

## EXPOSURE



## THE GROUNDWORK FOR GROWTH

*Life on the farm: JJ Lino*

Story by [Fresno State](#)

October 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019

One year ago, Juan “JJ” Lino’s life changed forever. The youngest of seven children and the son of a farm worker mother, JJ became the first in his family to pursue a college degree.

The path became possible thanks to Derek and Heather Carr.

JJ is the first-ever recipient of the Derek and Heather Carr Scholarship. For a student who needed loans to pursue higher education, the award is especially meaningful.

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“When I found out, I just kind of broke down,” JJ says. “I’m just like, ‘There’s no way this is actually real.’”

Derek and Heather’s gift allows JJ to pursue his bachelor’s degree in viticulture at Fresno State. The scholarship covers the cost of his education for four years, as long as he qualifies.

“We just wanted to give him an opportunity to let his dreams be fulfilled,” Derek says. “Our number one goal is just to bring joy to his family and give them some relief.”

### The groundwork for growth



→ **Did you know? Approximately 80% of Fresno State students receive some type of financial assistance to attend school.**

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## PLANTING SEEDS FOR SUCCESS

Derek was a record-setting Fresno State quarterback from 2009 to 2013. He graduated with a bachelor's degree in recreation administration and was drafted by the Oakland Raiders in the second round of the 2014 NFL Draft.

At Fresno State, Derek met his wife, Heather. Heather graduated with a bachelor's degree in liberal studies. The couple, who now have three children together, say that they created the scholarship to support deserving students like JJ.

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"The reason we started this was just to give an opportunity," Derek says. "Just like someone decided to give to Fresno State one day and they gave me a scholarship to play football here. That to me was an opportunity — and that's all we want to do."

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# A HARVEST AHEAD

The first few weeks of JJ's college experience did not go as planned. Having no college-educated role models in his family, JJ says he had difficulty navigating higher education. His high school graduating class had only 72 students — a stark contrast to Fresno State, where nearly 25,000 students are enrolled.

"I felt pressure. Like, 'You can't mess up. You've got to do this,'" JJ says. "It was just so overwhelming and I didn't really know how to grasp it all at once."

Like many first-year students, JJ struggled with time management and motivation. His academic performance began to suffer as a result.

But a pivotal moment changed everything. At a Bulldogs' football game in October 2018, JJ was honored on the field as the Carrs' first scholarship recipient. Heather and sons Dallas and Deker joined JJ in front of a crowd of Bulldog fans for the announcement. JJ was presented with an autographed Raiders' jersey from Derek. A video message from Derek also played on the scoreboard.

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"It was really exciting in the moment, but after the fact, I felt like I was letting people down based on how I'm performing with academics," JJ says. "That's really what got me thinking, 'I definitely have to make some changes.'"

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→ Did you know? Nearly 70% of Fresno State students are the first in their families to attend college.

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## FRUITS OF LABOR

JJ's spring semester was a drastic change from his first semester at Fresno State. His grades improved thanks to study sessions at the library, support from his fraternity and connecting with his professors.

In a letter to the Carr family, JJ wrote:

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“I lost track of myself. I came to college so that I may be able to give back to my family later in my future, but I came to the realization that in order for me to do it for them, I need to do it for myself.”

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Derek says he sees a lot of himself in JJ.

“I went through the same things that JJ went through,” Derek says. “I had a lot of struggles when it came to school ... everyone saw something in me, but I didn't see it in myself.”

With his focus on education renewed, JJ is able to concentrate on his viticulture degree. He

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recalls early mornings where he joined his mother working on farms in Napa — it was hard labor that peaked his interest the older he got.

Fresno State is located within the largest grape producing region in the nation. Resources for students include 120 acres of table, raisin and wine grape vineyards — the training ground for numerous award-winning viticulturists and winemakers.

Fresno State is also home to the largest and first commercially-bonded winery on any university campus. Student-produced wine, jams, jellies and other products can be purchased at the [Rue and Gwen Gibson Farm Market](#).

Thanks to Heather and Derek Carr, JJ is able to gain hands-on skills at Fresno State's 1,000-acre University Agricultural Laboratory (campus farm). He hopes to one day own a vineyard.

“God really had a way of showing me that this is where I belong,” JJ says. “Blessing my life with having the Carr family do this for me ... It's meant a whole lot to me, my family and my friends — because they all wanted something for me, and here I am.”



**YOU CAN HAVE A HAND IN STUDENT SUCCESS.**

Footnote: *Photos by Cary Edmondson, Story by Esra Hashem, Video by Daniel Teran and Domenick*

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