

Rickerby Hinds:

Welcome to The Creator State, where we share stories of social innovation and entrepreneurship for movers, shakers, creators, and change makers. Each episode will celebrate success and failure, ingenuity, and the endless pursuit of knowledge, from education to implementation. Join us as we explore everything in between. The Creator State.

Rickerby Hinds:

Can you name the fastest land mammal in North America? If you guessed the pronghorn, you're right. In the world, they're second only to the cheetah. Fascinating. Right? On a warm day in November, a team from UC Riverside got to meet some friendly and very fast pronghorns, along with giraffes, chimpanzees, and okapis, while interviewing UCR alumni, Denise Verret, at the Los Angeles Zoo and Botanical Gardens.

Rickerby Hinds:

The zoo, according to Denise, represents the best of Los Angeles, a place she loves dearly and has dedicated her life to serving. In 2019, after three decades working for the city of Los Angeles, Denise was named CEO and director of the zoo, becoming the first African American woman to lead a major U.S. zoo. In this wild episode, Denise shares her love for animals and LA during an interview with UCR Magazine editor, Omar Shamout, inside The LAIR, the reptile and amphibian house at the LA Zoo.

Omar Shamout:

Denise, could you tell us about your family and growing up in Altadena?

Denise Verret:

So Altadena was an amazing place to grow up. It was like this small town where you knew all your neighbors and local stores, and I remember walking to my local park or my local library, and I remember it was a very diverse community, so I appreciated that, and my parents were amazing and were really about family and valuing family and spending time with family, which really instilled that value in me today.

Denise Verret:

I had two sisters growing up, five years older and five years younger, so I was the middle child. So it was interesting, we didn't really have a close relationship because there was such a large age disparity, but still, we were very close. I remember going to my grandparents' house often because they lived in Altadena, and they were world travelers. They traveled all over the world. I remember sort of going on journeys of the places that they went through pictures and photos, and we would go to their house on Sundays and have dinner, and that's where I was first introduced to National Geographic, and also taking journeys through that magazine, and my first experience with wildlife television show called Mutual of Omaha with Marlin Perkins. And so family and growing up in Altadena was a very wonderful part of my life.

Omar Shamout:

What did your parents do and what type of influence did they have on you?

Denise Verret:

So my father was an LAPD detective when he retired, so he was in law enforcement. My mother was an accounts payable manager at Huntington Memorial Hospital, sort of started her career a little bit later because she was a stay-at-home mom initially. I remember as a child, you watch TV and you see police shows, and I remember thinking, "That's not my dad," because my dad was incredibly nice and kind, and he talked to everybody, and we sort of had this running joke because back in the day you could call the operator 411 for information, and by the time he got off the phone, he knew that operator's entire life story because he would be talking to them as if he knew them.

Denise Verret:

But my parents were both amazing people, very inspiring people. I can remember my mother especially always making me believe that I could grow up and do anything that I wanted in life, and that being a woman or being a minority was an asset and an opportunity. I always remembered that, and it stayed in me until this day.

Omar Shamout:

What were your interests as a child?

Denise Verret:

You know, so we kind of laugh about this. So I was a bookworm. I love to read. I had lots and lots of books on my shelves. My sisters liked to be in the kitchen with my mom, kind of seeing her cook because she was an amazing cook. I did not get the cooking gene. I am not a good cook. Thank God my husband is. But I was the curious type. I was always asking questions and wanting to learn and go to the library, and so I always was somebody that was always curious and wanting to learn more throughout my entire life, and that continues to be one of my characteristics today.

Omar Shamout:

How did you find your way to UC Riverside?

Denise Verret:

I knew when I was in high school that I was going to go to college, and when it was my junior year and you kind of start thinking about where you might apply, I honestly didn't know where I wanted to go to school, and I wasn't even sure what I wanted to major in. But what I did know is that I did not want to go to a university that was a huge campus with a huge student population. I didn't want to feel swallowed up. I wanted to go someplace a little more intimate where I would know my fellow students and I could navigate the campus very comfortably.

