

# THE CONNECTION

SPRING 2024



## *Meet the New Boss*

Introducing President  
George Timmons

### ALSO INSIDE

A Force in the Right Place —  
Remembering President  
David Bartley '54

Holyoke  
Junior College



HOLYOKE  
COMMUNITY  
COLLEGE

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President George Timmons

Dear Alumni and Friends,

As we prepare to conclude this academic year, I continue to be filled with gratitude, pride, and excitement since stepping into my role as president of Holyoke Community College. I want to express my heartfelt thanks for all you have done to welcome me into this amazing community and for your unwavering support of our students and mission.

Taking on the role of president has been a remarkable journey, one that has offered me an up-close look at the incredible community that makes up HCC. Throughout the last two semesters, I have been deeply moved by the dedication and passion that our alumni, donors, faculty, staff, and friends have for this institution.

Holyoke Community College has a rich history, and I am honored to play a part in its future. I firmly believe that a thriving community college is the result of a collective effort, and your generosity is at the heart of what makes us so special.

Our shared vision to be a college of academic excellence known for helping students overcome barriers to their success guides all we do. In the pages that follow, you will find examples of how we have advanced that work while living our values of innovation, collaboration, kindness, inclusion, and trust. These values resonated with me from the moment I first learned about HCC. Now that I am here, it is clear they are words put into action every day.

As we look ahead to the coming months and years, we have ambitious plans and exciting initiatives in store. We aim to further promote student success, continue to be a community where everyone feels welcome, deepen our partnerships, and increase our impact on the communities we serve. Your continued support is vital to our success, and I am confident that, together, we can achieve remarkable accomplishments.

I am excited about the promise our future holds and the progress we will make together. As we embark on this new chapter in the life of the college, I am filled with optimism and enthusiasm for the opportunities ahead. Thank you for joining us on this journey.

With gratitude,

George Timmons, Ph.D.  
President

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**HOLYOKE  
COMMUNITY  
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# THE CONNECTION

SPRING 2024



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# Guided by Voices

## Sonia Mendez '19, '20

I was working at Burger King. It was my day off. I got called in to work the night shift, and I got fired. It's 12 o'clock at night, I went home and got on the computer and decided that I was gonna go to college. I started classes at HCC a few days later.

So, I got fired from Burger King, but that's what propelled me to move forward.

My adviser, Jossie Valentin, asked me, "What do you want to do?" I said, "Well, I want to be a lawyer." And she was like, "Okay, we're gonna put you in liberal arts."

My very first class was "Orange is the New Black: The Real Story" with professors Lisa Mahon (English) and Melissa Weise (sociology). That was a Learning Community class about the book and Netflix series that included a service-learning project with the women from the prison writing group Voices from Inside.

At first, I didn't tell anyone in the class that I had been involved with Voices from Inside myself when I was in jail. I just kept quiet and observed. I saw how enthusiastic Lisa was about the women's writing and the book and the way she positively spoke about people who have been incarcerated and how great their poetry was. Then she brought in one of the Voices from Inside chapbooks, and I was in it.

I joined Voices from Inside because there wasn't much else to do in the women's jail, at least at that time. In the beginning, I didn't take it seriously. I was actually already making a small living writing love letters for the other girls. That was my business, inside, to buy myself soup or soap or whatever from the commissary, but that was the extent of my writing. I didn't consider my writing poetic or anything like that. But then I started taking it seriously.

After four years, I got out. I went to the Hampden County Sheriff's Department to get services and help with re-entry, and I noticed that Voices from Inside was also there, except

they called it Voices from Inside Out. We did performances at colleges and other places. The director said my stuff was good. I was like, OK, I'm a writer. I'm a poet. It's been about 13 years.

At HCC, I tried to focus on writing good papers. Lisa seemed to like them, and so I just started trying harder and harder, reading the dictionary, Eminem, whatever. I took classes that I thought would help me, like public speaking. I was here a little longer because I took a couple of semesters off. When you're trying to rebuild your life, there's other things that you have to deal with outside of school that can take your focus away.

I graduated in 2019 with my associate degree in liberal arts, and then I got a certificate in human services in 2020. I need just a few more credits to get my bachelor's degree in social work from Westfield State.

I was working a little bit as a recovery coach for the Holyoke Police Department in conjunction with Behavioral Health Network. I just started a small contract as a lived experience expert with the Disability Policy Consortium out of Boston. We help people with disabilities identify their needs and access services and see if we can make policy changes. I have tons of experience in that area, dealing with access to services and individualized education plans. I think those services are important because that's what has helped me thrive.

So I'm doing social work right now, but I'm not really into therapy. I want to do social work at a macro level, like policy. I want to be a lawyer, in the courtroom, or at the Statehouse, making changes. Congress. I had a dream that I was going to be in the Supreme Court. Advocacy. That's what I want to do. 



Sonia Mendez's story and poetry are featured in the documentary "Finding the Words: The Story of Voices from Inside." She last visited HCC in April 2023 for a Voices from Inside performance in the Leslie Phillips Theater. She lives in Williamsburg.

My HCC Story narratives are adapted from interviews with HCC alumni conducted by Connection editor Chris Yurko.

>> Sonia Mendez reads her poetry during a Voices from Inside presentation at HCC.



# Top Chef



» Chef Warren Leigh, right, with culinary arts student Sherleymary Santiago at the HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute

Culinary Arts Professor Warren Leigh was named “Educator of the Year” by the Center for the Advancement of Food Service Education, a national industry group.

Leigh, a professional chef and restaurateur, has been teaching at HCC for 15 years. He received his award June 21 at the 2023 CAFÉ Leadership Conference in Charleston, S.C. “It’s pretty cool,” said Leigh. “It’s nice to be recognized. It’s humbling.” Leigh also received honorable mention for CAFE’s annual “Community Outreach” award. In receiving the Educator of the Year award, Leigh, co-chair of the Culinary Arts program, was recognized for his part in designing the HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute; re-imagining the culinary arts curriculum; creating a line cook training program in collaboration with the noncredit business and workforce division; and pushing forward on his concept for a mobile kitchen where students can learn food truck operations while also teaching the community about nutrition and healthy eating. “As a product of his work myself, I can attest to his superb teaching and knowledge,” HCC alum Matthew Enos ’19, now an executive sous chef at Johnny’s Bar and Grille in South Hadley, wrote in

support of his mentor’s nomination. “Chef Leigh has given me a great stepping stone to launch a career in culinary.”

## Political Positions

Before she took the microphone for her town hall forum at HCC on June 25, U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Warren grabbed some private time with a few of her fans, including HCC alum Jeffery Anderson-Burgos ’15. Anderson-Burgos, a former president of the HCC Student Senate and graduate of the University of Massachusetts, is the administrative assistant for the Holyoke City Council and has long been involved in state and national politics. At a pre-event meet-and-greet in HCC’s Media Arts Center, Anderson-Burgos presented Sen. Warren with a pin celebrating Holyoke’s 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary that she immediately fastened to her blouse and wore for the duration of her visit. “It will never not be a special experience to have a little face time with U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren when she’s visiting Holyoke,” Anderson-Burgos wrote in a Facebook post the same day. “To have it be at the school where my life changed in many positive ways is even better.”

» Jeffery Anderson-Burgos ’15 visits with U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Warren before a town hall forum at HCC.



# Ace for a King

In June, **Josh King '23** accomplished a feat no other HCC golfer had achieved in 52 years of competitive play. He made a hole in one, which was also his first ever. And he did it on a big stage — the final round of the National Junior College Athletic Association Div. III Men's National Golf Championship. King's ace came on the par-3 eighth hole at the Chautauqua Golf Club in Chautauqua, N.Y. "The entire tournament felt surreal," King said. "With other players shooting in the 60s and 70s, my nerves were so bad that all I could try to do was make decent contact. The tee box was marked at 158 yards, and the nicest 6 iron I've ever hit turned out to be perfect." Teammate Dominik Rodrigo was on the tee box next to the green and saw King's tee shot drop in. "It was very exciting," said King, a visual art major at HCC now studying at Hampshire College. "Everyone was stoked." HCC Athletic Director Tom Stewart, the NJCAA Division III golf chair, was at the scorer's table, not far away. "The whole place went wild," Stewart said. HCC has had a competitive golf team since 1971 and not a single ace in tournament play. "That's a lot of years," Stewart said.



⚡ **Josh King '23** after his hole in one  
(Photo courtesy of Dominik Rodrigo)

# Loud and Proud



⚡ **Christina Royal, left**, is joined by her partner **Karen MacGeorge**, and **Renee Tastad**, HCC assistant vice president of student affairs and dean of enrollment management, right, for the raising of the Pride flag on Royal's last day as HCC president.

In June 2021, then-President Christina Royal raised the Pride flag over the HCC campus for the first time in its history. On Friday, July 14, 2023, a large crowd of students, faculty, and staff braved the rain to watch her do it again, for the third and last time, in what turns out was her last official act as president. This time, her fiancée (now wife) Karen MacGeorge joined her at the flag pole. "In so many ways, raising the flag is a symbolic gesture," said Royal, HCC's fourth president, the first woman, first bi-racial, and first queer person to hold that position. "That alone isn't the action that creates a welcoming and inclusive environment, but symbolism is important along with action. We need all of it to create a safe environment where people can speak up and share their experiences so that we all have a comfortable place to live and coexist together."

