Tania Anders:

Dear Magic Mountie Podcast listeners. Today we are releasing episode 105, one of the Mt. San Antonio College Podcast mini-series, focused on sustainability, which I recorded in January of 2021 with my very special guest, Mika Klein. On December 22nd of 2021, we lost Mika, whose big heart failed her and took her away from us at an age way too young, when she still had so much in her to give to the world and to Mt. SAC. Mika served as the college's senior facilities planner. She was full of energy, generosity, and wit. She was the talented architect, a visionary planner, an environmental steward, and a friend to all. She loved her work at Mt. SAC, where she wove together her sense of social justice and environmental justice with her responsibilities as an architectural planner. She will be forever missed.

Tania Anders:

This Friday, January 28th at 11 A.M. Mika's memorial service will be held at the Hillmer Stadium at Mt SAC. We will celebrate her life and share memories. Please join us if you can. For now, we hope you enjoy this moment in time that we were able to capture with Mika when I sat down with her to talk about Mt. SAC's climate action plan and our campus's accomplishment so for, the greenhouse gas inventory, LEED certified buildings and so much more. Forever in our hearts, dear Mika.

Mika Klein:

The number one contributor to greenhouse gases is vehicle emissions. When you are a community college, you are by definition, a commuter campus. For one full-time equivalent student, that might be made up of multiple part-time students on our campus. So, the number of vehicle trips is even higher than that. Dr. Scroggins signed the American College and University president's climate commitment back on August 14th, 2014.

Christina:

Hi, I'm Christina Barsi.

Sun:

And I'm Sun Ezzell, and you're listening to the Magic Mountie Podcast.

Christina:

Our mission is to find ways to keep your ear to the ground, so to speak, by bringing to you the activities and events you may not have time to attend, the resources on campus you might want to know more about, the interesting things your colleagues are creating, and the many ways we can continue to better help and guide our students.

Sun:

We bring to you the voices of Mt. SAC, from the classroom to completion.

Speaker 4:

And I know I'm going to achieve my goals, and I know people here are going to help me to do it.

Speaker 2:

She is a sociology major and she's transferring to Cal Poly Pomona. Psychology major, English major.

Sun:

From transforming part-time into full-time.

Speaker 3:

I really liked the time that we spent with Julie about how to write a CV and a cover letter.

Christina:

Or just finding time to soak in the campus.

Speaker 4:

To think of the natural environment around us as a library.

Christina:

We want to keep you informed and connected to all things Mt. SAC. But most importantly, we want to keep you connected with each other. I'm Christina Barsi, Mt . SAC alumni, and producer of this podcast.

Sun:

And I'm Sun Ezzell, Learning Assistance Faculty and Professional Learning Academy Coordinator.

Christina:

And this is the Magic Mountie Podcast. Hi, welcome back. This is Christina and Happy New Year. We wanted to kick off 2021 with an important and amazing new mini-series led by Tania Anders, the campus's first Sustainability Coordinator. And you may have guessed it, the series is focused on sustainability efforts on campus. In this episode, Tania has an inspiring conversation with Mika Klein, who is Mt. SAC's Senior Facilities Planner, and also a licensed architect. They talk about the many efforts towards a more sustainable campus. It is amazing what is in motion as well as what has already been accomplished. Here's Tania and Mika.

Tania Anders:

Welcome to the Magic Mountie Podcast mini-series focused on Mt. San Antonio College and sustainability. My name is Tania Anders and I'm our campus's for Sustainability Coordinator. In this role, I co-chair the climate commitment and environmental justice committee where I get to engage with colleagues from across our wonderful campus regarding matters related to sustainability at Mt. SAC. Today, I'm joined by Mika Klein who represents facilities, planning, and management on our committee. Hi, Mika, could you-

Mika Klein:

Hi, Tania

Tania Anders:

...could you please be so kind and introduce yourself to our listeners and what's your professional background and your role at Mt. SAC?

Mika Klein:

Great. So, I am Mt. SAC's Senior Facilities Planner, and I am part of our facilities planning and management department. Specifically, I lead what we unofficially refer to as the planning unit. I am both a licensed architect and a LEED accredited professional. And I am actually one of five of us on staff here at Mt. SAC in my department, which I think is unprecedented in the community college world. We also have two licensed engineers, one in civil and one in mechanical. And so, this is part of Mt. SAC's Initiative to really bring design professionals into the project management process so that we get a much better-finished product, but also a much better design process where our clients, which is the Mt. SAC community really feel heard and incorporated into the decision-making.

