**Meet Mt. SAC’s New President/CEO Dr. Martha Garcia Episode 189**

00:00:00 **Martha**

-We are their hope for prosperity and a better future. It is this community college that continues to inspire them and hopefully help them achieve the goals that they aspire to achieve. We're here because of our students and I'm privileged to serve this campus, these students, to serve the team, but also to serve alongside our team. There's great work that's being achieved by the employees of Mt. SAC every day.

00:00:38 **David**

Welcome to the Mt. SAC Podcast, your window into the vibrant world of Mt. San Antonio College. I'm David Sloan.

00:00:45 **Tania**

And I'm Tania Anders. And we are your hosts on this journey through the heart and soul of our institution.

00:00:51 **David**

Mt. SAC is not just a campus, it's a thriving community filled with dreamers, innovators, and trailblazers. Whether you're a student or alumni, faculty member or other employer of the campus, this podcast is designed with you in mind. We're here to keep you connected and informed about all the exciting happenings on and around our campus

00:01:10 **Tania**

In the spirit of unity, the Mt. SAC Podcast aims to be a hub for communication, engagement, and collaboration. We want to hear from you, please share your experiences.

00:01:21 **David**

Subscribe today and stay tuned for the fascinating stories, insights, and updates coming your way. Mt. SAC is more than a college, it's a community and we're thrilled to share it with you. Welcome to the Mt. SAC Podcast.

00:01:32 **Tania**

Welcome to the Mt. SAC Podcast.

00:01:38 **Voiceover**

Hi and welcome back to the Mt. SAC Podcast. Today, you'll hear a conversation hosted by Tania Anders with the new Mt. SAC, President and CEO Dr. Martha Garcia. Dr. Martha Garcia is the 10th President and CEO of Mt. San Antonio College. She is also the first president of color for the college as well as the second female president. Listen in to learn more about our new president.

00:02:06 **Tania**

Welcome dear listeners, to the Mt. San Antonio College Podcast. My name is Tania Anders, your host for today's episode. My guest is Dr. Martha Garcia, our campus's 10th president, the first female president of Mt. SAC in 50 years, and our first president of color.

00:02:24 **Tania**

Dr. Garcia, came to Mt. SAC from the College of the Desert and prior had served as superintendent president of Imperial Valley College. I'm honored to talk to Dr. Garcia about her first full semester at Mt. SAC, which is just coming to a close.

00:02:38 **Tania**

Dr. Garcia, thank you so much for taking the time out of your very busy schedule to chat with me today.

00:02:44 **Martha**

I'm glad to be here. Thank you so much for the invitation and I'm looking forward to our conversation.

00:02:51 **Tania**

So, you've been with Mt. SAC for six months now and I have to admit, it's almost felt longer to me because so, so much has happened in the time that you've been here and we've all been very busy and there are many things for us to be excited about for the new year coming up 2024. First off, let me ask you, how are you settling in, both on campus as well as our area? Your new to the area, your new home.

00:03:18 **Martha**

I'm settling well. In regards to the campus, this is a very special place to be at. Mt. SAC is special, the team that works here generates and contributes to an energy that's truly remarkable. And being that I've been in three campuses, I obviously state that from the perspective that I've been able to serve at three campuses.

00:03:46 **Martha**

So, definitely settling in well, and I know that the team that works here has contributed to that. They've provided a beautiful welcoming, they're hardworking and I feel have embraced me and contributed to me feeling that I'm transitioning well and six months have gone by very quickly.

00:04:10 **Martha**

I will say that I continue to learn every day. We are a very large campus, the largest single community college district in California. And I continue to learn about who we are and the amazing work that's being achieved and continue to learn about the processes that we have followed as a campus. So, that's in regards to settling into the campus and within the campus.

00:04:42 **Martha**

In regards to the community, I moved to Northern Pomona. I am very fortunate that I was able to purchase a home in a new community of 36 homes within that community, and it's been great. It's peaceful. I love the small-town feel .