After the flag-raising, she lingered for goodbyes. As of 11:59 p.m., she would be officially retired. "I can't wait to see all the ways that HCC continues to grow," she said. "And so I will always be excited to support the college, now as a community member and former president. I have so much love for this institution, and that love is because of all the work we've done together."

# ‘Historic’ Agreement



Representatives from American International College and Holyoke Community College signed a “historic” agreement that now allows HCC students to live in residence halls and apartments on the AIC campus in Springfield. “This is definitely a momentous event for both AIC and HCC,” said Sharale Mathis, HCC vice president of Academic and Student Affairs. “As we know, our students come in with a whole host of challenges, and it’s fortunate to have such a partnership with AIC that will help us address their basic needs. It’s exciting to be present now with the presidents of AIC and HCC to engage in this historic signing.” The agreement calls for AIC to discount their room rates for HCC students, making college housing available and affordable to community college students for the first time at AIC. “I think today is a hallmark on how public and private institutions truly should work together,” said AIC President Hubert Benitez. “This is a prime example of two teams, two institutions that have a similar mission of providing access and opportunity.” “This agreement does more than just provide housing for our students,” added then-HCC President Christina Royal. “It will also give them a taste of college life beyond HCC.”

⤵ AIC President Hubert Benitez and then-HCC President Christina Royal shake hands after signing a “historic” agreement in April 2023.

and affordable to community college students for the first time at AIC. “I think today is a hallmark on how public and private institutions truly should work together,” said AIC President Hubert Benitez. “This is a prime example of two teams, two institutions that have a similar mission of providing access and opportunity.” “This agreement does more than just provide housing for our students,” added then-HCC President Christina Royal. “It will also give them a taste of college life beyond HCC.”

## For the Future



⤵ Gary and Peg Wendlandt '58

HCC has received a pledge of more than \$10 million, the largest single gift commitment in the college’s history and one of the largest gifts ever to any community college. The pledged gift is included in the estate plan of HCC alum Margaret “Peg” Laframboise Wendlandt '58 and her husband, Gary Wendlandt, longtime HCC supporters and donors. The money, estimated to be at least \$10 million, will go toward student scholarships and the college’s greatest needs. “Education has made a great deal of difference in our lives and how we have succeeded over the years,” Peg Wendlandt said a few years ago. “Gary and I both received scholarships to assist us

in achieving our goals of education and feel fortunate that we can help others do the same.” The Wendlandts’ many gifts to the college in their lifetime already total more than \$1 million and include donations to the President’s Student Emergency Fund and two endowed scholarships administered by the HCC Foundation. “Peg and Gary are truly extraordinary donors,” said Amanda Sbriscia, vice president of Institutional Advancement and executive director of the HCC Foundation, “thinking about the needs students face today while also creating the conditions for future students to succeed.” 



# Partners in Education

**William '68 and Rosalind (Barbacki) '68 Brezinski** have been passionate supporters of HCC for more than two decades. As students, they were drawn to HCC for its inclusive reputation that welcomed people from all backgrounds; including veterans, mothers, and first-generation college students.

William, himself a veteran who used the GI Bill to finance his education, and Rosalind, a first-generation college student who worked at Lesser's Bakery in Holyoke to support herself, first met in Professor Lora Simon's psychology class. They formed a connection that would shape their journey together.

During their time at HCC, they found that everyone — from President George Frost to the custodian Harold Hannible Patton — was there to support the students.



⌘ Rosalind and William Brezinski

"HCC accepted us as partners in education," says William. "We learned that each of us has an inner potential and genius that has to be brought forward and given an opportunity to grow. That is why we continue to support HCC." 

*William and Rosalind have given to the HCC Foundation for 25 consecutive years. To learn more about the ways that your gifts can impact Holyoke Community College, visit [hcc.edu/foundation](http://hcc.edu/foundation) or call 413.552.2253.*

## JOIN THE FROST SOCIETY

Naming the Holyoke Community College Foundation as a beneficiary in your estate plans makes you a member of the Frost Society. It's a simple process that will help ensure future student success. Your planned gift can:

- Pay you income
- Reduce your taxes
- Cost you nothing now
- Have an immediate impact

To learn more about becoming a member of the Frost Society, or if you already have named HCC in your estate plans, contact John Sieracki, leadership gift officer, at [jsieracki@hcc.edu](mailto:jsieracki@hcc.edu) or 413.552.2746.

# Meet the New Boss

Introducing President George Timmons

By CHRIS YURKO

**T**he PeoplesBank Conference Room was so crowded the coffee ran out before the day's activities had begun. Attendees carried in extra chairs from nearby classrooms. Still, many stood around the perimeter while another 150 or so Zoomed in, their tiny, boxed faces stacked and displayed on a large monitor. They all wanted to hear what the bow-tied man in the middle of the room had to say.

**The occasion** was Professional Day, the traditional opening event of the academic year. President George Timmons, on the job for just six weeks, opened a loose-leaf binder flat on the lectern to offer his first official remarks as the new leader of Holyoke Community College.

"We have a full house," he said. "It is wonderful to be here with you at this moment as we launch the latest chapter of our institutional history."

The president began by offering his gratitude to faculty and staff for their hard work and commitment. He thanked everyone listening for the opportunity to serve as the fifth president of HCC.

"I'm humbled and honored," he said.

He continued with a matter-of-fact report on the state of the college, giving updates on accreditation, assessment, shared governance, enrollment, finances, grants, and the college's Strategic Plan, which had been initiated by his predecessor, Christina Royal, early in her tenure.

After about five minutes, he paused.

"Now, let me transition into what I think you're really interested in — the elephant in the room," he said, gesturing toward himself. "Who is this guy? What am I all about?"

That morning he gave only a brief rundown of his personal and professional life: married, father of three, owner of a 130-pound Rottweiler "that thinks he's a lap dog." He mentioned his love of bow ties and colorful socks — his trademarks — that he was raised by his grandmother, and has worked in higher education in various capacities for 25 years.

He did not, he assured the audience, intend to undo all the hard work that had been done under the previous administration. Instead, his initial focus would be listening and learning. He would be asking a lot of questions with no particular agenda, he said, other than to better understand HCC.

"I will make decisions by gathering information and understanding the context," he said. "I will not articulate the vision of HCC without your input, because we do this work together. Most importantly, I will always be guided by what is in the best interest of students at HCC."



“IT WAS [HCC’S] MISSION, VISION  
AND VALUES THAT REALLY SPOKE TO ME.

WHO WOULDN’T WANT TO BE PART OF AN  
INSTITUTION KNOWN FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE  
AND REMOVING BARRIERS TO STUDENT SUCCESS?”



Allotted 45 minutes for his remarks, the new president spoke for less than 12.

Later that day, at a welcome reception in his honor, a colleague commended President Timmons on his efficiency.

“That’s me,” he responded. “I’m short-winded. Authentic.”

While economical in his public remarks, in one-on-one conversations, written communications to the college community, and interviews with reporters and this magazine, President Timmons has been happy to expound on the details of his life — his upbringing, the path that led him to a career in higher education, and why he wanted to be the president of HCC.

“I’m unapologetic about who I am and my story and how I got here,” he said in mid-July not long after his first day. “I think it’s important that people know who I am.”

### Life with Grandma

**To begin at the beginning.** Timmons describes himself as an “Army baby.” He was born in Louisiana, at Fort Polk (since renamed Fort Henry Johnson, he notes, after a decorated Black soldier from World War I), where his father was stationed. The family moved to Connecticut when he was a toddler. He grew up in Hartford, the elder of two brothers.

He speaks often about the financial difficulties his family faced, that neither his mother nor father were college educated, and that they could not afford to take care of both children. And so,

⚡ President Timmons and students celebrate HCC’s 2024 Reader Raves award as the best college in western Massachusetts.

George, the elder, was sent to live with his grandmother, or, rather, he was asked if he wanted to go live with his grandmother.

“My grandmother was living by herself, and I saw that she enjoyed the company,” he remembers. “I was a good kid, for the most part. I said, sure, why not? I loved hanging out with grandma.”

He credits his grandmother, Vivian, for instilling in him a strong work ethic and impressing upon him the value of education, which at the time did not necessarily mean college. Her family put a high value on learning a trade, he said, like her brothers, one a master plumber, another a mechanic.

“But I just wasn’t blessed with a vocational skill set,” he said. “We have a running joke: If I had to use my hands to eat, I might not eat. But I did understand that education was important, and, once I earned it, no one could take that away. My grandmother always said, ‘No one owes you anything. You have to go out and make your way and earn your keep.’ That was embedded in me.”



## Norfolk State University

**For the most part**, Timmons was raised in the city but attended high school in the middle-class Hartford suburbs.

“Where I grew up, in my community, graduating from high school was a big deal,” he said. But, in the middle-class communities of West Hartford and East Hartford, he discovered, “there were clear expectations of something beyond high school.”

