

# Alumni Connection

HOLYOKE  
COMMUNITY  
COLLEGE  
SPRING 2020



## Healing the Invisible Wounds of War

Steve Jones '15 and the Warrior's Art Room

*ALSO INSIDE: Helping students Thrive*

## DEAR READERS



Christina Royal, Ph.D.,  
HCC President

If you're reading this, you most likely already know the grit and determination it takes to be a community college student. You know that community college students juggle job and family responsibilities to earn a degree and build a better life for themselves and their loved ones. You know that they stand at bus stops when it's below freezing and blisteringly hot, sacrifice sleep to keep up with their studies, and too often have to choose between books and food.

According to a national survey by the Hope Center for College, Community and Justice, 42 percent of college students at two-year institutions nationwide experienced food insecurity in the 30 days prior to the survey, and 50 percent have experienced housing insecurity. This is a crisis that few people know about. Our own student survey revealed that, at the time of the survey, 56 percent of our students were housing insecure, 23 percent were homeless, and 46 percent were food insecure — and we know that those numbers are low, because when someone is hungry or homeless, they aren't going to feel like filling out a survey. More significantly, they aren't going to be able to focus on classes or coursework when they are struggling to survive.

HCC was founded on the belief that everyone deserves access to high quality education, and we remain determined to remove the barriers between our students and their dreams of a better life. In this issue of *Alumni Connection*, you'll learn about HCC's Thrive Center, where students turn for food to get through the day, groceries to get through the week, emergency housing, food assistance benefits, health insurance, credit counseling, and other critical resources.

The Thrive Center is just one part of a multi-pronged approach to addressing the needs of our students. The President's Student Emergency Fund provides students with access to money (typically under \$500) for the types of circumstances that, while minor for many of us, can derail an education for a student with few resources: a car repair, a utility bill, or an unexpected medical expense. HCC has also established partnerships with the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts, Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness, Holyoke Soldiers' Home, and other organizations that offer services that help our students stay focused on their educations.

At last year's commencement, the Class of 2019 made a contribution to the HCC Food Pantry, housed in the Thrive Center. Of the five student senators that presented the gift, one had been forced to choose between groceries and heat for his home, another lived in a shelter after escaping an abusive relationship, a third worked two jobs outside of school — and graduated with honors — and the fourth survived years in the foster-care system. Despite these challenges, those same students were part of a graduating class that went on to Yale, Williams, Smith, Mount Holyoke and Amherst College.

HCC is known for delivering an exceptional academic experience — led by the best faculty — that prepares students to excel in future academic and professional pursuits. But the realities facing today's college students are ones we cannot ignore, and when addressed, enable us to produce the best-educated citizenry and workforce in the nation.



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**HARNESSING DOUBT AND FEAR**

Two years ago, while I was a student at Holyoke Community College, I had the opportunity to take an inter-institutional

honors course at Smith College called “Free to be Free” that combined English and art history in a study of the 1950s. I remember telling myself then, “You’ll never be smart enough to get into a school like this.”

But I did, and this morning I woke up to discover that I had completed my first semester at Smith with straight A’s and a 4.0 GPA.

Although my grades may concretize my efforts, I strongly believe that my success is most accurately reflected in my personal growth throughout my academic journey. I discovered my academic passions and career ambitions, worked hard, and put in consistent effort. The key, however, was my refusal to let self-doubt and fear of the new and unknown stop me. Instead, at Smith and in the years leading to Smith, I chose to perceive all doubts and fears as messages which imparted to me that there was something new to conquer, and, once conquered, would result in new – and stronger – capabilities. I learned how

to harness doubt and fear as tools for personal transformation.

I am truly grateful for the doors Holyoke Community College opened for me. Without HCC and the mentors who encouraged me, saw in me what I did not see in myself, I would not be where I am today. I would not have known it would be possible. Every day, I feel fortunate for the field of possibilities open before me and the people who helped to guide me here. It’s a beautiful view.

**Tori Currier ’19  
East Longmeadow**

*Now studying art history at Smith.  
From her Facebook post of Jan. 10, 2020*



**HCC, THEN ANYWHERE**

I’m proud to say I started my academic career at HCC and finished with my doctorate in education 12 years later at the University of

Hartford. Linda Scott, the director of academic advising, and Monica Perez, then a professor of criminal justice, were instrumental in encouraging me to continue my academic career. I hope that my story can show that students can start at HCC and go anywhere and achieve any degree. It’s an honor to be a part of HCC community. I’m also a proud father to my little baby girl Ellie who was born on May 14.

**Brian Kapinos ’08  
Springfield**

Director of advising, Elms College;  
Adjunct faculty, HCC



**THE TIME I NEEDED**

During my time at HCC, I failed classes, got a DUI, left and went to work full time at a local factory, then came running back to HCC,

started getting straight A’s, and eventually transferred to Hampshire College on a full scholarship. I graduated from Hampshire in 2009 with a degree in U.S. history. For my final thesis I wrote about the history of lynching, 1890-1940. As part of my research, I traveled to Mississippi and collected oral histories. After that, I ran an HIV protection program in downtown Holyoke for five years and got my law degree from Western New England University School of Law. I now work on

real estate and marijuana licensing as a paralegal in the law offices of Marvin Cable in Northampton, and I’ll be taking the Massachusetts bar exam in February 2020.

I live in South Hadley with my beautiful wife and three children (6, 4, and almost 2). When I was an HCC student, though, I would never have thought this is where life would take me.

I love HCC, because it gave me the time I needed to get my priorities straight, and I owe my HCC professors Diane Beers, Kim Hicks, and Deborah Fairman (now retired) a ton of gratitude for helping guide me to the finish line. I could not have been successful without their support.

**Raul Matta ’06  
South Hadley**

**WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU.**

HCC welcomes letters from readers. 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.

## AROUND CAMPUS



### Pedal Power

Holyoke Community College has hopped on board with ValleyBike Share. That means a fleet of electric-assist bicycles is now available to students, faculty and staff at HCC for short-term rentals. The ValleyBike Share docking station at HCC opened in early September on the plaza near the bus loop between the Donahue and Frost buildings,

adding to a growing network of bike-sharing stations in the Pioneer Valley. The Pioneer Planning Commission launched ValleyBike Share in 2018, and there are now more than 40 similar stations in Amherst, Northampton, Easthampton, Holyoke, South Hadley and Springfield. For as little as \$2 a ride for a single trip, riders can rent a bicycle and drop it off at any of the other ValleyBike stations. The bicycles can be pedaled like regular bikes or powered with the help of an electric-assist feature to get up tough hills.



### Romaine to the Rescue

In late November, after a national recall on Romaine lettuce from Salinas, California, left HCC Dining Services short of salad greens, chef supervisor Christopher Robert turned to Claire McGale '19, manager of HCC's Freight Farms urban agriculture program. "I'll take whatever you have," he said. Fortunately, they had a lot. Over the course of the morning, McGale and her co-workers harvested close to 70 pounds of lettuce from two repurposed shipping containers on Race Street managed by the college. HCC has been growing leafy greens inside the Freight Farms containers since October 2018. Each container is a fully operational hydroponic farm equipped with 256 grow towers and the capacity to grow as much produce in a year as an acre of farmland – without any soil. The lettuce was used in the salad bar in HCC's cafeteria, for packaged salads, as well as toppings for sandwiches. Freight Farms "bailed us out," said Mark Pronovost '80, director of Dining Services, which is managed by Aramark. "They helped us out big time."

Read more at: [hcc.edu/romaine](http://hcc.edu/romaine)



### Boost for Thrive

The HCC Foundation accepted a \$50,000 check in December from Holyoke-based PeoplesBank, money earmarked for the college's Thrive Student Resource Center. Thrive runs the college food pantry and provides free grab-and-go snacks, as well as other support services for students facing food and housing insecurity and other

non-academic challenges. "This gift from PeoplesBank will allow us to significantly scale up the services we provide to students," said Amanda Sbriscia, HCC's vice president of Institutional Advancement and executive director of the HCC Foundation. "In so many ways, Thrive addresses the emotional, physical and psychological needs of our students so they can come closer to achieving a degree and building a more stable future."

