The story of the revitalization of Fresno’s downtown helps to describe the critical role our students and graduates can play in generating bold ideas for where we live.

Universities are generally recognized for the quality of their academic and research programs and the ways in which they provide opportunities to students from all backgrounds. These are the cornerstones of higher education and the hallmarks of what society values and expects from our nation’s universities. While those attributes are incredibly important and worthy, it is noteworthy that, at Fresno State, our students and alumni also make giving back to the community a vital part of their Bulldog experience. Our surveys show students and alumni are more likely to be civically engaged in their communities than those who haven’t had the opportunity to seek a higher education. While we provide a strong academic foundation at Fresno State, we also value the opportunity for students to become civic entrepreneurs, which inspires community pride and engagement.

As you will learn through this issue of Fresno State Magazine, even though the campus is located eight miles from downtown Fresno, it’s clear that our Bulldogs are woven into the fabric of the district, just like they are in countless communities throughout the Valley and beyond.

The University is proud of the contributions people associated with Fresno State are making to the downtown revitalization effort. We have expressed our institutional support by investing in the Graduate Art Studios and in the Downtown Center at Bitwise South Stadium, where our lecture series, professional-development courses and career-readiness workshops are offered.

I hope you enjoy reading about the energy and devotion your Bulldog colleagues are pouring into this initiative, and I hope you take the time to visit downtown Fresno to see for yourself. It’s a bold effort that we can all be proud to support.

Dr. Joseph I. Castro
President, Fresno State
Back in the Spotlight
Photo by Cary Edmondson

Fresno State wrestling returned to the mat this season for the first time since the program was disbanded in 2006, and women’s water polo competed for the first time ever. And the Red Wave showed its excitement. The wrestling home opener against No. 14 Illinois drew the third-largest crowd in program history as 6,840 fans packed the lower bowl of the Save Mart Center. The Bulldogs finished fifth in the nation in total attendance.

A youthful team, the Bulldogs put up a fight before falling 33-10 to the Illini under first-year coach Troy Steiner. Fresno State finished the season 4-16 overall (1-5 in the Big 12 Conference) with a 20-man roster that included 19 freshmen and sophomores.

Just the Ticket
to Build Our Community

The Bulldog Scholarship Fund gives Fresno State alumni and fans the opportunity to support the student-athletes who inspire them.

For more information, visit www.bulldogscholarshipfund.com
Splashing onto the Scene
Photo by Cary Edmondson

Fresno State women’s water polo hit the local sports scene with its first-ever home match on Feb. 9, a 16-6 win over crosstown Fresno Pacific. A standing-room-only crowd of 858 fans were treated to plenty of action and a beautiful sunset at the Fresno State Aquatics Center.

With a young team and a challenging schedule under first-year coach Natalie Benson, the Bulldogs got out to a 5-14 start on the season and beat Santa Clara 7-6 on March 28 to earn their first Golden Coast Conference win. Twelve of the 19 players on the roster are freshmen.

Just the Ticket to Build Our Community

The Bulldog Scholarship Fund gives Fresno State alumni and fans the opportunity to support the student-athletes who inspire them.

For more information, visit www.bulldogscholarshipfund.com
To strengthen its reputation as a national leader in applied research on water, Fresno State appointed Central Valley native Thomas C. Esqueda as its first associate vice president for water and sustainability. Esqueda was previously the director of public utilities for the City of Fresno.

"Thomas Esqueda brings a wealth of water experience in private industries, local and state government and higher education," says Fresno State Provost Lynnette Zelezny. "A high-energy leader, he is eager to champion our quest to be ‘the Water University.’"

Partnering with industry and government agencies, Fresno State incorporates new technologies — satellite, infrared and computer — into its applied water research. Faculty, students and staff study water quality, conservation, delivery systems, supply development, recycling and drought-tolerant crops. The campus houses the Center for Irrigation Technology, the International Center for Water Technology and the Water and Energy Technology Center. The University also is a partner in Blue Tech Valley — an ambitious initiative to create a Silicon Valley-like hub of water research and development.

"Throughout my 29-year career, I have worked with communities around the country to solve water challenges, and this opportunity to combine my experience with the commitment and passion of the Fresno State community is an ideal match."

— Thomas C. Esqueda

In an unpretentious lab on the Fresno State campus, biology professor Dr. Jason Bush is looking for ways to target biological mechanisms that fuel cancer. Clues to cutting-edge cancer research may be found in metabolites, small molecules that could hold the secret to better quality of life for patients diagnosed with brain or breast cancer. His current work involves refining cancer treatments by studying stem cells.

"Humans are merely extrapolations of all their trillions of cells, but stem cells are special," Bush says. "They have the potential to develop into different cell types throughout the body, thus acting as an internal repair system that is crucial to a healthy life."

Bush’s work with biology students is just one of the latest research projects underway in the College of Science and Mathematics at Fresno State, which recently received two major gifts to further its mission "to graduate the next generation of scientists and mathematicians, teachers, technicians, health professionals and field researchers."

A $1 million gift from a donor who wishes to remain anonymous was announced Oct. 24 by University President Joseph I. Castro with half allocated to student research in genetics and molecular biology and the other half for The President’s Circle for Excellence, an annual giving society dedicated to addressing the most pressing needs on campus.

A week later, Castro joined Chevron in announcing a $450,000 donation to Fresno State in support of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) programs in Fresno State’s Lyles College of Engineering and College of Science and Mathematics.

The College of Science and Mathematics also celebrated the grand opening of two newly renovated biology and chemistry laboratories on the first floor of the Science I building. This project allows for data collection and analyses that are critical for preparing students for future science careers.

By Eddie Hughes
Bulldog Stadium Renovation Update

Planning continues on the Bulldog Stadium modernization project, as previewed in this magazine in 2015. The project’s scope and timeline have been adjusted to emphasize core maintenance and improvements to existing facilities and to limit overall project costs.