Mika Klein:

For 10 years prior to coming to Mt. SAC, I worked with two outside architectural firms doing work on this specific campus. I was the architect who led the design of the Child Development Complex, which if you don't know, was our first LEED-certified project on campus, which stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design. As far as my role on campus, so overall, as the senior facilities planner, my main responsibility is to develop the long-range and the smaller detail plans for the physical space on campus that meets the needs of Mt. SAC. And so, I steward the campus planning and design of the physical change to campus facilities and grounds. My role is very similar to that of what we would call a campus architect on a university or a four-year campus. So, I'm looking at everything and how all of this connects together kind of to create our physical community.

Tania Anders:

And I really think that shows, I think our campus has... I've only been at Mt. SAC for five years, and what has happened just in those five years is just so amazing. And we have so many beautiful new buildings popping up, and you already mentioned that we have LEED-certified buildings and that you are trained to do that. So, I'm curious, what got you interested and involved with sustainability in general, and then also, at Mt. SAC specifically?

Mika Klein:

It's a really interesting question. I was thinking about this. For me, specifically sustainability started for me in the 1990s. I intentionally chose to attend the University of Oregon School of Architecture and Environment for my graduate studies. So, my master's degree in architecture was specifically focused on social justice. And as we all know, that goes hand in hand with environmental justice. So, that was part of my educational training, but the reality is it's part of my family's values. This is how I grew up. I mean, as a little kid, I remember writing letters for Greenpeace and Amnesty International, like this is just kind of what we do as a family. So, it automatically translates into what you think about in terms of your education and what you want to do professionally.

Mika Klein:

I don't know if folks know this, but the University of Oregon, otherwise known as the UO, that's a nationally recognized institution. They're known for innovation and specifically, sustainability research, which is housed in the School of Architecture and Environment. So, that includes the design of buildings, interiors, landscapes, communities, urban planning. I mean, like they really look at all of it cohesively and how indoor and outdoor, that edge is blurred and how all of this ties together. And as a result of that - and that began long before I got there in the '90s, but their values were really civic responsibility and environmental sustainability. They really have sort of an international focus, a global focus about what's going on in terms of climate, and also the value of interdisciplinary education. So, linking across these different departments.

Mika Klein:

So, I had that as my training and then as a result, so, I've always tried to both sort of embed in my projects, but also imbue my projects with principles of social and environmental justice. And so, when I joined Mt. SAC, that was a perfect opportunity to blend my education, my experience in the architectural world with the efforts that were already occurring on campus. And specifically, I think one of the big turning points was I was responsible for framing and leading the effort to produce our first-ever comprehensive and integrated educational facilities master plan. And so, that was finally approved in 2018. We call it the EFMP for short because that's a long name.

Tania Anders:

And I actually remember you were so active in like you said earlier, engaging everybody on campus. Because I joined Mt. SAC in 2015, and I remember going to Flex Day once and you were there, and you were asking people for their voices. So, that's a really fantastic document.

Mika Klein:

It's huge. I don't expect everybody to read it. And there is an entire chapter dedicated to the environmental analysis of the campus, but it was really important with that effort for it to be a campus-wide effort. And I think the other really important part is that the educational piece, the pedagogy, what we're trying to teach has to drive facilities and not the other way around. And so, we really needed to get the campus's voice and feedback on what they were trying to do, what was working and more importantly, what wasn't working or what they don't have to do their job better.

Tania Anders:

Right. So, another really important document that we have is the Mt. SAC Climate Action Plan, or for short, we call it the CAP, which includes many sections that are dedicated to areas that fall really under your department's expertise. And it includes things like greenhouse gas emissions, our campus's energy use, transportation emission sources, solid waste, wastewater, just to name a few things. And that one is a shorter read. And I think that everybody on campus should at least read the summary in the beginning of that. But you touched on our first LEED-certified building already, but so what are some other major milestones and accomplishments that you've seen since your arrival here at Mt. SAC? And some are visible, like a LEED building is very visible, but there's a lot of not visible things too in the ground, et cetera. So, I'm just curious to hear some milestones that you think we've accomplished as a campus.

