

Announcer: Welcome to Hancock Conversations, an Allan Hancock College podcast. Join President Dr. Kevin G. Walthers and members of the Hancock community, as they explore the stories behind the people and places that make Allan Hancock College the unique hub for learning that it is today. You're sure to learn something new and even have a little fun along the way.

Kevin Walthers: Well good afternoon. This is Kevin Walthers, Superintendent President at Hancock College. This is Hancock Conversations, and this will probably be the loudest and longest conversation we ever have in this, because our guest is Shannon Seifert, an alum and the CEO of the Santa Maria YMCA and a good friend of mine. And she's a good, good alum and a good community member. I'm gonna read a little bit about her and then we're gonna have a real conversation. So, Shannon was hired as the CEO of the Santa Maria Valley YMCA in January of 2008. She's an active member of the Y California Alliance. Why California, Shannon?

Shannon Seifert: Well, I like California. I'm partial.

KW: That's good. She's also on the small to mid-size national YMCA Cabinet, and she served on the YMCA National Board, and on the Y National Membership Standards Committee, that seems ironic.

SS: Doesn't it? That's an oxymoron.

KW: She's president of her Rotary Club in 2015-16, and is currently serving on the board for the Women's Fund, CALM Rotary, and is an employment ambassador for the California Strawberry Commission. She earned her A.A. degree from Hancock College in 2006, where she studied business administration and sociology. She went on and earned her bachelor's degree in business management in sociology from Brandman. So, let's talk about your time as a as a Hancock student and how you got here. Where'd you come from?

SS: Well I gotta say when I came here to Hancock, it was at behest of my YMCA board. They were watching me do some work and watching the current CEO at the time and said, "You know, you should probably tee up for this job, and we'll back you up on your education." And I'm like, "All right." I said, "Well, I'm going to start Hancock the next week," and so I did. I came in and was the oldest student, I was so annoying. In the classes, you know when you're an older learner, you kind of come in and go, "Oh, I know the answer," and I raise my hand, and all the other students are like, "Come on lady, just get this class going." And I'm positive I added a very, very strong influence to those young learners.

KW: You guys are the worst.

SS: We are the worst. Even I knew, I was annoying.

KW: Poor students for them and the professors, like, well, that's all I got, if nobody has any questions, and sure enough the re-entry students got their hand in the air.

SS: We can't help ourselves. We're so excited that we still have a brain cell left.

KW: So, you got your A.A. and then you did Brandman.

SS: I did Brandman after, and here's what I loved about Hancock, I have to say, the online learning. Because I was going to school full-time, carrying full units working full-time and I had two teenage girls in high school, and a husband who basically raised them, fed them, and clothed them while I was in school. And so, I have to say that the 4 a.m. online classes. If it hadn't been for that accessibility here, I

don't know that I could have done it. So, it was really, really cool and Brandman, same. Had to show up for statistics and a few of those key classes, but it was, it's a huge asset here.

KW: Oh, that's awesome. So, what's your favorite class?

SS: Definitely not Algebra II, I had to get tutoring for that from a 12-year old tutor. I didn't know you took 12-year olds at Hancock, but this kid was a genius, and he taught me how to do Algebra II in the Tutoring Center.

KW: That's awesome, every once in a while, we get one of those.

SS: I know, I was amazed.

KW: So, you're big in the community. And when we talk about the community, you know I feel like over the last five or six years after the recession, we've been able to really attack poverty problems in this community, as a group, all of us together, the college, the school districts, the YMCA, the Boys and Girls Club.

SS: The hospital.

KW: Talk about that a little bit.

SS: Yeah. The YMCA is, we're completely dependent on our partnerships. There's nothing we could do in our community, we are at the hub over there, but we're huge on prevention. We take those little itty bittys, and teach them and often bring the parents into the routine of, you know, hey, here's some ways that we can make things better with our preschool, and with our Rise Up program, of which Hancock is heavily involved in, and our camps and all of that. And we grow them, the help of this community, and then we want to hand them off to people. School district, we partner with all the time, handing off our fifth-graders to your Bulldog program. There's the hospital, we work with behavioral issues, as well as CALM. So, these, all these partners help us build a stronger base and a future for the community.

