

Alumni Connection

HOLYOKE
COMMUNITY
COLLEGE

FALL 2017



Saving Miss Mary

The story of a cook, her colleagues and a college community.

PLUS

Dear HCC: Reflections from a former phonathon caller
Why I Give: Legacy gift mark of grateful graduate

DEAR READERS



Christina Royal, Ph.D.,
HCC President

Nearly every day I hear something that makes me proud of Holyoke Community College. Whether speaking with a student who found her path and passion with the support of a faculty mentor, or meeting with our Open Educational Resources team, a group of faculty and staff working to drastically cut the cost of books and educational materials for our students, the sense of community and the transformative power of our mission are unmistakable.

In the year ahead, HCC will embark on a strategic planning process that will bring students, faculty, staff, alumni and community stakeholders together to envision and plan the future of HCC. What are the most pressing needs of our students and our community? What are our unique strengths and how do we want to build upon them? How can we invest our resources in order to have the greatest impact? This is a pivotal moment for HCC, and I hope you will join us in this undertaking. To learn more about the planning process and how you can participate, please visit hcc.edu/forward. We look forward to your input and involvement!

I hope this issue of the *Alumni Connection* inspires and enriches your life.

Sincerely,



Bonnie Zima Dowd
Director, Alumni
Relations

Think back to a time in your life when someone helped you unexpectedly. Perhaps it was recently, years ago, or even as far back as childhood. Did this particular act of kindness come from a friend, family member, co-worker, or stranger? Do you remember how it made you feel or how much it changed your life?

Memories like those remind us all to act in similar ways, to help, encourage, and support others. As members of a college community, we aspire to act in the best interest of others, to work together toward common goals, help our colleagues and encourage our students, so that we can all succeed.

On a campus such as ours, unheralded and often unnoticed acts of good take place all the time. In this issue, we pull back the curtain a little bit to tell you a story that shows our HCC family acting at its best. In our cover story, "Saving Miss Mary," you'll meet Mary Pennicooke, the kind-hearted cook for our Gateway to College program, who likely would have died but for the actions of her HCC colleagues. Her story, which is also ours, shows how one person can make a difference in so many other lives and how we are all connected. Then go on to read Jon Roe's story about doing good for the next generation of HCC students.

Yes, our lives are hectic and often stressful. Today, we challenge you to go out and exercise your kindness muscles. If you are touched by these stories, then do something good for someone else. You'll help create a happier and more compassionate world.

With kindness and gratitude,

Dawn E. Bryden, '89
President, Alumni
Council



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President Christina Royal, back left, gathers with HCC students and staff to celebrate International Women's Day on March 8.



HCC celebrates International Women's Day

HCC celebrated International Women's Day March 8 with a rally in the campus courtyard featuring speeches by more than a dozen HCC students, faculty, and staff — both male and female. Speakers took turns at the mic, sharing original poetry, giving shout-outs to the strong women in their lives, and offering encouragement and inspiration to all in their quest for equal rights and struggle for a better world. "As an open access educational institution, Holyoke Community College has a unique responsibility to provide opportunities for those who need them

most, right here in our local community," said President Christina Royal, who gave the keynote speech. "The fight for women's rights is just one part of the larger struggle to create a world in which all are valued, all are secure, all are educated, and all can achieve their full human potential. I call on all of us to learn and reflect on our history, embrace it, celebrate our progress, and continue advocating for equity, not just on behalf of women, but all people."

Read the full text of the speech at: hcc.edu/women

Art exhibit features 'Impressions of Home'

Alicia Shibley '13 studied printmaking at HCC. She is now working on her master's degree in art therapy and counseling at Springfield College and helping homeless shelter residents create art. The HCC Taber Art Gallery featured some of that work in an exhibit Shibley curated called "Impressions of Home." She gave a gallery talk March 22 during which she discussed her internship as the arts program facilitator for the Friends of the Homeless shelter in Springfield. "I hope that everybody can just take a minute and kind of feel what it feels like to step into these paintings and maybe experience what these artists are experiencing," she said.



Alicia Shibley '13 gives a gallery talk for the show "Impressions of Home," at HCC's Taber Art Gallery.

Read more at: hcc.edu/home

'This just changes lives'

HCC student Kiana Estime received a prestigious transfer scholarship from the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation that she will use to complete her bachelor's degree in anthropology at Mount Holyoke College. Estime, a 20-year-old liberal arts major from Great Barrington, Mass., with a GPA of 4.0, was one of only 55 students in the United States to be awarded the Jack Kent Cooke Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship this year. The scholarships, worth up to \$40,000 a year, are awarded to outstanding community college students transferring to top-tier universities.



Kiana Estime, right, with her HCC mentor, Pathways Program coordinator Irma Medina '97.

Read more at: hcc.edu/estime



HCC President Christina Royal cuts the green ribbon. Standing beside her are, from left to right: Hope Davis, deputy commissioner of the state's Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance; Peter Blauvelt, senior project manager at ADI Energy; student trustee Theodore McCormick '17, of Holyoke; Bill Fogarty, HCC vice president of Administration and Finance; HCC Board of Trustees vice chair Julie Pokela; and Holyoke Mayor Alex Morse.

Campus gets 'greener'

The college held a ribbon-cutting ceremony June 7 marking completion of a \$5.2 million energy conservation project, part of HCC's selection as a "Toward Zero Net Energy" pilot site. The energy upgrades will significantly reduce consumption of electricity and natural gas, saving the college nearly \$200,000 in utility costs and reducing carbon emissions by 672 tons per year. Sustainability Studies

professor Kate Maiolatesi said the college's selection as a TZNE pilot site has been an exciting opportunity for HCC students, who were included in project planning and design. "As students, it's really nice to see the projects that we work on being implemented," Sustainability Studies major James Walcott of West Springfield, told the crowd.

Read more at: hcc.edu/greener



Music students get a little Wet

Kelly Zutrau, lead singer and songwriter for the indie-pop band Wet, visited HCC March 29 as part of the Music Department's weekly series of free concerts and guest lectures. Zutrau, whose band has performed on "The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon," talked about her evolution from college art student to singer, offered songwriting tips, gave advice about the music industry, and played a snippet of the band's most popular song, "Don't Wanna Be Your Girl." Zutrau and her bandmates lived in Hadley, Mass., while recording their debut studio album, "Don't You." Zutrau took voice lessons from HCC adjunct vocal instructor Sarah Clay, of Florence.

Kelly Zutrau, from the band Wet, with her former vocal teacher and HCC adjunct music instructor Sarah Clay.

See the music video at: hcc.edu/zutrau



'Belchertown Patient #3394' returns to HCC

At the age of 6, Donald Vitkus '05 was committed to the now-shuttered Belchertown State School. He lived there for 11 years, enduring countless horrors and daily abuse. That story is told in the book about his life, "You'll Like It Here": Donald Vitkus - Belchertown Patient #3394, written by Northampton author Ed Orzechowski. Vitkus returned to HCC for a book signing April 19.

Above, Donald Vitkus '05, with his former teacher, Jackie Griswold, retired HCC professor of Human Services.

Read the full story at hcc.edu/vitkus



“I miss listening to the stories I heard from graduates I had the pleasure to talk to.”

If you're one of our alumni, you've probably received a call from a student working for the HCC phonathon. The phonathon was founded as one way for alumni to give back to the college while connecting with students about their shared college experiences. This is an open letter to all HCC alumni from a former student phonathon caller.

I initially chose Holyoke Community College for its intimate, accessible campus, affordable cost and small classes. But when I felt like the rest of my world was spinning out of control, the student-centered approach of HCC's faculty and staff became my anchor. I quickly realized there was always someone I could turn to for help and support, even when I could not find the words to express what was going on.

I will always fondly remember the time I spent with the Unity Club. We had numerous bake sales, plant sales and other fundraisers with proceeds going to charities like Wigs for Kids or to assist homeless families. The club provided a space where I felt accepted and was allowed to just be me, which is very important to somebody healing from domestic violence and other traumas.