Mika Klein:

Yeah, there's so many you guys. What you guys may not know or see, like this is some of the invisible stuff is that we intentionally did the CAP effort in parallel with the EFMP effort, so that the two documents talk to one another and they reinforce one another, and that's part of integrated planning. And then both of those documents are now part of the educational master plan final environmental impact report. So, then that rolls them together as part of our environmental mitigation strategies as a campus, which is really important to link all these documents. And so, then when you start looking at all these different projects and there are, wow, you guys, there's been so many since I've been here.

Mika Klein:

So, for example, so LEED again, that's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, and they have a certification system, there are four levels. There's certified, silver, gold, and platinum. So, our first two buildings, that's the administration building, you guys might know it as Building 4; and the Child Development Center got certified status. Then our next two buildings, that's the Design Technology, which is Building 13, and the Mountie Cafe, that's Building 8 they got certified as silver. And most recently, the Student Success Center, which is known as Building 9E, just got certified as gold. So, we have five certified projects so far, and there are a bunch more in process.

Mika Klein:

So, for those who don't know, the Business and Computer Technology Complex, that's three buildings, 77, 78, 79 is going through the LEED process right now. We don't know what the finals level will be. The Athletics Complex East, which most notably includes the brand new field house, the stadium, which is Building 742, that's going through the process. Then in construction, we've got the Student Center in the middle of campus, that's in the queue. The new physical education complexes, the Gymnasium and the Wellness Center and Aquatics and Heritage Hall, that's in the queue. And also, the new Campus Store Instruction offices, which is also in the Southern campus. So, that is another five projects that are sort of somewhere in the process.

Tania Anders:

So, people may wonder because again, what we usually see is the visible stuff. And so, how a building can get LEED certification without every one of those buildings having, like for example, solar panels on them. So, I'm curious and our listeners may be curious, like to get the gold status, for example, what are some of the key components for a gold status?

Mika Klein:

Well, so imagine if you will, that there's a giant checklist of all these potential points that you could get on a project, and that's all the way from site design to building design, to how you manage construction. Construction waste, it has links to regional transportation. There's all these different points. And then how that all plays out at the end of a project is where they tally out the number of points and whether or not the U.S. Green Building Council agrees that you've met the requirements for each of those points. So, obviously, solar voltaic would be one option, but there's categories underwater, there's categories under waste, there's categories under air quality, or using recycled or local materials. There's categories under transportation. Because when you think about carbon, if I get things locally, that's a lot cheaper in terms of carbon than having it shipped clear across the country or for somewhere else.

Tania Anders:

So, a lot of it has to do with the construction actually then also, and not only the end result of what we see. So, that's really interesting.

Mika Klein:

Yeah, and think about all that waste on a construction site. Like how are you going to deal with that? Are you going to dump it in a landfill? That's not what we should be doing, right?

Tania Anders:

Right. So, I'm curious about another one of those non-visible things, because we've had opportunities to chat about these things before. And that has to do with how we use electricity, for example, on our campus or the water, like you mentioned. And so, I know you've told me that a lot of things underground that we don't see. So, maybe you can share a little bit there.

Mika Klein:

Yeah, it's true. You know, utilities infrastructure isn't sexy. That's not what people want to talk about, but it's really, really important. So, if anybody's driven by the campus lately, they're going to notice that the center of campus is completely torn up. Well, that is the central campus infrastructure project. So, that is getting rid of all the old dilapidated, frankly, contaminated transit pipe that's underground and putting in all of these new structures. And Dr. Scroggins was sort of talking about how we're moving like a freight train, I equate the infrastructure to laying the train tracks. You have to do that before the locomotive can run. It's pretty important. It's important in terms of stormwater, it's important in terms of regular water distribution, we have a central plant, so how are we getting chilled and hot water distributed around campus? It's really important in terms of power.

Mika Klein:

So, for example, I'm trying to think of sort of two major ones. So, like right now, we're super excited is that we, and it should be done this month. We are upgrading the relays in the central plant for the co-generation system. And once that's done, that will allow us to connect to solar voltaic and other sort of self-regeneration systems on campus. So, you have to do that before you can start installing solar pumps. And so, that's happening right now. Another big one, which I think some people saw, which pretty impressive was a couple of years ago, we installed a 2.2 million gallon thermal energy storage tank underneath Flat H, it's huge, a giant concrete deck.

