

Announcer: Welcome to Hancock Conversations. Join President Dr. Kevin G. Walters and explore the stories behind the people and places that make Alan Hancock College the unique hub for learning that it is today.

Kevin Walthers: Welcome to Hancock Conversations. I'm Kevin Walters, superintendent president here at Allan Hancock College. This is a place where you can get your information about what's going on at Hancock and get a little bit of history along the way. Today we're joined by one of my bosses, Trustee Greg Pensa. Trustee Pensa has a relationship with the college dating back into the 70s'. So, he's been a longtime supporter of the college and is an alumnus as well. So, welcome, Greg.

Grag Pensa: Well, thanks for having me, Kevin. Actually, I started in 69'.

KW: (*Laughing*) I was trying to be kind. So, tell us a little bit about what Hancock was like back in the late 60s', early 70s'.

GP: Well, at that time your pathway was, if you were going to transfer, was to come to a community college. And so, a lot of my friends from Santa Ynez Valley, we didn't have the option of going to any community college. You had to come to Hancock college. A lot of people in Santa Ynez Valley want to go over the hill into Santa Barbara City College. So, ah, it was a small school then. I remember you could smoke in the student center, and that was a big deal when you first came up here. But probably 20, 30 of my classmates out of 120 came to Hancock and got degrees and transferred and went on into business. So, it was a small college and you knew all the guys because you played sports with them. They were here from Lompoc, Righetti, and Santa Maria. So, you knew all those guys. And so, it was a community. Close-knit community. Really small.

KW: And you were on the baseball team back then?

GP: Yeah, I played for John Osborne. I was on the team. Didn't play much. Saw a lot of baseball, traveled all over the central coast. We went up to Merced, Reedley, Kalinga. We were all in our league. It was all north of Santa Barbara County. We actually had a very strong team. Doke Moore, who some people might know, uh, Jimmy Deanny was on the team. Doke went on and played, professional baseball. He ended up, coaching at, Righetti for many years, and he coached Robin Ventura, who was one of his main players. So, I still have relationships with a lot of those guys and, fond memories of Coach Osborne, who was a legendary coach here at Allan Hancock College. And it was fun. But like I said, watch a lot of baseball.

KW: But you know what? That's awesome when you get a chance to play on a team that they were competing for state championships every year back then.

GP: Yeah, we were in the final four. We lost a two-out-of-three series here in Santa Marie, over at Elks Field by one run. And the team I think we played was College of the Redwoods, and they had two guys that went on and played professional baseball. So, it

was high-quality baseball. We used to travel down to Cerritos and play a tournament during Easter. And Cerritos was always the number one college in the nation, was called the Casey Stingle tournament and Casey Stingle actually came out and handed out the trophies at the end of the tournament.

KW: Oh, wow. That's a baseball legend right there. That's pretty great. So, you went from Hancock, you went down to San Diego State, got a major in film, which fit right in with the family business of gas stations. So, what'd your dad think about that?

GP: Well, I always like to say I took the John Madden path. I came to Allan Hancock, and then I went to San Diego State. Well, I was really interested. I got a degree in telecommunications and film. While I was at Hancock, I served an internship at the local TV station. I used to get sideline passes for the Chargers games. That was pretty cool. Also, I broadcast college sports there. I did volleyball and basketball for San Diego State on our local little college station. We won the national championship in volleyball my senior year. So, we had a couple of all-Americans, so that was a lot of fun. But you're right. I got a degree in telecommunications and film. But I got an opportunity to go into business with my father. His health started failing a little bit, and we actually were in the service station business. I was in charge of mergers and acquisitions because immediately we bought two other gas stations. So, I was the one that went in and hired the people, did all the bits and pieces on the escrows to close them. So, it was a great relationship.

KW: I think it's instructive when we talk about what's going on here at the college and we're talking about offering four-year degrees. And just the fact that you have that degree, and it doesn't necessarily have to be subject-specific all the time, but a good college degree teaches you how to learn. So, you can go and learn how to buy a gas station, you can work with your dad, and you get all those tools for research and just figuring out how things work. And I think that's something that's so lacking in our community, right now, and you've been a big supporter of trying to get to these four-year degrees for our local community.

