



VETERAN of the Year

Math Alumnus Found Community at Cal Poly Pomona

By CATHIE LOU PARKER

Seeing soldiers guarding the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier during a youth trip to Washington, D.C., changed **Fabricio Monterroso's** life. Though just 11, he decided to be a soldier when he grew up.

"Seeing the men in uniform and how honorable that was, I knew that's what I wanted to do," says Monterroso ('18, mathematics). "I have always loved being part of something greater than myself. I love serving, I love giving back."

His 14-year Army Reserve service includes 18 months in Mosul, Iraq, as a convoy commander's gunner when he was 20. At Cal Poly Pomona, he served as a student advisor at the campus' **Veterans Resource Center**. Now 32 and a recent graduate, Monterroso is a drill sergeant at Joint Forces Training Base Los Alamitos.

In July, Assemblyman Freddie Rodriguez (D-52) named him Veteran of the Year for the City of Pomona.

"I am proud to have chosen Fabricio Monterroso as the 2018 Veteran of the Year for the City of Pomona because at a young age he has demonstrated exemplary service to his country, the veteran community and Cal Poly Pomona," Rodriguez says. "I have no doubt that Mr. Monterroso will continue to go above and beyond for his community."

The alumnus views the award as an opportunity to spotlight the VRC's offerings to Cal Poly Pomona's student veterans.

The center is a campus home for them, providing computers, coffee, a well-stocked supply of snacks and a "family" of staffers ready to answer questions. He credits VRC coordinator Elke Azpeitia, who nominated him for the award, and the center's staff for creating the welcoming environment.

"I'm here to be a go-to guy for veterans seeking information about educational and vocational benefits, resources on and off campus," he says. "Sometimes a veteran just needs to talk, just needs to open up to somebody."

He also tutored math at the VRC while he pursued his bachelor's degree in applied mathematics and statistics.

"My sister used to reward me with little toys she won from Chuck E. Cheese for helping her with her math, so math became fun for me," Monterroso says. "I advanced in math skills by participating in what is now known as the Jaime Escalante Summer Math Academy at Pioneer High School in Whittier. Besides JROTC, math was my best subject. I always loved all the sciences. At the heart of the sciences is math, so I followed my heart."

Monterroso started his Cal Poly Pomona journey in fall 2014, only to be interrupted in 2015 when he mobilized to Foot Hood in Texas for a year. Re-enrolling in 2016, he balanced coursework with monthly weekend reserve "battle assemblies" and other Army assignments. A year later, he graduated from the U.S. Army Drill Sergeant Academy at Fort Jackson in South Carolina.

Over the years, his close relationship with his parents, three sisters and two nieces remained a top priority. Whittier is home for the whole family.

An advanced leadership course in July 2019 will help him promote from Staff Sergeant to Sergeant First Class, both non-commissioned officer ranks.

He's not stopping there.

"Now that I have my bachelor's degree, I can take the next steps to become an officer," he says.



Through a partnership with a local food bank, the mobile food pantry distributes food and supplies to students every month.

Permanent Food Pantry Coming to Student Center

The Bronco Student Center will soon be home to a permanent campus food pantry.

"Our students come to Cal Poly Pomona to get the very best education, and we set a high bar for their academic success. But as we are seeing more often across universities, some of our students struggle with food insecurity, which can be a barrier to their being able to reach their full potential," said University President **Soraya M. Coley**.

The food pantry began with an initiative started by 2016-17 ASI President Uriah Sanders as a result of a California State University study that reported 41.6 percent of CSU students don't have consistent access to quality food.

The new food pantry will be available to all students who feel they are in need. In addition, students may be connected to services such as CalFresh and other university resources.



"We want our food pantry to be transformational, not transactional," said BSC director **Barnaby Peake**. "Engagement, belonging, those are critical components to basic needs as well. We're going to try to make it so that in giving you something to eat ... we help you to be successful as a student and get the full college experience."