

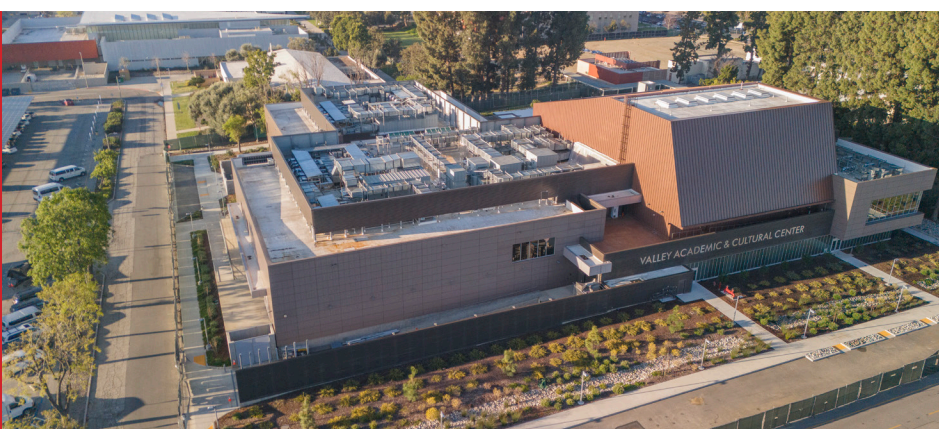
Pinner hits district with \$35 million suit

The LACCD faces another legal battle over the construction of the VACC.



Valley Star Staff

The \$100 million VACC remains unfinished with no completion date in sight after the LACCD terminated its contract with Pinner Construction on March 8.



Valley Star Staff

Star Eisenberg and Milan Rafaelov,
Editors-in-Chief

Pinner Construction filed a wrongful termination suit against the LACCD after the district ended its contract with the construction company to complete the \$100 million Valley Academic and Cultural Center.

"[The] LACCD has terminated the original contractor and is currently in the procurement process for a new contractor to complete this theater and classroom building," according to an email sent Friday by LACCD's Director of Communications and Marketing Juliet Hidalgo on behalf of BuildLACCD.

The termination of the con-

tract by the district and the legal response by Pinner is the latest in a series of battles between the two sides. The district ended its contract with Pinner on March 8, and Pinner filed a multimillion dollar suit against the LACCD 10 days later.

The suit states Pinner is "entitled to its unpaid contract balance of \$5,876,150 plus consequential damages." Pinner Chief Administrative Officer Newt Kellam said the suit also includes "extra costs totaling \$30 million and unspecified damages for wrongful termination."

According to Kellam, the company has completed 99.12 percent of its contract work.

Kellam added, "LACCD's bad faith termination of [the] Pinner contract is obvious retaliation for Pinner serving its

amended taxpayer complaint naming the board members the same week LACCD issued its notice to cure and is a desperate attempt to defend the \$50 million in extra costs incurred by Pinner and its subcontractors since the previous arbitration."

The relationship between Pinner and the LACCD has been contentious since 2022. That year, Pinner filed a lawsuit against the LACCD, alleging overspending exceeding \$12 million and accusing the district's projects team of racketeering. These allegations implied deliberate efforts to extend construction timelines for increased billable hours, sparking legal disputes among involved parties. This legal action brought to light a no-change orders policy imposed by the district board

without Pinner's knowledge, according to the independent arbitrator's report conducted by Deborah S. Ballati.

The arbitrator's report determined that the LACCD was primarily responsible for the delays, resulting in a directive to compensate Pinner Construction and its subcontractors for \$5,172,612.

Touted as the jewel of Valley College, the building has roots as far back as 2002 when it was called the LAVC Media Arts Center and a "final draft" document by Gonzalez/Goodale Architects states that the new building "is a key expression of Los Angeles Valley College's commitment to the arts, and the media arts in particular."

Initially budgeted at \$78.5 million, costs have ballooned to \$100 million, saddling taxpayers with an additional \$20 million. As part of Valley College's Facilities Master Plan, the VACC broke ground in 2016 with construction scheduled to conclude in 2018. The deadline was pushed back twice, first to 2020, then to 2022.

The building now sits idle on the north side of campus near the corners of Oxnard Street and Fulton Avenue with no firm completion date in sight.

The plans call for the 118,000-square-foot-facility to house theater, music, media arts, cinema, broadcasting, journalism, and the photography programs. The building was contracted to include a wide range of facilities: a

430-seat main stage theater, a 143-seat horseshoe theater, a 221-seat screening theater, a 76-seat smart lecture hall, classrooms, studios, a newsroom and a radio station.

Due to the ongoing delays, some of the programs and their students have resorted to using make-shift classrooms and outdated facilities. In particular, the theater department performs plays at the Campus Center and looks for off-site facilities for their performances.

"We're like these nomads that move around from building to building," said Kurt Swick, a theater major at Valley. "Do I sometimes feel very cheated? Yeah, 'cause it's not fair. But my philosophy is that our theater department is about the people, not the building."

BuildLACCD declined to provide further comment regarding the matter, citing the ongoing contractual dispute, claims, and litigation; however, Juliet Hidalgo sent BuildLACCD's response about the VACC to the Valley Star.

"LACCD's 20 plus year bond program has delivered almost 800 projects that have transformed the facilities of our nine community colleges into modern, full-service, best in class institutions. The commitment to deliver the Valley Academic and Cultural Center for the students and faculty at Los Angeles Valley College remains our top priority."

Enrollment increases for ESL Courses

Students from Russia, Ukraine and Armenia flock to Valley College's ESL program

Katherine OBrien Field,
Copy Editor

According to an internal President's email, non-credit ESL, ESL-Civics and Computer Literacy enrollment has increased by 77 percent since 2022, due to an influx of students from Armenia, Ukraine, and Russia.