Read more at: [hcc.edu/thrive-donation](http://hcc.edu/thrive-donation) and more on pages 10–15.

*Clockwise: Valley Bike Share kiosk at HCC is located in the plaza by the bus circle. Claire McGale '19, manager of HCC's Freight Farms urban agriculture program, holds two heads of sweet green crisp salanova. Tom Senecal, president of PeoplesBank; HCC president Christina Royal; HCC student Christopher Royster of Chicopee; and Amanda Sbriscia, executive director of the HCC Foundation outside the Thrive office.*



## Latinx Exploration

For the Fall 2019 semester, HCC introduced a new academic code into its course catalog – LAX, which stands for Latinx Studies. Students can now pursue a major in Latinx Studies, which is offered as a concentration option to an associate degree in liberal arts. Assistant professor of Spanish Raúl Gutiérrez, co-founder and chair, says HCC may be the first community college in Massachusetts to offer Latinx Studies, an interdisciplinary program that explores the culture, literature, history, politics, economics, movements, and identity of people of Mexican, Central-American, South-American and Caribbean descent. "It makes perfect sense for HCC to have this program because we are an HSI" – federally recognized Hispanic Serving Institution – "and we have a large population of Latino students, or Latinx students, especially those from Puerto Rico," he said.

Read more at: [hcc.edu/latinx-program](http://hcc.edu/latinx-program)



## Kits for Kates

As the college prepared for winter break, representatives from four HCC student clubs delivered hundreds of care packages to agencies in Holyoke and Springfield that serve the homeless. Members of the HCC Military Club, Criminal Justice Club, Radio Club and Sociology Club created hygiene kits (84 for women; 86 for men) that included basic toiletries such as razors, shaving cream,

deodorant, lip balm, soap, lotion, toothbrushes, toothpaste, combs and sanitary products. They also prepared 208 kits that included hats, mittens, scarves and blankets and gave away winter coats. On Friday, Dec. 20, they dropped off care packages at the Springfield Rescue Mission and handed out items to the lunchtime crowd at Kate's Kitchen in Holyoke, part of Providence Ministries. "Hygiene products were the things the agencies told us were needed the most, especially by homeless people," said HCC student and Military Club member Robert Vigneault of Belchertown.

Read more at: [hcc.edu/kates-kits](http://hcc.edu/kates-kits)

*Clockwise: Theater professor Patricia Sandoval facilitates a class exercise in an HCC Learning Community course combining Latinx Studies and theater called "Teatro Nuestro," during the Fall 2019 semester. Criminal justice professor Alex Sanchez; student John Serrano of Chicopee; student Sierra Palazzi of West Springfield; HCC alumna Lindsey Pare of Ludlow; student Robert Vigneault of Belchertown; and student John Colleto of Agawam hold some of the winter care packages HCC student clubs delivered to area agencies that serve the homeless. Students bake cookies at the HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute during a program training them for work as culinary assistants in the cannabis industry.*



## Cannabis Education Center Launched

HCC has partnered with the nonprofit Cannabis Community Care and Research Network to create the Cannabis Education Center. The center provides education, training and business resources to individuals who want to work in the state's newly legalized cannabis industry. "The emerging cannabis industry will spur investment, economic growth and job creation in the Pioneer Valley," said Jeff Hayden, HCC's vice president of Business and Community Services. "The purpose of

the Cannabis Education Center is to create an innovative learning space for those interested in joining the cannabis workforce as an employee or entrepreneur." Launch of the Cannabis Education Center was announced Oct. 21 at a forum and networking event at HCC's Kittredge Center for Business and Workforce Development, where the CEC is based. HCC and C3RN are designated training partners through the Massachusetts Cannabis Control Commission's Social Equity Vendor Training program, which was designed to provide priority access, training, and technical assistance to people who had been negatively impacted by marijuana criminalization.

Read more at: [hcc.edu/canna-ed](http://hcc.edu/canna-ed)

Warrior's  
Art  
Room



A person is painting a wall in an art room. The person is wearing a dark blue shirt and is focused on their work. The background is slightly blurred, showing shelves with various art supplies and a sign that says 'MARKET'. The text 'PAINT WHAT YOU FEEL' is overlaid on the image in large, bold, yellow and white letters.

# 'PAINT WHAT YOU FEEL'

That's the mission of the Warrior's Art Room, founded by Steve '15 and Brenda Jones '18

By LAURIE LOISEL

Three years after completing an eight-year stint in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve, Iraq war veteran Steve Jones began to experience bouts of sadness, helplessness and depression so severe he knew something was wrong. Until then, he thought he'd adjusted to his years of combat service with no lasting effects.

In other words, the married, 46-year-old father of four now says, "I thought I was perfectly fine."

But, of course, he was not. Though a naturally upbeat and positive person, intrusive thoughts and sleep-stealing dreams eventually took their toll. Deeply affected when friends he'd served with became suicidal or died by suicide, he grew concerned about his own mental health.

It was like he had "started experiencing PTSD out of the blue," he remembers. And that's when he took action. In 2012, he enrolled at Holyoke Community College to study psychology, eventually earning his associate degree with high honors. "I wanted to figure out what was wrong with me, but I also wanted to help my fellow veterans."

His time at HCC would lead him to discover both a passion and a talent for art that would ultimately help him heal his post-traumatic stress and put him on a path toward helping other veterans experiencing the after-effects of military service.

## **Finding a purpose**

Jones, an Easthampton native who graduated from Smith Vocational High School in Northampton, had always wanted to join the military. He finally did at the age of 28, signing up for the U.S. Marine Corp



Previous page, Steve Jones '15 talks to retired college professor and Vietnam War veteran Barry Sponder in the Warrior's Art Room. This page, Jones, left, with 16-year-old Brandon Kowal; his mother, Melanie Casineau, a U.S. Air Force veteran; and Barry Sponder. Inset above, Brenda Jones '18 and her husband, Steve, during a Warrior's Art Room exhibition at HCC in April 2019. Opposite page, top: Brenda Jones '18 is a neonatal intensive care nurse at Baystate Medical Center. Bottom: "I'm doing what I love and helping other veterans," says Steve Jones. Right: Sponder, '73, says the art room has helped him reclaim a passion he hadn't pursued in 40 years.

Reserve so he would be stationed close to his home and family in Russell.

He appeared for his physical exam on Sept. 11, 2001, the day terrorists attacked the United States. The next day, Jones was sworn in.

In 2004, his unit deployed to Iraq, where Jones served in airborne control and command in support of troop operations, directing resupply missions as well as medical and casualty evacuations, rising to the rank of sergeant.

The job involved long hours taking calls from soldiers in mortal danger, coordinating troop evacuations and air strikes. Lives depended on him.

"It's not the people that you save," says Jones. "It's the people you don't save that wake you up at night."

Years later, to fulfill a humanities requirement for his HCC degree, Jones took a painting class with artist and former HCC instructor Dean Nimmer. He had a breakthrough when Nimmer asked students to paint their feelings and emotions.

Without consciously intending to, Jones painted a picture that

depicted his first casualty evacuation in Iraq in 2004. "It was crazy," he says. "Almost immediately, I felt like that weight was lifted off me." He hadn't even realized that incident was eating away at him so many years later.

At HCC, he met other student-veterans who'd had similar experiences. He resolved then to find a way to work with veterans to make art that heals the invisible wounds from war.

From her own vantage point, his wife, Brenda, a 2018 graduate of HCC's registered nursing program, watched her husband's post-traumatic stress emerge after he returned from Iraq. He was having trouble sleeping and suffered nightmares. Around the anniversary of the second battle of Fallujah (fought in late 2004) – a happy time when they were celebrating a family birthday – she noticed her husband seemed uncharacteristically depressed, aggravated and frustrated.

