
HOLYOKE

HCC celebrates fall 2023 graduates

The first time Alannah Brunt tried Holyoke Community College, she flunked out after one semester. The next semester, she only passed one class.

“I was working a ton of hours and had not yet invested in school,” she recently said. “I hadn’t found a way to get excited about being a student. It was COVID times, folks, and it was not fun.”

But Brunt eventually did find a way to get excited about college, and that led her to where she now stood - on the stage of HCC’s Leslie Phillips Theater as one of the student speakers for the college’s first-ever fall graduate reception, held on Nov. 29.

“Fear not,” said Brunt, who will complete her associate’s degree in Latinx Studies this month before heading to the University of Massachusetts in the spring. “In my journey at HCC, I found a community of people who became my village.”

SEE **HCC**, PAGE C3

HCC

CONTINUES FROM PAGE C2

“Fate led me here to Holyoke, and the doors of Holyoke Community College,” said Figueroa, now a communications, media and theater arts major. “I must say, I am extremely grateful. Here, I didn’t just find refuge, I found my passion. Photography and cinematography became my new path — a discovery that reshaped my life.”

Figueroa is on his way to Emerson College to study filmmaking in the spring while working as a video journalist for WBZ CBS-Boston.

“Adapting to a new culture wasn’t easy,” he said, “but it was through this journey that I met incredible individuals who became my guiding lights.”

Student Angela Tindell-Gula, a creative writing major from Three Rivers, talked about “surviving” adolescence and



Student speakers Marcos Figueroa of Holyoke, Angela Tindell-Gula of Three Rivers and Alannah Milgros Brunt of Springfield, with president George Timmons at Holyoke Community College’s first fall graduate reception on Nov.

29. (HCC SUBMITTED PHOTO)

deferring her college dreams for two decades as she became a wife, mother, and small business owner.

“No one could have prepared me for how hard going back to school as an adult would be,”

said Tindell-Gula, who will attend Westfield State University in the spring. “Every day I fold my life lessons from the past and tuck them safely in my backpack, and that gives me the drive to put one foot in front

of the other.”

For Brunt, the recipe for college success was getting involved in campus life. She joined the college radio station, WCCH, and became a DJ. Through Student Engagement, she joined clubs — “Lots and lots of clubs,” she said — including the Radio Club, the Psychology Club, and the Latinx Empowerment Association (the LEA Club). She found an internship in the Financial Aid office through SAMP — HCC’s Student Ambassador Mentorship Program, and discovered El Centro, a bilingual support program for HCC’s Latinx students.

At El Centro, Brunt said, “I found people who look like me, who understand me, and who helped me navigate higher education in a way that I had never seen before. I love the community that El Centro provides and the people who are here who help me find joy.”