The three non-credit ESL (English as a Second Language) courses include English, English-Civics, and Computer Literacy. In addition to learning English, students can study American history and civics, to prepare for the citizenship exam. The entire program is open entry and open exit, so that students may join or leave at any time, as long as there is a seat. All the classes are free and students can get a Certificate of Completion at the end of the course.

"Certificates look good on a resume, it's not a degree and not transferable because it's uncredited, but certificates give satisfaction and confidence - which matter," said Department Chair of Continuing Education Administration and Career Advancement, Lilit Davoyan. "Non-credit classes are a point of entry for students who are trying to adapt to the U.S. and its educational system. Here they can learn the language without the pressure of credit and units."

There is a brief, ESL-friendly online application. Davoyan said that the college's goal for the non-credit ESL student is to transfer to the school's regular curriculum so that they can get the units needed to get a degree. However, students are not required to move to regular enrollment and many students already have jobs.

Lynne Brower founded the non-credit ESL program

in 2008 under the title of Continuing Education Director until 2015, when the program was approved to be a Department. Thereafter, Brower became Chair of the Counseling Department.

"I began the non-credit ESL program in 2008, with one single student. When I retired in 2017, we had 200 students" Brower said. "When we first began, most of our students were from Mexico, South America, and Armenia. By 2017, we had more Russian and Armenian students. Since our attendance kept increasing, we received additional instructors and staff. The increase in enrollment was slow and steady over time."

According to the Los Angeles Valley College Non-Credit Adult Education Program fact sheet, the 2022-2023 Academic Year, the current non-credit ESL enrollment is over 5,842. That means

from 2017, where Brower remembers there being about 200 students, the Department increased enrollment by over 29 times in five years.

Associate Vice Chancellor of Institutional Effectiveness Maury Y. Pearl identified the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 Non-Credit Adult Education Program data. This showed a year over year increase, from a 2021-2022 enrollment of 2,987 to a 2022-2023 enrollment of 5,842 - roughly a 98.88 percent increase in one year.

"Most of the new students are of Ukrainian, Russian, and Armenian origin, based upon my physical observation," said Davoyan. One such student is Oksana Ulianchenko.

"The online classes are great for me," said Oksana, whose family, after 12 years, won the Ukraine Green Card Lottery and came to the U.S. in 2019. "They are so well organized, which makes studying very

comfortable. Modern technologies allow this, and these technologies are very easy to use. Despite the densely filled classes (30-40 people), one gets the feeling of an individual lesson with a teacher."



Astrid Cortez for The Valley Star

Oksana Ulianchenko succeeds in ESL program.

Campus summit shares cyber risks and job skills

Valley College hosted Cybersecurity Workforce Development and Education Summit.



Ivonne Elias for The Valley Star

Robert Dotson, a representative for the Los Angeles County office of Education, speaks at the March 8 cyber summit.

Katherine OBrien Field,
Copy Editor

Valley College hosted the 2024 Cybersecurity Workforce Development and Education Summit with speakers from IBM,

Homeland Security, LACCD Build, Amazon, and more.

The experts met March 8, to discuss cybersecurity threats, skills needed, and paths to apply for such jobs. Moderator California State University, Fresno Professor Keith Clement, who

chairs an education task force, estimated there are over 600,000 unfilled jobs across the country for cybersecurity professionals.

"The annual salary for an entry level cybersecurity professional is currently \$92,000, 59 percent require a bachelor's degree, 22 percent require a graduate degree, and 19 percent of the jobs do not require a degree," said Mark Henderson, District Manager, College Technology Services (LACCD).

According to a Cybersecurity Ambassador for IBM, the 2024 IBM Threat Intelligence Index reveals a hack can cost up to \$10 million per crime, not including the data ransom. For jobs in the private sector, cyberthreats often attack individuals or small businesses.

"If your client has lost their identity, tell them to immediately report the incident to the F.B.I.," said IBM's Michael Melore, Senior Cybersecurity Advisor.

"Lockdown and freeze their credit reporting information. Everyone should call the bureaus

and freeze their credit. When you need a loan, you can unfreeze your credit temporarily, complete the needed transaction, and then freeze your credit again."

For positions in the military, the threat is often directed at institutions and industries. Jeremy Esperitu, Training Coordinator, and Sergeant First Class Chao, California Cybersecurity Integration Center (Cal-SIC), described wide swath threats. There are network attacks, in addition to flooding of phone systems. Data breaches, where a bad actor has gotten hold of a single password, can use that to reach sensitive data in a system. Malware inserts a corrupt program, locks the data, and issues a ransom.

The military experts said foreign actors are dangerous. They can access the programmable logic controller of an automated system, to quietly collect data. The motive can be for a specific bad act, or to spy and learn how the automation of the whole system works.

Patrick Luce, Chief Information Security Officer, Los Angeles Community College District, showed some ways in which students fall victim to fraud.

"Students are often told what to do in case of a problem, but not who to believe. Trust absolutely no one on the internet - even your mother - wait no, especially your mother!" Luce said. "If you receive a solicitation for extra financial aid, a job, or a tuition payment, do not ask friends, family or the internet actor. Instead, contact the financial aid, student employment, or finance offices and ask them."

Finally, the conference also included jobs for those interested in science, technology, engineering, and math, relative to building construction. Sunil B. Shah, Build LACCD Director, Technology Program Management, said these jobs include paid internships in ironworking, plumbing, and carpentry. Students are paid to learn these engineering skills and positions are open.

Hire UP pays students

Star Eisenberg,
Editor-in-Chief

California's community colleges have initiated a \$30 million pilot program called Hire UP, designed to provide compensation to economically vulnerable students.

Hire UP, approved by the California State Assembly in 2022, prioritizes individuals from diverse backgrounds, including those with past experiences of incarceration, foster care, or recipients of CalWORKs benefits.

