

# OPPORTUNITY

# NEWS



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# NEWS FROM YOUR COLLEGE

## San Jac awarded silver veteran award

The Texas Veterans Commission honored San Jacinto College with the Silver 2024 Veteran Education Excellence Recognition Award.

Established by the Texas Legislature, the award this year recognized 24 Texas public higher education institutions that provide excellent education and related services to veteran and military-connected students.

“San Jacinto College ensures that veterans and their dependents have the support they need to transition smoothly into higher education,” said Holly Morrison, veteran services manager. “Many of the veteran services team are veterans themselves, bringing a deep understanding of the unique challenges that come with transitioning from military service to academic life.”

The Veteran Education Excellence Recognition Award is presented at gold, silver, and bronze levels to highlight the depth and breadth of veteran services.

With three veteran centers at the North, South, and Central Campuses and intentional support at the Maritime and Generation Park Campuses, the College’s veteran services team champions this mission.

Each veteran center houses a team of advisors who also serve as school certifying officials. This team fosters a sense of community among veterans.

Scan the QR code to learn more.



## Give the gift of education Dec. 3

The season of generosity is upon us. Why not give the gift of education on Giving Tuesday, Dec. 3?

The San Jacinto College Foundation



Photo by Courtney Morris, San Jacinto College

needs your help providing scholarships for students who could not complete a degree or certificate without financial help.

The Foundation’s 2024 Giving Tuesday goal is \$50,000 in 24 hours.

Foundation scholarships help students like Francisco Zavala, a former Promise Scholar. The Promise @ San Jac Scholarship covers 100% of an associate degree or certificate for in-district high school seniors who attend San Jac after graduation.

“It’s helped me by allowing me to focus on my studies instead of working or taking a gap year so I could afford to go to college,” said Zavala. “Now I’m saving up more money in the long run for a university and focusing on making better grades for future scholarships.”

Mark your calendar now to give to San Jac students through the Foundation on Giving Tuesday. Scan the QR code to help students achieve their educational dreams!



## Pledge deadline approaching for Promise @ San Jac Scholarship

High school seniors who live in San Jacinto College’s taxing district have until Feb. 28, 2025, to pledge for the Promise @ San Jac Scholarship.

This scholarship ensures all in-district high school graduates — including those in portions of Clear Creek, Pearland, and Humble ISDs, as well as all of Channelview, Deer Park, Galena Park, La Porte, Pasadena, and Sheldon ISDs — can earn a workforce credential or an associate degree with 100% of their tuition, books, and supplies covered.

The scholarship doesn’t have any GPA or financial restrictions, meaning all in-district graduating seniors qualify.

Other deadlines for future Promise Scholars to remember include:

- April 30, 2025: Complete and submit the FAFSA or TASFA.
- June 30, 2025:

Complete all enrollment steps and register for fall classes.

Scan the QR code to learn more.



Photo by Courtney Morris, San Jacinto College

# SERVICE IS LIFESTYLE FOR ARMY VETERAN

By Courtney Morris  
San Jacinto College

Robert Charles remembers Sept. 11, 2001, as more than a dark day. It was the day he glimpsed his future.

Eyes glued to the TV screen at his elementary school, Charles watched the Twin Towers fall and learned about the other hijacked planes. If he had been 18, not 8, he would have enlisted on the spot.

“I’ve always had the urge to be in uniform — to protect and serve — because of that moment when I saw the terrorists attack,” he said.

That desire to step up, no matter the cost, has never wavered. For Charles, it hits close to home. Broken homes and lack of vision weave through his family history. He wanted those negative cycles to end with him.

Twenty-three years later, wrapping up his Army service and preparing to launch from San Jacinto College, he is gaining ground.

## Joining the Army

Even though Charles devoured war movies and video games like Medal of Honor, his family didn’t believe he would enlist. For a time, he didn’t.

After high school, he worked full time to help support his family. But in 2016, a job layoff had the 24-year-old marching straight to an Army recruiter’s office.

As a horizontal construction engineer, Charles jumped from high-performance aircraft to repair landing strips for

supply planes. But more than accomplishing the mission, he pledged to protect the young paratroopers under his command.

In Afghanistan, Charles served in an armored vehicle convoy that cleared bombs. The day two military brothers in his division lost their lives remains seared in his mind.

“I was not on that mission with them that horrible day,” he said. “They are heroes during Operation Freedom’s Sentinel. They gave their all for this country.”

## Finding home at San Jac

While the military grew his resilience and assertiveness, it brought Charles face to face with the “fragility of life” and the need for a larger mission. After returning from Afghanistan, he struggled to untangle his identity from the military.

