RANCHO CIELO

Fall 2026

Rancho Cielo's 11th annual Veggie Box & BBQ Fundraiser, held August 24–28, delivered an incredible 17,000 boxes of fresh, locally grown produce to families in need through our nonprofit partners, and raised more than $600,000 to support Rancho Cielo programs and the young people we serve. PHOTO: Tiffany Velasquez

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Susie Brusa, Interim CEO

I'm thrilled to serve as Interim CEO of Rancho Cielo. You might remember that I was the first professional leader here, and I served in that role for 12 years. My heart has always been with our students and dedicated staff. Coming back to the Ranch feels like coming home.

Here's what continues to resonate after all these years: We serve young people aged 16 to 24 who have been marginalized and have had the fewest opportunities. What we provide includes high school education, job training from industry professionals, mental health counseling, cultural affirmation and enrichment activities they deserve to experience. And we lift our youth with our belief in their ability to succeed, because when they get what they need, they thrive.

We're in the Love Business. Every academic teacher, vocational instructor, staff member, board member, counselor and industry partner on this campus is in the Love Business. Diplomas and job training matter, and our students work hard to achieve that success. But what ultimately changes a young person's life is being seen, believed in and held to a high standard by adults who care. The young people we serve are more important than the skills we teach.

The board is conducting a search for Rancho Cielo's next leader, so stay tuned. In the meantime, my focus is to keep this campus strong and steady.

Thank you for believing in our young people.

Susie Brusa, Interim CEO

The Next Generation of Classic Car Craftsmen

Rancho Cielo Board Member Bill Hayward and his family ride in the front and 2026 Classic Car Restoration graduates Aaron Correa and Max Perez enjoy the scenery from the backseat rumbler of the 1934 Rolls-Royce Phantom II Continental during the 2026 Pebble Beach Tour d'Elegance. PHOTO: Tiffany Harbrecht

For Rancho Cielo students, Monterey Car Week offers something different: a classroom. This year, that classroom stretched from Rancho Cielo's 100-acre campus to Carmel-by-the-Sea, the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance and the winding roads of the Monterey Peninsula. Two recent graduates, Max Perez and Aaron Correa, stood alongside a 1934 Rolls-Royce Phantom II Continental at the 75th annual Concours, while current students spent the week learning from some of the people responsible for keeping the collector-car world alive.

The experience began August 12 with Rancho Cielo's second Classic Car Education Day, which brought students, staff, community members and automotive enthusiasts together with professionals from an industry that is both highly specialized and increasingly concerned about its future.

James Mitchell, founder of Pendine, a British car collection management company, and Giles Crickmay, director of Frank Dale, a specialty Rolls-Royce and Bentley dealer, spoke candidly about their careers. Neither followed a conventional educational path. They talked about struggling in school, finding their way outside traditional academic systems and eventually building careers around a passion for historic automobiles.

For Rancho Cielo students, their stories carried an especially relevant message: There is more than one way forward. The Piston Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to helping young people pursue careers in the collector-car industry, also participated.

President Jeff Mason described the organization's scholarships and its efforts to create pathways into an industry where skilled technicians are increasingly difficult to find.

"The future of the classic car world depends on having skilled people to preserve, maintain and restore these cars," Mason said. "We're proud to support Rancho Cielo students as they take their first steps toward careers in the industry."

In addition, an extraordinary teaching tool arrived on campus. A pre-war 1934 Rolls-Royce Phantom II Continental was brought to Rancho Cielo, so students could learn and work alongside master detailers and restoration specialists as they prepared the automobile for the Concours d'Elegance.

The car belongs to Rancho Cielo Board Member Bill Hayward, a businessman and philanthropist who acquired the rare Rolls-Royce and had it restored to its original condition. He entered the vehicle in the Concours with Rancho Cielo students in mind. Perez and Correa were selected to help Hayward present the car at Pebble Beach because of the skills and enthusiasm they had demonstrated in Rancho Cielo's Classic Car Restoration program.

They learned the Phantom II's history, studied its mechanical details and absorbed the small pieces of knowledge that come only through experience, such as why some automotive professionals wear thin-soled shoes to better feel what an engine is doing beneath their feet.

The car carried a history of its own. One of its former owners was Don Williams, a founding participant in the Pebble Beach Concours. Rancho Cielo had another connection to Williams: Three years earlier, the Classic Car Restoration program became a beneficiary of a fund established in his memory to support underserved young people interested in automotive restoration. The connections continued throughout Car Week.

