



PHOTO BY DREW A. KELLEY, CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER
Jessie Echaury, president of Student Veterans of America, who served in Afghanistan, speaks during the university's annual Flag Raising Ceremony on Wednesday.

CAREER PATH

VETERAN FINDS HIS MISSION AT CSUF: HELPING OTHER VETS FIND THEIR WAY

Resource Center work gave him direction

By Nicole Gregory
contributing writer

As Cal State Fullerton's Veterans Resource Center activities get underway this month in appreciation of military members and veterans, student veteran Jessie Echaury is an enthusiastic participant. Echaury, 29, who served in the U.S. Army in Afghanistan, spoke at the flag-raising ceremony on Nov. 6. Now in his last semester as an undergraduate student, Echaury's goal is to become a licensed social worker counseling veterans who struggle with alcoholism or

drug abuse, a career that combines his experience, skills and desire to help other veterans. He's already bringing veterans together on campus as president of the Cal State Fullerton chapter of Student Veterans of America, where he's revived the group to engage in community projects such as beach cleanups and food distribution. Born in Los Angeles, Echaury graduated from Santiago High School in Garden Grove and has spent most of his adult life in Orange County. "I took a little break out of high school and eventually went to a recruiting station in the city of Orange," he said. Not long after

that he was on a plane to Georgia for basic training for five months. After being stationed in Fort Hood, Texas, he was sent overseas. "I did one tour in Afghanistan in 2016," he said. "Our mission there was to train the Afghan police in helping them just be a little better at their jobs, whether that be combat or just controlling the ground that they already had." Once out of the army, Echaury worked as an electrician for a time but didn't enjoy it. "I just didn't find myself happy. I didn't feel like I was contributing everything that I could." Meanwhile, he was deeply affected by the experience of someone close to him

who struggled with substance abuse. "I'd heard other stories about other veterans that I served with and some of their struggles, and they hit home for me," he said. He realized he wanted to help veterans with these kinds of problems. "That's how I put those two together to choose to work in that field. It was close to home on different sides, but that's how I came to that." His path was through education. "I fell in love with the social work field, and I started going back to school, to community college." He got his associate degree in sociology from Santiago Canyon College, then transferred to Cal **VETERAN » PAGE 5**



PHOTO COURTESY OF ORANGE COUNTY BUSINESS COUNCIL
From left, Mira Farka, Dean Sridhar Sundaram and Anil Puri at the Orange County Business Council and Cal State Fullerton 30th Annual Economic Forecast Conference.

FORECAST

Experts expect slowdown from current economic upswing next year

University's Puri, Farka didn't anticipate 2024's higher numbers

By Lou Ponsi
contributing writer

Even Cal State Fullerton's esteemed economists, Anil Puri and Mira Farka, acknowledge being a bit perplexed when trying to make sense on why the U.S. economy hasn't slipped into a recession, given the uncertainty stemming from a litany of occurrences. These include an aggressive rate hike, high inflation, rising geopolitical risks, a banking panic and a contentious presidential race. "The script was so dark, few expected the U.S. economy to remain unscathed," the economists wrote in their 2025 Economic Forecast for the nation and the

region. "But it did, not only barely, but spectacularly." Amid an incongruous state of affairs, Puri, director of the Woods Center for Economic Analysis and Forecasting at Cal State Fullerton, and Farka, co-director of the Woods Center and professor of economics, delivered their 2025 economic forecast on Oct. 24 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Irvine. The economists labeled the forecast "The 'Vibes Economy:' Outlook for Growth and Inflation Amidst Election Uncertainty." "We've named our forecast today the Vibes Economy, and there's a good reason for that," Puri said. "Because what we see in the economic world right now is a lot of dissonance, a lot of divergence between hard data and sentiments between theories and practice. So, all of our old models ... Some of them don't seem to work. So how do you make sense of that?" Real GDP in the U.S. has grown by an average of 2.8% over the past two years and 3.2% over the past year. The U.S. has also added 7.4 million jobs since March 2022, including 3 million added over the past year and 1.4 **ECONOMIC » PAGE 5**



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TITAN VOICES

How the pandemic changed nursing ... and me

During the darkest days of the COVID-19 pandemic, nursing faculty member Christine Kaford leaned into gratitude and hope. She teaches students to do the same.

By Christine Kaford
contributing writer

Looking back now, it feels like a blur. I worked on the front lines as an emergency department nurse when much of the world shut down in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I will never forget the moments of fear, the extensive conversations with nursing colleagues, the lack of planning and the sadness that rapidly spread.

It may have been extremely foolish for me and my colleagues to volunteer to try new practices, technology and more for the first time during a pandemic — but we didn't have time to consider the risks or benefits.

During the height of the pandemic, I taught clinical rotations and worked as many hours as possible. I did not do it to be a hero, but because both of my parents were immunocompromised and I could not be with them.

There were many instances when I, and other front-line workers, were not welcomed because we were exposed to the very disease that everyone was afraid to be around.

I did not contract COVID-19 until 2021 when I was pregnant with my first child. I was working in triage and felt mild body aches. I was convinced I was tired because I was pregnant. Unfortunately, I tested positive for COVID-19.