GP: Well, the baccalaureate program, because, as you know, Kevin, we have place-bound students here, and our closest community college affiliation is Channel Islands, which is 115 miles away, which is unrealistic. So a four-year degree not only teaches you about the subject matter, but you also have to follow a course of design and take certain electives and classes to graduate. So, it shows that you can learn and that you are having a level of intelligence to meet a goal.

KW: Yeah. So, as you were doing your career, uh, as, ah, a small business owner, you served on a couple of boards down in San Diego Valley, but ultimately you got on the , , Allan Hancock College Foundation Board as a member. When did you start doing that?

GP: I actually came on the board in, uh, 2000. Leonard Marshman, who was a Mobile executive that had moved to the valley, was on the board, and I had a Mobile gas station, and he and I would have lunch periodically. Super guy. Gentleman taught me about how to fundraise. In fact, our first big ask was, uh, we were doing a capital success program, and he and I were able to raise \$50,000 from the Chumash. And we ended up taking Mr. Ortega to lunch, I think three or four times. But he was a very gentleman. Like, when a woman came to the table, he stood up until she sat. So, he taught me a lot about fundraising.

KW: That's awesome. At that point, then you're associated with the college, and you followed Carol Anders onto the board, right? Carol was going to leave, and so I think she kind of recruited you to run for the board, right?

GP: Absolutely. Well, I was ten years as a trustee at Solvang schools before that and then I went onto the board at the foundation, and I was just terming out. You serve nine years and you term out. And one of the things I want to mention here is part of the experience on the board was helping pass the bond in 2006, Tim Fleming. So we had a special group. Jim Bray was our chairman. And that's when I first met Jim. And, we formed a group and we put signs up all over Santa Ynez Valley, Los Alamos, Santa Maria. I spoke at a few civic organizations about it. So one of my highlights of being on the foundation was getting that bond passed, and we had to get 55% at that time. When I was at Solvang school, we passed a bond. You had to get a two-thirds vote.

KW: That's amazing.

GP: And that was back in 1988. And so we were able to build a gym in six classrooms at solving school. But um, it was just a great experience and it was a great transition for me because I knew Dr. Ortiz, I knew Felix Hernandez, I knew a lot of people on set, Betty Miller. So, it was an easy transition because I knew all the good things that we were doing at Hancock.

KW: Well that's been great and you've been a great representative for Santa Ynez Valley. I remember when I first got hired your first question me was how are we going to get Santa Ynez more involved, in Hancock? And my first thought was like "oh man, that's a heavy lift. You Know?" Santa Barbara City College sits right on the beach and it's the same distance away. And we started plugging away at it and we've really invested a lot of time and effort in making sure the Santa Ynez Valley knows that Hancock is wanting to serve them. I think the promise program has been huge. So we're starting to see record numbers of students Santa Ynez High School coming up as part of the promise program. Now we were getting sometimes single digits but usually never more than ten or twelve students from Santa Ynez and now we're getting 40 to 50 a year coming up, just so they can take advantage of the promise program.

GP: Well that's the highest percentage of increase has been the Santa Ynez Valley valley and, you know, when I talk to students there that are talking about going to City College I say their promise doesn't work for you because you don't live in the district. And if you go to Hancock you get the first year free. And I think another good thing was that we moved the campus out to Santa Ynez High School and we're going to be working more on concurrent enrollment and there's a lot of Community Ed there, but it puts us right on the campus. We did a survey a couple of years ago and they said "you really need to move from the city of Solvang over to the campus."

KW: And we have. Yeah, that's worked out really well. And one of the things I'm most proud of for our team putting together is when the state changed the funding formula for high schools, and they went to the locally controlled funding formula that took away the funds that Santa Ynez High School had for career education. I remember Scott Corey calling me up and saying "Hey, we don't know what we're going to do. We can't fund this ourselves." It was like \$600,000 worth of funding so that they could have career education, and we got our team together, and they figured out how we could offer concurrent enrollment there and really support the automotive and welding and some of those kind of programs out at Santa Ynez. And so that's been a great partnership for the students and for both institutions.

