

Pillar & Post

Trinidad State—A Life's Vocation



“What I love most is that place inside someone, where they care so much and just want to see Trinidad State thrive. To me, that’s what is sacred in all these conversations...it’s the core of why I love this work.”

– Toni DeAngelis

Trinidad State enjoys an amazing history in southern Colorado. Founded in 1925, by visionary thinkers who labored in the fields and in the mines, these people envisioned a different future for their children and grandchildren. One with less hardship and uncertainty.

With wisdom and foresight, these families came together to help form Colorado’s first community college. They knew that education held the key. They recognized the impact a local college would create.

Through the generations, many have worked to build and sustain Trinidad State—from our students and faculty, to leadership teams and community leaders. We have grown from our humble beginnings into a vibrant, thriving college serving families and communities across southern Colorado, and beyond.

Trinidad State enjoys a rich legacy. This legacy is a gift for all of us to carry into the future.



This significance is not lost on Toni DeAngelis, Executive Director for the Trinidad State College Foundation.

“When I imagine our earliest days,” she said, “I think of people who dreamed of something different than a life in the fields and inside the mines. Their work that was so demanding. They knew hardships firsthand, and they wanted something different for their children.”

“Trinidad State enrolled 37 students in 1925,” Toni added. “When I think of all the students since then—all the families we’ve touched

through the generations—it’s humbling. This legacy matters. And when I connect with people who care about Trinidad State, it informs each and every conversation.”



After graduating from Trinidad High School in 1987, Toni DeAngelis arrived at TSJC during the summer before her freshman year.

“I wanted to get a head start, so I took a couple summer courses that year,” she explained. “I was also eligible for work study, and my first job was in the Admissions Office working for Pete Deluca. He was the VP of Student Services at the time, and he immediately asked if I knew what I wanted to study. I didn’t know yet, but during our conversations Pete helped me recognize where my interests could connect academically.”

Pete Deluca would remain a helpful voice in the years ahead.

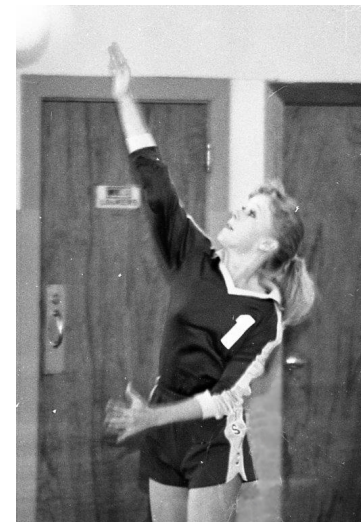
Toni had also received both academic and athletic scholarships, and she would play on the first intercollegiate volleyball team at Trinidad State. “I’m pretty proud of that,” she added.

She would graduate from TSJC in 1989, earning her Associates in Arts degree with an emphasis in business accounting. From there, she would pursue a Bachelor’s degree at Adams State, but her summers in Trinidad kept her close to the College.

“The summer before my senior year, I reconnected with Pete,” she explained. “The College was just starting to build its Alumni Relations program. Pete had transitioned into a new role as VP of Institutional Development, and they were creating an alumni database. My role was pretty small—labels and envelopes for the outreach. But we were reconnecting with our alumni. It was a high priority for the College.”

Building upon these alumni outreach efforts, Trinidad State would soon embark upon a \$500,000 challenge grant. Over 800 citizens, businesses, service organizations, alumni, TSJC faculty, staff and students would contribute to the effort, which also created 29 endowed scholarships. The effort would secure a permanent endowment for Trinidad State.

After spending that summer in the Alumni office, Toni would return to Adams State where she earned her Bachelor of Science in Finance in 1991.





In 1998, Toni's life took an unexpected turn. "I was playing volleyball and felt something. At first, I thought I'd pulled a muscle," she said. "But even with rest, it wouldn't heal."

Eventually, her doctors discovered a benign tumor on the head of the femur, inside the hip socket. Toni was facing some hard choices and a long recovery.

"They gave me several options, including a complete hip replacement," she explained. "I ended up choosing a procedure that utilized a partial cadaver bone, wrapped in a bonelike substance. It meant four surgeries, two bone grafts and 13 months on crutches."

"It was hard, especially with two small children at the time," she added, "but it postponed a full hip replacement."



In 2002, an opportunity at Trinidad State caught Toni's eye, especially when she realized it meant working again with Pete Deluca.

"There was a part-time position in Alumni Relations, an opportunity that also allowed me to devote more time to my young family," she said. "And it meant returning to Trinidad State."

"Once I got started, Pete would have me attend the Foundation Board meetings, mainly as the recording secretary. I quickly learned a lot about the Foundation and its role in supporting the College."

Toni would also help plan alumni events—anniversary celebrations, department gatherings, hosting alumni at sporting events, even two alumni cruises.

"Our very first event was an alumni gathering at Coors Field for a Rockies game," she said. "It was so much fun meeting our alumni and their families. We made connections and built friendships."

"These gatherings also helped me realize how much I love doing this work," she added, "just connecting with people who care deeply about Trinidad State."

In 2004, Toni would be named Director of Development & Alumni Relations, returning again to a full-time professional role.

"The gatherings helped me realize how much I love doing this work, just connecting with people who care deeply about Trinidad State."

“Pete had decided it was time to retire,” she explained. “It was a loss for Trinidad State—he had so much knowledge about our community and the College’s history. But he taught me a great deal during his last couple of years. He was preparing me for this role.”

“He was such a wonderful mentor, from my very first days as a college freshman. Everyone should have someone like Pete in their lives.”



As Executive Director for the TSC Foundation, Toni leads the fundraising effort on behalf of the College. It’s a role she embraces, but perhaps with a slightly bigger perspective.

“Fundraising is vital to the College,” she said, “but it’s not just about raising dollars. It’s also about people and their hopes for Trinidad State.”

“What connects us is our shared experiences—our shared love for Trinidad State.”

“My hope is to connect with people who love the College as much as I do—to learn their stories, and to uncover our common experiences. To share our belief in the College, as it gives each and every student a chance to build a great future.”

“And there are so many wonderful people out there,” she said, “so many great stories. In these conversations, I often find myself wishing I could go back in time to see someone in their youth at Trinidad State. What connects us is our shared experiences—our shared love for Trinidad State.”

“I also know that fundraising can get a bad reputation, like we’re just trying to squeeze people for money,” Toni added. “And I get it—I know it’s out there. But that’s not me. I just enjoy connecting with people, helping others create an impact that truly matters to them. When people know they made a difference—knowing inside, ‘I did that!’ It’s those moments that truly matter.”

For those curious about ways to support Trinidad State, there are many options. From a single donation to the monthly Partner’s Program—from a special gift for a scholarship, or a creating legacy gift as part of the Society of 1925—there are lots of ways to offer support.

“There’s another thing,” Toni added, chuckling. “Those who know me also know I’m a little on the introverted side. But I’m also incredibly motivated to help others. And I’m always grateful for the trust people place in me, as they explore how they might be able to give back.”

“Family is my first priority,” she added, “my husband, Joe, and our three sons, Chris, Matthew and Nick. But professionally, this work has become my life’s vocation.”

Once upon a time, Trinidad State was only a dream. A century ago, people came together around that dream—to give it vision and purpose—and from their efforts, they established a college in 1925. Since that time, countless people have built upon this original dream, shaping an institution that now serves 1,500 students across two campuses. Even with this success, the original aspiration remains the same—to help young men and women work toward a brighter future for themselves.

It's hard to know if those early families could ever have imagined today's Trinidad State College. But it's easy to recognize how very proud they would be.