Mika Klein:

What that does is the availability of that cool water, from the thermal energy plant, so we use it to make ice at the central plant that reduces peak electric demand. And therefore, that results in cooling capacity, which for you guys is okay, whether or not I've got air conditioning in my building. So, if we're growing a campus and we're adding more physical space, that's going to add electrical load. How do you do that responsibly? How do you do that with the least impact, least cost, that's one pretty major example of what's hidden underground that makes that happen.

Tania Anders:

I think that's exciting because I hope as people walk across campus once we're back, to think about all the things that they're walking over that are making it possible for our campus to become greener and greener and so, I wanted to go back to the solar panels for a sec because we don't see as many as we would like to see maybe. At like every roof, people will say should have one. And I know I've learned from you that that's not necessarily possible because of roof stability and other issues. So, where are going to be the main areas for solar panels on our campus in the future?

Mika Klein:

Well, I think most everybody's aware that the original idea was to put them on the West parcel and we got a lot of pushback from the neighbors. I think they really didn't understand what it was going to look like or what we were trying to do. That would have been a pretty substantial megawatt facility. We had about 10 acres that we could have built solar panels on. Now, that that project is no more, we're looking at different options. So, it's very hard to put them on existing building roofs because the structure of the building can't support them, but you can design the structural system for the new buildings to support them. So, for example, the new parking structure that's going up right now (drive by, you guys should check it out, it's pretty awesome) in what we used to call Lot S, that structure was designed and approved by the division of the state architect to support future solar panels on the roof.

Mika Klein:

That will then be a conversation with the city. There's certain requirements and permitting processes we need to go through. We also just turned in the drawings to the State for capital outlay funding for the new library facility. And if you look at those renderings and you look at the cost of some of it, you will see it clearly shows solar Voltaics on the roof of that structure. We also showed them when we submitted the technology and health building to the State for capital outlay funding, which we have just received and been approved for. So, we're moving forward with that project. Ideally, we'd like to start incorporating it in every new project we've got substantial roof space. The last thing we're going to do on this campus is what we call ground-mounted solar, which is where you build them in the parking lots. And the reason is we have so much construction going on, they're just going to get whacked by construction trucks. We have to do that when we're done doing all the construction in the center of campus. So, that would be sort of the last piece of it.

Tania Anders:

Right. That's very interesting. I want to turn our conversation maybe a little bit to the greenhouse gas inventory and our carbon footprint, I guess. And again, I encourage folks to look at the CAP and they'll see that most of our greenhouse gas emissions all have to do with transportation, which of course, is not a surprise. We're a community college and we have a very large campus, a lot of students. And so, that is something that we need to address basically, what can we do there in those areas. And so, I'm excited as I'm sure you are too, about some of the upcoming projects. Like our Temple Avenue Green Corridor will have a transit center. So, maybe you can talk a little bit about those upcoming projects that will help us reduce our greenhouse gas emissions.

Mika Klein:

Yeah, it's really important. For those of you who don't know, the number one contributor to greenhouse gases is vehicle emissions. When you are a community college, you are by definition a commuter campus. And then think about it even more like for one full-time equivalent student, that might be made up of multiple part-time students on our campus. So, the number of vehicle trips is even higher than that. And it's probably one of the biggest issues as well in our environmental impact report. Because if you think about the impacts on traffic and congestion and noise and air quality, you link all of these things together with the greenhouse gas. So, what's pretty amazing and I don't know if all of you know this but Dr. Scroggins signed the commitment, which is the American College and University President's climate commitment back on August 14th, 2014. And he did that and it is now administered by a group called Second Nature. It's referred to as the Carbon Commitment. And he had huge faculty and student support of that and there were multiple resolutions passed on campus.

