Mission: CAA provides an equitable collegiate experience to adults with special needs who historically have not had access to college education.

Vision: Empowering the student body to creatively transform the way the world views individuals with disabilities. CAA creates successful contributing citizens through inclusive collegiate partnerships.

IN THIS ISSUE:

CAA Forging Inclusive Collegiate Partnerships

CAA Superstaff Spotlight:
Sarah Thrasher

Board Member Spotlight:
Joe Siecinski

Thoughts from the Exec Director:
Something Beautiful Is Happening...

Student Spotlight:
Curtis Kitaji

CAA Forging Inclusive Collegiate Partnerships

As we reflect on the past six months at CAA, we couldn't be prouder of our accomplishments and excited for what the future holds.

In September, we held our Celebrating Abilities Gala which raised much needed funds for our programs and students. We were fortunate to have incredible support from all our sponsors, including our presenting sponsor Western Digital. Our students “Mike Man” and Curtis were wonderful emcees for the event, and even our special guest Mayor Sam Liccardo commented on how professional they were.

In October, we were excited to bring back the Steve Mayo Golf Classic, which was the first time since the pandemic that we've been able to hold the tournament in person. It is always a beloved event for our students, supporters, and the community in general. The tournament was at the Santa Teresa Golf Course and helped us raise money for the Golf Team and other CAA programs.

We were thrilled that one of our superstar professors, Angel Gonzalez, received special recognition at the 24th Annual Service Above Self Awards Dinner, presented by San Andreas Regional Center. It is always a yearly event for the community organization and there were 15 awards that was given out during that night. Angel won the ‘Recognition of Merit” award and we are so proud of his accomplishments.

We have made incredible strides with our SAELL Council (Special Adult Education and Lifelong Learning) which we first launched in July. The aim of SAELL is to create a community where anyone involved in special adult education can come together to share stories and resources. We have had interest from all over the world, including an academy in Nigeria and in Florida on how they can create programs similar to ours.

CAA now has the highest enrollment we’ve ever had at 187 students! Our college is continuing to grow and thrive, and we expect our numbers to only keep climbing. Thank you to all of our amazing students, families, staff, donors and supporters. We are moving mountains because of all your hard work and belief in CAA!
Sarah Thrasher first learned about the College of Adaptive through her sister Hannah, the head of the CAA Theatre Department. Hannah connected Sarah with CAA’s Co-Founders, and once Sarah met the staff and students, she knew it was the perfect opportunity to join an organization that was genuinely making the world a better place.

Born and raised in San Jose, Sarah studied multicultural and gender studies with a focus on women’s studies at CSU Chico. She built her career in administration and held positions in both corporate companies and start-ups, but say that working at CAA is unique because of the people.

“This organization cares so much about its staff and students,” said Sarah. “They respect people for who they are, and everyone is working towards the same goal.”

Sarah works behind the scenes at CAA as part of the newly formed Management Team, taking on everything from registration to course offerings and much more.

One of Sarah’s passions is language. Her mother is an amateur linguist and passed on the love of language, travel, and culture to her daughters. Sarah is currently learning Turkish, French, Scottish Gaelic, and Italian with one of her nephews.

“I am very passionate about approaching life like it’s an adventure,” said Sarah. “Mistakes are great, and I believe that it’s all about exploration, trying new things, and figuring it out.”

Anchored in that same spirit of adventure, Sarah believes deeply in CAA’s core mission of providing lifelong learning. Paraphrasing one of her favorite quotes on the subject, Sarah said, “I love what Michelle Obama said in an interview once: ‘Where's the fun in waking up one day and deciding there's nowhere left to go?’ And it's so true – I wouldn't want to ever reach a point in my life where there was nothing left to do and nothing left to learn because I'd done it all already.”

Joe Siecinski
Chairperson Emeritus

College of Adaptive Arts Chairman of the Board Joe Siecinski has been involved with the College of Adaptive Arts for more than 10 years, helping to guide and advise on all sorts of financial and business-related matters.

Born in France and raised in Missouri, Joe attended school in Korea and also served six years in Military Intelligence before finally settling down in Silicon Valley. Before opening his own company called BrainShare, Joe worked for Hewlett-Packard for 25 years. Now he makes his living coaching and mentoring all sorts of businesspeople and entrepreneurs and finds joy in seeing his clients grow and thrive.