"Whether it's working with the community college system or looking for a career technical education in the community college system, our system is for everyone," said Rio Hondo's Vice President of Student Services Dr. Earic Dixon-Peters. "Whether you come from, whatever life experiences you have had, it's never too late to look at multiple ways of improving your circumstances."

The program addresses students' financial challenges by offering regular monthly stipends ranging from \$4,960 to \$9,920 per semester. These stipends, adjusted according to the student's course load, are intended to assist with essential expenses such as housing, food, transportation, and childcare costs.

Ten California community college districts have already received funding for the five-year pilot program, with distribution currently underway at institutions like Santa Rosa Junior College and Rio Hondo College.

Rio Hondo College's Dean of Student Equity and Achievement Cecilia Rocha said in a statement: "This is a unique opportunity for our eligible students to get paid to finish their degree or certificate. It is an honor to be one of 10 schools in California chosen to lead the way with this program that will have a profound impact on so many."

Advocates have long called for increased cash assistance for students, leading to legislative reforms such as gradual increases to the Cal Grant program. Unlike many existing financial aid programs with stringent requirements, such as the Student Success Completion Grant, Hire UP offers more flexibility. Part-time students taking at least two classes can qualify for monthly disbursements adjusted based on course enrollment.

According to a 2018 report by the Prison Policy Initiative, formerly incarcerated individuals are eight times less likely to complete college compared to the general population. The National Foster Youth Institute reports that only two to six percent of former foster youth earn a two-year degree, and three to four percent earn a four-year degree. Additionally, the Institute for Women's Policy Research indicates that over half of student parents leave college without graduating.

Data from the National Center for Education Statistics indicates that 22.6 percent of undergraduates struggle with food insecurity, while eight percent experience homelessness. Furthermore, student parents, individuals with prior incarceration experience, and those formerly in the foster care system are particularly vulnerable to these hardships.

Districts applying for funding must demonstrate their commitment to student success, including staff and resource allocation, partnerships, and engagement with local employers and workforce organizations.

"Valley College and California community colleges offer tremendous opportunities for anyone in California," said Valley President Barry Gribbons. "From short-term training to programs facilitating transfer to four-year institutions, there are over a hundred options available. These opportunities cater to individuals at any stage in life, background, or educational interest."



Scan QR code to read more

OPINION

Biden's empty plea for voter support

Biden has lost support due to the handling of the conflict between Israel and Palestine.

Kaia Mann,
Opinion Editor

The Biden Administration's handling of the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine is a disappointing mess that has prompted young voters to lose interest ahead of an important election year. Over 80% of Palestine's population has been displaced with approximately 1.4 million civilians residing in the country's last refuge, Rafah. The men, women and children that have fled to the border of Egypt are over-packed and under-fed, and as Palestinians are facing a humanitarian crisis, Americans are gearing up for the upcoming election. When political ideologies are not matched in potential candidates and the decision comes between two elderly, borderline senile men, it can be easy to disregard and give

up on voting as a whole. While Biden is leading the democratic party, the overall voter turnout for primaries was low with reports saying around 30-35% actually made it to the polls. When voting for local representatives, their support of Palestine, or rather lack thereof, was a major deciding factor. While international affairs are on the forefront of voters' minds, Biden has continually vetoed calls for a ceasefire while requesting 14.3 billion dollars in financial aid for Israel. This money, which is most likely coming from taxpayers pockets, should not be used to support the violent siege of Palestine which has injured over 70,000 and killed more than 30,000 people of which at least half are women and children. The divide between the two candidates is closing. A harrowing December 2023 poll showed 49% of voters aged

18-29 supported Trump while only 43% supported Biden. Trump has remained largely neutral throughout his entire tenure. The little that he has said has been in support of Israel. The unfair and biased Middle East peace-plan released in 2018 was aligned with Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu. In said plan, Trump ignored Palestinians' pleas, not providing a "right of return" for their refugees and keeping Jerusalem as the undivided Israeli capital. As of February, Biden is leading in the support of young voters, but very narrowly. In 2020 Biden beat Trump by 20 percentage points in the support of Millennial and Gen-Z voters. As of late last year, Trump beat Biden by 4-6 points in voters under 35. The U.S. is once again in a situation where voters will have to choose between the lesser of two evils.



Protesters march up to City Hall on March 2 in support of Palestine during the Hands Off Rafah So-Cal rally.

Throughout his entire political career Biden has been consistent in his support of Israel, recently referring to it as "rock solid and unwavering" following the October 7th attacks. He then diminished the Palestinian death toll, naming it a price of war and questioning its truthfulness. The white house reiterated this support after Israeli troops targeted unarmed Palestinians collecting aid, calling them close allies. It wasn't until March 5th that The Biden Administration stopped covering from the prospect of a "ceasefire" and Kamala Harris made calls

for an immediate yet temporary truce. Humanitarian relief has been sent to Rafah, but it is not the children dying of starvation prompting this aid, but the growing distaste of potential voters rearing its ugly head. Biden has begun to criticize the genocide of Palestinians but has yet to stop his contributions to their suffering. The superficially supportive gestures the American government has begun making to the people of Palestine is an inch in the right direction but ultimately reads as an empty plea for voter support.



Emilio Godinez for The Valley Star

A moving sculpture of watermelons, which stand as a symbol for the Palestinian flag, moved along a Feb. 2 protest in Pasadena showing support for free Palestine.

Hollywood should pay a living wage to increase diversity

In order to attract a diverse workforce, the entertainment industry needs to step up.



