



Cal State Fullerton President Ronald Rochon, left, helps Alisson Dingoasen during move-in day Aug. 22.

PHOTO BY DREW A. KELLEY, CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

EXPANSION

3 THEMED COMMUNITIES ADDED TO ON-CAMPUS HOUSING

Latinx, APISAA and transfer students supported

By Lou Ponsi contributing writer

With the addition of three new themed housing communities this fall, Cal State Fullerton students opting to live on campus can now choose among six affinity-centric communities, each giving students a deeper level of connection and stronger sense of community with other students from similar backgrounds.

The new communities are Titans Unidos, a community that embraces diverse Latinx cultures, APISAA, a space for

Asian, Pacific Islander and South Asian American students, and Titan Transfer Gateway, which is tailored to the needs of transfer students.

The new spaces join with Ujima, (pronounced OO-Jee-ma), a community geared toward African American students and culture; Rainbow House, a welcoming space for students of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations; and Athena, a community focused on empowering and connecting residents from diverse backgrounds and cultures centering around gender equality and empowerment.

Offering housing options for students from groups that have been tradition-

ally underrepresented is the impetus for establishing these specialized communities, said Kafele Khalfani, director of Housing and Residential Engagement at CSUF.

Housing and Residential Engagement comes under the umbrella of the Division of Student Affairs.

“The hope and the goal is to create a safe living and learning environment where the students feel welcomed, represented, respected and appreciated,” Khalfani said. “Many students also want the option. The APISAA community, for example, came from a proposal by one of our RAs (resident advisers).”

Residents in Rainbow House have

direct access to the recently opened Losquadro Keller LGBTQ Resource Center.

Ujima students collaborate with the African American Resource Center offering social, educational and culture-themed events.

Titans Unidos hosts events and offers programming designed to celebrate diverse Latinx cultures. Residents will gain a deeper understanding of current issues and events affecting Latinx communities.

The APISAA community promises to engage residents “with educational and affirming programming that celebrates

HOUSING » PAGE 5



Joe Morales – CSUF ASI president 2024–2025

PHOTO COURTESY CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES

INCLUSION

ASI president vows to ensure every student has a voice

Community, organizations are priorities

By Jenelyn Russo contributing writer

With the fall semester of the 2024-2025 academic year in full swing at Cal State Fullerton, Joe Morales is eager to serve the Titan student body this year as president of Associated Students Inc.

Morales has been on the road to this role since before he arrived on campus. The San Diego native always had an interest in student government, but his high school athletic and academic commitments, along with the COVID-19 pandemic, didn’t allow him time to explore that path.

After graduating in 2022 from Olympian High School in Chula Vista, Morales headed to CSUF as a criminal justice major.

In his first semester, he enrolled in a general education political science class taught by Judy Stambaugh, and her course curriculum prompted him to reconsider his choice of major.

“She was such a great lecturer, and the way that she spoke about some of the topics in the course was always so insightful,” Morales said. “She helped me find my passion about politics. ... I realized that it’s the perfect combination of politics and history.”

But Morales didn’t stop with a change in major. He wanted to become involved in student government, and at the end of his freshman year, he was elected as an ASI Board of Directors representative from the College of Humanities and Social Sciences as well as ASI board treasurer, serving in both positions during his sophomore year.

“I decided to run because there were some things that I wanted to be able to have the opportunity to advocate for students such as myself, and be the voice for students who didn’t have the opportunity to get involved in student government,” Morales said.

His experience last year inspired Morales to take on an even larger role in

PRESIDENT » PAGE 5

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WHAT'S NEW

A bachelor’s degree, an academic concentration among the upgrades

Urban learning,
real estate enhanced

By **Larry Urish**
contributing writer

To paraphrase an ironic and oft-cited quote by the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus: The only constant in life is change. This certainly applies to the goings-on at Cal State Fullerton. For example, last spring the university named a new president, Ronald S. Rochon. In addition, two new deans: Celestina Barbosa-Leiker and Jessica Yirush Stern, will lead the university’s College of Health and Human Development and College of Humanities and Social Sciences, respectively. Two other notable developments include a new bachelor’s degree and a new academic concentration.

