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HCC celebrates inauguration of new president

HOLYOKE – In opening the inauguration ceremony of Holyoke Community College President George Timmons on Friday, April 19, his pastor, the Rev. Damone Paul Johnson, offered a parable about a high rise building with a broken elevator. There was another elevator in the building, the attendant told a concerned tenant, a service elevator. That one is working, the attendant said. It goes to the top but stops on every floor.

“Dr. Timmons has made it to the top,” Johnson said, “but he has stopped on every floor of service, dedication, and excellence.”

“In the past 78 years, we have come together as a college community only four times before to do what we are gathered to do today,” said Vanessa Smith, interim chair of the HCC Board of Trustees. “On average, we have hosted a presidential inauguration just once every decade and a half. This is an extraordinary occasion for many reasons, and because it is so rare, it is truly momentous.”

Smith said it was Timmons’ commitment to student success that stood out to her during the interview process last spring (he was hired in April 2023 and started in July) and called him a natural connector.

“All of the genuine interactions in the hallways, out in the community, or over a meal in our culinary arts institute clearly bring him joy,” Smith said. “His ability to inspire, motivate, and engage our community is among the many gifts he brings to Holyoke Community College. We need only look around this room to see the evidence of Dr. Timmons’ ability to connect and form



President George Timmons embraces Student Senate president Alicia Beaton after she placed the HCC presidential medallion around his neck as student-trustee Barney Garcia (green bow tie) and Vanessa Smith, interim chair of the HCC Board of Trustees look on. *Submitted Photo*

strong and lasting relationships.”

Indeed, many in attendance wore bright green bow ties and socks in recognition of Timmons’ preferred dress style.

Student-trustee Barney Garcia talked how he had started off at HCC battered, lost, and depressed, someone who always wore a mask, and was too afraid to be himself.

“It wasn’t until I met Dr. Timmons, someone who is unapologetically himself, that I felt empowered to break that barrier and be unapologetically myself,” Garcia said.

Garcia said he and the president bonded over the fact that both were raised by grandparents, and that he had found in Timmons an awesome bonus dad.

In his own remarks, Timmons, talked a lot about how he once was and

thanked all those people in his life who made it possible for him to be where he is today: academic leaders, coaches, and colleagues, his brothers from Kappa Alpha Psi, his fraternity at Norfolk State University, the historically Black college in Virginia where he earned his bachelor’s degree; his parents, in-laws, and extended family; his brother, Tyrell; his wife, Frankie, and, last but not least, his grandmother, Ruby, now 91, who “raised me to be the man I am today.”

“Ruby taught me the value of education, which, she always said, will help you find your way, and, once earned, can never be taken away,” Timmons said.

Before coming to HCC, Timmons served as the provost and vice president of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs at Columbia-Greene Community College

in Hudson, N.Y. He holds a Ph.D. in higher education administration from Bowling Green State University, a master’s degree in higher education from Old Dominion University, and a bachelor’s degree in financial management from Norfolk State University.

From the moment Timmons was introduced to HCC, he said, he knew it was the right place for him.

“Among the things that inspire me about Holyoke Community College is our commitment to living our values of innovation, collaboration, kindness, inclusion, and trust,” he said. “Do you know what these values have in common? Each word suggests the need for others, for unity and togetherness. None can be accomplished alone.” Timmons said.

As an undergraduate himself, Timmons said, he learned first hand the impact a college president can have on the life of a student. When he ran out of financial aid during his final year at Norfolk State, President Harrison B. Wilson tapped into a discretionary fund so he could complete his bachelor’s degree.

“I was able to finish what I started,” Timmons said. “And that was just the beginning.”

“In the end,” Timmons said in conclusion, “when a single student finds their calling, discovers a talent, turns their life around, hones a skill, or finds the courage to speak up, the world is a better place. Potential becomes reality. We all benefit. That is the work we are doing at Holyoke Community College, and I can’t think of a better way to spend a life.”