Mika Klein:

When you sign that, you are required to do an annual greenhouse gas inventory update. So, we're in the process of what I call "catch -up" right now. And the document that we're going to be turning in is due in May. And it will bring us up to date through fiscal year-end, so, June 30th, 2020. And then after that, we need to turn it in every year. The other cool thing that they now have available, the University of New Hampshire created this really cool, comprehensive online tool for both measuring and reporting our campus's carbon footprint. They call it SIMAP map. So, it means the Sustainability Indicator Management and Analysis Platform. So, this is the first year we're going to be uploading all of our data there, that's publicly available. And it's part of the whole effort towards transparency and accountability. It's really, really important that we implement this CAP document that we wrote, and that we're able to measure how the greenhouse gas situation gets better, which ironically, due to COVID, is going to be outstanding this last year. We've absolutely had no cars on campus. But I think it'll be great to sort of see that as a benchmark, look what happens when we cut down deeply to that level, right?

Mika Klein:

So, then the Transit Center, if you guys don't know, is in partnership with Foothill Transit. This is a federally funded project. Foothill is literally footing, pun intended the majority of the bill on that project. It's starting construction this spring. And we're really excited because it's part of Foothill's green transit corridor, which would connect the station at Pomona all the way to El Monte coming down Temple, then the Amar. And if you don't know, El Monte then connects to Union Station. So, it really starts to create this regional transportation grid, which if we're really able to take advantage, this really gets a lot of vehicles off the road. So, that's coming. The Temple Avenue Green Corridor is a project that came out of the Educational Facilities Master Plan, otherwise known as the EFMP. And that one, we're really excited about because what it does is it's putting in protected, dedicated bike lanes along to Temple Avenue, it's bringing in trees and wider sidewalks, it's bringing in signage.

Mika Klein:

It's basically creating Temple Avenue so that you know that when you enter at either Grant or at our border on the East side, there at Cal Poly, that you're not in the city anymore. That Temple Avenue isn't a through-fare. Now, you're at Mt. SAC. You've entered a college and an academic environment. It's shaded, it has a different feel. You slow down on the whole bit. And that project, we're kicking off the whole South side of Temple Avenue because it links to the parking structure and Lot S, it links to the new signal we're putting in for the transit center and the new pedestrian sort of gateway bridge that's going to be crossing over Temple Avenue from the parking structure all the way to Miracle Mile. That's another way that we're looking at getting pedestrians off the street level. That's a safety issue as well. That's going to transform the way the campus looks.

Tania Anders:

I'm so excited about that. I actually, that's one of the things I remembered when you did your FLEX Day breakout and where you asked people for input, when you showed some ideas for that green corridor, I'm like that is so awesome. That's what Mt. SAC needs to connect the two sides, the athletic side as I call it, kind of, it's so exciting. Like you're saying, it'll tell people you are now on Mt. SAC territory. And so, that's so exciting. And again, we've mentioned already that there are a couple of resources available that we will link with this podcast. I really encourage folks to pull up some of the renderings of all the projects, it's just mind-blowing. It's such an exciting time to be on our campus. So, I want to start slowly but surely thinking about wrapping up our conversation here. I know we could go on forever and ever, but is there something else that you would like to share? Maybe something we forgot to address so far?

Mika Klein:

Wow, well, there's a lot of, I'd say, what I call smaller efforts. So, just so you know, the outdoor water bottle fillers, they're going into the next phase of that project that's happening right now.

Tania Anders:

One thing folks will be interested about too, which is so exciting, more and more faculty come with electric cars. So, where can they park?

Mika Klein:

So, that's another one. So, those are the electric vehicle charging stations, otherwise known as EVCS. So, with the construction of the new parking structure over by the tennis courts next to the stadium, we have 42 new electric vehicle charging stations there. The parking structure that's being constructed right now in what we called Lot S, that adds another 18. And then there are a couple South of Temple in the facilities area. So, we're getting closer to 70 or so of those. They're not parking spaces, this is important, guys, these are really going to be charging stations. And obviously, we've got to set up a policy. But when students come back to campus, you're going to see those parking structures and you're going to see all those designated electric vehicle parking structures.

Tania Anders:

So, those parking structures, when we return, hopefully, in the fall or whenever it is that we will return - will those parking structures be done at that time?

Mika Klein:

Well, parking structure R just opened. So, that one is ready for occupancy and S is coming out of the ground so fast. It would not surprise me if it's ready to go by the time the students come back, which is extraordinary. And that's one of the things about Mt. SAC, is that rather than moping around, we're like, okay, we're going to use this COVID moment to construct these things faster, cheaper, and take advantage of not having people on campus so that when people come back, all of this work is done, and these amenities and these new things are ready to go. I mean, I think you're going to see a different campus when you come back.