Phase 1, which included new fencing and branding elements at the stadium, was completed in 2016. The early stages of Phase 2, which is focused on facility modernization including repairs to the east side seating area, are underway, with additional work to be completed after the 2018 season.

“Enhancing the fan experience continues to be our top priority,” says Stephen Robertello, interim director of athletics. “This requires the University to focus on addressing the backlog of deferred maintenance and improvements that are priorities for our Red Wave fans, such as utility and technology infrastructure, upgraded restrooms, concessions and ADA accessibility.”

Robertello emphasizes the importance of the University addressing these facility issues first before moving forward on expansion of any premium seating areas, which may be a future phase of expansion (Phase 3).

Fresno State President Joseph I. Castro says the University remains committed to this project as a high priority. The scope of the project will be focused on upgrading the facility and fan experience by addressing projects mentioned above and existing luxury suites with an estimated budget of $45 million. He said the University will be working closely with the CSU Office of the Chancellor to develop an appropriate financial plan that will support these necessary improvements. Bulldog Stadium is an asset owned by the CSU, with a facility and operating lease with the Athletic Corporation.

As the planning for Bulldog Stadium progresses, the Athletics Department has initiated a master-planning effort that includes the expansion and renovation of the Student Athlete Village, which supports 450 student-athletes and 21 sports teams. An update on this much-needed, donor-funded project will be provided in the near future.

An Emerging Scholar

Dr. Larissa Mercado-Lopez, associate professor in the Women’s Studies Program at Fresno State, was selected as a 2018 Emerging Scholar and was featured in the January edition of “Diverse: Issues in Higher Education” magazine. The magazine selected 15 scholars under 40 years of age from across the country who are making their marks through teaching, research and service.

Judge the Game by its Cover

Former Fresno State baseball star Aaron Judge, the reigning American League Rookie of the Year of the New York Yankees, was selected as the cover athlete for the new MLB The Show 18 video game, released March 27.

Howard Joins Parliament of World’s Religions Board

Fresno State philosophy professor Dr. Veena Howard, whose expertise is in South Asian religious traditions and Gandhi’s philosophy, was elected to the board of trustees for the Parliament of the World’s Religions, a leading global interfaith organization.

’Coach Hut’ takes over on the Hardwood

Fresno State named Justin Hutson, one of the West’s best recruiters and a Bakersfield native, its 19th head men’s basketball coach. He returns to the Valley after 10 years as an assistant at San Diego State and two seasons at UNLV. As a collegiate player, Hutson enjoyed a storied career, winning two NCAA Division II championships at CSU Bakersfield. “I am a Valley guy,” Hutson says. “This is where I have my roots and family. Having the opportunity to come home and be the next head coach of the school I dreamed about is very special for me.” Visit fresnostatemagazine.com for an exclusive Q&A.

Unique Motivation Behind a Generous Gift

James Moller, a University of Minnesota professor emeritus of pediatrics and medicine, grew up in Fresno near the original Fresno State campus. On a visit in September 2016, he saw the laboratory’s traditional but outdated welding and mechanical equipment during a tour led by mechanized agriculture faculty member Ken Heupel.

“Educational institutions, especially state universities and colleges, have pressing financial concerns, and Ken quietly expressed the program’s obvious needs,” Moller says. “The surroundings reminded me so much of my father’s machine shop that I could visualize him there, and it really touched me. Even though I moved away 60 years ago, I wanted to express my appreciation for the educational opportunities that I was afforded as a third-generation Fresno while helping to create better opportunities for future students, many of whom are training to be educators and key members of the Central Valley ag industry.”

On Nov. 14, the Jordan College of Agricultural Sciences and Technology at Fresno State showcased initial renovations to its mechanized agriculture laboratory that were made possible by a $250,000 gift by Dr. Moller and his wife, Carol.

The donation was made in memory of Moller’s father, Leonard Moller, who owned and operated the Acme Machine Shop in Fresno until 1973. The shop was originally started by Herman Moller in the 1920s, and he later co-owned it with his son, Leonard.

The gift provided for a revamped welding area with new multi-processing booths, racks, gas line manifolds, work tables, a computer numerical control (CNC) plasma cutting table and a freshly painted interior with additional improvements to come.

Fresno State is the only California State University campus that offers a mechanized agriculture emphasis for agriculture education majors.
Fresno State

Fresno State finance student Nadia Jassim uses the Interfaith Prayer and Meditation Room to pray between classes.

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FRESNO STATE

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How one room creates a sense of belonging across spiritual lines

By Esra Hashem

Fulfilling a Need Across Faiths

I t’s 3:15 p.m. and 19-year-old Nadia Jassim just finished her third class of the day. She walks from the Peters Business building to the Henry Madden Library, eager to find some quiet time before her 4 p.m. class.

The finance major goes to the south wing of the library and rides an elevator to the third floor, where she reaches her destination: the University’s Interfaith Prayer and Meditation Room.

“The room is kind of like a safe zone,” Jassim says. “Like a little break from everything around us.” It’s no wonder Jassim is looking for a break: on Mondays like these, she is on campus from 8 a.m. until 9 p.m.

Jassim spends more time on campus than any other place so that she can one day reach her dreams of becoming a college professor.

But between exams and group projects, Jassim needs a space to pray.

“When you’re around people all day, sometimes you just want to be alone with God for a second — or whatever you believe in,” she says. “It’s nice to have that moment to yourself where you don’t have to think and stress about due dates and exams. It’s nice to get 10 minutes of peace in your day.”

