



Members of the Holyoke Community College's Giving Tree Committee hold some of the gifts collected for local charities. Standing, from left, are Laura Freeman, Mary Starzyk, Michelle Vigneault, Erin O'Brien and Lindsey Pare. Denise Roy is in front. (SUBMITTED)

## College wraps up Giving Tree campaign

HOLYOKE — Members of the Holyoke Community College community helped spread some holiday cheer this month, as they delivered piles of wrapped and donated gifts to representatives from three local charities at the closing reception for the college's 22nd annual Giving Tree campaign.

This year, the HCC community fulfilled the holiday wishes of more than 300 clients from Homework House, WestMass ElderCare, and the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

"These gifts are very, very meaningful for our kids," said Virginia Dillon, executive director of Homework House, a free academic support program for Holyoke children. "It's a happy time of year at Homework House. There's an air of excitement, but we also know that it can be fraught for the families who oftentimes have to make a choice between warm coats and clothing and gifts, or putting food on the table and buying presents. For our kids, this means that families will have something underneath their trees again this year, and we are ever so grateful for your continued generosity."

Each year during the annual campaign, Giving Trees are set up in designated areas around campus. Participants choose tags from one of the nonprofit agencies based on the age of the recipi-

ent and their wish for a gift. The purchased gifts are then wrapped and stacked on tables for the closing celebration, when HCC faculty, staff, and students join with representatives from the agencies to distribute the gifts and share food and stories.

"We have been part of this great tradition for many years now, and our participants couldn't be happier and more thankful for everything you do for us," said Nancy Allen-Scannell, executive director of the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. "We are located in Holyoke, and we serve families, young parents, who are struggling with their day-to-day lives. And now we have the great privilege of bringing presents to them, so they have something to put under their trees, because no parent ever wants to feel like they can't provide for their kids."

This year's Giving Tree campaign was the first for new HCC President George Timmons.

"This warms my heart," he said. "It is just another example of how we live out our values by being kind to our community during a difficult time of year for many people. Being able to give a little holiday joy and happiness this holiday season is really important to me and makes me very proud to be the leader of this great institution."

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