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Your Community College

Kevin G. Walthers: Changing the odds together

Dec 2, 2023



Kevin Walthers
Contributed



In this season of gratitude, let's take a moment to appreciate the incredible community we're a part of, where unity prevails in times of need.

While national news and social media may often highlight divisive topics for the sake of ratings, join me in recognizing the positive bonds and collaboration within our local community.

Earlier this year, hundreds of volunteers pitched in for Marian Regional Medical Center's annual Day of Hope. An incredible new record was set, with more than \$370,000 raised to support cancer treatment for our neighbors in need.

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Not long after, many of those same volunteers were supporting Hats for Hope, an organization that provides assistance directly to cancer patients.

In October, our county hosted the annual Veterans Stand Down. This multi-agency event provides services to over 400 local veterans who are battling homelessness and poverty.

More than 700 volunteers converged on the Santa Maria Fairpark to provide clothing, haircuts, medical assessments, and services to these heroes at home.

Throughout the course of the year, we came together to play golf, create chalk art on sidewalks, and dress for dinners in support of local children.

Organizations such as the YMCA, Boys and Girls Club, Shoes for Students, and the Orcutt Children's Art Foundation provided critical support for working families and their children, and we are grateful for the many opportunities to lend them a hand.

This weekend includes a beloved local holiday tradition - the annual Parade of Lights. Saturday night, thousands of people will fill the sidewalks along North Broadway in Santa Maria to ooh and ahh at 103 floats, bands and other parade entries.

While the Parade of Lights is the official kickoff of this year's "Santa Watch," it's also a benefit for the Salvation Army's annual food drive for needy families, all put on by local Rotary clubs.

Here at Allan Hancock College, I am proud to say that the students, staff and faculty have participated in at least 100 events this year in support of the community.

In the last month, our Bulldog community provided Thanksgiving meals to students who are single parents, and nearly 100 children of our students will have at least one gift on Christmas morning thanks to our annual Angel Tree effort.

We believe that changing the odds involves each of us finding ways to remove barriers for those in need. It means working across organizations to ensure that everyone has access to quality education, health care, food, and recreation.

The Hancock Promise is a prime example of this community ethos. We must expand educational opportunities and open pathways to families that have long been shut out of higher education.

Over the past five years, local donors, businesses, and the Santa Barbara Foundation supported what is now widely known as "first year free at AHC."

We are on the cusp of completing the \$10 million endowment that funds this program — and when we reach that magic number, we'll need to update the catchphrase to "two years free at AHC" because a second year of access to education will be a dream come true for our community.

Allan Hancock College's students, faculty, staff and trustees are grateful for the support of this community, and we're honored to be an integral part of our collective effort to change the odds for northern Santa Barbara County.

Kevin G. Walthers, Ph.D., is the superintendent/president of Allan Hancock College.

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