Timmons would often see classmates wearing college sweatshirts and wondered, what’s that about? “It was like a foregone conclusion. How they thought about college and education — that was new for me.” He started to wonder: “Am I supposed to go to college?”

He was a senior when one of his father’s friends, who happened to live in Virginia, suggested he consider attending an HBCU (Historically Black College or University). He did some research and convinced his mother to rent a car and drive him and a high school friend down south for a weeklong college tour.

“Norfolk State resonated the most for me, and I was fortunate enough to get in,” he said.

At the time, he did not realize how important that decision would be.

“I’m the first in my family to go to college,” he said. “Going to a historically black college was a game changer for me. I saw people who look like me doing positive things.”

He embraced college life. As a first-year student, he joined the student activities club and became president. He joined the student government association and became president of that. He joined the Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity and became vice pole-march of the undergraduate chapter. The fraternity’s themes of achievement and service resonated.

“That was great for me because it helped surround me with people who were all driven by similar values,” he said, “and while we had fun, we were all there for a reason, and we motivated and supported each other.”

At times, though, he admits, he might have had a bit too much fun at the expense of his grades, describing himself as an average student who refused to quit despite some academic setbacks.

“Some people might be embarrassed, but I let folks know that it took me six years to get an undergraduate degree,” he said. “There is a reason I say that. The moral of the story is that there are multiple pathways to success.”

*Continued on next page*

## Presidential Profile

### EDUCATION

Ph.D. Higher Education Administration,  
*Bowling Green State University*, 2002

M.S. Higher Education (student affairs/  
counseling), *Old Dominion University*, 1996

B.S. Financial Management, *Norfolk State University*, 1992

### PROFESSIONAL

*Columbia-Greene Community College*, provost and vice president for Academic and Student Affairs (2019-2023)

*Excelsior College*, dean, School of Liberal Arts (2014-2018); associate provost, Center for Online Education, Learning, and Academic Services (2012-2016); founding dean, Online Education and Learning Services (2004-2012)

*North Carolina Wesleyan College*, associate dean, Adult Degree Program (2003-2004)

*Bowling Green State University*, graduate assistant (1999-2002)

*Old Dominion University*, site director, TELETECHNET (1996-1999)

### PERSONAL

*Spouse*: Frankie Timmons, chief diversity officer and professor of criminal justice at Columbia-Greene Community College

*Children*: Briana, 28, epidemiologist, New York City; Georden, 18, first-year student, University of North Carolina at Charlotte; Vivian, 16, high school junior

*Dog*: Kobe, Rottweiler

*Hobbies and Interests*: history, chess, basketball, table tennis, bow ties and socks 

## A Natural Fit

Timmons graduated from Norfolk State University in 1992 with his bachelor's degree in financial management, intending on a career in finance. Straight out of college, he went to work for Connecticut National Bank and CIGNA Insurance.

"I was pretty decent with numbers," he said, "and if you were GenX coming up and interested in business, you had to be thinking MBA, Wall Street, so I did that for a while, and I quickly realized that wasn't my calling."

A visit to a career counselor helped reorient his life. After an interview and a battery of tests, the counselor made a suggestion.

"I can't help but notice that you had a phenomenal time during your college years," the counselor said. "What about a career in higher ed?"

At first, he shrugged — not interested in being a full-time teacher.

"What about administration? Student affairs? Who's to say you couldn't be a college president?"

A college president?

"That was an epiphany," he said. "I thought about all of the experiences I had in student government and my interactions with the college president. I said, you know what? I want to go for it."

He was 26.

"Chasing a profit or bottom line didn't seem appealing to me," he said. "I felt like there was more to life than that. But having an impact on shaping people's lives and providing a pathway for people to further themselves and get an education, given what education did for me, that just seemed like a natural fit."

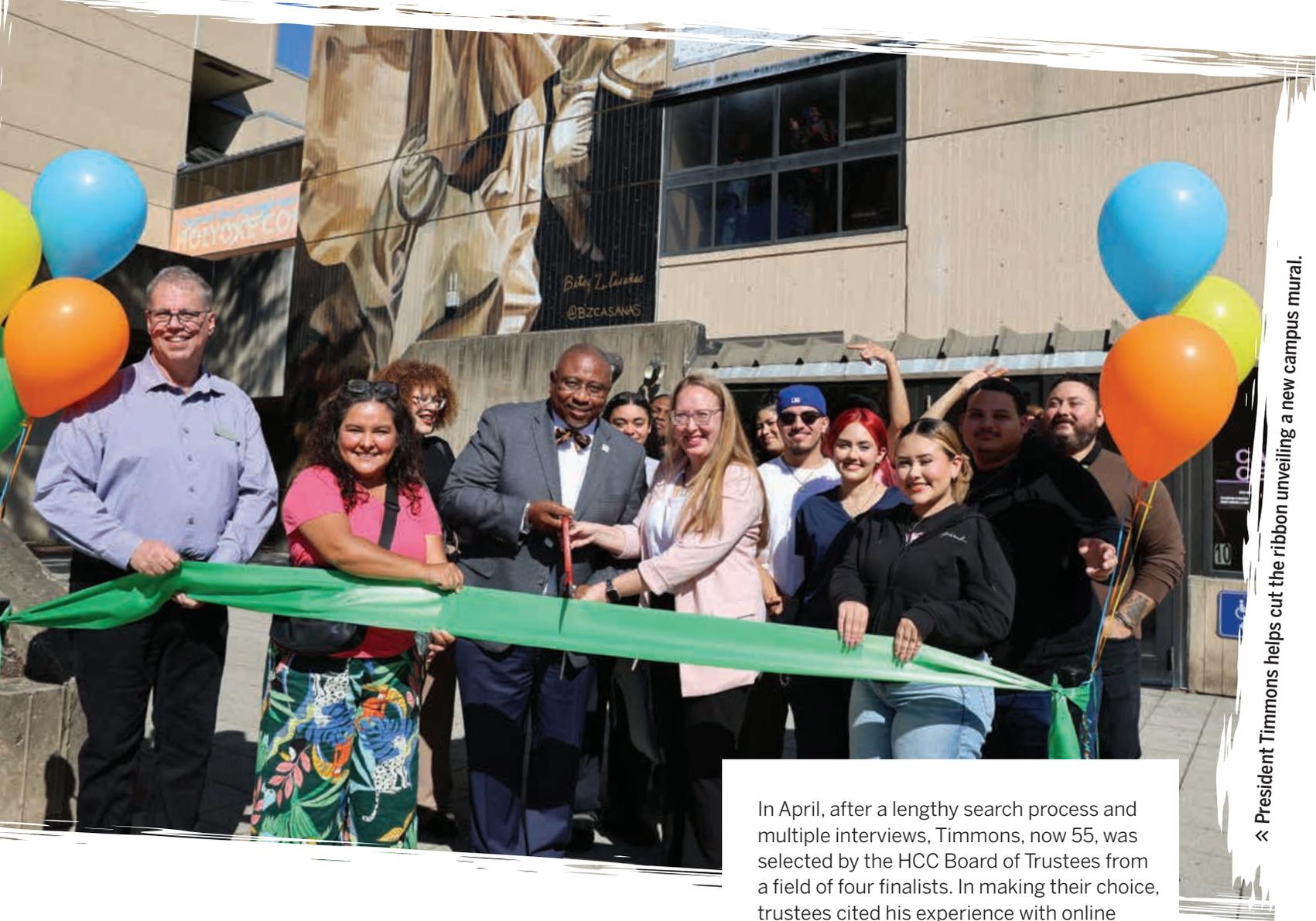
Within a year he had applied to Old Dominion University in Norfolk, earning a master's degree in higher education while working for TELETECHNET, a distance learning program at Old Dominion, eventually becoming its site director. In 2002, he earned his Ph.D. in higher education administration from Bowling Green State University, where his research focused on distance education.

From there, his career steadily progressed, to North Carolina Wesleyan College as assistant dean of adult degree programs; Excelsior College in Albany, N.Y., as the founding dean of online education and learning services (later associate provost and dean of liberal arts); and, most recently, Columbia-Greene Community College in Hudson, N.Y., where he served as provost and senior vice president for academic and student affairs.

"I'm almost 30 years in this higher ed space between being a student and working, and I enjoy it as much today as I did back then," he said. "Are there bad days? Of course. But in terms of fulfillment and what it brings me, I get up every morning with passion and zeal for what I do."



“YOU WANT TO **INSPIRE** PEOPLE.  
YOU WANT TO **EDUCATE** PEOPLE,  
AND YOU WANT TO **CONNECT** THEM  
TO PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS,  
WHATEVER THEIR GOALS ARE.”



President Timmons helps cut the ribbon unveiling a new campus mural.

## ‘Their story is my story’

While Timmons knew he wanted to be a college president, he did not want to be just any college’s president. He’s made it clear he wasn’t chasing the title.

He focused on HCC after reading the college profile put out during a national search for a president to succeed Christina Royal.