Like many HCC students, I held a number of different jobs during college. By far the most rewarding was my work as a phonathon caller. I was looking for a way to give back to the college and provide future students with similar positive experiences. The college's call center was another place where I could come out of my shell, build my self-esteem and establish positive relationships. It was really good to be working with a team of people who understood the challenges of balancing school, work and home. There was a strong sense of camaraderie among student callers. We all wanted to do our jobs well and show support for the college. I also found it meaningful because, as an alumni scholarship recipient, I know first hand that annual gifts help maintain a quality education for all HCC students.

I graduated with associate degrees in 2016 and 2017 so I am no longer with the phonathon program. I miss listening to the stories I heard from graduates I had the pleasure to talk to. In fact, I was quite surprised how eager some alumni were to tell me about their



A student works in the HCC call center.

experiences. I especially liked hearing about the history of the college.

For me, HCC became a home away from home. It was a place where I knew I was safe and was able to learn and grow while healing from past trauma. My job as a phonathon caller allowed me to gain new skills and confidence while I attended classes and continued to be present for my children and grandchild. I thoroughly enjoyed the diverse population of people I met and worked with during my time at the college.

So, if you ever get a phone call that starts something like, “Hi, my name is Sera, and I'm studying music at Holyoke Community College” – please don't hang up. More than likely, it's a current HCC student calling from the phonathon program. Take a moment to have a meaningful conversation. Share a story from your time at HCC. And, please, think about giving back. What you say and what you do could make a big difference in some student's life. It certainly made a big difference in mine.

Sincerely,

Valerie Pease
Proud HCC Alumna '16, '17

We want to hear from you



HCC welcomes letters from readers relating to articles or items that have appeared in recent issues of the magazine or contain information of interest to HCC alumni, students, faculty or

friends. Send your remarks to Editor, Alumni Connection, 303 Homestead Ave., Holyoke, MA 01040 or email comments to alumni@hcc.edu. Please include your name, class year, home address and telephone number.



Saving Miss Mary



The story of a cook, her colleagues and a college community.

Story and photos by CHRIS YURKO

Pastor Pennicooke and his wife Sybil gave all their children Biblical names. The third of five they called Mary, Mary Rebecca.

Mary would have been Mrs. Hudel Thomas if she had ever taken her husband's name. She preferred her own and so remained Mary Pennicooke.

"I cook for a penny," she says and laughs at her own joke. "Ain't that good? My name is *penny cook*."

At Holyoke Community College, though, where she has indeed worked as a cook for nearly 10 years, few people know her by that, and nearly everyone calls her "Miss Mary."

Good morning, Miss Mary.

Hello, Miss Mary.

What's for lunch today, Miss Mary?

Have a good day, Miss Mary.

The courtesy title reflects a kind of southern

civility uncommon in New England, familiar yet more polite. Respectful. "I've always been helping students, young people, and that's the kind of respect I demand," Miss Mary says. "Furthermore, where I come from in Jamaica, you never call anybody by their first name. It's always mister or miss. Some people started calling me Miss Mary and it just stayed, so when anybody asks me my name, I tell 'em — Miss Mary."



This is a story about Miss Mary and the day last spring when, in the words of one HCC staff member, Miss Mary was "busy getting dead and getting alive again," the day "we lost her and got her back," said another. It's a story about the swift actions of a few colleagues who saved her life and the actions of many more who stepped forward to do what needed to be done. It's a story about an immigrant and a cook who provides much more than food to the students she serves and it's about a community of individuals whose lives connect in ways we often do not know, the big and little heroes on a college campus, the work they do every day and all they did on one extraordinary day.

1 The Early Birds

Center.

Until recently, Miss Mary prepared hot meals five days a week in a small cafeteria adjoining the main food court in the Campus Center, serving an assortment of homemade dishes: chicken pot pie, beef and gravy with mashed potatoes, American chop suey, chili with cornbread, roast turkey, pulled pork, macaroni and cheese, candied yams, collared greens, peas, and rice.

With the Campus Center closed for a two-year renovation, a refitted staff office in HCC's business building now serves as her kitchen. The spare accommodations restrict her menu to a rotating selection of on-the-go items: hamburgers, hot dogs, chicken patties, meatballs, hot ham sandwiches. Pizza she offers every day.

Miss Mary serves lunch to a Gateway student.



Miss Mary starts her workdays at 5:15 a.m. when she stops at Chestnut Middle School in Springfield to pick up the groceries and supplies she orders from her employer, Sodexo. She unloads her silver SUV at HCC an hour later, pushes a handcart up the delivery dock ramp, and rides the elevator to the third floor of the Kittredge

Center. Jo-Anne Wrobel, the Kittredge Center receptionist, stops by Miss Mary's office every morning after opening the building. "I look around," she says. "See what's going on."

Wednesday, April 5, was no different.

"What are you cookin' up today?" she asked.

"Meatball grinders and pizza," Miss Mary said.

Jo-Anne thought Miss Mary looked a little off.

"Are you sure you should be here?"

"I'm all right," Miss Mary said. "Just a little tired."

"She always says that."

Next in is Aimee Funk, coordinator of Jump Start, a job-training program for men and women on transitional assistance. Jump Start used to have its classroom next to Miss Mary's kitchen in the Campus Center. The two would talk each morning, and Aimee saw Miss Mary often throughout the day.

"I've worked with Miss Mary for probably six or seven years," she says. "She can be sort of like a porcupine if you don't know her, sort of prickly. But then once you know her, it's just part of who she is. She's a great lady. Very kind-hearted. Truly her mission is to feed not only the stomach but the soul. Some of these kids come from situations that are not good. Transient homelessness. No one who really cares. So, from the time they walk through the door, there's always a welcoming, *hey baby, come in and get some*. She's very loving, and she can be really strict."

When the Campus Center closed, Jump Start was relocated to the end of the same third floor hallway in Kittredge. To get to her office, Aimee has to pass right by Miss Mary's door.

"I had seen her that morning," she recalls. "I said, hey, how are ya? She looked okay."

Then there's Kat — Kathryn Stewart, a 19-year-old HCC student who helps prepare breakfast. "Miss Mary," she says one day, "what's cooking, good looking?"

Kat is not an employee, nor a work-study student, nor an official volunteer. She is Miss Mary's friend. Another student introduced them. It's not clear who adopted whom.

Kat talks fast, and she's fond of nicknames. She's dubbed herself Miss Mary's "junior chief executive in training."

"I'm Kathryn," she goes on. "People call me Kat, Kathleen, K, Katy, anything as long as it's not late for lunch, late for supper. I help my Baby Dukes. I Help Chocolate Thunder, And I'm Baby Girl. Cookie."

It's Kat's responsibility to fill the fruit cups. When she's done, she sits on the floor and knits.

"She's with me every morning," Miss Mary says. "She's always so helpful, reminds me of things I forget. When I moved, she followed me upstairs."

At 8 a.m., they pack the breakfast cart and go to Gateway.

2 Gateway Grandma

The Gateway to College program occupies the southern end of the second floor hallway in the Fine & Performing Arts building. There are a couple of classrooms here and a main office, locked this time of day, and a lounge under the windows with a few easy chairs and tables where students congregate. That's where Miss Mary parks her breakfast cart and sits down for "pastry time" with Kat.

Miss Mary cooks exclusively for Gateway, a second-chance program for students who mostly have either dropped out or failed out of high school. They take classes at HCC and earn college credits while working toward their high school diplomas. Meals are included. During the spring semester, Miss Mary fed more than 90 students a day.

In one way or another, they have all struggled, or they would not be in Gateway. Whatever their individual challenges — homelessness, teen parenthood, abuse, anxiety, poverty, neglect, or the street — Miss Mary does not want hunger to be the reason they don't show up for school.

"There are some kids, because of home life, they don't get the kind of food they need to get," she says. "Some kids get up in the morning, and they don't eat, so it's my job to make sure they get some food, and my job is to make sure they get lunch and a good lunch, cause sometimes they go home and they don't get dinner. It's like I'm helping them for their future. The nourishment goes with the education, because if you don't feed the brain, you can't use the brain."