Urban learning degree

Beginning this semester, the university’s College of Education is offering an undergraduate bachelor of arts degree that will prepare students to become teachers engaged in providing a just, equitable and inclusive education. The new urban learning degree, geared for those committed to making effective changes in the profession, focuses on social justice issues for today’s diverse classrooms. “Opportunity gaps between students in marginalized groups — in terms of race and ethnicity, language, ability and socioeconomic status — are historical

and pervasive,” said Calli Lewis Chiu, director of urban learning and associate professor of special education. “This degree will aim to transform education and prepare students to be changemakers in their communities by valuing differences as assets, not deficits.

“For example, students who do not have English as their first language are often seen as having a language deficit that needs to be remediated. Our students will learn about the tremendous value that students with diverse linguistic repertoires and their families can contribute to classrooms and schools.”

Although open to anyone seeking to make a positive impact, “The degree is ideal for those wanting to be an elementary or special education teacher,” Lewis Chiu said.

Along with interdisciplinary classes offered at the university, the new major includes five new offerings: Structural and Institutional Bias in Schools; Curriculum as a Lever of Change; Urban

Policy and Practice; Living, Learning and Translanguaging Across Identities in Schools; and Just, Equitable and Inclusive Classrooms.

Lewis Chiu emphasized that peer-centric support will be paramount. “We intentionally designed the program to be a cohort model to foster a strong sense of belonging and community among our students,” she said. “We want them to thrive in our program and have strong connections with others who share a vision of promoting equity in schools and communities.

“We know that CSUF graduates often remain in our local community after graduation,” Lewis Chiu added. “We are so excited to build this group of students who will likely become teachers in their own communities.”

Real estate concentration

The College of Business and Economics’ Finance Department is offering a new academic concentration this semester, one that focuses on the real estate sector. Open to upper-division finance majors, the concentration looks at a broad range of specialties: development and construction, financing, brokerage and leasing, property management, appraisal, urban planning, government affairs and more.

The new concentration is in response to an ever-increasing demand for real estate professionals. California remains one of the largest states in terms of real estate transaction volumes, with monthly overall sales between 300,000 and 500,000. Of the 962 local Realtor associations in the country, 96 are in California. In addition, SoCal has the greatest

share of real estate transaction volumes in the Golden State and is one of the most prominent markets among professionals in this business sector.

Students wishing to become real estate brokers will have a huge advantage by completing this concentration, said Jia Xie, associate professor of finance and academic director of CSUF’s Center for Real Estate.

“There are two types of (real estate) licenses,” Xie said. “One is the entry-level license, called the salesperson license, and the other is the more advanced broker license. To hold a broker license, one must first hold a salesperson license for two years. But if you graduate with the CSUF Real Estate Concentration, the California Department of Real Estate will waive the two-year-experience requirement.”

Part of a broader Cal State University resource, the Center for Real Estate hosts guest speakers and career days, serves as a home for local and national industry conventions and conferences, offers assistance with job opportunities and networking, and furnishes on-campus Argus financial analysis training.

“The Center for Real Estate plays a crucial role in connecting with industry professionals and fostering strong relationships,” Xie said.

Xie expects to see students enroll in this brand-new concentration later this semester. “As our new real estate concentration gains momentum, I anticipate increased interest from industry partners in our program and our talented graduates,” Xie said. “Our goal is to make the real estate concentration a flagship program in our institution.”

PHOTOS BY DREW A. KELLEY, CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER



Bryan Rodriguez works on music during the first day of the fall semester Aug. 26.



Vanessa Onofre reads a book on the first day.



Hieu Phan, right, and Kelly Moc enjoy catching up on the first day.



Students play volleyball.



From left, Jasmine Nolasco, Alyssa Galvez and Melissa Galvez walk to class on Aug. 26.

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CA BALLOT BOWL

Efforts to register new voters on campus are underway

Intercollege competition sponsored by the state

By Nicole Gregory
contributing writer

Cal State Fullerton is once again an active participant in the California Ballot Bowl, a friendly competition organized by California's Secretary of State to see which college or university can register the largest number of new voters.

In 2020, CSUF won the competition, registering 2,716 new voters.

This year, the universitywide effort to engage students is in full swing, said Scott Spitzer, professor of political science who teaches undergraduate and graduate students.

"Students will learn about the competition from their faculty as well as digitally," he said, explaining that a notice about it will pop up every time students log into their student portal. They are also hearing about it at campus events, such as the recent talk given by political expert Mike Madrid, author of "The Latino Century: How America's Largest Minority Is Transforming Democracy."