KW: You know, a lot of times we'll hear people say things like, you know, because you're talking with the parents, you know, "Well why don't these parents coming to the parent teacher conference? Why aren't they more involved?" And we see these parents and they're working, so talk about how you help support the parents when they can't.

SS: Absolutely. So, I have to say this. Like millennials and parents, they get a bad rap. Now there's a few, you know, yeah, it's true. But, most of the time with the parents that we work with, and we work a lot with the farming working community, and families. They're working their tails off. We got single parents, we got them out there working at 4 a.m. They're just trying to put food on the table, and they're trying to take care of their families and have a roof over their heads. They care so much about their kids and this next generation, they just don't have capacity to do it all. And I truly believe it's our responsibility in this community, to give them a hand up, not a handout, this is a hand up and it's necessary as partners.

KW: That's huge in our community. Because we see the same thing with the parents for we suppose, the high school parents. And when we tell them their kids can come to college free. And now we started with your Rise Up Kids, selling them come to Hancock, come to Hancock. And you see the parents' eyes just light up, how excited they are because they know that's where their kids need to get to. And when

you're working 60 hours, 70 hours a week at manual labor you just, you can't show up for parent-teacher conferences at three in the afternoon, it doesn't work.

SS: And, you can't even help your kids with their homework, right? Not that I was any great at it with my kids either. But truly, if you're if you're speaking a whole different language, and you haven't had a higher education, we're dependent upon this educational system to get our next generation through. And these kids have brought parents to us in such a genuine, authentic way. So those partnerships are building and going, and the biggest issue is the trust. And that's a slow burn, but it's happening.

KW: Yeah, absolutely. See, your kids are older than mine. I'm telling you, it's easier to help them with homework these days.

SS: Is it?

KW: Yeah, 'cause he comes in. Did you Google that? I'm just, here every answer is.

SS: Oh, you're right. I'm jealous.

KW: Even the math problems are on Google, it's crazy. You just Google the math thing in there and then it gives you the answer.

SS: Really? I could have done without my 12-year old. (Laughter). What are those tutorees, do you still even have the tutoring program because Google?

KW: We actually do have the tutoring program, because we expect our students to take calculus, and that's a very difficult class, and physics. We're teaching them right, you know, we're really doing some cool things with, with that that I think help. You know, we start to see the kids coming from the YMCA and from the Boys and Girls Club. And we see them on campus and bring them here, and they start to see how important it is to do well in school before they come here, and having that connection is really important.

SS: Ah, alright. Totally.

KW: So, we're good at the kids. What do you think we need to do to get better outreach for adult learners in our community?

SS: So, I will say, for the Y, we're very, very kid-focused. What happens with us when parents come to us, for instance, I was at a thing at Marian hospital last night. And a couple of the moms, they're community moms, are like, "Hey you know what, we have a bunch of adults here who need a swim lesson, they've never learned how to swim." Again, back to our culture in Santa Maria, swimming just isn't a priority, and never has been, and all of a sudden, these adults are like, "We need to learn how to swim." I'm gonna say that's a gateway thing. Once you get people in to do something like that that they want to do, the education opportunities and the engagement opportunities present themselves as you build those relationships, back to the trust issue.

KW: Right. So, we talked about changing the odds. What do you think's the most important thing the Y does to change the odds for our community?

SS: Early, early prevention, early intervention. I think that we get those little preschoolers in there, two-and-a half. We have fabulous opportunity to say, "Here's some options, here's some things you can do."

And we're really, really focused on people who can't afford it, who can't afford childcare, can't afford preschool. We're in the middle of a fundraiser right now, raising \$300,000 and all of that goes back out to programs like this. Our STEM programs for summer camp, the Rise Up programs. These kids are often handpicked because they have one parent who's working all day and cannot do the things that need to be done to help this child thrive.

KW: What's your what's your capacity for, for how many kids you can take?

SS: So, our preschool, 37. Right now we're looking to grow that. In the middle of capital project as a matter of fact, right now, expanding the options there, and camps, 300. Outreach, we started in Guadalupe on campus, and then outreach in Los Alamos, so we're really, really broadening our horizons because these families can't get to us. It can't be, "Oh, build it and they will come," no offense. I mean Hancock's great, but you do have distance learning as well. So, we're really sensitive and my board strategic plan and mine is, get out there, get out there where you're needed. So, we take our training staff and engineers, and we go to these sites where these kids can congregate, usually at a school site because the parents already trust the school. So, I don't have to worry about building that, it's already pre-built for me, I just need relationships and board members who are administrators.