“It was the mission, vision, and values that really spoke to me,” he said. “Educate. Inspire. Connect. It’s simple but it’s powerful. You want to inspire people, you want to educate people, and you want to connect them to pathways to success, whatever their goals are. Who wouldn’t want to be part of an institution known for academic excellence and removing barriers to student success?”

The student profile — significant minority and low-income population, large percentage of first-generation students — reminded him of his own humble roots.

“Their story is my story,” he told a reporter for New England Public Media.

In April, after a lengthy search process and multiple interviews, Timmons, now 55, was selected by the HCC Board of Trustees from a field of four finalists. In making their choice, trustees cited his experience with online education and adult learners, calling him “creative,” “innovative,” and a “strong leader” who would be an “excellent ambassador for the college.”

“I inherited a really good institution,” Timmons said.

It should be noted that all four finalists were persons of color, and Timmons’ selection was historic; he is the first African-American man to serve as president of HCC.

“That is important to me,” he said. “I think it’s important for people of color to see someone who looks like them in leadership roles. I don’t take it for granted, because I know there were a lot of people who paved the way for me to get to this point in my life. I feel an obligation and a duty to do it with excellence and with professionalism. That’s something that I will always commit to.”

*Continued on page 25*

# Advocacy in Action



## Alum Meghan Maury '04 honored for social justice activism

By DOUG SCANLON and LAURIE LOISEL

There was a time when Meghan Maury '04 believed higher education was out of reach.

"I was a rough kid," Maury admits, and just 14 when their mother died. "I didn't know how to deal with it."

That trauma led to substance use, including heroin addiction, homelessness, and, at 18, an arrest. Eventually, sobriety and the stability that provided led to Holyoke Community College.

"I realized maybe I could do it," Maury said. "It was affordable and right down the street. I had a criminal record, and they didn't care."

Maury found success at HCC and after. Since 2021, Maury has served in various capacities as an adviser in the Biden Administration and is now chief of staff of the Office of the Under Secretary for Economic Affairs in the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Maury's achievements have not gone unnoticed.

In April 2023, at the annual conference of the American Association of Community Colleges in Denver, Maury received the AACC 2023 Outstanding Alumni Award, which is presented annually to three alumni from among all of the nation's community colleges.

"We are immensely proud of Meghan's accomplishments," said Amanda Sbriscia, vice president of Institutional Advancement, who was in Denver for the awards presentation. "Their achievements exemplify the mission of HCC and inspire us all to continue making a positive impact on the world."

(Among other HCC accolades, Raúl Gutiérrez, HCC associate professor of Latinx Studies and Spanish, was a finalist for the AACC Faculty of the Year award, while Robert Gilbert, then chair of the HCC Board of Trustees, was a finalist for the AACC Trustee of the Year award.)

In accepting the alumni award, Maury recognized several members of the HCC faculty who made an impact on their development, notably professors Deb Fairman (English), Diane Beers (history), Mark Clinton (political science and history), and Kim Hicks, former English professor and now dean of Arts and Humanities.

They "took the time to teach me how to learn and how to study, how to ask important questions," Maury said. "I want to thank leaders like President Royal, who continue to invest in the kind of creative education that makes students like me feel like even the hardest subjects are accessible."

"But, most of all," Maury continued, "I want to thank the staff at HCC who helped me figure out how to navigate financial aid, and how to make sure I could schedule my classes around my job and who encouraged me to continue my education, even after I received my associate degree. So, thanks to all of you who are doing the same work with hundreds of thousands of students across the country and making all of this feel like it's in reach for all of us."

In a 2021 HCC interview, Maury singled out a Learning Community course taught by professors Beers and Fairman that focused on the history of the LGBTQ movement, social justice, advocacy, and how social change movements work. "I had always thought I was terrible at history," Maury said.

The experience proved to be an awakening.

"It just changed how I looked at the world," said Maury. "It's what made me pursue social justice activism."

In the class, Maury learned about icons of the LGBTQ movement, such as Urvashi Vaid, an activist and former executive director of the National LGBTQ



« Meghan Maury accepts the 2023 AACC Outstanding Alumni Award.

Task Force, founded in 1973 and said to be the oldest LGBTQ rights organization in the United States.

After graduating from HCC with an associate degree in accounting, Maury transferred to the University of Massachusetts for a bachelor's degree, then the UMass Isenberg School of Management for a master's, eventually earning a law degree from Georgetown University Law Center in 2013.

After law school, Maury landed a job as policy director for the National LGBTQ Task Force and met people they'd studied about at HCC, including Urvashi Vaid.

"One of the first meetings I went to she was running," Maury said, chuckling at the memory. "Now I think of her as a friend and colleague."

During their time at the task force, Maury led a campaign to "queer the census," initiated to counter a deficit of data about the LGBTQ community.

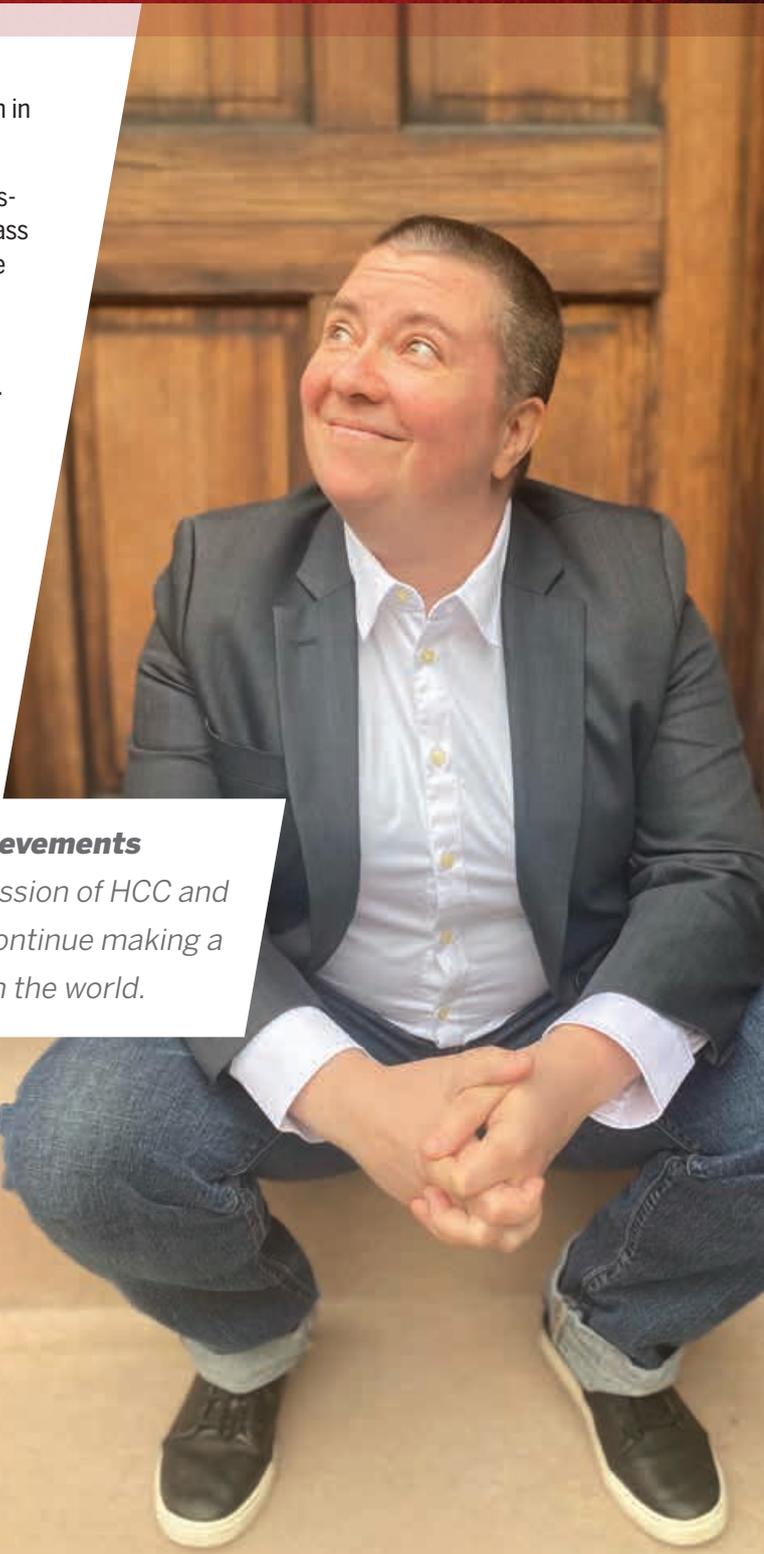
Work like that captured the attention of the Biden transition team, which earned Maury a seat at the table as the administration consulted with advocates for various constituencies.

From 2014 to 2020, Maury served on the National Advisory Committee on Racial, Ethnic, and Other Populations for the U.S. Census Bureau. In 2021, Maury became a senior adviser at the Census Bureau, where they served as a liaison to nonprofits, members of Congress, and other stakeholders, providing education about the work of the bureau, to make what is complex and technical accessible to people who are not necessarily data experts.