00:05:04 **Martha**

I love that I have the opportunity to spend time at the local restaurants in Claremont, in La Verne, in Glendora, in the surrounding areas , San Dimas . And I also spend time within our service area. But when it comes to what I feel truly experiencing the local experience , I spend more time in those cities and it's been great.

00:05:33 **Martha**

I'm finally settled in, I finally have an almost fully furnished home. And that makes a difference because even something as simple as being home or having the time to be home to have furniture delivered was not that easy. I'm grateful to be here, but I live on my own. If I truly need help from my family, yes they would come and take time out of their busy schedules to support me, but I was trying to limit that as much as possible. So-

00:06:12 **Tania**

It's wonderful to be independent, strong. That's wonderful, I'm so happy to hear. Is the climate any different? You lived in the desert for a while. I feel like our summers have been pretty hot here also, but ...

00:06:26 **Martha**

Well it didn't feel hot to me. Someone else was sharing that it was hot for them. I come from the desert where during the peak summer months, it's common to experience 115 up to 120-degree weather. And as long as we stay at about a hundred or less degrees, that is nice weather for me.

00:06:57 **Tania**

Well, then you'll love it here. Well, I'm really, really happy to hear that you're settling and well, I know a move is always, it's a lot of work and a lot of opportunities to create something new, and so very fun. I've always loved moving in my life, but it's a lot of work.

00:07:15 **Tania**

So, during the opening session of Fall Flex Day, which was your first semester with us, and I want to remind our listeners that they can revisit this podcast, episode 184, you were kind enough to share a little bit about your family's history with us on that podcast and your personal background, which I know everyone so appreciated. So much positive feedback that you opened up in that way. So, just briefly, can you remind our listeners how your experiences growing up have shaped you into the person you are today?

00:07:49 **Martha**

They definitely continue to contribute to who I am, my leadership style, my decision-making priorities. I am a proud daughter of farm workers who came to this beautiful country with a dream of ensuring that their children had a better opportunity in life. And that continues to be the journey of many of our students who are first-generation immigrants.

00:08:16 **Martha**

Well, their parents are first-generation immigrants and they're first-generation Americans, many of them, not all of them, some of them are first-generation immigrants. And I'm grateful to them, I'm grateful to my parents for having the courage to come to Imperial County and settle in Imperial County because if it wasn't for that decision, I would've not been able to pursue higher education.

00:08:47 **Martha**

I did start my academic journey at a community college and I'm truly grateful for that opportunity because it was my only opportunity to pursue higher education.

00:09:00 **Martha**

What I have learned growing up from my parents are values that continue to drive me, which are hard work, honesty and perseverance. And both of my parents started working at a young age and sacrificed tremendously growing up, but also had tremendous hope for better opportunities. And I don't think they ever imagined that their only daughter would achieve the level of success that I have.

00:09:33 **Martha**

My father knew that his only daughter would pursue higher education and it was important to him that I did that. I was not allowed to move on to a university even though I had been accepted because he essentially stated his only daughter would pursue higher education locally. So, I'm grateful for that opportunity that I had locally, which I will reiterate with the community college.

00:10:01 **Martha**

So, I'm grateful for the experiences. They definitely have contributed to me continuing to be committed every day, to doing what's best for students because for many of our students, we are their hope for prosperity and a better future.

00:10:22 **Martha**

It is this community college that continues to inspire them and hopefully help them achieve the goals that they've aspired to achieve. We're here because of our students and I'm privileged to serve this campus, these students, to serve the team, but also to serve alongside our team because there's great work that's being achieved by the employees of Mt. SAC every day.

00:10:57 **Tania**

I'm so happy that we have you in this leadership role because it's one thing to say we do things, but for our students to now have you as a role model, I think speaks volumes and it makes it easier for them to see this is something I could achieve too. And your family must be so proud as they should be.