The idea is to get young people engaged civically so they participate in democracy, Spitzer said. Although youth voter turnout has been on the rise since the mid-term elections in 2018, "it's still well below older groups in terms of the percentage of that age group that participate," he said.

He's part of Cal State Fullerton's Civic Engagement Working Group, which includes members of administration staff, government relations, faculty and students who work year round to come up with ways to inspire students to become civically involved.

"One way I personally am doing this is by talking in my American government class about the expansion of the right to vote over time and within the context of a larger discussion about democracy, liberty, equality, democracy and justice as primary values in American politics." He reminds them that until relatively re-



PHOTO COURTESY CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES

Shaquille Manley, senior community coordinator in Cal State Fullerton's Housing and Residential Engagement department, speaks with a student about the voter registration process.

cently, not everyone in America was allowed to vote.

"When we first started, only white men who owned property were eligible to vote. Even that was a huge improvement over our European counterparts. But over time, obviously women, African Americans, pretty much every American citizen now is eligible to vote. Young peo-

ple got the expanded right to vote in 1971 with the 26th Amendment."

That amendment lowered the legal voting age from 21 to 18.

A QR code has been created for Cal State Fullerton students who want to register to vote. By using this code to complete their registration form, or by filling out a preprinted registration form available on campus, they will be automatically added to the Cal State Fullerton count in the Ballot Bowl. The office of the California Secretary of State Shirley Weber posts updated numbers for each university and college in the state.

This is not a partisan effort. "I would never say you should register as a Democratic or Republican - that's not at all what this is about," Spitzer said. "This is just about young people learning, as part of their college education, that taking part in democracy is a very important part of being one of the leaders of the next generation."

The Associated Students Inc. will host a Titan Turnout event with food trucks and Tuffy, the university mascot, to encourage the community to register to vote, said Annie Yea, interim associate vice president in the office of Government and Community Relations, who is also part of the Civic Engagement Work-

ing Group. "We will also have our traditional review of ballot propositions," she said, noting this is a virtual event.

"Our housing folks have really stepped it up," Yea said. "Three residential halls are competing among themselves to see which residential hall can get the most ... students to register."

Yea senses more excitement and energy on campus about this upcoming presidential election than in previous elections. "I think the campus understands the importance of the election, whether you're Democrat or Republican," she said.

Cal State Fullerton has been a vote center for the last three elections and will be this year, too. "We will be an in-person vote center at the Titan Student Union," Yea said. "We also have a permanent ballot drop box on campus."

Spitzer is excited to see students take action on their right to vote. "I really believe that our politics need some healing," he said. "There's always this hope that I have as a faculty member that this young generation will renew our politics. They will change it in a positive way. More involvement, more concern, more passion and engagement all make our democracy strong. That's why I'm doing this stuff."



PHOTO COURTESY CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES

A flyer for the Ballot Bowl event aims to boost student voter registration.

NEW MINOR

Uniting students from Southwest Asia and North Africa

Association leads to academic path

By Nicole Gregory
contributing writer

A new minor offered at Cal State Fullerton this fall was initiated by students, who proposed the idea to faculty members with research showing how it could be done.

Now, the 15-unit minor, a study of the Southwest Asian and North African area, which includes Morocco, Afghanistan, Turkey, Yemen and other countries, is in place. Students earning this minor will learn about the diverse cultures, economies, languages, religions and histories the region, often called the Middle East.

One advocate for the minor was Mary Chammas, whose family is from Lebanon. She graduated from Cal State Fullerton in 2023 and is now in law school, but when she arrived at CSUF as a freshman she felt alone and isolated and wanted to transfer to another university.

"I really wanted to go somewhere that had some representation on campus toward people of Middle East descent," Chammas said. "I saw that Cal State Fullerton had none of that."

While she waited for her chance to transfer to USC, she started the Lebanese Student Association on the CSUF campus, and to her surprise it grew. "I saw how many people gravitated toward that organization, whether they were Lebanese or not," she said. This inspired Chammas and her friends to create the SWANA (an acronym for Southwest Asian and North African) student organization.

Middle East is primarily a Western term, explained Talia Boukhalil, who is a business administration student and now president of the SWANA student organization. "It is not accurately representative of the region," she said.