GP: Well, as we both know, with our declining enrollment, concurrent enrollment is a big feature, and we're hoping that we can. And you and I have had conversations about ramping it up at Santa Ynez high school.

KW: Yeah. It's cool that Santa Ynez high school actually makes deliberate attempts to hire faculty that would be qualified to teach at the community college level as well. So, it makes it a lot easier for us to be able to offer classes for them. So you've been on the board for 13 years now as a trustee. What are some of the things you like about being a trustee?

GP: Well, as we just discussed, I enjoy representing valley. When you're in Santa Maria, Hancock is gold. In San Ynez Valley, you've got competition with UCSB and Santa Barbara City College. And being a little more affluent area, it's not always on people's minds. They're thinking that they want their kids to go to a four-year school. We do so many good things here. We have 100% acceptance rate at Allan Hancock College. It's been a big influence on my whole family. My dad was here at Hancock. He went to school with Patty Boyd. I've got a yearbook that I shared with you.

KW: I saw that that. That was awesome.

GP: You know, he ended up going into World War II as a mechanic, which he learned here at Allan Hancock College. I have four children. They've all been through the system. I have a daughter that teaches at San Marcos. She went through community college system. I have a son that has businesses. He went through the community

college system. I had a daughter that was going to be a dental hygienist and I have a daughter that went through the wine industry, all because of community college. So I really believe in the system. And like I said, we have 100% acceptance rate.

KW: Yeah, that's right. We take everybody. Our old friend BJ Jones always said that we take everybody, but I think you're one who doesn't like to take credit but when I look around campus and I see, this is your 13th year as a trustee, right? So, 13 years ago, the new administration buildings didn't exist. 13 years ago, there was no Public Safety Training Center. There was no theater building for the new PCPA building, and there certainly the new Fine Arts building wasn't there. So, I mean, you've been right in the throes of making sure all those things were completed and are out there to serve students.

GP: Well, one of the things that I was excited about coming on the board was that we were now going to be able to use some funds. And Andy Dinsmore and I happened to work at the Chumash casino together, and he was showing me plans for public safety when we were both working at the Chumash. So it was very exciting. I knew Larry Lahr very well. We've been longtime friends from when he lived in the valley. And I knew what a great team we had here. And probably the most exciting thing was seeing the transformation of this campus. When I bring friends up here or my kids up here and they go "Oh my God, it looks like a college campus." You look like you're at a four-year institution. I remember going to counseling and having to stand outside because there wasn't enough room. You had to wait your turn outside the building to go in to see the counselor.

KW: That old administration building, I'll never forget that was my first year here, was in the original administration and student services building. I met a lot of students that way though, because they were right outside my office waiting to see counselors. So I could kind of sneak out there and talk to them. So it's been great. And so now you've sort of layered your time on the board. You're actually in a statewide leadership position on the... it's called the California Community College Trustee Board or the triple CT. You've become a very active and, well-thought-of leader in that. What are you enjoying about being on that statewide board?

GP: Well, I really joined it for a selfish reason, was to become more aware of what is going on at the state level. We're very sensitive to the budget and legislature there. So, my first goal was to learn about what's going on in Sacramento and bring that back to you and to the college. As you know, every time I go to a meeting, I come back with several things. How are we doing this? And most of the time I'm finding out that we're ahead of the curve. I'm very involved in the diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility or antiracism. The a changes committee. We've put on several town halls. We've actually were able to include Dr. McNulty in one of our town halls. She talked about her culturally responsive curriculum. So I've been very involved in that. It's significant to

know what's going on in the legislature because that greatly affects us in the same with the budget because we're a boomer bust state and right now everybody's worrying about a recession and we get money earmarked for us and then we have the may revise and it changes. So, I get a lot of knowledge. Um, and I hope to bring that back to Hancock and to you to discuss where we're going and what our plans are.

KW: I think one of the things, and we didn't talk about this before, so we might have to edit it in post. But, one of the things that I've been so impressed with what you're doing is you're in your seventy now, right? You grew up in the Santa Ynez Valley, which during your whole time of growing up was not a diverse community and is still limited in its diversity. And so here you are at the later stages of your life kind of delving into something that you didn't really have any interaction with. And to see you adopt that and work into that, I think personally. How has that just personally been for you to look at, like, oh, this is a really important way to think, maybe does it help you understand your kids better? Obviously, helps you understand our students better.

