and the like cannot be done adequately without a distinguished faculty and staff leading the way. To promote educational excellence and provide students with exceptional leaders, VSU implemented the VSU Leadership Academy for its faculty and staff. The Employee and Organizational Development Department oversees the VSU Leadership Academy, and utilizes the expertise of the Leaders Lyceum facilitators to create transformational experiences that accelerate the development of leaders to a stage of greater maturity and effectiveness to better serve the students of VSU.

Representatives from all divisions on campus were selected to be part of the VSU Leadership Academy. The group of 35 applicants chosen for VSU Leadership Academy will spend approximately 40 hours during a six-month period in group learning formats, independent study, and action learning with the opportunity for extended mentoring through March 2018.

The complete list of other initiatives funded by Project Innovate can be found below:

- Programming to Reduce Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, and Stalking on Campus
- Paying it Forward: Enhancing American Sign Language (ASL) Skills in Pre-Service Teachers of the Deaf, ASL/English Interpreters, and Community Stakeholders
- Center for Applied Social Sciences Partnership Grants
- Collaboration Between Nursing and Spanish for Medical Professionals
- Three-Dimensional Scanner for VSU Maker Space and Online Course Enhancement
- The Big Pitch: A Problem-Solving Approach to the Application of Undergraduate Research
- MGED-STEM (Middle Grades Education Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) Interdisciplinary Teaching and Learning Experiences
- Standardized Patient Program
- Big Data Storage to Power Recruitment and Retention Solutions
- Enhancing Student Enrollment, Retention, and Satisfaction in Engineering and Other STEM Fields
- Exploring Citizenship Through Politics: Summer Camp for Local Students
- Project CORE (Creating Opportunities for Research and Engagement) Pilot
- Videos for Student Success and Retention
- Improving Pass Rates for Introductory Computer Science Courses through the Creation of Hands-On Closed Labs
- Communication and Vital Screening Initiative
- Online Undergraduate Psychology Degree
- Joint Urban Planning and Management Program with a Chinese University
- Criminal Justice Outreach and Recruitment to Agencies
- Extended College Algebra Using SI-Led Learning Activities
- ACES (Aspire, Connect, Encourage, and Succeed)
- Career Readiness for African-American Males
- Professional Development for Best Practices in Online Courses
- Establishment of a Core Curriculum Faculty Status

OUR NEW DAY

Dr. Richard Carvajal has been many things in his life. He has been a janitor, a homeless teen, an assistant banquet chef, a college graduate, a cancer survivor, a triathlete, and a college president. In January 2017, he became the 10th president of Valdosta State University.

TEXT **KEITH WARBURG**
PHOTOS **PAUL LEAVY**

Carvajal came to South Georgia from Washington State, but he didn't see himself as a Washingtonian. Born in Los Angeles and raised in Oklahoma, he often spent nights with his father waxing floors and cleaning bathrooms, receiving payments of Pepsi Cola and cherry pies. After a series of family changes, he ended up living in the back of his car in high school. It was there that he was urged by teachers and mentors to make the most of his education and go to East Central University (ECU) in Oklahoma, a regional university he compares closely to Valdosta State.

After meeting and marrying his wife at ECU, the Carvajals migrated around the country for school and work. Eventually, they landed at the University of South Carolina where he completed his Ph.D.

"I love being in the South," he said. "The sense of community and small town life is a tremendous value for my family, and it's ultimately what brought us back here." For family reasons, they moved west after graduation: first to Kansas, to be near his father, and then to Washington, to be near his mother.

"We were there for six years," he said, "and my wife and I were blessed to be there to take care of my mom, but I was never a Washingtonian—I don't like the rain, I don't like the traffic. Once we got her back on her feet, we wanted to get back to an area we were comfortable in." They were selective when looking for a new home and they ended up connecting with the people of Bainbridge, Georgia, where Carvajal became the president of Bainbridge State College in 2010.