"The term Middle East leaves out countries like Armenia and Afghanistan, which otherwise would still have to apply as white or other on the census," Chammas said.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MARY CHAMMAS

2022-23 SWANA board members at Discoverfest, a two-day event for students to learn about on-campus clubs and organizations

The SWANA organization became so popular that Chammas reconsidered her plan to leave CSUF. "I decided to stop my transfer applications and just build the community at Cal State Fullerton from the bottom up," she said, "and so that's what I ended up doing."

She and other students focused on advocacy work and succeeded in having SWANA added as an optional ethnicity box to be checked on Cal State University applications.

Chammas and her friends saw another need. "We needed a resource center for these students to academically succeed

and also to get to know each other and the resources on campus," she said.

There was one hitch. "We were told that we needed to tie a resource center back to an educational curriculum on campus," said Boukhalil, who was born and raised in Lebanon and came to the U.S. nine years ago.

At the time, Chammas was the chair for the board of directors of Associated Students, Inc. and Kira Dawson was vice president. They, along with Boukhalil, began extensive research into similar programs on other campuses and soon discovered that many classes already

taught at Cal State Fullerton focused on the region from different aspects.

"We saw that we already had classes in history, language and business that related to the SWANA region," Boukhalil said.

"The three of us came together and we went through every single college on campus, the College of Engineering, the College of Business, the College of the Arts, the College of Humanities," Chammas said. "We went through every single class and read every single summary of every class to see what could fall under this minor. And we made an Excel sheet of all the classes that could be incorporated into the syllabus."

The group met with department chairs and Jessica Yirush Stern, dean of the College of Humanities and Social Science, and made their case that the classes were there to create a minor, and plenty of students were interested in signing up.

"There was so much out there, but no one really pieced it all together," Chammas said.

Professor Zakyi Ibrahim, chair of the Department of Religious Studies, volunteered to take on the interdisciplinary program under religious studies, and the minor was established.

Chammas believes that the SWANA student organization and now the SWANA minor provide an important boost to Cal State Fullerton students whose families come from the region. "It helps them in many ways. When I first came to Cal State Fullerton, I had no one. I felt so alone. I didn't want people who were entering Cal State Fullerton to feel the same way."

The SWANA student group works to raise awareness of the region for the entire campus, hosting events, such as SWANA week. "Every single day there is a different event to educate the campus community and also for those who identify as who want to come together and just be community with one another," Chammas said. "We all come from the same countries. We almost all speak the same languages. And so it's a way for us to unite and just be together. When you have that community and that support behind you, you do academically better in school."

STUDENT RESEARCHER

Exploring cancer disparities within Latin American population

CSUF News Media Services

First-generation Cal State Fullerton student Vyanka Mezcord is committed to addressing cancer health disparities.

Mezcord grew up in Costa Rica, shaped by the philosophy known as “pura vida.” The “pure life” philosophy emphasizes maintaining a positive outlook, resilience and making the most of every opportunity.

“This philosophy, combined with my personal experiences, drives my determination to find solutions that can reduce health disparities and approach challenges with optimism and dedication,” said Mezcord, a senior biological science major.

For the past year, Mezcord has had the opportunity to pursue her interest in cancer health disparities research as part of CSUF’s Cancer Health Equity Research Partnership with UC Irvine, directed by Marcelo E. Tolmasky, chair and professor of biological science. The university was awarded a \$905,787 grant from the National Institutes of Health’s National Cancer Institute for the program.

Mezcord is a UCI faculty-student research team member who identified a key enzyme contributing to cancer health disparities within the Latin American population. She is a co-author of the study published in Nature Communications.

The research focuses on developing a molecular-based digital test for patients with an aggressive subtype of acute lymphoblastic leukemia, or ALL, which is most common among Hispanics with Latin American ancestry.

“This experience has deeply influenced my perspective on the importance of advancing cancer research,” she said.

Cancer research fascinates her because it combines complex molecular biology with real-world implications for patient care. But she also is personally motivated. Her grandmother battled with cancer, exposing her family to health care disparities.

“The potential to uncover new methods for preventing or treating cancer is incredibly motivating,” said Mezcord, who moved to the U.S. with her parents as a teenager. “But I am driven by the desire to address the inequalities in health care that have affected my family and to



PHOTO COURTESY CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES

Student researcher Vyanka Mezcord works in the lab with faculty adviser Marcelo E. Tolmasky, chair and professor of biological science.

make a meaningful contribution to the field of molecular biology.”