00:11:18 **Martha**

Yes, yes they are. I no longer have my mother and I miss her tremendously. It's been six years and that frankly is difficult. However, I honor her and I am committed to fulfill her legacy in regards to helping others, especially those that need the most support in life and leading with humility. It was important for her that I remain humble as I continue to grow and serve in different capacities. She was proud, and my father is proud and I adore him. I'm grateful to him every day.

00:12:03 **Martha**

The students, because it is a priority for me to engage with students, the students have shared, especially our female students, that they are excited about having a leader who is a female. And they often ask me more than once if I'm the president for the whole college.

00:12:30 **Martha**

And it is interesting to see that there's still doubt because when we're underrepresented, even though we're doing well in California when it comes to community college CEO representation, so we've improved, there's more females in those roles, students are still surprised, especially female students.

00:12:57 **Martha**

And I want them to know that they can achieve any, any goal that they aspire to achieve. And that even when we are underrepresented in those roles, that we deserve the opportunity that we've earned. Because we have to work really hard, that we belong and that when we are afforded the opportunities, it is also important to make sure that we do our best so that we leave the door open for others to come after us.

00:13:33 **Tania**

Yes, well said, exactly. As a female in the sciences, yes, I hear you loud and clear. So, as you reflect on your first six months at Mt. SAC, what would you consider to be some of the highlights and fondest memories that you'll cherish from your first semester here?

00:13:53 **Martha**

Well, I will definitely cherish the open house. It was during summer, it was held during summer and warmer weather for those of you that have been reciting in this area. And I will always remember that day because it was so special and honestly I didn't expect the amount of team members to attend and they wanted to meet me.

00:14:22 **Martha**

They formed a line, some of them were lined up outside the building and it was hot. And that they took the time not only to meet me but that to provide a very warm and special welcome to the campus, it was beautiful. I was informed, had about over 400 attendees, that was the estimated attendance.

00:14:50 **Martha**

And frankly, it was beautiful because as I stated, I didn't think I would have that many team members come to visit and introduce themselves and made me feel truly special so that I will always cherish.

00:15:09 **Tania**

That's wonderful. Thank you for sharing that. So, on the flip side, as is also normal for a campus to face challenges, are there some, whether they were expected or unexpected that stood out to you as you onboarded over the past few months and as our new campus leader, how has this allowed you to get to know the campus community better? There's always opportunities and challenges, right?

00:15:34 **Martha**

Yes. Well, the greatest one is campus safety. Experiencing incidents that are abnormal for the campus, not only seeing, but hearing the fear that employees and students felt. That was for this semester, what I felt was the greatest challenge, but also the greatest responsibility.

00:16:03 **Martha**

Because we need to ensure, especially as a campus leader, that those that come to work here every day to serve our students and teach them and guide them in addition to those that we're here to serve, which are our students and the community members that come to our campus, that they feel safe. So, that was truly difficult.

00:16:27 **Martha**

I think it gave me an opportunity to gain a perspective of trying to understand from the student's perspective and the team member's perspective why it felt as unsafe as it did and what were the concerns that we had to address.

00:16:47 **Martha**

It gave me the opportunity as a leader to one, demonstrate to you all that your safety is my priority. Two, that I will take actions to address such a situation that was truly concerning and sensitive and that we'll continue to improve because even if it's better now, I still have a responsibility to make sure that we continue to take actions to improve safety for our campus.

00:17:24 **Martha**

We are a large campus, we are open to anyone that wants to be on campus and we have to make sure we take the measures that are necessary to be safe, especially when we're not accustomed to experiencing some of the incidents that we did.

00:17:41 **Tania**

And I think that the campus community, I hope at least I felt this way, that yes, you are taking it very seriously and yet you continue, as you said, to work on this, which also takes me to my next question for you. So, as you think about the year ahead, what are some things that you're looking forward to?