By Hilary Van Hoose,
Special to the Star

Hollywood runs on unpaid interns and underpaid skilled workers. Here is why that creates diversity barriers. Every year, bright eyed newcomers try to break into the entertainment industry. But even those with years of training, experience, and graduate degrees from top film schools can only obtain work as unpaid interns or in jobs paying minimum wage. Even many doing skilled and specialized jobs like video editor or screenwriter are earning

less than grocery store clerks on non-union productions. Who are these low wages excluding? A USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative study found that female and minority inclusion in entertainment workplaces is severely lacking, and an article by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission notes that women, minorities, and those from underprivileged backgrounds still earn significantly less income on average. Los Angeles minimum wage is about \$30,720 to \$32,448 per year. According to a survey by #PayUpHollywood, more than half of support staffers who responded earned \$40,000 or

less, and more than one-quarter earned less than \$30,000. Thus, minimum wage fails to meet minimum needs. The 2022 Census showed the median gross rent in Los Angeles County to be \$1,805 per month. If financial advisors recommend one's income to be triple the rent, then interning in Hollywood would leave one woefully short. A minimum wage worker would need at least two roommates to afford a studio apartment in LA. Consequently, many entertainment workers are unhoused. A 2018 study by Economic Roundtable showed that "more than 10 percent of Disneyland Resort employees report having been homeless

because they're not paid enough to afford rent in Anaheim or Los Angeles. Additionally, "Over half of workers who rent their housing are overcrowded - squeezing too many family members, roommates or even multiple families into a unit that is too small to accommodate the number of occupants." If an entertainment worker is disabled or supporting a family these shortcomings become more acute. According to an article by Lending Tree, raising a child requires an average \$25,000 per year. The National Disability Institute estimates that, even if a pre-disabled person could live on minimum

wage, a disabled person would require an additional \$8,680 per year to survive. Numbeo estimates \$4,500 for a single adult per year for groceries. These numbers are revealing. How can employers increase diversity in the entertainment industry, and Los Angeles as a whole? Pay workers a living wage, and ensure strong protections against wage theft. Otherwise, entry level jobs, many skilled jobs, and essentially the future of the entertainment industry are only open to people with wealth and other varieties of privilege.

EDITORS-IN-CHIEF
Star Eisenberg
Milan Rafaelov

COPY EDITOR
Katherine OBrien Field

PHOTO EDITOR
Astrid Cortez

VALLEY LIFE EDITOR
Maia Richaud

OPINION EDITOR
Kaia Mann

SPORTS EDITOR
Alex Diaz

SOCIAL MEDIA EDITOR
Ivonne Elias

STAFF WRITERS
Lamonta Amos
Alex Diaz
Star Eisenberg
Katherine OBrien Field
Maxine Ibrahim
Sara Lemon
Kaia Mann
Jabes Pascual
Milan Rafaelov
Maia Richaud

PHOTOGRAPHERS
Astrid Cortez
Taylor Cowhey
Kaya Dantzler
Ivonne Elias
Patrick Escobar
Natalie Gazarian
Emilio Godinez
Lluvia Marinero Arevalo
Brian Nemorin
Samantha Salazar
Torja Saxxon
Janessa Scoggins

ADVISORS
Bill Dauber
Brian Paumier

GOT A LETTER TO THE EDITOR?
Letters to the editor can be submitted online at www.valleystarnews.com. Letters must be limited to 300 words and may be edited for content. Full name and contact information must be supplied in order for letters to be printed.

VALLEY VIEW | Do campus construction delays affect students?

Text by Maia Richaud
Photos by Lluvia Marinero Arevalo



"Yeah, definitely. It's a huge hassle trying to get to most of my classes over there (the constructions). At the same time, this campus is just so convenient to where I live, so I am going to keep going here, even despite the situation."

-Rafael Estrada, music major



"Not really, other than the fact that it just looks bad on the campus, I think. Especially since it's been a long time."

-Nathaniel Hurst, economics major



"Yeah, because I'm in Theater. Now we have smaller rooms, I feel like it's kind of hard to perform at our greatest. I feel like if we had our own area it would be better."

-Dejanee Moss, theater major



"It does not affect me because my classes are nowhere near the constructions, so that doesn't bother me. I'm able to get through when I need to get to school, or leave, everything's really smooth for me."

-America Diaz, sociology and chicano studies major

VALLEY LIFE

Theater Department left to fend for itself

The Valley Theater Department puts on “Mr. Burns - A Post Electric Play” amidst ongoing displacement.



Lluvia Marinero Arevalo for the Valley Star

Peter Zucchero, Sami Kiel, Sara Kaner, Kurt Swick, Stella Ramirez, Jack Bernaz take a quick break after dress rehearsal for their group portrait in their costumes on March 6.

Kaia Mann,
Opinion Editor

The show must go on for the Valley College theater department despite not having a place to call home for more than 7 years.

Two of the department's most recent projects include “The Laramie Project” and “Mr. Burns - A Post Electric Play.”

Both of which required the audience to follow their actors in, outside, and around Monarch Hall. Construction on the Valley Academic and Cultural Center (VACC) building started in 2016, leaving the theater department displaced. They are promised a mainstage, horseshoe and outdoor theater when the VACC is completed but have to settle for random rooms in Monarch Hall in the meantime.

“They (administration) are not adding more classes. They aren't hiring more professors because not enough people are enrolling in the classes,” said Angel Vazquez, assistant stage manager of “Mr. Burns.” “In reality, there is actually a real demand and if we have more resources more people will be joining the department.”

“Mr. Burns - A Post Electric Play,” is a story about the

ever-lasting nature of pop culture. It follows a group of people after the apocalypse, recounting the Simpsons episode, “Cape Feare”. Act two occurs seven years later when they are now in a traveling theater company where stories are used as currency. The last act is set 75 years later where the rendition of the episode is surreally reimagined once again.

“I need to think about my education in the long run, there's more variety at ELAC and LACC. [Valley's] administration is contributing to this problem, they are complicit.”

-
Angel Vazquez

One thing that made this performance innovative was the interactive element that Valley brought to the stage. Each of the play's three acts took place in a different part of the room. Actors moved from the courtyard, to the back of the room, all the way to the stage in front. “Mr. Burns” shines in pro-

duction design. Each act was distinct in the set, costumes and props. Despite an actor having to bow out just days before the opening, the acting and singing hardly faltered. Notable performances include Sami Kiel, who stepped in on-book and Sophie Haaland who was a standout singer of the group.