In the summer of 2014, Carvajal spent the spring and summer training for an Olympic-distance triathlon. In the best shape of his life, he began driving across Alabama to compete in the race. During his trip, he stopped for a sandwich and got a stomachache. The pain grew worse and worse, and he ended up crawling into an emergency room in Birmingham. Doctors thought he was passing kidney stones and gave him Tylenol, and placed him in a room. It didn't get better—the pain increased as the night went on. Overnight, he passed out from the pain, but it went away on its own. They sent him back home—no race—and over the next three weeks, every doctor said "it's probably nothing, it'll never happen again."

"I must have been on the prayer list of every church in South Georgia, churches I knew I didn't know anybody at. But they heard about my story. I can never fully repay that, but to have an opportunity to serve the area of the state that has become my home is a big deal to me."

Carvajal's doctor finally asked him to see one more specialist, a new doctor in nearby Thomasville. That doctor was the only local physician who could run one particular test that would conclusively tell whether anything was actually wrong. After the procedure, Carvajal came out of the operating room and found out he had pancreatic cancer. It turns out that the specialist had only recently arrived in Thomasville because he had been studying at the Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville, where he had spent a year learning to do that particular test. A day and a half later, Carvajal was in Jacksonville. They performed a surgery, and after months of recovery, he was cured.

"My motto is 'don't quit,'" he said. "I have a copy of a poem called 'Don't Quit' in my office, and I read it every day. I keep telling myself

'don't quit, we're going to get through this.'"

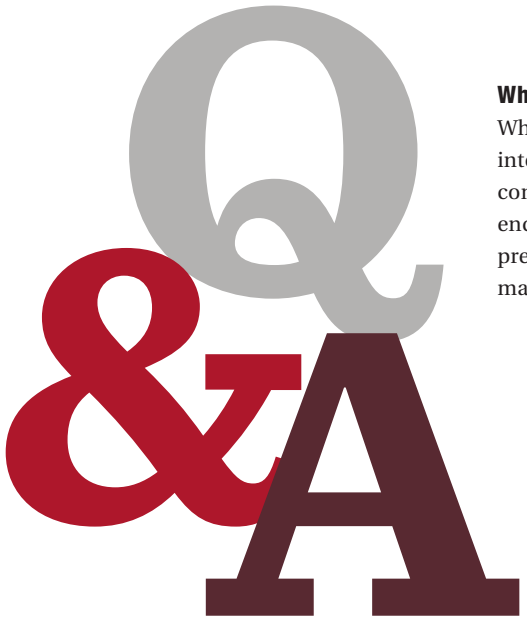
One year later to the day, he got back into his car to compete in a triathlon. This time, he finished the race.

It was during the months of recovery that Carvajal realized the deep connection his family has with South Georgia. "The support that I got during my sickness didn't just come from Bainbridge," he said. "As I sat in my recliner during the weeks of recovery, I started to put a few get well cards on the glass doors behind me." After a while, he had a wall full of get well cards from across South Georgia, and had to start making space for the plants, cakes, and meals that followed. "I must have been on the prayer list of every church in South Georgia, churches I knew I didn't know anybody at. But they heard about my story," he said. He believes that his recovery is owed to the support he received from South Georgia. "I can never fully repay that, but to have an opportunity to serve the area of the state that has become my home is a big deal to me."

Carvajal has now been able to serve as the president and interim president of three South Georgia institutions, and he believes there is no institution in the system with a bigger opportunity to impact the region he loves than VSU. As a regional university, he sees VSU as the key to answering the unique questions and problems facing South Georgia, using the talents of our faculty and students to make the region a better place for having the university. "I think it's an immense privilege to partner with the folks who care so much about this place and to do the work collectively to make South Georgia better."

About Richard A Carvajal

Education: Ph.D. in Educational Administration, University of South Carolina • M.S. in College Student Personnel Administration, Southern Illinois University of Carbondale • B.S. in Mass Communication/Sociology, East Central University **Career:** Interim President, Darton State College (Albany, Georgia) • President, Bainbridge State College (Bainbridge, Georgia) • VP Student Success Services, Cascadia College (Bothell, Washington) • Dean of Student Services, Independence Community College (Independence, Kansas)



When did you know VSU was the right fit for you?