When Steve came home with the painting he'd made in Dean Nimmer's class, it all began to make sense. She'd always known her husband had undertaken intense work in Iraq. If not putting him in immediate physical danger, the job was high stress – and extremely high stakes. But once he was home, she began to fully grasp the depth of his trauma, loss and emotion.





"I'm sure it will take his lifetime to be able to process that," says Brenda.

She studied the painting, which shows one soldier walking, carrying another clearly injured soldier, and found it particularly moving. A close look shows the injured soldier nearly eclipsing the one carrying him, who represents Jones.

"I said, 'Wow, Steve, this is pretty intense.' You could see the pain was there on the paper," Brenda recalls. "To me, that one is really powerful because it represents what Steve did and how it made him feel."

During Steve's deployment, Brenda had felt her own stress at home. She had to maintain a firm foundation for their four children, while also protecting them from her own fears about their father's safety. Right around the time he was expected to return from Iraq, in January 2005, she learned there were multiple casualties when a helicopter went down in the area where Steve was stationed.

"I remember going down into my basement and bawling my eyes out. I didn't know if he was in it or not. That was really hard because it was so close to him coming home," she says.

When she found out Steve was okay, she felt great relief – but that was a complicated reaction, too.

"Then I felt guilty because it's somebody's family."

As Steve began talking about opening a place where veterans could make art, he had her own ideas. "You know what?" she told him. "You have to do this for the families, too."

Steve agreed. "It's very important that both the veterans and their families are able to come," she says. "There are different struggles that the spouse goes through, and this creates a place where they can come together."

In February 2016, Jones quit his longtime job as a receiving manager at C&S Wholesale Grocers in Hatfield to work on opening an art studio for veterans and their families. By June, he and Brenda had created a nonprofit and opened the Warrior's Art Room one day a week in a single, small room rented from the Westfield Alliance Church.

Last summer, they relocated the Warrior's Art Room to a larger space in an old mill building in Westfield that allowed them to expand operations to five days a week.

## An invitation to create

It's the day after a December blizzard prompted multiple cancellations and left snow-encrusted streets, a week before Christmas at the Warrior's Art Room. Steve Jones steps away from a painting on an easel to greet a visitor. With a beard, moustache and deep dimples that flash frequently, he's dressed in a baseball cap and green T-shirt bearing the Warrior's Art Room logo on the front and these words on the back: "When those who are trained in WARFARE create ART: Good things can happen."

Retired college professor Barry Sponder, a Vietnam War veteran, is working on a sketch using a grid to copy a picture from his phone. Jones offers gentle encouragement and concise instructions.

The room has three tables, one easel and a multitude of art supplies – markers, boxes of paints and various types of paper. Paintings, many with military themes, cover the walls. Brightly painted rocks decorate the window sills.

Jones surveys the scene, arms crossed at his chest. He revels in describing the inspiration behind the Warrior's Art Room and his desire to help others paint what they feel while also building their skills to make meaningful art.

He points to the picture of a Naja Buddha sculpture on Sponder's phone and then to his drawing. "Remember, you're just making a sketch," he says. "You're blocking it in and then you're going to come back and fuss over the details."

Sponder, 73, with a white beard, wire-rimmed glasses and a baseball cap, focuses intently on the sketch on the table before him, taking in the advice. The sculpture in the picture is in a park in Kathmandu Sponder recently visited. "I always take pictures of things I might paint later," he says.

"Just go fast," says Jones. "Lots of lines and fast because you're going to erase the lines that don't matter."

"For me, it's really about the process of creating art," Jones explains later. "It's not what the final outcome is."

Sponder has been visiting the art room almost weekly for about a year, one of some 800 people Steve and Brenda have worked with to date. Some spend time in the studio. Others have their art experiences brought to them.

Art supplies in tow, the couple travels to jails in Ludlow and Billerica on Fridays when the art room is closed to offer lessons to incarcerated veterans. They also work with veterans organizations, such as the Holyoke Soldiers' Home, the West Springfield Veterans Center, and Project New Hope in Worcester.

Despite skill level, aptitude or experience, Jones believes most people can find healing by making art. He is clear that what he

offers is not therapy, but, rather, an opportunity to understand a traumatic experience in a safe, non-judgmental environment.

"Their pieces tell their stories," he says.

Jones takes no salary as the Warrior's Art Room director. He earns a modest paycheck teaching art one day a week at the Community Christian School in Granville, Mass., and will be completing his bachelor's degree in human services this summer at Cambridge College while Brenda completes her bachelor's degree in nursing at Westfield State. They make do primarily on Brenda's salary as a neonatal intensive care nurse at Baystate Medical Center.

The art room is supported entirely by donations, such as those from Leeds-based Chartpak Inc., a producer of art supplies. If they ever raise enough that he could take a salary, Jones says he'd prefer to use the money to open a satellite center.

"I'm doing what I love and helping other veterans," he says. "I'm enabling others to become passionate about creating art."

As Sponder labors over his piece, the center's door opens, and in walks Brandon Kowal, a 16-year-old from Westfield. Kowal pulls out a painting he's been working on during weekly visits, inspired by one he likes that hangs on the wood-paneled wall: a cross draped with a flag, military dog tags dangling, army boots at the bottom.


"I like to do art. It's calming," says Kowal, who attends a vocational school in West Springfield, where he's learning the automotive trade. "It's a place where I can go to take my mind off everything else in the world."

Kowal's parents are both veterans. Soon his mother, Melanie Casineau, enters the studio, here today to make Christmas cards.

"It's comfortable," says Casineau, who spent 20 years as a photojournalist in the U.S. Air Force. "I like coming here because you have something in common. When you're with someone from the military, you're not with a stranger."

Sponder says he, too, is drawn by the camaraderie. "Everyone who comes here has a bond, knowing you could have died," he says. "There's a basic respect for what we all went through." It's not only "a safe spot," he says, "but a growing spot."

His own growth has meant reclaiming a passion he hadn't pursued in 40 years. "It wouldn't have been possible if I hadn't been here" receiving guidance from Jones, he says. "He encourages you to paint what you feel."

That life-changing lesson, something Jones learned in his first art class at HCC, is a gift he is determined to pass along. 

# Scholarship honors parents' legacy

By JUDITH KELLIHER

Candida “Candy” Johnson has always been inspired by her parents’ devotion to education and love of the arts.

They were educators, and having them as role models led Johnson to a 35-year career as a teacher of business administration at HCC, a job from which she retired in 2011 and is eternally grateful for.

“Every day brought something or someone new to the classroom and to my life,” she said.

For the past 19 years, Johnson has made monetary donations to HCC. And now, to honor her parents, who died within seven months of each other in 2016 and 2017, she has established the Edward and Verdenal Johnson Memorial Scholarship through the HCC Foundation. Starting next year the scholarship will be awarded annually to an HCC student studying fine arts or music.

“Honoring my parents in a way that values education seemed logical to me,” Johnson said. “And a scholarship supporting students in the arts is an extension of all of that. As educators, my parents were never rich, but their lives certainly were.”

They met at Swarthmore College in 1945; she studied psychology, he engineering. Their path saw him later earn a master’s degree in education at Columbia University and go on to become a high school guidance counselor and swim coach. Likewise, her mother, after being a stay-at-home mom, went back to school to earn her master’s degree in American studies at Seton Hall University. She became a high school English teacher.

“Dad was all about encouraging his students to pursue their educations so that they might achieve their goals in life, and mom worked hard to help her students become as proficient in English as she could while supporting the same goals,” Johnson said.

In the 1960s, when Johnson was in high school and later college, her parents co-owned the Argus Gallery, a fine arts gallery in Madison, N.J., just 25 miles outside New York City, attracting artists of national acclaim.