Breakfast is nothing fancy — cold cereal, cereal bars, breakfast cakes, yogurt, cookies, fruit, juice, milk — but it matters. Between meals, her office door is open to anyone who's hungry.

"I want to give them something to look forward to when they come," she says. "They know they can come here and find some food."

Miss Mary is a professional cook, not a teacher, social worker, adviser, or counselor. Really, though, she is all those things and more.

"Her chicken patties aren't the reason why the kids go down to lunch every day," says Vivian Ostrowski, the Gateway coordinator. "It's part of the reason, but, really, it's the relationship. She's kind of a presence. She is. She's a gift to us. It's sometimes complicated, but she's a gift."

The Gateway students rave about her. Savannah Mayberry, 17, of Springfield calls her "the best person in the world."

"She's the African Queen," Savannah says. "She is amazing. She is always in a good mood. She knows how to keep the kids in check."

"She's a force to be reckoned with, but in the best possible way," says recent Gateway graduate Melanie Acevedo, 19, of Springfield. "She's the love of my life. She treats us like her children, and a lot of us don't get that kind of love anywhere else. She's like Gateway grandma."

They confide in her, too much sometimes, she admits, like when a student described to her how he had lost his virginity over the weekend.

"They tell me everything," she says. "They think I'm their grandma. Some think I'm their mom. They tell me every, every thing. Sometimes I say, why are you telling me?"



"They trust her, so they tell her a lot of stuff," says Jada Waters, Gateway's academic coordinator, "and she gives them advice, and she puts them in check when need be."

Miss Mary hates to miss work and almost never does, because she knows some students won't come to lunch if she's not there, even though Sodexo will send a substitute cook.

"I know I'm a lot to the students," she says. "I mean a lot to them."

From her seat in the Gateway lounge, Miss Mary can see the full length of the corridor, all the way down to the Forum Café in the theater lobby. Straight ahead is the building entrance. She greets everyone who walks by with a warm smile and a gentle good morning.

Kat sips her milk and often knits before heading off to class. Walter Stevenson, a member of the facilities crew, brings Miss Mary the morning newspaper. Miss Mary reads and drinks her tall Dunkin' Donuts coffee.

Sometimes, she sinks back in her chair, closes her eyes, and rests.

3 Good Morning, Miss Mary

When Julissa Colon walked in at 8:30, Miss Mary's eyes were open.

Julissa started working for Gateway as a clerk seven years ago while she was herself a student at HCC. After graduating in 2013, she transferred to Smith College, where she earned a bachelor's degree last year in Latin American Studies and History. She's now Gateway's special programs coordinator.

"I usually chit chat with Miss Mary in the morning, cause we're the first ones here," Julissa says. "Her birthday was coming up, and we were talking about her birthday party at the Monte Carlo in West Springfield. It was going to be that Saturday. We were all invited."

Typically, Julissa waits for Jada, her Gateway colleague, and they walk down to the Forum Café together. But Julissa desperately craved coffee. "I asked Miss Mary if she wanted one, and she said, no, so I went down."

The line, though, was long with the early crush of students before their nine o'clock classes. She decided to wait and turned back. By then, Miss Mary was quiet. Her eyes were closed. Julissa went into the Gateway office and sat down at her desk.

That Wednesday turned out to be the first warm, sunny morning of a late New England spring. The children were playing outside before the doors opened at Bowles Elementary School in Springfield, and Jada was able to drop off her daughter a few minutes early and get a head start on her day.

She came up the stairs and saw Miss Mary in her chair.

"Good morning, Miss Mary," Jada said. Miss Mary did not stir.

"Good morning, Miss Mary!" she said again. Jada pulled out her cell phone.

"Miss Mary, I know you're not sleeping on the job," she said. "I'm gonna take a picture of you."

"I knew that would wake her up," Jada said later. "The picture was just to get her attention, cause she'll be like, oh, my hair's not done, you know?"

Jada snapped a shot, and Miss Mary did not move. She yelled for Julissa.

"Miss Mary's not answering me!"

"I was just talking to her," Julissa said. "She's probably just taking a nap."

"I thought she was just messing with us," Julissa would later recall. "Like I legit thought she was just being funny."

"No," Jada shouted back, "she's not answering me!"

Miss Mary with Gateway academic coordinator Jada Waters, "an angel come by to save me."



Julissa rushed out. They grabbed Miss Mary by the shoulders, pushing and pulling.

"Miss Mary! Miss Mary!"

"I remember feeling so disrespectful cause I shook her so hard, and I was screaming in her face," says Julissa. "You're not supposed to do that to people."

Jada dialed Campus Police from the office phone. Julissa called Mitch Pysznik, the campus nurse.

"I don't think Miss Mary's breathing," Julissa said.

"I remember feeling like, oh, my God," says Julissa. "This person that I just talked to is gone."

4 Everybody Knows Miss Mary

Campus police officer Selina Ortega, an HCC Criminal Justice major from the class of 2016, was working as the dispatcher on the 7-3 shift. She took the call from Jada and immediately dispatched officers to the scene.

"Miss Mary is reported to be unresponsive at the FPA center."

Next she called the Holyoke Fire Department and Action Ambulance, which services Holyoke.

Officer Lizbeth Martinez, HCC class of 2004, a 13-year campus police veteran, was in a patrol car by Q lot on the opposite side of campus. She put on her blue emergency lights and made her way down Campus Road, past the Kid's Place into F lot, parking as close as she could to the building. She grabbed the First Aid bag, slung the strap over her shoulder, and bolted up the stairs to the second floor.

Mitch Pysznik sprinted from the Health Services office in the Frost building, arriving moments later. "It was obviously an emergency," he later said. "I get a lot of calls. I had a feeling this was going to be really serious. I knew I was heading to Gateway, and that's when I saw Mary in the chair."

Officer Andrew Bechthold was on foot on the second floor of the Frost Building. He darted through the hall and out the door and down the courtyard stairs. Even though he was just a rookie who had started at HCC in January, he recognized the name of the person who needed help.

"Everybody knows Miss Mary."

Sergeant Jacqueline Robles-Cruz was doing paperwork in the campus police station. During medical emergencies, department protocol recommends a patrol car meet emergency

vehicles at the main campus entrance on Homestead Avenue to provide an escort. "I immediately grabbed the keys," says Robles-Cruz. "There were already officers at the scene. I was more concerned with getting the ambulance where it needed to go."

Among her duties, Robles-Cruz serves as the school resource officer for the Gateway program. "I'm basically theirs," she says. "If they have any issues at all, I'm the person they reach out to."

In his adjoining office, Chief Joe Rivera could hear Officer Ortega keying up the radio at frequent intervals, usually an indication something is wrong. He went out to check, and Officer Ortega briefed him. Unresponsive employee. Officers on scene. Ambulance on the way. Everything seemed to be under control. Still, he decided to walk over. Quickly.

5 Shock Advised

Mitch, a former emergency room nurse, and Officer Martinez quickly confirmed that Miss Mary wasn't breathing. She also had no pulse.

"Let's get her on the floor," Mitch said.

Working together, Mitch, Officer Bechthold, Jada, and Julissa took hold of Miss Mary, lifted her from the chair, and lowered her to the ground.

"I just thought she was dead," says Jada. "Her body was so lifeless."

From the First Aid bag, Officer Martinez removed the AED — the automated external defibrillator. Mitch started CPR. Thirty chest compressions. Two breaths. Thirty compressions. Two breaths. Officer Martinez connected the AED pads to Miss Mary's chest and signaled the machine was ready. Mitch had to stop CPR while the AED diagnosed Miss Mary's condition.

The AED unit looks like a child's toy — a bright-green plastic box with a large handle. It opens like a clamshell. Inside cartoon diagrams illustrate each stage of the life-saving process. A robotic voice tells you what's going on and what to do.

"Analyzing ... no pulse detected ... shock advised ..."