At the time, my husband, a firefighter, was working the Dixie Fire in Northern California. I was alone, pregnant and extremely sick with a low oxygen saturation and an oral temperature of 102 to 103 F. I was barely able to take a couple steps from my bed to drink water or walk to the door to grab food sent by friends and family.

I remember crying a lot. I felt guilty that I got my unborn daughter sick.

My biggest takeaway from the experience is that we will never change until our love exceeds our pain. It was painful to watch the entire world suffer as a result of an unknown virus that quickly surfaced and changed our lives. Rather than focus on resentment or pain, I leaned into gratitude and hope.

I consciously remind myself that I matter. Just as I see my patients as real people who are deserving of care, I too am worthy of care. I remind my stu-

dents that if nurses do not take care of themselves, their patients and families also will suffer.

Following the pandemic, I believe nursing has widened the lens to our quality of life, the true meaning of a service occupation, alternative pathways for self-care, improvements in mental health, the importance of community and roles beyond patient care. We are always evolving, moving forward to create a better life for our patients and ourselves.

Today's nursing education embraces such technologies and innovations as simulation, asynchronous and hybrid classrooms, interactive case studies, and virtual reality. We are beyond the traditional textbook and multiple-choice questions, which is a promising path to ensure students are equipped to step into the field with the foundational clinical judgment and skills required to practice safe, quality care.

As an educator, I am fueled by my desire to advocate for new nurses. I was a new nurse once; I know and will always remember how it felt.

My approach to education is rooted in active listening and taking time to understand the aspirations and interests of those who desire a future career in health care. I hope that students never lose sight of the "why" that brought them to our School of Nursing.

My research interests have transitioned to the care of my students. I have had the opportunity to watch the students act with resilience and flexibility. They inspired me to begin a study that explores students' lived experience in nursing education during the pandemic.

We lost so much during the pandemic, but I choose to focus on what I have gained: A deep respect for my profession and colleagues, and a happy and healthy daughter named Karisa, who is safe and well.

Christine Kaford is an assistant professor in Cal State Fullerton's School of Nursing, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary of preparing students to serve in Orange County's health care workforce. She teaches such courses as Critical Care Clinical Capstone and Nursing Capstone Theory for prelicensure nurses. This column appears in the fall/winter 2024 Titan magazine.



PHOTO COURTESY CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES
Christine Kaford fully equipped in personal protective equipment



PHOTO COURTESY CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES
Kaford taught clinical rotations and worked many hours in hospitals during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A portrait of Christine Kaford, a nursing faculty member, smiling. She is wearing a dark blue jacket over a dark blue shirt. The background is a solid orange color.

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The Cal State Fullerton community section is produced by The Orange County Register for the benefit of its subscribers. While the university is the section's primary advertising sponsor, all editorial decisions are independent of the university's control.

Published on select Thursdays by The Orange County Register
1920 Main Street, Suite 225
Irvine, CA 92614
ocregister.com/cal-state-fullerton

SUSTAINABILITY SUMMIT

Event showcases CSUF’s commitment to a sustainable future

Students display projects that target environment

By Lou Ponsi
contributing writer

Through education and innovation, Cal State Fullerton has committed to being among the frontrunners in the effort to ensure a greener, more sustainable future. This commitment was once again the driving force behind the university’s annual Energy & Sustainability Summit. Held on Oct. 21 in the Titan Student Union, the third annual summit was presented on a larger scale than in the previous two years. The event featured panel discussions with industry experts and government officials and showcased the work of CSUF student researchers whose projects demonstrated innovative solutions to climate-related issues.

“I know California is leading the way in creating a more sustainable and cleaner energy future,” said CSUF president Ronald Rochon, who was attending his first Sustainability Summit since becoming president four months ago. “And thanks to our state leaders, I am proud that we as a campus are a part of reaching these particular goals, including becoming carbon neutral by 2045.”

Rochon also pointed out some of the university’s current initiatives designed to bolster energy efficiency, water conservation, waste reduction, sustainable transportation and community outreach. CSUF has been distinguished as a Gold Star member of the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education, the president noted.

The university is also a top performer in the water category of the 2024 Sustainable Campus Index, achieving 27% of water reduction through infrastructure and landscaping, the president said.

CSUF provides 100 electric vehicle charging spaces through Southern California Edison’s Charge Ready program, which has helped save 8,300 pounds of greenhouse gas emissions each day.

“As president of the largest CSU, serving nearly 43,000 students, it is important that myself, our faculty and staff have a good understanding of where we are going, where we are growing, and where the demand is for our students so they will know how to best be equipped with the necessary skills to be successful in this changing environment,” Rochon said.

One panel discussion focused on how Orange County’s new Climate Action Plan aligns with the region’s commitment to transition to clean energy and to include disadvantaged communities in that mission.

Panel participant Katrina Clay, Fifth District Supervisor on the Orange County Board of Supervisors, said climate change has caused Orange County to fall victim to an increase in wildfires, landslides, coastal erosion, toxic algae in our waters and a rise in temperatures. “These are all a result of climate change,” Clay said. “And anyone denying that is just not paying attention.”

Crafting a climate action plan is critical to enable the county to receive federal



PHOTO COURTESY CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES

CSUF President Ronald Rochon speaks with student Penelope Karim.



PHOTO COURTESY CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES

CSUF provides 100 electric vehicle charging stations across campus.



