

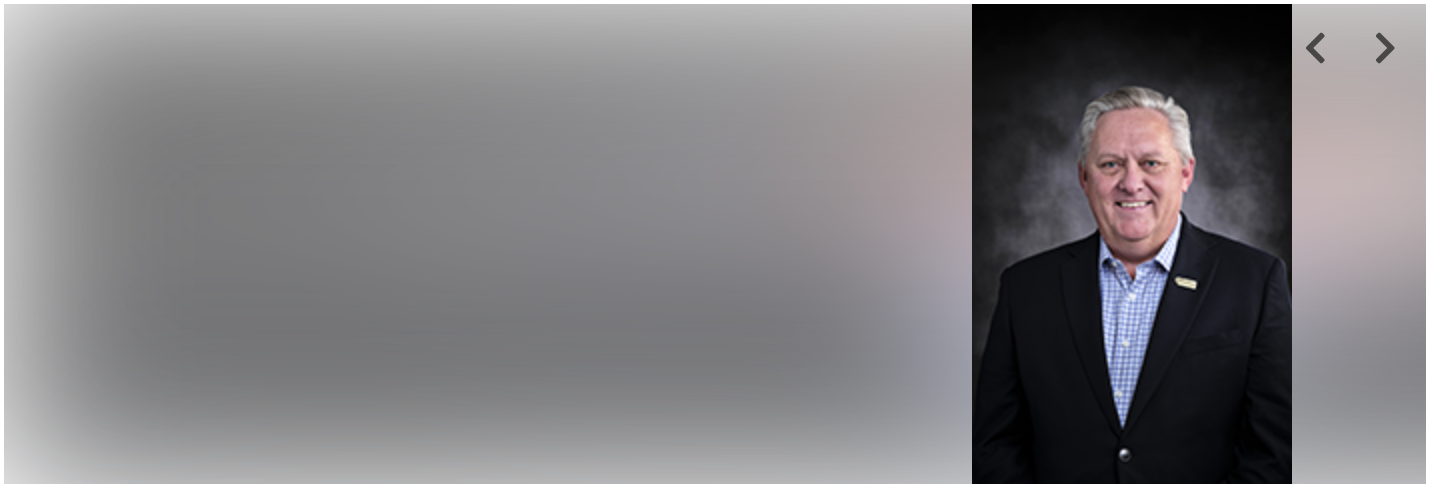
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Your Community College

Kevin G. Walthers: Introducing the newest gem on the Central Coast

Mar 4, 2023

1 of 2



Kevin Walthers

A college's history often pivots on a handful of remarkable events. And the grand opening of Allan Hancock College's new Fine Arts Complex last Friday was one of those moments.

Despite stormy conditions, more than 400 of our friends and neighbors across the district turned out to celebrate the ribbon-cutting for the most cutting-edge fine arts facility on the Central Coast.

Despite the dark skies outside, the energy inside was bright and optimistic.

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The numbers alone are telling. At 88,000 square-feet, the new building is by far the college's largest building, comprising more than 20 percent of space on the Santa Maria campus. The project's general contractor, with the assistance of an owner's representative and many college staff, brought the building in on time for the spring semester classes.

The project was also on-budget, with final construction costs around \$500 per square foot. Of the 166,000 labor hours, nearly 70 percent of those labor hours were from local contractors, putting tax dollars back into the the local economy.

Over the winter break, our fine arts faculty diligently set up their classrooms, art studios, and office spaces, while our information technology and facilities teams prepared the "behind the wall" infrastructure that ensures the building is ready for instruction.

Sustainability was at the forefront of the design of the Fine Arts Complex, and as a result, the project achieved LEED Gold status. The building features several solar power features, water-efficient plumbing fixtures, LED lighting throughout, and occupancy-controlled outlets and lighting that reduce energy usage.

Eighty percent of construction waste was diverted from landfills, and more than 10 percent of all building materials contain recycled content. Drought-tolerant and native landscaping reduce water use and provide habitat for local bird and insect species.

But the Fine Arts Complex is more than steel beams, drywall, and desks. This new facility is already becoming a hub of learning and lingering. Students are filling social spaces to collaborate, study, or just decompress and exhale as they navigate hectic weeks.

Retired AHC arts legends such as Nat Fast, Bob Nichols, and Steve Lewis dreamed of new spaces in which to teach and create. Today's fine arts faculty now enjoy large studios and teaching spaces that are unparalleled at other colleges and universities in California — and dare I say, in the United States!

The high-tech classroom spaces dedicated to graphic design, animation, photography, and film production are particularly thrilling features of the new complex.

Equipped with state-of-the-art technology, AHC students can fully prepare for lucrative, 21st century digital jobs. Whether it's the graphics and videos found online today, the stunning visual effects during sporting events, or the indie movies streamed at home, Hancock graduates will be prepared to compete for well-paying jobs in these fields.

Our Fine Arts Complex has a bright future ahead, thanks to the visionary and diligent leadership of various individuals at AHC who made it possible.

Anne Foxworthy was president in the 1990s, when planning began in earnest and led to the placement of a bond measure on the 2006 ballot.

Jose Ortiz took the reins just in time to shepherd bond Measure I over the finish line, providing the college with the funds necessary for various transformational facility projects. Faculty leaders — like current Fine Arts Department Chair John Hood — spent three decades reviewing two-dimensional building plans.

Today, they walk the halls of their dreams come true.

Ultimately, credit for the Fine Arts Complex lies with our community. You placed trust in the college by supporting bond Measure I over 15 years ago. I am confident that the college's stewardship of your investment will pay dividends for generations to come.

The Fine Arts Complex belongs to everyone in northern Santa Barbara County, and we hope that you will make use of this unique asset in our community.

If you weren't able to join us at the grand opening last week, we invite you to come walk through the facility at your convenience. No doubt you will find an excited faculty member or an eager student to show you around.

Allan Hancock College is your community college and we are honored to be entrusted with this amazing gift.

Kevin G. Walthers, Ph.D., is the superintendent/president of Allan Hancock College. To watch a brief overview of the Fine Arts Complex grand opening, visit tinyurl.com/ACHFineArts or [view photos at tinyurl.com/AHCFACPics](https://tinyurl.com/AHCFACPics).

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