The afternoon prayer Jassim performs in the Interfaith Prayer and Meditation Room is one of five she performs each day as a Muslim. Muslim prayer is based on a lunar calendar, which causes the timings for the five daily prayers to vary between morning and night. With limited time to complete her afternoon prayer before the next prayer time, Jassim uses the Interfaith Prayer and Meditation Room to fulfill her spiritual needs and still make it to her 4 p.m. marketing class on time.

A Spiritual Solution

No matter their religious beliefs, research shows maintaining spiritual and emotional health is critical to the success of college students. That’s why Fresno State joined at least 100 universities in Canada and the U.S. in creating the Interfaith Prayer and Meditation Room in 2015. It can be used for prayer, meditation, reading or any other quiet activity.

“One of the things that is important to Fresno State is that our students, faculty and staff have a sense of belonging on campus,” says Dr. Francine Oputa, director of the University’s Cross Cultural and Gender Center. “Providing that sense of belonging impacts retention rates and graduation rates.”

That sense of belonging is felt by students, says Zinab Attia, a sophomore biology student.

“The room shows that the University is welcoming to all cultures and faiths,” she says. “It’s the University saying, ‘We have space for you.’”

A Room for all Religions

According to the Pew Research Center, 51 percent of California adults pray at least once daily, with 14 percent praying on a weekly basis. Forty-one percent of adults in California meditate at least once a week.

At Fresno State, there are 12 religious student organizations and nearly 40 cultural clubs.

“I’ve seen different types of praying methods that I’m not familiar with, and it makes me think, ‘Oh, that’s cool, I wonder why they do that?’” Jassim says. “I mean, [Muslims] do certain movements when we pray that I’m sure people think, ‘I wonder why they do that type of movement.’”

As Jassim finishes her afternoon prayer, she folds her prayer rug and adjusts the purple headscarf she wears — a hijab, symbolizing modesty and a commitment to God in her faith. She smiles at another student using the room before quietly making her way out.

“There’s no reason for anyone of any faith to not use this room. Everyone’s accepted in here.”

— Nadia Jassim

“There’s no reason for anyone of any faith to not use this room. Everyone’s accepted in here.”

— Nadia Jassim

A Room for all Religions

There’s no reason for anyone of any faith to not use this room. Everyone’s accepted in here.”

— Esra Hashem is a marketing strategist at Fresno State.
A March Down Memory Lane

Alumni and friends share memories of the amphitheater on social media

The 1964 Fresno State Marching Band aligns on the amphitheater lawn, which will be near the future site of the new University Student Union.

Facebook.com/fresnostate

Today’s Fresno State students might know the on-campus amphitheater only as a grassy area to relax or pass through in between classes. But it once attracted some of the largest musical acts, rallies and political speeches — as many alumni recalled during a recent #FlashbackFriday Facebook post.


Most large concerts, as well as graduation ceremonies, are now held at the on-campus Save Mart Center. But soon, the area surrounding the amphitheater will get a facelift as students recently voted in favor of building a new University Student Union near the site (see page 7).

Below are some memories shared by alumni and friends on Facebook.

John Noel
Saw Ronald Reagan and Bobby Kennedy there. Also saw Santana playing at a Peace and Freedom Party rally before they hit big. Maybe 30 people were watching in a light rain.

Jim Runyon
Graduated there in June 1968. A cool and windy night. My grandparents got to attend. Great memories!

Gabriel Dillard
I’ll never forget Warped Tour 2000 at the amphitheater. Green Day and Weezer on the same stage.

Aaron Crutchfield
2000 was a good year for the amphitheater. It also had Bush and Moby, and later, Al Gore’s running mate, Joe Lieberman.

Trisha Campbell Hammond
Saw Hootie and the Blowfish there!

Richard Bullough
I will always have a special bond to the amphitheater because I graduated there in 1989 with my master’s in history in a ceremony that was traditional and just right for me and did not have the madness of my bachelor’s ceremony at Bulldog Stadium.

Peggy Siemer
Went to a Cesar Chavez speech here (long time ago).

Mark Garcia
Saw Eddie Money there in the mid ‘80s.

Maya Smith
Jefferson Starship rocked it as did the controversial Two Live Crew in ‘86–87. Vintage Days air guitar concert 1987 was too much fun! Lots of great memories there, and many late night strolls with my true love.

Doreen Goshgarian
I attended many concerts there and air guitar! Also graduated there.

Cary Edmondson
The following is based on a true story. It’s about the fall — and rise — of a downtown located in California’s fifth largest city. The story begins with an alarming deterioration of the historic urban center of the city that was booming in population while shriveling at its core. Right before our eyes, the area our parents and grandparents once saw thriving morphed into an afterthought as struggling businesses became shuttered storefronts turned deserted buildings. The people flocked north, east and anywhere but downtown.

This is a story about Fresno. And in true comeback fashion, the region hopes it will have a happy ending — but there is a long way to go. The good news is several characters, including some who are about to be introduced, are working toward what will one day become the final chapter to this story. For now, this is a story with a yet-to-be-determined conclusion. But it’s a story that needs to be told, and retold, to help spark the movement that will once again make Fresnans proud of their downtown.

URBAN EVOLUTION

Alumni Behind the Downtown Turnaround
By Eddie Hughes | Photos by Cary Edmondson

This is a story about Fresno. And in true comeback fashion, the region hopes it will have a happy ending — but there is a long way to go. The good news is several characters, including some who are about to be introduced, are working toward what will one day become the final chapter to this story. For now, this is a story with a yet-to-be-determined conclusion. But it’s a story that needs to be told, and retold, to help spark the movement that will once again make Fresnans proud of their downtown.
THE LEADERS

It’s 7 o’clock in the evening on a Tuesday in downtown Fresno. A new class on the history of Fresno architecture is wrapping up at Fresno State’s Downtown Center inside the Bitwise South Stadium building on Van Ness Avenue. When the class started about an hour earlier, a few dozen people were passing by outside. Even fewer people will be around when the class ends.

