

## Vallarta Supermarket Heir Credits LAVC with Learning Life Skills

Before he became district manager of seven Vallarta Supermarkets in Southern California, Enrique Alejandro Gonzalez, III made a three-year stop at Los Angeles Valley College where he stepped into adulthood.

“It instilled a lot of different qualities that I still carry to this day,” said Gonzalez III about his time at LAVC. “You know, like, being on time, discipline, things like that. I would say that was where I thought ‘Okay, this is where real life really starts.’”

Despite having been raised by the heir to the supermarket chain, the 31-year-old did not always see a future with Vallarta. He enrolled at LAVC in 2011 as a communications major, mostly to break out of his reserved personality and explore career options. During his time there, he realized that his family business was more than just a fallback option; it was his dream. Gonzalez III switched majors to Business Management, and with the help of the college, transferred to Cal State Northridge, graduating in 2017.

He remembers how important it was to follow his family’s footsteps, saying “it was something that eventually, I just didn’t want to shake off.”

Along with being the first family member to earn a degree, he was the first to attend community college. Gonzalez III enrolled at



## Enrique Alejandro Gonzalez, III

### COMPANY:

Vallarta Supermarkets

### MAJOR:

Business Management



Valley with the help of family friend Florentino Manzano, who was recently retired after serving as the college's Vice President of Student Services for 25 years.

"Enrique Gonzalez attended the same high school as my compadre's daughter," said Manzano. "He was fresh out of high school when I met him. At that time, he was indecisive about his higher education plans. I seized the opportunity and explained to him the advantages of attending a community college; especially, Los Angeles Valley College."

His parents, the classes, and the mentors he found at Valley College pushed Gonzalez III to where he is today. The district manager's day-to-day work consists of overseeing multiple store operations, keeping track of sales, customer service, and more.

There are 55 Vallarta Supermarkets and over 8,000 employees providing goods to the state that boasts the largest Hispanic population in the country.

But the supermarket had a modest beginning. Before Vallarta, there was Puerto Vallarta, a bar created by Enrique Gonzalez Sr. After a fire burned the bar down, Gonzalez Sr. used the money to open the first Vallarta Supermarket in 1985. It originally operated as a carniceria on Van Nuys and Victory boulevards. The community felt represented, and the continual support allowed Gonzalez Sr. to expand his stock to groceries and other products.

Gonzalez III learned from his grandfather and father the necessity of listening to and honoring his customers. "As a Mexican community, we were getting a lot of support, and we wanted to have more variety," said Gonzalez III. "And it started with a customer asking my grandfather, 'Hey, do you carry this?' And he said, 'You know what, no, but come back later. I'll make sure that we have it for you.' The customer ended up coming back, and he ended up selling it."