Business coaching was exactly how Joe got involved with the College of Adaptive Arts. His son, who experienced educational challenges, attended a school right next door to CAA, and that’s when he met the co-founder, DeAnna Pursai. He was immediately drawn to their mission and began volunteering his time and expertise with the goal for CAA to expand and become a stable, sustainable institution.

“What makes CAA so remarkable is that it is lifelong learning...how cool is that?” Said Joe. “My son had his challenges, and although he found his own different path, not everyone has access to those opportunities.”

Joe remembers fondly when a student affectionately known as J LO was selected as the Valedictorian and he got to present her the award at the graduation ceremony. “I was almost moved to tears,” said Joe. “It was incredible to see her passion and how many other students’ lives we could change with what we were doing.”

Joe is an avid reader and challenges himself to read at least two books every month. He is also a passionate scuba diver and has completed over 400 dives everywhere but the Red Sea. He says he is proud of how far CAA has come since its inception and hopes to be involved for many more years to come.
Something beautiful is happening at CAA. We are in the midst of a transformation, surpassing the operational benchmark of 1.3 million this past fiscal year as we diligently and collectively strive for our 2 million operational budget goal to achieve a viable model that is sustainable and replicable. How are we going to get there? We had a most impactful graphic created called Bridging the Gap which depicts CAA’s collective Mountain Movers plan to build bridges in four key areas to achieve our goal of sustainability.

The first element is connecting with legislators in all levels of government to brainstorm new legislative avenues for funding in higher education for adults with intellectual disabilities. We have made great relationships with local policy leaders at the local, county, and state levels who are engaged with creating equitable access opportunities education for all.

A second key area is continuing to build bridges with higher education thought leaders across the bay area and beyond.

A third area of building bridges is to cultivate strategic partners to leverage community collaborations, team building and sustained support. Western Digital, the Palo Alto Women’s Thursday Morning Dialogue Group, local Rotary, Kiwanis & other service organization groups have been tremendously helpful. We continue to reach out and provide information about new opportunities and team building hubs.

The fourth area of building bridges is expanding our ever-growing base of donors at the local, state, national, and international level. This school has been built upon local donors who see the vision and believe in the cause. Just this past month three brand new donors have reached out intrigued with learning how CAA is building this expanded higher education model.

This work is not easy; hence our affectionate reference to being Mountain Movers. In our world of special needs, ground zero is often “No, this is not possible – you have a disability.” Which makes the small wins that much more gratifying. Something beautiful is happening, and very much the Mountain is Moving a bit more each day thanks to your belief and support of this innovative, lifelong collegiate model for adults who historically have not had access to higher education.
When Curtis Kitaji was first born, his family was told that he wouldn’t be able to speak. Fast forward many years later, and Curtis is one of the most prominent performers you’ll meet. However, his dream is actually to become an actor.

Curtis takes acting and songwriting classes at CAA and recently was one of the emcees at the Celebration of Inclusive Partnerships Gala, where he received rave reviews.

“Being at CAA has helped me come out of my shell,” Curtis said. “I love being on campus and being here with my friends.”

CAA’s model for lifelong learning was highly beneficial for Curtis. He attended two other colleges before CAA but had trouble keeping up with the required pace and workload.

There have been so many great memories Curtis said he had experienced as a student, and he remembers fondly when his acting teacher, Katie Zeisl, showed up to class dressed as a chicken for no reason.

Curtis is a South Bay native and loves participating in various sports. He is part of the Special Olympics bowling team and also an integral part of the CAA golf team.

