



Dennis Kause '79, economics

Opening a brewery and running a company that makes custom shoe insoles wasn't part of the plan. As a baseball player at UCI, Dennis Kause wanted to go pro. And he nearly did after graduation, briefly dabbling with the Dodgers organization before deciding he'd have more success in the business world. So he joined General Electric Information Services and later

founded and sold two software consulting firms before taking over Santa Ana-based Bio Orthopedic Lab, which supplies foot orthotics to college sports teams, doctors and private patients. More recently, with his son, Daniel, a former University of Oregon football player, Kause launched Dueling Ducks Brewing Co., which sells craft ales at Angel Stadium and operates a tasting room along Anaheim's La Palma Beer Trail. The venture began in 2014 when his son discovered "you can make this stuff at home" and invited dad to help. Eventually, Daniel Kause's creations started winning awards and, in 2021, the pair transformed the hobby into a full-fledged business.

Vicki (Peralta) Vasques '81, teaching credentials (elementary and high school)



Her detour to Washington, D.C., was supposed to be temporary. While teaching elementary school in Mission Viejo, Vicki Vasques landed a job with the Reagan administration as a special assistant in the Department of Education's civil rights office. Instead of returning after a year, as planned, she caught "Potomac fever" and spent the next quarter century in various federal posts under four presidents, finishing as assistant deputy secretary of the Office of Indian Education under George W. Bush. After retiring in 2005, Vasques – who is Diegueño, from the San Pasqual Band of Mission Indians, and now lives in Virginia – founded Tribal Tech LLC, which provides consulting services

to federal, state, corporate and tribal clients. In 2016, she established the Ronald Maese Peralta Foundation, named for her father, to improve the education, health and wellness of all, but especially Native Americans. The nonprofit also funds UCI internships at the Center for the Study of the Presidency and Congress.

Farhad Daghighian, Ph.D. '87, physics

A year before the Shah of Iran was overthrown in 1979, Farhad Daghighian left his native Tehran and arrived at UCI's plasma physics lab with a single suitcase in hand. His brother, Henry ('85, physics), three cousins and a couple of friends eventually followed, forming a small Anteatier expatriate group. After graduation, Daghighian entered the field of nuclear medicine and developed a series of devices to aid in treating cancer. His latest machine, a lower-cost, portable image scanner called BBX-PET, enables neurologists to quickly diagnose Alzheimer's disease in-house instead of sending patients to an outside lab, he says. The FDA-approved technology, which took eight years to perfect after Daghighian won a 2012 business plan competition sponsored by UCI's Paul Merage School of Business, will also be marketed to cardiologists. When the Santa Monica resident isn't tinkering with medical gadgets, his hobbies include travel, reading and a mostly unplayed cello.



Mark Gagnon, M.A. '99, German



A dynamic high school teacher and a flyer from upstate New York set the course for Mark Gagnon's career. As a teen, inspired by an "amazing" German class at Diamond Bar High School, he lived near Hamburg as an exchange student during his senior year. Then a leaflet from the U.S. Military Academy in West Point, New York, caught his eye. "I didn't come from a military family," Gagnon says,

"but I wanted to attend a college that would challenge me academically and physically, teach me leadership" – and offer the chance to be stationed in Germany. After graduating, he served seven years, including assignments in his favorite European nation, before West Point recruited him to come back as a German instructor. That led to the UCI degree and, later, a Ph.D. from Harvard University. In 2020, Col. Gagnon retired from active duty, but he continues to direct the academy's German program. He and his wife, Kristin, a fellow West Point alum, have 10 children and one grandchild.



Diana (Hamman) Dizon, M.S. '03, biological sciences

As chief "bionerd," Diana Dizon organizes hands-on workshops for K-8 children on such topics as bugs, dinosaurs, skeletons, fingerprints, jellyfish and cardiology. Originally from Jakarta, Indonesia, Dizon spent the first part of her career researching macular degeneration and colon cancer. But in 2015, after noticing that her young son and daughter weren't getting much exposure to biology and nature in their elementary school, she quit her medical products job and founded Bionerds as a family business. "I love working with kids and felt that I needed to do something different in my life," she recalls. The company's first class was held in Dizon's Rancho Santa Margarita garage. Seven years later, Bionerds programs are taught in more than 150 Orange County schools, cities, libraries and Girl Scouts gatherings, she says, with plans to branch out to neighboring counties and work more with underserved students. In her spare time, Dizon enjoys hiking, scrapbooking, puzzles and gardening.



Farah Bajwa '04, electromechanical engineering

Cascading dominoes, a Red Bull Rube Goldberg machine, fuse boxes and fighter jets are all part of Farah Bajwa's life story. After UCI, she initially joined the aerospace industry, working on military and commercial flight control systems. But she also found a creative outlet for her engineering skills: helping to build Red Bull's half-human, half-mechanical kluge at the old El Toro air base. The resulting video has racked up more than 36 million views. It also led to Bajwa being recruited to compete on "Domino Masters," a 2022 TV series devoted to

elaborate displays of falling rectangular blocks. Meanwhile, two years ago, Bajwa switched from aerospace to electricity, becoming a project manager for Eaton Corp.'s circuit breakers, fuses, and other power management products and services. The San Diego resident is also a travel aficionado whose first passport – at the age of 3 weeks – took her to Egypt and whose subsequent trips have included chasing the northern lights in Iceland, snorkeling along Australia's Great Barrier Reef and touring a space alien museum in New Mexico.



Zach Golden, MBA '12

"Peace through perspiration" is the motto of Sanctuary Fitness, a small chain of strength and conditioning studios founded by Zach Golden. The former college baseball pitcher developed the concept in 2016 after getting laid off from an outdoor apparel company. "While I was unemployed, I realized that I liked the group atmosphere at the different

gyms I went to, but I couldn't find the workout or vibe I was looking for," he recalls. So Golden created his own fitness program – a no-treadmill regimen that focuses on strength and cardio training – and put his MBA to use launching his first studio in downtown Los Angeles in 2017. With newer branches in Pasadena, West Hollywood and Koreatown, Sanctuary Fitness survived the pandemic by shifting to outdoor and online classes. Golden now hopes to expand and possibly franchise beyond L.A. County – even, perhaps, to his home state of Texas.



Taylor Fagins '17, drama

A 30-minute burst of creativity turned Taylor Fagins' life upside down. Heartbroken over the death of George Floyd in police custody, Fagins dashed off a song about the chilling effects of such incidents, posted it online and watched in wonder as the composition drew tens of thousands of views. The tune also won *American Songwriter's* 2020 contest, with a \$10,000 prize. Encouraged by the accolades, Fagins – who grew up in La Palma, started singing at age 9 and began writing music in high school to cope with his parents' divorce – enrolled in graduate school at the Berklee College of Music's New York City campus. Then "American Idol" came calling. Although Fagins wowed the room during the season premiere in February, he was cut in the next round. But his luck continues. Fagins says his phone has been ringing off the hook with offers since his TV appearance. His latest project is a new musical called "Sunken Cathedral."