

## **Rudy Valencia – Business/Community**

Mr. Valencia began his high school career as a 9<sup>th</sup> grader at a rival high school here in Manteca. The fall of his 10<sup>th</sup> grade year, he was present at Sierra HS on our inaugural day, back in August 1994. During his time at Sierra, he would participate in the basketball program and a variety of clubs and other organizations. Mr. Valencia would eventually be part of the first graduating class of Sierra HS in the spring of 1997.

In 2017, Mr. Valencia accepted a position as Director of Operations at Second Harvest Food Bank here in Manteca. One of the most well-run food banks in the state of California, Rudy oversees the operations and deployment of food that serves over 35,000 people on a monthly basis within San Joaquin and Stanislaus counties. The food bank partners with over 90 non-profit agencies, community centers and schools to distribute approximately 15 million pounds of food each year. Within the food bank, Rudy oversees and directs several food assistance initiatives. Some of these programs include stocking of local food pantries, serving 2600 at risk senior citizens and 4200 children on a regular basis. The food bank also provides access by delivering 20,000 lbs. of food monthly to high risk areas where food is not readily available in underserved neighborhoods through their mobile fresh program.

Also known as Coach Rudy, Mr. Valencia also finds time to coach within the women's basketball program at Sierra HS. He can often be found behind the scenes assisting our own at-risk student population with food needs or others area of need.

Rudy epitomizes the vision Sierra HS has set for its graduates. He has established a strong reputation as a person of character, someone who cares deeply about his community and the students he serves. Perhaps his greatest accomplishment is marrying his wonderful bride Elyana and fathering two beautiful daughters – Izzy (6) and Sophia (3).

## **1998-2000 Varsity Baseball Teams - Athletics**

The 1998-2000 run of the varsity baseball teams set the tone for the baseball program as a whole for the next quarter century. Many of these young men either opened the school during the 1994-95 school year or were part of those early classes that defined the baseball program and overall athletic mission and vision.

During this span, the program was led by fellow inductee Jack Thomson and his staff of Kevin Alavesos and Todd Vick. "Big Rudy" as he is affectionately called, also assisted in managing the team during the 98 season.

The team's accomplishments are second to none. These teams still hold the Sierra High School record in establishing a 33 game Valley Oak League win streak, spanning 3 seasons - not losing a league game from March of 1998 to April of 2000. The program record for total wins is still held by the 2000 team (26 wins) and the 1999 team (23 wins). During this span, the program went an impressive 39-2 during that span. In league play, the team batting average by year was .376, .410 (along with 28 home runs) and .366, respectively. The teams sported the league MVP each of these years with Robert Perkins winning the award twice (98, 99) and Josh Duran once (2000). Collectively, 20 all league selections were had by the Timberwolves during this period.

Each of these teams claimed a Valley Oak League Championship and qualified for the Sac-Joaquin Section Playoffs, with the 2000 team advancing to the CIF SJS Championship game. In addition, these teams saw 3 players that would eventually be drafted by Major League Baseball. Robert Perkins would be drafted by the Atlanta Braves, Matt Miller by the Florida Marlins and Matt Berezay by the San Francisco Giants and the Los Angeles Dodgers in different drafts.

Congratulations to the members of the 1998-2000 varsity baseball teams for both your accomplishments and your induction to the Sierra HS Hall of Fame.

## **Debbie Mitzman – Education**

Mrs. Mitzman was hired by Manteca Unified School District in 1976 as an elementary teacher at Lathrop School. After stops at New Haven Elementary and Stella Brockman, Debbie was quickly establishing herself as one of the most effective and knowledgeable English Language Arts teachers within MUSD. Due to her outstanding reputation, she was then hired in 1994 by Rick Arucan to help open Sierra HS.

Debbie was part of a core group of teachers that was established to help create and define procedures, policies, schedules, training, curriculum and most importantly, what would later be known as “the Sierra way.” As one of her peers stated, Mrs. Mitzman “influenced the entire staff, improved curricular practices, gave teachers the tools to engage their students and students the tools to learn actively.”

During her time at Sierra, Debbie developed and implemented many programs at our school. In addition to her obligations within the English Department, Debbie established the Peer Resource Program, the Yellow Ribbon Suicide Prevention program, the Reading Support class. All of this was done while concurrently serving as the English Department Chair. During her tenure, there was not a class within the English Dept that she did not teach – all the way from ELD to AP. She also found time to serve in a variety of professional development activities ranging from cooperative learning to Senior Projects, as both a trainer and mentor to other teachers within the district and county. She was (and is) an avid supporter of the Sierra band, choir and theatre programs.

After her retirement in 2016, room 10 (her classroom of 20+ years) fittingly had a small plaque installed above the door entitled “The Debbie Mitzman Center for Learning.” Mr. Arucan stated, “It is because of teachers and leaders like Debbie Mitzman that Sierra High’s reputation and status in the Manteca and surrounding communities is highly respected. She was a true gem and deserves recognition as a member of the Hall of Fame.”

Mrs. Mitzman is the mother of three grown children. She maintains relationships with several local music groups, finding time to volunteer as a musician. She also enjoys traveling in her retirement and advising new teachers through induction. It is with great gratitude and honor that we induct Debbie Mitzman to the Sierra Hall of Fame.

## **Randy Sandoli – Education/Entertainment**

Mr. Sandoli graduated from Sierra HS as a member of the 2006 class. During his time at Sierra, Randy was heavily involved with the music program and worked towards defining himself as a top tier musician. Upon graduating from Sierra, Randy attended the University of the Pacific, earning a BA in Jazz Studies. He later attended CSU Sacramento to pursue and complete a MA in Jazz Studies.