On August 13, more than 150 Ferrari owners gathered in Carmel-by-the-Sea for the Ferrari Owners Club Northern California Region's fourth annual Concours Carmel. Rancho Cielo students shadowed the judges, observing the process from close range and learning how experts evaluate some of the world's most

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Monterey Car Week

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celebrated automobiles. Then the students became judges themselves. They selected their favorite cars and presented owners with one-of-a-kind trophies, including rose sculptures Rancho Cielo students had welded themselves.

At the Pebble Beach Concours Forums, Rancho Cielo students and instructors listened to experts discuss the history and future of the automotive industry. They also encountered one of its most recognizable personalities: Jay Leno, who participated in a forum celebrating the living history of the automobile. Classic Car Restoration student Mario was the first Rancho Cielo student to ask Leno a question.

"What's your favorite car in your private collection?" Leno, ever the comedian, answered with humor, comparing his collection to the different loves of his life. Afterward, students met Leno and took photographs with him and other forum speakers.

Meanwhile, Perez and Correa received another lesson in the history and ritual of Car Week when they joined Hayward and his family in the 1934 Rolls-Royce for the Pebble Beach Tour d'Elegance. The route carried them along the 17-Mile Drive and Monterey coastline, offering the two young men a perspective on the Concours that could not be learned in a classroom.

Then came Sunday. On the Pebble Beach show field, Perez and Correa stood beside the Phantom II as they helped Hayward present the automobile to the Concours judges. Thousands may apply to participate in this premier competition, but only about 200 automobiles are selected. For two young technicians beginning their careers, the students couldn't imagine being next to a Rolls on the field, period.

Rancho Cielo Classic Car Restoration students at the Ferrari Owners Club Northern California Region's fourth annual Concours Carmel. The four students learned what judges look for when deciding the winning Ferrari among the best of the best in the world. PHOTO: Julian Castillo, The Piston Foundation

The Phantom II placed third in its Rolls-Royce pre-war class. Then came another announcement. The Phantom II had received the Montagu of Beaulieu Trophy, recognizing it as the most significant automobile of British origin at the Concours d'Elegance.

Rancho Cielo's Classic Car Restoration program began in 2023 as a track within the Auto & Diesel Repair program before becoming its own dedicated program in 2025. Believed to be the only high school-level Classic Car Restoration program in the country, it introduces students—many from communities with limited economic opportunity—to an industry that might otherwise seem inaccessible.

During Monterey Car Week, students handled historic automobiles. They shadowed judges. They welded trophies. They listened to industry veterans describe unconventional career paths. They met some of the most recognizable figures in the automotive world. And two recent graduates stood on the Pebble Beach show field beside a car that had traveled nearly a century to reach it.

"The future of the classic-car world depends on having skilled people capable of maintaining and restoring these remarkable automobiles," Hayward said.

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11 Years of the Veggie Box & BBQ Fundraiser

Rancho Cielo celebrated its biggest Veggie Box fundraiser, from August 24 through August 28, since its 2015 inception. PHOTOS: Tiffany Velasquez

By the time the first boxes begin moving down the line, the operation has already been months in the making. At Rancho Cielo, the 11th annual Veggie Box & BBQ Fundraiser arrives each August with the familiar machinery of a well-practiced civic ritual: trucks loaded with produce, volunteers arriving in waves, tables becoming assembly lines and thousands of boxes making their way into the community.

This year, 17,000 boxes of fresh, Salinas Valley-grown produce were distributed; another record for an event that has grown steadily since its beginnings more than a decade ago.

Kim and Mike Costa, who have chaired the fundraiser since its inception, have watched that growth firsthand. What started as a straightforward fundraising idea has become one of Monterey County's largest community-driven events, sustained by an increasingly expansive network of growers, businesses, nonprofits, volunteers and donors.

The proceeds benefit Rancho Cielo's programs, but the reach of the fundraiser extends well beyond the campus. Thousands of boxes were distributed to families in need through the Food Bank for Monterey County, Boys & Girls Club of Monterey County, Second Harvest Food Bank and the Salvation Army.

Much of the produce itself was donated by agriculture companies throughout the Monterey region, with additional support from agricultural businesses elsewhere in California. The generosity is measured not simply in dollars, but in the sheer volume of food that moves from fields to boxes and, ultimately, into people's kitchens.

