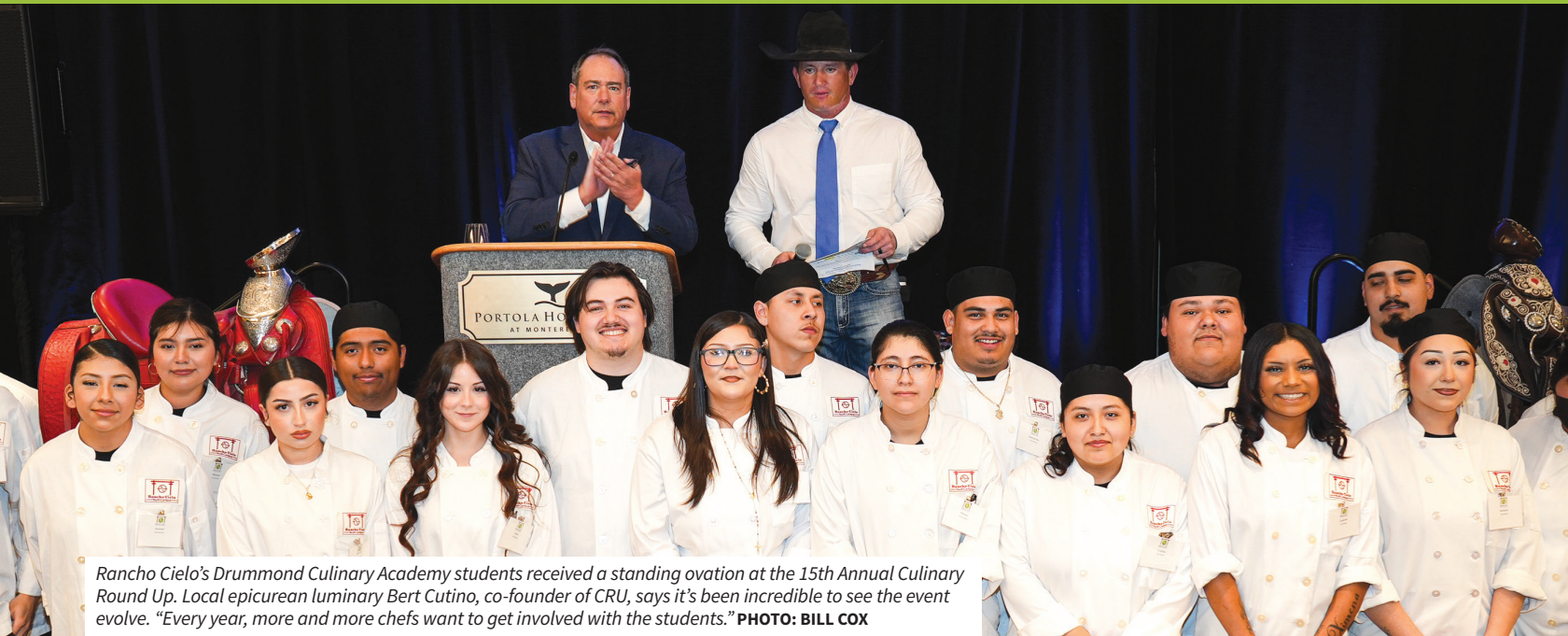




RANCHO CIELO

Spring 2025



Rancho Cielo's Drummond Culinary Academy students received a standing ovation at the 15th Annual Culinary Round Up. Local epicurean luminary Bert Cutino, co-founder of CRU, says it's been incredible to see the event evolve. "Every year, more and more chefs want to get involved with the students." PHOTO: BILL COX

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15th Annual Culinary Round Up is a Grand Slam!

After 15 years, the **Culinary Round Up** has proven it's much more than a foodie event or a fundraiser. It's a powerful reflection of how deeply this community believes in Rancho Cielo (read more on p. 3). Thank you for continuing to show up, celebrate with us and invest in our students' futures.

