UC SANTA BARBARA

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Shelly Leachman

Seizing Opportunity

Carlos Marquez wasn't too long returned from a four-year stint with the U.S. Army and looking for steady work when his brother referred him to his own employer, UC Santa Barbara. It's a solid job, his brother promised, one he could settle into for a while.

Did he ever.

Fast forward to present day and Marquez is in the midst of his third decade on campus — his 28th year, to be exact (brother Raul, meanwhile, is going on 40 years).

After spending all of his preceding years working for the housing department, Marquez has taken up a new role. Now part of the Kavli Institute for Theoretical Physics (KITP) team, Marquez manages the Charles T. Munger Physics Residence — a recently constructed world-class housing facility for visiting researchers to KITP.

"I love coming to work," Marquez said recently. "I'm meeting people from all over the world here — people from Israel, Cape Town, India, Eastern Europe. Where else can you do that? You just don't know who's going to walk through that door. It's like that every day. It's amazing."

Curiously, the most interesting guest at one of his earlier job sites perhaps foretold, somehow, Marquez's current assignment: None other than the prominent physicist Stephen Hawking.

“We used to house Stephen Hawking at family student housing — he would stay at one of our cottages when he was visiting campus,” recalled Marquez, who grew up in Santa Barbara and attended both Santa Barbara High School and Santa Barbara City College. “That was one of my highlights, and that was many years ago. I guess I’ve come full circle now that I’m working for KITP. Who would’ve thought?”

The same could be said for much of Marquez’s tenure at UC Santa Barbara, which he began with something of a shrug but soon grew into a rewarding career. Deciding from the start to do everything possible to advance within the university, Marquez has made good on that over and over again, working on a custodial crew, then leading one, and eventually rising to become a housing supervisor, then a manager.

His ethos around work, Marquez said, was gleaned over four years in the infantry: “Teamwork, leadership, attention to detail. There’s no problem big enough that you can’t resolve. Staying cool and calm, not overreacting. There’s always going to be different situations but knowing you have a great support team to help you get through it.”

“I first started here in custodial maintenance,” Marquez said. “In the Army our sergeants would do the white glove test in our barracks, so I figured I could do some cleaning, with the emphasis of being able to move up within the system. Housing gave me that opportunity — professional development courses, supervisor certificate programs, management classes. The more classes I took, the more I learned, and the more I realized about UCSB: What a great place to work.”

By all accounts, the feeling is mutual.

The first time Marquez walked through the door of the Munger Physics Residence, it was as a supervisor for the housing staff, called in to help maintain the just-built facility. He quickly made an impression on KITP Director Lars Bildsten, who began consulting with Marquez on myriad questions and concerns about building operations.

“I first met Carlos in fall 2016, when he assembled the career housing staff team to maintain the Munger Residence,” Bildsten recalled. “Working together with our founding Residence Manager James Brill, we opened the building and shared the fun and excitement of final inspections. In the intervening two years, James and I would always reach out to Carlos for advice and counsel on the many vexing issues that arise in operating a 75,000 square-foot house for 61 physicists. His advice was

always spot-on, allowing KITP to navigate many challenges of operations over the first two years. It’s simply wonderful that we have been able to now attract Carlos to be our residence manager. He knows how to get things done.”

Marquez has done a lot.

Over the decades he has worked at all of the main campus residence halls, as well as university apartments and housing facilities on west campus and in Isla Vista. Characterizing his new role at KITP’s high-profile research residence as something of a personal pinnacle, Marquez credits much of his success to the colleagues and co-workers he’s met along the way.

“I always say, ‘I didn’t get here by myself, I had help,’” Marquez said. “And my little bit of wisdom: If somebody has helped you out, then make sure you help another person. Extend a hand as someone did to you, so when you leave you know you helped somebody else move up. Many people did that for me, so now that’s my gratification — helping people out.

“This is an amazing job, and that’s what picks you up and makes you come to work every day,” he continued. “A good team, good people that work for you, good leadership. What else can you ask for? I’m so grateful to be in the spot where I am right now. I’m enjoying what I’m doing and I love getting up every morning and coming here, meeting and greeting people. So I’m very grateful to be here and to have been here this long. The time has flown. After 28 years at UCSB, this may be my last chapter — but it’s going to be a great chapter.”

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.