Therein lies the biggest obstacle for downtown revitalization — how to (greatly) increase foot traffic.

The daytime hours Monday through Friday aren’t so much the issue. But how does downtown attract people to stay after hours and come back on the weekends to eat, drink and explore? From an entertainment perspective, it’s about being creative and becoming a destination by offering something different and authentic.

The years-long process of opening the historic Fulton Mall to vehicle traffic this past October was the first step. More than 15,000 people showed up for the official opening with pop-up businesses, a dozen musicians performing and eateries buzzing with patrons.

Chat with the movers and shakers in downtown revitalization, and many of them will bring up the same names — including Ashley Swearengin, a former Fresno mayor. Swearengin is quick to point out the downtown movement was afoot well before her time at City Hall, but there’s no question her administration pushed forward some key projects.

"The Central Valley needs a major downtown marketplace. It’s the DNA or thumbprint of our community," says Swearengin, a 1994 and 1997 Fresno State alumna now serving as president and CEO of the Central Valley Community Foundation. "It’s our unique skyline and historic buildings. It’s one of the few places in the Valley that are uniquely identifiable."

With Fulton Street now open to traffic, downtown businesses can become more identifiable.

"Now that we have good visibility for our businesses and additional on-street parking so people can get to them, we can help businesses be more successful" says Craig Scharton, a Fresno State alumnus and former urban entrepreneurship instructor who is interim CEO of the Downtown Fresno Partnership. "With dining, entertainment and culture, we can go from a daytime downtown to a nighttime fun and entertainment district."

That’s the vision. And with 1.7 million people living within a 45-minute drive of downtown, there’s no reason it shouldn’t be a cultural hub for the region.

Scharton says he has been a student of cities and their downtowns for more than 30 years. He’s tracked 175 cities that removed pedestrian malls like Fulton, and 90 percent of those cities revitalized their downtowns within four years.

Scharton points to an example just 45 minutes down Highway 99 in Visalia. "In the Valley, Visalia has done a better job than anybody else with nearly the same demographics Fresno has," Scharton says. "When you have a downtown with fun stuff to do, people show up. It’s no different here."

Ashley Swearengin, alumna and CEO of the Central Valley Community Foundation, was one of the visionaries behind downtown revitalization.

THE CENTRAL VALLEY NEEDS A MAJOR DOWNTOWN MARKETPLACE. IT’S THE DNA OR THUMBPRINT OF OUR COMMUNITY."

– ASHLEY SWEARENGIN

Continued
THE DEVELOPERS

Events and entertainment are one way to increase downtown foot traffic — and certainly part of the equation — but there’s also a more reliable way: “Housing, housing, housing,” says Terance Frazier, the CEO of TFS Investments, which prides itself on bringing economic opportunities to distressed neighborhoods. “You’ve got to have people living downtown so, at nighttime, if they don’t want to drive somewhere, they just walk downstairs. We need to get away from the notion of making people drive downtown. Housing is the key.”

Frazier, a former Fresno State baseball standout who helped the Bulldogs make the 1988 College World Series and was drafted by the Oakland Athletics in 1992, has been involved in various developments downtown and has high hopes for a block of properties he owns on the east side of H Street when and if high-speed rail arrives. Frazier envisions the properties, south of Chukchansi Park, becoming a block of housing, restaurants, pubs and more.

More immediately, Frazier and business partner Mehmet Noyan are preparing to break ground this summer on a new, three-story mixed-use building called The Park on the corner of Fulton and Inyo streets that will include a 54-unit apartment complex with 7,000 square feet of retail space on the bottom floor, complete with a rooftop bar. Half of the units will overlook Chukchansi Park, home of the Triple-A Fresno Grizzlies baseball team. Frazier hopes to have people moving in by 2020.

Head a couple miles northwest up Fulton Street and it’s easy to see the potential for creating attractive urban living communities in downtown. Housing and retail mixed-use spaces dot both sides of Fulton and Broadway for several blocks, including the Iron Bird Lofts and Broadway Lofts developed by 1998 Fresno State alumnus Reza Assemi. He says his lofts are 100 percent full and there’s a waiting list of up to 10 people to get in.

“It’s interesting because I don’t think people understand how much downtown has actually changed,” Assemi says. “I would never have dreamed in 18 years that downtown would have changed as fast as it has.”

Assemi’s first project downtown was The Pearl building in 2000. He was inspired by studying downtown Portland, Oregon. For perspective, he points out that Portland started revitalizing its downtown in the 1970s, and, in 2000, Portland revitalization was already 25 years in the works. “It’s going to take time,” he says. “That’s really important to remember. Nothing happens in six months.”

DID YOU KNOW?
Fresno State’s Downtown Center, located at Bitwise South Stadium, offers a wide range of courses open to the public related to professional development and personal growth. For the full list of upcoming courses at Fresno State’s Downtown Center, including Craft Beer 101, visit www.fresnostatedowntown.com.
Assemi is a developer, yes, but he's an artist at heart — and it shows in his projects, which feature everything from murals outside and inside his buildings to gargoyles perched atop the Iron Bird Lofts to metal heart-shaped designs detailed in staircases to represent the heart of Fresno. "The arts make me feel good," Assemi says. "I love seeing murals put up and helping the arts any way I can. We have an amazing creative community here."

His motivation is to preserve historic buildings and create spaces for artists to work and to share with the public. ArtHop, an event hosted by the Fresno Arts Council the first and third Thursday of every month, now has more than 40 participating locations in downtown Fresno.

"As a culture, we're getting younger people who see more and more value in older things that are special," Assemi says. "It's not like the previous generation in the '70s that wanted to knock everything down. Keeping the nostalgia is cool."