They also enjoyed theater and dance, and their adventures took them frequently to the city for Broadway productions such as *Hair* and *Oh! Calcutta!* – both considered controversial at the time – as well as Off

Broadway shows and the New York City Ballet. Her mother even worked a while as arts editor at the *Newark Star Ledger*.

“Candy’s longstanding support of HCC and our students is truly remarkable,” said Patrick D. Carpenter, director of Institutional Advancement. “I continue to be impressed as I learn more about Candy, her upbringing, the important lessons instilled in her by her parents, and her decades-long relationship with HCC as a faculty member,



Above, Edward and Verdenal Johnson. Below, Candida Johnson

volunteer, and donor.”

Johnson’s giving spirit emerges in other ways. Each week, she helps serve free lunch to veterans and their families at St. Paul’s Church in Holyoke, inspired after watching her father volunteer until the age of 94 at a community lunch at a church in Portsmouth, N.H. Since his passing, she has carried on the family tradition at St. Paul’s.


Johnson, a Holyoke resident, volunteers for the HCC Foundation, reviewing scholarship applications, an activity she finds inspiring and satisfying because she learns about so many young people overcoming challenges.

In 2002, as an HCC professor, Johnson received the HCC Elaine Marieb Faculty Chair for Teaching Excellence, which honors one faculty member each year “who exemplifies the characteristics associated with outstanding classroom teaching.” Johnson considered the honor a “wonderful affirmation of my efforts in the classroom.”

“I used my Marieb award to travel to the United Kingdom and France, where I met with faculty and administrators of business degree programs, exploring how each institution handled activities like internships and cooperative education opportunities to facilitate students’ better understanding of their place in the now global economy,” she said.

Besides HCC, Johnson taught economics at the Poltava Cooperative Institute in Ukraine, now the Poltava University of Economics and Trade.

Her former office in the Kittredge Center (KC 425) is marked with a plaque that reads, “Made possible through the generosity of the Poltava Connection.” But that was just Johnson, who had made all her donations to the HCC Foundation anonymously. Until now.

“What I find most inspiring about Candy is that she remains determined as ever to help our students achieve their goals,” Carpenter said. “Candy continues to set an example about the true nature of being in service to HCC students. 





Coordinator Rosemary Fiedler; work-study students Chris Coburn, Gia Mendez, Eilish Hackett; office assistant Veronica Rivera; and program assistant Elizabeth Rivera stand inside the HCC Food Pantry, one of the key services offered by HCC's Thrive Student Resource Center. Opposite, HCC student Paul St. George picks up a snack from the Thrive Center's signature Grab-n-Go cart.

# One Day in Thrive

**A look inside the program that supports HCC's most vulnerable students**

By CHRIS YURKO

“I actually can't recall off the top of my head. A lot of places. It's just, everything's scattered. We kind of went everywhere – shelters, hotels. I feel like if I could get a place of my own I will have that foundation of finally being stable so I can focus on other things, instead of worrying about what I'm going to eat or how I'm going to get to school or where I am going to stay. When you're homeless, those things are constantly running through your head.”

– An 18-year-old Holyoke Community College student, November 2019

Rosemary Fiedler '12 unlocks the door to the Thrive Student Resource Center every weekday morning before the posted opening time of 8:30 a.m. If she has learned anything during 3½ three years as the program coordinator, it's that she cannot be late and it's better to be early. Too many students' lives depend on her and this place, and missed connections are sometimes gone for good.

Inevitably, whenever she arrives, students are already there, lurking nearby or seated in a makeshift waiting area in the hallway. "You should have been here yesterday," she tells me. "It was nuts."

The day before, a representative from the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts was in the office, helping students fill out applications for SNAP food assistance benefits. Fiedler scrambled to accommodate two new mothers who needed private space to use their breast pumps. She arranged a meeting between a homeless student and an intake coordinator for an emergency housing program. And all that was on top of a routinely packed schedule of meetings with distressed students dealing with a wide range of non-academic challenges, mainly housing, healthcare, and hunger.

Today, though, two weeks before Thanksgiving, Fiedler's calendar is for the most part clear, but that doesn't mean it will be any less hectic. On "Walk-In Wednesdays," students don't need appointments.

"Anything can come through that door," she says.

### **'You're always welcome here'**

At 8:20 a.m., she opens up. Two students follow her straight in.

Thrive operates the HCC Food Pantry and also provides free snacks for students from its signature "Grab-n-Go" cart, such as single-serving cereal boxes, fruit cups, instant oatmeal, granola bars, nuts, noodle bowls, crackers, cookies, and chips.

Andre Desjardins, a 40-year-old, first-semester student from Chicopee, pokes around the Grab-n-Go cart and selects a package of chocolate chip cookies and bag of Cool Ranch Doritos.

To ensure Thrive's resources have the greatest reach, students are limited to accessing the Food Pantry once a month for a bag of groceries and twice a week for Grab-n-Go. They're required to show their HCC IDs, but Thrive



operates to some extent on an honor system that most students seem to respect. Desjardins says he'd come more often if he could.

"It's not easy," he says. "I live on a fixed income, and I have to try to make what I get last a month."

Thrive occupies a former classroom on the second floor of the Frost Building divided now by cubicle partitions. A small reception area houses a desk, visitors chairs, fax/copy machine, water cooler, microwave, coffee maker, dorm-sized refrigerator, and the Grab-n-Go cart.

The Food Pantry is in the back next to an office used by Thrive's part-time program assistant and representatives from visiting agencies who help students apply for SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistant Program), open bank accounts, enroll in affordable healthcare plans and find emergency housing. Fiedler's office is separated from reception by a partition and a plastic shower curtain that functions as a door.

She drops her coat in her office and takes a seat behind the reception desk. Student Marcus Collazo starts explaining the problems he has been having with his health insurance.

He uses MassHealth, a state-funded plan for low-income residents, he tells her, so he doesn't need the college's health insurance, Blue Cross Blue Shield. (Students taking nine course credits or more are required to buy the college's health insurance if they don't have their own plan.) Despite attempting to opt out through a waiver process, he appears to have been enrolled anyway. Now he's worried he might lose access to critical prescription medication he needs or to his longtime therapist or that he might be charged with co-pays he can't afford.

"The waiver process is incredibly complicated," says Fiedler. They spend nearly a half hour together. Fiedler scribbles a few questions on a Post-It for Collazo to research before a Friday appointment she has scheduled for him with Tony Sbalbi, HCC's dean of students, who has authority to intercede



Above, Thrive work-study student Chris Coburn marks the expiration dates on items in the HCC Food Pantry. Opposite: Thrive coordinator Rosemary Fiedler talks to HCC student Marcus Collazo.

over matters related to the college health plan.

"I want you to do your homework and then I want you to come back," Fiedler says. "You're always welcome here. We've got tea, coffee. We've got Grab-n-Go, so if you need to run in and run out, we've got food."

"I'm actually going to take some," says Collazo, a 19-year-old biology major from Holyoke. "I haven't been able to eat breakfast today."

Collazo has a part-time job at Chipotle. Still, he says, he often skips meals.

"Me and my mother are living paycheck to paycheck, so it's either I make something at home or I don't eat at all," he says. "Sometimes I just don't have time. I don't have a car. I take the bus so I need to be there at a certain time or else I'm not going to make it to class."

### **'We're all helping each other'**

Fiedler studied psychology at HCC, then went on to Elms College for her bachelor's degree and Springfield College for her master's in psychology and counseling. As an older HCC student – she was 45 when she started – she worked here as a tutor and never left.

Before taking over in Thrive, she was a learning coach for an HCC program called STRIVE that supports low-income, disabled and first-generation college students, and then a career counselor and academic adviser in Transition to

College and Careers, a free, pre-college program whose classes she still visits.

"HCC changed my life," she says. "It changed my world. It changed my children's world." Her daughter Shayla is a student in HCC's Veterinary Technician program.