Our **Annual Partnership Fund** (APF) campaign is now underway. This is a vital opportunity to support Rancho Cielo's day-to-day operations, keeping our programs strong and resources accessible for every student who walks through our doors.

There's exciting momentum across all our programs. Our **Classic Car Restoration Program** is officially up and running, with a **1929 Model A Ford** as the next restoration project.

And soon, we'll launch the **Ford Technician Training Program**—another step forward in preparing youth for real-world careers.

In our **Construction & Sustainable Design Academy**, students are building the first two of several tiny homes, each paired with custom trailers built by our **Welding & Fabrication** students. Thanks to our partnership with **YouthBuild**, this hands-on, cross-disciplinary project helps to further impact our students' education and community.

Additionally, some of our executive staff recently attended the **Lift Summit**, where they gained insight into **Advanced Air Mobility** and **Unmanned Aerial Systems**, including drone technology. These forward-looking tools will soon be integrated into new learning tracks within our **Ag Tech Program**.

Finally, with spring in the air, we're already looking ahead to graduation on June 13—a milestone that reminds us why we do this work.

As **Eleanor Roosevelt** once said, "The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams." Our students believe—and so do we.

Chris Devers,
CEO



Fundraising and Development



15TH ANNUAL CULINARY ROUND UP

Thank You, Sponsors!

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• DIAMOND •

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Noland, Hamerly, Etienne & Hoss - Pisoni Family Vineyards - Refco Farms, LLC/SMD Vineyards, Inc.
Rodnick.Farm - The Ruby Company - Salinas Valley Ford - Waste Management - Wescom Credit Union



Fundraising and Development

15th Annual Culinary Round Up: A Feast of Success

Rancho Cielo's 2025 Culinary Round Up (CRU) at the Portola Hotel & Spa showcased an impressive partnership between Drummond Culinary Academy students and some of Monterey County's top chefs, creating an unforgettable night centered around food, mentorship and community.

Since launching in 2010, CRU has become a standout experience where students work directly with local culinary leaders to serve guests an evening full of flavor. This year, over two dozen chefs teamed up with students to deliver a "strolling dinner" of creative small plates and desserts.

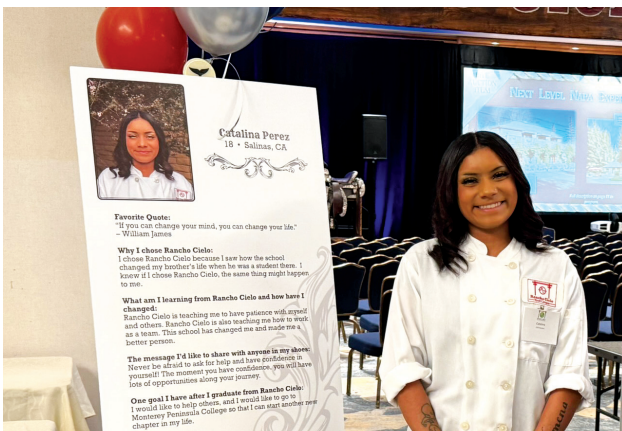
Guests enjoyed shrimp and lobster meatballs with chorizo emulsion and jalapeño powder, truffles, miniature parfaits and much more.

The event's success was made possible by the continued support of the community, donors, volunteers, sponsors and local beverage partners—proving once again that CRU is more than a dinner; it's a shared celebration of talent and opportunity.



In addition to the two-dozen Monterey County restaurants that participated in the 2025 Culinary Round Up, Drummond Culinary Academy Instructor Efren Diaz Ortigoza (pictured above, middle) prepared pulled-pork tacos with students (above) from a 33-pound pig which they learned how to butcher and debone.

PHOTO: MARTINA SOLINAS



Some of the night's most poignant moments came from the students who the event supports.