“It took a while for me to realize my identity shouldn’t come from my achievements,” he said. “It comes from Christ.”

Years earlier, Charles had dropped out of San Jac to work full time. Now nondeployable because of injuries, he decided to return. What drew him to the College were affordable tuition and convenience.

What kept him there were the people — from veteran services staff to professors.

San Jac was home.

“I’m not just a number here,” he said. “I’m a person.”

## Navigating college as a veteran

What has Charles found most

challenging about returning to school? He says a new schedule each semester.

The military routine, while “chaotic order,” felt “amazing.” Falling out of his bunk at 5 a.m. Scrambling to dress. Standing in formation. Listening to the Reveille bugle call. Cycling through physical training exercises.

Although setting his own routine now sometimes feels uncomfortable, he can’t drop a class because of his veteran education benefits. To succeed, he focuses on the future.

“Coming out of the military isn’t the end of a chapter,” he said. “It’s the beginning of a new one.”

He encourages other veterans not only to rely on San Jac’s veteran resources but also to ask for help.

“We have people here who care about our veterans,” he said. “That means a lot right there.”

## Pursuing his purpose

After earning his computer science associate degree next year, Charles will pursue

bachelor’s degrees in computer science, math, cybersecurity, and theological studies.

He explains: “Options.”

Maybe he’ll teach math part time and work in the IT field. Or maybe he’ll pursue full-time ministry and mentor youth.

In a country where few join the military and many struggle to find their purpose, Charles knows his: serving regardless of personal gain.

“The Lord has given me this opportunity to be in college,” he said. “I want to use it for his kingdom.”



Photo by Courtney Morris, San Jacinto College

# ARTURO GUERRA: FROM NAVY SERVICE TO EDUCATIONAL PLANNER

By **Melissa Trevizo**  
San Jacinto College

Arturo Guerra, educational planner for San Jacinto College's veteran services, grew up in Pasadena and Deer Park. Uncertain about his future after high school, he joined the U.S. Navy, a decision that would shape his career and approach to student guidance.

In his senior year at Deer Park High School, Guerra was introduced to military service through a recruiter who promised college benefits and the opportunity to travel the world. He graduated in May 2010 and joined the Navy that November as a cryptologic technician.

"I didn't want my dad to pay for college if I wasn't sure what I wanted to do," he said. "The Navy gave me time to figure things out while working and getting paid."

After completing boot camp and training in Pensacola, Florida, Guerra was stationed in San Diego, where he served on the cruiser USS Antietam. The Navy expanded his worldview and instilled collaboration and responsibility.

"It became very apparent that I was not there as an individual but part of a team," he said. "I was late one morning in boot camp, and they made an example of me by making the other recruits work even harder while I sat out. Teamwork and accountability are high on my priority lists because of those experiences."

One of Guerra's defining moments occurred during a leave in Oklahoma, where he, a friend, and his friend's dad responded to an EF5 tornado that struck a nearby elementary school. Guerra, alongside other first responders, helped rescue children and staff from the rubble. His efforts earned him a Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal and an American Red Cross Real Heroes Military Award.

"I'll never forget that experience," he said. "My friend's dad was a master chief petty officer in the Navy, and he was all about mission action. He told us to hop in the car to go help these people, and we never hesitated."

After four years of service, Guerra also earned a Navy and Marine Corps

Achievement Medal for superior performance as his ship's signal exploitation space supervisor.

In this role, he collected more than 120,000 signals of interest and disseminated more than 1,000 time-sensitive reports.

In 2014, Guerra transitioned to civilian life and eventually returned to Texas, where his military benefits would be extended, combining the GI Bill® and the Hazlewood Act. He enrolled at San Jac and earned his associate degree in 2017.

"The process when I got to the veteran center at San Jac was super easy," he said. "It was like a breath of fresh air because the staff knew about the veteran benefits and all the steps to take throughout the process."

Former San Jac veteran services manager Eugene Bernard mentored Guerra while he attended the College.

"Mr. Bernard would check in on me and let me know about work-study and applying for financial aid," he said.

"Anytime he had a learning opportunity or there was an opportunity to grow, he was like, 'Check this out.'"

Guerra transferred to the University of Houston-Clear Lake and pursued a bachelor's degree in communication, studying public relations and graphic design. He also served as an audience engagement editor for the student newspaper, *The Signal*.

"Initially, I was called to communication for graphic design, but public relations ended up being the meat and potatoes of the program for me," he said. "I realized it was a lot cooler than I thought. Crisis communication was exciting because it was almost exactly like what I did in the Navy."