Mezcord aspires to a career as a research scientist and is on track to graduate in January. She plans to apply to graduate school this fall and pursue a doctorate in molecular biology or a related field, focusing on cancer research.

For the past three years, Mezcord has been studying antibiotic resistance under the guidance of CSUF’s Maria Soledad Ramirez, professor of biological science. She has contributed to multiple publications — 11 to date — as a lead student researcher.

Mezcord is investigating how vitamin B12 impacts resistance in gram-negative bacteria that cause pneumonia and other life-threatening infections.

“The study aims to enhance our understanding of resistance mechanisms, which could help develop better antibiotics and strategies against multidrug-resistant pathogens,” Mezcord said.

To help support her CSUF research efforts, she received an Undergraduate Research Opportunity Center Fellowship Award in 2024. She was also awarded the Greg Wright Fellowship in 2022 from the College of Natural Sciences and Math-

ematics, given to outstanding students studying cellular and developmental biology or molecular biology and biotechnology.

Mezcord has gained a solid foundation for graduate studies and her future research career through hands-on laboratory experiences at CSUF and UCI and rigorous coursework, which enhanced her critical thinking, data analysis and public speaking skills.

“My goal is to use research to help bridge the gap between scientific discoveries and the communities most affected by health disparities,” she said.

Housing

FROM PAGE 1

the wide diversity within the APISAA diaspora.”

Titan Transfer Gateway is characterized as a “vibrant and engaging housing experience with programming and community events for transfer students in collaboration with TAPP, the Transfer, Adult Re-entry, Parenting and Pregnant Student Center.”

“The goals for our themed communities are to provide an inclusive and welcoming environment and for our residents to use our special programs to better understand their identity and culture even more,” said student Brian Rubion, a resident assistant living in the Titan Unidos community. “It is all a growing and learning experience for us, being able to share our stories with others and to highlight our community above all.”

The Ujima and Rainbow communities accommodate 125 students each, Titans Unidos and APISAA segments can each house about 95 students and Athena and Titan Transfer Gateway communities can house 40 students each, Khalfani said.

Rainbow House was established in 2015, Ujama in 2020 and Athena in 2021.

The specialized communities are dispersed around campus, in residence halls, suites and apartments.

Between themed and un-themed spaces, CSUF can house about 2,100 students, with the majority of students still choosing to live in nonspecialized spaces, Khalfani said.

Resident advisers also collaborate on ways to “create and incorporate intersectionality,” Rubion said.

For example, Titans Unidos and the Rainbow community partner on an event in the spring titled Drag Loteria, he said.

“This will incorporate different aspects of our identity into one event,” Ru-



PHOTOS BY DREW A. KELLEY, CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

Sophie Jacquez rolls her belongings during CSUF’s move-in day.



Ron Perez helps Caleb Perez, his son, move in.

bion said. “Little things like this. “We all do our best to collaborate and bring together as many students as we can and have them represented.

In its coverage of Move-in Day in August, CSUF News spoke with Lorna Cariaga, a transfer student from Glendale Community College, who moved into the Titan Transfer Gateway.

“Having other transfer students on the same floor gives me the opportunity to make friends with people who understand the community college to university experience,” Cariaga said. “This community will give me a safe space, which will make my academic and social life much easier to adjust to.”

Many universities within the Cal State



Patrick Tilley enjoys move-in day Aug. 22.



Ava Crantz and her father Eric Crantz head to her residence.

System provide themed housing options.

Cal State Los Angeles offers Living and Learning Communities that offer STEM-, Business-, Health Professions- and Psychology-themed spaces.

Thematic Communities at Cal State Long Beach include International, First Gen, Pride and Black & Pan-African Scholars houses.

President

FROM PAGE 1

campus politics by campaigning for ASI president.

“Sitting in those conversations with university officials and hearing about the overall climate on campus made me realize that I didn’t want to be limited,” Morales said. “I wanted to be able to speak out and advocate for larger issues and make a difference aside from what I was able to do as treasurer.”

Morales and ASI vice president Suzette Morales were elected last spring, and despite running unopposed, the two made it a priority to be accessible and engage with the Titan community.

In preparation for the role, Morales attended a weeklong summer leadership seminar through the Panetta Insti-

tute for Public Policy, where he was able to receive valuable insight and training alongside representatives from each CSU campus.

