On the wall over the desk of Dr. Victor Jaime, president of Imperial Valley College (IVC), are two diplomas—the two he holds most dear. One is the associate's degree he earned at IVC in 1977; the other is his doctorate from Northern Arizona University earned in 1999.

He has more degrees, including a master's from San Diego State University and an educational specialist degree from Point Loma Nazarene University. But the two on the wall hold a special place for Jaime, who was born and raised in the Imperial Valley.

The degree from IVC, a community college in this California desert southwest region, set him on his educational path and the doctorate was a culmination of that journey, one that took him farther than even he anticipated when he finished high school and thought about his future.

College was always a goal, instilled in him by his parents and grandparents who didn't have his opportunities, but wanted more for him. That he would earn a doctorate and one day become president of the college that began his path—well, those accomplishments became examples of how an education can guide one to new heights.

Those accomplishments are also examples of one man's passion to make a difference at the college where he has devoted his entire professional career and in the Imperial Valley community where he has raised his family.

"This is my community. It will always be my home." said Jaime, who has been president of Imperial Valley College for six years but has worked for the college for 36 years.

Jaime, who at 59, is the father of three adult children and grandfather of three, and husband to Caroline Jaime, a longtime educator in the El Centro Elementary School District, looks back on his career with a great deal of satisfaction. He also has gratitude for the advice he received from his family growing up and those who pushed him along the way.

Born in Brawley and raised in El Centro, Jaime was the first in his family to attend college. His father, Victor Jaime Sr., was a successful mechanic in El Centro who eventually worked for the El Centro elementary school district, retiring as director of maintenance, operations and transportation. However, his father never had the chance to attend college. He wanted Jaime to have that opportunity and to take advantage of it. He told his son to strive to be the best he could be and no matter what he chose to do, to give it his all.

Jaime remembers watching his father at the mechanic shop do more for his customers than what he was paid to do to ensure the vehicles were in the best condition.

"I told him you are doing more than what you were asked to do," Jaime said. "He responded, 'When you give the customer more than what they expect, they will come back to you and refer you to others.' That stuck with me all my life.

While attending Central Union High School, Jaime was an average student. He passed his classes with what he called unexceptional grades and graduated in 1975. He knew from there that he wanted to pursue a higher education and earn a bachelor's degree. Imperial Valley College became his pathway.

He enrolled at IVC and earned his associate's degree in 1977. When his graduation was nearing, he had a conversation with his grandfather, Larry Gonzalez, who wanted to see him in his cap and gown. His grandfather, who only had a third-grade education, was still one of the brightest men he has known. Jaime
said if the chances had been afforded to his grandfather, he would have pursued a higher education to become a medical doctor.

“When he saw me in the cap and gown, he told me, ‘What you are doing is what I wanted to do, and I am so proud of you,’” Jaime said.

A week later his grandfather died in a drowning accident. In his doctoral dissertation, Jaime devotes a page to his father and grandfather who inspired him to take a different path than the generations that preceded him.

Jaime went on to attend the University of California, Irvine where in 1980 he achieved his goal of earning a bachelor's degree in social science. His career goal was to help others, and he decided counseling would be his means to do so.

Jaime was immediately hired by Dr. Hector Lopez, then vice president of student services at IVC. Jaime became a part-time counselor. A year later he was promoted to full time and named director of the Talent Search program, which extends services to low income and potentially first generation students.

Meanwhile, he made the decision to continue his own educational pursuits, earning a master's degree in counseling from San Diego State University. At that point, Jaime, then married and a parent, thought he had finished his studies. He was doing what he loved—helping students at IVC who were much like him, working to inspire them the way he was inspired.

Hector Lopez had other ideas for him.

"He had everyone’s pathway figured out," Jaime joked. "He said I needed to go after a doctorate; that I needed to become an administrator. I figured I better listen to him."

Jaime did launch into his doctoral studies, the first part of which involved earning an educational specialist degree at Point Loma Nazarene University; then the second part of the program led him to Northern Arizona University (NAU) where, over the course of four summers, he completed his studies and defended his dissertation. Those summers were special times, he said, because he would bring his family with him so they could spend the summer together in Flagstaff, Arizona, where NAU is based. He earned his degree in February 1999.

"First, you stand before a committee, and they quiz you on your statistics and your findings," Jaime said of defending his dissertation. "Then they send you out of the room. If you make it, they say, 'Dr. Jaime, you can come back in.' That’s what they said to me."

In all, Jaime’s educational journey took 24 years. He was 42 at the time he earned his doctorate. He said the only way to get through it was to set small goals rather than focus solely on the end goal. He extends that advice to others.

"You really have to have short term goals and celebrate them when you reach them," he said. "Those small little successes—people have to celebrate them."

It was in 1999, after serving years as financial aid director, that Jaime became vice president of student services following Lopez’s retirement. He remained in that position until becoming president of IVC, a college that serves some 7,500 students, six years ago. In all his years at IVC, he never thought about leaving to other colleges outside the Valley.

"If Imperial Valley College was the only pathway for me, there were so many countless others out there who wouldn’t have an opportunity to pursue a higher education without this college," he said, adding that even as he made the move into administration he wanted to be there to help students achieve their goals, and to remain at IVC to specifically help this region's students.

Though the job of running a college campus can be political, and Jaime does not consider himself "a political kind of guy" as he phrased it, he has focused on building relationships and has striven to face issues with honesty, truth and a sense of genuineness.

"People are not always going to like the decisions you make, but you have to do what is best for the institution," he said. "Will we always make the right decision? No, we are human. But if you try to follow your mission, then you know you have done your best."

As president, he wants students and the community to have a mindset of just how important a community college is and how critical it is to celebrate the successes of students. IVC, he added, is unique in the state because of its number of first-generation students, and families in the Valley do recognize how special it is for those students who graduate from the college.

"In our community it is a big deal," he said.

Just as Jaime has spent his career stressing the importance of an education to IVC students, it is also a message he and his wife imparted to their children. He
speaks of his children and their achievements with even more pride than his own.

His two oldest, Stephen Jaime and Jennifer Kerns—twins— are college graduates and his youngest, Matthew, is a junior at Fresno State University.

Stephen, who earned a degree from IVC and went on to earn a bachelor's and master's in nursing from San Diego State, is director of critical care at Pioneers Memorial Hospital and a faculty member at SDSU, Imperial Valley Campus. Jennifer earned a degree in interior design from Fresno State and now has her own business. Matthew is studying to be a registered dietician.

"I am so proud of what they have done," Jaime said.

On a bookshelf in his office are the photographs of his family. Nearby are banners of the educational programs that are so critical in the Imperial Valley toward increasing the number of young people who pursue their own education.

In recent years, the number of students in the Valley going on to college has improved, but the numbers still are considerably lower than other parts of the state. Jaime, together with so many other local educators across the Valley, has worked to change that, and those efforts will continue.

And, he said, IVC will always be there to help students along their educational path, just as IVC was there for him.

"We are here to encourage and be a part of helping students succeed academically," he said. "I want students to know they can aspire as far as they want."