Denise Verret:

So I went to my counselor and sort of said that's what I was looking for, and she provided me with a lot of options, Cal Poly Pomona, the Claremont colleges, UC Irvine. I wanted to also be able to go far enough away where I lived on campus but I could drive home, and she also suggested UC Riverside. I applied to various colleges, got in to many, and after going to the campus, I felt like it was the campus for me. It gave me this sort of small town feel, which was sort of like Altadena, and I felt like I could be successful there.

Omar Shamout:

Could you tell us about your experience as a student at UCR?

Denise Verret:

My student experience was amazing. You know, one of the things that I remember when I went on my high school tour, which was before I graduated, so it was in early 1984 and Tomas Rivera was the chancellor at the time. And I remember thinking, "Wow, a Mexican-American is at the highest level of this university." And I was like, "That is inspiring and that is trendsetting," at the time for a UC campus, and I thought, "This is going to be the campus for me." He passed away suddenly before I entered, but it stayed with me throughout my career at the university, and I felt like the campus was all about student success, academic success, what can we do to support you in graduating from this university and being successful in your professional career? And that was one of the things that stayed with me.

Denise Verret:

I also had three African-American professors that have stayed with me in my career, and again, being symbols of what you can achieve, Professor Maulana Karenga, Dr. Carolyn Murray, and Dr. David [Horne 00:06:46], who all left an impact on me, and then developing lifelong friends that I still have today. It was an experience that I think set me up for personal and professional success and is one of the reasons why I'm in this position today.

Omar Shamout:

Tell us the story of how you met your husband.

Denise Verret:

Oh, my Gosh. The love of my life for 26 years. I'm a little bit older than him by 10 months. It's sort of a running joke, but I was a junior and he was a freshman, and I worked at a program called Early Outreach at UC Riverside. It was a program that was helping local high school students that were underrepresented be ready to be prepared to apply to go to college. And so I was in the office on a particular day, and I was making packets for the director who was going to an evening meeting, and I was running out of time before I had to go to class. My future husband would come into the office often because he knew the director personally, and he was trying to get work, but he was a freshman so you can't work yet. So he came in the office that particular day and I'm like, "Okay, you want to work? I need help finishing these packets. Come help me finish," and he did. And I was like, "Okay, so I'm going to take you to lunch and I'm going to pay you back for helping me." He said, "Okay."

Denise Verret:

So, I don't know, maybe about a week or so later we go to lunch, and I go to pay, and before I could pay he paid, and I'm like, "Okay, great. Now I have to take you to lunch again because I still owe you." So it sort of struck up this introduction and this conversation, and from that we began dating, and about seven years later we got married, and we've been married for 26 years. He is the absolute joy of my life, and I would not be in this position without his support raising two children. He's my rock and I love him dearly.

Omar Shamout:

Your son is now a UCR alum as well. How was his experience at UCR?

Denise Verret:

So I'm going to try and remember what he told me last night as we talked about it, but basically what he said was, when he went to UC Riverside, and he applied to a lot of different universities. When he first got there, he thought, "Okay, I'm going to do one year and I'm going to transfer to a different university." And after his fall semester and getting involved with campus activities, he completely changed his mind because he found out that UCR was the campus for him where he could sort of rediscover himself. He learned to be independent and resilient, and it prepared him for, not only to be academically successful, he finished his bachelor's in psychology in four years, but also prepared him professionally. I found that it was very sort of ironic, but yet not surprising, that really that is the same experience that I had, that he found that UCR prepared him not only academically but personally and professionally, and provided the foundation for his future that will stay with him. Many years have gone by, but UCR is still the same in preparing people to be successful in life.

Omar Shamout:

What does UCR mean to you?