That historic vibe and the arts, including music and theatre, can make downtown Fresno the cultural center of the Valley. And that's something everyone involved would like to see. Scharton hopes to see the city's historic theatres put into more active use. "It's difficult for individual businesses to generate the foot traffic they need upfront, but if you have concerts and movies and plays at your larger venues, that spills out into restaurants, bars and coffee houses."

The same holds true for sports. When the Fresno Grizzlies' stadium opened in 2002, it was seen as a catalyst for downtown revitalization. The Grizzlies' creative promotions like Taco Truck Throwdown have been a hit. Add the new professional soccer franchise Fresno FC, which will also call Chukchansi Park home, and downtown Fresno will have 79 sporting events booked between the two teams.

"There's a chance that over time, Kern Plaza will become the main entrance," says Franks, a 2007 Fresno State alumnus. "Connecting the experience at the ballpark to Fulton is very important to us."

As a culture, we're getting younger people who see more and more value in older things that are special."

— REZA ASSEMI
THE PEOPLE

Brew U is a series of courses designed for people interested in commercial or home brewing, and is one of dozens of courses open to the public through Fresno State’s Downtown Center located at Bitwise South Stadium. Other course topics include everything from Fresno architecture and painting to professional development in things like Adobe Photoshop or grant writing.

Dr. Scott Moore, the University’s dean of Continuing and Global Education, says the Downtown Center is an opportunity for Fresno State to partner with the community and invest in downtown revitalization. “This is about Fresno State doing right in the community,” Moore says. “It’s not about making money.

“I think it’s really important that we have more opportunities for people to partner with Fresno State and the University and are proving to be instrumental in the movement. People like Edgar Blunt, who co-founded IMAGO with Jason Shoulet, and in just over four years has grown the company to 12 employees and relocated from Bitwise South Stadium to the eighth floor of the T.W. Patterson Building on Fulton Street and Tulare Avenue.

IMAGO partners with school districts and other organizations throughout the U.S. to deliver learning experiences that prepare people for the workforce and facilitate their career options. Unlike retail businesses in the area, IMAGO doesn’t rely on foot traffic to succeed, but the company has embraced the downtown revitalization movement and is committed to depositing its entrepreneurial spirit in the area.

Blunt, a 1998 Fresno State graduate, tirelessly points out that in a company like his, it takes a whole team of entrepreneurs to make a difference. And in a downtown like Fresno’s, it will take dozens of teams full of entrepreneurial spirit to spark growth.

The Fresno State name brought comfort to people signing leases. We’re just one player, but at the same time, we have a responsibility to be that player.”

In 2015, Fresno State also opened its Graduate Art Studios at the M Street Arts Complex downtown, where students work with faculty and professional artists.

Sarah Moffat, who chairs the Downtown Fresno Foundation, envisions even more downtown partnerships with the University. Some of the foundation’s recent projects include planning of public spaces and storefront renovations on Fulton Street — things she can see students being a part of. She says she hopes to one day see a satellite campus where city and regional planning students (page 24) are attending class and doing hands-on projects downtown.

“Fresno State is already an active leader in downtown Fresno,” she says. “To have our region’s largest higher ed institution invest in revitalization by not only words, but actions, is so very important. Fresno State brings an air of credibility along with a student population that predominately has not spent a great deal of time downtown.”

Swearengin and Scharton agree. “It’s consistent with what we’ve seen in other successful cities,” Swearengin says. “Anchor institutions will either help or hurt, will either contribute to the decline or contribute to bringing downtown back. The University is absolutely doing the right thing.”

But perhaps Fresno State’s greatest contribution to downtown revitalization is the people who have been educated at the University and are proving to be instrumental in the movement. People like Edgar Blunt, who co-founded IMAGO with Jason Shoulet, and in just over four years has grown the company to 12 employees and relocated from Bitwise South Stadium to the eighth floor of the T.W. Patterson Building on Fulton Street and Tulare Avenue.

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There’s a lot of things people should be excited about and proud of when it comes to downtown,” Blunt says. “This is our community, and the more stories like this that people see and hear, the more we can start changing the narrative about our city’s self-esteem."

Downtown is evolving, one project at a time. It’s not a quick fix, and it’s an ever-changing environment, but it’s happening. This story introduced several characters who are but a small representation of the hundreds of entrepreneurs, visionaries and investors who are reshaping downtown. But, ultimately, the final chapter of this story will be written by you and your friends and your families.

When downtown Fresno earns your consistent business, provides your entertainment and even your job or your home — that’s when this comeback story will be complete.

This is not the end — and perhaps there is no end. There are just new beginnings.

— Eddie Hughes is senior editor for Fresno State Magazine.

THIS IS OUR COMMUNITY, AND THE MORE STORIES LIKE THIS THAT PEOPLE SEE AND HEAR, THE MORE WE CAN START CHANGING THE NARRATIVE ABOUT OUR CITY’S SELF-ESTEEM."

— EDGAR BLUNT

See an exclusive video about alumni and friends involved in the downtown turnaround at fresnostatemagazine.com.
Shaping Spaces

A new degree program is grooming students to shape the region
By Lucero Benitez

Seventeen miles north of campus in Madera County, atop a hill overlooking nothing but green grass and future possibilities, class is in session.

A group of city and regional planning students are on site learning from industry leaders while studying the Tesoro Viejo development, a 1,600-acre site at the foot of Little Table Mountain that will soon be transformed into a scenic master-planned community.

It’s an opportunity Fresno State students didn’t have until fall 2017, when the city and regional planning degree option was reinstated for the first time in about 25 years. The program partnered with McCaffrey Homes to provide students with hands-on experience in design and infrastructure through the Tesoro Viejo case study.

