

INVESTING IN THE ECONOMY

# TEACHING FOR THE REAL WORLD

College of the Desert graduates have never been more prepared for the workforce – so much so that the very skills they’re learning are tailored to our valley’s future economic growth.

BY JUNE ALLAN CORRIGAN



Retired Palm Springs Fire Chief Scott Ventura obtained his associate of science degree from COD while working as a firefighter in the community. He is now a full-time faculty member teaching fire technology.

**C**OLLEGE OF THE DESERT alumni reside in every corner of the Coachella Valley. The skilled nurse you meet at one of our local hospitals delivering patient-centered care? Likely a College of the Desert graduate. The hotelier ensuring guests' needs are met? Same scenario. The police officer keeping the peace, the chef whipping up culinary delights, the mechanic deftly repairing vehicles, the fireman extinguishing a blaze, the solar engineer making a home energy-efficient? Ask them — and more often than not you'll discover that they, too, studied at COD. In fact, 80 percent of alumni live within a two-hour radius of the main campus. It's fair to say every Coachella Valley industry and service benefits, either directly or indirectly, from these consummate professionals who ply their trade courtesy of training and certification they received at the College.

There is bound to be a field of study among College of the Desert's thousand-plus course offer-



LEFT: College of the Desert offers programs for students to pursue a variety of careers in the healthcare field, from a home health aide and nursing assistant to a registered nurse.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Healthcare is the second-largest employer in the Coachella Valley. College of the Desert partners with local medical facilities and all three valley hospitals to provide nursing students with clinical requirements to graduate.

ings that will appeal to anyone who is seeking to broaden their horizons — and improve their job prospects. Individuals can enroll confident that they will gain real-world skills that will later translate into a rewarding career. It's worth noting that the College's signature programs align with the valley's blueprint for economic growth; good jobs in healthcare, hospitality management, green technology, agriculture, public safety, and transportation technology, to name just a few key disciplines, await trained individuals. In striving to fulfill its mission to provide access to quality education in support of students' success, COD is preparing people to assume important roles in the community.

Former College of the Desert nursing student Amy Hetherington, D.N.P., serves as a perfect illustration. Today she is a nurse practitioner as well as a COD instructor helping to train up-and-coming nurses. "College of the Desert completely opened doors for me," Hetherington says. "My counselor put me on the correct path, and I followed through." She then went on to earn her doctorate. The program, which is now in its 50th year, "sets you up to get you working. I always tell my students, this is the start of something wonderful and life-changing."

The College has proven instrumental to Vincent Battaglia's success story as well. The CEO and president of Renova Energy Corporation accumulated credits at College of the Desert in the early 2000s before entering the MBA program at UC Riverside. Once there, he developed and defended his thesis around the concept of Renova — the now firmly established solar and battery

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## AMY HETHERINGTON, D.N.P.



AS THE DAUGHTER of an American father and a South American mother, Amy Hetherington enjoyed a bicultural upbringing. She was raised primarily in Colombia, but after marrying in 2000, she chose to settle in the Coachella Valley with her husband. Armed with an undergraduate degree in communications as well as esthetics training, she eventually found work as an esthetician at a local spa. One day a client who happened to be a physician suggested Hetherington look into a nursing career. "Cheesy as it sounds, she said I have the hands of a healer," Hetherington shares. "But that client literally ignited an idea in my brain and got me thinking there is so much more I could be doing."

The next day Hetherington visited College of the Desert and began investigating the whole process of studying in the United States and what she needed to do to become a nurse. "I didn't know how to transfer my credits, and everyone at COD was so helpful," she says. "They really got me motivated!" Once she started on her newfound path, little could stop her. She earned her associate degree in nursing in 2007 and then transferred into the Registered Nurse baccalaureate program at California State University, San Bernardino, which later propelled her into a master's program. Today she holds her doctorate, works as an adult acute care nurse practitioner and as part of the College's nursing faculty, and relishes the time she gets to spend educating future nurses.

