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Moraga welcomes new engineering technician/construction inspector



Photo provided

New Public Works staff member Hussain Arya

By Vera Kochan

With new and continuing infrastructure projects keeping the town's public works department constantly busy, this January Moraga hired Engineering Technician/Construction Inspector Hussain Arya to join the team.

"He's basically filling a much needed position," replied Public Works Director/Town Engineer Shawn Knapp. "The position has been empty over four years, and with our steady stream of projects requiring his type of attention it was more cost effective to hire someone full-time rather than contract

out." Knapp also explained that with Arya's skill set he can provide input on overlapping projects.

Arya earned the United States equivalent of a bachelor's degree in civil engineering from a regionally accredited institute, which is now under Kabul University in Afghanistan. Over the past 18 years, he has been involved with construction of large infrastructure and development projects.

"I have about 10 years of experience working on Army Corps of Engineers projects in Afghanistan," said Arya. "Most of them were for large

army and police compounds. These facilities were like small towns, containing barracks, dining facilities and administration buildings for thousands of soldiers."

Three years ago, Arya moved to America with his wife and three children "through the Special Immigration Visa program for Afghan nationals who worked for the U.S. government in Afghanistan. Immigration is not easy. You can never imagine how hard this is to decide to leave your country, your friends and families."

Upcoming town projects for Arya include encroach-

ment permitting, construction inspection, and assisting in the creation of new Capital Improvement Program bid documents for routine maintenance projects such as street, sidewalk and storm drain repairs.

Arya is happy to be a part of the town staff. "I am appreciative to the Town of Moraga for hiring me and giving me the opportunity to work in municipal engineering," he stated. "I am hopeful my extensive work experience and dedication will be beneficial to the town."

SMC students 'de-stress' on campus at highly-rated rec center



SMC students use outdoor Strength Station. Photo Rebecca Harper

By Vera Kochan

Raquel Corral, a Saint Mary's College senior majoring in psychology, feels that COVID has contributed additional stress to her last year of college. Rather than experiencing special school moments and celebrations with friends she is saddened at the prospect of no formal commencement ceremony and a bleak job market.

Approximately 650 students currently live on the Saint Mary's College campus – an increase of nearly 200 from the fall semester. For many on campus, finding a way to release the stresses of college life during a pandemic is paramount, and visiting SMC's 60,000-square-foot Joseph L. Alioto Recreation Center, completed in March 2015 and recently making the list of 50 Best Campus Recreation Centers at No. 15, is one way they combat that stress.

SMC is not letting COVID suppress the need for students to use the facilities to help de-stress. By making reservations 24 hours in advance, students can partake in outdoor recreation opportunities including using cardio equipment such as spin bikes and Erg (rowing machines); participating in lap swim; strength stations (where students bring weight equipment outside); and outdoor fitness classes.

"We offer so many different exercise opportunities and activities that cater to all the students here at SMC," said Savannah Gagnon, a junior majoring in business who also works at JARC. "Before COVID, it was the place that most students spent their time."

Corral was disappointed when county mandates closed JARC's indoor facilities just as she was becoming a daily user. "Not being indoors anymore is really frustrating, because I don't think our facility neces-

sarily contributed to the spread of COVID due to the constant disinfecting by attentive staff members. We had minimal cases in general," she said, "so I truly believe the facility should be open to support students' well-being. It has been more challenging now because of the restricted outdoor use, and I know it doesn't only impact my well-being, but many others at SMC who use their own workouts as an escape. I still go daily, but my workouts have definitely changed. I think as someone who puts a lot of value in exercise for mental health, it is important to be grateful for the access I do have and remaining optimistic for the future of opening instead of dwelling on the frustrations."

A sophomore majoring in economics, Erich Storti admits that COVID has made his college experience a challenging one. "Transitioning to remote learning was a difficult hurdle to overcome, and not being able to spend time with your friends and family has also been tough."

As a member of the SMC Men's Rugby Team, Storti said using the JARC has helped him significantly throughout the year. "While following the laws of our county, we are able to be as a team and workout. The JARC gives us a place where we are able to step away from a chaotic world. It has been extremely helpful in giving us a break from the constant Zoom meetings and providing a place for us to alleviate any stress."

Gagnon considers herself lucky to live on campus this year and hopes that by her senior year she and her fellow classmates can look forward to the college experience that she has always dreamed of. Into her third year working at JARC, she has noticed an increase in students using the facilities "even with the restrictions placed due to COVID-19."

Mentioning all of the outdoor prospects for a workout, Gagnon said, "With this, it gives on-campus students a different variety of exercise opportunities to de-stress during these times. Many students come in for their routine workouts, but there have been many new faces, which I believe is due to some anxiety surrounding COVID-19."

Corral praised the campus community for doing its part to keep everyone safe. She named weekly testing and efficient housing protocols for any who test positive for the virus, along with student cooperation in adhering to the school's mandates. "Even though I can admit to frustrations, I know we all have to do our part and keep gratitude near to prevent more stress and cope with the pandemic as a whole."

"We hear from students and parents who appreciate the opportunity to have this facility," Senior Director for Campus Recreation Rebecca Harper said. "When the county moves to the 'Red Tier' gyms can operate inside, and we will offer indoor use to the students."

While the indoor center is currently closed due to COVID restrictions, pre-pandemic amenities include: a 14,000-square-foot fitness area with state-of-the-art cardio equipment, top of the line weight machines and Olympic weight lifting area; three basketball courts (one of which can be converted to an indoor soccer court); a group exercise room with hardwood floors and wall-to-wall mirrors; a Functional Training room with additional weight equipment; a Spin room with 24 indoor cycling bikes; a climbing wall with opportunity to belay with a partner or automatic belay device; an Aquatic Area that includes a pool deck and patio for lounging, a Hydrotherapy spa for relaxation and a 10-lane pool with diving board and large shallow end; locker rooms with showers and lockers for students; and locker rooms with showers and lockers for faculty and staff. Services include weekly fitness classes, personal training opportunities, CPR & Lifeguard Training, and endless student employment opportunities.

Harper recollected the all-too-brief period last year when gyms were allowed to resume activities. "Campus Recreation, as a department, worked endlessly to reopen the facility. Protocol was developed with industry guidance, and the procedure in place made it safe for our members. We were one of the first colleges in the Bay Area to open its doors and offer services to students. This is in part to the dedication and hard work of Campus Recreation."

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