In 2022, Maury was named senior adviser for data policy for the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy and, since May 2023, has been chief of staff of the Office of the Under Secretary for Economic Affairs in the U.S. Department of Commerce. Their primary responsibility is seeing that the work of the OUSEA is functioning as effectively as possible, ensuring their team members are holding the right seats at the right tables, and working with constituents both inside and outside of government to brainstorm about new projects.

"Every day, the job is a little different," Maury said, "but it is always fun, challenging, and rewarding, and makes great use of my eclectic mix of expertise." 

*(Information and quotes from a 2021 HCC profile about Maury were used in this story.)*



**Meghan's achievements**  
*exemplify the mission of HCC and  
inspire us all to continue making a  
positive impact on the world.*

President  
WELCOME  
WALK IN

*David M. Bartley served as president of Holyoke Community College from July 1975 to January 2004, a time of extraordinary growth and expansion, succeeding George Frost, the founding president of HCC.*



# A Force in the Right Place

HCC remembers its second president, David M. Bartley '54

By CHRIS YURKO

One day, back in the early 2000s, David Bartley, then the president of Holyoke Community College, summoned Jeffrey Hayden to a meeting in his office on the third floor of the Frost building. At the time, Hayden was the economic development planner for the City of Holyoke. He did not yet work at HCC — or report to Bartley.

“But in some sense, I felt like I did,” said Hayden. “I kind of felt like a kid going to the principal’s office.”

Bartley wanted to talk to Hayden about building a new road that would exit the south side of the HCC campus.

“He essentially made it my project and said, ‘You’ve got to help us out and make this happen,’” Hayden recalled. “David had a powerful personality. He was highly motivated, especially when he saw that it would be of benefit to the college.”

Years later, even after Bartley had retired from HCC after 28 years, he would periodically call Hayden to check up: “So where do we stand with the road?”

*Continued on next page*



⌘ President David Bartley works the phone in his corner office overlooking the HCC campus.

## A FORCE IN THE RIGHT PLACE

Continued from previous page



⌘ (Above, left) Bartley remembers Jack Doyle. (Above, right) Bartley, with former Massachusetts governor William Weld.

Although it took more than 10 years, Bartley finally got his road. On May 22, 2015, he was on campus for the dedication and grand opening of Doyle Drive.

"I respected David an awful lot because he had a passion for what he did," said Hayden, now HCC vice president of Business and Community Services. "And, really, what he did was provide public service. He was really a force of nature."

Bartley '54, the college's second president, a lifelong resident of Holyoke and a former Massachusetts Speaker of the House, died June 13 after several weeks of hospice care. He was 88 years old and remembered by those who knew and worked with him as a proud alum and fierce advocate for public education and for HCC.

"David loved the school," said Angela Wright, one of Bartley's classmates from the class of 1954 when it was still Holyoke Junior College (HJC). "He loved what it did for him, education wise and opportunity wise. We were all in the same boat. We couldn't afford a four-year college or any of that. We were all working, and so he knew the value, personally, of a community college education."

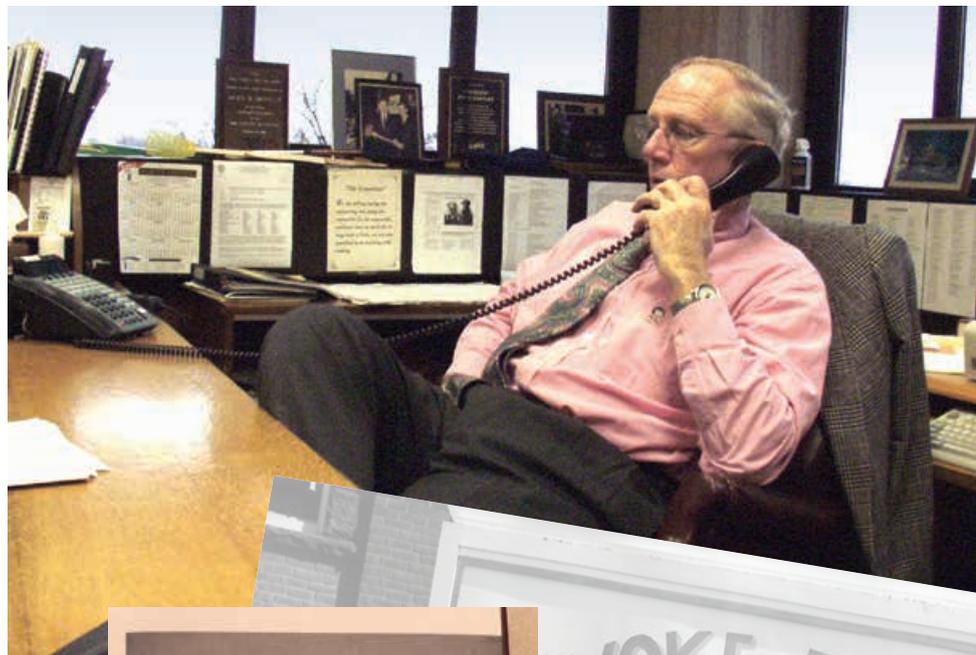
Bartley served as president of HCC from July 1975 to January 2004, a time of extraordinary growth and expansion, succeeding George Frost, the founding president of HCC.

"I'm really going to miss him," said Tom Stewart, HCC director of athletics, activities, and clubs, who worked with Bartley for eight years, before the latter retired, and maintained a close relationship with him thereafter. "He was really good for this place. He loved the school. He wanted kids to succeed."

⌘ David Bartley, with Mimi Doyle, during the dedication ceremony for Doyle Drive, named for her late husband, Jack Doyle '51.



⌘ President Bartley marches in the Holyoke St. Patrick's Parade.



Stewart, who is also director of the Bartley Center for Athletics and Recreation, said the former president's philosophy is epitomized by the quote on the dedication plaque outside the building: "Holyoke Community College is four walls and a future."

"That was his big thing," said Stewart.

Francis Kane '56, a friend since grammar school, called Bartley a great innovator, motivator, and visionary.

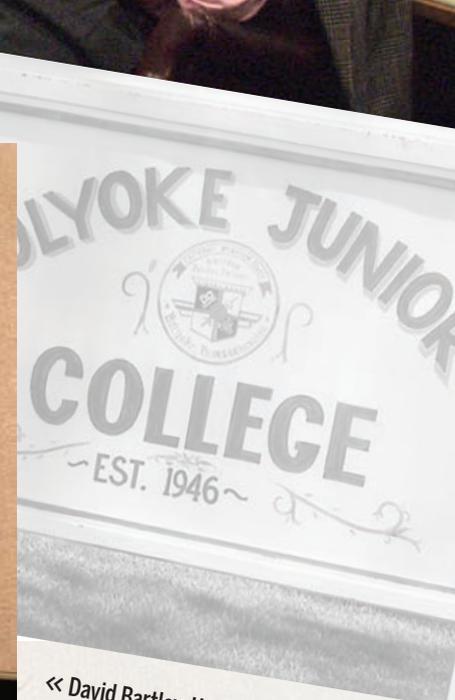
"He was a great leader," said Kane, who served as a college trustee during Bartley's presidency. "He never expected you to do anything that he wouldn't do himself."

Bartley lived his entire life in Holyoke in the Irish, working-class neighborhood of Elmwood, not far from Holyoke Junior College, where he enrolled in 1952 after graduating from Sacred Heart High School.

During a 2021 HCC interview, Bartley credited George Frost, the founding president of HCC, for instilling in him a love of learning and a desire to pursue greater goals.

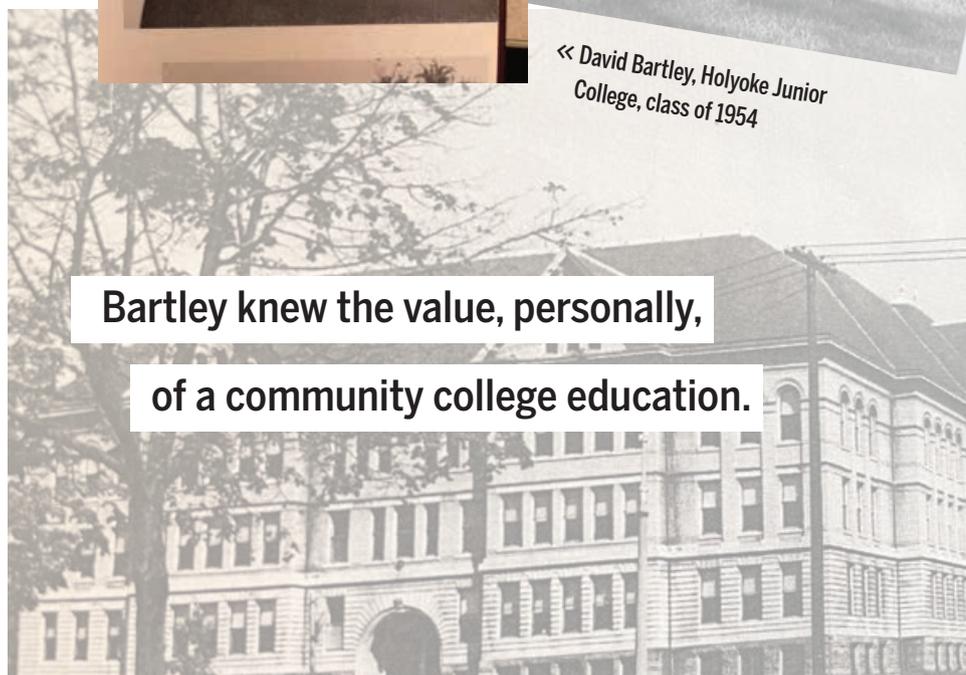
"He was my mentor, my friend, and the greatest guy I ever met in terms of education," Bartley said.

