



Press Release

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YOSEMITE COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT
Modesto Junior College & Columbia College

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Contact: Chancellor's Office: (209) 575-6509, publicaffairs@yosemite.edu

Interim Chancellor Lena Tran delivers State of the District address that touts YCCD's community roots and its bold plan for the future

MODESTO, Calif. – Strong programs in agriculture, nursing, and firefighting, among others, are driving growth at the Yosemite Community College District, interim Chancellor Lena Tran, Ed.D., said during an uplifting State of the District address that highlighted innovative programs and the role Modesto Junior College and Columbia College will play in shaping tomorrow's leaders.

The theme of Tran's address – believed to be the first in the district's 104-year history – was "Deep Roots, Bold Futures." She spoke to an audience of nearly 300 – made up of students and faculty, community members, public safety personnel, and local officials – at the Performing Arts and Media Center on MJC's East Campus.

"What is the true state of our district today?" Tran asked near the conclusion of her 20-minute address. "The state of our district is one of vision and vitality. We are not standing still; we are moving; we are reaching; we are transforming."

YCCD is comprised of two campuses in Modesto and one in Sonora. Located about 55 miles apart, the colleges have garnered acclaim for programs that fortify the region's workforce, while serving 30,000 students each year.

Tran underscored the deep roots at MJC, where its agriculture program is one of the strongest in California – offering certificates and degrees in plant science, environmental studies, veterinary technology, ag business – and bolsters the Central Valley economy. Meanwhile, the school's nursing program ranks 85th in the U.S., according to College Factual. That places the program in the top five percent nationally at a time when the nursing field faces critical workforce shortages.

Columbia College's roots stretch deep with fire and forest management programs.

"Columbia has strengthened its fire technology, and forestry programs with on-campus housing – training the next generation of firefighters, first responders, and forestry and natural resources management at a time when wildfires test us every year," she said.

While YCCD's roots give it an unshakeable foundation, Tran emphasized it is still just the beginning.

"A tree does not flourish by holding onto the ground, said Tran, a native of Vietnam who came to the U.S. when she was 8 years old. "It flourishes when it grows, when it stretches, when it reaches toward the light."

Tran's vision drew praise from many in attendance:

- Chad Redwing, Columbia College interim president – "I was emboldened. No matter how much I would like to live in the past, I've never found a way to do it, and I don't know anyone who has. We're supposed to look ahead, not behind."
- Brian K. Sanders, MJC president – "I think Dr. Tran did a nice job of telling us where we're at and where we're headed, focusing on the future and building on the roots that we have in our community."
- Brett Rios-Ellis, Stanislaus State president – "I'm very excited about how we can continue the collaboration between YCCD and Stanislaus State."
- Milton Richards, YCCD board of trustees president – "The district does so much for our community, and our chancellor just hit it out of the park with her vision. When you look at her background, she does everything. And she really showed it."
- Marie Alvarado-Gil (R-Jackson), District 4 state senator – "The interim chancellor did an amazing job bringing the community together and encouraging us about the future at a time when there's a lot of stress and tension in young people's lives. I feel uplifted."
- Jaron Brandon, Tuolumne County District 5 supervisor – "YCCD continues to lead the way in job training and in its vision of the future. We're jealous that she's leaving Columbia College, but the whole district should be grateful that we've got her at the helm."

Tran closed by detailing what she believes is YCCD's mission: being a leader in the evolving educational landscape.

"Our classrooms will prepare students not just with knowledge, but with adaptability – ready for jobs that don't even exist yet, but will one day define our future," she said. "In our classrooms, students are putting on virtual reality glasses to explore virtual worlds that bring science, history, and healthcare to life. They are working side by side with robotics that mirror the industries they will lead tomorrow. They are learning to harness the power of artificial intelligence, not as a distant concept but as a tool they can use today to solve problems, create opportunities, and imagine futures that don't yet exist. This is the next generation of learning, and it will happen right here in YCCD."

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