"Rancho Cielo has changed my life," the evening's first student speaker, 18-year-old DCA student Catalina "Cat" Perez (pictured, left), said. "The staff has helped me become more confident and have taught me new skills and shown me I can be successful. I realize now that there are so many adults who care about me, and it's okay to ask for help. I finally feel supported. I have a new view on life. I want to give back and help others."

After Perez graduates high school, she plans to attend college and work as a medical assistant or nurse. The night's second



Rancho graduate Jesus Hernandez says that the car he received through the RIDE Car Scholarship Award has been life-changing. He wouldn't be able to go to college and work while living in South County without his new wheels. PHOTOS: BILL COX

BY THE NUMBERS

\$550,000+

Raised

760+

Attendees

72

Sponsors

25

Restaurants

16

Wineries/Breweries/Libations

student speaker, Welding & Fabrication alumnus, Jesus "Chuy" Hernandez, spoke about being one of the three students to receive the first RIDE (Rancho Invests in Driving Equity) Car Scholarship Award. "This car has already made a huge impact on my life," Hernandez said. "It has given me the opportunity to maintain two jobs and get to my college classes."

Learn more about RIDE on p. 6.

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Bert Cutino
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Accelerator Project to Boost Rancho Cielo Programs

Rancho Cielo is set to expand its impact thanks to Uplift Central Coast. As one of 36 initiatives selected from a competitive pool of 136 proposals, Rancho Cielo will enhance its workforce development programs, ensuring local youth have greater access to career pathways in sustainable industries.

Uplift Central Coast, a regional partnership focused on economic resilience and equitable growth, has committed to early-stage project planning across six counties. This investment aims to drive long-term community benefits in job training, education and environmental sustainability.

For Rancho Cielo, the award represents an opportunity to accelerate its mission of empowering at-promise youth through hands-on learning and career preparation. Predevelopment assistance will allow for feasibility studies, assess expansion opportunities and refine its Ag Technology & Mechatronics, Welding & Fabrication and Auto &

Diesel Repair programs.

“By investing in Rancho Cielo, we’re not only strengthening the workforce pipeline but also creating sustainable economic opportunities for local youth,” Bruce Stenslie, President and CEO of the Economic Development Collaborative, said. Rancho Cielo and its partners plan to work closely with Uplift Central Coast to implement strategic initiatives that drive meaningful changes in Monterey County and beyond.



Uplift
Central Coast



Welding & Fabrication students practice various types of welds.
PHOTO: ADAM JOSEPH



THANK YOU!

MONTEREY COUNTY GIVES!
Joining Together for Big Ideas

More than **300** individual donations equaling over **\$241,000** will help continue to fund **100%** of students' academic and vocational education, preparing them for higher education and full-time employment.

**The key to a good life is making an impact,
big or small.**



Rancho Cielo Awards First-Ever RIDE Car Scholarships



From left: Isabel Patino, Anthony Trejo and Jesus "Chuy" Hernandez are the first recipients of the RIDE Car Scholarship Award.

PHOTO: ADAM JOSEPH

In February 2025, Rancho Cielo (RC) marked a major milestone: three graduates—Isabel Patino, Anthony Trejo and Jesus Hernandez—became the first recipients of the RIDE (Rancho Invests in Driving Equity) Car Scholarship Award. This new initiative tackles one of the biggest obstacles students face—transportation—by helping them remove barriers.

At the award ceremony, RC leaders—including CEO Chris Devers, Founder Judge John Phillips, Equity Committee Chair Jamie Kitz and Board Member Don Chapin, Jr.—underscored a central message: lack of reliable transportation often stands

between students and their goals.

Addressing this challenge has been a natural evolution for RC, starting with a daily bus and van system that now transports nearly 100 students across a 225-mile round trip.

RC has also built strong partnerships to expand access. Collaborations with MST (Monterey-Salinas Transit) and the Monterey County Hospitality Association have made free bus passes available to students, and MST's new Route 40 now offers direct service to the campus.