00:18:02 **Tania**

Campus safety you already mentioned is definitely going to be one of your priorities still. And I'm sure there are going to be others as the sustainability coordinator for our campus, I'm very excited, also very excited that we will have an opportunity to host a state climate summit for community college leaders. But I'm sure you have other things that you're looking forward to and I'd love for you to share some of those.

00:18:27 **Martha**

Well, I'm definitely looking forward to the new year, looking forward with excitement about the opportunities that we have. And honestly, I know that transition is difficult because with every transition there is change. But what I will say is that the change that we make, I want to make sure that we do it together.

00:18:54 **Martha**

Unless there's something such as safety where I need to address a situation that requires that we do address it immediately, then I'll definitely take the measures necessary to address the situation in order to better serve us as the whole.

00:19:13 **Martha**

But some of the opportunities we have that I'm excited about, two major ones. The first one is starting a journey of developing a new educational and facilities master plan, a comprehensive. Educational and facilities master plan, which will include integration of our cap and all the other plans that we have developed on campus.

00:19:39 **Martha**

That journey is truly exciting because it'll be critical that we receive input from the campus community, both our team members and the students, and also the community in general. That will be our blueprint and will take us to 2035.

00:20:00 **Martha**

It will be an integrated plan that is centered on DEISA and will be a blueprint, as I stated, that will also include our allocation of resources as we plan for the institution. It's really exciting for me and I look forward to engaging with the campus community as we go through that process, that's one.

00:20:28 **Martha**

The next one we will hear during spring 2024, from Aspen Community College Institute of Excellence. We submitted our application, we'll hear from them to determine if we were named top 25 community colleges in the United States, and it's possibly likely that we will not be top 2025.

00:20:55 **Martha**

And that's fine because my goal is as we continue to improve in some areas, in some areas, because we're doing amazing work in many, that next time that we have the opportunity to apply that we will be better prepared for that.

00:21:14 **Martha**

And why is that important? Aspen is the most prestigious recognition that community college could receive in the United States. To me, given who we are, given our history, given that excellence is a priority for this institution, I believe that would be a recognition that we definitely should strive for.

00:21:37 **Martha**

I'm excited and one of the opportunities that we have is the opportunity to engage with the campus community and create processes that are clear for us. So, that is more from an operational standpoint, but it excites me that there's interest and willingness to help and create a process that is clear and that we could follow consistent when it comes to planning as well, when it comes to integrated planning.

00:22:15 **Martha**

So, tremendous opportunities for us, excitement. And I truly believe that with the opportunities that we have been presented, more opportunities will arise and we'll be able to achieve because this campus is committed to working together and this campus is committed to doing what's best for students. So, we'll definitely achieve success at an additional level, at a greater level, and that's exciting.

00:22:53 **Tania**

That is exciting. It sounds like some of these are goals for 2024, but it really also exceeds and goes beyond, which of course is important. We hope that you'll be here with us for a long time. And it is of course, important for you to think beyond 2024.

00:23:09 **Tania**

So, your vision for our college as you onboarded to this leadership role, one you already mentioned to get recognized for the work that we do, but what are some of your other visions, broader visions that you have for the upcoming years?

00:23:29 **Martha**

Well, I definitely want to ensure that we ... there's so much amazing work being completed as they get to know the campus better, that we understand what are some of potentially the programs or services where we could improve and that we focus on that. I consider myself a leader that is entrepreneurial, so I definitely have interest in creating endowments and I'll be very specific.

00:24:01 **Martha**

My vision is we're going to create an endowment. We're going to create an opportunity to be able to support our athletes long-term. We're doing that very well now, but I want a long-term sustainable funding source to support our athletes. So, from a fundraising perspective, there's definitely goals that I have.

00:24:23 **Martha**

Also from that same perspective, the opportunity to write proposals to provide additional services for our students and support, but also to think about what programs can we help that need additional support. That may be because they're at an infancy stage or because we haven't realized that they need additional support, that we take the time to identify that and take action to provide support. That to me, when it comes to serving our students, really excites me.