When I interviewed, I needed to just be me, and see if I fit. As we went through two days of interviews, I had forums back to back. People would leave at the end, chat in the hallway, and come back again with more and more energy as the day went on. It energized me, and by the end of the day, I could feel a buzz in the final forum. I went home and told a mentor of mine that presidential searches should be a time of hope, and what thrilled me the most was just that, no matter how it turned out, I had given some folks hope about the future of the university.

As excited as we were in the forums, I was exhausted by the end of the second day. When we finished, I was loaded up and taken to the College of Business, and I don't know if I showed it, but I was about to drop. I walked into the business school for the last meeting with the search committee, where I was expecting one more round of hammering questions. I was trying to pull together the energy for another interview when they told me it was my chance to ask any last questions I had.

"I started asking about things I'd heard over the previous two days. I started with a faculty question, and there was a great energy among the committee, and they started talking to each other. It was educational for me, because I got to see what that issue really looked like. I got through that one, and the last question I asked was for the students. The two student reps were at the other end of the table, and when I asked about school spirit and how to build it, they almost jumped out of their chairs. Everybody around the table had a theory about what was working, what wasn't, and what needed to improve—it was like a bomb had gone off. After they talked for a while, I raised my hand and told them 'We just spent two days of me telling you a process in which I would ask questions about the issues, you all would tell me what they were, and we would come up together with a plan to fix issues that we are most passionate about, and we just did that.' It was a powerful moment, and I knew that she understood it. The energy of that moment for me was an amazing draw. I went home and told all of my mentors, colleagues, and friends that story, and I knew that this was a place I could call home.

What are you looking forward to the most in the first 100 days?

The first 100 days matter a lot. It's how I've structured the presidency at both the places I've been. I'm not somebody who comes in on day one and says, 'I have all the answers, so just get on my back and I'll get us there." It's much more about a process of asking questions about what we're doing, what we need to change, and where we need to innovate. With the answers to those questions, you see where the energies lie. That ultimately forms a vision, and we go execute that. The first 100 days are about answering those questions.

On the first day of classes, I'm going to buy a local donut shop out of all its donuts. I'll stop by classes and staff departments. It's something I do every year, and it's admittedly selfish, because I want to be able to get out and meet as many people as possible on campus. I use it as an early icebreaker to start having conversations with everyone.

I will also send out an email to the entire campus that asks three questions. The first is to tell me about yourself; relationships matter, and we need to get to know one another better. Then, I'll ask where they think we need to go as a university and what they need from me as their president to make it happen. I'll follow that up with listening

5 THINGS YOU WON'T FIND ON HIS RÉSUMÉ

1. **Triathlon and long-distance runner.**
2. **Amateur thespian.** "In college, I got to play the lead in *Inherit the Wind*. I love the arts because of that, and I look forward to being a part of that at VSU. I also met my wife while she was performing in a play with my brother."
3. **Small-town guy.** "I graduated with 28 kids; I was co-valedictorian… with 4 other students. There's just something about small towns—I still love walking into restaurants and seeing people you know."
4. **Former assistant banquet chef.** "I worked every job I could to get through college. One summer I got a job as a cook's helper in the catering kitchen, and after 5 days on the job, the chef and assistant chef quit, so I had to cook turkey and dressing for 60 people that night—I had no idea how to cook anything, much less a catered meal. So I got on a long, corded phone, and my mom walked me through the entire meal for several hours as I got through it. It's one of those crazy stories of how someone with a goal of getting through college can do anything to make it happen."
5. **Homeless as a teenager.** "I was the student who was living homeless in the back seat of a car until someone steered me into a regional university. And my life changed because of the people there. What we have to do as an institution is to understand the situations our students are coming from, and that we're in the opportunity business. Students come to a school like VSU to get their shot at success."