PHOTO COURTESY CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES

From left, Alexia Rodriguez and Jordan Kennedy speak with Shanna Charles.

funding, which can be used to implement greater sustainability measures, the supervisor said.

A second panel discussion focused on the technical support and resources available to local communities looking to invest in energy efficiency and sustainability.

Panelists included Tara Tisopulos, dep-

uty director of environmental sustainability for OC Waste & Recycling and the county’s first ever sustainability officer.

With 800 county structures in its 34 cities, along with an airport, harbors, vessels and 20 landfills, the Orange County is “an incredibly large greenhouse gas emitter,” Tisopulos said.

“We are a big footprint,” she said. “So,

our goal with this Climate Action Plan is to address our municipal footprint and to encourage and incentivize our funding.”

Keynote speaker Zack Valdez, strategic adviser for the manufacturing energy supply chain office for the U.S. Department of Energy, discussed the department’s programs specifically focused on energy cost savings.

“But if we move beyond sort of workforce programs, we have the great infrastructure development that’s going through our great development office,” Valdez said. “It’s really looking at ways ... to build more efficient and facilitated transmissions.”

The student projects that were displayed at the summit represented a cross section of academic disciplines including biochemistry, engineering, biological science and art.

Biochemistry student Alexia Rodriguez and chemistry student Jordan Kennedy presented their research on hydrogen fuel cells, finding that green hydrogen can serve as renewable energy for batteries used in portable electronic devices along with transportation vehicles.

A project titled “Pervious Concrete: Constructing Sustainable Urban Ecosystems” made a case for using pervious concrete on certain construction projects.

The porous Rice Krispie-like material reduces the risk of flooding, reduces stormwater runoff and recharges ground water.

“Project Titan Green: hydrogen powered drones for sustainable flight and enhanced performance” focused on replacing lithium-ion batteries as a power source for drone operation with hydrogen fuel cells, which would improve flight performance and sustainability.

CSUF is on the Green Colleges list as one of the nation’s environmentally sustainable colleges in the 2025 edition of the Princeton Review’s Green Colleges.

The university made the list for its “exceptional programs, policies and practices related to sustainability and the environment.”

PREVIEW

Prospective and newly admitted students explore what CSUF offers

CSUF News Media Services

Alexis Norman, a student at Citrus College, was among more than 1,000 prospective and newly admitted students invited to visit campus, connect with academic colleges and learn about university resources during the Oct. 26 Fall in Love With Cal State Fullerton event.

During Norman’s first college tour, she had a surprise encounter with CSUF President Ronald S. Rochon in the Pollak Library.

“That was a shock,” shared Norman. “I didn’t expect the president to be walking around and introducing himself to people. I thought that was a great way to make future students feel connected to the university.”

An aspiring kinesiology major, Norman is considering following in her mother, Tracy Hall’s, footsteps by attending Cal State Fullerton.

“My mom is an mom of Cal State Fullerton and has always said good things about the campus,” said Norman. “Plus, the university has a really good kinesiology department, which I’m excited for.

“I’ve always wanted to be a caregiver,” said Norman. “I really want to work with senior citizens, and eventually work my way to becoming a doctor or athletic trainer.”

Hall, who graduated with a bachelor of science degree in child and adolescent development, has enjoyed a long career as a special education teacher. She recently transitioned into a new role as a high school community school specialist.

While she gained the academic tools she needed to succeed in her profession, Hall shared that she wishes she got more involved in campus activities as a student. That’s why she’s encouraging her daughter to make the most of every opportunity in college.

“Now, as a parent, I’m really pushing my kids to get involved in clubs and anything that interests them,” said Hall. “It’s

exciting to be here today and see all of the resources available to them.”

Resources

Students from partner school districts and out-of-state schools attended the Fall in Love With Cal State Fullerton event, which in addition to campus tours, offered workshops to assist with the application process, presentations on financial aid and the Educational Opportunity Program, a reception for newly admitted transfer students, and information about all eight colleges.

At a College of Communications information session, Dean Jason Shepard invited prospective students to learn about all the college has to offer.

“In the College of Communications, we have more than 40 signature programs and student clubs beyond the classes you can take,” he said. “I encourage you to discover what we have available, and what might interest you, and to get involved in those things.”

In addition to the more than 1,000 prospective and newly admitted students who RSVPed for the Fall in Love With Cal State Fullerton event, an additional 3,000 parents and supporters also signed up.

“The event is essential for preparing students for their journey as Titans at Cal State Fullerton,” said Kevin Martin, director of outreach, recruitment and orientation. “We offered one-on-one support for the Cal State Apply applications to help students navigate the process smoothly. They also had the opportunity to connect with academic advisers who were available to assist with course selection and degree planning.

“Additionally, students took campus tours, met with their academic colleges and explored campus life, including student organizations and resources. Overall, it provided a great opportunity to lay a strong foundation for their future while fostering a sense of community and belonging.”



PHOTO COURTESY CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES

Future Titans take pictures with Tuffy the Titan at the Oct. 26 Fall in Love With Cal State Fullerton event.



PHOTO COURTESY CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES

CSUF alum Tracy Hall and her daughter, Alexis Norman

COMMUNICATIONS

Study looks at humor in stirring end-of-life discussion

‘Death Walks Into a Bar..’ analyzes research

By Larry Urish
contributing writer

“Dude, what’s it like circling the drain?” Any rational person with even one molecule of compassion would agree that this is something you don’t ask anyone who’s dying. It’s a no-brainer: Humor doesn’t belong in any death-related scenario or discussion.