After earning his bachelor's degree in 2019, Guerra returned to San Jac as a veteran services educational planner. His military background, particularly lessons in trust and accountability, informs how he guides students today.

"In the military, people depended on me to do my part," he said. "That's the same mindset I bring to my work with students. I want them to know that I've got their back as they figure out their path."



Photo by Melissa Trevizo, San Jacinto College



**CHANGING IMPOSSIBLE TO**  
**I'M POSSIBLE**

**SAN JACINTO**  
**COLLEGE**

FOUNDATION

**It's the season of giving.**  
Make students' dreams possible by supporting the San Jacinto College Foundation on **Giving Tuesday Dec. 3.**

An Equal Opportunity Institution

# VETERAN SERVICES HELPS STUDENTS ACHIEVE THEIR DEGREE MISSION

By Courtney Morris  
San Jacinto College

Lorraine Rowe has a big heart, so it's no surprise she wound up working where heart is needed most.

As San Jacinto College's North Campus veteran services coordinator, Rowe is on the front lines of welcoming students from the military to college.

"In this position I get to serve those who served for me," she said.

Each semester, students walk through the veteran center doors at North, South, and Central Campuses to meet with advisors, grab snacks, log on to computers, and mingle with other veterans.

With nearly 900 veteran students currently, San Jac smooths the transition from the military to the classroom. Rowe shares more:

## Q: How does veteran services support students from enrollment to graduation?

**A:** We start from the very beginning. We help veterans with educational planning, register them for classes, certify student benefits for federal and state, and serve as a resource portal for connecting with other veterans and veteran resources.

It's not just about sending paperwork to let the VA know they're using their education benefits at San Jac. We sit and listen.

## Q: What challenges do veterans face when transitioning to college?

**A:** The majority say the biggest

challenge is the structure. They are not being told when, where, and how to do things any longer. Everything is left up to them. But that's where veteran services comes in. As school certifying officials, we advise them and support them.

The veteran center is a safe place. We're their biggest cheerleaders.

## Q: Who qualifies for GI Bill® benefits?

**A:** To be eligible for the Post-9/11 GI Bill®, you must meet at least one of these requirements:

- You served at least 90 days on active duty (all at once or with breaks in service) on or after Sept. 11, 2001.
- You received a Purple Heart on or after Sept. 11, 2001, and were honorably discharged after any amount of service.
- You served for at least 30 continuous days (without a break in service) on or after Sept. 11, 2001, and were honorably discharged with a service-connected disability.
- You're a dependent child using benefits transferred by a qualifying veteran or service member.

## Q: How do you help students use their GI Bill® benefits?

**A:** What's most difficult is applying to receive the benefit. We assist with navigating the va.gov system. Once they've applied, there's a minimum 30-day wait to receive the certificate of eligibility, which says what they're eligible for and what percentage of the benefit will cover tuition.

Students often call us while they're still in the military, but

they won't get a certificate of eligibility until they're released. We encourage them to start the process as early as possible. We can give them a deferment until they receive the certificate, and then we can apply the benefit to their tuition.

## Q: How do you collaborate with other San Jac departments to support students?

**A:** We host monthly in-person meet-and-greets, which include different departments like mental health, financial aid, etc.

We also have Buddy Check Days every Wednesday. Veteran students can come in for donuts and coffee, and we check in on them: "How are you doing? Is there something we can help you with?" We get to know their struggles and needs.

## Q: What San Jac veteran initiatives have helped students stay engaged and on track to graduate?

**A:** One motivation project we host is "The Ahren Project," which encourages our veterans and their families to create a vision board. Ahren is one of my veterans who took his life. I wanted to make sure we didn't lose another one of our veterans on our watch.

In our conference room, our students create a vision board with their life plan. It started in fall 2023 and has spread to other campuses.

## Q: What's next for San Jac's veteran services?

**A:** Since fall 2023, we've been offering Green Zone training to

help San Jac employees learn how to support our veteran students.

We're also requesting a veteran wall of honor at the Generation Park Campus. The honor walls show who received the veteran scholarship from the prior year. Or anyone, including the public,

can pay \$250 to honor a veteran. That money goes toward veteran scholarships.

Scan the QR code to learn more about veteran services.



Photo by Courtney Morris, San Jacinto College

## Free Veteran and Military Affiliate Resource Fair

Learn about education benefits, job opportunities, transition assistance organizations, and much more!