Officer Bechthold ordered everyone to move away. The button on the AED that initiates the shock is literally the outline of a valentine heart with a finger pointed at it. He pressed it. Miss Mary's chest heaved, and her body convulsed.

"Continue CPR ... continue CPR," the machine repeated.

Mitch resumed. Thirty compressions. Two breaths. On the radio, Officer Martinez updated the dispatcher on Miss Mary's status. Officer Ortega relayed the information to the EMTs en route.

In the meantime, Officer Bechthold headed for the parking lot entrance to flag down the ambulance when it arrived, just as Chief Rivera was walking in.

Most people don't realize how exhausting CPR can be and how violent

chest compressions are. When done correctly, the breastbone is pressed so deeply the supporting cartilage is torn. Mitch was tired. He sensed someone standing behind him. The chief asked if he wanted relief. Mitch nodded, and Rivera took over the chest compressions while Mitch focused on the breaths.

As emergency vehicles approached the campus entrance, Sgt. Robles-Cruz put on her emergency lights and the trucks followed her cruiser into G lot, where Officer Bechthold was waiting to guide them in.

Inside, Officer Martinez had her fingers on Miss Mary's wrist.

"Oh, my God. She has a pulse."

By the time the EMTs took over, Miss Mary was breathing on her own.



HCC student Katherine "Kat" Stewart is a frequent presence in Miss Mary's kitchen.

6 That's One of My Kids

government faucet.

Miss Mary grew up in Saint Andrew Parish in the hills outside of Kingston in a house with an outdoor bathroom and no running water. As a child she walked to school barefoot and through the jungle with a jug on her head to collect water from the

In 1960, after her parents divorced, her mother left Jamaica for a job as a live-in domestic worker in New Jersey, earning \$60 a week taking care of someone else's babies, cooking and cleaning their home, and saving money to bring her own children to America, one by one.

Ten years later, when Miss Mary was 17, she was sent to live with an uncle in New Haven, Conn.

"Most people come to this country they think it's paved with gold," she says. "They think living in the United States is like being born a millionaire, cause in a lot of countries you can't go to school unless you have money. Here, you can go all the way up through to college for free. If you work



Miss Mary, with some of the Gateway to College students she cooks for every day.

hard you can get academic scholarships. In my country, it's not like that."

Miss Mary completed the culinary program at Eli Whitney Technical High School while working nights in a factory, saving money to support the daughter she had left back in Jamaica and would one day send for herself.

Her three surviving siblings, her sisters, all went to college. One became a physician's assistant, the other two registered nurses. "I'm the cook," Miss Mary says. She started her culinary career at Yale-New Haven Hospital.

"College is a wonderful thing, but it's not for everybody," she says. "I had a child to take care of too. It's not like now. It's still a lot of responsibility. Before she came here I had to support her back in Jamaica. You had to have money to pay people."

Later, she worked for New Haven Job Corps, which is part of a national network of educational and vocational training programs for disadvantaged youths.

"It's something like Gateway," Miss Mary says. "People go to college from there. You can get your drivers license. You can get your CNA license. It's a lot of good things."

Over the years she moved to Job Corps programs in Chicopee and Albany, working her way up to lead cook. She returned to western Massachusetts 10 years ago to work for Sodexo, which provides school dining services in Springfield. The company first sent her to HCC to cook for Early College High School, a program of Springfield public schools.

"I like working with young people," she says. "That's most of my life."

When the Gateway program began at HCC in 2008, Miss Mary started cooking for those students too. During the first few years, though, there were some conflicts. The Early College High School model featured high school classes taught on a college campus. Miss Mary served lunch at a fixed time every day. Gateway students followed college schedules and needed more flexibility. Early College treated its students like high school kids, which, of course, they were. Gateway treats theirs like the college students they are supposed to be.

"It took a while for us to find the sweet spot," says Vivian, the Gateway coordinator. "I think Miss Mary feels truly free now to fully engage with the kids. It was hard, but since Early College High School left, it hasn't been that hard. It's been so much more graceful."

Miss Mary has four children, all grown. She notes with pride that her son

is a graduate of the University of New Hampshire and now a police officer in New Haven. She has two daughters in college and one who is disabled. All of them live in Connecticut.

"I have 11 grandchildren and about 40 other grands who call me grandma," she says.

Sometimes former students stop her on the street. "Hi, Miss Mary. They say, oh, she was the best cook at Job Corps. I say, that's one of my kids."

She keeps in touch with students from Early College High School, especially those who have matriculated to HCC. They stop by for lunch. She feeds them. She sometimes gives them rides to appointments, money for the bus, or a bed to sleep in. Since she and Hudell bought their house in East Springfield 10 years ago, she has taken 20 students into her home who had no place else to live.

"As long as you're in school, that is my thing," she says. "If you're getting your education, I'm there to back you."

7 Something's Happening

From her desk in the FPA office near the theater lobby, clerk Mary Starzyk could see the commotion. People were running by, including the barista from the Forum Café, who typically only passed on her way to empty trash.

"I asked her if everything was OK. Is something going on? That's how I found out," Starzyk says. "When things happen over here, you know right away."

At the request of campus police, Starzyk shut the fire doors in the corridor and stood by to keep people away. "I really only know Miss Mary to say hi to her," she says. "So many people were standing over her. It was upsetting. The hardest part was seeing her going out on the stretcher, cause you knew it was really bad."

Maureen Conroy, director of HCC's Office for Students with Disabilities and Deaf Services, did not recognize the woman standing in her office doorway over in the adjacent Donahue building.

"Something's happening," the woman said. "There's an emergency over at Gateway, and students are freaking out. I didn't know who to go to. Can you go over there?"

Students were crying, mulling around. Miss Mary was still on the floor. Mitch Pysznik and the police were trying to revive her. "The Gateway staff were crying and really having a very hard time with it," Maureen recalls. "I don't think they had the capacity at that moment to deal with the students."

She invited students into the Gateway office and introduced herself. "I said, listen, they're doing everything they can. We need to stay out of the way. Let me help out with whatever you need. I'll write down any questions you have and I'll get answers for you."

She remembers one student in particular, Demetrius Rojas, Miss Mary's "grandson." That's how the 20-year-old HCC student introduces himself. He's one of those students Miss Mary has taken in, and he's been living with her for more than a year.

"He was upset, and he recognized me, and he was saying, this is awful, she's the nicest person in the world." That's what everyone was saying. She's the nicest person. She gives them food every day and takes care of them."

Maureen stayed in the Gateway office for more than an hour that morning, long after Miss Mary had been taken away. While there she learned that many of the students she knows from OSDDS spend their mornings in the Gateway area, even though they are not part of that program.

"They were never in Gateway, but it's a nice place, and they love Miss Mary," she says, "so they go hang out in that corner."

That morning, one of those students asked if she could have some food from Miss Mary's breakfast cart.

"I guess, if everyone has had something," she replied.

"Miss Mary would let me have it," the student said.

"I guess that's her tradition. She sounds like a cool lady. I'd like to meet her some day."

8 A Unity of Purpose

ambulance to the hospital.

Mitch returned to the health office and locked himself in the exam room, rattled and shaking from adrenaline. As an emergency room nurse at Bay State, he'd performed CPR countless times in controlled settings, with patients hooked up to heart monitors and under the supervision of physicians. In 25 years, this was the first time he'd ever done CPR at HCC.

"It was very personal this time," he says, "because it was someone from HCC and because we were doing a rescue outside a hospital setting, and yea, because I sort of knew the person."

He was worried that Miss Mary might still die.

Julissa dashed across the footbridge to the Kittredge Center to retrieve Miss Mary's purse for the EMTs. "Miss Mary's in trouble!" she shouted when people asked her what was going on. Jada called Miss Mary's daughter and then followed the

"Most don't make it. Even with a perfect response, you're not guaranteed that the patient is going to make it, so the fact that she had a pulse when the EMTs got there was huge. We were really lucky they found her right away and that we had a quick response from Campus Police, and we had the AED right there."