KW: Cool. For those 37 kids, do you have a waiting list?

SS: We do, it's intense.

KW: Is there a way to help those kids get to another provider?

SS: Well, we have the list of every preschool here, including Hancock, which I think you have a giant waiting list as well. Yeah, it's definitely an issue and it's expensive. I mean anybody who has raised a kid knows how expensive it is to care for them, educate them, especially that one to five and how important it is because that's their sponge age. That's the technical term right? The sponge age?

KW: That's fine. Yes.

SS: Yeah, I studied that.

KW: We actually have a whole class on sponge, sponge kids.

SS: Sponge, one to five.

KW: Yeah, it's a three-unit class.

SS: [Laughter]. Porous.

KW: You know, our friends at United Way, they kind of put together, they added up how much it costs to live here. I mean, so for a family of four in our community, it's \$76,000 a year. That's just the basic food, medicine, transportation, cost to live here, to have a roof over your head, to go to work, and to send your kids to school. \$76,000 a year. Except, if one of those two kids in that family of four is a preschooler, that jumps to \$91,000 a year, and that's how much the childcare is.

SS: Right.

KW: Our Public Affairs director is over there nodding about her head about childcare costs.

SS: That's what I'm saying, right, I know. It's so, it's so ridiculously expensive, so anything we can do to mitigate, that we do.

KW: So, you know, I think we live in a great community because people are willing to step up and help. It's, you know, it does feel like one fundraiser after another, but you see those people and you see the folks who had it, who had a hand up when they were kids, coming, stepping up and helping. Talk a little bit about what the community does not just for the YMCA, but for everybody else.

SS: What the community in Santa Maria does?

KW: Yes, Santa Maria.

SS: Oh my gosh. So I will say, I'm gonna use you as an example. When I call you and say, this is like I'm setting him up to you guys, so be ready, but when I call you and say, "Kevin, can you help me go to Vandenberg Air Force Base, and present this to the giant colonel there so that I can get on a streamline list to get free STEM items for my Rise Up Kids?" And you take a chunk out of your day to support me and my board to go speak for two hours on something that you may or may never see anything from. That is the key to the community and my responsibility to do that back. The other things I see in this community, I'm loving the way the chamber is stepping up. Last night, that hospital with them taking on all the things that you're taking on, and then saying, "Yeah but there's a mental behavior," I think is the term right now. There are some issues around that and there's no care here in North County. It's all, it's all really focused in South County, instead of lamenting that, let's do something about it.

KW: Yeah.

SS: So, to me, that is the key and then, and then my responsibility and I think all of ours is, suit up and show up, be part of it. Don't, don't sit home going, "Well, that's nice that you're doing that, that's great." Just showing up, there's connections you don't even know you have that can help that cause, until you're there. So I think that's key for all of us.

KW: I like to suit up and show up, I'm going to steal that.

SS: Help yourself.

KW: Take from the witty, give to the dull. That's my motto. [Laughing].

SS: I will do it for you Thursday morning.

KW: So, well, and you know, it is crucial because I think we've got this community that, when you look at the big institutions and like to think it starts with Marian and Hancock, again. Then you start to look at the service agencies and your service agency is kind of a big dog among the service agencies. And we all know each other and we know the school district superintendents, and you're right, when somebody says we got to do something, everybody's like yeah, no, everybody's like yeah, that can't be done until they're all about, let us all get together and figure how to make it happen. So, that that's so exciting to me. We'll have this here we'll have seventh-and-eighth graders from Santa Maria Bonita District who need summer school, and they come to Hancock and do summer school at Hancock.

SS: Right on.

KW: So, they're on campus and it's like, that's perfect.

SS: Plus, they're gearing up for their college years because they're comfortable and safe here, and they know, they know it. Oh, I love that ownership. Very cool.

KW: All right, I got rapid fire questions for you.

SS: Oh, this is so fun and then are we going to do a lip sync? [Laughing]

KW: We can do lip sync, let's do that. We can put it in the closed captioning.

SS: Could you?

KW: Do you have closed captioning on podcast?

SS: [Laughing]. Okay, boomer. Hey, don't act like you're not.