“We're like these nomads that move around from building to building,” said Kurt Swick, a theater major at Valley.

“Do I sometimes feel very cheated? Yeah cause it's not fair. But my philosophy is that our theater department is about the people, not the building.

Given the fact that there is no estimated timeline for the VACC construction, the theater department will have to continue their performance season with little to no aid from the college. The drama department has been able to make a bad situation good, taking an already interesting play and putting their own spin on it.

“I love this department so much but after some thinking I'm going to be moving on,” said Vazquez. “I need to think about my education in the long run, there's more variety at ELAC and LACC. The administration is contributing to this problem; they are complicit.”



Janessa Scoggins for the Valley Star

Act 2 set waits for the performers of “Mr. Burns - a Post Electric Play” to enter the multi-purpose room in Monarch Hall on March 6. The play ran for three consecutive days.



Lluvia Marinero Arevalo for the Valley Star

Kurt Swick readies to play Matt in ACT 1 during “Mr. Burns - A Post Electric Play” rehearsal at Valley.



Lluvia Marinero Arevalo for the Valley Star

Sophie Haaland and Peter Zucchero readies to play Gibson and Quincy in ACT 1 during “Mr. Burns - A Post Electric Play” rehearsal at Valley.



Lluvia Marinero Arevalo for the Valley Star

Ensemble member Rafael Estrada shows up ready for the dress rehearsal in Monarch Hall on March 6.

VALLEY LIFE



Jacob Rosenquist scales new heights

Student shows resilience in come back.

Milan Rafaelov,
Editor-in-Chief

Seventeen-year-old Jacob Rosenquist opened his eyes and gazed up at the 100-foot waterfall towering over him, he lay bleeding in a shallow pool of water with a broken sternum, bruised lungs, and unable to feel his legs. To his left, he spotted the gear he and his friends left behind at the bottom of the hike and could not help but wonder, 'How did I get all the way down here?'

"I didn't see them (his hiking friends,) at first I thought I had died or something because my memory went completely blank," Rosenquist said.

The high schooler grappled with the sensation of having narrowly escaped death after a hiking accident in the Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Park left him paralyzed from the waist down.

Before his accident, Jacob Rosenquist worked at Valley's

"It's all I could think about every day when I was in rehab, and I fell in love with it," Jacob said about rock climbing. "Even though it's not the same, it's just my favorite thing."

Jacob Rosenquist

climbing gym as a youth rock climbing instructor while taking on some college courses as a high school student. After having two rods surgically placed to stabilize his spine, the rising senior embarked on a difficult six-month journey of rehabilitation. Once he had healed and began to adapt to life in a wheelchair, Jacob transitioned to attending high school fully online. Despite the challenges brought by his paraplegia, the determined young instructor was eager to return to Valley and resume his work.

"When I was in rehab, I felt like I needed to find a way to start getting back into it, and needed to find people like me that still climb," said Rosenquist. "All the guys at my work were trying to figure out the best equipment and system for me to come back, and asked when was the soonest I could start again, all of that was really helpful."

Before his injuries, Jacob had aspirations of a career involving travel or hands-on work. But, since his life took an unexpected turn, he's wrestled with finding a vocational path that worked for him. While uncertain about his future profession, he is certain about the destination ahead.

"I really want a family," said Rosenquist. "I wanna get married and have a family, and I definitely wanna have

kids. I just love people, I want to always be surrounded by people I like and care about."

Throughout his rehabilitation, Jake's family posted updates on his recovery meticulously documenting each visit where their youngest son would radiate positivity, despite the challenging journey he faced following the accident that nearly claimed his life. The support of his friends, family and community buoyed his spirits and maintained his optimistic outlook throughout his convalescence. He warmly recalled the compassionate care provided by the nurses and rehab volunteers whose efforts contributed to his comfort and recovery.

"All of the nurses have been so nice, and the food has been really good," wrote Jake in an Instagram post. "The pain has gone way down since last week. We are supposed to be transferred to a hospital back in LA today. Thank you so much for all of the visitors and everyone's nice messages. Please keep praying for a miracle for my legs!"

Throughout his rehabilitation, Jake dedicated himself to researching climbers who faced similar challenges, even reaching out to some for guidance. Besides his deep affection for people, his passion for climbing remains unrivaled.

"Six months ago today, Jake had surgery on his back," wrote his aunt, Rachel Ward, in a Caring Bridge post. Today is a very special day, not only does Jake turn 18, he finally gets to climb again. Since being home, he has adjusted quite well."

Now, following Rosenquist's successful completion of physical rehabilitation, he has embarked on a new endeavor: competing in para-climbing tournaments with the aspiration of one day participating in the IFSC Paraclimbing World Championship. The para-climbing movement gained traction in the late 2000's, culminating in the inaugural world championship in 2011, and has since evolved into a vibrant and esteemed community of climbers.

"I was going easy at first with climbing to make sure my back was doing okay," said Jake. "But I want to start training, pull-ups and finger strength, things like that to eventually be able to compete, maybe by next year. I'm very competitive, I love that kind of thing, something to strive and train for."

Juggling online high school classes alongside in-person college courses at Valley, Jacob Rosenquist commits himself to his training as he strives to achieve his goal of becoming a competitive rock climber. Supported steadfastly by his family and friends, and supplemented by his side gig of streaming Fortnite on Twitch, Jacob faces each challenge with deep resilience and an appreciation for life.

"It's all I could think about every day when I was in rehab, and I fell in love with it," Jacob said about rock climbing. "Even though it's not the same, it's just my favorite thing."



Luvia Marinero Arevalo for the Valley Star

Eighteen-year-old Jacob Rosenquist positions himself to begin rock climbing eight months after being paralyzed from the waist down. Photo taken at the Community Service Center in Los Angeles Valley College on March 5.