The logistics are formidable. This year, 125 sponsors and more than 435 volunteers from local businesses, nonprofits and community organizations helped make it happen. Among them were KSBW, Monterey Bay Football Club, Portola Hotel & Spa, Bernardus Lodge, CASA of Monterey County, West Coast Community Bank and the Arts Council for Monterey County.

For a day, Rancho Cielo becomes something like a small distribution center; a temporary system of trucks, tables, forklifts, produce and people, all moving according to a plan refined over 11 years. And then, almost as quickly as it appears, it is gone.

There are also the popular BBQ tri-tip lunches, churned out by community volunteers and our Drummond Culinary Academy students. The BBQ lunches were originally created to thank sponsors. They still are, but community members can now purchase them, and they've become very popular. For the Costas, however, the measure of success has never really been the number of boxes or number of BBQ lunches.

"Everyone's on board with why we're doing this," Mike says. "It's about the students. That's the main thing: always remembering it's about the students."

DCA students, many just starting their culinary education, helped prepare 2,500 tri-tip BBQ lunches.

BY THE NUMBERS

Veggie Boxes Distributed: **17,000**

BBQ Lunches: **2,500**

Sponsors: **125**

Community Volunteers: **435**

Fundraising & Development

Rancho Cielo Veggie Box Fundraiser

THANK YOU!
TO ALL OF OUR VEGGIE BOX & BBQ EVENT SPONSORS
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Rancho Cielo Tri-Tip BBQ Fundraiser

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SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR AMAZING **BBQ CREW**

DCA Students Thrive in Summer Internships

Nineteen students gained hands-on experience at some of the region's most respected hospitality establishments, from Schooners Monterey to Ad Astra Bread Co. in the Drummond Culinary Academy's summer internship program. Ad Astra even joined the Monterey County Hospitality Association specifically to qualify as a participating business in the program.

The students made an impression. In fact, many of the establishments wanted to hire them following their internships. For some students, the only thing standing between them and a job offer was the need to complete their high school education first.

Students also interned at Bernardus Lodge & Spa, Roy's at Pebble Beach, Carmel Valley Ranch and several other top establishments throughout Monterey County.

"This is the most successful internship group to date," says DCA General Manager Wanda Straw. "The students performed remarkably well."

The program's success reflects more than the students' technical skills. It is also a measure of their ability to step into professional kitchens and hospitality environments, contribute to a team and meet the expectations of some of the region's most demanding employers.

From left: DCA Front-of-House Instructor Laura Nicola, DCA students Lucero Ramirez and John Salviejo at the Portola Hotel & Spa, one of this year's internship sites.

This summer also marked a milestone for Rancho Cielo's Welding & Fabrication program, with its first student participating in a summer internship. Christian Pahua-Arevalo spent eight weeks at the InterContinental the Clement Monterey, gaining firsthand engineering experience in a professional setting and extending the program's career-focused training beyond the classroom. Pahua-Arevalo was brought on full time after his internship ended.

For Rancho Cielo students, internships offer something that cannot be replicated on campus: the opportunity to put their skills to work in the real world, and to discover where those skills might take them next.

2026 Ag Tech Grad Scores Big at Monterey County Fair

When Eddie Chambers (above) bought Luna (right) last spring she was 80 pounds. Over a three-month period, she ate her way to 254 pounds, just in time for the 2026 Monterey County Fair Livestock Auction.

Eddie Chambers, a recent graduate of Rancho Cielo's Ag Tech program, took first place in the Future Farmers of America (FFA) Market Class Weight Champion division in the pig category at the Monterey County Fair in September. His 254-pound pig, Luna, fell squarely within the 240–260-pound weight class, and, as Chambers might tell you, had a personality all her own.

The following day, at the livestock auction, the stakes were even higher. By then, it was clear that Luna had become something of a queen at the Monterey County Fairgrounds. Monterey Pacific placed the winning bid, with the proceeds going directly to Chambers to cover expenses and help fund the next pig he plans to show at the San Benito County Fair this fall.

For nearly three months, Chambers spent almost every day with Luna, making sure she ate a carefully managed diet, was properly groomed and got enough exercise. It is an extraordinary amount of time and attention to invest in an animal whose eventual fate is already understood.