KW: I'm not actually, I'm Gen X.

SS: Right under the cusp.

KW: I'm Gen X, and I hate the millennials, and the boomers.

SS: Oh, you're in that middle ground.

KW: You know, someday the last boomer is going to be alive, it will have to be a guy or this doesn't work, because, he'll be like 114 years old and they'll just make him president because they're all, he's the last one. We don't even have to have an election, just ...

SS: Why not? Last leaf on the tree.

KW: Last boomer. I don't even want to get to be president anymore. And that's not a commentary on either political party 'cause they're all boomers. We're gonna finish this up before staff kick us out.

SS: Wait, wait I have so much more to tell you.

KW: What are you gonna tell me?

SS: Well, I wanted to tell you that. Well let's see what your rapid-fire questions are.

KW: This has to be the last part.

SS: This has to do with, oh this has to be last?

KW: This has to be last, so.

SS: Well my thing is, I was gonna say where I came from. Because there was a question in there, about education and my family, and none of my family was educated. And there are six of us kids, and our education came, I mean I've shared a little bit with you in Rotary, but, it came from, I would say, I'm gonna use this term, not lightly, survivalist skills. But, for instance, learning to drive a truck. I was raised on a ranch, no stoplights. No, no lights of any kind, you're on dirt roads. And my dad said, "On your 16th birthday, I'm going to take you to San Francisco, I've never even seen a stoplight. I'm gonna teach you how to use a clutch on a hill with a giant diesel tank in the back of this work truck that has two bald tires." I'm like, "Oh, that sounds great. Let's do that." It was so terrifying, mostly for the people behind me on the hill. But we burn out a clutch. We learned it, I learned how to drive a stick. I'm very proficient

now, anywhere I go, but that, Hancock was a piece of cake, compared to the school of hard knocks and it was a beautiful education with guidance. And, I still have a clutch in my car, so I'm excited about all of that.

KW: Can you parallel park?

SS: I can parallel park.

KW: Nice.

SS: No, I'm the master, I'm a master.

KW: Do you want to compete?

SS: Do you?

KW: Yeah.

SS: And back up a trailer. No?

KW: I have not done that in a long time.

SS: Doesn't matter, once you know it, you know it. Okay, go ahead with your rapid fire.

KW: Okay. So, what town did you grow up in?

SS: I grew up in King City, Monterey County farmer, fifth-generation Californian. And so, we grew up kind of raising ourselves. You know, I think there's a balance between structure and no structure at all. We were the no structured family, go play and come back at dark. We played with a magnifying glasses on the dry grass and lit a hill on fire, and we did a few things that maybe we needed a tiny bit more, you know, supervision, but we all made it out. And so did my parents. So, I'm gonna say I love that Hancock has structure, but also some free time. That art, is it the art studio I saw down there, with your cool new app that the kids, students? That gallery, I can't wait to go back in there. I'm totally going back in there after this, because it's fascinating the stuff these students are coming up with, and that is some time that they got to spend just, free-forming I'm going to guess.

KW: So, that you know that's a whole job that you can have now, is doing all of that digital media, all that kind of stuff.

SS: I know.

KW: It's gonna be fantastic. We'll get our new facility, they're gonna have this great space and ...

SS: Parents are always saying, "My kids on the phone, what are they gonna be able to do?" That. That's fabulous. Yeah, it's really cool.

KW: You know why we weren't on our phones when we were kids? because we didn't have them.

SS: We didn't have them. [Laughter] It's the only reason.

KW: Oh, they're no worse, they're no worse than us. They just got better toys.

SS: They're not, they do. I'm a little envious from there, but it's okay. Carry on your rapid fires.

KW: I would have never graduated from college if YouTube existed.

SS: I know that. I'm glad you're able to hold the position that while it exists.

KW: Alright, are you ready?

SS: I'm ready.

KW: Is it wrong for vegetarians to eat animal crackers?

SS: Perfectly acceptable, vegans as well.

KW: What's your favorite junk food?

SS: Oh, Hot Cheetos.

KW: Hot Cheetos. Do you know how those were invented?

SS: Do tell.

KW: So, there was a guy who worked at the Fritos Cheetos factory.

SS: Okay.

KW: And they would have these blanks that would come out and he would take them home, and his family was from Mexico, and he had grown up putting the hot kind of powder on them.