Tania Anders:

I completely agree. I have not been back to campus, following all our COVID rules, of course. But I've driven by, and I mean, just the stadium already. I know everybody still got to see that. It was in the end phase, and it was just so sad that we couldn't have this official ceremony. And it will be so mind-blowing when we come back to campus. And especially, also in the center of campus, I'm just so happy for the construction workers that they don't have to worry about us and the students walking around right now. And I agree, it probably makes everything a little bit faster, so that's exciting.

Mika Klein:

I think it's not only faster, honestly, safer.

Tania Anders:

Of course.

Mika Klein:

And I think the project managers are greatly relieved that they can get in there and do what they need to do without impacting the daily life of students and faculty and staff. The other thing I was going to say, if folks don't know this, but really, check out as you're driving down Grand Avenue, you will see one of the major habitat mitigation projects that came out of our EIR, which is the reestablishment of Snow Creek as a natural area, instead of a man-made area. We've got two protected groves of California Black Walnut trees. One is on Mt. SAC Hill and the other is on Reservoir Hill, and they're really coming in quite nicely. It's a big deal like since I've been here, one of the big things that we were able to do is officially expand the wildlife sanctuary and establish a restrictive covenant as part of our California Environmental Quality Act work, or CEQA work to protect those areas in perpetuity.

Mika Klein:

Protected habitat, there's special signage, there's special fencing. We don't have to worry that literally, it's going to get bulldozed and turned into a parking lot or something. And what I have heard most recently is because we've done this, we have two endangered bird species that have been heard on campus that's coming back. One is the California gnatcatcher. But more importantly, it's the Least Bell's Vireo, which they have now, the biologists have heard a pair out there. So, what that shows is how when you do this work and you create these environments, the animals come back. So, that's part also of our curriculum.

Tania Anders:

That is just so amazing. And I'm glad you bring up the wildlife sanctuary because it is such a unique and amazing space that is available to our campus community. We have so many students that grow up urban that they've never been to a place like that, where they can learn about the native plants and other species like the birds you just mentioned. And so, I hope that faculty know that this space is available to them to take the students to, and we have a lot of folks that use it. Of course, the biology folks, for them, it's apparent. But even for art like photography or painting, or just anybody really, to go and give the students a great experience. There's an amphitheater over there where you can meet with your classes. And another reason why I'm excited about the Temple Green Corridor, it'll also will make it, tie in that whole side of the campus more too, and make it safer also to go over there, take your students over there. We are blessed, we have an amazing campus.

Mika Klein:

And I think the important thing is there's a big project that's happening over there, and Mt. SAC way South of Temple, where the wildlife sanctuary, with the beach volleyball courts are coming and cleaning up that entryway. And that new neighborhood and that entry to the wildlife sanctuary, hopefully, will highlight it and really make it more of a destination on campus. Which if we go back to the main concept of the master plan, if you think about our campus, we have two incredibly unique things. We have the wildlife sanctuary on one end, and then we're book ended on the other end with the farm. And the connector piece is Temple Avenue.

Mika Klein:

So, you've got these two green gateways. Now, we're going to connect it with a green corridor so that when you enter the Mt. SAC campus, you know you're somewhere special, that the emphasis on the environment and creation of campus and sustainability and education is immediately apparent whether you enter on the West side or the East side. And I can tell you as a campus planner like that warms my heart, like to be able to highlight what is uniquely us and what is so special about this campus and protect it and enhance it.

Tania Anders:

Absolutely. And I'm glad you brought up that other side of campus too. And I know this is one of our podcast and our sustainability mini-series, and I will still be talking to others as well. So, you can look forward to hearing more about the CAP. For example, I'm going to talk to some of the faculty who've been very strongly engaged with writing the CAP, and we have a sustainability garden, for example, over on the farm. So, we want the campus community to be informed about all the amazing things happening on our campus. And Mika, thank you so, so much for your time. So, greatly appreciated. And I want to thank everybody who thinks about sustainability on our campus. And as we've mentioned, it's so much more than just the environment. There's so many aspects to it, and we hope that the entire campus community will embrace this. Thank you again, Mika.

Mika Klein:

Thank you for having me.

Christina:

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