“Everybody there encouraged each other to fight for what they’re passionate about,” Morales said. “It was a great way to learn how to advocate about different things that students on my campus might face.”

The three main priorities that Morales and the ASI board are focusing on for this academic year are increasing awareness for student government, enhancing community engagement and boosting participation in campus activities.

To the goal of increasing awareness of student government, ASI is a co-sponsor and a strong presence at Discoverfest, a two-day event held at the start of each semester where all CSUF student clubs and organizations showcase opportunities for engagement and involvement.

Additionally, ASI is working to enhance community engagement through

Beyond the Conversation at CSUF, where guest speakers come to campus to share on topics such as diversity and social justice. The speaker earlier this month was Grammy- and Tony Award-winning English actress and singer Cynthia Erivo.

And since it is an election year, ASI is hoping to boost participation in campus activities and election awareness through the California University and College Ballot Bowl, a friendly competition in which campuses across the state compete in voter registration and civic engagement efforts.

“We are doing our best to see how we can equip and educate our students to make a difference ... and make sure that students are civically engaged and continue to do this, even when they’re not attending Cal State Fullerton,” Morales said.

Above all, Morales’ goals are to make sure he is accessible to the Titan community and provides a voice for every

student on campus.

“I have noticed all throughout history that college campuses have been the place where a lot of change takes place and a lot of advocacy work is done,” Morales said. “I want to make sure that on our campus at Cal State Fullerton, all of our students feel that they are given the opportunity to do that same exact thing.”

As for his future plans, Morales hopes to pursue immigration and criminal law. He credits his parents, Joe and Rosie Morales, for their constant support and encouragement. As a first-generation college student, his time at CSUF has made a significant impact on his journey.

“I love being a Titan because Cal State Fullerton has honestly changed my life,” Morales said. “The beautiful thing is that not only are we so diverse, we are united in the fact that we have been given this opportunity, and we’re all trying to make the most out of it.”

SPORTS

Mark Collins reflects on his storied career with the Giants

By Brian Robin
contributing writer

Mark Collins wasn't in the mood for a history lesson. He didn't drive from Huntington Beach to Rancho Mirage to chat about the Pleistocene Era New York Football Giants. Or any other Giants era.

But Bob Papa, the voice of the Giants and the PGA Tour Champions, aka the senior tour, was. Papa was in the desert, calling the Tour Champions event at Mission Hills Country Club for the Golf Channel. But he wasn't in the mood to talk golf with Collins. Instead, Papa welcomed Collins inside the putting-green ropes with an expansive speech about the history of the Giants, who joined the NFL in 1925 as one of the league's five original teams.

"I'm thinking we're going to talk business and I'm going to watch a little golf. But he starts with this speech about the history of the Giants, how there's over 10,000 players who have put that uniform on," Collins said. "I'm thinking, 'What's wrong with this picture?' He told me where my place was on the list of top 100 players, and I'm trying to ignore that and talk business when he said, 'You're No. 56 on this list.'

"I thought, 'Well, that's cool.' He goes and does his work. I watch a little golf, then drive back to Huntington Beach and I don't say a word to anyone. It's April. May passes and I don't say a word to anyone. I'm traveling, doing stuff and I can't say anything anyway. It was no big deal to me."

Come July, it became a big deal to Collins, the former Cal State Fullerton defensive back, stalwart of some of the Titans' best teams from the mid-1980s and 13-year NFL veteran. Come July, the history lesson Papa imparted that spring day on the Mission Hills putting green hit him like a blind-side block.

"I told my family and they said, 'That's huge.' I was thinking the same thing," said Collins, who played eight of his 13 seasons with the Giants. "It hit me this team has been around 100 years. This team is iconic. When you think iconic teams in North America, you think the Boston Celtics. You think the Yankees, the Montreal Canadiens, the Green Bay Packers. You think about teams that are more than 100 years old, and I'm going, 'This guy just told me I'm number 56 out of 10,000 players who put this uniform on over 100 years. I'm one of the best players in this franchise's history.' That's special.

"That's how it hit me. After we got the



PHOTO BY GEORGE ROSE/GETTY IMAGES
Cornerback Mark Collins #25, next to head coach Bill Parcells, cornerback Everson Walls #28 and assistant coach Bill Belichick of the New York Giants stand on the sideline against the Buffalo Bills during Super Bowl XXV at Tampa Stadium on January 27, 1991 in Tampa, Florida. The Giants defeated the Bills 20-19.

