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CSUSB Palm Desert Campus hosts special gala to support its hospitality management program

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Published May 1, 2024



Students and faculty at the “Spirit of Polynesia” gala hosted by the CSUSB Palm Desert Campus on April 27, 2024 at the Renaissance Esmeralda Resort & Spa Indian Wells.

The richness of Polynesian culture was on full display as the Palm Desert Campus of Cal State San Bernardino celebrated and supported its hospitality management program on April 27 at the Renaissance Esmeralda Resort & Spa Indian Wells.

Guests at the university’s “Spirit of Polynesia” gala felt transported to Polynesia, a region made up of more than 1,000 islands in the Pacific Ocean known for its rich and diverse culinary traditions, warm hospitality and natural beauty.

The event, which featured classic Tiki cocktails and mocktails and native dishes influenced by Southeast Asia, Europe and South America, showcased program developments, introduced students in the program and recognized sponsors and donors.

“Just like the many islands of the Pacific Ocean, our students represent a diversity of talents, aspirations and dreams, and most of them are the first generation in their family to attend college,” said Joe Tormey, director of the hospitality management program at the CSUSB Palm Desert Campus. “Many work to pay for their education, and in some instances, help support their families financially as well. We recognize the sacrifice, perseverance and strength of their commitment to earning a college education.”

The annual gala is a component of the hospitality management program’s curriculum and a learning activity in the Meetings and Event Planning course. Students assist in planning a large-scale event that generates financial support for their education, study abroad opportunities and the marketing of the program.



Hospitality management students Alejandra Portillo and Evyannah Camp provide opening remarks at the gala.

“The best way to have our students succeed, excel and contribute is to learn by doing,” said Rafik Mohamed, provost and vice president for academic affairs at CSUSB. “There’s hands-on student learning, but also as we see here tonight, there is an emphasis on equipping our students with marketable skills and opportunity to really engage with the local community to not only enhance their own lives, but also to enhance the economy of the Coachella Valley. We have incredibly talented and ambitious students here in the Coachella Valley and this hospitality management program really captures that idea that we take that ambition and partner with opportunity and great things happen,” he said.

The world-class hospitality management program at CSUSB caters to the \$8.7 billion hospitality and tourism industry in the Coachella Valley. There is a consistent demand for qualified applicants for managerial positions, and this program is attracting top students from the Coachella Valley and beyond.

Event sponsors included Visit Greater Palm Springs as platinum sponsor; Renaissance Esmeralda Resort & Spa Indian Wells, San Manuel Band of Mission Indians, Yaamava Resort & Casino at San Manuel, H.N. and Frances C. Berger Foundation and the Jack H. Brown College of Business and Public Administration at CSUSB as gold sponsors; Desert Champions and Hyatt Regency Indian Wells Resort & Spa as silver sponsors; and Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, The Westin Rancho Mirage Golf Resort & Spa, Oak View Group, Lulu California Bistro, The Ritz-Carlton, Rancho Mirage and Las Casuelas Terraza as bronze sponsors.

Students and faculty in the hospitality management program at the CSUSB Palm Desert Campus also recently returned from a short-term study abroad trip to Italy where their itinerary integrated academic coursework with a focus on Italian gastronomy, tourism and transportation systems, restaurants, destination marketing, art, history and hands-on activities.

For more information about the hospitality management program, visit the [CSUSB Hospitality Management](#) webpage.

About PDC: The CSUSB Palm Desert Campus offers bachelor’s and master’s degrees, teaching credentials and certificates, and plays a vital role in educating the region’s growing population.

For more information about the CSUSB Palm Desert Campus, contact Mike Singer in the Office of Strategic Communication at msinger@csusb.edu or (760) 341-2883, ext. 78107, or visit the PDC website at www.csusb.edu/pdc.

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