Problemista's immigration odyssey

Quadruple threat Julio Torres tells his story in collaboration with A24.



Jon Pack

Problemista takes an artistic approach to filmmaking while telling the story of an immigrant's journey.

Kaia Mann,
Opinion Editor

From the comedian behind the eccentric SNL skits, "Wells for Boys" and "The Actress," comes the surrealist comedy Problemista.

The new film from the acclaimed company A24 follows Alejandro, an El Salvadoran immigrant, dreaming of becoming a toy designer in his race to get a work visa. While the description may seem cut-and-dry, the movie is nothing but. Full of colorful characters and wacky cut-away scenes, Problemista is one of the most interesting movies out in theaters.

Julio Torres who wrote, directed, produced and stars in the film, has been in the entertainment industry for over 12 years. Torres is the co-creator of the HBO comedy Los Espookys and is behind some of SNL's most iconic skits and has worked as a prolific stand-up comedian in New York.

"Sometimes I feel like a one trick pony. I think that I am a very idea first, medium second kind of person," said Torres at a college roundtable recently hosted by A24. "I just start pouring and see when I have to stop."

While Torres is great, a real standout of the film is Tilda Swinton who plays Elizabeth. Swinton is a seasoned and award winning actor in both blockbuster and independent films. In Problemista, her character is scary and threatening, but intriguing, especially for Alejandro. You may not expect Swinton to star in a low-budget feature debut, but she fits right in.

"Tilda brings the physicality that is like that of any other actor," said Torres. "Working with her was just so joyous and so happy and so not intimidating."

The movie is full of color and off-the-wall jokes. The online advertisement company Craigslist is personified into an omniscient operatic god, Bank of America is one of the movie's main villains, and characters are cyrogenically frozen to live in the distant future. Bursting with life, Problemista sometimes feels void of a true vision or path, yet has a real unexpected heart in the center of it.

This film is about art and artists. How humans have the desire to create, yet face countless systemic obstacles. Presented as a never-ending yet time-sensitive maze, the process of getting a work visa and navigating the U.S. immigration system takes Alejandro on an outlandish odyssey. He works a series of random and often demanding jobs sweeping him throughout the city and forcing him to confront difficult and unconventional people.

"Immigration feels like it's this silent, baseless, gloom that just sort of hovers over you and when the time stops, there's no explosion," Torres said. "It's just you know that you're out of time and now what."

Problemista is almost stuffed too full, but in a way that is the beauty of it. The sheer quantity of ideas can be overpowering, but the message of struggle and perseverance shines through. Torres is quickly garnering a cult following and will most likely have many more chances to tell all of the stories in his head. It is exciting to think of what will come next.

"I have this joy for making work that you're interested in doing that brings you joy," Torres said. "Maybe people will like it; maybe people won't, but that's not the point. If getting success is what you're chasing after, then I think that's a different lane."

Community center offers residents space

Soap making, balloon twisting, and cooking are a few of the classes offered at the Valley resource center.

Maia Richaud,
Valley Life Editor

The campus Community Services Center and Monarch Camps Program provide all types of classes for the community, using Valley College's facilities as a support for their activities.

The center offers classes for anyone. Registration is separate from the one that Valley College uses for credit and non-credit courses, meaning that if a student would like to take classes there, it would not show up on their transcripts. Anyone who wants to use the facilities has to be enrolled in a community service class.

"We serve the whole community," said Community Services Manager Debra Erickson. "Anyone in the community can register and sign up for our classes. We have a separate registration site, so you do not have to apply to the college. There is not a formal application process."

Their registration platform is available through Valley College's website, and closes one business day before the class begins. To enroll, users must create a profile and complete a form, which can be done online or in-person at the center. Classes are categorized on the website, allowing users to select their desired class and view all details, including tuition.

A lot of classes are provided by the center: arts classes, dance, cooking, music, soap making, henna, balloon twisting, arts and crafts, a variety of sports classes, as well as career training and professional development type classes. This facility has a gymnastics gym, a rock climbing area, a rock wall, a dance room, a kitchen, a computer lab, and an



Carson Tarabochia-Martin for the Valley Star

The Community Services Center, which sits between the pool and the baseball field, hosts after-school camps for children.

arts and crafts or messy space. "We have one of each, something for everyone, something for every class," said Erickson. "So we're really able to offer all of our classes here."

The center also uses various facilities on campus so they can provide tennis classes and aquatics classes for the community.

"These are more like workshops," said the Community

Services Manager. "They're not for credit. They are fee-based, and they can be anywhere from a one day, one and a half hour workshop to possibly a six week, two hour session, two hours every session workshop. It just depends."

The Community Services Center is also in partnership with the Monarch Camps Program, a program centered around children, providing

different kinds of camps from 1st grade to 12th grade since 1971.

This program serves the community by providing all different kinds of camps throughout the year, like speciality day camps, summer and winter camps, camping trips and excursions. The next camp coming up is the Monarch Spring Camp in which children and teenagers from age five to 17

can attend full days of activities, alternating between on site activities using Valley College's sports facilities like the rockwall, the pools, the sports fields, and field trips like going to La Brea Tar Pits or KidsSpace for example.

Along with these camps, the partner program offers the Afterschool Camp, a program dedicated to the San Fernando Valley children for ages five to

12, that picks them up from local schools, have a homework time, and then do STEM activities, cooking, or sports.

"We're here year-round," said Director of Afterschool Camp Geoffrey Lancaster. "We run our after-school camp that I'm primarily in charge of. But we spend a lot of the year preparing for the big camps, like Thanksgiving Camp, Spring Camp, Winter Camp, and of course Summer Camp, which is our biggest program. Our year-round after-school program, we have about 60 kids per day, for summer it's closer to 600."

Along with this after school camp, they have a variety of weekday afternoons and weekends classes for children like gymnastics, fine art, rock climbing, or theater classes.