Job Opportunities

City and regional planners work in public agencies and private consulting firms, preparing comprehensive plans for projects, neighborhoods, cities and entire regions. They address land use, housing, transportation, public facilities, infrastructure and open space. And they have the potential to impact the future of the Central Valley.

“The Valley is different from other California cities. It has more of a sense of rural areas,” says Dr. Chih-Hao Wang, who teaches environmental planning and economics at Fresno State.

“The way to solve urban problems should be different than in big cities. Having our own planners will help better address our own issues and provide solutions that are more suitable for the Valley,” says Dan Zack, a Fresno State alumnus and assistant planning director for the City of Fresno, who says the new degree program is a blessing for the community.

“We’re a growing city with a lot of challenges. We’re growing outward, and that presents a unique set of challenges and opportunities. We’re also growing inward now in a way that we never have before with infill development that is revitalizing downtown, which has a whole different set of unique challenges and opportunities,” Zack says.

Up until this academic year, Valley students had to travel out of the region to obtain a degree in planning. In doing so, they were more likely to leave the area permanently.

“Regional governments, developers and nonprofits alike have been expressing the need for such a program for quite some time,” says Dr. Michelle Calvarese, chair of the Department of Geography and City and Regional Planning at Fresno State.

“We’re also growing inward now in a way that we never have before with infill development that is revitalizing downtown, which has a whole different set of unique challenges and opportunities.”

– Dan Zack

“Having a degree in the Valley, where you actually go through the experiences with the developers, you get to see what’s going on in the community,” Mitchell says. “In this field, you can actually see the fruit of your labor. At a localized level, you can see your efforts being manifested.”

– Lucero Benitez is a communications specialist for the College of Social Sciences at Fresno State.
Thirty years apart, Stacy Batrich-Smith and her daughter, Cassidy Smith, both participated in Fresno State's Peach Blossom Festival. They aren’t unique in that.

But few multi-generational participants can say they memorized and recited the same piece for the annual oral interpretation festival.

Stacy, a Fresno State alumna with a bachelor’s degree in radio and television, still remembers the piece she performed for Peach Blossom in 1965 as a sixth-grader from Fresno’s Mayfair Elementary School:

“It’s called ‘What is a Girl’ by Alan Beck,” says Stacy, a longtime Fresno businesswoman who came back to campus in March to serve as a judge for the festival.

When her parents purchased a life-insurance policy for her when she was an infant, the insurance salesman gave them a framed copy of “What is a Girl,” which hung in her childhood bedroom.

In 1996, Cassidy also performed “What is a Girl” at Peach Blossom, as a first-grader from Forkner Elementary.

Both women spoke to the impact the Peach Blossom experience has on young students.

“Both Peach Blossom and Pay It Forward have given me a sense of community, a sense of belonging to a group of people who are trying to make the world a better place,” Cassidy says.

“Peach Blossom has launched me into big things,” Stacy says. “I went on to perform as a dancing bear mascot at Yosemite Junior High, forensics at McLane High, win Fresno’s Junior Miss competition and California’s Junior Miss competition in 1972, compete for America’s Junior Miss in Mobile, Alabama — not to mention my professional success later.

Cassidy contrasted the Peach Blossom experience with other typical childhood accomplishments:

“Unlike a lot of sports or academic-related activities for elementary school-aged kids, it’s a very independent and creative endeavor. Electing to participate, picking your piece, memorizing it, thoughtfully incorporating gestures — those are a lot of important skills for a 6-year-old. I can’t think of anything else quite like it for children that age.”

— Lisa Maria Boyles is a public information officer at Fresno State.
Those Fresno State bat-and-ball sports sure must like years that end in the number 8 — because they’ve made a habit out of finishing No. 1.

This year marks the 10th anniversary since Fresno State baseball won the 2008 College World Series, becoming the lowest seed to ever win an NCAA championship. The “underdogs to wonderdogs” story was capped with longtime ESPN broadcaster Mike Patrick proclaiming “Cinderella wins a national championship” on national TV as Steve Detwiler caught a pop fly in right field for the final out. It was the program’s fourth College World Series appearance and first under current coach Mike Batesole.

This year also marks the 20th anniversary since Fresno State’s first team national championship, when the Fresno State softball team won the Women’s College World Series in 1998 after three previous runner-up finishes. The Bulldogs softball team earned 10 Women’s College World Series berths in former coach Margie Wright’s 27-year career, when she amassed an NCAA-best 1,294-450-1 record.

To take the lucky 8 streak even further, in 1988, the softball program advanced to the national championship game, and the baseball program advanced to the College World Series after winning an NCAA record 32 straight games and spending much of the season ranked No. 1.

So how will 2018 play out? Both storied programs welcomed alumni and coaches back for celebrations this season and certainly hope some more magic is in store.

Fresno State Magazine caught up with former Fresno State softball All-American Becky (Witt) Labandeira, who was a freshman on that 1998 team, and with former Bulldogs baseball catcher Danny Grubb, for their first-hand accounts of those historical championships.

Continued
Looking back on that championship run, the goal was always that you have to play the best to be the best. We were seeded seventh out of eight teams. We had very convincing wins over those higher seeds, which kept building our confidence. I believe having to play Arizona again was the best thing that could have happened for us. That year, we had played Arizona several times, one game a 6–0 loss. They had All-Americans up and down their lineup. Speed and power. So when the championship game came around, and we were facing Arizona again, there was a collective sense of “we got this.”

Championship day felt like any other day, actually. The only time I could say I was nervous was going into the bottom of the seventh inning. Arizona had the top of their lineup due up. We had to keep the leadoff hitter off the base path, as she was the fastest player in the NCAA. Amanda Scott had been throwing a great game for us, limiting Arizona to only three hits. We could tell they were deflated, evident by their body language after Nina Lindenberg hit the home run for our only run. They were in shock. When Angela Cervantes fielded the ball and stopped on first base for the last out, it was complete EUPHORIA! To see Coach Margie Wright finally accomplish this last goal, to see her hug her dad on the field was one of the greatest and most vivid memories that I will forever cherish from that day.