Randy is a pianist, composer and lecturer in Jazz Studies at University of the Pacific. He currently serves as the Assistant Director of the prestigious Brubeck Jazz Institute at UOP. Randy directs Jazz combos, adjudicates and serves as a clinician at numerous festivals. He also has a Jazz trio which performs regularly, while recording original music. Randy currently has recorded two albums, with many of his songs and music receiving significant airtime on Jazz stations across the country. Most recently, his album “Simcha,” Hebrew for joy, includes trio, quartet, quintet and sextet arrangements of his original music. These and other endeavors have led Randy to work within his field across the country and around the world.

Mr. Sandoli also finds time to give back to his community and serve those around him. He has returned to Sierra HS on many occasions as both a guest artist for Sierra HS music concerts and fundraisers. He has also been an active member of the Habitat for Humanity, leading the Brubeck Institute on a trip to Paraguay in 2017. As part of the institute, Randy has taught or teaches Jazz Piano, Jazz Theory and Jazz Harmony.

Above all, as Mr. Hammarstrom states, “Randy is a class act. He is respectful, thoughtful, kind, helpful and an overall happy person. He is a credit to Sierra HS.” Perhaps his greatest accomplishment is marrying his wonderful bride Vandella and fathering two sons – Amos and Timothy.

## **Don and Kim Widmer – Community**

Mr. and Mrs. Widmer form part of the backbone of the Sierra HS community. The Widmer's have three children that have graduated from Sierra HS. Raymond in 2010, Grant in 2011 and Lucas in 2014.

The story of the Widmer's goes further back than most successful novels. Mr. Widmer graduated from Manteca HS in 1966. He was an outstanding student athlete in both football and wrestling. Among many accomplishments athletically, Don had a 67-match winning streak in wrestling during his junior and senior years, allowing only 4 points to be scored against him. He went on to accept a full ride scholarship to play football and wrestle for UCLA.

After graduation, Don returned to the Manteca area and was instrumental in the development of the Manteca Cowboys Youth Football association, where he began coaching in 1975. He later became active in numerous community service organizations, serving on boards, in leadership roles and supporting local initiatives. During this journey, Don was fortunate enough to find someone to not only match his endeavor's but strengthen them – he met and married his wonderful wife Kim. If you know Don and Kim, they did (and do) all of this while maintaining an active farm and another full-time job with State Farm. It is this same spirit of giving back and leadership that Don and Kim brought with them to Sierra HS with the enrollment of their first son in 2006.

Almost immediately, the Widmer's not only got involved, but made things happen. As a rough estimate, Don and Kim led the charge serving well over 5,000 meals to the teams and athletes that participated in their kids' sports. They both served as active members within the Sierra HS athletic boosters for the better part of a decade. During this time, they led fundraising activities and planning to purchase and install new scoreboards on campus, new wrestling mats for the wrestling program, a scorer's table for basketball and volleyball and were instrumental with the installation of the all-weather track. These initiatives reflected the extreme generosity of both time and resources by a family that epitomizes what it means to give back and support kids.

The Sierra HS community is honored to induct the Widmer's into the Sierra HS hall of fame. Their leadership and commitment to student athletes has not only affected past students but will affect a generation of students at Sierra HS.

## **Jack Thomson – Athletics/Education**

Mr. Thomson – better known as Coach Thomson – was hired to open Sierra HS in the fall of 1994. Coach Thomson served as the Business Department Chair for 23 years, up to his retirement from teaching in 2017. Coach Thomson served as a coach in many sports, including football and basketball before ultimately taking the reigns as the school's first baseball coach in the spring of 1995. Coach Thomson went on to hold this position for 24 years, retiring in 2018.

Through his involvement and dedication to coaching and teaching, Coach Thomson found himself heavily involved in professional development. He has served on the board for the American Baseball Coaches Association, an organization that hosts an annual conference that has an attendance of almost 7,000 baseball coaches from all levels across the country. In his capacity as a board member, Coach Thomson has served on both the National Baseball Rules Committee and the chair for the Rawlings Baseball HS All American Committee. Jack was also instrumental in collaborating with the Pittsburgh Pirates/ABCA to develop courses in Coaching Philosophy.

As a coach, Jack's the accomplishments of his teams rank him as an elite coach. Jack finished his career with a total of 607 wins over a 41-year coaching career which ranks second all-time out of the 194-member Sac-Joaquin Section and in the top 25 in the state of California. At Sierra, Coach Thomson's teams have won 5 Valley Oak League Championships and have advanced to the SJS playoffs almost every year. In 2010, Coach Thomson was selected as a state CIF model coach of the year. Coach Thomson is also an inductee to the CA Baseball Coaches Hall of Fame, ABCA Hall of Fame and the City of Manteca Hall of Fame. It is due to these accomplishments and many more, that just 9 days ago the baseball stadium at Sierra HS was dedicated as "Jack Thomson Stadium."

If you know Coach Thomson, he is a person of strength, character and leadership beyond any other. He gives of himself and never asks for anything in return. This was best exemplified in an article about him a few years back. Coach Thomson stated, "I want the focus to be on the kids. We can talk about coaching all we want, but the kids are the ones who win games."

Outside of the chalk lines on the baseball field, Coach Thomson is part of an even more important team, the Thomson family team. He and his wife Paula have raised four outstanding young men, John, Scott, Travis, and Michael. They also enjoy four grandchildren. It is an honor to induct Coach Jack Thomson into the Sierra HS Hall of Fame.