Christian Seiter, assistant professor in Cal State Fullerton’s Department of Human Communication Studies, doesn’t align with this belief, and his stance isn’t based on opinion. It’s based on meticulous research. His study, “Death Walks Into a Bar: Humor and Profanity in Advanced Care Planning Messages,” examines the role of joking, as well as cursing, in end-of-life advanced-care planning.

The man who created autocorrect has died. May he restaurant in peace.

News flash: We’re all gonna die. Seiter notes that denying death doesn’t help anyone, and that for many, especially young and healthy people, planning ahead for our eternal “dirt nap” is something that’s easily ignored. Humor, he contends, can help. “It can make conversations about death more accessible.”

Seiter found his niche in end-of-life-communication research in an unlikely manner. “I was a trained actor. I have a BFA and was always interested in comedy. When I was later at the University of Rochester, I started to develop theater-based workshops to help health care providers have end-of-life conversations. My sense of humor has always gotten me through some challenging things, and I happened upon the Death Positive movement.”



PHOTO COURTESY CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES
Christian Seiter, assistant professor in Cal State Fullerton’s Department of Human Communication Studies

One may assume that Death Positive is a “grassroots” movement, since most of us eventually wind up staring up at the “wrong side of the lawn” (well, at least those who aren’t poured into an urn). The DP movement encourages people to communicate openly about death, dying and (ewww!) even corpses. DP folks seek to lower anxiety related to death and end the silence around death-related topics, including end-of-life discussions.

The psychic said, “Treat every day as if it were your last. Especially this Thursday.”

Seiter co-authored his study with as-

sociate professor Zac Johnson, chair of CSUF’s Department of Human Communication Studies. In their research effort, published last May in the journal “Death Studies,” 604 participants listened to one of three podcasts about advanced-care planning: messages delivered with clean humor, profane humor or no humor. The results indicated that to best facilitate end-of-life discussions and encourage appropriate action, advanced-care-planning “motivators” should avoid profanity and use humor cautiously.

How does humor work to assist in end-of-life discussions? “It relies on surprise, something that can shake us out of our automatic processing,” Seiter said. “It catches our attention, which could

be a good or a bad thing, depending on whether or not someone is offended by dark humor. For those who are curious about this subject but are dealing with a societal stigma, having a way to demystify the fear by using humor can be effective. ... If you know that those involved are amenable to humor — if it’s a big part of their identity — that’s fine. However, if you’re not sure how the person or people in question will react to humor in a death-related conversation, play it safe: Don’t do it.

My mother-in-law has a blunt way of going about things,” Seiter added. “She’ll often say something like, ‘If I ever get dementia, give me a glass of my favorite whiskey and shoot me in the backyard.’ This is someone who enjoys the sicko one-liners. Humor will help her.”

About a month before he died, my uncle had his back covered in lard. After that, he went downhill fast.

Seiter had a target demographic in mind when he did the study. “I really wasn’t focusing on the elderly. I wanted to appeal to a younger audience, like millennials. I want to know how we start death-related conversations for people who don’t see them as relevant.”

Although the Grim Reaper isn’t on Seiter’s dance card anytime soon — then again, maybe that cement truck rounding the corner on two wheels has his name on it — he’s followed his own advice by engaging in end-of-life planning.

“There are a few documents everyone should complete,” he said. “Most important is a health care power of attorney. Designate the person to make decisions if you can’t decide for yourself. The second is a living will. This relates to specific medical treatments and the type of care you get if you can’t communicate your decisions. ... In any event, it’s always helpful to be curious. Have an interest in discussing death aloud.”

ELECTIONS

CNN commentator gives a glimpse Behind the Ballot

CSUF News Media Services

A week before Election Day and with early voting underway, CNN political commentator Van Jones told Cal State Fullerton students that the character of candidates matters.

Jones responded to a student’s question about candidates’ character following his Oct. 24 talk at the inaugural Behind the Ballot civic engagement event, presented by Associated Students Inc. and the Division of Student Affairs.

“I think character matters. I think the country has got to make a choice, and whatever choice the country makes, we’ll have to live with it.”

Behind the Ballot is a civic engagement event that aims to inform and educate college students through Q&A dialogue with a political influencer.

The Yale-educated attorney, Emmy Award-winning producer and author of three New York Times best-selling books fielded questions from student moderator Kayla Lam during the evening program, followed by questions from students in the audience.

Jones talked about his childhood, work as a civil rights advocate and professional success. He addressed such topics as civic engagement, the benefit of civil discourse and the importance of voting.

Alexis Cuevas, a graduate assistant in ASI’s student programming and engagement department, was among the students who attended the event.

Cuevas, pursuing a master’s degree in higher education, said Jones’ message about the importance of voting resonated with her because the outcome of local measures and candidates elected locally directly impact students.

“With this upcoming election, civic engagement is important to discuss because of the divide in our country,” said Cuevas, a first-generation college graduate who earned a bachelor’s degree in liberal studies from CSUF in May. “Many people associate themselves with one side or another, so promoting civic engagement and getting students to vote for the kind of future they want is critical.”

