

neighbor to neighbor

COMMUNITY NEWS FOR THE RESIDENTS OF ORANGE

THE BACKLOT: CHAPMAN STUDENTS ENVISION A CREATIVE FUTURE FOR ORANGE

Under the guidance of Kevin Meredith, a faculty member in Chapman University's Argyros College of Business and Economics, and at the invitation of the City of Orange, a team of four graduating students developed a 20-year economic development strategy for the City's West Katella corridor. Students Whit Wilder, Collin Murphy, Nova Warnstrom, and Cole McGowan collaborated on the project, with Wilder, Murphy, and Warnstrom presenting the team's vision—The Backlot—to the Orange City Council.

Located across the river from the future OC Vibe! entertainment district, The Backlot is envisioned as a creative production and entertainment district that complements Orange's unique identity, while supporting long-term economic growth. Rather than competing with OC Vibe's modern entertainment environment, the proposal focuses on what Orange already does best: authenticity.

The students' vision builds upon one of the City's greatest assets, Old Towne Orange, California's largest National Register Historic District. With more than 1,400 preserved historic buildings, Orange already offers the character, walkability, and architectural charm that many communities work to create. The Backlot would leverage

those strengths by creating opportunities for film production, content creation, dining, retail, hospitality, and mixed-use development.

The proposal also highlighted Orange's strategic location outside of Los Angeles' traditional production zone, making it attractive for film and television projects that benefit from California's production incentives. By attracting creative industries and production-related investment, The Backlot could support local restaurants, retailers, hotels, and service providers while generating new economic activity throughout the community.

Beyond the economic benefits, the concept focuses on retaining creative talent. With institutions such as Chapman University and Santiago Canyon College educating future entrepreneurs, artists, and business leaders, Orange is well-positioned to retain emerging professionals in the community by providing opportunities to launch careers and businesses locally.



From left: Chapman University students Whit Wilder, Collin Murphy, and Nova Warnstrom, and Professor Kevin Meredith.

The Backlot vision also supports broader community goals by increasing tourism, strengthening Orange's identity as a destination, and creating new opportunities for residents and visitors to experience the city's history, culture, and creativity.

Mayor Dan Slater praised the students' efforts, stating, "The timing cannot be better, and we really appreciate your efforts and creativity. This is why we're happy to be working with Chapman on future endeavors like this as well."

CHAPMAN GRAD INSPIRES A NEW TRADITION OF COMMUNITY SERVICE



Chapman University graduate Mo Hijazi teaches fire safety to elementary school students in the Orange Unified School District.

When Chapman University graduate Mo Hijazi was looking for a way to give back, he found the perfect opportunity with the Orange City Fire Department — an experience that not only allowed him to serve the community but also opened the door for future Chapman volunteers.

A 2024 biology graduate and member of the Chapman University First Aid Team, Hijazi became the first Chapman student to serve as an Orange City Fire Department Reserve volunteer after touring a department facility. "I was looking for an opportunity to serve the community," he said.

Throughout his volunteer service, Hijazi visited elementary schools, senior living communities, and other local organizations, educating residents about fire safety while encouraging careers in public service. The experience also allowed him to represent Chapman beyond campus. "It was a good opportunity to show the community what Chapman students are about."

"Mo was a great volunteer fire prevention reserve who was incredibly reliable and a very humble person," said Robert DeSimone of the Orange City Fire Department. "Each year, we award one of our reserves the 'Reserve of the Year Award,' and due to Mo's outstanding character, he was voted Reserve of the Year in 2023."

Before completing his volunteer service in May, Hijazi encouraged the department to recruit more Chapman students, helping create new opportunities for future volunteers.

Need to Know

Fall Semester Move-In and Orientation

- August 18–23

Opening Convocation

- August 18
- Fireworks at approx. 8 pm

Classes Start

- August 24

Want to Connect?

- Contact Chapman University's Office of Community Relations at (714) 289-2097 or email neighbors@chapman.edu to engage and provide feedback.

YOU'RE INVITED!

Join us for these engaging events at Chapman.

There are many terrific Chapman University events that neighbors are welcome to attend. Here are just a few. Find more at the University's online events calendar: events.chapman.edu. Advance tickets for performing arts events may be purchased online at tickets.chapman.edu.

