On May 11, Bakersfield College will celebrate a special graduating class, its 104th. Graduation is always a time of celebration and accomplishment, for students, for college faculty and staff, and for the community. But this year’s class is a special celebration for the community to join in recognizing student success and accomplishment.

Ever since its modest beginnings in 1913, Bakersfield College has been meeting the needs of Kern County students and community. The community has invested in BC’s success, in 1913, with the Panorama campus in 1956, with the development of the Delano campus, and with a center in Arvin and the renovation made possible with the passage of Measure J. And BC has grown, from a handful of students to over 31,000 today.

This year, 1,972 students have earned two-year degrees, and certificates – the most ever – and will be joining the workplace and community with their newfound skills and abilities, as well as those continuing their studies at universities in California and across the nation. A total of 2,212 degrees will
be awarded that evening with the highest areas of concentration being both Psychology Associate in Arts Transfer degrees and Business Administration Associate of Science Transfer degrees, both tied at 208. More than half (52%) will graduate with a 3.0 GPA or higher and more than three quarters (78%) will be transferring to a four-year institution. This record-breaking success helps meet a need. U.S. Department of Education still shows a lower educational attainment (15.7%) for Kern County in comparison to 32% statewide,

But in addition, the graduating class includes seven students who will earn the first-ever Baccalaureate 4-year degrees in Industrial Automation from Bakersfield College. In 2015, legislation was passed that allowed 15 community colleges in California to pilot offering a four-year degree. Bakersfield College staff and faculty immediately began to develop the new Bachelor of Science program, selecting a degree in Industrial Automation to meet local need, a degree that focuses on the engineering and development of assembly and manufacturing technology. This area of study is forecast to be one of the most in-demand for the Kern County workforce. Kern County is the vibrant home to industries such as agriculture, fuel, alternative energy, healthcare, and several major corporate distribution centers – all of which rely increasingly on automation technology to remain competitive.

In developing the program, Bakersfield College invited industry leaders to participate in the Advisory Board for our Industrial Automation program and the college works closely with them to ensure that the curriculum matches the skills that they’re looking for. Industry partners provide our students with important networking, internships, and employment opportunities. Employers tell us that this community college program is on par with those offered at other major universities across the country, and our graduating students tell us that they’re receiving job offers before they’ve even officially finished the program.

On May 11th, please join us in the historic Memorial Stadium to witness the first set of graduates earning a Baccalaureate degree from Bakersfield College. All living past presidents of the institution will be on the stage to confer the degree to this history-setting class of 2018.

Commencement is indeed a time for celebration! Whether you have family and friends graduating, or want to represent our larger Kern County community to witness history being made, I hope you will join us, show up early, stay to enjoy the fireworks, and support our Renegade Class of 2018.

*Sonya Christian is the president of Bakersfield College. The opinions expressed are her own and not necessarily representative of her official capacity as president.*