See the president's donut run at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cmzHJXmpzW8]

sessions, and then I'll be out and about a lot. Relationships are important, so I will go to people where they are, at campus events, athletics, and community events to start building those relationships.

On Faculty:

Next to mom and dad, there is not a more impactful relationship than the one students will form with a faculty member. It doesn't happen in the tenth row on Tuesday and Thursday mornings, but it happens in hallways, in faculty offices, and in coffee and lunch meetings. What I ask of our faculty is that they recognize the incredible opportunity they have to shape lives. Who else gets to wake up everyday knowing their mission is to change somebody's life? All of our staff and community have a role there, but at the front of the line for that is the faculty, so I'm going to ask them to embrace that. A lot of them are embracing that mission—but they can grab someone and bring them along to do it with them.

The strength of a regional university is so closely connected to the place it serves. I've visited with our faculty about this—I want the faculty's research mission to be focused on the big questions for South Georgia. We have the folks here who can get those answers, so we're going to be engaged in that work everyday to make a difference.

On Students:

We have some great student leaders here. There is an energy to that group that shows me what the university is and what it can be going forward. I was the struggling student who was living homeless in the back seat of a car until someone steered me into a regional university. And my life changed because of the people there. What we have to do as an institution is understand the situations our students are coming from, and that we're in the opportunity business. Students come to a school like VSU to get their shot at success, and we have to help them become successful. They don't come here thinking: "I'm going to have one year here, then I'm gone." Retention is key. If you ask me, the two happiest days of the year are move-in day and graduation day. On move-in day, every student and every student envisions themselves getting to graduation. Our mission is to help them get there.

On Community:

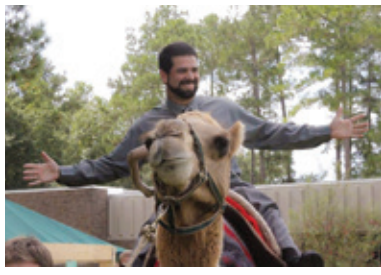
We are not just this community's, but also South Georgia's regional university. I want our community leaders to get to know me, but I also want them to get to know other leaders in the institution. I want them to see our students in positive ways. I want there to be an incredibly close connection between VSU and the Valdosta community. I want folks across the state to say 'that is the perfect example of what a university working alongside its community can look like.' And it doesn't happen by accident. It's intentional work, and it takes time. I'll do my part in that, but it's all of our job to build that connection and maintain it. Valdosta and the region should be a great place because VSU is here.

And two questions from VSU students:

What is the strangest day you've had on a college campus?

When I got to Bainbridge, a cookout was the extent of student life. So when I got there, we had conversations with the students that revealed that there just wasn't enough fun stuff to do. We invested in student life personnel, and the new director would just pop in and say "Hey, boss" whenever she had a good idea. And it was always wild and crazy. So she popped in one day and said, "Hey, boss… do you mind if I bring a camel to campus? I want to do a hump day." So we got together with a local zoo and had camel rides on campus. *They even got photos of me riding a camel through campus!*

When I was a student, we voted on a fee to build a student union that I would never get to use, but we knew we were investing in the students to come after us. It didn't mean we weren't investing in projects that would benefit us immediately, but sometimes you just try to leave a place better for the people who come after you. So what I would say is, we're going to need to collect ideas and solutions for how we improve school spirit now and be intentional about making long-term impact on the campus. How do we make the student section a great place to be? How do we plan fun activities for students that will encourage them to stay? Students don't just come to college to have fun—you can do that anywhere—they come for a degree. But we know that students who get engaged in activities tend to stay. We have to figure out how the students who are involved can get others involved. Sometimes that means concerts, clubs, or, you know, camels.



What will your regular order at the Student Union Starbucks be?

I used to live near Seattle – the home of Starbucks and coffee—but I hate coffee. I can't stand the smell of it [laughs]. But when you work in Seattle, meetings don't happen in conference rooms—they happen in Starbucks. I always had to be there, so I started experimenting with what I liked, and I found Chai Lattes. I'm looking for who has the best vanilla chai in town.