When Curtis isn’t in class at CAA, he enjoys hanging out at the mall with his friends or listening to his favorite band, Pentatonix.
Together we are Moving Mountains
2020 - 2022 Donors and Partners

School Underwriters:
Art: Schmidt Family
Business: Open
Communications: Open
Dance: Open
Health & Wellness: Bill & Linda Giannini Family
Library: Schmidt Family
Music: Soderbery Family
Science & Technology: Raghuram Family, Riccio Family
Theatre: O’Farrell Principe Family
TV/Film: Private Family

Monthly Recurring Personal Donors:
Marilynn Ahern
Netta Anderson
Brian Appleton
Janet Atkinson
June & Clyde Beck
Erin Benford
Sue Breckenridge
Darla Carter
Leann Cherkasky Makhni
Toni & Gary Cook
Ed & Katherine Correia
Nancy Crowe
Sharon Dahntert
Jerome Dees
Desiree Douville
Brad Ehle
Ana Eppel
Steve Fiss & Tette Sokolsky
Karen Fore
Mary Frausto
John Giannini
Bill Giannini
JoAnn Gines
Linda & Joe Gonzales
Sonia Gonzalez
Adam Kline
Mai Le
Dr. Pam & Dave Linsay
Donna Martinez
Sara Misiego
Janet Molina-Heathcote

Corresponding Personal Donors:
Marilynn Ahern
Netta Anderson
Brian Appleton
Janet Atkinson
June & Clyde Beck
Erin Benford
Sue Breckenridge
Darla Carter
Leann Cherkasky Makhni
Toni & Gary Cook
Ed & Katherine Correia
Nancy Crowe
Sharon Dahntert
Jerome Dees
Desiree Douville
Brad Ehle
Ana Eppel
Steve Fiss & Tette Sokolsky
Karen Fore
Mary Frausto
John Giannini
Bill Giannini
JoAnn Gines
Linda & Joe Gonzales
Sonia Gonzalez
Adam Kline
Mai Le
Dr. Pam & Dave Linsay
Donna Martinez
Sara Misiego
Janet Molina-Heathcote

Monthly Recurring Corporate Donors:
BrainSHARE

Corporate Donors:
Adapt Health Clinic - Dr. Mike Grossman
*Amato Pizzeria
*Apple Corporate Match
*AnT’s Swim School
*Benefit Authority Insurance Solutions
*Benevolent Auctions & Consulting
*Benford Real Estate Inc.
Blach Construction
Bluffton Street Fair
Bone Smart Pilates
*BrainSHARE - Joe Siecinski
California Sports Center
*Christie’s Sereno 1% for Good
Co+Ed Architecture
*Coequantem Fund
*Columbian Foundation
Supporting People with Intellectual Disabilities
Cupertino Rotary Club
*Delta Kappa Gamma
Society International, Chi State
*DKG, Zeta Theta Chapter
*Focus Women's Leads/Referrals Group
*Gotuaco & Associates
*Heritage Bank of Commerce
*Kiwanis Club of West San Jose Foundation
*Knights of Columbus
Bishop O'Dowd Council #3474

*lifeSport Fitness, Inc.
Los Gatos Morning Rotary Club
Los Gatos Rotary Club
*Luis Pedro Castillo Pictures
*Micheletti Insurance Services
*Mission City Community Fund
*MyProGroup Leads & Referrals Group
*Northrup Grumman Foundation
*Oracle Corporate Match
*Pam Kelly, San Jose City Council, District 9
*Peace and Light Foundation
*PG&E Corporate Match
*Pinnacle Bank
*Promote Her Business Silicon Valley Networking Circle
*Rotary Club of San Jose Foundation
*Rotary Club of San Jose Rotary Club of Silicon Valley
Silicon Valley Foundation
Rotary District 5170 Foundation
*Santa Clara County Realtors Foundation
*Santa Teresa Golf Club
*Saratoga Springs
Saratoga Rotary Club
SCORE Business Executives
Silicon Valley STAR Rotary Club
Sunnyvale Rotary Club
Sunnyvale Sunrise Rotary Club
*SV Creates

MOVING THE MOUNTAIN FOR CAA
BRIDGING THE GAP
Striving Towards $2 Million Fiscal Sustainability

College of Adaptive Arts
Innovative College Partnerships

OUR VISION
To have this innovative model of expanded college education be positioned on every campus of higher learning around the world to be the Special Olympics-type model for lifelong education.
Personal Donors