FACULTY/  
ALUMNA

SINCE 1993, MORE THAN  
**2,200** NURSES HAVE  
GRADUATED FROM THE  
COD NURSING PROGRAM,  
THE MAJORITY FINDING  
EMPLOYMENT LOCALLY

# VINCENT BATTAGLIA

VINCENT BATTAGLIA WILL tell you College of the Desert helped pave his path to becoming a successful entrepreneur. The CEO and president of Palm Desert-based Renova Energy Corporation will also tell you that College of the Desert continues to help grow his company even today. It's been almost 20 years since Battaglia amassed math and accounting course credits at the College before entering the MBA program at UC Riverside, where he hatched the idea for Renova as part of his master's thesis. He officially launched the company in 2006. However, the real story centers around an exam called the NAPCEP, a desirable certification bestowed by the North American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners. "I studied and took the NAPCEP test during Renova's first year, because when you pass it, you essentially have a doctorate in solar," Battaglia says. He set his sights on having all Renova employees become certified.

Three years later, an opportunity at College of the Desert arose. At the time, Battaglia was conducting classes at Renova headquarters to prepare his employees — many culled from COD job boards — to take the NAPCEP test and managing a rather hectic schedule, as he simultaneously went about the business of installing solar systems. He was thrilled to forge a relationship with an accredited community college. "I essentially handed all the responsibility for further solar industry education over to the partners at COD," he says. "It became one of the very first community colleges to set up a track so people could get a degree in green technology. It's been a win-win situation for students and for Renova ever since."



PHOTOGRAPH BY THE MONOCLE PROJECT

COD ALUMNI  
CONTRIBUTE  
MORE THAN  
**\$243 MILLION**  
EACH YEAR  
TO THE LOCAL  
ECONOMY

storage company he launched in Palm Desert in 2006. "My relationship with the College began as a student, but the great thing that happened after I received my MBA and started Renova is that the College became my conduit for bringing in new talent to grow the company," Battaglia explains. Renova Energy's symbiotic relationship with the College continues to this day; 120 of the 160 Renova employees are COD alumni.

The course offerings at College of the Desert have expanded in recent years to reflect the growth in the renewable energy industry, with many students going on to find careers in the clean energy and utilities sector. The College has also taken steps to prepare more students for science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) disciplines, establishing an east valley Salton Sea STEM Center, offering scholarships to those who wish to pursue the field, and inviting eligible students to apply to the grant-funded MESA program, which aims to increase the number of COD students who successfully transfer to a four-year college as STEM majors.

Jorge Perez, a mathematics professor, partici-  
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The majority of  
employees at Renova  
Energy Corporation are  
College of the Desert  
graduates.

pated in MESA as a COD student before transferring to UC Riverside, where he obtained a bachelor's and master's in pure mathematics. He now serves as a MESA mentor and helps students find the beauty in numbers.

"Teaching without involvement outside the classroom I think cuts you off from reaching the students' humanity, the human side," Perez says. "It's all business at that point, but just showing your own interest outside the classroom, I think that piques theirs."

The stories of these alumni who not only successfully achieved their goals but then returned to the College to foster more talented



LEFT: Dorothy Anderson, who learned to repair her car as a means of saving money, went on to become the College's first female automotive instructor. BELOW: More than 400 students are currently enrolled in the College's Public Safety Academy.



#### DID YOU KNOW?

The automotive/advanced transportation program at College of the Desert includes training on electric, fuel-cell, and hybrid vehicles (students can even get hands-on experience with an on-site Toyota Prius Prime and a Fiat 500E). Many graduates go on to work in Coachella Valley dealerships and auto shops.

and trained individuals in their community match those of many others who are associated with the College. They contribute to this comprehensive institution's overall narrative, namely, teaching real-world skills that enable graduating students to go out into the community and acquire fulfilling and remunerative employment; the skills they gain enhance quality of life in the greater community as well. For example, more than 2,200 nurses have graduated from the College since 1968, and statistics show that approximately 70 percent of nursing alumni remain in the area to provide care. There are similar figures to report on the 1,000-plus public safety officers and 700-plus firefighters who have graduated from or become certified at the College.