I use coffee meetings now as a way to meet and listen to students. There aren't many students who will come to West Hall and see me, but I will come see them. The reason is simple – students will tell me things that need to be worked on that I won't hear about any other way. I'll meet regularly with student leaders to make sure communication is open, but the SGA won't hear everything from the students either. Students should at least have an idea of who their president is. For example, I know basketball season is going strong, and I hope the students won't kick me out when I come to the student section with them. I've already prepped my wife for that.

Colleen Kavanaugh: FOCUSING HER FIRE

TEXT **JORDAN WEST**

PHOTOS **GRAHAM NGUYEN**

Junior **Colleen Kavanaugh** can be found at VSU sporting events donning face paint and wearing red to support the Blazers. But her school spirit does not stop there—she and fellow members of The Fire Pit, a student organization dedicated to promoting school spirit by handing out megaphones, cheer cards, t-shirts, pom-poms, and noisemakers to the loudest and proudest fans in Blazer Nation.

Kavanaugh, co-founder of The Fire Pit, said its purpose — changing the culture of campus with school spirit — is an overflow of her love for the school that helped her discover her passion.

She arrived on campus as an athletic training major, but after her first few classes, she realized that she was not sure what she wanted to study. Kavanaugh, a Brunswick, Georgia, native, knew she needed to change her major and was at a loss.

"I went to talk to a staff member in financial aid to see how I could drop my classes and move home," she said. "He told me to open up my planner and said, 'Look at all of the events you have going on just this week.'"

He explained to Kavanaugh that both she and the campus would miss out if she were to move home, and he encouraged her to finish up her classes that semester and find a major that would be a better fit for her at VSU.

"I talked to Kevin Taylor in Career Services, and I learned that communications was a major I would really enjoy," Kavanaugh said. Her new classes taught her about coordinating events, clear communication, and being part of a team.

Now in her fourth year, Kavanaugh found a home at VSU. "I have fallen in love with Valdosta and the diversity of our campus," she said. "I realized the biggest focus of my heart was school spirit, and I wanted to concentrate on it. Everyone had school spirit, but because no one was promoting it, people kept it to themselves."

The organization does not create events, but instead brings school spirit to pre-planned events to enhance the overall experience. Kavanaugh said that the organization hopes to help students embrace their Blazer pride.

In fall of 2016, Kavanaugh and friend Jackie Marrero, a fourth-year healthcare administration major, launched The Fire Pit. Kavanaugh explained that The Fire Pit utilizes different departments on campus to encourage students, staff, faculty, alumni, and members of the community to come together and support VSU through activities like attending events and wearing red. The organization does not create events, but instead brings school spirit to pre-planned events to enhance the overall experience. Kavanaugh said that the organization hopes to help students embrace their Blazer pride.

More than anything, Kavanaugh just wants to celebrate VSU with the people who love it most. She said, "If I had left my freshman year, I would have missed out on all of this."

"The people," she said, "are what make VSU so special."

Luke Tilt and Quinn Silvernale: IN THE WAKE

Quinn Silvernale and Luke Tilt at their Valdosta Wake Compound

College students dream about turning their passion into a job that pays the bills. Some make that dream a reality. For Langdale College of Business Administration graduates, Luke Tilt and Quinn Silvernale, that passion was wakeboarding

During his freshman year, Tilt began making several new friends, including Silvernale, who lived in his dorm and shared his love for wakeboarding. Soon, Tilt and Silvernale began studying together and focusing their school projects on one concept: building a cable park for wakeboarding. After putting their thoughts together, they realized they had developed a solid business plan and decided to pursue their dream of creating Valdosta's first Wakeboard Cable Park.

When graduation rolled around in the spring of 2011, Tilt engaged the Small Business Development Center in the Langdale College of Business Administration to secure financing and make their dream a reality. Within one year of graduation, the Valdosta Wake Compound was open and ready for business.