00:25:04 **Martha**

I don't do the work alone, but I have been successful providing additional services and creating additional programs that other institutions did not have if it wasn't for the commitment to always do better for them and for the programs that we offer as well.

00:25:29 **Tania**

Well, thank you so much for sharing. I'm sure a lot of groups are excited to hear that and I know you've touched on it a little bit already, but for those of our very large campus community who have not had an opportunity yet to meet you, maybe you could share in a nutshell a little bit about your leadership style.

00:25:49 **Martha**

Yes. So, if I haven't met you, I hope I have the opportunity to meet you. And I want to thank everyone who has came to my open office hour. That time is for you, please come and say hello. It makes me really happy to engage with you.

00:26:05 **Martha**

I am a transformational servant leader. I believe in the power of transformational education. And the reason why is because in my career I have been able to see that even students who had lost hope for many reasons and sometimes reasons that they don't have control over or situations in their life that they don't have control over their education, we've definitely seen them prosper and achieve goals that they didn't imagine they would be able to.

00:26:39 **Martha**

When it comes to being a transformational servant leader, service to our students and the team is my priority, student success is our collective success, service to the communities, especially our communities where we see greater need is a priority.

00:27:01 **Martha**

It is. When we think about our DEISA commitment and work, action correlated to that commitment should reflect that we are being intentional and going above and beyond to serve and uplift and support those students that we may not be serving in the way that they need and that they deserve. And obviously, we look at data in order to determine that.

00:27:33 **Martha**

And we should be utilizing not only quantitative, but also qualitative data as we think about that. It is important to share that being honest about appreciating the contribution from everyone is a priority that for me to express gratitude means that's coming from my heart. It's not saying that just to say it's correlated to the type of leader that I am.

00:28:02 **Martha**

I have stated that I don't do the work alone and everyone's contribution is vital and I'm really grateful for that. And I'll end by stating that accountability is also important. As a transformational servant leader, which is the most important, I need to make sure I'm accountable myself.

00:28:25 **Martha**

That if I model behavior and I model actions, but that we as an institution hold ourselves accountable for one, which is the most important one. Yes, we're privileged to serve our students, but we also have a responsibility to make sure, as I stated, especially with our students that may not be succeeding at the same level. We have a responsibility and accountability to make sure we do our best.

00:28:57 **Martha**

I look forward to getting to know more of you, and I encourage you to please ask if you have questions. I'm here to serve you. And I feel truly privileged to do that every day that I walk on this campus, I am grateful for that. And I feel as a transformational servant leader that I'm fulfilling a purpose every day that I'm here.

00:29:25 **Tania**

And as someone who's had the privilege to work closely with you as a senate, vice president and now senate president and sustainability coordinator, we've had areas where we've overlapped. And yes, I want to thank you for your leadership. So, I really can just echo this and encourage people to visit with you.

00:29:43 **Tania**

It's sad when we see that people feel like there's a barrier. You are not someone to put up barriers. So, people should feel very encouraged to utilize your office hours that you have, or you've also been incredibly busy attending events that we've had, whether it's athletic events or music events, you name it. And so, I'm sure there are many opportunities for our larger campus community to get to know you.

00:30:09 **Tania**

So, thank you for being someone who is incredibly approachable and kind and honest and open with all of us and the transparency, I really so appreciate that. We're almost at the end of our time together here, is there anything else you would like to share with our listeners?

00:30:27 **Martha**

I wish you all a happy 2024. I look forward with excitement to start the new year strong, as an institution, united because we're stronger together and we do the work together. And once again, thank you for helping me do the work that we need to do to serve our students, teach our students, guide our students, and contribute to prosperity of the committees that we have the opportunity to serve.

00:31:03 **Tania**

Thank you so much, Dr. Garcia, for your time, and happy 2024 to everyone.

00:31:10 **Martha**

Thank you.

00:31:14 **Tania**

Thank you for listening to the Magic Mountie Podcast. And don't forget to share your favorite episodes.