In 2023, RC launched a driver's education program with Drive Carmel to fill a gap left by traditional high schools. So far, 145 students have gone through the program, with over 115 earning permits and more than 70 securing licenses. RC covers DMV fees and provides rides, helping students gain mobility and, with it, independence.

The RIDE Car Scholarship, launched in 2024, is the latest step in this effort. Selected through a competitive process, the inaugural recipients earned more than just cars—they gained access to opportunity, momentum and a clearer path to success.



Scan the QR code above to support the program. Please write "RIDE Scholarship Program" in the "comments" section.

25 Years of Building Rancho: Sally Hughes Church Amphitheater

Rancho Cielo founder Judge John Phillips remembers it clearly: Rancho Cielo was once "nothing but an unsightly dumpsite."

In those early years, the school was more vision than reality. But it was a bold vision rooted in

giving young people purpose and hands-on opportunity. During a Board meeting, someone said, "We should have an amphitheater for these kids." The idea came with a price tag—roughly \$150,000—well beyond the program's early budget. But then a connection to the Salley Hughes Church Foundation led to funding.

"We had eight kids start on the project," Phillips says. "They were the most uninspired kids I had ever met. They didn't want to do anything, so I fired them. I told them I'd bring them back only if they promised to work hard." They did. And they returned with something to prove. That summer, they hauled base rock, poured concrete and worked alongside the Judge himself. By the end of the season, they had built more than a structure. They had built pride. The finished amphitheater, reminiscent of the Greek Theatre in Berkeley, features a proper stage and tiered seating with lighting for evening events. When the work was done, the students invited their families to a barbecue to show off what they had helped create.

Over a decade later, that same amphitheater held its largest audience yet. In 2024, around 600 people gathered there for Rancho Cielo's biggest graduating class in history.

"It started as a vision," Phillips reflects. "Now it's a place where young people celebrate their accomplishments. And they built it with their own hands."



More than a decade after the Sally Hughes Church Amphitheater was constructed, world-renowned rockers Los Lobos performed at Jazz at the Ranch in 2024.



Student Spotlight: Isaac Vargas

When Isaac Vargas wakes up in the morning, he looks forward to going to school—something he never imagined before starting at Rancho Cielo last fall. As a junior in the Auto & Diesel Repair program, he has discovered a passion for learning that once felt out of reach.

Before Rancho Cielo, Vargas attended two high schools in Salinas, where he often felt overwhelmed by the sheer number of students. “I didn’t get much attention from the teachers,” he explains. Without the support he needed, his enthusiasm for school faded. He began skipping class, falling behind, and getting into trouble.

“Rancho Cielo gives you a fresh new start,” Vargas says. “There are so many opportunities here.”

And he’s making the most of every one. His instructors and case manager agree that his dedication is unmistakable—he rarely misses a day.

“He’s always well-behaved and consistent with his learning,” says Auto & Diesel Repair instructor Luis Ruiz. “He’s a well-rounded kid—smart and dedicated to getting things done.” Rather than focusing on one specialty, Vargas is eager to master every aspect of auto repair.

Recently, he replaced the fuel tank in his 1991 Ford F350, a hands-on experience that reinforced his goals. Now 17, Vargas has a clear vision for his future: after high school, he plans to become a full-time mechanic.



Auto & Diesel Repair student Isaac Vargas learns a new skill everyday. Above, he’s repairing a 2012 Ford Escape.

PHOTO: ADAM JOSEPH

Alumni Spotlight: Cynthia Cuevas



Welding & Fabrication Instructor Angel Padilla says that Rancho Cielo graduate Cynthia Cuevas picked up welding very quickly, and once she finishes her college classes will be in demand within the industry. PHOTO: ADAM JOSEPH

Before Cynthia Cuevas came to Rancho Cielo, welding wasn’t even on her radar. In fact, she had never heard of it. But everything changed the day she struck her first arc.

“After completing my first practice weld, I knew I wanted to do this,” she says.