When asked about college students’ indifference toward voting and whether their votes counted, Jones shared a lesson about the 2000 presidential election contest between George W. Bush and Al Gore. Jones emphasized that Bush won the election by a mere 537-vote margin.

“I’m not going to lie. There is a very hard truth about voting. You cannot vote and get everything you want,” he said. “If you want to make a community successful, voting is one of the many things you have to do.”

Lam, a business administration major and ASI programs and events coordinator, asked Jones what students can do when feeling overwhelmed and struggling to understand confusing ballot propositions and candidates for office.

Jones advised that college students should “find a source you respect” for information, such as political party voter guides. Voting isn’t an exam, he added: “If you just don’t know, you can



PHOTO COURTESY OF ASSOCIATED STUDENTS INC.
CNN political commentator Van Jones joins Associated Students Inc. students and staff following the Behind the Ballot civic engagement event. Business administration major Kayla Lam, front row, second from right, moderated the event.

leave it blank.”

He also urged students to get involved with their communities because they’re the ones who will benefit most. He spoke about his work to get bills passed, as an advocate for people falsely imprisoned and activism for coal miners who lost their pensions and health.

“It’s impossible to volunteer, get involved and contribute and not get way more out of it,” he said. “You’ll never make the world perfect, but you grow your heart, mind and network of people.

“To solve problems, you’ll need people who don’t look like you, pray like you, love like you. You have to work with people who are completely different.”

Jones opened up about his childhood and humble beginnings in rural Tennessee. He relayed that his parents, both educators, were born in the segregated South. His father joined the military to escape poverty and put himself through college.

After high school, Jones attended the University of Tennessee at Martin, where he studied communications and political science, then enrolled in Yale Law School in 1990.

“I’ve come a long way. My dad started with nothing and gave me everything,” he said.

Jones said his mother always told him he could do anything. He encouraged students to put aside doubts and push forward to achieve their goals.

“What I’m saying is no pressure, no diamonds. The struggle is what will make you great. It’s your ability to overcome that makes your story special.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF ASSOCIATED STUDENTS INC.
Van Jones, political commentator, author and Emmy Award-winning producer, speaks to students at the Behind the Ballot event.

SUCCESS STORY

From working class to executive: His advocacy blazes trails

Joe Cordero got initial help he needed at CSUF

By Jenelyn Russo
contributing writer

Cal State Fullerton alumnus Joe Cordero's journey from young Chicano activist to successful civil servant exemplifies how community support and his CSUF education transformed his life, enabling him to overcome obstacles and dedicate his career to public service and advocacy for equality.

Cordero hails from the barrio of Chino, a town where he and his family have deep roots. His great-grandfather moved to Chino in 1900, and his grandmother was a member of Chino High School's first graduating class in 1918.

The son of farm workers, Cordero's working-class upbringing did not include encouragement to pursue higher education. As a high school activist and a lowrider in the 1970s, he was active in the Chicano movement and advocated for civil rights and educational equity.

During that time, an increasing number of Chicanos and Latinos were choosing to pursue higher education. While it wasn't initially in his plan to attend college, Cordero quickly understood that to be an effective advocate, he needed to lead by example.

"I came to the realization that if I was going to advocate for educational equity and for more representation in higher education, I needed to follow my own advice," Cordero said.

Cordero's growing passion for higher education was met with challenges, including a defining moment in high school when a representative from Pepperdine University visited campus. His request to attend the information session was met with resistance as his teacher told him he would be "wasting everyone's time." The interaction left an indelible mark on him and strengthened his resolve to create a different life for



PHOTO COURTESY CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES

Joe Cordero says his CSUF experience helped change his life.

himself.

"Part of my motivation was that I came from a family that had a lot of social problems," Cordero said. "In addition, it was to make my mom proud. I was raised by a single mom. ... I wanted to break this cycle of social failure within our family."

Cordero recalls a number of students from Chino at that time who were attending Cal State Fullerton. So, he applied to CSUF, where he was admitted through the Educational Opportunity Program. The program provided the classes, counseling and support he needed to achieve his goals.

"I couldn't have succeeded without EOP because it really helped me realize my potential," Cordero said. "They believed in me. ... They give you advice, and they model what a good, successful college student needs to do."

Cordero settled on criminal justice as his major and was a member of the ME-ChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán; Chicano Student Movement of Aztlán) group on campus. In 1978, he became the first in his immediate and extended family to graduate from college, a milestone that inspired several family members to follow in his footsteps and pursue higher education.

"I became kind of a trailblazer," Cordero said. "I didn't know the impact it was going to have. The next generation (in my family), those are the ones that started going (to college)."

After graduating from CSUF, the early years of Cordero's career took him from a director position at the Buena Clinton Neighborhood Center in Garden Grove to the Friendly Center in Orange. During that time, he also went back to school to earn his master's degree in public ad-

ministration – from none other than Pepperdine University.

Seeking a new challenge, Cordero joined UCI Medical Center, where he managed the departments of patient transportation and interpreter services. He later transitioned to human resources and created a recruitment program aimed at increasing the number of bilingual health care professionals at the medical center.

Cordero then headed south to San Diego in 1989, where he held human resources positions at UC San Diego and Cal State San Marcos before arriving at San Diego County to eventually take on the position of director of ethics and compliance. In this role, he was able to draw on his expertise in human resources, advocacy, public administration and criminal justice to lead one of the few counties in the nation with an ethics and compliance program, serving as one of the county's highest-ranking Chicano executives.