Despite her previous HCC experience, Fiedler learned through Thrive that students are generally more self-conscious about being hungry than being homeless.

"That's not how I thought it would go," she says. "But if you think about it, there are so many outside variables that affect whether someone is homeless or housing insecure. The onus isn't necessarily on them for being in that position. But for food, they think it's somehow their own fault, which is why we've made such an effort to normalize access, so they will come in."

Doughnuts help. Nearly every morning this semester, an anonymous member of the HCC community has been dropping off boxes of fresh doughnuts and muffins.

"It's nice to have for students, to destigmatize and normalize the Grab-n-Go, so it's not just, oh my god, you're in crisis, go get a granola bar. It's, come to Thrive for coffee and a doughnut," says Fiedler. "It makes them feel valued, that it's a normal thing to come and access services here. Normalizing food access reduces the stigma. Because of that, we make these connections and build relationships, and that's the key. Cause we don't know they're in crisis unless they come in."

Like Collazo, Chris Coburn first visited Thrive for help with health insurance. Since then, the 21-year-old biology major from Springfield has been a frequent presence. He's used the Food Pantry at times and stops in regularly for Grab-n-Go, and now he also works here 10 hours a week, one of several work-study students here who all got to know Fiedler after coming in for services.

Coburn's chief responsibility is organizing the Food Pantry, weighing and recording donations, restocking shelves, and marking expiration dates. Though his shift today doesn't start until 10:15, he dropped by before his 9 o'clock class just to check in and say hello.

"Rosemary is always so nice and so kind," he says. "Working in Thrive it almost feels like a family. We're all supporting each other. We're all helping each other."

### 'Kind of wobbly'

Two female students stop in.

"Who are the doughnuts for?" says one of them, Rachael Jablonski, a 21-year-old human services major from Westfield. It's her first time here.

"Just Grab-n-Go," says Fiedler. "Would you like one?"

"I haven't had breakfast yet," says Jablonski, "so this is good for me."

"Well, you can always grab something more nutritious."

Fiedler often uses these casual interactions to raise other subjects, and this conversation drifts seamlessly from food to credit counseling, another Thrive service and one she mentions frequently. The young ladies sit down, and Fiedler gives them a brief tutorial on credit, explaining what a credit score is, how it's calculated, and why it's important.

"Do you need a good credit score to get an apartment?" Jablonski asks.

Fiedler's face lights up. "Yes, you do," she says. "I'll teach you more if you want to come back. I'll teach you the rules of credit. It's a game, and it has rules. Let me teach you, so when you are in a position to get credit, you'll use it correctly, and you'll win."

A male student named Josh grabs a doughnut and quickly departs. Four young women visit the Grab-n-Go cart, taking cups of ramen noodles, packets of instant oatmeal, and a few bags of chips.

"Hi, Rosemary," says a male student peeking in from the hallway. "Are those doughnuts for anyone?"

Work-study student Bianca Thomas arrives in time to relieve Fiedler from the sudden burst of action at the reception desk. Thomas checks student IDs, makes photocopies for the Thrive files and sits down to log into the office computer.

She reads an urgent email message from a homeless student asking for help. The student says she's been sick, and it had been a cold night. She left no phone number. Thomas sends an immediate reply: *Are you in a safe, warm place?*

"Every shift, someone mentions some sort of housing need," says Thomas. "Unsafe. Unstable. Slumlord."

While they try to make a quick connection, it doesn't always work out.

"When they're in crisis like that, you have to

reach them in that moment or you may lose them," Fiedler says.

Three years ago, Thomas was herself living in a shelter for women battling domestic violence. At the time, she was a student in HCC's Transition to College and Careers program. Fiedler visited her class one day to talk about Thrive.

"Rose helped me get out and get my own apartment, but to do that I needed to get my credit score up," Thomas says. "I was under the 600 mark, so I wasn't able to get into apartments."

Now she's in the "700 club," she says. "It took me three years to get there, all uphill, but it was worth it."

The 35-year-old Springfield resident, sustainability studies major and mother of two, who also works part time as a home health aide, is now looking to buy a house.

"Getting my credit in order was the key to everything," she says. "Without that I didn't really have stable housing. Once you get that foundation, you can build off of it. Without it, you're kind of wobbly."

### 'I hope so'

Food donations show up frequently in Thrive, and this morning another anonymous donor left an assortment of red and white holiday gift bags, each pre-portioned with a pouch of tuna, fruit and granola bar, can of sparkling water, sleeve of peanuts, cheese and crackers, cup of ramen noodles, and package of instant oatmeal. Thomas places a few of the bags next to the Grab-n-Go cart.

Paul St. George, a 36-year-old business major from Northampton, swings in on break from math class.

"I forgot my ID," he says. "Can I bring it down when I come back?"

"You can just write down your name and ID number," says Thomas. "We have some doughnuts, and we have some to-go bags."

St. George makes himself a cup of coffee, takes a granola bar from the Grab-n-Go cart and a holiday to-go bag. He says he comes in about once a week for snacks and once a month for the Food Pantry.





"It's very convenient and very helpful," he says.

Thomas sorts the photocopied student IDs into two folders, one for the Food Pantry and one for Grab-n-Go.

"Grab-n-Go gets used four times as much as the Food Pantry," says Fiedler. "Our students are hungry now. They're not thinking of dinner. They're thinking of now."

If they see the same students coming in repeatedly, they try to follow up: *Hey, do you have SNAP? Maybe you qualify and we can get that for you.*

"People might only know us for Grab-n-Go and then, coming in here, they find out we help out with other stuff too," says Thomas.

"Today, it's a granola bar," Fiedler often says. "Tomorrow it's food stamps."

Thrive was founded in 2015 as a "one-stop financial success center," a tagline that still appears on some Thrive signs, although the name has changed along with its focus. It is now officially the Thrive Student Resource Center, or, simply, the Thrive Center.

Originally, Thrive pushed financial literacy skills – checking and savings accounts, tax preparation, budgeting workshops – not food.

"We tried running money skills classes at 3 o'clock in the afternoon and nobody would show up," says Fiedler. "It's really tough to get people excited about managing money when they're busy working two jobs and picking up kids. How many homeless students do you think gave a hoot about their credit scores?"



Fiedler still talks up the importance of establishing good credit and wise money management, but Thrive now puts more of an emphasis on basic needs. In keeping with that mission, the college moved the HCC Food Pantry into Thrive about a year ago.

"It's Maslow's hierarchy of needs, right?" she says. "We need to stabilize them with housing, food and healthcare first before we can start to engage them on issues like their credit and budgeting."

Later, across the hall, Fiedler sits down in a small office with Jean Rogers, a social worker from a transitional housing program called CHD Safety Zone, and Faith, an 18-year-old homeless student in her first semester at HCC.

A 2019 graduate of Springfield's Central High School, Faith learned about Thrive on New Student Orientation Day before starting classes in September.



"They've helped me out a lot," she says, "cause most of the time I don't have money for food, so I come here for Grab-n-Go. I try not to come more than two times a week because I know other people have to eat too."

Homeless most of her life, Faith's unstable living situation is now putting her college career in jeopardy just as it's begun. In the past year, she's lived off and on with her aunt. Not long before turning 18, she was briefly in foster care. Now she's living with her mother, in the home of a family

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Top: Nathan Wyrwal, a regular visitor to Thrive, pours himself a complimentary cup of coffee. Middle: Foundations of Health major Solney Santiago came into Thrive one day to use the fax machine but came away with a lot more. Bottom: Thrive has "helped me out a lot," says Faith Ballard, "cause most of the time I don't have money for food."



friend. She started the semester with five classes and has already dropped three.

"If we can help her maintain housing," Fiedler tells Rogers, "then she can focus on being a student."

"I'm sure they'll be something for you," Fiedler says.

"I hope so," says Faith.