California Art Club 115th Annual Gold Medal Exhibition

Now through September 13
Hilbert Museum of California Art

The California Art Club, founded in 1909, is one of the oldest and most prestigious art organizations in the nation. This juried exhibition showcases the best of the best of new paintings and sculptures by the club's members, who include many of the finest professional artists in the state. The Gold Medal Exhibition is highly reputed for demonstrating the finest creations of the realist genre, from golden California landscapes and seascapes to urban scenes, animal portraits, and evocative figural paintings and sculptures – all being exhibited for the first time.

More information: HilbertMuseum.org

Wind from the West: California Weathervanes

Now through November 1
Hilbert Museum of California Art

During the 1920s and '30s, builders in Southern California often commissioned unique weathervanes to crown new homes, garages and barns. These handcrafted iron pieces are now considered a vital form of American folk art. The weathervanes in this exhibition come primarily from the Palm Springs area, and several adorned the resort homes of well-known members of the movie industry. From a vane depicting Zorro to whimsical iron pieces showcasing ships, cars, horses, golfers, divers, bullfighters, stagecoaches and much more, these weathervanes reveal a uniquely Californian blend of romance, optimism, humor and invention!

More information: HilbertMuseum.org

10th Anniversary Jubilee

Saturday, Sep 19, 7:30 pm
Musco Center for the Arts

Join us for a celebration created especially to mark a decade of extraordinary artistry, community, and performance at Musco Center for the Arts. Bringing together alumni, returning professional artists, and Chapman University students, the Jubilee is a tribute to the vibrant artistic community that has grown and flourished at Musco Center over the past ten years. The evening's program weaves together music, theatre, and dance in a celebration that represents the full breadth of what Musco Center has meant to so many performers and audiences alike.

More information: MuscoCenter.org



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A NEIGHBOR AT THE PIANO

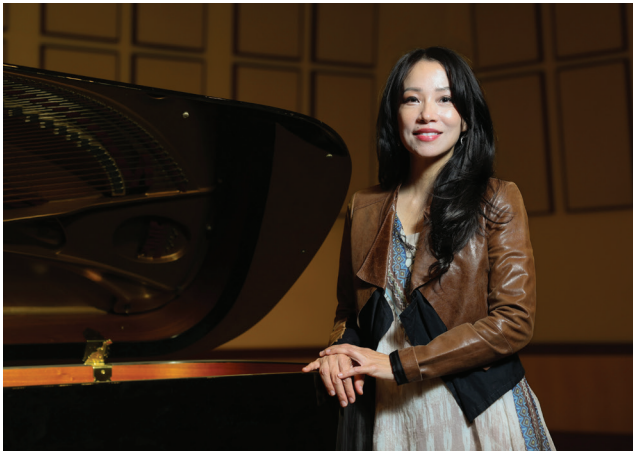
Grace Fong, a professor and director of piano studies at Chapman University's Hall-Musco Conservatory of Music and a U.S. Presidential Scholar in the Arts, has spent decades bringing live music to hospitals, libraries, cultural centers, schools and mental health programs in Orange and surrounding communities.

Inspired by a grandmother who learned firsthand what it meant to be cared for through the kindness of others, Fong began volunteering at hospitals as a child. Today she performs regularly at Rady Children's Health, City of Hope, Kaiser Permanente Hospital and USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center — bringing moments of comfort and connection to patients, families and staff. Rady Children's Health in Orange is also home to Seacrest Studios, where Fong brings her students to perform live, their music broadcast directly to patient rooms throughout the facility.

"There is so much power in live music, and Grace has an incredible ability to create meaningful connections through her performances," said Luke Morand, Seacrest Studios Media Programs Coordinator at Rady Children's Health. "Her performances bring moments of joy, comfort, and normalcy in what can often be a stressful environment." For Fong, the work is personal.

"In a concert hall, people come to the music," she said. "In community spaces, the music goes to them."

Fong also brings Chapman students to volunteer their musical talents for patients.



Grace Fong brings the power of live music to patients and communities throughout Orange and beyond.

More inside!