

# Students and civic leaders share hopes for a better future

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*More than 70 gathered at LMC for 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Civic & Student Leaders Networking Lunch in honor of Cesar Chavez*

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**Pittsburg, Calif.** – Andrew Farias on Tuesday padded quietly into the conference center at Los Medanos College, just hoping to get through the event. Surrounded by jovial conversation and inquiring eyes, Farias said he was nervous about sharing a table with elected officials and community activists.

“I was afraid I wouldn’t understand everything they were talking about, or that I wouldn’t relate,” he said.

The Civic Leaders Luncheon was presented by the **Puente Program, Transfer & Career Services, office of equity and inclusion** and the **President's Office**. The event brought students together with local leaders to inspire and encourage them to follow through on their educational and career goals, and to assure them that they can succeed, no matter their background. The annual event honoring the labor rights activist, had been on hiatus since 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It returned to its in-person format this year.

The leaders in attendance – from members of Pittsburg City Council to Marivel Mendoza of Hijas del Campo – shared personal stories of how they achieved success and ascended to their roles in the community.

“Turns out, they’re human beings and have had the same struggles and interests as me,” Farias said. “The takeaway I got was: Don’t alienate yourself because you think you might not fit in. I’m glad I came. I shared that I want to be a teacher for special needs kids. They said it was noble, and a good thing, and that really gave me a boost.”

For Jose Rizo, program director at the Village Community Resource Center in Brentwood, the experience filled him with hope.

“I am just blown away by the students I met today,” he said. “They are knowledgeable and the conversations we had were amazing. They were really asking us about how we are going to bring about change. And to that, I want to challenge them to shake up innovation. We need them to challenge us as leaders to innovate in ways that are better than what we thought was OK.”

Mendoza, likewise, was impressed by the students.

As the event concluded, she said to the roomful of students, “I’m really looking forward to what the future will look like with leaders like you.”

*About Los Medanos College (LMC): LMC is one of three colleges in the Contra Costa Community College District, serving the East Contra Costa County community. Established in 1974, LMC has earned federal designations as a Minority-Serving and Hispanic-Serving institution. It offers award-winning transfer and career-technical programs, support services, and diverse academic opportunities in an inclusive learning environment. With exceptional educators, innovative curriculum, growing degree and certificate offerings, and state-of-the-art facilities, the college prepares students to succeed in their educational pursuits, in the workforce, and beyond. LMC’s Pittsburg Campus is located on 120 acres bordering Antioch, with an additional education center in Brentwood.*