Denise Verret:

You know, UCR means, just as I've described it, myself, my husband, my son, it is about preparing people to be successful in life professionally and personally. I sent an article that was in the LA Times in 2017 to my son that was about UCR, as part of this big research, was one of the top universities in the nation in ensuring graduation rates among minorities, and that is something that is to be so proud of and to be a part of. I think that they are an incredible asset to the greater Riverside community, and really, to any student that is interested in academic achievement across the entire country. It is something that everybody should be proud of, and it just continues to grow in innovation and diversity and research, and I'm just proud to be an alumni.

Omar Shamout:

How did you decide to work for the city of Los Angeles?

Denise Verret:

So I was a senior in college and had absolutely no idea what I was going to do career-wise. I was going to be graduating with my bachelor's in administrative studies, and my aunt was an executive administrative assistant with the city of Los Angeles. She said, "Okay, so you don't know what you're going to do, so why don't you just come do an internship in the city? I have a friend who's an assistant city manager, you could do an internship and then figure it out." And I thought, "Okay, I'll go to graduate school and then I'll get a real job in the private sector."

Denise Verret:

So I go in 1988, and I start in July as an intern in the Office of the City Administrative Officer, which is like a city manager's office. I did an internship and they said, "Well, we have an opportunity for you to stay on beyond the summer, are you interested?" And I said, "Oh, okay. I'll stay beyond the summer," and I ended up taking the entry level exam for an administrative position and doing well. I stayed on, and I actually found that I liked work for government that was benefiting the residents of Los Angeles. 31 years later, here I am. I liked the analytical work. I liked working for elected officials. I liked doing work

that was going to some way make a difference, and I've stayed and feel very rewarded and fulfilled in the work that I've been doing.

Omar Shamout:

How did you later end up working for the zoo?

Denise Verret:

So in the CAO's office, I had promoted to a principal analyst, and I had a complex assignment of budgeting for the recreation and parks department. At the time, the zoo was a division within the recreation and parks department, and in the '90s, it had fallen on some difficult times and there was a lot of work that needed to be done. The mayor and the council president at the time, who also represented the district that the zoo resided in, were very committed to improving the zoo, and so they established an ad hoc committee just to focus on the zoo. There were lots of policy reports that were being written that I was involved in, so I got to understand and know some of the challenges that the zoo was facing, but writing reports that provided recommendations on how to improve it.

Denise Verret:

One of the things that came out of all of that was the zoo should be separated from recreation and parks and be created as its own separate city department, which happened in 1997. They hired a new zoo director at that time, and after a few years, he had an opportunity to hire the first ever deputy director. And I felt like I could contribute to the zoo as it was sort of going through a reemergence and rebirth, competed in a nationwide search, and I got that position in 2000.

Omar Shamout:

What does it mean for you to be the first female African-American director of an Association of Zoos and Aquariums accredited institution?

Denise Verret:

Being the first means that I won't be the last, and people seeing what the opportunities are and being a role model for other women and women of color is very humbling to me, but I take it very seriously. I am committed to bringing as many people along on their own leadership journey as I possibly can, talking to groups, being an inspiration and mentoring. I feel it's my duty to do so. And again, I look to my UCR experience as providing sort of the foundation of being able to be where I am today, sort of like President Barack Obama. Seeing is believing, and having hope and knowing that there's opportunities for other is what I hope to be able to leave in my legacy.

Omar Shamout:

What's your favorite exhibit at the zoo and why?

Denise Verret:

So my favorite exhibit is the gorilla exhibit, Campo Gorilla Reserve. It is a very immersive exhibit. You leave the main visitor path and sort of meander and wind and sort of discover our gorillas. It's very lush, lots of landscape. We have two gorilla troops, a family group and a bachelor group. It has glass paneling so that when the gorillas choose to come to the glass, you can kind of see them nose-to-nose and see their eyes and the details of their features, which are very amazing. They're somewhat mysterious but

highly intelligent. You can also learn about how critically endangered they are. And so it sort of embodies to me what zoos are really all about in one experience.