*Perheen Abbasi
*Vicky Abrams
Hinna Adnan
Deepa Advani
*Marilynn Ahern
Salman Alam
Peter Allen
Anthony Allen
*Bill & Deb Alley
*Lupe & David Ambrosio-Garcia
Maria Ambrosio-Garcia
Cindy Anderson
*Tim & Netta Anderson
*Sky & Fay Anderson
*Kristy Anderson
Marti Anderson
*Brian & Laura Clay Appleton
*Christine Amett
*Carlota Asceves
*Prakash & Nandini Atawale
*Janet & Chuck Atkinson
Marilyn Atteberry
Mary & Doug Aumack
Brenda Bachchi
Om Bachu
Gurjit Bains
*Manny Barbara
*Janis & Jeff Baron
*Penny & Patrick Barrett
*June & Clyde Beck
Milissa Bedell
Lillian Beltran
Haley Beltran
Martha Beltran
Pauline Beltran
Monica Beltran-Thompson
Ann Benett
Maria Benevento-Collins
*Jeffrey Benford
*Erin Benford
Laura & Jason Bennert
*Kathryn Berry
Raj & Anjali Bhandari
Ervin Biener
*Russ Blahetka
Elisa Blatt
Cristina Bliss
*Ken & Ellyn Bloomfield
Kristine Bobier
Noelle & Emily
Boccignone
*Bob & Yvette Bothman
*Leticia Bracamontes
*Sue & Michelle Breckenridge
*Moira Brown
*Loni Brown
*Christopher Burke
*Emily Burke
*Daphne Cagle
*Judith Calise
*Diane Canby
*Renée Capovilla
*Jacob Caputo
Angie Cardoza
*Gordon & Carlylnne Carlson
*Darla Carter
*Carol Carter
*Adrienne Caselli
*Henry Castaniada
Darla Chang
*Karla Chavez
*Charlene Chavez
*Jennifer Chen
*Donna Cherkasky
*Leann Cherkasky Makhni
*Suchiha Chetia
*Niketa Chheda
Gigi Chu
*Tiffany Chung
Jeanine Ciecko
*David & Judy Cline
*Annette Coleman
*Toni & Gary Cook
*Ramon Coria
Angel Coronado
*Jim & Janice Correa
*Ed & Katherine Correia
Cowen Family
*Maureena Craig
Sam Cramer
*Mindy Cramer
Mark & Terri Creamer
Trami Cron
*Nancy Crowe
*Jennifer Cutie
*Sharon Dahner
*Mary Daly
Charles Dampier
Khalid Darwish
*Jerome Dees
Sam Dennis
*Bharat Desai
Marisela Desantana
*Rod Diridon, Sr. & Dr. Gloria
Duffy
*Mike & Liz Ditty
Jane Divinski
*John Dods & Karen Vanderpan
*Desiree Douville
*Terry Downing
Mike Dubinsky
*Ann Dubinsky-Ross
Akshai Duggal
Yen Duong
Melanie Durr
Vikie & Jack Edington
*Brad Ehle
*Ivan Rodriguez & Elizabeth
Santana
*Susan & Steve Ellenberg
*Angel & Jill Ellenberger
*Ana Eppel
*Kathleen Erickson
*Jill & Christopher Escher
Luann Fahl
*Vickie Fairchild
*Anonymous Family down
South:)
Luca Fasoli
*Nicole Ferguson
Kathryn Feskanin
Chris Filios
*Rhoda Firth
Susan Fish
*Stephen Fiss & Bette Sokolsky
Wendy Flapan
*Mark Fleisher
Jennifer Flick
*Madeline Fluhr
*Rodney Fong
*Karen Fore
*Tiffany Fort
Richard Fox
*Mary Frausto
Joseph Freeman
*Robert Freiri
Elizabeth French
*Ryan Gallegos
*Mary Gama
Dan & Darlene Gerdon
*John Giannini
*Mimi Giannini
*Bill & Linda Giannini
Foundation
*Allegra Gibbons-Shapiro
*JoAnn Gines
*John O’Farrell & Gloria
Principe
Amy Gode
*Mukesh Goel
*Joe & Linda Gonzales
*Frank Gonzales
*Sonia Gonzalez
Julie Goode
*Gayatri Gopalan
*Jayashree Govind
*Sharon Green
Lisa Greigoire
Phil & Diane Griego
*Susan Griffin
*Carla Griffin
*Dr. Mike Grossman
*Rosalie Gutierrez-Ledesma & Juan Ledesma
Chen Guo
*Conception Gutierrez
*Leslee Hamilton
Josephine & Scott Hanan
*Patti & Jim Hancock
*Amy Hancock
Jennifer Hayes-Luong
Vicki Headley
Christine Headley
*Chris Heathcote
*Teddi Heathcote Peters
William Heffem
*Richard & Ann Hermerding
*Jeanne Herrick
*Christopher Hibbert
Masaaki Higashianti
*Angie Higgins & Tom
Shamrell
Teresa Hilleary
Michael & Christina Hogg
Jon & Carla Holloway
Cliff & Tammy Holloway
*Math & Lilian Holmes
*Evy Horton
*Bill & Marilynn Host
*Shih-Jung Hsi
*George Huff
Meike Huizinga
*Vijay Iju
Hatch Ingwerson
Khrurram Ismail
Lalitha Iyer
Ken Jackson
*Wayne & Amy Jasper
*Peter & Lineth Jezek
Darrien & Clent Johnson
*Kathy Johnstone
*Fred & Cathy Jones
*Joy Jones
Audrey Jones
*Joe Joroski
Olena Kamentsev
*Dae-Wook Kang, M.D.
Olena Kamentsev
*Dr. Mike Grossman
Rosalie Gutierrez-Ledesma & Juan Ledesma
Chen Guo
*Conception Gutierrez
*Leslee Hamilton
Josephine & Scott Hanan
*Patti & Jim Hancock
*Amy Hancock
Jennifer Hayes-Luong
Vicki Headley
Christine Headley
*Chris Heathcote
*Teddi Heathcote Peters
William Heffem
*Richard & Ann Hermerding
*Jeanne Herrick
*Christopher Hibbert
Masaaki Higashianti
*Angie Higgins & Tom
Shamrell
Teresa Hilleary
Michael & Christina Hogg
Jon & Carla Holloway
Cliff & Tammy Holloway
*Math & Lilian Holmes
*Evy Horton
*Bill & Marilynn Host
*Shih-Jung Hsi
*George Huff
Meike Huizinga
*Vijay Iju
Hatch Ingwerson
Khrurram Ismail
Lalitha Iyer
Ken Jackson
*Wayne & Amy Jasper
*Peter & Lineth Jezek
Darrien & Clent Johnson
*Kathy Johnstone
*Fred & Cathy Jones
*Joy Jones
Audrey Jones
*Joe Joroski
Olena Kamentsev
*Dae-Wook Kang, M.D.
Stephanie & Bob Kashima
James Kason
Venkata Prakash Kastala
*Kat & Jeanne Katayama
Community Partners

