



Orange Coast College Dance Department Hosted Free Day of Dance

The Orange Coast College Dance Department hosted a free Day of Dance event on August 4 at OCC's Dance Studio B. This exciting event invited dancers of all levels to participate in a variety of classes, including Jazz, Modern, Advanced Tap, Middle Eastern, and Contemporary.

Each class was taught by a member of the OCC dance faculty, including award-winning choreographer Zach Groenewold. Participants were able to sign up for more than one class.

"We are excited to offer these short sample classes to our greater dance community," says OCC Dance Department Chair Rachel Berman. "This inaugural Day of Dance will provide a glimpse into the diverse offerings within our amazing department."

In addition to the dance classes, two program information sessions were held: one for Pilates and a general session for OCC Dance. The OCC Dance Department offers over 75 dance courses, with many available throughout the year. The department's programs prepare students for university transfer and offer two Associate Degrees, A.A. in Dance and A.A. in World Dance, as well as Certificates of Achievement in Dance Instructor, Commercial Dance, World Dance Instructor, Comprehensive Pilates Instructor and Pilates Mat Instructor.



OCC Artist Promise to Provide \$1,000 Scholarships to Aspiring Arts Students

Orange Coast College is launching OCC Artist Promise, an initiative that will provide \$1,000 scholarships to 200 prospective students entering the College's Visual and Performing Arts (VPA) programs.

This new initiative is part of the OCC Endowment for the Arts, which was established through a transformational \$9.44 million gift from an anonymous alumni donor in late 2024. The \$1,000 awards are available to eligible students enrolling in VPA-related programs starting in Fall 2025, helping to offset tuition and material fees.

OCC Artist Promise Scholarships are available for new students entering VPA programs such as art, dance, music, digital media

art and design, photography, theater arts, film and television, and immersive media. To qualify, recipients must meet with a counselor to declare their major in one of the VPA programs and complete at least one class in their major during their first semester.

"This is an incredible opportunity for students who may have thought college – and a career in the arts – was out of reach," says Dean of Visual and Performing Arts Larissa Nazarenko. "This scholarship is designed to ease the financial burden and send a clear message: your creativity matters, and we believe in your future."

Applications for the OCC Artist Promise are now open. For more information on how to apply, visit OCC's Visual and Performing Arts webpage.

Former Pirate coach, Mike Thornton, passes away



Mike Thornton - longtime Hall of Fame Orange Coast College women's basketball coach and beloved figure throughout California Community College women's basketball - passed away on June 22 due to complications brought on by Alzheimer's Disease. He was 77 years old.

"Mike was a legend, not just here at Orange Coast College, but throughout all of women's basketball throughout the state," OCC Athletics Director Jason Kehler said. "Mike helped put women's basketball on the map at OCC, and his impact at Coast went far beyond the wins and losses. Our hearts go out to Mike's family, his former players, and assistant coaches. Forever a Pirate."

Thornton guided Coast to a 584-333 record and 23 postseason appearances over his 29-year Pirate coaching career (1989-2018). The list of amazing seasons is almost too many to mention in this story, but if there is a word that best describes Thornton and his teams, it is consistency. Year in and year out, you could count on the Pirates to be at or near the top of the Orange Empire Conference standings, and that is a testament to the hard work and dedication Mike put into his program.

"I first met Mike Thornton when he asked me to announce his games when he was hired at OCC in 1989," longtime OCC Foundation Director Doug Bennett said of Thornton. "I had only seen two OCC women's basketball games, but I immediately said yes. That was the beginning of a long friendship. There were many exciting wins and achievements mixed in with a few tough losses. Although it is great to celebrate and remember the wins, what I remember most about Mike was how much he cared about his own kids - Brian, Keith, and Kelsey. He was always talking about their achievements and how much he was committed to the young women in his program. While OCC had quite a few players who went on to four-year success, Mike enjoyed helping all of his student-athletes prepare for the next level, regardless of whether or not they were a star or the last player on the bench."

Thornton's legacy was forever cemented by the California Community College Women's Basketball Coaches Association (CCCWBCA) when they inducted Mike into their Hall of Fame in 2019. Four years later, Thornton was inducted into the Orange Coast College Athletics Hall of Fame. Among his many accomplishments during his time as the Pirates' head coach were:

- 23 postseason appearances in 29 years
- Two 30-win seasons
- Nine 25-win seasons
- 15 seasons with 20-or-more wins
- 23 seasons above .500
- 2002-03 CCCAA State Champions
- Three Final-Four appearances
- Five Elite-Eight appearances
- 16 All-State players
- More than 80 players continued their basketball careers at the four-year level
- Fifth-most wins in CCCAA Women's Basketball history
- One of only 13 head coaches with 500 or more wins

More than 80 players who played for Thornton continued their basketball careers at four-year colleges and universities across the country at schools such as UCLA, UCI, Cal State Fullerton, UNLV, the University of New Orleans, St. Mary's, Concordia University, Northern Colorado, Mercer, and Cal State Bakersfield. An additional 80-plus student-athletes transferred to four-year colleges and universities but did not play basketball.

Thornton and the Pirates put it all together in the 2002-03 season, finishing 31-6 overall and winning the 3C2A Women's Basketball State Championship with a 69-61 win over Contra Costa in the championship game.