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⌘ David Bartley, Holyoke Junior College, class of 1954

**Bartley knew the value, personally,  
of a community college education.**





⤵ **President Bartley with his family after the dedication of the college's athletic center in 2001**

At HJC, Bartley studied liberal arts and developed some of the political skills that would serve him well later as a state legislator and Speaker of the House. He was elected president of his freshman class and vice president of his sophomore class. He was a member of the yearbook staff, co-director of the annual variety show, and parliamentarian of the Student Council. He also played baseball and captained the HCC men's basketball team.

For graduation, the faculty selected Bartley as the student who most contributed to Holyoke Junior College.

After HJC, Bartley transferred to the University of Massachusetts, where he was a star in the classroom and on the basketball court. After earning his bachelor's degree, he taught for four years at Forest Park Junior High School in Springfield.

Politics, however, ultimately trumped teaching. He won a seat in the Massachusetts Legislature representing Holyoke in 1963. He assumed the speaker's post in 1969 at the age of 32.

As speaker, Bartley's influence was critical in securing the state funds required to construct a new campus on Homestead Avenue after the 1968 fire that destroyed the main campus building on Sergeant Street. To get it done, he worked together with another Holyoke native, Maurice Donahue, then president of the Massachusetts Senate.

"I would consider that David's biggest achievement," said Wright. "It was really David who rallied the troops. He used his best political skills and his knowledge and know-how to put the funding together to buy the Sheehan Farm (on Homestead Avenue). To me, he was a giant. He was a force in the right place. Come hell or high water, that college was going to be here. And the land had to be big enough, because he had a vision for the future of the school."

His legislative highlights included the Bartley-Fox Act, which imposed a one-year prison sentence for illegal gun possession, and Chapter 766 legislation that supported mainstreaming special needs students in public schools. In 1975, a year after the open-

ing of the new campus, Bartley left the Legislature to succeed George Frost as president of Holyoke Community College.

"He had done all of the hard work; all I had to do was administer," Bartley demurred. Like Frost, Bartley said, "I wanted to ensure that everyone had an opportunity for an education in western Massachusetts."

Nevertheless, Bartley did a lot of hard work himself over the course of his 28 years as HCC president and left an indelible legacy.

One of his first initiatives as president was to start an alumni association, and the person he tapped to run it was George Frost. In the 1980s, at Bartley's behest, HCC created the first philanthropic community college foundation in Massachusetts, the nonprofit HCC Foundation, which was launched with \$200 left over from the Friends of Holyoke Community College, a fundraising organization created after the 1968 fire.

"What the hell is a foundation, David?" Kane, then a trustee, remembers saying at the time. "And he starts off with, 'we're going to spend the first two years raising friends of the college, people that we know are capable of helping us out with money, letting them know what's going on at the college, and getting the message out through the media.' And then we got to the point where we had to raise the money."

And they did.

The Foundation awarded its first student scholarship in 1987. By the time Bartley retired in 2004, the Foundation endowment had reached \$3 million. Today, the Foundation manages assets of more than \$20 million and over the years has awarded more than \$10

million in student scholarships while also helping the college build key academic facilities, such as the Kittredge Center for Business and Workforce Development, the Center for Health Education and Simulation, and the HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute.

During his tenure, Bartley oversaw the construction of the Campus Center and the athletic facility he had long sought while also laying the groundwork for the Kittredge Center, which opened in 2006. He was a key backer of Biology Professor Elaine Marieb '80 as she built her career as a textbook author and became one of the college's largest benefactors.

"He loved Elaine Marieb and courted her when she was here," said Stewart. "He courted her after she left and her book took off. He gave her the support that she needed. She was very good to us. A lot of that was because of David Bartley."

He was never shy about using his political influence to benefit the college.

"I have wonderful memories of him," said Idelia Smith, the recently retired assistant vice president of Academic Affairs and a 41-year employee of HCC. "He was great fun to be with, and he drove far too fast."

Smith remembers Bartley loading up his Buick Electra 225 with HCC staff and tearing down the Mass Pike to the State House to lobby the legislature for money. "He'd roll underneath the State House and use the parapet where the legislators came in," said Smith. "He stood up out of the car like he owned the place. They still referred to him as Mr. Speaker and he walked through like he was still the speaker. We were terribly impressed. It was really nice to be with him because he knew who he was."

Bartley, so family oriented in his personal life, brought that sensibility to his work at HCC, supporting faculty and staff through personal difficulties and making exceptions to rules and regulations to help them.

"He was good to us and to me, specifically," said Smith. "He was very fatherly. It was wonderful having someone like that at the helm."

*Continued on page 24*

» **President David Bartley, center right, with HCC faculty and staff**





# Family Matters

By CHRIS YURKO

**Earning a college degree was something Luis '23 and Lisette Antonmarchi '23 had always wanted to do together but put off as they worked to support their three children.**



Luis Antonmarchi calls himself “hardheaded.” Lisette, his wife, prefers the word “determined” to describe them both.

“We set a goal, we stick to it,” says Lisette.

“No matter what it takes,” adds Luis.

That attitude has carried them a long way over the past 35 years, out of poverty in the Bronx and north to western Massachusetts, where they sought a better life for themselves and their three children, Luis, Eric, and Teea.

“We’re city kids,” says Lisette. “We had children very young. Our drive has always been to work as much as we could. School was something we really didn’t have time for since providing for our family was our top priority.”

Over the years, even as they both progressed into satisfying careers, they talked about going to college but never could seem to find the right time. Finally, in 2018, as their children were finishing high school, they decided to act on that long deferred dream.

“It was really just a personal goal,” says Lisette. “We were always stressing to our kids, you have to go to college so you won’t struggle as much as we did. We’re always setting goals for ourselves, so we’re not complacent in where we’re at. A degree was just one of those things we hadn’t done yet.”

And now they have.

« (Clockwise from top left) Lisette and Luis Antonmarchi get ready to graduate from HCC; The Antonmarchis gather for a family photo after Commencement 2023; Luis and Lisette Antonmarchi, in May 2018, at the beginning of their HCC journey.

On June 3, 2023, after five years as part-time students at Holyoke Community College, Luis and Lisette Antonmarchi walked together across the Commencement stage at the MassMutual Center in Springfield to claim their associate degrees. Luis, 55, a sociology major, graduated with honors, Lisette, a liberal arts major, with high honors. Nothing — not raising children, nor working full time, nor a global pandemic — was going to stop them once they had started.

“Even though we’ve been together so long, we genuinely enjoy each other’s company,” says Luis. “Part of being together is holding each other accountable. She’s smarter than me. There’s no way I would have been as successful as I am without her.”

Last spring, Luis and Lisette were inducted into the Phi Theta Kappa national honor society. On May 11, they gave a joint speech at a celebration for graduating students who belong to HCC transitions programs, in their case New Directions for Adult Learners.

“We’re fortunate that every step of this journey has been taken together,” Luis said that night. “I remember our very first day of classes here. That feeling of excitement because we were finally doing this and at the same time that feeling of fear of the unknown.”

The Antonmarchis got their start at Holyoke Community College through another transitions program, Transition to College and Careers, a free HCC college prep class.

That made all the difference. Neither one of them had attended school since the 1980s. Luis had dropped out in 11<sup>th</sup> grade to help his mother pay rent and raise his two younger brothers.

“It was either school or work, so it was no choice. Family comes first,” says Luis. His father wasn’t around. “The street called Dad. That’s where he

chose to be. I worked to make sure my brothers didn’t follow him. It was important to me to set an example for them.”

Lisette finished high school in a program for truant and pregnant teenage girls. She gave birth her senior year and graduated a month later.

“My father was around a little more often — when he wasn’t in jail,” says Lisette. “We grew up either running from him or all of us running from the law.”

The two met as teenagers and have been together ever since.

“I say this all the time: we’re street kids. Our dads were no good,” says Luis. “We’ve worked hard to get everything we have, but we don’t concentrate too much on the material stuff. For me, it’s all about family. It’s all about her. As long as it’s us. As long as the family’s OK. That’s what’s important.”

***“We were always stressing to our kids, you have to go to college so you won’t struggle as much as we did. We’re always setting goals for ourselves, so we’re not complacent in where we’re at. A degree was just one of those things we hadn’t done yet.”***

*— Lisette Antonmarchi '23*

In New York City, as they struggled to make ends meet, Luis worked “all kinds of jobs,” he says, including stints at the World Trade Center as a security guard and in a Bloomingdale’s warehouse.