**When:** Friday, Nov. 8, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

**Where:** LyondellBasell Center for Petrochemical, Energy, & Technology (Central Campus, Building C45)

# ESCOBEDO HELPS STUDENT-ATHLETES SUCCEED ON AND OFF THE FIELD

**By Neesha Hosein**  
San Jacinto College

Silvia Escobedo has been part of San Jacinto College’s North Campus athletics and physical education departments for almost a decade, providing valuable support to both coaching staff and student-athletes.

Escobedo helps ensure smooth office operations while helping student-athletes navigate their academic journey. She enjoys assisting students from the ApplyTexas application to graduation and everything in between.

She started as a federal work-study in the veteran success center at the North Campus while working on her Associate of Arts in business. After graduating in 2015, Escobedo was hired into her current position. Her experience helps her understand

things from students’ perspective.

“Many of our student-athletes are away from home for the first time, and they need extra support with things like the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, tech support, Blackboard, the SOS system, and more,” Escobedo said. “I’m here to help them or refer them to the appropriate person or department to get their issues resolved as quickly as possible so they can focus on their studies and the field.”

### Best part of the job

Escobedo feels lucky to work with an “amazing team” of coaches and student-athletes.

“Year after year it gives me great joy to know that by taking care of the office operations, the coaches can fully focus on coaching our Ravens baseball players to be successful on the

field and chart a brighter future on their baseball careers beyond San Jac,” she said.

Escobedo believes San Jac is a great place to work because student success is at the heart of everything the College does.

“That is what keeps me here,” she said. “Each employee, faculty, or administrator contributes in their own way, and collectively we complete the pathway to student success. As one of the Top 10 colleges in the nation, San Jac is making a big impact on our community, with graduation and accreditation rates showing it is the best place to work and pursue higher education.”

Escobedo feels a great sense of accomplishment and plans to continue helping students achieve their goals toward graduation and beyond, whether they enter the workforce or transfer. Some student-athletes have gone on

to play at four-year universities such as Louisiana Ragin’ Cajuns, Indiana State Sycamores, and the New Mexico University Lobos.

“Most of our players get drafted in the minor leagues and work their way up to the Major Leagues,” she said. “We’ve had a few lucky enough to get drafted right after graduating from San Jac. It is very humbling to look them up online and see where they are at and know that San Jac took part in their career, and I too had a small part in it.”

### On a personal note

“I’m an Army veteran,” Escobedo said. “I served two years active duty, nine years reserves, and deployed twice to Iraq. I am very proud and humbled to be first-generation [first-time college graduate and a first-time military service member].”

Outside work, Escobedo relaxes by working in her front yard flower bed and walking her dogs.



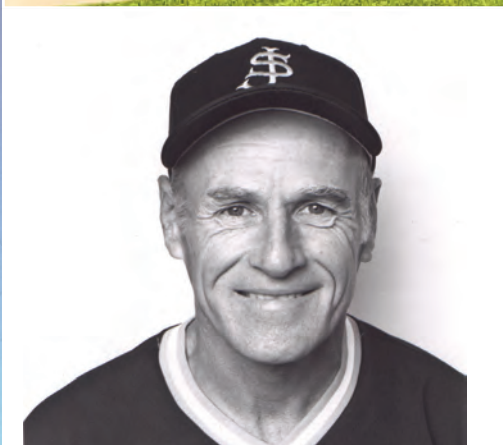
Photo by San Jacinto College

## SAN JAC HAPPENINGS

DATE	EVENT	TIME	SITE
Through Nov. 6	Guest Artists: Venessa Monokian and Tina Hernandez	Varies	Central Campus Gallery, Davis Library (C21.163)   Contact carmen.champion@sjcd.edu
Through Nov. 21	Romeo Robinson Exhibit	Varies	North Campus, Grant Fine Arts Center (N1.106)
Through Dec. 6	“Solastalgia” Exhibit	Varies	South Campus Gallery, Flickinger Fine Arts Center (S15.143)
Nov. 8	Veteran and Military Affiliate Resource Fair	10 a.m.-2 p.m.	Free fair with lunch and veteran resources   Central Campus, LyondellBasell Center for Petrochemical, Energy, & Technology (C45)
Nov. 11	Woodwind Studio Recital	3:30 p.m.	Central Campus, Corbin Hall, Monte Blue Music Building (C5)
Nov. 14	Orpheus Concert	7 p.m.	Central Campus, Corbin Hall, Monte Blue Music Building (C5)
Nov. 15	Voice Area Recital	3 p.m.	Central Campus, Corbin Hall, Monte Blue Music Building (C5)
Nov. 18	Piano Area Recital	3:30 p.m.	Central Campus, Corbin Hall, Monte Blue Music Building (C5)
Nov. 18	Guitar Ensemble Concert	7 p.m.	Central Campus, Corbin Hall, Monte Blue Music Building (C5)
Nov. 19	National Entrepreneurship Day	8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.	Free professional development workshop   Generation Park Campus   Contact kimberly.ward@sjcd.edu
Nov. 20	Colloquium Recital	3:30 p.m.	Central Campus, Corbin Hall, Monte Blue Music Building (C5)
Nov. 20	Steel Band Concert	7 p.m.	South Campus, Flickinger Fine Arts Building (S15)
Nov. 21	Jazz Ensemble Concert	7 p.m.	Central Campus, Corbin Hall, Monte Blue Music Building (C5)
Nov. 25-Dec. 1	Thanksgiving Break	Closed	All campuses and online