### **'This is gonna help me write my paper'**

Solney Santiago, a 28-year-old Foundations of Health major from Springfield, comes in after she was told Thrive provides free fax services, and she needs to send some documents to MassHealth. Thomas helps her but senses there's more.

"You look stressed," Thomas says.

She is. A few days ago, the state Dept. of Children and Families suddenly placed Solney's two young nephews in her custody. She's trying to add them to her health insurance plan. Plus, she and her husband have a 4-year-old daughter of their own.

"We're here for you, to help you," says Thomas.

Solney comes back later in the day and leaves with two bags of groceries from the Food Pantry, an emergency appointment to meet with a SNAP benefits coordinator, a referral to the Easthampton Community Center, which provides free backpacks and school supplies to low-income families, and doughnuts for the children.

"It really helps," she says.

Not long before closing time – 4:30 p.m. – Nathan Wyrwal comes in for a cup of coffee. It's his second time here today. Earlier, he'd been in looking for a snack.

"I had heard they had free doughnuts," he says. "Then I was offered a grab bag full of goodies that had some healthier options."

An engineering major and honors student in his final semester, the 35-year-old Holyoke resident enrolled at HCC as part of a re-education grant offered through unemployment, and he first came to Thrive for help building his credit. Now his score is up to 776, a rating of "excellent."

"I'll take that," he says. "I love the services here. Mostly I come for Grab-n-Go. It helps me get through the day, like when I need a coffee and can't afford one."

The last Walk-in-Wednesday visitor of the day is Rae Maltz, a 32-year-old biology major from Northampton. She's also been in twice today, both times to heat up a supermarket burrito she brought in.

"I get hungry," she says. "I come and use the microwave or sometimes I'll use the Food Pantry or the Grab-n-Go or even walking by I'll say hi."

"Would you like a doughnut?" says Fiedler. "I need to feed you."

Maltz thinks for a moment and takes a muffin instead.

"I'm gonna be sad later," she says, "but this is gonna help me write my paper."

### **'A better semester'**

According to a January 2020 basic needs survey conducted by the Hope Center at Temple University, 46 percent of HCC students who responded had experienced "food insecurity" in the previous 30 days, that is, they were worried about how much food they could afford, leading many to ration their consumption, either by skimping or skipping meals entirely if not going a day or more at times without eating.

More than half, 56 percent, faced "housing insecurity," meaning their living situations were unstable or in some way threatened; 23 percent identified as outright homeless; and 67 percent had experienced either food insecurity, housing insecurity, or homelessness.

HCC's numbers are slightly higher than those for community colleges nationwide.

By my count, on Nov. 13, 2019, one day in the life of Thrive, 40 HCC students visited the center for one or more services, and here's why: Grab-n-Go (30); credit counseling (5); health insurance (5); Food Pantry (2); SNAP benefits (2); housing (2); other (8), microwave, clothing, coffee, backpacks, school supplies, just checking in.

I interviewed about half of them for this story, and it's a credit to Fiedler's mission to destigmatize Thrive's services that only two students asked that their names not be used.

One was the anonymous doughnut donor, who I caught up with early one morning when he came to Thrive with a delivery. I recognized him right away as a student who had come in for Grab-n-Go the day I was there.

"I'm just trying to help them out," he said. "I try to help them because they help me."


Unfortunately, the doughnut deliveries eventually stopped. Fiedler told me this student did not return for the spring 2020 semester. She doesn't know why, and so it goes.

Someone who did return, though, is Faith, the 18-year-old woman whose quote opens this story and the second person who asked not to be named.

On Jan. 19, Faith moved into a dormitory on the campus of Westfield State University after being accepted into a new program for homeless community college students set up through the Dept. of Higher Education. She was recommended by Fiedler and Tony Sbalbi.

As part of this program, she shares a room with another previously homeless HCC student. They get complementary meal plans at Westfield and free public transportation to HCC. They can use all the facilities there, including the library and gym, and, for the first time, they have consistent, reliable Internet access where they live.

"I'm trying to make everything run smoothly," Faith said after a few weeks of classes. "I feel like my mental state is clearer. I'm getting all my work in and keeping everything organized, so I think this is going to be a better semester."

Her spirits up, Faith changed her mind about letting me use her name. It's Faith Ballard. She also agreed to let me take her photo, which is on the opposite page. That's her outside the Thrive office, smiling. 

# ALUMNI IN ACTION

**Grandpa Pride** **Joseph Paul '55** stopped by campus one sunny October day to swap cars with his granddaughter, Caitlyn Paul, an HCC biology major who goes by "Cat." Grandpa Joe, 85, is a retired schoolteacher from Holyoke and was a classmate of former HCC president **David Bartley '54**. After graduating from HCC, Paul went on to study at Westfield State, Springfield College and the University of Massachusetts. He's also a past president of the Holyoke St. Patrick's Day Parade Committee. Earlier in the month, he was in the audience at the Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield when Cat represented HCC on a college panel organized by the Mass. Dept. of Higher Education, where she talked to high school juniors and seniors about her decision to attend HCC, her training as an EMT and her goal of becoming a doctor. "She blew my socks off," he said.

1. *Joseph Paul '55 and his granddaughter "Cat" share a moment at HCC.*

**Feeding the Masses** **Mark Pronovost '80**, director of HCC Dining Services, and his colleagues at Aramark, prepared, delivered and served lunch to more than 200 volunteers who spent one fall Friday building a new playground at the Greater Holyoke YMCA on Pine Street in downtown Holyoke. Pronovost was joined at the event by HCC volunteers Renee Tastad, dean of Enrollment Management; and Sheila Gould, assistant professor of education, who spread mulch and constructed picnic tables, alongside state **Rep. Aaron Vega '90**. **U.S. Rep. Richard Neal '70** also made an appearance.

2. *Mark Pronovost '80 with HCC volunteers Renee Tastad, left, and Sheila Gould, at the Greater Holyoke YMCA.*

**'All you do is train'** Former HCC police officer **Selina Ortega '16** completed 23 weeks of paramilitary training at the Massachusetts State Police Academy June 27 and is now working as a state trooper out of Russell, Mass. Of the 171 graduates, she was one of only 11 women to finish. "To say the Recruitment Training Troop was rigorous would be an understatement," said Ortega, who earned her associate degree in criminal justice at HCC. "The academy is an in-house program, which means Monday through Friday you live there. No phones. No exposure to society. All you do is train." Throughout the 23 weeks, Ortega continued to fulfill her duties as a reservist and mental health technician with the 439th aeromedical staging squadron at Westover Air Reserve Base in Chicopee.

3. *Selina Ortega '16, during her graduation from the Massachusetts State Police Academy in June.*

**Kindness in Action** HCC celebrated the 20th anniversary of its annual Giving Tree campaign in December, fulfilling 375 holiday wishes from four nonprofits that aid and support some of greater Holyoke's most at-risk residents. The closing ceremony was also cause to celebrate one of

the people most responsible for the campaign's continued success, **Gail Golas '80**, administrative assistant for the Arts & Humanities division, who has served on the Giving Tree committee as either a member or chair for the entire 20-year stretch. Gail "is synonymous with our Giving Tree," said **Nelson Lopez '04**, committee member and HCC special projects assistant. "She embodies one of HCC's values – kindness." Lopez presented Golas with a special award, thanking her on behalf of the college. "This is for you," he said, "just an appreciation of your leadership and dedication."

4. *Gail Golas '80 and Nelson Lopez '04 at the 20th annual Giving Tree closing ceremony.*

**Puerto Rican Connections** On Oct. 12, HCC hosted a national summit examining the impact of Hurricane Maria on the Puerto Rican diaspora in New England. During the daylong conference, which brought in academics, researchers, economists and other experts from as far away as Florida and Puerto Rico, **Karianne Santiago-Ruiz '17**, a senior studying public and global health at UMass Amherst and New England liaison for the National Puerto Rican Student Coalition, moderated a panel titled "Youth and Millennials." "My duties as liaison are to reach out to existing Puerto Rican student associations throughout New England and help connect them with resources like Centro" – the Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College, the conference organizer – "and HCC," she said.

