

Two community colleges feed casino

Born and raised in Holyoke, Angel Rivera moved with his family to the Atlantic City area when he was 18. He needed a job and knew that the casinos in the area employed a lot of people, so he gambled on himself.

"I didn't play cards that often as a kid and I had never been in a casino before, but I had a feeling there was an opportunity for me," he said.

He watched and learned and went to a dealer class. He impressed his instructors and later, his employers. He was hired and worked in New Jersey for 15 years before being recruited and moving on to Mohegan Sun casino in Connecticut, where he worked for 11 more. He enjoyed it, but he kept his eye on Western Mass.

"Everyone in our industry knew about the possibility of a

casino in this area," Rivera said. "No one knew which company would be selected, when and where it would be built, but I knew I was going to take a close look at it."

When MGM Springfield was becoming a reality, MGM quickly offered Rivera a position and he gladly accepted. In fact, Rivera was working for MGM Springfield well before the casino opened. He was one of the first instructors hired by MCCTI – the Massachusetts Casino Career Training Institute – at a new school designed to teach area residents how to be casino dealers.

MCCTI is a partnership between Holyoke Community College, Springfield Technical Community College and MGM.

"Western Mass. didn't have



HCC President Christina Royal with Angel Rivera

many casino dealers, so we had to grow our own," said Jeffrey Hayden, HCC vice president of Business & Community Service. "Casino dealing is a skill that requires training. MGM worked with us to identify good instructors and then train and then hire our students. They still are. We have classes running regularly."

Rivera started teaching dealer

school students several months before the casino's opening.

"I always wanted to teach casino dealing, and I was given a chance here with MGM and MCCTI, and I love it," Rivera said. "I'm in the classroom with nice people looking to learn a skill to find a job. They are just like I was. In a short time, we become co-workers."