We were representing all the Bulldogs who had come before us with the same goals, who had made Bulldog softball what it was. This win was for all our Bulldog Diamond Club members and fans for their countless hours of support, and for making sure the team had what it needed to be successful.

It was apparent what this championship meant to our Diamond Club members and our fans. The parade we had was unbelievable! Shaw Avenue was lined with Diamond Club members and fans for their countless hours of support, and for making sure the team had what it needed to be successful.

Fast forward to the eighth inning, which is when it started to sink in that this really could happen. Nerves started to kick in, but with the offensive help from Steve Susdorf and Justin Wilson, we became national champions, something that will go down in the history books for the sport of baseball and for our city.

However, we were not thinking that at the time, nor did we have any idea how big of a deal this really was until we arrived home to thousands of people waiting for us at the parade. It was a sight we had never seen, and the boys and I finally realized what we had accomplished. I was proud to be a part of it. It is something I will cherish and be able to tell my son, Harvey, as he gets older. I will always be a Bulldog and the 24 other guys who stood side by side with me that year will always be a part of a chapter in history, but, more important, family.
Longhairs Do Care

ABC’s ‘Shark Tank’ was full of hair whips and high fives with these Fresno State alumni

By Eddie Hughes

The double doors opened, and Chris Healy and Lindsay Barto emerged with a rush of swagger that captured the nation’s attention on the Jan. 14 episode of the ABC hit show “Shark Tank.”

Healy and Barto, both Fresno State alumni who met during their days in the Sigma Nu Fraternity, pitched their business, The Longhairs, that makes hair ties for guys. The two didn’t disappoint, striking a deal with Dallas Mavericks owner Mark Cuban in the Sigma Nu Fraternity, pitched their business of hair ties for guys. The two didn’t disappoint, striking a deal with Dallas Mavericks owner Mark Cuban.

We are proud to represent Fresno State and the Valley, and we attribute much of our success to our formative years spent there. You’ll find us cheering on the ‘Dogs and wearing cardinal and blue at every sports event we can make it to.

Healy pitched their business of hair ties for guys on ABC’s “Shark Tank.”

How did you get started?

Barto: The Longhairs was established in 2014, and we are located in San Diego. For the first year, we didn’t have any products or make a single dollar; all we did was publish original, quality content for guys with long hair. Once we started building an audience, we realized there is a very real community out there, and they really need our help.

Was there an experience from your time as Fresno State students that helped prepare you?

Healy: I can say without question our Sigma Nu Fraternity experience helped prepare us for starting our own business. Working together in the fraternity, from recruitment to leadership development, helped us figure out how to get things done.

What’s the biggest challenge you’ve faced?

Barto: We’ve never had a steady paycheck, a savings account, a 401K, paid holidays or any of those nice securities. We didn’t have jobs, we made our jobs. We have been grinding, and we still are, and there’s a long way to go before we’ve “made it.”

What’s your advice for a young grad who has a business idea?

Healy: Ideas are a dime a dozen, even good ones. The difference is doing what it takes to make an idea real. And that’s putting in the work. There is no such thing as overnight success, get rich quick or seven-minute abs. If you want to make it, you must be willing to put the work in.

Take us through the ‘Shark Tank’ experience.

Healy: That morning we got up at 4 a.m. We hit the hotel gym. We practiced our pitch while lifting weights, breathless. We knew if we could pitch mid-exercise we could do it anywhere, in front of anyone. The next five hours included breakfast, transport, orientation, walking the set, hair, makeup, audio, sound checks, wardrobe checks, run-throughs, set checks and more walk-throughs.

Finally, it was just the two of us standing in front of those double doors leading into the hallway. We looked at each other, and we were ready. Those doors opened and we walked down that hallway, fearless.

Tell us about the deal you were able to reach with a shark.

Barto: While we would have welcomed a deal with any shark, we both believed in our hearts we were going to get a deal with Mark Cuban. We are extremely humbled, grateful and fortunate to have gotten the deal we did.

Did you make sure Mark Cuban has some Fresno State gear?

Healy: We still need to get him some Bulldogs gear!

Fresno State alumni Lindsay Barto and Chris Healy pitched their business of hair ties for guys on ABC’s “Shark Tank.”

How is business since the show aired?

Barto: Business has been on fire since airing. The first week we did about times our average weekly sales. We’ve shifted our focus to sustaining our momentum and positioning ourselves for the long haul.

What’s next for The Longhairs?

Healy: Alongside our charity partner, Children With Hair Loss, we will attempt to break the Guinness World Record for the largest hair donation in history. It will be The Great Cut on March 16, when men, women and children will cut their hair for children who cannot grow their own. We are seeking the support of every Fresno State alum and friend.

Anything else you’d like to add or that you’d like people to know?

We are still need to get him some Bulldogs gear!

To be a part of The Great Cut for children with hair loss, visit blog.thelonghairs.us/great-cut/

To learn more about The Longhairs, visit thelonghairs.us.

Healy: We are extremely humbled, grateful and fortunate to have gotten the deal we did.

Photos courtesy of ABC
1940s
Lillian Faderman (1940) authored “Harrow: Milk His Lives and Death,” which was published by the University Press of York.

1950s
Carlene A. Kostiw (1958), a watercolorist who runs an art studio in Fresno, and her students displayed their artwork at “A Legacy Exhibit” at The Kings Art Center.

1960s
Richard Doepker (1960), an educator, was inducted posthumously to the College of the Sequoias Hall of Fame. As a pitcher, he led COS to the 1971 state championship before moving on to Fresno State and later playing in the Pittsburgh Pirates organization from 1969-1964.