At 19, Cuevas enrolled at Rancho Cielo with a simple goal: finish her high school credits. Her newfound love for welding ignited her academic motivation. She not only completed her coursework but proudly graduated in 2024. Along the way, she transformed. “I saw her confidence spike big time,” says her case manager, Maria Alvarado. “She came in as a quiet and shy student and graduated as a class leader.”

For Cuevas, Rancho Cielo is more than just a place to learn—it’s a community that uplifted her.

“I believe everyone here is family,” she says.

“Everyone is happy to see me whenever I walk in. Maria and Angel remind me of that every time I’m here.”

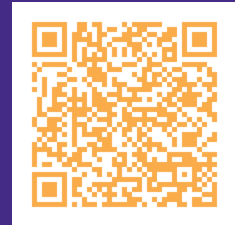
Now, with welding as her craft and Rancho Cielo as her foundation, Cuevas is ready to forge a future built on strength, skill and determination.

Ranch News



TAPAS ON
THE PATIO
RETURNS ON
MAY 2, 2025!

Support our culinary students
by joining us on the patio for
sunset views, shared plates
and fine local wines every
Friday evening in May!



RESERVATIONS REQUIRED
BEGINNING APRIL 21

ranchocieloyc.org
Rancho Cielo is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization

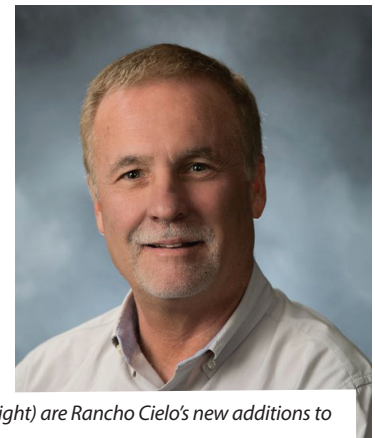
Rancho Cielo Welcomes Two New Board Members

Rancho Cielo is proud to welcome two dedicated leaders to its Board of Directors: Mike Costa and Dave Johnson.

Mike Costa, Partner at Costa Family Farms, returns to the Board after serving two prior terms. A longtime Rancho Cielo advocate, Costa has been instrumental in several key initiatives, including launching the Veggie Box Fundraiser in 2015, which continues to this day. He's held roles on the Family Fun Day Committee (Chair in 2017), served as Board Vice Chair in 2018, and contributed to the Governance, Equity and Ted Taylor Vocational Center Program Committees.



Mike Costa (left) and Dave Johnson (right) are Rancho Cielo's new additions to its Board of Directors.



"It's an honor to once again be a part of the Board of Directors," Costa says. "I'm excited to contribute my passion, experience and energy, to help further Rancho Cielo's mission, including acting as the Chairperson for the Veggie Boxes program, which helps provide fresh, nutritious food to our students and community."

His history of service reflects a deep commitment to Rancho Cielo's mission and the local community.

Joining him is Dave Johnson, owner and co-founder of Pacific International Marketing. A native of the Alisal-Salinas area, Dave brings a wealth of agricultural experience and local insight. After being mentored by industry pioneer Bruce Church, Johnson helped launch Pacific in the late 1980s. Today, the company operates across California, Arizona and Mexico, offering year-round fresh produce with a grower-centric approach. Dave is also the sole owner of Dynasty Farms, a regenerative farming business focused on sustainable agriculture.

Both Costa and Johnson bring invaluable leadership, experience and heart to Rancho Cielo. Their agricultural roots and community focus align perfectly with our mission to empower youth and strengthen the Salinas Valley. We're excited about their energy and vision for the board.



RANCHO CIELO

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SAVE THE DATE

VEGGIE BOX & BBQ

August 18-22



TASTE OF MARKON

October 3



25TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

October 25



CONTACT

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Student Enrollment

recruitment@ranchocieloyc.org
831-444-3561

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giving@ranchocieloyc.org
831-444-3530

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Friday Night Dinners

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