Now six years into retirement, Cordero still resides in San Diego, remains a lowrider enthusiast and hasn't forgotten his humble beginnings. He continues advocacy work and has committed to give back to the university that gave him his start by supporting CSUF's Abrego Future Scholars, a scholarship program created to increase college enrollment among first-generation and historically underrepresented students.

"I've always been a big believer in paying it forward, because whatever we accomplish, we don't do it alone," Cordero said. "We do it on the backs of others."

He will always hold a great deal of pride as a graduate of CSUF, as Cordero believes his degree truly changed his life.

"It broke the cycle of social failure," Cordero said. "It broke, to some extent, the generational poverty in my family, and it prepared me for my career. It was an important piece of my life and my journey, and I couldn't have accomplished what I accomplished without my degree from Cal State Fullerton."

Economic

FROM PAGE 1

million during the first eight months of 2024.

"So, this does not look like a recession," Puri said. "Look at employment growth. Huge increase in the last four years. Employment growth is a little less than GDP growth because employment fell a great deal. And so, it's going to take a little while to dig out of that hole."

The significance of elections for the economy is an open question, the economists wrote.

Whatever the outcome, the Fed will likely fail to deliver on its goal of bringing its target inflation down to 2% over the long term, Farka said.

"We call this a soft landing with an asterisk," Farka said.

The biggest concern continues to be service inflation, which refers to a wide range of industries such as medical care, hospitality, personal services and education.

Service inflation has fallen from 7.6% to its current 4.8% but is still running more than two percentage points higher than its historical average.

Though the economists do not expect a recession over the near term, they do believe that the U.S. economy will ultimately downshift, in part, due to difficulties felt in lower-income house-



PHOTO COURTESY OF ORANGE COUNTY BUSINESS COUNCIL

OCBC President and CEO Jeff Ball joins Mira Farka and Anil Puri for a discussion.

holds, where debt levels are high and delinquency rates have risen, prompting this cohort to pull back on spending.

In Southern California, the economy has experienced a slowdown since mid-2023 and has decelerated more than the national economy, the economists noted.

There has been minimal job growth in the region over the past 15 months.

"So, there are clear indications that something is going on in California that is hurting us a lot more than the rest of the country," Puri said. "Now, there are many reasons to think of, but one of the important reasons that we identified is the slow growth in labor force."

The labor force is defined by the number of people who are either working or looking for a job.

"If you look at the growth of labor force since the pandemic, we have not recovered that," Puri said.

Households in Orange County and Southern California have also become more cautious about their spending, as indicated by drop in credit card debt, Puri said.

The economists do not forecast a recession locally but do expect the current slowing to persist well into 2025.

Puri and Farka expect the average annual rate of unemployment in Orange County to rise to 4.3% in 2025 following a rate of 4.1% in 2024 and 3.6% in 2023.

The economists also addressed the topic of artificial intelligence (AI) and whether this set of technologies will be a factor in global and local economies.

Running AI technology is hugely expensive, the economists said, which partly explains why only 9% of U.S. companies currently integrate AI into their business operations.

"Part of the reason may be that they're looking for this killer app that's not there yet," Puri said. "And maybe it will show up, but right now the usage is sort of doubtful."

"AI servers are energy hogs," Puri said. "They take 10 times as much power as all servers do."

However, the economists forecast AI to grow exponentially in the coming years, in the same way the use of the internet exploded in the 1990s.

Veteran

FROM PAGE 1

State Fullerton. "Now my ultimate goal is to be a social worker," he said.

Classes he has particularly enjoyed include case management, crisis intervention, cultural diversity and group counseling. "Treatment in drug addiction was one of my favorites, as well," he said.

Echaury witnessed alcoholism and substance abuse among soldiers while in the army, and among veterans later. "You'd see it more frequently, especially coming from the military where it's a big no-no to talk about your feelings and where people are able to drown it in alcohol or whatever substance they choose," he said.

During internships at the Veterans Resource Center on campus, Echaury helped students complete documentation they may need for their next educational step. "I help military students get from the community college to any Cal State program, just making sure that their transcripts are up-to-date and making sure they know how to do it flawlessly," he explained. "If there's any mishaps, I guide them so that they can get over that bump in the road and they get into higher education."

He's also revived the Student Veterans of America chapter on the Cal State Fullerton campus and is now its president. "Me and a couple of buddies wanted to bring it back this semester," he explained. "It's a way to connect veterans, whether that be with other veterans at CSUF or at other universities; it's



PHOTO BY DREW A. KELLEY, CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

Cadets unfold an American flag Wednesday during the Flag Raising Ceremony at the Langsdorf Flagpoles.

an ongoing thing of networking between other schools, different chapters, different alumni. It's a forever growing club." They also engage veterans in community outreach projects such as food drives and Toys for Tots.

Echaury hopes to enter the graduate program in social work at Cal State Fullerton next year and credits fellow veteran Alex Ortega, assistant director at the Veterans Resource Center, for helping him along the way. "He is someone that I look up to," Echaury said. "He's guided me throughout my journey at CSUF in the human services field, guiding me to help me get into the MSW program."