Additionally, they host the Monarch parties on weekends, providing equipment and staff-led activities such as painting, dance and foam party, soccer, inflatables, or rock climbing among others.

Valley College does offer some kinesiology classes in the community services center, like rock climbing, judo, and gymnastics, and they utilize the gym and the rock climbing area.



Scan QR code to read more

SPORTS

Men stay hot against West LA

The Monarchs men's baseball team continues to sit in first place in the south division of the Western State Conference.

Alex Diaz,
Sports Editor

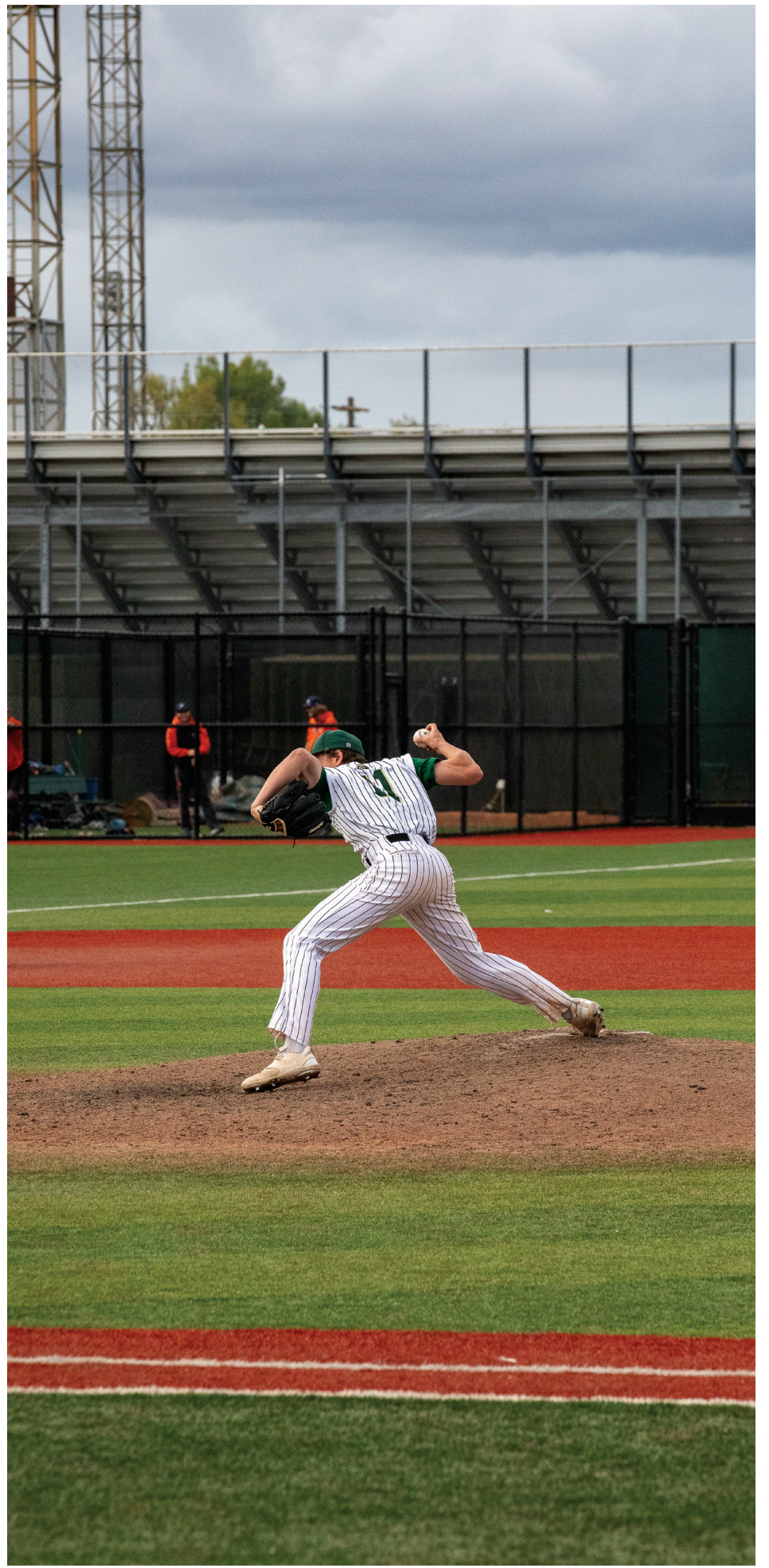
The Valley College baseball team continued its hot streak as it dispatched West LA College on Saturday, 14-5. The Monarchs dominated the second inning with four runs. Lucas Gabay, Vic Pico, and Sean David each scored for Valley. Royce Clayton Jr. hit a sacrifice fly to left field which allowed Will White to score one more run before the end of the second, making the score 4-0. Pitcher Matt Sanders kept West LA scoreless for five innings until left-hander Drew Gustafson took over in the bottom of the sixth. The Wildcats scored five in the sixth, making the score 10-5 in favor of the Monarchs. In the seventh, the Monarchs scored four more runs. Tino Valdez singled to center field, scoring Will White. Manolo Tafolla doubled, sending Tino Valdez home to score and advancing Amari Yolas to third. "My approach at the plate is hopefully they throw me a fastball and I'm swinging at a fastball," said catcher Will White after a recent practice. Kevin Vasquez reached first on an error by shortstop allowing Amari Yolas to

score. Lucas Gabay advanced to second on an error by the third baseman while Kevin Vasquez advanced to third. The win moved the Monarchs to a 5-1 mark, maintaining their first-place position in the South Division of the Western State Conference. The Monarchs took the win 13-1 Thursday at home against the Wildcats. "We pitched great and we defended well," said assistant coach Chris Johnson after a recent practice. In the bottom of the second, Anthony Reveles, Lucas Gabay, and Eddie Zapata all scored runs for the Monarchs. Dorian Asher flied out to first resulting in Royce Clayton Jr. advancing to second base leading Eddie Zapata to score a run. "First, it felt good to always help the team, but like I said, my approach is to always go the other way," said right fielder Eddie Zapata after a recent practice. "Anything helps to get on base or at least do something to put some pressure on the other team." Pitcher Spencer Kratt opened the eighth inning, the Wildcats scoring a single run. In the final inning, Solomon Margolis replaced Spencer Kratt as pitcher, helping the Monarchs to a 13-1 victory.