Jim Vidak (1962) announced his retirement after nearly three decades as Tulare County superintendent of schools.

1970s
James V. Boren (1972), executive editor and senior vice president of The Fresno Bee, retired on Jan. 18 after 49 years at the newspaper.

Daren Gee (1971), of DB Specialty Farms, earned the Extraordinary Achievements in the field of canine breeding.

Angela (Angie) Cisneros (1982) was honored by Arte Americas with the first Judge Armando O. Rodriguez Legacy Award.

Randall R. Groom (1989) is now city manager in Visalia.

Karen Hendricks (1990) is now interim superintendent for the Palo Alto Unified School District Board of Education.

Sheila Kincaide (1993, ’96) and her students were paid tribute in an exhibition of digital artwork at Madera South High School.

Kelley Loundan (1994) was appointed Fresno County librarian.

Tony Lupics (1995) earned the 2018 Engineer of the Year Award from the San Joaquin Engineers Association.

Joseph Allison (1993) is now vice president of administrative services at Merced College.

Kim R. Bobby (1991), of Prince George’s Community College, was appointed as the president’s chief of staff.

Brant Brown, a former Bulldogs baseball standout who was drafted in the third round in 1992 by the Chicago Cubs, is now assistant hitting coach for the Los Angeles Dodgers.

ToddCowee(1992) is now a partner with Hutchinson and Bloodgood LLP.

Monica R. Diaz (1993) is now the national partner for audit, tax and advisory firm KPMG LLP.

Dennis Shelby (1978), CEO of Wilson Medical Center in Merced, Kansas, was honored as Distinguished Alumni by Hope International University, from which he earned his bachelor’s degree in 1974.

Kathleen R. Smith (1972), of Easton, Kansas, was named Professional of the Year by Strathmore’s Who’s Who Worldwide for her contributions and achievements in the field of canine breeding.

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1990s
Rosanna Aguirre (1994) is now part-time coordinator for the Bohemian Academy for Ministerial Leadership as the coordinator of the Spanish-language ministry training program.

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Jim Gillio (1997) announced his candidacy for San Benito County Supervisor.

Hilary Graves (1995), who owns agricultural consulting business Mighty Nimble, was featured in the San Luis Obispo Tribune. She also breeds the endangered heritage breed of Gloucestershire Old Spots pigs.

Scott Howell (1995), M.D., is now chief medical officer at Advantmed health care solutions company.

Curtis Johnson (1994) is now director of sales for North America for the Euramco Group.

Jay Mahal (1999), a partner in family farming operation Creekside Land Company, LLC, was elected to serve on the board of governors for the California State University, Fresno Foundation.

Adrienne McGraw (1993) is now executive director for the Gateway Science Museum at Chico State.

Larry Spikes (1981, ’92) is retiring after 24 years as Kings County administrative officer and 36 years total with the county.

Patti Waid (1991) is now director of University Communications at Fresno State. She previously served as director of public affairs at Chico State and as assistant vice chancellor for communications at UCI Merced.

Dora C. Westerlund (1996), CEO for the Fresno Area Hispanic Foundation, was appointed to the California Secure Choice Retirement Savings Investment Board by Governor Jerry Brown. She also holds board positions with the Big Fresno Fair and the Fresno State Foundation.

Jimmy Hook (2000) is now Tulare County agricultural commissioner.

Ashley Jacobsen (2003), an assurance manager for Moss Adams in Fresno, was featured in Working Mother magazine as Working Mother of the Year.

Jessica Peterson McCormack (2008), a former Fresno State volleyball standout, was inducted into the Sonora High School Hall of Fame after starring in volleyball, basketball and track and field and being named 2003 CIF Woman of the Year.

Patrick Ramirez (2005), vice president of corporate services at Community Medical Centers, was named to Fresno State’s University Advisory Board.

Kathleen S. Rindahl (2007), assistant professor of nursing at Fresno State, was among 11 nursing professionals recognized statewide at the Association of California Nurse Leaders 40th annual conference in February.

Demitrius Snaer (2005), a Modesto Junior College professor and men’s cross country coach, presented for the Positive People Speaker Series at the college.

2000s

Edison Barrales (2006) is now local sales manager at KPNX-TV, an NBC affiliate in Phoenix.

Melody Canady (2002) is now assistant superintendent for business and fiscal services for Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District.

David Carr (2001), the former Fresno State quarterback and No. 1 over NFL draft pick, was inducted into the Fresno Athletic Hall of Fame in November.

Melvin Ely, the former Fresno State basketball star and NiKlottery pick, was inducted into the Fresno Athletic Hall of Fame in November.

Mitch Fagundes (2003) is now vice president for global strategic accounts at AonCrest Visions, an HR-based managed services company.

Continued

Dimitrius Snaer (2005), a Modesto Junior College professor and men’s cross country coach, presented for the Positive People Speaker Series at the college.
For Louise and Jim Dunaway, math is everything.

Math is what led to their first meeting in a Bay Area school district in 1969. Teaching math is how they both spent their 30-year careers. And math education is where the retired couple will leave their legacy.

“When we started looking at what to do with what money we have when we’re gone, we thought we wanted to leave at least a reasonable amount to attract and encourage people in mathematics teaching,” Jim says.

That’s why Louise and Jim are leaving a generous gift in their wills to provide scholarships to Fresno State students. Their goal is to provide students the same opportunities that were provided to them.

Fresno State prepares more K-12 school teachers than any other public university in California. For students at Fresno State, 80 percent who are in financial need, gifts like these help ensure their vibrant future.

If you would like information on planned giving opportunities, please contact Liz Garvin, Director of Planned Giving, at 559.278.4038 or egarvin@csufresno.edu.

fresnostate.giftlegacy.com
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