After speaking at the flag-raising ceremony on campus, Echaury is particularly excited to play in the upcoming vets versus cadets flag football game. "I believe this is our 10th annual football game versus the cadets. We play against the ROTC kids on campus on Nov. 21. It's always a fun time," he said.

SPORTS

Dedrique Taylor sizes up a new era of men’s basketball

By Brian Robin
contributing writer

Dedrique Taylor saw this coming months ago, even two years ago. He saw the runaway train bearing down and inevitably derailing what he spent 11 years building.

The only Cal State Fullerton men’s basketball coach in program history to crash the NCAA Tournament dance twice now faced an inevitable truth — one that forced him to take the concepts he built, refined, re-refined and refined some more after that, and, well, forget them.

This realization did not come easy. Nor did it come without heavy contemplation and an ongoing 360-degree evaluation of what men’s basketball at Cal State Fullerton would have to become in the Age of the Transfer Portal.

It was the defection of guard Max Jones to Kansas State that was Taylor’s sudden realization that he would have to coach at all three levels and make his teammates better along the way. When healthy, he had thrived in his two seasons at CSUF.

But when Kansas State came calling with a six-figure offer, Jones couldn’t take Manhattan (Kansas) fast enough.

“We’re going to have to play the game different than we did my first 11 years here, based on who we are and our personnel,” Taylor said. “Some things are now different. We’re not as ball-screen heavy, nor as spacing-driven. We’re now the opposite of those things, but it caters to our personnel in terms of our size and our ability.”

What the Titans are now are, well, Titans. They’re bigger, but not as skilled in the ball-screen motion offense that Taylor made a fixture. It was an offense that regularly put CSUF players among the Big West’s scoring leaders because Taylor was able to find those overlooked gems at community colleges and small towns you’ve never heard of who could score at all three levels and beat you off the dribble to create opportunities for themselves and teammates.

They’ll have to play a more basic system of defending, rebounding and running. Expect to see these Titans in transition in more ways than one — on the court during games and off the court in the way they play. And expect to see a more half-court-dependent style when



PHOTO COURTESY CSUF NEWS MEDIA SERVICES
CSUF men's basketball coach Dedrique Taylor calls for a play from courtside.

the transition game isn’t available.

The college athletics landscape is now brought to you — Sesame Street style — by the letters “N,” “I,” and “L” — name, image and likeness. College athletes are now able to earn money for the use of their names, images and likenesses and collectives to raise NIL funds for athletes have sprung up at universities all over the country.

Jones’ migration to Manhattan wasn’t the first crucial defection of a CSUF player. The year before, Taylor lost standout guard Latrell Wrightsell Jr. to Alabama — a player who arrived at CSUF in the midst of the pandemic as a typical Taylor find: a multiskilled player with a Swiss Army knife rack of skills that merely needed refining. In his final season as a Titan (2022-23), Wrightsell was an all-Big West First Team selection and All-Big West Tournament pick who averaged 16.3 points, and 2.4 three-pointers a game. He told Taylor he’d return for his senior season — until Alabama came calling with serious NIL money. All Taylor could do was tell his former player Godspeed and good luck.

And all Wrightsell did was play a key role in getting the Crimson Tide to the Final Four last season. During the NCAA Tournament, he averaged 52.9% from the field and 63.6% from three-point range.

“This is a direct impact of the NIL and us not being able to compete, so to speak, in that category,” Taylor said. “The

players we’ve had in the past would cost a lot of money these days. The players we’ve gotten and grown in our program are able to get money, number one, and number two, we’re not able to do the same. ...

“The types of players we’re used to getting now cost a lot of money.”

Even with the cost of doing business changing the rules of engagement, Taylor still has talent at his disposal; for how long remains to be seen. But the Titans opened the season last week boasting considerable size along with seven returners. Leading the latter contingent is 6-foot-6 senior swingman John Mikey Square, another Swiss Army knife player who can defend everyone from point guards to centers and rebound. He’ll have to add scoring to his repertoire this year for the Titans to be competitive.

The size comes from 6-10, 230-pound sophomore center Kendrick De Luna and 6-9, 280-pound senior center Zachary Visentin. Taylor expects both to thrive in his new system, especially when the Titans go heavy half-court.

Other key returners are sophomore guards Antwan Robinson and Keith Richard, who played only six games last year due to shin surgery.

“They are big, strong, athletic guys who allow us to play the game a lot differently than we had in the past,” Taylor said. “Those guys give you a different level of freedom.”

So do transfers Kobe Young, Kaleb Brown and Zion Richardson. Young, a Boise State ex-pat, is a 6-7, do-everything forward who played in three NCAA Tournaments for the Broncos. The 6-7 Brown, the brother of Los Angeles Clippers guard Kobe Brown, arrived from Missouri with court vision and a basketball IQ that Taylor can’t wait to unleash. Richardson arrives from Quincy College as a 6-4 grad transfer who can defend point guards and power forwards alike. Taylor would take two-thirds of his 17.8-point and all of his 7.8-rebound average last year at Quincy.

Every year, Taylor gives his players a theme to follow, a simple directive that, if it’s followed, so is success. This year’s directive couldn’t be more simple if it was carved on tablets or scribbled on a cave.