It had been a first too for Officer Martinez, Officer Bechthold, and Chief Rivera.

"She was gone," says Officer Martinez. "We don't even know how long she was gone."



Above, HCC Campus Police officers Lizbeth Martinez '04 and Andrew Bechthold responded to Miss Mary's emergency. Below, an AED (automated external defibrillator) like the one they used to save her life.

Chief Rivera recalls a strange sense of calm during the emergency he attributed to years of training, waiting for that one moment when it will make a difference.

"I knew what to do, and there were other people who knew what to do, and we were all doing it in concert, together," he says. "It was kind of a unity of purpose."

In the Kittredge Center, Jo-Anne Wrobel was at the reception desk when she heard a woman fitting Miss Mary's description was getting CPR over in the FPA building. She went looking but by then the ambulance had left.

"I said, OK, now who's going to feed the kids?"



Jo-Anne found Aimee Funk in the Jump Start office and shared the news. Aimee threw on an old sweater.

"I'll meet you in the kitchen," she said.

Valentyna Semyrog, the administrative assistant in the Kittredge Center's Business and Community Services office, also did not hesitate.

"I'm going with you," said Valentyna, remembering the outpouring of compassion and support she received from colleagues after experiencing her own family tragedy a couple of years ago. "People helped me a lot when I needed it" she says.

Jo-Anne knew what Miss Mary had planned for lunch — meatball grinders and pizza. The oven was already on. The meatballs were browning. The women tied their hair back, put on plastic gloves, and formed an assembly line Jo-Anne would later joke was like Lucy and Ethel's candy factory fiasco. When they couldn't find tomato sauce, they borrowed cans from the HCC Food Pantry down the hall. When they couldn't find grinder rolls, they put the meatballs on hamburger buns.

"You gotta do what you gotta do, right?" says Jo-Anne. "Take care of the kids."

"Lunch was made," says Aimee, "probably not with as much love as Miss Mary does, but it was made."

9 Just Keep Knitting

Gateway coordinator Vivian Ostrowski was returning from an off-campus meeting when she received an urgent call from Julissa Colon.

"Get here now!"

By the time she arrived the ambulance was gone.

"Then the day was just dealing with it. The repercussions of something like this in terms of somebody's life and their role within a community and kind of unraveling what needs to be done, all that is complicated — how it needs to be communicated, how to take care of the kids, what happens if she dies, what happens if she lives."

The Gateway students, a typically animated lot, were quiet, anxious. "There were a lot of faces at my door not wanting to ask in public, but wanting to know, did you hear anything?"



Top: Miss Mary with HCC school nurse Mitch Pysznik. Below: Miss Mary with HCC Police Chief Joe Rivera.

Some students wanted to go to the hospital. "That's how close they feel to her," says Julissa, "how much they care about her, because she cares about them."

Jada was at the hospital, waiting for Miss Mary's family. In the meantime, she'd called a college friend who belonged to Miss Mary's Springfield church, More Than Conquerors Ministry. They sent a few members to pray.

"The doctor was concerned about the amount of oxygen she had lost after she stopped breathing," Jada recalls. "Every time the doctor would say something negative, they would say, 'No, the Lord has the last say.'"

Once they arrived Miss Mary's children were told she might not live. One of her daughters collapsed and was hospitalized in the next room. On campus, the mood among those who knew her was grim.

"Everybody thought she was not gonna make it," Demetrius remembers.

A meditation and mindfulness class scheduled for that afternoon became a time for Gateway students to reflect. "There was a lot of fear," says Mary Jane "Mimsy" O'Connor, the teacher and Wellness Promotion coordinator. "They didn't know if she had died."

They wanted to talk about Miss Mary, how she watches out for them, how she holds food aside for them if they are late, how she'll give them an extra piece of cake or dessert, and pack containers of food for them to take home.

"She can be real tough too," one student said. "You know, she's not easy on us."

And then they started laughing.

"They could see the wholeness of her, which was really quite wonderful for me to experience," says Mimsy. "She came alive in that moment with them."

Over in the Donahue building, Kat, Miss Mary's breakfast buddy, stopped in to see Maureen Conroy. She'd been over in the Kittredge Center helping Jo-Anne, Aimee, and Valentyna serve lunch.

"She wanted to know what was going on with Miss Mary, and how she was doing. I didn't know if Miss Mary had made it."

Kat said she had decided to make Miss Mary a blanket.

"Just keep knitting," Maureen said. "Just keep knitting."



"I'll crochet her back to health," said Kat.



Two weeks later, Miss Mary was back at work.

10 I'm Not Ready to Go Yet

At a meeting of the Business and Community Services division the day before Miss Mary's emergency, participants were talking about their

work and why they do it.

"Terms like transformation, compassion, kindness, support and caring kept recurring," the division vice president, Jeffrey Hayden, recounted in an email to staff the next afternoon. "In my cynicism," he wrote, "I kept asking how does that make us any different from any other college. Today I was bowled over by the dedication, caring and feeling of community from our faculty, staff and students."

Hayden oversees HCC's Gateway to College program; his office is across the hall from Miss Mary's kitchen.

"I think for me it wasn't surprising that people responded," he said later, "It was that people responded in so many little ways, not all in big heroic fashion, but just the little things. For me this incident reaffirmed that people's natural instincts are to do good and help one another, and they did what they could do, and to me that is a sign of how strong people are here, and how strong the community is."



"May-mester" is a short session of classes after the regular spring term ends, specifically for Gateway students getting ready to complete the program. Miss Mary, dressed as usual in her blue Sodexo shirt, black apron and hairnet, serves lunch at 11, but she lingers long after, waiting for stragglers.

"It's like, y'all come in here whatever hours," she complains to one. "You ever seen anything like this? They just come in whenever."

She quickly softens. "Hello, my love. How are you, sweetie? Would you like a chicken patty? It's all ready to go."

Later she spots a familiar face slinking by the lunchroom, which these days is just a repurposed Kittredge Center classroom.

"Come back here," she commands. "Come on. Get something to eat."

The student sheepishly enters and grins.

"There's pizza there. Get a plate. You want chocolate milk, sweetie? It's in there."

She points to a cooler. "There's a peeled orange in there," Miss Mary says, and then explains, "I peel the oranges, cause otherwise they won't eat 'em."

"Thank you, Miss Mary. Have a good one."

"You too, honey."

Doctors could not say for sure why Miss Mary's heart had stopped. She did not have a heart attack and there was no blockage in her arteries. "Everything just shut down," she says. She remembers nothing from that day and knows only what others told her.

"I believe in God," she says, "and I go to church and all that, but, just to know, I think Jada was an angel come by to save me. She came just at the right time. If it had been any longer, if somebody found me, I'd be dead. That's God's mercy. I believe there's things for me to do on this earth. I'm not ready to go yet."

And no one is ready to see her leave. She returned to HCC to find a bouquet of carnations on her desk and an overwhelming assortment of cards from staff, students and friends. "One of them says, I went to the Golden Gate, and they kicked me back."

"You know what amazes me?" she says. "All the people I don't even know, and I don't even know they know me. They was hugging me. They was like, you're the last person I thought I'd see."

She showed her appreciation to Mitch Pysznik and Campus Police with phone calls from her hospital bed and fruit baskets after she returned.

"Thank you. Thank you. You saved my life," Miss Mary said, her voice still hoarse from ventilation tubes.

"That was one of the best calls we've ever received here at the station," says Officer Bechthold.

Electronic Media Arts professor Justin West, whose office is down the hall from Gateway, was glad to see Miss Mary back in her chair. "I see you every morning when I come in. You always say, good morning, which I like. So many people don't say anything."

"Well, I'm from the Islands, and we do that."

Her quick return shortly after surgery to have a pacemaker implanted came too soon for those closest to her, who thought she should take more time off after her near-death experience. "That's the power of Miss Mary



Miss Mary, front and center, at the Gateway prom last May. (Underwood Photo)

and her insistence in doing what she's meant to do and what she wants to do," says Julissa. "You can't tell Miss Mary anything. She makes up her own mind."