Rickerby Hinds:

Now, let's get into the Creator State of Mind. In each episode we asked our guests to share what's been on their minds, something they can't stop thinking about, a new challenge they're facing, or what's inspired them into action recently. We call it the Creator State of Mind.

Denise Verret:

So what is inspiring me is the opportunity for zoos, and AZA-accredited zoos, so zoos accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, and the LA Zoo in particular, to make a difference in conserving wildlife. We hear a lot of stories about climate change and the impact on the world that we all live in, and species are going through sort of mass extinction right now for a lot of reasons, wildlife trafficking, poaching, human animal conflict, habitat destruction, and zoos play a vital role in addressing that very, very difficult topic.

Denise Verret:

So what's inspiring to me is how the Los Angeles Zoo can make a difference in that regard, and we do that a variety of ways. We have captive breeding programs that allow us to release animals back into their natural habitat. We have staff that have tremendous expertise in caring for animals and learning about reproduction and nutrition and husbandry, and we take that knowledge and expertise, and we share it with wildlife projects that we support around the world that help with wild populations and re-introduction. Then we support financially wildlife projects, help with local economies and the community, and engaging them because it is critical that the community be actively engaged in saving wildlife. We can't just focus on animals. We have to focus on the local people as well. And so I'm inspired about the Los Angeles Zoo's ability to make an even greater impact than we have.

Omar Shamout:

What are some facts about the zoo that people might not know?

Denise Verret:

We have an amazingly talented, dedicated team of staff that take care of the animals on a daily basis. We have animal care experts, we have researchers, we have a nutritionist, veterinary staff, and they all contribute greatly to the welfare and the wellbeing of our animals. But we also have a group of people that support us that I think is unique and interesting. We have a medical advisory board of 50 human and veterinary professionals that support us in case management when we are in need. These are humans and veterinarians that are experts in anesthesiology, oncology, dermatology, lots of different expertise, radiology, and they come in and provide us assistance in providing exceptional care for our animals. We sometimes take our animals off grounds if they need special procedures or access to special equipment, and I think that people don't always know the lengths that we go to to provide the outstanding care that the animals receive here at the Los Angeles Zoo. I'm very proud of our commitment to animal welfare and animal wellness.

Omar Shamout:

Why are zoos, and the LA Zoo in particular, important?

Denise Verret:

For a variety of reasons. Right? So we provide an opportunity for the public to see animals that they otherwise would not have an opportunity to see, to go to Africa and see giraffe or zebra, go to Australia to see koalas or cassowary, South America to see jaguars or tapirs. We need people to see animals in order to feel and to care and to do. We're trying to build empathy, and we need people to be able to see these amazing creatures and learn about them, smell them, be able to feel them. And so zoos are a vital asset in being able to create that experience.

Denise Verret:

Again, our conservation work is about saving animals from extinction, and supporting field projects is vital to preventing animals from going extinct. We have a lot of success. We have our California Condor program. Back in 1967, we received one of the last few condors. Their numbers were significantly low, down in the 20s, and established the California Condor Recovery program with other agencies, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the San Diego Zoo, and brought those animals back from extinction with captive breeding and release programs. Their numbers are now up to 300 in the wild, and if it were not for zoos, that animal would have gone extinct. And so it's very vital that zoos remain current and relevant to contribute to wildlife, wild places, ecosystems, and this world that we all live in.

Omar Shamout:

What makes the LA Zoo unique?

Denise Verret:

So what makes the LA Zoo unique is Los Angeles itself, right? Los Angeles is just rich in culture and diversity. We have arts. We have mecca sports teams. We are the entertainment capital of the world. We have innovation, and I think for the Los Angeles Zoo, being able to leverage all that is unique about Los Angeles is what I'm looking forward to in transforming the Los Angeles Zoo into something that is uniquely LA. There is no other city like Los Angeles in the world, and it needs a zoo that is unlike any place in the world, and I'm looking forward to that transformation.