“We have to defend. We have to rebound, and we have to get out and score some transition baskets. It’s very simple,” he said. “It’s the same in terms of getting to the (free-throw) line and knocking down 75%-78% of our free throws. All that has a lot to do with our ability to buy in to what we now have to do to be successful.”

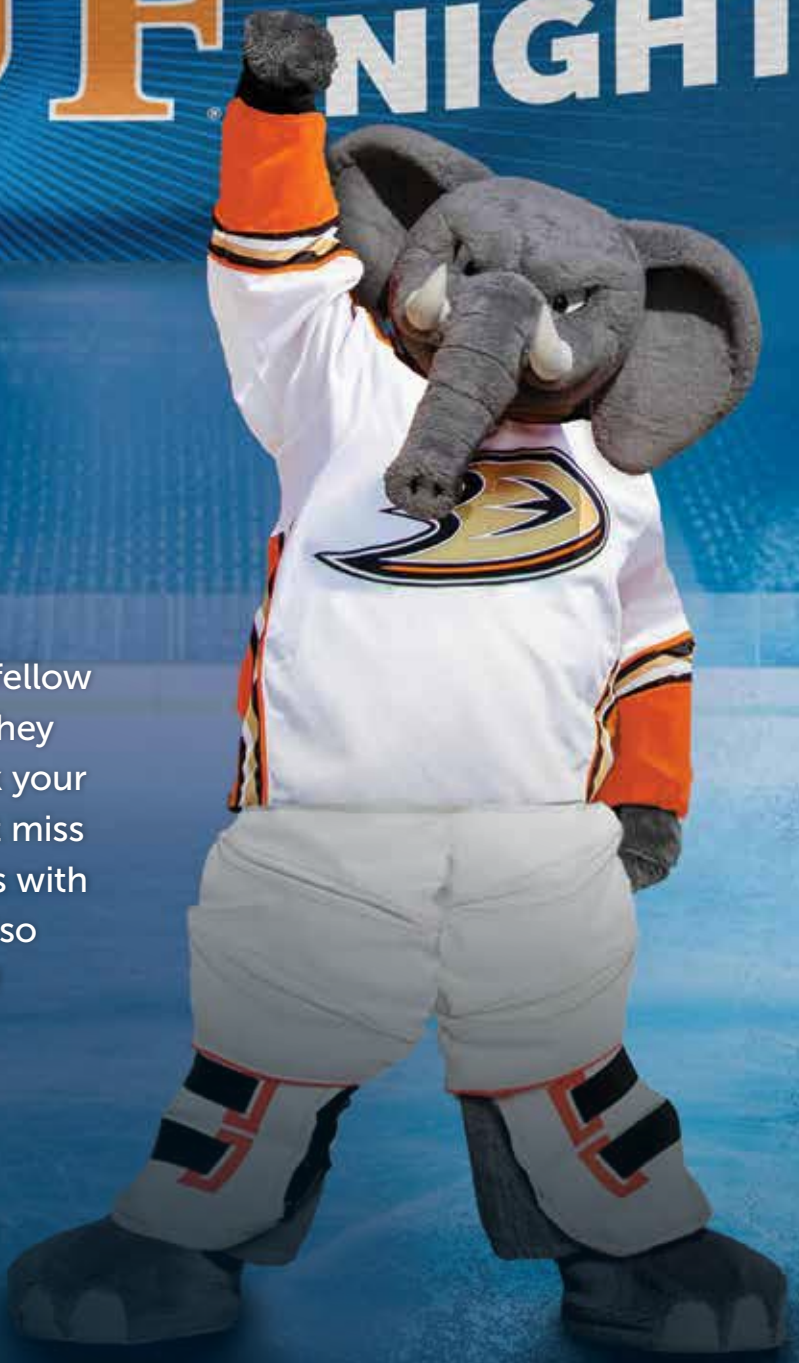
After last year, the Titans also have to rebound in a more figurative sense. CSUF went from losing the Big West Tournament final to UC Santa Barbara in 2022-23 to losing out on the conference tournament period. With Jones, leading scorer D.J. Brewton and Tory San Antonio —the reigning Big West Defensive Player of the Year and a five-year program mainstay — all missing significant time due to injuries, the Titans slumped to 7-13 in conference and missed the Big West Tournament.

“Last year was really simple and not unsolvable. The best ability is availability, and we weren’t available last year,” Taylor said, pointing out CSUF was blown out in only one conference game last year. “We started the season with the reigning Defensive Player of the Year unavailable to us. Then Tory comes back and we lose Max. Then Max comes back and we lose D.J. We’re not built like that. We can’t sustain an injury to those players and recover from it.

“You can say we didn’t perform, and we didn’t. But I’d like to see what could have happened if we had that talent all together. It would be a totally different outcome.”

Right now, Taylor would embrace any outcome that allows the Titans to find the light they once cast as a home for meaningful basketball. Not as a temporary beacon for point guards passing through more than just lanes on a court.

CSUF DUCKS NIGHT



December 2

7:00 p.m. / Honda Center

Help paint the Honda Center orange with fellow Titans to cheer on the Anaheim Ducks as they play against the Colorado Avalanche! Mark your calendars for this exciting game. And don’t miss out on our exclusive Titan Village festivities with giveaways, and of course, Tuffy! You will also receive a limited edition CSUF Ducks scarf!

Visit AnaheimDucks.com/CSUF for tickets and information.

Cal State Fullerton