Reunions led to some amusing and emotional moments. "I thought you would be a younger, better-looking man," she said to Mitch, who had grown a beard since the last time she'd seen him, nearly a year ago. "My friend," she said during a long embrace. "This is my life-saver here."

"We are connected," he said.

Chief Rivera choked up when he saw her. "I'm not this big, bad tough dude," he said. "I can be, but I started to get a little bit teary, believe it or not. It's an awesome thing to bring someone back. I don't really know how else to say it."

Her friends are more attentive to her now. Facilities personnel meet her in the mornings by the delivery dock ramp. Jo-Anne, Aimee, and Valentyna keep closer watch throughout the day. Kat stops by the kitchen every morning and again before lunch, and Demetrius is often there. "They do a lot, especially after I got sick," Miss Mary says.

Julissa and Jada make sure she does not fall asleep in her chair. "No napping," Julissa chides. "You cannot do that to us again."

Miss Mary celebrated her 64th birthday in early May with a belated party at the Monte Carlo restaurant in West Springfield. Her friends were there, from church and from HCC, including Jada and Julissa, and Kat, who had completed Miss Mary's blanket by the time she came back. As she does every year, Miss Mary attended the Alternative High Schools graduation in Springfield to watch the Gateway students collect their diplomas.

She has also never missed a prom. For this year's affair, she wore a blue and white floral print dress, and every so often, she'd rise from her chair, leaving her pocket book and cane at the table, walk to the ballroom floor and dance, energized by the circle of students that formed around her. For they are the ones who really brought her back and compel her to keep going.

"They make me smile," she says. She likes to see them smile too.

"I hope my food makes them happy," she says. "They deserve to be happy." 🍴



Top: Miss Mary, with her "grandson," HCC student Demetrius Rojas. Middle: HCC Campus Police Sgt. Jacqueline Robles-Cruz, the school resource officer for Gateway to College. Bottom: Miss Mary gathers with her friends and colleagues on the steps of the Kittredge Center for a reunion photo.

Why I

Legacy Gift Mark of Grateful Graduate

By Judith Kelliher

It's been more than 40 years since Jon Roe '76 took the stage of what was then called HCC's Forum theater to perform in the Holyoke Community College production of "The Elephant Man." Getting a chance to play one of the lead roles as Sir Frederick Treves is Roe's favorite memory of his time as a theater major at HCC.

He thrived in the theater environment, getting to work with the likes of legendary drama teacher Leslie Phillips, founder of the theater department, and Roy Faudree, technical director of the department, who authored HCC's version of "The Elephant Man." Roe described his theater experiences as "a dream come true for this young man struggling to find my place in the world."

He credits his education at HCC with having put him on a successful path in acting and in life and says he believes if he hadn't attended HCC he would not be "happily settled here" — in Los Angeles — "the way I am." While he never did get the big acting break he had hoped for, he did achieve some success, earning his union cards in television soaps and performing in theater and student films in Southern California in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

"The life I gained and the friends I have made living here since 1979 would never have happened," Roe said. "It didn't turn out exactly as I planned; I'm not a movie or television star, but all in all I am a very happy man at this point in my life. I think the life I've had is a direct result of the times I had and the things I learned at Holyoke Community College."

Roe has shown that appreciation with annual donations to the college but stepped up his generosity recently when he and his wife, Gretchen, who have no children, decided to leave a portion of their estate to HCC upon their deaths.

"If you went to HCC and enjoyed it in some fashion, then you went on to a four-year school, or if you went on to your adult life of work and



Jon Roe '76, during a recent visit to HCC.

family and living, how could you not be grateful to the school and teachers that catapulted you into that adult life?" Roe said. "Think of all the frivolous things you spend money on each day and week and year. How about sending a portion of that money to your alma mater so that HCC can help someone else just like they helped you?"

Roe, now 64, worked with Bonnie Zima Dowd, director of HCC Alumni Relations, to establish the planned gift to benefit the college. Zima Dowd said planned gifts, such as bequests, are one way alumni can give back to HCC while still being in control of their assets until death. Bequests make it easy for Roe and others to be philanthropists, she noted.

"Jon loves HCC and cares deeply about its future, and for that reason we are truly grateful for his legacy gift," said Zima Dowd. "His personal decision is one that will forever shape the lives of students that follow in his footsteps. That's inspiring."


Zima Dowd said donors like Roe have a desire

to somehow make HCC better, stronger, more vibrant, more innovative and more promising for future students.

"I like to think of them as HCC heroes," she said.

Roe has worked as an executive assistant to the president of Brookhill Corp., a property and asset management company in Santa Monica, Calif., since 2005.

For him, the legacy gift has the potential to create exciting opportunities for aspiring students.

"I hope other young adults will get a chance to attend HCC, glean what they can from the institution and create their own beautiful lives," he said. "I feel good right now knowing that I might make a difference; perhaps some extra cash will help HCC build a new theater space or classroom or maybe it will go into a scholarship fund that can help some acting student get through school and go on to make a mark in the world of theater arts." 

ALUMNI IN ACTION



Award-winning filmmaker Tom Roche '16 shoots a selfie during a spring visit to campus.

'A la mode' tops all

Filmmaker **Tom Roche '16** won first place in the 2017 "7 Day Film Sprint," a one-week competition sponsored by Northampton Community Television. Roche, of Holyoke, had one week to write, cast, film, edit, and deliver a 1-5-minute movie. His spy thriller spoof, "a la Mode," incorporated the contest's mandatory prop — an ice cream cone — in the opening scene, as an agent drops dead after eating one. In the film, Roche, who studied Communications, Media and Theater Arts at HCC, plays super spy "Bland ... Jim Bland."

Read more and watch the film at: hcc.edu/roche

Alumni honored at Commencement



Distinguished Service Award winner Elaine Pluta '92 at Commencement 2017.

Former Holyoke mayor **Elaine Pluta '92** and adjunct Criminal Justice professor **Lou Barry '73** were honored at HCC's 70th annual Commencement May 27 with Distinguished Service Awards, which recognize individuals for their dedication and outstanding service to HCC. Pluta was cited for her work as mayor, city councilor, and community volunteer. Barry, who was attending the birth of his first granddaughter and could not attend, is a retired police chief, adjunct HCC instructor, and founder and coordinator of HCC's Criminal Justice Academy, a summer youth program.



This year's alumni award honorees were Howard Greaney '63, of Holyoke, Nancy Fields '74, of Leeds, Patricia Sandoval '84, of Southamptton, and Dave Condon '06, of East Longmeadow.

HCC Presents Alumni Awards

HCC honored four alumni June 6 at the 40th Annual Holyoke Community College Alumni Awards Dinner and Scholarship Benefit at the Log Cabin in Holyoke. This year's honorees were **Howard Greaney '63**, retired Holyoke public school teacher and administrator and City Council member; **Nancy Fields '74**, owner of Fields Graphic Designs; and **Patricia Sandoval '84**, HCC professor of communications and theater. **Dave Condon '06**, of East Longmeadow, president of Northeast Security Systems, received the Rising Star Award, which celebrates alumni who have received their undergraduate degrees within the last 12 years and have made significant contributions to society through professional or philanthropic work. Established in 1977, the annual event recognizes alumni who have brought distinction to themselves and the college through their work or through community service, and have demonstrated commitment to higher education and to HCC.

Nursing Alumni Celebration

The annual Nursing Alumni Celebration was held May 3 with more than 50 graduates attending. Alumni gathered at the Center for Health Education for light fare and fellowship with former classmates, faculty, and new HCC president Christina Royal. Pat Triggs, a retired member of the HCC nursing faculty and founder of HCC's Nursing Success Program, gave the keynote address. A panel discussion followed during which six young alumni shared their stories of successfully navigating the transition from nursing student to nursing professional: **Melissa Burt '11, Fehim Becirbasic '15, Carlyne Bisia '16, Rita Collins '16, Elizabeth Hernandez '16, and Daniella Pootoolal '16.** Discussions also began about developing an alumni mentor program to help guide HCC nursing students from college to careers.