Tilt and Silvernale have been running the Wake Compound for five years. Since opening in 2012, the park has expanded from a 10-acre facility to a 30-acre facility that gains worldwide attention. In the future, they plan to expand the facility, provide overnight stays for out of town wakeboarders, and partner with Valdosta State to create a student wakeboarding team. The duo looks forward to further developing the park and sharing their passion with others for years to come.

TEXT **HALLE ZIMMERMAN**

PHOTOS **PAUL LEAVY**

Our Treasured Past Déjà vu

1950s

Over the last 110 years, many areas of the university have remained virtually unchanged— Pound Hall, the Front Lawn, and Palms Quad, for example. But as missions evolve and student bodies grow, the campus has changed to meet the needs of a modern university.

This photo is one of our favorites, taken mid-century on a grassy lawn where Hopper Hall now stands. In the back you can see West Hall, and on the right is Converse Hall, which later caught fire in the 1970s. What's most interesting is how little things change: 110 years have gone by, and students have always taken advantage of Valdosta State's wide open green spaces for sports, relaxation, and studying.

Where was your favorite space? Let us know at magazine@valdosta.edu.

PHOTO VSU ARCHIVES

happenings

Alumni Events

April 21, 2017
Opera After Dark: Wine, Women, and Song
This dinner-theater fundraiser, held at The Patterson in downtown Valdosta, will serve fine cuisine and wonderful entertainment, featuring beloved vocal music performed by VSU Opera. The event begins at 6:30 p.m. with a buffet of heavy hors d'oeuvres. The performance begins at 7:15 p.m. Reservations required. Ticket prices and information available at 229-333-2150.

March 31, May 12, and June 30
Critical Issues in Criminal Justice Seminar Series
Join VSU Criminal Justice faculty and earn CEU/POST credits for in-depth seminars on Adult and Juvenile Re-Entry, Technology in Policing, and Diversion Programs. Information is available at Valdosta.edu/cjseminarseries

April 29, 2017
Valdosta Symphony Orchestra
Performing: Dvorak Romance in F Minor, Op. 11 featuring Kristin Yu, violin; Copland Clarinet Concerto featuring Peter Geldrich, clarinet; and Stravinsky Petrushka (1947).

Winter 2017
Winter is Basketball, Baseball, and Softball season! See ticket info and schedules at vstateblazers.com, and watch games online at vstateblazers.tv

Summer 2017
Peach State Summer Theatre
Featuring six weeks of performances, including Shrek: The Musical, Forever Plaid, and My Fair Lady.

Recruitment Events

February 20 – V-State Experience Macon
Healy Point Country Club
293 River North Blvd.
Macon, GA 31211

February 21 - V-State Experience Columbus
Country Club of Columbus
2610 Cherokee Ave.
Columbus, GA 31906

February 22- V-State Experience Cobb
Marietta Country Club
1400 Marietta Country Club Dr.
Kennesaw, GA 30152

February 27- V-State Experience Warner Robins
Landings Golf Club
309 Stathams Way
Warner Robins, GA 31088