Chambers, 18, sees it another way. For him, the experience is less about the ending than everything that comes before it: the early mornings, the routine, the responsibility and, ultimately, the bond that forms between a young farmer and his animal.

"Life goes too fast, so take every chance you can," he says.

Student Spotlight: Edith Rodriguez

"I never thought I'd have so many accomplishments and be able to push through all of the battles I've endured," Edith Rodriguez says. "Coming [to Rancho Cielo] made me realize that you can do anything as long as you value yourself."

On a mild afternoon, a breeze moves across Rancho Cielo's 100 acres. In the Drummond Culinary Academy kitchen, the rhythm of food preparation takes hold.

For Edith Rodriguez, it is a place where pieces of her life are falling into place. The 18-year-old has lived in two countries. Born in Watsonville, Rodriguez moved with her parents and five siblings to Colima, Mexico, at 16. More than a year later, she returned to live with her sister and her family in Salinas. Back in a mainstream public school, Rodriguez felt behind after being unable to attend school in Mexico.

"It takes a toll on you when you feel like you should be more advanced," Rodriguez says. "That's why I put my all into everything at [Rancho Cielo], so I can accomplish everything I want to do."

Rancho Cielo gave her a chance to earn her diploma while learning vocational skills.

Less than a year after enrolling, Rodriguez is on track to graduate this December. She worked nearly every Friday Night Dinner and participated in most DCA catering events last year—that's roughly 90 events total.

"Edith is one of the most focused, hard-working students I have ever worked with at Rancho Cielo," says DCA General Manager Wanda Straw. "She is determined to create a successful, meaningful life for herself and it shows in both the classroom and kitchen."

During a summer internship with Ad Astra Bread Co., Rodriguez discovered a talent for baking. She later became a pastry assistant at Otto's Bread Co., where her brown-butter banana bread chocolate chip cookies sold out the same day.

DCA Executive Chef EJ Jimenez encourages her to continue her education.

"Chef always tells me to keep going with my education," Rodriguez says. "That I have what it takes to accomplish big things in life."

She is preparing to earn her driver's license and receive a car through Rancho Cielo's RIDE Scholarship, giving her greater independence. Rodriguez plans to become a surgical nurse.

"There's something special about helping people heal," she says.

Baking will remain part of the picture. She hopes eventually to operate a small pastry business on the side.

A surgical nurse helps people heal in one way. A pastry chef, perhaps, can do it in another.

Alumni Spotlight: Peter Maturino

"When Peter Maturino first started at Rancho Cielo, he had challenges committing to the programming and culture," says Senior Director Joseph DeRuosi. "Peter has a very big personality, incredible communication skills. I don't think he was totally sure what he wanted to do with his future, but he certainly found his calling as an entrepreneur."

At this year's Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance, Maturino seemed to be everywhere, detailing the finest automobiles in the world. He worked from sunrise to sundown.

"Rancho Cielo straightened me out, got me aligned," Maturino says. "I didn't want to be in school, and they just pushed me to finish. I've always loved being around cars, so the auto program was perfect."

Since graduating in 2024, Maturino has built Mr. Bubbles, the car-detailing business he started as a student. "I had little to no connections," he says. Rancho Cielo helped change that, bringing him to Car Week events and introducing him to people in the industry.

Now 21, Maturino has established himself among the area's top detailers, with clients including athletes from the San Francisco 49ers and Golden State Warriors, as well as Pebble Beach Concours participants. His work has taken him from a Pagani Zonda to one of the few black Ferrari Enzos in existence. But he's already looking beyond detailing. He is taking business administration classes at Hartnell College and Monterey Peninsula College, laying the groundwork for another business.

"I want to open a car wash [in Salinas] pretty soon," he says. "Like a self-serve and a drive-through car wash, so there's monthly recurring revenue. That's my biggest goal for this upcoming year."

His vision is a one-stop automotive destination featuring a barber, mechanic, smog shop and specialists in wraps, tinting and detailing.

"I don't think Peter (above) was totally sure what he wanted to do with his future when he came to us, but he certainly found his calling," says Rancho Cielo Senior Director Joe DeRuosi. PHOTO: @themr.bubbles

"I want to treat it more like a hangout spot. We're also planning on training kids in detailing so they can go out and do their own thing," Maturino says. "That way, they don't get caught up in the wrong things in Salinas."

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