5. *Karianne Santiago-Ruiz '17, left, with Elizabeth Roman '04, reporter for the Springfield Republican newspaper and editor of El Pueblo Latino, after an interview.*

**Real-life Applications** **Rebecca Rosenblum '19** (math) and **Colin Devine '19** (physics) attended the annual conference of the American Mathematical Association of Two Year Colleges in November to collect their third place prize for a national research competition they entered last spring as STEM students at HCC with their classmate **Richard Megarry '19** (chemical engineering). The challenge problem, "To Grid or Not to Grid," asked contestants to explore the pros and cons of different residential power sources. Their submission was a 26-page research paper, "Protecting the Environment Through Responsible Energy Generation and Consumption." "Whereas other AMATYC contest problems are purely mathematical, the Student Research League Competition had to do with real-life applications of mathematics," said their faculty mentor, HCC math professor Ileana Vasu. All three alumni are now students at UMass Amherst.

6. *Rebecca Rosenblum '19 and Colin Devine '19 collect their prize at the annual conference of the American Mathematical Association of Two Year Colleges in Milwaukee.*



# CLASS NOTEBOOK

**What's going on in your life?** We want to know what you've been up to since your school days at HCC. Send news of your wedding, retirement, promotion, travels, children/grandchildren, awards, academic achievements, military honors, whatever!

Email 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 the Fall 2020 publication is June 1, 2020.

## 1954



**David M. Bartley** was awarded the 2019 Lifetime Achievement Award by the Holyoke Democratic City Committee. Bartley, president of Holyoke Community College from 1975 to 2003 and

a former Massachusetts Speaker of the House, served as a member of the Massachusetts House of Representatives from 1969 to 1975 and secretary of Administration and Finance from 1981 to 1983.

## 1975

Holyoke city counselor **Joseph M. McGiverin** received the 2019 William G. Dwight Distinguished Award from the Holyoke Rotary Club. McGiverin is one of the region's longest-serving elected officials, joining the Holyoke City Council in 1980. Born and raised in Holyoke, McGiverin attended Holyoke Catholic High School and then HCC. He earned a bachelor's degree in social science from Westfield State.

## 1987



**Patricia A. O'Brien** was promoted to assistant vice president of Consumer Lending at PeoplesBank in Holyoke. She will help manage the daily operations of the bank's Residential Underwriting

Department and review residential and consumer applications. She earned an associate in business administration from HCC. Her volunteer service includes the Holyoke Kiwanis and National MS Society. She lives in Chicopee.

## 1989

**Patrick M. Berry** has been named co-host of Mass Appeal, the midday daily lifestyle program on WWLP-22News, based on Chicopee, Mass.

After HCC, Berry moved to New York City and studied at the City University of New York. Until 2019, he was the owner of The Westfield News Group. He is also co-owner of Gaslight Entertainment, a live stage performance production company.

## 1990

**Donna K. Brown** received the Volunteer of the Year award from the Palmer Senior Center in recognition of her work there as a volunteer nurse. Brown, a resident of the Three Rivers section of Palmer, Mass., holds regular Friday hours at the center. She earned her associate degree in nursing from HCC and worked at Baystate Wing Hospital in Palmer and Jewish Geriatric Services Lifecare in Longmeadow prior to her retirement. "I always wanted to be a nurse as far back as I can remember," she told the *Journal Register* newspaper. "When I left Wing, my daughter actually took over my old job."



**Theresa (Gill) Hooper** is a platinum-level Realtor with Park Square Realty in Westfield/West Springfield. She earned her associate degree from HCC while working full time for the U.S. Postal Service. She

transferred to the University of Massachusetts Amherst, graduating cum laude in 1993 with a degree in psychology/sociology. Now retired from the postal service, she says her education guides her every day as a mom, community volunteer, and real estate agent.



HCC criminal justice professor **Alex Sanchez** received the class Leadership Award after completing six months of training at the Western Massachusetts Chiefs of Police Association Reserve

Intermittent Academy in Springfield. Sanchez, a former Springfield police officer, also gave the keynote speech at the Sept. 29 graduation ceremony and is now serving as a reserve officer in Southwick.

## 1991

**Jennifer Lawton** was promoted to vice president of Insurance Operations for the Dowd Agencies in Holyoke. She began her career with Dowd in 2014 and was formerly the company's personal lines manager. A certified insurance service representative, she holds an associate degree in business administration from HCC. She is the chairperson and program coordinator for the Distinguished Young Women of Greater Easthampton, a scholarship program for high school girls, and lives in Southamton, Mass., with her husband and two children.



**Bernitta "Nikki" Burnett** has been hired as Educare Springfield's first executive director. Her duties will include oversight of strategic leadership, operational execution, and implementation

of the Educare model. Burnett also has been actively involved in community organizations in Springfield and in the region, having served on the board of the Public Health Institute of Western Massachusetts, the Baystate Health Community Benefits Advisory Board, and Live Well Springfield. After earning her associate degree from HCC, she transferred to Bay Path University, where she earned her bachelor's degree in leadership and organizational sciences and an MBA in leadership and negotiation.

## 1992

**Todd McGee** secured a second term as Holyoke City Council president. McGee works as a tax attorney at MassMutual in Springfield. He attended HCC and Northeastern University,

later earning a law degree at Western New England University and a master's in tax law at Boston University. He is also an adjunct professor at WNEU's School of Law.

1996



**Steven Gardner** was promoted to assistant vice president and East Longmeadow Banking Center manager at PeoplesBank. In his new position, Gardner oversees and manages all aspects of a full-

service banking center, including staffing, sales, lending, operations, business development, and community relations. He holds an associate degree in retail management from HCC and a bachelor's degree in business management

from Westfield State University. He also serves as vice president of the East Longmeadow Rotary Club, is a member of the ERC5 and West of the River chambers of commerce, and is a volunteer for Revitalize CDC and Junior Achievement.

1999



**Beth DeGray**, of Westfield, was one of featured speakers at a four-part Women's Leadership Luncheon Series last spring sponsored by the Greater Holyoke Chamber of Commerce

at the HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute. DeGray, managing partner at the Log Cabin/Delaney House/D. Hotel Suites & Spa in Holyoke, gave a presentation titled "Mentoring and Being Mentored." An early education major who later transferred to UMass, DeGray started at the Log Cabin as a server while she was a student at HCC and would often work shifts during breaks between classes. "I kept getting promoted and I just loved it," she said. "HCC definitely prepared me."

2003



**Nathan A. Costa** was awarded the prestigious James C. Hendy Memorial Award as the outstanding American Hockey League executive for the 2018-19 season.

In three seasons, the Thunderbirds have lifted their attendance 61 percent. Their 5,085-average attendance for 2018-19 was only the third time in the 83-year history of Springfield pro hockey, and the first in the 21st Century, that a 5,000 average had been reached. Costa earned his associate degree in communications from HCC and then transferred to Northeastern University for his bachelor's degree.

Actress and Chicopee native **Sabina Gadecki** married country singer Tyler Rich in a ceremony at Saddle Woods Farm in Tennessee. She has appeared in TV shows including "House of Lies," "Law and Order" and "White Collar"; served as hostess of "World Poker Tour" for the Travel Channel; modeled for Miller Lite, Saks Fifth Avenue and Oil of Olay; and appeared in the feature films "Entourage" and Elmore Leonard's "Freaky Deaky."



**Cassandra M. Pierce** has been promoted to vice president of Data Management and Analytics at PeoplesBank in Holyoke. In her new position, she will lead the Data Management and

Analytics team in constructing and maintaining highly effective, reliable, secure, and innovative information systems. She earned an associate degree in marketing from HCC, bachelor's degree in business management from Westfield State University, and master's degrees in cybersecurity management and communication and information management from Bay Path University,

2005

**Carey (Fountain) Hough** was named general manager of the Winnepesaukee Muskrats, a summer baseball team in the New England Collegiate Baseball League based in Laconia, N.H. Hough has been involved with the Muskrats since 2015 and served as the team's assistant GM during the 2018 season. She is the first female GM for the organization. She also owns and operates Carey Hough Photography.