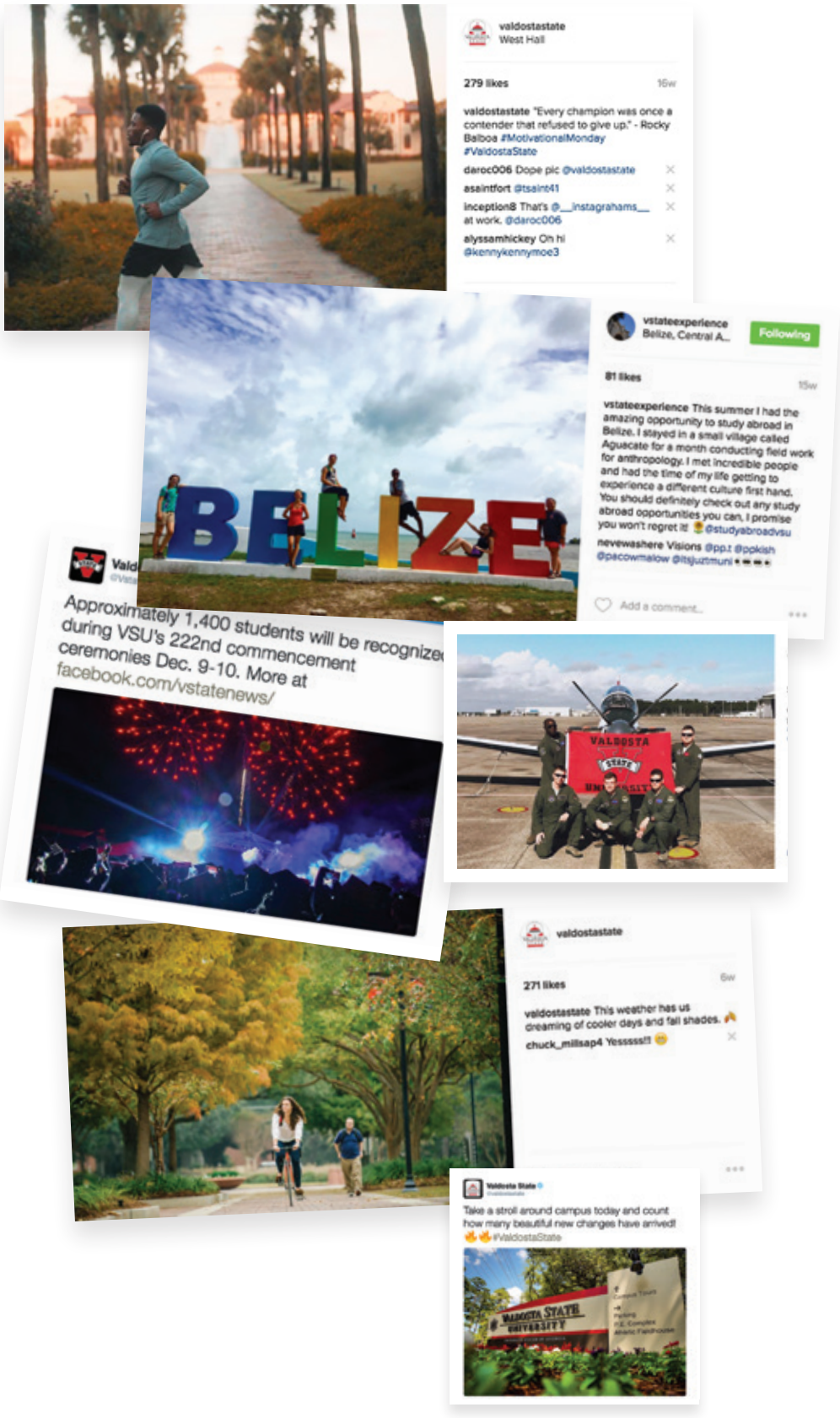
February 28- V-State Experience Jacksonville
Epping Forrest & Yacht Club Country Club
1830 Epping Forest Dr.
Jacksonville, FL 32217

March 9- V-State Experience Peachtree City
Flat Creek Country Club
100 Creek Rd.
Peachtree City, GA 30269

April 1 - Open House

snippets

See some of our favorite moments online and follow us @ValdostaState for updates, events & more.



SAY HELLO!

TO VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY

Maybe it's been a while since you've gotten to know VSU, but now at nearly 110 years old, Valdosta is poised to flourish with new leadership, new programs, new initiatives, and most importantly, new students. It is a time when the University is holding on to the best of its past while blazing a clear path toward a bigger future, a future of both substance and boldness. We welcome you to Valdosta State University Magazine and hope you'll "say hello" to a new future with us.

Valdosta State University magazine is a bi-annual publication for students, alumni, and friends of the university. The publication is committed to reflecting the mission, achievements, and culture of Valdosta State University, the communities it benefits from, and those it serves.

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