Valley took their first win on March 12, against the Wildcats, 14-9. In the fourth inning, the Monarchs started with five runs. Players Sebastian Garcia and Oskar Stark scored. Royce Clayton Jr. helped Valley by hitting a triple resulting in Will White, Lucas Gabay, and Collin Taylor scoring three runs. At the top of the seventh inning, Royce Clayton Jr. scored. In the bottom of the inning, Pitcher Zack Freck was switched for Amari Yolas. After the Wildcats scored seven runs, Ryan Higgins replaced right-hander Zack Freck. West LA scored two more runs before the inning ended. By the ninth inning, both teams were tied. The game went to eleven innings resulting in Valley scoring five more runs to get the win. "We must respect our opponents in all words to win all three games," said assistant coach Chris Johnson after a recent practice. "If we don't respect them, then it's going to bite us and we may lose focus. Respecting the other team is the key." Valley travels to Citrus College on Tuesday for its next conference match. First pitch is at 2:30 p.m.



Matt Sanders, Sebastian Garcia, Dorian Asher, Manolo Tafolla and other players celebrate a 13-1 win over West LA College on March 14. Valley has a 8-1 record in conference.



Valley right hander Zack Freck throws a pitch against the West L.A. Wildcats. Freck has made seven appearances in his first year at Valley. The freshman has a 1-0 record.

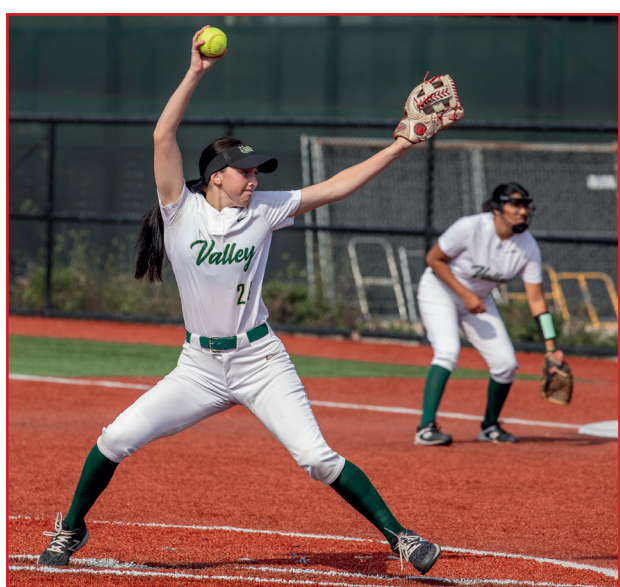
Valley softball keeps it positive after a series of home losses

The Monarchs women's softball team sits in last place in the South Division in the Western State Conference.

Alex Diaz,
Sports Editor

The Valley College softball team dropped a home game against Antelope Valley College Thursday 8-3, leaving the Monarchs in last place in the South Division of the Western State Conference. At the top of the second inning, the Marauders scored a run against pitcher Jolene Miramontes. However, the Monarchs remained upbeat in the loss. In the final inning, Monarchs Azucena Villalta Hernandez and Clarissa Robles each scored when teammate

Alice Buglairi reached first base on a throwing error. "High energy, we try to compete as much as we can," said coach Andrea Contreras. "I tell them not to let it go, just to have high energy and stay positive," Alice Buglairi scored on a wild pitch. In the final inning, Antelope Valley ended the game on a ground out by Jaylene Diaz. "It was fun," said outfielder Alice Buglairi. "I try to take deep breaths, trying to only look at the ball and not worry about distractions outside." Valley will face L.A. Mission College at home today starting at 2:30 p.m.



Emely Trinidad pitches against College of the Canyons as first baseman Precious Romero gets ready for the play.



Lilliana Noriega dives into the water during the Western Conference Meet in Ventura Aquatic Center on March 16.

In a non-conference meet held at Ventura Aquatic Center, Valley's women's swim and diving took second place with 297 points. The Monarchs dominated Citrus College(214), Allan Hancock College(162), Ventura Community College(147), Santa Monica College(143), Bakersfield College(104), Los Angeles Pierce(103), Cuesta College(77), and College of the Canyons(2). Ultimately, Santa Barbara City College swept first place with 570 points. The men's swim and diving took third place with 239 points. The men's team defeated Ventura College(203.5), Allan Hancock College(155), Santa Monica College(142), College of the Canyons (98), Pierce College (76.5), and Citrus College(40). Cuesta College took first place with 551 points and Bakersfield College finished second with 305 points.



Valley's Greg Carrillo comes up for some air during the 400-meter swim event at the Ventura Aquatic Center on March 16.

GALLERY



Emilio Godínez for the Valley Star

A father and daughter waiting for halal tacos at the Rising Together Against Occupation rally on Feb. 25 at Eastside Cafe on Huntington Drive.



Kaia Mann for The Valley Star

Pro-Palestine protesters march through the streets of Downtown L.A. on March 2 during the Hands Off Rafah So-Cal rally.



Emilio Godínez for the Valley Star

Memorial sticks to remember lost lives of Palestinian children on Feb. 25 at Eastside Cafe on Huntington Drive.



Taylor Cowhey for The Valley Star

Valley Sophomore Royce Clayton Jr. locks in on March 5 as he is waiting on deck at an away game against the Glendale College Vaqueros at the Stengel field.



Astrid Cortez for The Valley Star

A drone shot of a softball team facing off against College of the Canyons on March 21.