Editorial: Chico State makes positive strides

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Our view: Chico State improved its ranking in lists published by three magazines with national reach.

It's said that familiarity breeds contempt, but in the case of Chico State University and the city surrounding it, it's more like familiarity breeds complacency. It's easy for all area residents to forget how lucky we are to have the university here.

Sometimes it takes an outsider's perspective to remind us. The latest reminder came last week when U.S. News and World Report magazine released its annual college rankings. Chico State moved up to fifth in the West, which encompasses universities from Alaska to Texas.

The high ranking is nothing new. Chico State has been on the top 10 list for Western public universities since 1998, coming in as high as third place three times. Chico State had been sixth the previous three years before the latest ranking.

Among California State University campuses, Chico State trailed only Cal Poly-San Luis Obispo (first) and Long Beach State (fourth). Chico State was tied for fifth with Fullerton State.

The magazine ranked 578 universities in four geographic regions. Chico State was ranked among 121 public schools in the West that included undergraduate and master's programs but few doctoral programs. Public and private schools were then separated.

In a meeting with the E-R's editorial board last week, Chico State President Paul Zingg said he was particularly gratified that peers from other universities rated Chico State highly. Peer reviews are one of the voting criteria. Chico State also improved in several other graded areas, including graduation rate, freshman retention and alumni giving.

Zingg is an eloquent spokesman for Chico State. In almost any public setting, he'll take the opportunity to extol the positive traits of the university and its students. He'll brag about the high rate of volunteerism, the successes of programs, the environmental awareness on campus, active and involved alumni, and the benefits of a civically engaged student body.
Zingg knows better than anybody that there's room for improvement, which is why he strolls campus neighborhoods on occasional Friday nights and which is why he was out on the Sacramento River the day before Labor Day, trying to learn. But he also points out, in defense of Chico State students, that many people at weekend parties are not students — and in fact, prey on students — and that student groups were on the river the next weekend, trying to clean up the Labor Day mess.

Chico State improved in two other lists this fall. Chico State climbed from 451st to 392nd in the rankings by Forbes Magazine. Chico State went from 273rd to 165th in Washington Monthly's College Guide, which ranks colleges for their "contributions to the public good."

Chico State should be congratulated for its improvement, and for making another ranking — those old party-school lists from the 1980s — a distant memory.