College of the Desert's impact on individual lives and the community at large is destined to continue. Between the campus in Palm Desert and four thriving satellite campuses in Indio, Mecca/Thermal, temporary Palm Springs, and Desert Hot Springs (not to mention the exciting new campus being built in Palm Springs), it is the fastest-growing community college in the state of California. Through innovative programming that provides hands-on experience, the College teaches for the real world — and ensures that those at a crossroads never remain there for long.

## JORGE PEREZ

WHEN HE LOOKS out at the students assembled in his classroom, College of the Desert mathematics professor Jorge Perez sees himself.

It wasn't too long ago that Perez, a 2006 COD grad, sat in one of those same chairs. He was pursuing science, then philosophy, but his questions would always steer him back to math, a subject that has spoken to him since he was a boy.

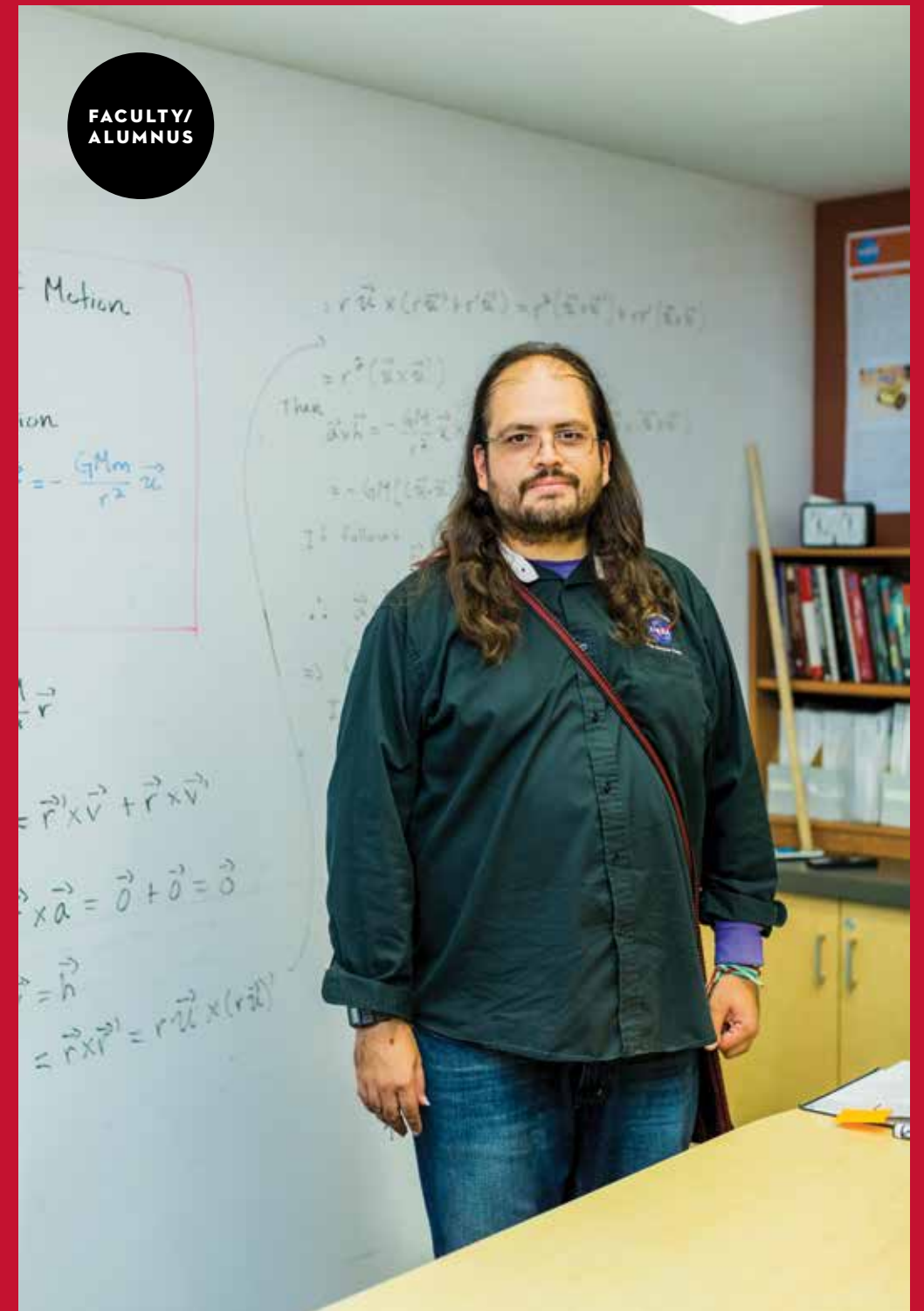
He moved to the Coachella Valley in 1998 from Guadalajara, Mexico, at the age of 12, and knowing little English at the time, he felt more at home with numbers.