GP: Well, in my employment...you're right. Solvang, the Santa Ynez Valley, it's pretty white. It's a danish community. I did have some friends when I came to Hancock. There was some of the football players. Everybody that was on the teams here were all local high schools. We had nobody on the baseball team that was not from Santa Barbara County high schools. I think as a person, my wife said it's helped me grow. I think in my employment, I employed people that had green cards and I knew that they struggled and it was a personal thing. They lived across the street and they didn't have a car, and they had four kids and they were supporting a whole family. So, I got a little bit of understanding there. But I think everybody needs a fair opportunity. And the pushback about diversity. We all have experiences in life. We all have talents, um, that we can bring to the table. And the more people around the table with diverse attitudes and, backgrounds, I think you come to a better decision.

KW: You know, I agree with Jackie. Jackie is Greg's wife. I'm looking at the camera like somebody's out there, but the growth that I've seen from you as a trustee and as a person, I think, has really been able to take those things that you're learning and apply them and see how they're acting on campus. The fact that you're asking the questions about how are we making sure our most vulnerable students are being protected, I think is tremendous that you've been able to do that. We've seen, you know, other trustees that it hasn't been so easy for, and we don't need to talk about those trustees, but, it's been good to see all of our trustees leading on these issues of what can we do to make it better for students. And it's not just a matter of how we're going to make sure we offer classes and try to offset some finances. We're really understanding that broad needs for all of our students. I think that's a great way for you and for the board to move forward.

GP: Well, one of the things that I was thinking about when you asked me about this, uh, podcast was the diversity of the board. When I came on the board, it was four white males and one black male. Now we have three women, two Hispanics, one black, one Jewish person and one white male. Me. So the board has completely changed, but it's also shown that it represents the diversity of our college.

KW: Yeah, I think it's great when you look at our board and you see a board that looks like the Northern Santa Barbara county community, I think that's a really positive aspect. I think one of the other things that's been great about the board, and we've had some other board members on as well, and we've talked about this with them, is that the board, by accreditation standards and state law, is supposed to, you have the final say on what happens at the college, but you're really supposed to let the college's day-to-day operations go. And our board is really good about that. Our board is really good at making sure we're financially sound, making sure students are being served, but not getting involved in the day-to-day activities. I think you've become a leader here and in the state with helping other boards understand what are the things that you should be doing that would make your college successful. So talk about how you see that at the triple CT with some of the things you see at other colleges that are kind of crazy.

GP: Well, uh, as you and I know, there's 116 community colleges in 73 districts. I see trustees that it's a platform for another political position. You can tell just by talking to them and their attitudes at meetings. The majority, though, are concerned about the students. And we talk about it here at Hancock, and we talk about it, uh, at the state board. Students come first. And how does this affect the students? And sometimes you get into discussions about finance or legislature and you've got to come back to, why are we talking about this? We're all here for the students. That's why we got elected. That's our platform, hopefully, that we got elected on, and we're student-focused.

KW: That's great. So, um, let's just wrap up with some more fun conversation about you're retired now, you're a big cyclist and hiker and you and Jackie like to travel, you know? You and Jackie do a lot together. What are some of your favorite things to do?

We're going to go see our daughter who lives in Cody, Wyoming. That's where our four grandchildren are. You know, Jackie and I... I'm a cyclist. I try and cycle twice a week. We do a lot of hiking. We were fortunate to spend a couple of weeks in Switzerland one year with a fellow Rotarian. That was great. We had to do a lot of training because you're at some altitude there and being in your 60s, you have to be ready when you get there. The one thing I'll say about Jackie, is she's very supportive. As you know, Kevin, I'm involved in other boards and in rotary, and whenever we're doing something where we're doing a public service and we need some help, she's always right there with me. So she's been a great support. You know, we have a lot of meetings with Hancock, so she's very understanding. I've got to travel up to Santa Maria and, you know, it makes it

a lot easier to serve and you've got to have that relationship with your significant other to do the things that you have to.

