



**SAN MATEO COUNTY  
COMMUNITY COLLEGES  
FOUNDATION**

Wednesday, April 30, 2025

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## The Foundation Newsletter

### Special Edition: *Eco Elegance Fashion Show* Cañada College Fashion Design & Merchandising Department

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#### Student Spotlight

##### Gir Session is the First Recipient of the Carmela Santino Scholarship



Daron "Gir" Session is a woman with a vision: a plus-size business that creates high-quality products and builds an uplifting community structure that offers jobs and careers to other artists and creators. Her unique design aesthetic and strong technical skills were on display at the recent *Eco Elegance Fashion Show*.

She amazed many in the audience when her model came down the runway in a wood-inspired cocktail dress (left); however, it is Gir's determination and perseverance that are the show stopper. She has been on the Dean's List for the past 2.5 years with a 3.96 GPA while developing her talent, sharpening her merchandising skills, and creating the business plan for her company.

As she prepares to graduate with her Fashion Design Technical (Apparel Industry Oriented) and Custom Dressmaking/Small Business Oriented A.S. degrees in December, she credits the programs at Cañada College that set her up for success-- Promise Scholars, EOPS, UMOJA Learning

Community, and Phi Theta Kappa-Beta Theta Omicron--and the wrap-around

support she received from Spark Point, Disability Resource Center, and CalWORKS. Most importantly, she says, "I appreciated being immersed in an environment surrounded by passionate and experienced people who taught me so much about my craft. My excitement about my growth in ability and understanding is so invigorating. I am looking forward to all of the ways I can put my new knowledge and experience into action." We cannot wait to see what she does next!

**Make it Possible for Students to Get to the Finish Line**

## **Donor Impact**

### **Carmela Santino: Trailblazer and Successful Serial Entrepreneur**



Annette Dobson recently lost her 89-year-old mother, who met, married, and emigrated with her Italian American pen pal, Anthony, to San Mateo from Italy, all within two weeks. Exceeding all expectations and gender norms of the time, Carmela opened several businesses, including a dressmaking/design and an alterations store, a restaurant, and a doll business. One of her favorite accomplishments was later in life when she volunteered with 4-H programs and senior centers, teaching sewing and doll making.

When Annette started to prepare her parents' house for sale, she came across her mother's extensive fabric collection and notions. This led her to the Cañada College Fashion Design & Merchandising Department. In addition to donating the fabric, she inquired about setting up a scholarship to honor her mother's legacy by encouraging those with similar talents and aspirations in perpetuity. While her mother never attended college, it was important for Annette to establish the fund in the community college system attended by her family, including her father over 70 years ago.

The inaugural recipient of the Carmela Santino Scholarship was awarded at the *Eco Elegance Fashion Show* VIP event. While it wasn't easy for Annette to do the honors, she loved the coincidence that Daron "Gir" Session has a passion for doll making and teaches others to sew. She also possesses her mother's entrepreneurial spirit and the desire to exceed limiting beliefs to make her professional dreams



come true. There is no question Gir will honor Carmela's legacy as she makes her mark on the fashion industry in the years to come.

[Learn More About Supporting Student Scholarships](#)

## Alumni Spotlight

### Nontraditional Student, Shawn Lorette Matthews Fashion Design Certificate May 2018



"In high school, my grandmother bought me my first pattern and fabric. When she lived with me towards the end her life, I made a dress, affectionately called 'the Daisy Dress' that had some issues. That is what lured me to Cañada College in my early fifties."

Initially, Shawn planned to take one class, Flat Pattern Drafting I. But then she took two, met some wonderful sewing friends, and stayed to complete a Fashion Design (Technical Apparel Industry Oriented) Certificate.

During her time at Cañada, she pushed herself. "I am slightly dyslexic, very math challenged, and have to read rulers multiple times. I never thought I would sew a pair of blue jeans. But I made a pair in the Pants Drafting course. They were amazing and fit well. From there, I moved on to make my own patterns, something I never saw coming."