2010

**Brian Francis Cox** and Hilary Lyle Wall were married Sept. 28 in Chilmark, Martha's Vineyard. He received his associate degree in business management from HCC and went on to graduate from the Isenberg School of Management at UMass with a degree in human resources management. He currently works in the IT department at Martha's Vineyard Bank. The couple will be combining their names to become the Wallcox family.

2012



**Kurt Bordas** has been working as a full-time table games dealer at MGM Springfield since the casino opened in August 2018. Bordas, a U.S. Air Force and Mass. Air National Guard veteran, earned a

certificate in law enforcement at HCC. He spent two years as a senior financial specialist in the Service to the Armed Forces department of the American Red Cross before taking blackjack, roulette and carnival games dealer classes at the Massachusetts Casino Careers Training Institute, an HCC-MGM partnership. 

# In Memoriam

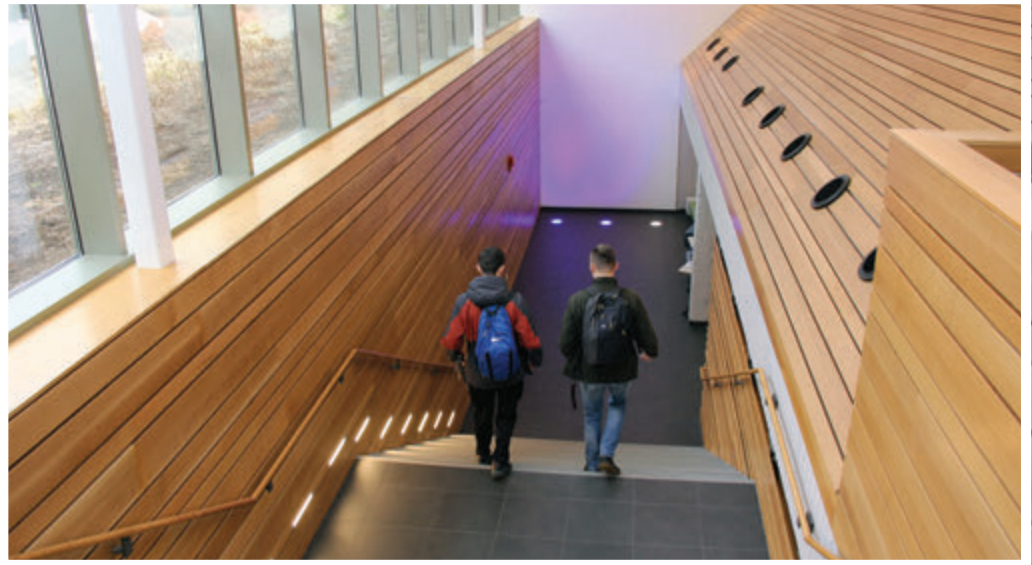
We are saddened to learn of the passing of the following members of the HCC community:

- Richard P. Suchocki '57
- Elizabeth A. Murphy '74
- Richard Venne '74
- Connie Louise (Fern) Goodspeed '89
- John J. Patterson '00
- Jordan D. Rivard '01
- Tracy J. Leavy '06
- Khara L. Wozniak '14

- Dorothy "Dot" Forkey, *retired staff*
- Spencer Clark Bridgman, *retired professor*
- Mark Normantowicz '95, *staff*
- Loretta Patterson, *retired staff*


To contribute in memory of a classmate, friend or relative, visit [hcc.edu/donate](http://hcc.edu/donate) or call Patrick Carpenter at 413.552.2746.

# HCC Album



## Uplifting Descent

**N**ot long ago, students called this place “the pit,” and for good reason. Weather-beaten and broken stairs descended from the HCC Courtyard into a water-stained, cracked, concrete crevasse that led somewhat ominously toward the second-floor entrance to the Campus Center. The pit trapped leaves, trash and other wind-blown debris, clogging drains and leaving deep, vast puddles to seep under the glass doors of the building’s foyer during spring thaws and rainstorms. Over the years, the pit became one of the more obvious manifestations of the water intrusion and resulting decay that had plagued the Campus Center since it opened in 1978.

No more. During a two-year, \$43.5 million, top-to-bottom building renovation and expansion – now complete – the pit was excavated, reengineered, rebuilt, and enclosed. What stands there now is what you see here in the top photo, a grand, glass and wood-paneled atrium that is a fitting entrance to a sparkling new facility. To see more before and after photographs of the Campus Center renovation, go to: [hcc.edu/campus-center-slideshow](https://hcc.edu/campus-center-slideshow) 



2020

# EVENTS



## Thursday-Saturday, April 16-18 \*

### Antigone

7:30 p.m. (and a 2 p.m. Saturday matinee), Leslie Phillips Theater, Fine & Performing Arts Building

The HCC Theater Department presents the classic Greek tragedy by Sophocles for its Spring 2020 production

Translated by Richard Emil Braun

Directed by Denise Boutin '77

Tickets: \$10 (general admission); \$8 (students and seniors); \$5 (HCC students, faculty and staff)

For more information or to reserve a ticket, call the HCC Box Office at 413.552.2528

\*The April 17 performance will be ASL-interpreted



## Sunday, May 3

### Holyoke Civic Symphony Benefit Concert

3 p.m., Leslie Phillips Theater

\$10-20 general admission, \$5 under 12, free for HCC students w/ID



## Thursday, May 13

### Scholarship Meet and Greet

11:15 a.m. – 12:30 p.m., gymnasium, Bartley Center for Athletics & Recreation

Join members of the HCC Foundation and Alumni Council as they honor more than 200 student scholarship recipients and thank the individuals, businesses and organizations whose generosity make the awards possible.



## Tuesday, May 20

### Honors & Student Awards Night

6:30 p.m., Leslie Phillips Theater

Join the HCC community as we celebrate student success with faculty staff, families and friends.



## Saturday, May 30

### 73rd Commencement

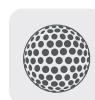
10 a.m. – 12 noon, MassMutual Center, Springfield, Mass.



## Tuesday, June 30

### Fiscal Year End

It's the last day of HCC's fiscal year, so we want to provide a friendly reminder to make your tax-deductible annual gift if you have not already done so. You can make a big impact on a student's life. Visit [hcc.edu/donate](http://hcc.edu/donate). Thank you in advance for your generosity.



## Tuesday, September 14

### 33rd Annual HCC Foundation Golf Classic

Springfield Country Club, Springfield, Mass.

Join alumni and friends on the golf course and help raise funds for HCC students and programs. Register to play or sponsor at [www.hcc.edu/golf](http://www.hcc.edu/golf). For more information, contact Patrick Carpenter at 413.533.2746 or [pcarpenter@hcc.edu](mailto:pcarpenter@hcc.edu).

## Saturday, September 26

### Phillips Festival 2020: An Evening of One-Act Plays

7:30 p.m., Leslie Phillips Theater

An HCC alumni benefit for the Leslie Phillips Fund for Theater Arts and Education.

# Alumni Connection

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

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# Proud to be HCC

April 28, 2020

24 hours.

303 donors.

## So many reasons to be Proud to be HCC.

While every day is a great day to support HCC, on April 28, we invite you to tell your story. Start a movement. And make a big, collective impact.

Tell us what makes you Proud to be HCC, then, make your gift – of any size – to support scholarships, technology, our Food Pantry or any other area of the college, and have an immediate impact on today's students. Your points of pride will be specially highlighted all day long, and your support will inspire today's and tomorrow's HCC students.

[Learn more at hcc.edu/proud](http://hcc.edu/proud)