Later, as their two sons were about to start grade school, they decided to move to Holyoke. Luis found work in a factory, then Home Depot. After a few years, he tested to become a police officer and joined the department at

the University of Massachusetts Amherst. He eventually made detective, working for five years on loan to the FBI for its terrorism and western Massachusetts gang task forces. He now works as the university’s conduct and compliance investigator in the dean of students office

Meanwhile, Lisette developed an expertise in electronic medical records. She works for Commonwealth Care Alliance as an enterprise manager for clinical systems training.

They live in West Springfield in a house they purchased a few years ago to accommodate their growing family, which includes five grandchildren.

*Continued on page 25*

## A FORCE IN THE RIGHT PLACE

Continued from page 21

Unlike many college presidents, Bartley was not an academic stalwart, said Stewart. Though he did later go back to UMass for his master's degree and Ph.D., he was more of a people person.

"Nobody was too big or too small for David," said Stewart. "Everybody was part of David's team. He treated everybody the same, which was unusual for a man in his position."

He was not above bending over to pick up trash or pulling over to assist a groundskeeper with car trouble, Stewart said.

And he ran a tight ship.

"We all got a piece of David once in a while," said Stewart. "The old line was, 'If you can't get it done, I'll find someone who will get it done.' And it got done."

His demands could sometimes cause friction, and he knew it. "He always said to me, 'Tommy, it's very lonely at the top, and it's very windy too,'" said Stewart.

William Messner, HCC's third president, said his predecessor deserves credit for building HCC into an "absolutely rock solid academic institution."

"He did a hell of a job building the institution," said Messner. "While, of course, the faculty are primarily

**"HCC would not be the gem it is today**

**without former President Bartley. How**

**fortunate we are to have been beneficiaries**

**of his leadership and generosity."**

*Former President Christina Royal*

responsible for delivering a first-class education, David made sure that he had in place a faculty who did that very thing. That was, in my estimation, his priority, and I think he did it damn well."

While Bartley was president, enrollment at the college grew from about 2,000 to more than 6,500. He remains the only community college graduate in



⤵ David Bartley, on one of his last visits to HCC.

Massachusetts' history to serve their alma mater as president.

"I have been at this college nearly 30 years," Bartley said in 2003. "Each year has been exciting and rewarding. I have watched dramatic changes occur at this institution over the past three decades. There are challenges ahead, but the college is well positioned to continue its role as one of the leading community colleges in the state."

In retirement, he remained closely connected to the college, playing in the HCC Foundation's annual fundraising golf tournament that he co-founded, serving for many years on the HCC Foundation Board of Directors, and creating the Dr. David M. '54 and Bette Bartley Scholarship.

In her first days as HCC's fourth president, Christina Royal received a letter from Bartley welcoming her to the community, a gesture she greatly appreciated. A friendship grew out of their conversations over the years about the college, the city, and the region.

"He was present at my inauguration in the fall of 2017, and I distinctly remember looking his way during a moment of applause. He seemed so very proud of this college," said Royal, who retired

in July. "HCC would not be the gem it is today without former President Bartley. How fortunate we are to have been beneficiaries of his leadership and generosity."

Bartley leaves his wife of nearly 60 years, Bette Bartley, sons Myles Bartley, a New York lawyer, and David K. Bartley, a lawyer and Holyoke City Councilor, and daughter Susan Bartley, who works at the MassMutual Center.

On June 20, after a Catholic mass at Blessed Sacrament Church, Bartley's funeral procession made its way up Homestead Avenue and past the main entrance to HCC, where staff and students were waiting to pay their final respects. Among them was alum Brian Burns '85, a 36-year staff member, former HCC police sergeant and current maintainer, whose mother, Eleanor, had worked at HCC for 23 years, and whose wife, Cynthia '86, and two daughters, Emily '16 and Erin '19, are also HCC graduates.

As the procession slowed to acknowledge the crowd, Burns raised up a hand-made sign that said, simply, "Thank You." 

*Freelance writer Dennis Hohenberger contributed to this story.*

## A New Chapter

President Timmons likes to walk. He tracks his daily step count on a cell phone health app. On his first day at HCC, after spending the morning filling out paperwork and holed up in his office for back-to-back meetings, he finally ventured out to stretch his legs and tour the campus.

Guided by his senior executive assistant, Karen Desjeans, he ambled from the President's Office across the lobby to Academic Affairs, around the corner to the Business Office, down a flight to Financial Aid and Student Records, then over to the HCC Library, the Kittredge Center, and Campus Center, where he browsed through the bookstore to check out the HCC-branded merchandise.

"I'm a swag guy," he said.

He had a 2 p.m. appointment in Student Engagement, where, like every new student or employee, he sat for his HCC ID card photograph. Operating the camera was clerk Lindsey Pare, who, the president learned at that very moment, is an alum with two associate degrees from HCC, a bachelor's in psychology from Southern New Hampshire University, and aspirations to continue on for a master's degree.

The president smiled. His eyes opened a little wider, genuinely enthused.

"I'm such a believer in education," he said later. "It's a great equalizer. When I see young people pursuing



⌘ President Timmons greets new student Kristen Thiel on his first-day tour of campus.

education who are passionate about something they want to do for a possible career, I get motivated by that. It's exciting for me to see that. I wasn't necessarily on that path at such a young age. And I want to applaud that and encourage that."

Next in line to have her photo taken was Kristen Thiel, a new student from Springfield, enrolled in medical billing and coding, she told the president.

"Welcome to HCC," he said.

"Welcome to you, too," she replied.

"Thank you," he said. "I'm so glad to be here. It feels good."

Thiel complimented him on his green bow tie and matching argyle socks.

"Socks and bow ties," he said. "That's my thing."

Wherever he stopped, whomever he met, the pattern was the same. The new president introduced himself, held out his hand with a firm grip, asked a few questions, then leaned in to listen. 📍

▶ [hcc.edu/GT-interview](https://hcc.edu/GT-interview)



## FAMILY MATTERS *Continued from page 23*

They are now continuing their studies at UMass through the University Without Walls program. Lisette is pursuing a bachelor's degree in instructional design, Luis a bachelor's in social justice.

"We hope that with this graduation and continuing our education that we can continue to be an inspiration for our family," Luis said before graduating. "I hope that our grandchildren, when they see us walk at Commencement, that that becomes a moment they'll always remember and a motivation for them, too, as they begin their educational journeys." 📍

◀ Luis and Lisette Antonmarchi in May 2023

# MORE THAN just a classmate

The legacy of Mark Giannini '19 lives on

By CHRIS YURKO



⤵ Mark Giannini, back left, with his classmates at the HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute

Mark Giannini '19 was already an executive chef and a business owner when he enrolled in the HCC Culinary Arts program in 2018 at the age of 50. He'd started cooking "professionally" at 15 as a busboy/chef at Salvatore's Restaurant in Springfield. At home, though, he'd been cooking for his family long before that.

"He got into cooking because his parents weren't around much," his son Joe Giannini said. "He cooked because he had to."

Later on, he cooked because he loved to.

"Without a doubt, he loved food," said Joe. "But to him it was more about culture. Food was an outlet."

After serving in the U.S. Navy, Giannini joined the Springfield Fire Department, where he often cooked for his fellow firefighters at the Station 9 safety complex on Carew Street. Through the years, he ran a catering business, opened a restaurant called Friends in Chicopee with his wife Abby, worked at MGM Springfield, and, more recently, started a fit meal business and landed a job

as the head chef at Mario's Café Ambiance, an Italian restaurant near his East Longmeadow home.

He didn't need a culinary arts certificate or another cooking credential to pad his resume.

"That was the thing about him," said Nicole Ortiz '19, '20, one of Giannini's HCC classmates. "He wanted to further his knowledge. He really cared about the character of food. He had a lot of experience before he came here. He just wanted to sharpen his tools and learn some more things."

His classmates and instructors remember Giannini as generous, kind, upbeat, always willing to help, and excited to share food he cooked and brought in from home, especially Italian dishes.

"He always wanted to share what he enjoyed with everybody else and bring people together with his food," said Jessica Garza '19.

"He had such a positive, almost intoxicating energy," said Maureen Hindle '12, now a culinary arts lab tech. "His passion seemed to drive everything from his plating to his creativity to his overall work ethic."

Giannini hired Ortiz to work for him in the kitchen at Mario's while they were still in school, and Giannini worked with Ortiz as she was starting up her Crave food truck and restaurant business in Holyoke.

"He was more than just a classmate," said Ortiz. "He was a friend, definitely."

A few years later, as Giannini battled a rare and terminal form of gastrointestinal cancer, his attention returned to his classmates at HCC. He remembered one in particular, a single mother with a young child who was struggling with transportation, child care, school, family responsibilities, homework.

"Mark was overwhelmed with the dedication and hard work of this single mother, and that she was a really considerate and helpful classmate when she had so much on her plate," said Julie Phillips, HCC director of institutional development.

That classmate inspired Giannini to establish a scholarship during the last few months of his life. But he didn't want the scholarship to be based solely on academic achievement.