(celebration) itinerary, I thought, 'That's special. I must have done something right.'"

Collins has done plenty right on the football field, and being named one of the Giants' Top 100 players is merely the latest acknowledgment of that fact, the proof of which began at Pacific High School in San Bernardino. There, Collins was a man among boys, dominating games in one of the then-top leagues in the CIF-Southern Section: the Citrus Belt League.

His senior season, Collins won the Ken Hubbs Award, emblematic of the top senior athlete in San Bernardino County. The award, named after the Colton native and 1962 National League Rookie of the Year for the Chicago Cubs, who was killed in a 1963 plane crash flying to spring training, has a winner's roll that includes NFL Hall of Famer Ronnie Lott, former major leaguer Greg Colbrunn, former NFL players Charles Johnson and Allen Bradford, current Oakland Raiders' running back Alex Mattison and 2023 Heisman Trophy winner Jayden Daniels, who received his 2019 award from Collins.

CSUF was the next stop on Collins' path to history, and that ability to take over games as an electric defensive and special teams presence didn't take long to manifest itself. Collins set records that won't be touched, intercepting seven

passes as a sophomore and six as a junior for a 10-1 Titans' team enshrined in the university's Athletic Hall of Fame. His 20 career interceptions will forever stand as No. 1 in PCAA/Big West history while placing him in a tie for 10th on the NCAA career interception ladder.

"In my opinion, he was the greatest Titan football player of all," said longtime CSUF booster and former assistant sports information director Kirk San Roman. "Not only did he command the secondary and force the opposing quarterback to throw the other way, he was breathtaking on special teams, as he had the ability to take any punt to the house. Some of my favorite Titan football memories are of Mark intercepting the ball and hoping that he could take it to the end zone."

Growing up in the Inland Empire and playing at CSUF imparted Collins with a humility and far-sightedness that served him as well in the NFL as his 27 career interceptions did. You don't play 168 games over 13 seasons in the Darwinian hothouse that is the NFL — where your job is constantly imperiled by someone younger, faster and cheaper — without understanding the deeper implications of how to not only constantly bring out your talent but do so in a way that goes beyond the tangible and obvious.

That humility manifested itself when Collins returned from the weekend cel-

ebrations in New York, where the living members of the Giants' Top 100 Players were honored. Collins returned to his Kansas City home and began calling some of his former Giants' teammates who weren't on the list. For the ones he couldn't reach, Collins put out a post on Facebook.

He wanted to thank them "for helping me get to where I was and for making me the player I was."

"I never got too involved with singular awards. That was never my focus," he said. "I wanted to be accountable to my teammates, be accountable to the coaching staff and be accountable to the organization. I wanted to win. Anything else that comes along with that is icing on the cake."

"... To me, (being named one of the top 100 Giants) wasn't important at the time. I put it in its compartment, and I didn't think about it. I never thought about individual awards; that wasn't me. Now if you want to talk about the two (Giants) Super Bowl teams, if you want to talk about beating Redlands High in 1981, I'll talk about that all day."

Because Collins has a mind that never stops whirring, he will talk about a lot of things: the made-for-TV golf show he's working on pitting American football players against soccer players, the phone call two years ago from former coach Bill Parcells at 3:30 a.m. asking if he could still jam receivers like he did in the old days — a call Collins saved on his phone. Or the jazz club he proposed to a local Kansas City entrepreneur looking for a way to promote his event center.

And if you want an entertaining story, get Collins talking about the kilt he wore to the Top 100 ceremonies, the one he got from a Scottish rugby team nearly 30 years ago and the one former teammate and Hall of Fame linebacker Lawrence Taylor teased him about.

"Lawrence said, 'You wore a kilt in New York?' I said, 'Yeah, Lawrence. I played left cornerback eight years in the toughest media market in the country. I can wear a kilt. I'm secure in what I can wear and bring to the table,'" Collins said. "He said, 'Good point,'"

His disdain of individual awards now has an asterisk. Collins is secure understanding that being a key chapter in a legacy franchise's history book is a lesson that never gets old. Humility and history can coexist comfortably.

"It's a big deal. It's special. I never knew or thought a guy like me from San Bernardino, going through Cal State Fullerton, could get something this big. This is as big as it gets."



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