Omar Shamout:

While Los Angeles has had a zoo since the 1890s, it took more than a half century to bring one to Griffith Park. Could you give us a bit of background on the uphill battle to build a world-class zoo in Los Angeles?

Denise Verret:

In Los Angeles, there are lots of cultural, recreational facilities, museums, and lots of unique facilities. We have a world-class observatory. And so I think that the citizens of Los Angeles in 1965 voted and determined that a zoo was vital, and there had been lots of other zoos in different places, but in 1965 they voted and they said they wanted a zoo and they wanted a zoo for Los Angeles. I think that they understood the value of a resource and an asset like this facility. It brings together people from all walks of life. It's one of the things that is so beautiful about the zoo, is that people of different backgrounds and ethnicities and religions and social economic status and genders and abilities, it is sort of the melting pot and microcosm of all that is Los Angeles.

Denise Verret:

So one of the beautiful things about the Los Angeles Zoo is when you come through the Gates, everyone is the same. It doesn't matter where you came from. This is an equalizing experience. Everyone is coming here with family and friends to see animals and develop an appreciation and create memories. And so I feel that the zoo is really a great place to have that all sort of converge here at the Los Angeles Zoo.

Omar Shamout:

How was the zoo able to rebound after a challenging period in the 1990s, and how have you built on those advances since then?

Denise Verret:

So one of the ways that we came out of it was the city giving the zoo the attention that it needed and elevating its importance, and they supported a lot of bond measures and assessments that resulted in \$172 million investment in capital projects, which we did in partnership with our nonprofit support organization, the Greater Los Angeles Zoo Association, and were able to address a lot of the infrastructure that had not been improved since we opened in 1966. We were able to build a lot of beautiful new exhibits. We're sitting in one today, The LAIR, but it gave us an opportunity to reinvest from a capital standpoint, and then that was supported by being able to invest in the human capital, which allowed us to elevate our commitment to animal care and welfare and achieve our AZA accreditation, which is really the gold stamp of approval saying that you meet rigorous standards in a variety of categories, and we are one of 239 institutions in North America that have achieved and maintained that AZA accreditation.

Omar Shamout:

How has the zoo evolved its exhibits and programming to keep up with changing consumer habits?

Denise Verret:

Exhibits have evolved by becoming larger, more expansive, representing more naturalistic features, and sort of mimicking what the habitat might be in the wild for the animals that are in human care, allowing for animals to make choices and to thrive, have behavioral enrichment that stimulates behaviors like foraging, and so we're proud of our exhibits and look to continue to improve in that regard.

Denise Verret:

We've also evolved to focus on community engagement, and how can we not only draw more visitors to the zoo, but take the zoo out into the community? Our strategic plan's title is The Los Angeles Zoo: A Zoo Without Borders. And so we want to be more than just the facility that gets 1.8 million visitors, but how can we go out into the community in the places and spaces that people are comfortable and engage them in their own assets and teach them about the zoo and begin to have them ask us questions so that they can learn, and perhaps ultimately come to the zoo and have an experience here?

Denise Verret:

And then the experience at the zoo is also more about connecting people with the animals, and we've had some new experiences like giraffe feeding and our Flamingo Mingle where you can actually get up close and personal and learn about those animals at the same time through these types of engaging and dynamic experiences. I think that zoos, and the LA Zoo in general, are trying to do more things to tell our

conservation stories and engage our audience, and then build new audiences like we have with our evening events such as Brew at the Zoo and Roaring Nights, which are targeted towards the millennial crowd. So provide great food, a fun atmosphere, entertainment like music, and then drive them here and then teach them about our animals, our animal programs, and our conservation programs at the same time, and build that audience and that demographic as well.

Omar Shamout:

Could you provide some details on the new zoo vision plan and explain how it will improve the zoo even further?