"I had always found refuge in school," Perez says. "I just always liked learning, but math in particular was probably the class where I needed the least amount of English to get through. Math was the common ground that I had between my education in Mexico and my education here."

That common ground reappeared when he met Thang Le, Ph.D., a math instructor at the College. Like Perez, Le was an immigrant who overcame language barriers and a socio-economically challenged background to pursue his dream. "He just became this mentor for me," Perez says.

Perez went on to receive his bachelor's and master's degrees at UC Riverside and is the first in his family to graduate from a four-year university. The College offered him the chance to find his path. He then took the significance of that support and turned it into a life-changing commitment to giving back through teaching. He understands that his students can envision their own success story by looking at him. "Once you start caring for them as individuals in a genuine way, then I think they open up, and they open up to challenges too," he says. "You can ask them to do some of the hardest problems in the world, and once you have their respect, and once you have their trust, then they'll try to do it."

FACULTY/  
ALUMNUS



# JOHN SHAY

## CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, LULU CALIFORNIA BISTRO

**IN HIS ROLE** as chief operating officer at Lulu California Bistro in Palm Springs, John Shay is no stranger to the challenges of securing highly trained and skilled workers. Consequently, he was thrilled when College of the Desert approached him about joining an Advisory Board aimed to advance culinary and hospitality programs within the school's curriculum. His experience and insider industry knowledge will no doubt prove invaluable as progress is made on the College's new Palm Springs campus. The westernmost addition to the College's growing network of campuses will offer a complete culinary, as well as a hospitality, program – to the benefit of local restaurants and hotels.

Shay has spent years in the hospitality industry developing and implementing systems and procedures and is renowned for his ability to recruit, train, and develop strong management and culinary teams. "I'm truly committed to taking hourly employees and grooming them to become management candidates," he says. "College by itself doesn't prepare you for the realities of the real world." He is encouraged by the College's innovative programs that blend practical experience with theoretical training. "Hopefully someone like me can help bridge the gap because I know what is required on a day-to-day basis in the real world." When candidates are given the opportunity to balance hands-on experience with a degree that is going to be useful down the road, Shay is convinced it is a recipe for success.



INDUSTRY PARTNER

PHOTOGRAPH BY THE MONOCLE PROJECT

# KIM DOZIER, Ph.D.

FACULTY



PHOTOGRAPH BY THE MONOCLE PROJECT

**DESPITE COMING FROM** a long line of educators, College of the Desert English professor Kim Dozier did not set out to become a teacher. It was only after obtaining her Bachelor of Arts from UC Riverside in 1991 and while doing some substitute teaching prior to attending graduate school that this Redding, California, native discovered she really enjoyed the profession. Teaching at the college level held the greatest appeal, so Dozier continued her studies to secure a master's degree and before long added a Ph.D. to her growing list of credentials. "I very much like our older, non-traditional students," she says. "They're the reason I wanted to teach at a community college."

Now in her 13th year at the College, Dozier's primary arena is distance education, otherwise known as online education. In fact, she served as the distance education coordinator for two and a half years. Online education is geared toward working adults who are tied to a nine-to-five schedule, Dozier explains, "which really meets the needs of a lot of students who have the time to go to school but don't necessarily have the time to sit in a classroom." She also feels it prepares them for the reality of working-life today, where so many people conduct business virtually or engage in online meetings with customers or other members of their team. Finally, she expresses faith in a matter dear to any English professor's heart: "I believe online education encourages students to become stronger writers too, because they have to convey what they're thinking in writing."