Shawn continues to sew ("It is my happy place") and remains in touch with two others she met in the program. Together they recently did "This is NOT a Contest" Challenge where they bought each other two fabrics to make the same garment: A V-necked, bishop sleeved dress with a gathered skirt and ruffle and a center back zip. Similar to when they were in school together, they had fun discussing the ins and outs of the garment, although this time it was over the phone and texts since her friends are no longer in the area. Shawn, like many others, is forever grateful for her experiences at Cañada College and its lasting impact on her life.

[Join the SMCCCD Alumni Network](#)

## Faculty & Staff Spotlight

**Jaleh Naasz– Designer of the Eco Elegance: Earth Day Fashion Show**



**Jaleh Naasz** joined the Cañada College faculty in August. She has a B.S. in Business Management from San Diego State and an MFA in Fashion Design from the Academy of Art University, San Francisco.

In addition to industry experience from luxury womenswear and action sportswear, Jaleh has nearly 20 years of teaching experience. She has taught over 40 topics in fashion at various colleges, including developing a course on fashion sustainability, an area of particular interest and expertise. She is a known collaborator, having curated the **Seen Iranian** exhibit that included work by local Iranian artists, Sac State students,

archives sourced from the Gerth Special Collections and University Archives in 2023. And this summer, her **Isabel Azam** fashion camps will host a sustainable fashion event, showcasing the 7-17-year-olds' work, with Crocker Art Museum on July 31st, called *Behind the Seams*.

As the new Coordinator of the Fashion Design & Merchandising Department, Jaleh could have easily spent the year settling into her role. Instead, she decided to spearhead the inaugural *Eco Elegance Fashion Show* to showcase her students' work while highlighting the importance of sustainable fashion. Her talent as a designer, educator, and social change agent was readily apparent in the quality of clothes her students modeled, the expertise of the guest speaker, and the overall professionalism of the production. We are blessed to have her as a member of our faculty and cannot wait to see what she will do next year and throughout her tenure!

Support Students by Giving to the Fashion Department Fund

## Foundation Spotlight

**Canada College 55th Earth Day Celebration: Eco Elegance VIP Event**



To celebrate the 55th anniversary of Earth Day and further its Educational Master Plan initiatives, Cañada College hosted 500+ attendees at the inaugural *Eco Elegance Fashion Show*. Attendees included the campus community, high school students from Westmoor and Aragon, industry partners, members of the public, and guest speaker Matt McGivern of Planman. Thirty models showcased 50 garments to highlight creativity, sustainability, and the future of fashion.

The Foundation was privileged to sponsor the event along with **Recology**, **Rosanne Foust and Jim Hartnett**, **Stacy Harris**, **Bitwize Investments**, **RehReh Threads and Goods**, and **Pickled Clothing**. At its VIP gathering following the show, attendees had food and drinks, met the designers, examined the garments, and asked one another which of the garments they most wanted to buy and have customized.

Together, sponsors and donors **raised \$2600 for the Fashion Design & Merchandising Department** to update supplies and equipment and uplift the students' experience with an out-of-town trip, including a market research seminar and tours of showrooms and factories of fashion brands from various product categories.

Please join us in celebrating and thanking our amazing students, faculty, staff, community members, and industry partners who made the *Eco Elegance Fashion Show* and VIP events a success. We are already looking forward to next year.

[Watch a Video from the Event](#)

**Upcoming Events**





**SAN MATEO COUNTY  
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*Supporting the Students of Cañada College,  
College of San Mateo, and Skyline College*



## **Scholarship Awards Ceremonies:**

Celebrating scholarship recipients and donor impact

**May 1, 4:00 pm**

### **Skyline College**

Farallon Room (Building 12), Reception and Donor/Student Meet & Greet immediately following the ceremony.

**May 9, 6:00 pm**

### **College of San Mateo**

Building 9 (Library) and the Reception and Donor/Student Meet & Greet immediately following the ceremony at Bayview Dining Room (Building 10, 2nd Floor).

**May 16, 2:00 pm**

### **Cañada College**

Main Theatre Building (Building 3), Reception and Donor/Student Meet & Greet immediately following the ceremony at the Grove (Building 5).

[Learn More About These Events](#)

## **Follow on Social Media**

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Thank you for being part of our mission to support students and transform lives.



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