Denise Verret:

So the vision plan is very ambitious. It is several hundred million dollars. If it were to be completely funded today, almost \$700 million to be exact, but it would take place over eight phases, which would be really over three decades. It's very ambitious. It would transform the entire 133-acre campus, and I think be really visionary in transforming the zoo into something that is uniquely Los Angeles. We hope to be able to implement the first three phases before 2028, or just in time for 2028, when the city of Los Angeles will host the Olympics for a historic third time. We will be on the world stage, and we think that the Los Angeles Zoo can be a great attraction during that time. So we would hopefully transform our California section, our Africa section, and our Asia section by 2028.

Omar Shamout:

What are some of the highlights of the vision plan that will be most noticeable to visitors?

Denise Verret:

So one of the biggest highlights is we are envisioning a gondola. So the Los Angeles Zoo, if anybody's been here, it's a very uphill experience, and the gondola will take you sort of from where our gift shops are now and take you to the very top of the zoo in Africa. So for those who would like to go to the top of the zoo and then work your way down and have that experience, you can make that choice, or if you'd like to get your steps in, you can walk all the way to the top of Africa and take the gondola down. So we think that that's going to be a great addition.

Denise Verret:

One of the highlights for me is that, for the first time, the California section will have the California condor on exhibit for the very first time in our history. Right now, that program is a off-exhibit conservation breeding program, so we will be able to actually, for the first time, show our visitors the California condor and tell that amazing story in a very visual way.

Denise Verret:

We will also be implementing a lot of sustainable practices. We hope to have cisterns that will capture all of the rainwater and recycle that and use that in our irrigation programs, and so reducing our carbon footprint is a big part of the vision plan, and just really transforming the zoo, and hopefully engaging the community when we curate the actual design so that it's a collaboration with the community.

Omar Shamout:

One of the vision plan's goals will be to nearly double the number of annual visitors from 1.7 million to 3 million. Will the zoo be expanding its physical footprint to accomplish this?

Denise Verret:

No. We are not expanding the footprint at all, but the goal is to drive more tourist visitation. Right now, our visitation of 1.8 million visitors is largely local, and so we would like to target the tourist market, which is huge in Los Angeles, and get more of that attendance on weekdays and to grow to that number.

Omar Shamout:

There are many things Los Angeles could spend money on. Why is the zoo an important investment?

Denise Verret:

I think the zoo is a proven cultural, recreational, scientific asset to the community. I think the community values our place, and I think that they support the zoo as being a needed relevant facility into the future. I think that we represent all that is Los Angeles, so as diverse as the animals and the plants are, that's the diversity that our visitors represent, and I think that as we are committed to accessibility, diversity, and inclusion, I think that the Los Angeles Zoo is just that asset that embodies all that is needed in this country and in this city at this time.

Omar Shamout:

Could you tell us about the zoo's animal care program?

Denise Verret:

Our animal care team, which is not only the animal care staff, but our veterinary staff, are people that I say work tirelessly every day with passion, pride, and purpose. They have amazing expertise. They are experts in captive breeding and providing exceptional nutrition. What's unique about zoos is when it comes to breeding for an endangered species, we follow the AZA's Species Survival programs, which means that species are managed collectively as a group. So if you take the western lowland gorilla, which is critically endangered, there's an SSP, and all of the western lowland gorillas amongst all the AZA-accredited zoos are managed together. Breeding recommendations come from science and genetics and population management and sustainability and looking at the pairings, and so our staff are experts at contributing to sustainable populations, which really is a testament to their expertise in terms of breeding and managing populations that are required for breeding. And so I'm just very proud of the talent that they have that contributes not only to the zoo's efforts, but to the efforts of all the AZA zoos across the country.

Omar Shamout:

Could you detail some of the zoo's conservation efforts?