SS: Right.

KW: And just kept doing that, and then like brought him back to work and, was like, "You guys should try these." And that's how they came up with, and now he's like a bigwig in the Frito-Lay company.

SS: I totally believe you. As an educator, I know you wouldn't mislead me.

KW: Too good to fact check.

SS: I won't even bother, I believe. That's my new thing, let's just not know.

KW: It's more complex than that, but that's kind of the story, so ...

SS: Well good, I picked a good one.

KW: Alright. Do you believe in fate?

SS: I do.

KW: How come? [Laughing]

SS: You know, I don't think we can be any other. [Laughing]

KW: This isn't a really rapid fire, but ...

SS: Go to the next one.

KW: Because you know, we haven't talked about Tim. You know, you and Tim are awesome.

SS: Okay, are we speaking of fate, are we talking fate? Or did we move on from that?

KW: Is that the fate thing, or is he from King City too? I would like to know my options.

SS: No, Tim was from L.A., San Fernando Valley. Here I am, no traffic lights, and here he is, king of traffic, and we meet in the middle here. He's a construction guy building my new office when I work for Shell Oil. I mean, face it, I was fascinating to him. I was like a weird creature from another planet and, I mean, irresistible. Tim's pretty tolerant, can you tell?

KW: Oh, you know, we were all at a concert once, and they opened up a dance floor down there, and you decided to go dance and Tim was right there with you. I had a great video of Tim dancing, he was really good at it, and Tim's kind of a staid guy, and he told me says, "You know, this is what I learned a long time ago, Shannon's going to dance. So I should learn how to do that because I want her dancing with me." What a great thing to say, right?

SS: I know, 38 years, it seems to be panning out well for us. Yeah, I like him.

KW: Come on the downhill side now, right?

SS: It's okay, it's alright. At least you, with your X Gen. I'm the last leaf thing on the tree. I am going to be the last one.

KW: So, you want to climb a mountain or jump off of a plane?

SS: Oh, jump off of a plane. Yeah, very lazy.

KW: Have you ever done that? Just let gravity take care of it?

SS: Very lazy. Just let gravity fling me out, pull something, I'm good.

KW: But you've done that before?

SS: Yeah, I have.

KW: Where did you do that?

SS: In Santa Cruz, my daughter's 26th birthday. All four of us went there with two daughters, Katie and Rae. And Katie, Rae's getting her doctorate right now as a matter of fact. And she came to Hancock as well for two years. She just wants to be called Dr. Rae, though to be like a DJ. [Laughter] But, my other daughter decided on her 26th, She goes, "I think I want us all to jump out of a plane," And we wouldn't do it when they were little, because you have that self-preservation thing with kids, or we had it for a moment, it left. But we're like "Okay, sure, why not? That sounds like a great idea." So all of us girls went out first, and Tim was last. He goes, "Oh god, I don't want to do it. But now if I don't do it, that's really bad."

KW: I'm not jumping out of a perfectly good plane.

SS: Why not?

KW: I might not even jump out of one that's not perfectly good.

SS: Stay on to the last minute, would you?

KW: Like sort of pull it up at the end.

SS: So, you're telling me you'd climb a mountain?

KW: Oh, I've done that a bunch.

SS: Where?

KW: I lived in Utah.

SS: Well, that doesn't mean you climb there. I live in California, doesn't mean I go out and climb.

KW: No, I didn't climb like up the face of a mountain, but we would hike up to the top of the mountains. And I remember one time I was with a friend and we took this really steep, great hike up to the top of this, this peak and we were winded, and we were exhausted, and we get up and you hear these people talking, and they're obviously having lunch. And we kind of stagger over, and we walk around, it's this couple, they're like 70 years old, but the same height.

SS: Oh, that's so humbling isn't it? Drinking a beer, a six-pack they brought up with them.

KW: Maybe there's a flatter way.

SS: Did you guys take a tram? [Laughter]

KW: How did that work? [Laughter]

SS: I got you, I get it. That's my type of hiking joke, except for the actual hiking part.

KW: Yeah, exactly. Alright. Well, I think that's all of our questions.

SS: This was fun.

KW: Thanks. It was fun. Thanks for coming. Thanks for being a great community leader.

SS: Thank you, Kevin. this was really fun, I love Hancock.

KW: See you tomorrow.