



RANCHO CIELO

Winter 2024



World-renowned rockers Los Lobos headlined Rancho Cielo's second annual Jazz at the Ranch fundraiser, closing out a three-day celebration of music, food and community partnerships. PHOTO: ADAM JOSEPH

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As the end of 2024 nears, I am filled with gratitude and pride. It has been a year of growth, learning and opportunity. Reflecting on our accomplishments, I realize there are too many to include in this space. That's a good problem to have!

Above all, hope and opportunity are the heart of **Rancho Cielo**. Every young person who walks through our doors is welcomed into a supportive, encouraging environment where they can discover endless possibilities. Last June, we celebrated our largest graduating class. More than 90% of those students are continuing their education and/or working full or part-time jobs. The **Drummond Culinary Academy (DCA)** started a robust paid internship program that paired a dozen work-ready students with the region's best restaurants. Meanwhile, 125 students have completed our driver's education program since its inception—over 100 have earned permits, and more than 60 have received driver's licenses so far. Our new **Classic Car Restoration Program** was highlighted throughout **Monterey Car Week** at elite events, including the **Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance**, as our students showed the **1952 MG** that they restored.

When students returned in the fall, they immediately engaged in our ninth annual **Veggie Box & BBQ Fundraiser**, the most successful yet. Then, our DCA students helped deliver the biggest **Taste of Markon** dovetailed by our second **Jazz at the Ranch** (read more on p. 2), headlined by **Los Lobos** (pictured). Two months into our new **After School Program**, we're successfully bringing even more opportunities for academic help, social development, recreational engagement and mental and emotional support. Rancho Cielo turns 25 in 2025. None of this would be possible without you—our supporters, partners and friends. Your belief in our mission allows us to exist as a sanctuary where young people can truly thrive. Together, we are building a community of hope where every student can reach their full potential. Let's keep inspiring hope and creating opportunities for our students. You can contribute (scan QR code on p. 3) to our students' success through **Monterey County Gives!**. The annual holiday campaign runs through Dec. 31. Thank you for being a part of the Rancho Cielo family.

Chris Devers
CEO



Student Spotlight



Drummond Culinary Academy student Nico Hernandez sifts through the morning's radish haul from Rancho Cielo's Leadership Garden. PHOTO: ADAM JOSEPH

NICO HERNANDEZ Drummond Culinary Academy

"There was so much blood," he explains. "And my hand started to feel hot, and it was [throbbing]." While the sliced fingertip was painful and required an emergency room visit, the East Salinas native says he remained calm, and more

importantly, everyone enjoyed the scratch-made pozole. After just a few months, DCA Instructor Chef Efren Diaz Ortigoza already sees Hernandez's talent. He references a chicken fettuccine Alfredo dish with a Cajun-influenced kick that he recently whipped up in the DCA kitchen. "It was incredible," Chef Efren praises. "He knows to taste everything first [before serving it]." Chef Efren says Hernandez's relaxed

demeanor while working under pressure separates him from others. He saw it most recently during Jazz at the Ranch and the Monterey Jazz Festival. The 22-year-old high school graduate says his maturity stems from his year in Rancho Cielo's Silver Star Youth Program about five years ago. "I was hanging around the wrong group of kids and got myself in trouble," Hernandez explains. "I wasn't allowed back to [Alisal High] for a year. I have some family members that are locked up. I don't want that for me." Hernandez also spent several years in the workforce before DCA, first in quality control for Tesla and then as a machine operator for Taylor Farms. "The money was good, but that work wasn't for me," he says. "I love to cook. It's like a creative art. Your masterpiece is what you put on the plate. But it has to taste good, too!"

All That Jazz

In association with the **Monterey Jazz Festival**, **Rancho Cielo (RC)** hosted its second annual **Jazz at the Ranch** concert series and fundraiser Oct. 18-20, drawing over 500 attendees throughout three days. Rancho Cielo's 100-acre campus was transformed into a haven of world-class music, gourmet cuisine and strong community spirit. The event was a resounding success, with 100% of the proceeds benefiting RC's **Arts and Mental Health Programs**.

The intimate **Sally Hughes Church Amphitheater** at Rancho Cielo, with its stunning panoramic views of the Salinas Valley, provided the perfect setting for the concerts, with a glowing sunset as a backdrop to the musical performances.

Friday kicked off the weekend with an electrifying performance by renowned Bay Area blues guitarist **Chris Cain** and a showcase of local talent from



Los Lobos co-founding guitarist César Rosas feels the music as the crossover masters unleash Alvaro Carrillo Alacon's classic love song, "Sabor a mí." PHOTO: ADAM JOSEPH

the **Monterey Jazz Festival Regional All-Star Jazz Combo**. Saturday's lineup featured acclaimed Australian singer-songwriter **Sarah McKenzie**, whose vocal versatility captivated the audience. The evening was rounded out by San Francisco crooner **Nicolas Bearde and the Full Spectrum Jazz** band, adding soulful R&B to the mix. The event culminated in a thrilling performance by the **Latin Jazz Collective**, featuring **John Nava**, whose infectious rhythms set the stage for the headliner, the legendary **Los Lobos**.

The multi-Grammy Award-winning band from East L.A. delighted the crowd with their unique blend of rock, Tex-Mex and Americana, closing the night with a lively encore of "La Bamba" and "Good Lovin'."

In addition to the exceptional music, the event hosted an array of our community partners, including **Montage Health's Ohana**, **Salinas Valley Health** and **Harmony At Home**.

The top-tier "Food Experience" yielded an assortment of local restaurants, wineries and breweries that donated their expertise and products. Students from RC's **Drummond Culinary Academy** played a key role, serving innovative appetizers and working alongside professional chefs from the likes of **Cultura Carmel**, **The Meatery** and **Bayonet Grill**.

Jazz at the Ranch is more than a celebration of music and food. It is a powerful reminder of the life-changing work Rancho Cielo does and the community's ongoing support!

Read more at ranchocieloyc.org/news

Fundraising and Development

2024 Jazz at the Ranch



THANK YOU TO OUR
SPONSORS!



MONTAGE
Health



SUPPORT A STUDENT AT RANCHO CIELO!

With your generosity, we can continue to fund 100% of students' academic and vocational education, preparing them for higher education and full-time employment.

THE CAMPAIGN RUNS THROUGH DEC. 31

MONTEREY COUNTY **GIVES!**
Joining Together for Big Ideas

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Rancho Cielo is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization. Federal Tax ID #77-0555859





RANCHO CIELO

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Salinas, CA 93912
www.ranchocieloyc.org

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SAVE THE DATE



15th Annual

CULINARY ROUND UP

Sunday, February 23, 2025

Portola Hotel & Spa at Monterey Bay
Two Portola Plaza, Monterey

SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Joanne Bravo - jbravo@ranchocieloyc.org

CONTACT

Main Office

831-444-3533

Student Enrollment

recruitment@ranchocieloyc.org
831-444-3561

Donations

giving@ranchocieloyc.org
831-444-3530

Volunteer Opportunities

volunteer@ranchocieloyc.org
831-444-3523

Friday Night Dinners

ranchocieloyc.org/dining



GIVE

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P.O. Box 6948
Salinas, CA 93912