KW: Yeah, Jackie's great. And then it's funny, know, I'll show up at an event with my wife and you're there and Jackie's there, and Jackie always tells Shannon "You're at every event" and it's like, well, Jackie, so are you. So, Jackie keeps a pretty busy. You know, the other thing we haven't really talked about, though, is when I first hired on and I'd done my research at the college, or so I thought, and I'd seen PCPA, and that's a great drama program. It's kind of hard from the outside when you don't know what PCPA is to really understand that. And you asked me about how happy I was to be at a college with a program like PCPA and I stammered something about yeah, that's absolutely fantastic, and walked off like "I got to go figure out what's going on at PCPA because this is obviously clear it was a bigger thing than I thought it was. So now we have this conservatory theater that's generating like 300 FTS a year. I think my favorite part of PCPA is actually um, the fact that we bring students every Thursday we do a student matinee of whatever show we're doing and then on every fall we do a traveling show where they take a program designed to, almost an after school special type show, to elementary schools, but it's afternoon special with a real focus on modern issues of bullying, of, racial equity, those kind of things. That hits more than 10,000 students right there. When you look at what these students are doing and our faculty and leaders in that program, PCPA is huge and you're a huge proponent not only of PCPA but of the Solvang Theaterfest where we perform our summer shows. So give us your thoughts on PCPA.

GP: Well, as somebody that might be listening to this, we're the only community college that has a program like this in the United States where you can get a certificate in acting or in a technical field. Sound, lighting, production. So, it's a huge economic impact on the Santa Ynez Valley when people, you know, if I come up to Valley, what do I need to do? The first thing I tell them is "You need to go to a PCPA performance" because you're going to sit close. We've got a great sound system which Allan Hancock College was able to provide. They've reformulated the theater now so, you're going to be 10 feet away from professional actors. I've been to Broadway in New York. I think personally the quality that we have here at PCPA is just as good as you're going to see in New York or a lot of shows in New York.

KW: You're right. Certainly as good as the traveling shows that come through New York. They're not from New York, but they come and travel through the Midwest and we're every bit that good. Our students and faculty are building the sets and designing costumes and running the lighting and the sound. And then the student actors are just a phenomenal talent. There's a lot of energy in that program.

GP: Well, one thing I remember when I first came here, Tim Bennett, who was with the electrical workers brotherhood union, he always said, "We provide you a career, not a

job." And that's always stuck with me. That's what we do at PCPA. It's not just a hobby. These people are going to go from here and they're desired in Broadway, Los Angeles, because of their technical skills. When they see that certificate from Allan Hancock College, it's the golden ticket for a job. So, they're able to. When you talk to those students, just like when we opened the stagecraft last week, , 6.9 million of the Measure I bond, talking to those students, they're so enthusiastic about what they're doing in this new facility. As Mark Bohr said, it's going to be better than a lot of places you go to work at professionally when you're doing set construction.

KW: Our technical theater students, over the last several years and the pandemic may have blocked some of this, but routinely 100% of the students finishing that are getting a job in some sort of entertainment industry, whether they might be working on a cruise ship or they might go to work for Disney or Universal, or they might go to work in a regional theater and some have gone to Broadway. We have a lot of Tony award winners that came out of PCPA. And the acting students have a similar success where they're actors, so they don't really get jobs the way that we think of somebody being employed, but they're getting gigs working in that same kind of entertainment industry. It's way more than just drama classes, it's a full-on career preparation program. And I think we're pretty fortunate to have that.

GP: Yeah, absolutely. And we have a great director with Mark Bohr who always has that enthusiasm about it. And like I said, talking to the kids, you know, that you're doing something that they're just totally 100% invested in.

KW: Yeah, it would be great. If you love something half as much as Mark loves putting on theater, you'd be in pretty good shape. Right? Well, I'm grateful that you're on our board and we're a better college for your service and it's great to have alumni who understand what happens at Hancock College who come back and serve in these kinds of leadership positions. So thanks for joining us to do this. We'll look forward to many more years of you being on the board and being part of Hancock College.

GP: Thank you for having me, Kevin.

KW: This has been Hancock Conversations. I'm Superintendent President Kevin Walters, and we've been talking to our board president, Mr. Gregory Pensa. Thanks and we'll see you next time.

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