Denise Verret:

Our conservation efforts are really outstanding and I look to grow them even more. We support a variety of projects. You know, an example is GRACE. It stands for the gorilla rescue and education center. It's in the Democratic Republic of Congo. They are committed to saving the Grauer's gorilla, which is critically endangered, and so we have staff expertise that goes and teaches them animal

management, husbandry, breeding techniques that help them to be able to breed and then release Grauer's gorillas back into the wild. It is those types of meaningful connections that our staff provide to a variety of projects around the world.

Denise Verret:

We're about to send a veterinarian to Ecuador to work on the mountain tapir, doing things like catching wild mountain tapirs with radio collars, collecting blood and doing analysis so that they can understand their eating and their reproduction and disease, and using that information to help us with our captive breeding program, and taking what we've learned with our captive knowledge of tapirs and helping with wild tapers. So it's this constant reciprocation that helps us improve our captive breeding and captive management, as well as helping animals, saving them from extinction in the wild.

Omar Shamout:

You have a strong connection to the city of Los Angeles. What are your favorite things about LA?

Denise Verret:

Oh my, gosh, there is so much that I love about Los Angeles, so I'm going to say it again. I love the diversity. I love all of the sub communities that are in Los Angeles. I love the mecca sports teams because I'm a sports junkie, so I love the sports teams, the cultural facilities. I love that Los Angeles is unique in that it is a place that people seek for innovation and ideas. It's progressive, it's accepting and tolerant, and I'm just proud to be a part of something that I think is progressive, and in a time where the country should be very united and supportive and accepting, I'm glad that I live in Los Angeles and in a community that is embodying a place where you can live and be whoever you are and be accepted and appreciated.

Omar Shamout:

What do you and your family do in your spare time? What are your other interests?

Denise Verret:

That family values that was instilled in me is still a part of what keeps us together. We love celebrating each other. We celebrate birthdays and all of the holidays together. We're looking forward to Thanksgiving and spending time together. It's very important to us. And then my husband and I love to travel. We love to go to concerts and sporting events and spend time with our friends, and my husband is an amazing cook, so I like to drink a good glass of wine and watch him in the kitchen or on the grill because he's really, really good at it, and it keeps us bonded and together, and we love spending quality time together.

Rickerby Hinds:

It is always a valuable learning opportunity to take time to reflect. At the end of each interview, we like to ask our guests this: in hindsight, what is something you wish you would've known when you were starting out?

Denise Verret:

I think managing adversity is something that I had to really learn along my leadership journey, and how to take adversity and turn it around into opportunity. I don't think I always knew that adversity could be

sort of turned around, but I have learned that both personally and professionally. It's really what you can take away from adversity that can help to make you a stronger and a better individual.

Rickerby Hinds:

Thanks for listening. Find photos and a video from our day at the zoo with Denise at creatorstate.com. You can read more about Denise's story in UCR Magazine. Find it online at magazine.ucr.edu. There's a team creating this podcast. Help us by subscribing at Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you listen. And while you're there, leave us a review. Our producer for the show is Jennifer Merrett, with audio and editing by Kevin Williams, digital strategy by Kelly McGrail and Madeline Adamo, and design by Krissy Danforth, Denise Wolf, Brad Rowe, and creative director Luis Sanz. Special thanks to Stan Lim, Christina Rodriguez, Taylor Ruthford, Omar Shamout, Jessica Weber, and Christy Zwicke.

Rickerby Hinds:

This show is brought to you by the University of California Riverside. I'm Rickerby Hinds. Thank you for listening to The Creator State.

Denise Verret:

And the one other thing that I want to add is that we still love The Sub Station. Is that what it's called?

Omar Shamout:

Yes.

Speaker 4:

Yes.

Omar Shamout:

Yeah.

Denise Verret:

We love The Sub Station.

Omar Shamout:

What's your order? What's your go-to?

Denise Verret:

I need a turkey with avocado.

Omar Shamout:

Fantastic. All right.