Arrupe Program
Autism Society SF Bay Area
AWO Huamnity Salon Series
Best Buddies in Action
Buddies in Action
Casa de Mir Montessori School
Chandler Tripp School
Chopsticks Alley
Christmas in the Park
City Lights Theater Co.
City of San Jose Office of Cultural Affairs
Community Health Partnership
CreaTV
Dance of Peace
Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences, Stanford University
genARTS Silicon Valley
Gilroy Center for the Arts
HOPE Services
International House-San Jose State University
Jewish Federation of Joint Venture Silicon Valley
Latizmo Hip Hop Productions
Los Gatos Ballet
Momentum Employment Services Momentum for Mental Health
New Ballet School
Open Mind School

Opera San Jose
Parents Helping Parents
Pivotal
Promote Her Business Silicon Valley Networking Circle
San Andreas Regional Center
San Francisco Ballet
San Francisco Shakespeare Festival
San Jose Museum of Art
San Jose State University
Disability Awareness day
Santa Clara University
Santa Clara University Community Action Program
School of Arts & Culture
Science of the Bay
SCORE Retried Business Executives
Silicon Valley
SJ Multicultural Artists Guild
sjDance co
SJSU DBH Communications Program
SJSU Sbona Business Honors Program
Stanford Shakespeare Company
STEAMF Fest of Redwood City
Sunday Friends
SV Creates
Tabard Theatre Company
West Valley College Associate Student Government
West Valley College Che School of Professional Studies
West Valley College DESP & Student Equity Success
West Valley Mission
Community College District
Women’s Philanthropy
Youth Drama for All