1. Young alums enjoyed the opportunity to reconnect with one another. Pictured are: Melissa Burt '11, Brandy Peterson '14, Nursing Learning Specialist Kelly Keane; Carlyne Bisia '16, Rita Collins '16, and Fehim Becirbasic '15. Kneeling is Stephanie Marie Rodriguez '14. 2. Girard Dugan '89 and Brenda Jaeger '91 enjoy a mini-reunion. 3. Melissa E. Perry '91, left, was joined by Karen Scheinost Mayotte '80. 4. Panelist Elizabeth Hernandez '16, left, answers a question while Carlyne Bisia '16 looks on. 5. Two generations of proud nursing graduates, Patricia Michalski '91, and her daughter, Mary Michalski O'Sullivan '97. 6. Former student Rosa Torres '12 embraces Nursing Learning Specialist Kelly Keane.



1974

Gayle Rud Smith, president of Middlebridge Marketing, was the keynote speaker at the Grinspoon Entrepreneurship Initiative Awards

Ceremony and Banquet last April. The event, held annually at the Log Cabin, recognizes and awards area college students for their entrepreneurial spirit and exemplary business plans. More than 350 people attended. You can watch Gayle's address on You Tube at <https://youtu.be/FUSYbjB4WaQ>

1975

Kimberly DelGizzo is executive director of the Career Development Center at Saint Anselm College in Manchester, N.H. She holds an associate degree in early childhood education from HCC, a bachelor's degree in psychology and sociology from Coker College in Hartsville, S.C., and a master's degree in counseling from the University of Vermont. She resides in Mansfield, Mass.



1976

After 36 years, Westhampton resident **Frank Jurkowski** retired from his job as a mail carrier with the U.S. Postal Service. Loyal customers praised him as a reliable, professional,

and affable mailman who loved to talk about the Red Sox and other baseball matters.

1985

Brian R. Wells was named general manager for The Hotel Roanoke & Conference Center, Roanoke, Virginia, which is part of Curio – A Collection by Hilton. He brings 25 years of experience as general manager in the food and beverage industry and property operations to his new position. He is a graduate of Cornell School of Hotel Administration and majored in hospitality management at HCC.

1987

Dave Cichocki is vice president/general manager of sales marketing at the Whirlpool Corporation. He earned his associate degree in business administration from HCC and his bachelor's degree in business from Western New England University. Prior to Whirlpool, he held multiple leadership positions with Kraft Foods Group.



1988

Douglas Theobald, CPA, is a tax services partner and president of Moriarity & Primack, an accounting firm in Springfield, Mass. He received his bachelor's degree in accounting

from Bryant University and his master's degree in taxation from the University of Hartford. He is a U.S. Navy veteran, serves on the board of the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts, and is an HCC alumni mentor.

South Hadley, Mass., resident **Michael Lynch** has been promoted to the position of senior vice president/senior commercial loan officer at Florence Bank. Lynch joined the bank in 2004. He holds a bachelor's degree from Westfield State University and received a graduate leadership certificate from Western New England University.

1990

Deana McPherson is vice president and corporate controller at American Outdoor Brands Corp., formerly Smith & Wesson, of Springfield, Mass. After earning her associate degree in business administration from HCC, she went on to receive a bachelor's degree in accounting from the UMass Isenberg School of Management. Her nephew, **Jared McPherson**, was a member of HCC's graduating Class of 2017 and is following in his aunt's footsteps to Isenberg this fall.

1993

Darran Miner is director of Marketing for The New York Racing Association, which operates the three largest thoroughbred horse racing tracks in the state of New York: Aqueduct, Belmont, and Saratoga. He earned his associate degree from HCC in business administration and his bachelor's degree in sport management from the Isenberg School of Management at UMass Amherst. As an HCC student, Miner served as president of the Business Club.



1999

Patrick McCann is a project manager with the MassMutual Financial Group in Springfield, Mass. He earned his bachelor's degree and master's in business administration

from the Isenberg School of Management at UMass Amherst.

James M. Leahy of Holyoke, Mass., was elected chairman of the Westfield State Foundation board of directors. The 18-member organization raises funds to support the college and its students. He holds a bachelor's degree from Westfield State University and is working toward his master's degree in education and corporate training from Cambridge College. He has been a member of the Westfield foundation board for the past three years.



2001

Elroy Barber, former manager of the Holyoke Civic Symphony and volunteer with the Holyoke Senior Center, received the Ancient Order of Hibernians' James A. Curran

Division One Mr. Hibernian 2017 award at the Wherehouse in Holyoke in February. The award is given to a member of the AOH who best lives by the Hiberian motto: "Friendship, Unity and True Christian Charity."

2005

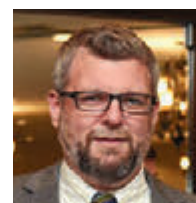
Former HCC student trustee **Shawn Robinson**, director of Franklin/Hampshire Vocational Services for ServiceNet, was named one of Business West magazine's "40 Under Forty" for 2017. He was joined by two other HCC alums: **Basia Belz**, of Vivid Salon & Spa, and **Alessandra (Ali) Connor**, of Camp K-9 doggie day camp. The award recognizes emerging young business and civic leaders in western Massachusetts.



2006

In June, **Andy Dowd** graduated from the University of Massachusetts Medical School with his medical degree and started his residency at UMass Medical

School's Emergency Medicine program in July. Additionally, he recently published his first book of photographs – called MED SCHOOL – which gives a raw glimpse into what happens inside the walls of a medical school.



2008

Ryan Rege is a culinary arts instructor at Pathfinder Regional Vocational Technical High School in Palmer, Mass. He is a member

of HCC's Alumni Council and is working toward his master's degree in higher education administration at Fitchburg State University. He lives in Belchertown, Mass.



2009

Sina (Thomasina)

Holloman returned to HCC as an alumni career panelist to speak to business students. She is the owner of HomeCare Hands, a 24/7 care at home

and staffing agency with offices in western Massachusetts and central Connecticut. She also serves on the Alumni Council and has a teenage son. She lives in Longmeadow, Mass.

Springfield native **Maryam A. Sullivan**, who writes under the pen name Umm Juwayriyah, released her fourth book, *Tried & Tested*, a novel about one American Muslim woman's personal journey through abuse, addiction, and family discord toward finding the courage to renew her faith. She is a second-generation American Muslim urban educator, business owner, and storyteller, and holds a bachelor's degree from Bay Path University and a master's degree from Regis University. She is currently pursuing a doctoral degree in educational leadership.

2011

Susanne Ollmann is a certified social media strategist, accredited PR professional, graphic designer, and photographer. For the past nine years she has owned her own photography and marketing firm, OllmannCreative.com, and lives

in Berlin, Germany, with her daughter Elise. After receiving her bachelor's degree from Mount Holyoke College and a master's degree from Georgetown University, Ollman came back to HCC for her associate degree in graphic design, graduating as a valedictorian. She is a member of the American Women's Club of Berlin and is currently on a one-year, round-the-world travel adventure with her daughter.



2012

HCC business students heard from **Dylan Pillon**, a young entrepreneur, about how he launched his business, Cloud 9 Marketing Group, and what factors contributed to his success. Joining

him to share their career stories were **Ruby Maddox '03** (nonprofit); **David Condon '06** (business); **Elizabeth Roman '04** (journalism), and **Doug Theobald '88** (accounting).

2013

Vocalist **Cait Simpson** of Agawam and bassist **Chris Merritt** met at HCC while studying jazz and remained friends after they transferred to UMass Amherst and continued to perform together. Today, they play as The Greys and their debut album, "The Landing," was released in February 2017. The musical duo enjoys performing original sounds of jazz, and alternative and indie rock across the Pioneer Valley.