All times and event schedules listed are subject to change. For more information, visit [sanjac.edu/calendar](http://sanjac.edu/calendar).

# THIS MONTH *IN* SOCIAL MEDIA



## Facebook

Today, San Jacinto College turns 63! Since 1961, we've grown from a renovated storefront in Pasadena, serving hundreds, to five campuses across the region and more than 41,000 students. #sanjaccollege #htx #txcollege



112 reactions | 5 comments | 17 shares

## Instagram

Behind the scenes with the San Jac Ravens Softball team during their photoshoot! Comment below if you're planning on watching them play.



9,743 plays | 327 likes | 25 shares | 8 saves

## LinkedIn

Last night we lost a baseball legend in Wayne Graham. Coach Graham spent 11 years at San Jacinto College, where he led the Gators to a 675-113 (.857) record and five National Junior College Athletic Association national championships.

Graham began coaching at San Jac in 1981 and turned the program into the national powerhouse it is today. We are incredibly grateful for the years that Coach Graham spent at San Jacinto College.

Our hearts go out to his family, including his wife Tanya and his children, and the hundreds of former players and coaches who knew him and benefitted from his incredible baseball knowledge.



168 reactions | 12 comments

# YOUR GOALS. YOUR COLLEGE.



## SAN JACINTO COLLEGE<sup>SM</sup>

### NORTH CAMPUS

5800 Uvalde Rd., Houston, TX 77049

### CENTRAL CAMPUS

8060 Spencer Hwy., Pasadena, TX 77505

### SOUTH CAMPUS

13735 Beamer Rd., Houston, TX 77089

### MARITIME CAMPUS

3700 Old Hwy. 146, La Porte, TX 77571

### GENERATION PARK CAMPUS

13455 Lockwood Rd., Houston, TX 77044

### ONLINE

[sanjac.edu/online](https://sanjac.edu/online)

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## VISION & MISSION



**Vision** — San Jacinto College will advance the social and economic mobility of all members of our community. We will be known for our excellence in teaching and learning, our intentional student-centered support, and our commitment to every student. We will be the preferred workforce and economic development partner in the region and a champion for lifelong learning. San Jacinto College will inspire students to explore opportunities, define their educational and career paths, and achieve their goals and dreams.

**Mission** — San Jacinto College is focused on student success, academic progress, university transfer, and employment. We are committed to opportunities that enrich the quality of life in the communities we serve.

## SUPPORT STUDENT SUCCESS



A gift to the San Jacinto College Foundation transforms lives, enriches our community, and provides tomorrow's community leaders. For more than 25 years, the Foundation has helped thousands of students reach their goals. Our former students and graduates have filled vital roles in hospitals, classrooms, executive offices, manufacturing plants, and laboratories across our region and beyond. They have also won the World Series and NBA championships, starred in major motion pictures, and created major theatrical productions. Help our students today with the gift of education. Contact the San Jacinto College Foundation at 281-998-6104 or visit [sanjac.edu/foundation](https://sanjac.edu/foundation).

## COMMUNITY IMPACT



Surrounded by monuments of history, evolving industries, maritime enterprises of today, and the space age of tomorrow, San Jacinto College has served the people of East Harris County, Texas, since 1961. The College is one of the top 10 community colleges in the nation as designated by the Aspen Institute and was named an Achieving the Dream Leader College of Distinction in 2020. The College is a Hispanic-Serving Institution that spans five campuses, serving approximately 45,000 credit and non-credit students annually. It offers more than 200 degrees and certificates across eight major areas of study that put students on a path to transfer to four-year institutions or enter the workforce. The College is fiscally sound, holding bond ratings of AA+ by Standard & Poor's and Aa2 by Moody's. For more information about San Jacinto College, visit [sanjac.edu](https://sanjac.edu).