2014

Tatiana Lakalo writes that she is part of a



car club called RAAC (Rise Above Auto Club). The club is comprised of auto enthusiasts, military vets, and community builders. Established since 2015, RAAC is based in the Enfield, Conn., and

Springfield, Mass., area.

2015

Ashley Wilson, RN, of Palmer, is a nurse in Baystate Wing Hospital's Emergency Department. She is a member of the Emergency Nursing Association and is currently studying for her certification in emergency nursing.



2016

Robert Ramos works as a registered nurse with MetroCare of Springfield. He visited HCC last spring for the annual Alumni Nursing Celebration and will join HCC's Alumni Council this fall.

Send your news and photos to alumni@hcc.edu or mail us at the Alumni Connection, c/o Alumni Relations, 303 Homestead Ave., Holyoke, MA 01040. The deadline for receiving copy or photos for our fall publication is December 1, 2017.

In Memoriam

We are saddened to learn of the passing of the following members of the HCC community:

- Michael Aldrich, 1970
- Angela Morgan Belisle, 1977
- Helene (Bibeau) Brouillette, 1975
- Ernest W. Brunault, Jr., 1950
- Dianne M. Buckel, 1991
- Michael E. Bys, 1972
- JoAnn Cabana, 1995
- David B. Crosier, 1972
- Michelle D. Denehy, 1997
- Jessica Godek, 2014
- Eric S. Goldenberg, 1969
- Michele A. (LeBlanc) Hennessy, 1980
- Thomas F. Kane, 1975

- Shirley J. Kenniston, 2010
- Alan J. Kurpaska, 1978
- Dolores Ann Lukasik, 1974
- Donna L. Marino, 1976
- Roy W. Provost, 1955
- Leokadia Z. Rowinski, 1973
- Karen Marie (Mallette) Sellers, 1980
- Frances Ann Morse,
*retired administrative assistant,
Social Sciences*
- Francis "Doc" Baker
former trustee

In Memory of . . .

If you would like to make a contribution in memory of a classmate, friend, or relative, please make your check payable to the HCC Foundation and mail it to Holyoke Community College, 303 Homestead Ave., Holyoke, MA 01040; call Bonnie Zima Dowd at 413.552.2253; or go online to www.hcc.edu/donate.

HCC Album



Jazz icons have performed at the annual Holyoke Community College Jazz Festival for two decades, but, according to Robert Ferrier, the festival organizer and one of its founders, the two-day event has always been more about education. Each year, eight to 12 high schools and some area colleges bring their music students to the festival to watch, play, jam and attend clinics and workshops. It gives students an opportunity to meet other emerging musicians, form friendships, and exchange ideas. The only thing they don't do is compete. "I love it," says Ferrier '77, a jazz guitarist and HCC music professor. "It's educational. No one leaves thinking they lost." This year's festival, the 20th, ran March 10-11 with jazz trombonist Steve Davis as the weekend's guest artist. The structure of the festival has not changed significantly in 20 years. For the Friday night kickoff concert, guest performers play with the Amherst Jazz Orchestra under the musical direction of David Sporny in the Leslie Phillips Theater. Saturday's events include jazz workshops and a concluding concert. Above, this year's guest artist, Steve Davis, performs with students. "It's a special event," says Sporny. "The fact that the school has committed to it is fantastic. Plus, they get to see world class jazz performers every year." ♪

2017-2018 Events

EVERYONE IS WELCOME!



Thursday, September 28, 2017

Community College Day at Fenway Park

Red Sox vs. Houston Astros

7:10 p.m., Fenway Park, Boston, Mass.

Join HCC alumni, students, friends and families for a night of baseball at Boston's legendary ballpark. For more information, please call 413.552.2182.



Saturday, September 30, 2017

24-Hour Theater Festival: An Evening of One-Act Plays

Special guest performance by HCC Alumni Players

7:30 p.m., Leslie Phillips Theater, Fine & Performing Arts Building

Presented by Lisa Poehler '84, Denise Boutin '77 and Linda Lacharite-Hegarty '82 in collaboration with the HCC Theater Department.

Proceeds from this fundraiser support the Leslie Phillips Fund for Theater Arts and Education. The fund will be used for a variety of initiatives such as scholarships, master classes, guest artists, and theater enrichment programs, along with capital needs such as theater improvement and equipment replacement.

Tickets: \$15 (general admission) and \$10 (students, seniors & HCC faculty & staff)

Purchase online with a credit/debit card:
www.hcc.edu/alumnievents

Interested in participating in this year's festival? Contact the Players at 24HF@comcast.net or on the HCC Alumni Players Facebook Page.



Wednesday, October 18, 2017

Fall Mid-semester Music Department Ensemble Concert

Free

11 a.m. – 12:30 p.m., Leslie Phillips Theater,
Fine & Performing Arts Building



Friday, November 3, 2017

The Inauguration of President Christina Royal

10 a.m., Leslie Phillips Theater, Fine & Performing Arts Building



Saturday, November 4, 2017

Inauguration Celebration

5 p.m., Bartley Center for Athletics & Recreation



Thursday – Saturday, November 16-18, 2017

Rhinoceros

7:30 p.m. (and 2 p.m. Saturday, November 18)

Leslie Phillips Theater, Fine & Performing Arts Building

Directed by theater professor Tim Cochran and written by Eugene Ionesco. HCC is eager to share this play and showcase its message of social transformation and pandemonium in strange times. The performance is a captivating, critically acclaimed commentary on what is absurd about human nature.

For more information or to reserve a seat, call the HCC Box Office at 413.552.2528. Tickets are \$10 (general admission); \$8 (students and senior citizens); \$5 (HCC students, faculty and staff).



Sunday, December 31, 2017

It's the last day of the 2017 tax year, and we want to provide a friendly reminder to make your tax-deductible gifts to your preferred charities before midnight. We hope that one of your priorities is

Holyoke Community College, and we thank you in advance for including us in your generosity.



Friday – Saturday, March 9-10, 2018

HCC Jazz Festival

Friday, March 9, 8 p.m., Leslie Phillips Theater

Opening concert featuring the Amherst Jazz Orchestra and a special guest artist.

\$15 general admission, \$10 students and seniors, free for HCC students, faculty and staff

Saturday, March 10, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m., Fine & Performing Arts Building

Jazz workshops, clinics and jams, followed by concluding concert at 4 p.m. in the Leslie Phillips Theater. All Saturday events are free.

Holyoke Civic Symphony



- Sunday, October 22, 2017
- Sunday, December 10, 2017
- Sunday, March 4, 2018
- Sunday, May 6, 2018

3 p.m., HCC Leslie Phillips Theater,
Fine & Performing Arts Building

Free admission. For more information visit
www.holyokecivicsymphony.org or call 413.256.1760.

Alumni Connection

Holyoke Community College Alumni Office
303 Homestead Avenue
Holyoke, MA 01040

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Family Bonds

By Laurie Loisel

The Dubchak offspring of Westfield are a close-knit bunch. Ranging in age from 13 to 29, they are children of Ukrainian immigrants who came to the United States in 1992 when the oldest were 3 and 4. Today, all seven Dubchak children center their work and social lives around their family. All are accomplished musicians. They play music together in church. The family band plays weddings. They run a family business. And here's another thing they share: Five of the seven have studied at Holyoke Community College. Four have already graduated and the fifth is on track to earn his diploma next year. And the two youngest, 16 and 13, expect to be HCC alumni some day as well.

Read the full story at: hcc.edu/dubchaks





Robyn Sutton-Fernandez, '14

Foundation, Inc.

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**“HC is the foundation
for everything that comes next”
— Robyn Sutton-Fernandez '14**



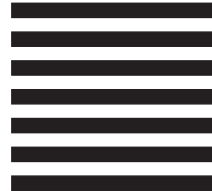
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Please make this gift in honor/memory of: _____

Direct my gift to support: **Greatest need** **Equipment & Technology** **Scholarships**
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Thank YOU for giving today! All gifts are tax deductible to the full extent allowed by law. Ask your employer if they will match your gift to the HCCF and *double* or *triple* the impact of your donation.