"He wanted the scholarship to go to students who were known as being good people, helpful to their classmates and instructors, and who treated people with

**He wanted the scholarship to go to students who were known as being good people, helpful to their classmates and instructors, and who treated people with kindness, respect, and dignity**

kindness, respect, and dignity," Phillips said.

Through the HCC Foundation, Giannini and his family created the Mark Giannini '19 Good Character Scholarship, to be awarded annually to two students selected by the culinary arts faculty and staff, one in the certificate program and one in the associate degree program.

In December 2022, the scholarship was awarded for the first time during a special lunch at the HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute to Tyrone McClure of Northampton and Aeryn Willingham '23 of Springfield. They each received a check for \$500, along with a vegan cookbook that had become meaningful to Giannini as he sought new recipes to make meals more palatable to him as he continued his treatment.

Giannini had hoped to attend the lunch himself to recognize the scholarship recipients in person, but he died shortly before.

At the lunch, McClure, 44, said he hoped to one day open a food truck business where he would employ the homeless.

"I know what it's like to struggle with opportunities," McClure said. "I want to do my part to help ease the way for others."

Willingham graduated from HCC in June with her associate degree.

"I was really honored that I was somebody they thought of as being hardworking and helpful and kind," said Willingham, who went on to the University of Massachusetts Amherst. "I do my best to exemplify those sorts of attributes, and it means a lot to hear that it comes across like that. I didn't know Mark personally, but I can say already that the legacy he leaves is making a lot of people happy."

So did the day's menu, which was prepared by HCC culinary arts students and selected with some of Giannini's favorite foods in mind: Caesar salad, braised beef, polenta, and roasted root vegetables.

"The braised beef was amazing," said his son Joe. "It brought me back. Home-style — like how my dad used to cook it." 

## Brinny's Back

In 2020, as a culinary arts student at HCC, **Brianna Couture '21** founded Brinny's Hand Pies, an online pickup and delivery service in Agawam. After graduating, she committed to it full time, until a medical emergency sidelined her for several months. We're happy to report that Brinny has fully recovered and recently started working as a full-time lab tech at the HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute. "I love being at HCC with like-minded people, and working at a culinary school just fills my heart," she said. "It's rewarding to see people progress in a field that I feel is extremely rewarding." For those craving one of Brinny's delicious hand pies, such as a sweet banana walnut Dulce de Leche or savory mushroom and leek, don't worry. She's still running the business part time based on requests. "After having a traumatic medical episode, I realized I wanted something more 9 to 5," she said, "and this is the perfect opportunity for me. It allows me to actually run my business from a place of joy and not, you know, panic." Check it out at [brinnyshandpies.com](http://brinnyshandpies.com). Her spinach artichoke hand pies are a fan favorite. "Lots of cheese," she said. "Everybody seems to like that."

↗ **Brianna Couture '21 at the HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute**



## Name That Tune

You'd be forgiven for never having heard of Zac Dune at HCC. That's actually the pen name of **Tom Dulac '23**, who last spring won the Jack Stone Award for New Music, which is presented annually by Northwest Vista College in San Antonio, Texas, to one community college student in the United States. Dulac won for a saxophone quartet called "In the Rain." "It's been described as sounding kind of Renaissance-y," he said. "Part of it was inspired by jazz, but I reverted back to Baroque-era Bach chorales, so I suppose there's some merit to that notion." Dulac has played saxophone for many years and also dabbles with other instruments, including guitar, bass, piano, harmonica, recorder, and bagpipe chanter. ("It's like a recorder, but more nasal.") At HCC, though, despite taking a few music theory classes, he majored in math. "I love the weird mathematical nature of music," said Dulac, who is studying math at Westfield State University. "I guess I've always been more interested in the theoretical side of music, rather than actually performing." Dulac submitted his piece under his pseudonym, so award officials initially had a hard time verifying his existence. Ultimately successful, they flew him down to San Antonio for the awards ceremony and a concert, where he got to hear "In the Rain" performed by the Bel Cuore Quartet. That recording is now on SoundCloud. Search: "In the Rain," by Zac Dune.

« **Tom ("Zac Dune") Dulac practices his saxophone last spring at HCC**



# SOLDIERING ON

⤴ Steve Jones '15, in the new and improved Warrior's Art Room

side — “that’s when they become forgotten.” Jones majored in psychology at HCC, but he found a salve for his own post-traumatic stress through art classes. He opened the first Warrior’s Art Room in 2016 in the basement of a Westfield church. Jones also recently started a new job in Easthampton as the city’s veterans service agent. Important work, he notes, but he prefers the art room. “This is what it’s all about,” he said. “This is where I actually feel like I make more of a difference.”

With the June 2023 grand reopening of the Warrior’s Art Room in a new space in Easthampton’s Keystone Building, **Steve Jones '15** finally realized one of his dreams: to create a public gallery where veterans can display their artwork. “This is an amazing space,” said Jones, a former Marine sergeant, Iraq War veteran, and director and co-founder (with his wife **Brenda Jones '18**) of the nonprofit Warrior’s Art Room, a studio for veterans and their families. “Our last space was 380 square feet. This is 1,750, which enabled us to create the gallery.” Jones named the gallery after Staff Sergeant James G. Wheeler, who served with Jones in Iraq before taking his own life. “From the very beginning, I was going to name it after him,” said Jones, “because, when we stop talking about them and mentioning their names” — soldiers who die by sui-

While only 32 years old, **Will Hastie '13** has already accomplished two life goals. A suggestion from his HCC French professor led him to apply for the Middlebury Summer Language program so he would have the right credits to transfer to the University of Massachusetts Amherst. The intensive seven-week program immersed Hastie in the French language, encouraging him to leave English behind and embrace everything in French, from conversations to music.

Hastie’s journey took him to UMass and then to the University of Toulouse in France. Through the Teaching Assistant Program in France, he taught English for a year in northern France before moving back to the states and finding a job as a French teacher at Woodberry Forest School in central Virginia. But his ambitions didn’t stop there. While fulfilling his dream of teaching, he never forgot his childhood fascination with flying, so Hastie moved back to France and enrolled in flight school in Paris. He now splits his time between flying in the Paris region and working as a substitute teacher at the American School of Paris. To Hastie, the choice of attending HCC was life-changing. Initially unsure about college, he saw HCC as his second chance. “HCC was the foundation for my life,” he said. “Going there was the most important decision I ever made.”

» Will Hastie '13, living his dream and flying high in France

# Flying High



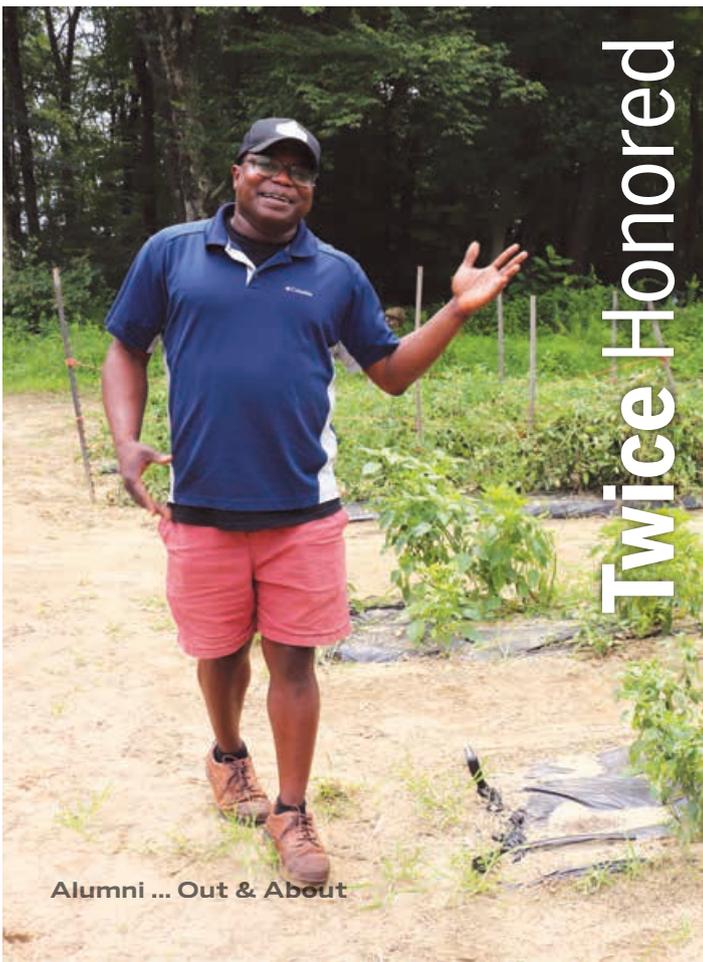


# TUBING

As a high school student, **Dave Mell '03** had always been something of an entrepreneur, to the point that he wondered if college would be a waste of time. But after applying to HCC and being awarded a scholarship, he didn't want to waste the opportunity. His two years commuting to Homestead Avenue proved invaluable, however, and the skills he acquired continue to guide his entrepreneurial journey as the owner of Viva Tubes in Easthampton, a retail business that specializes in the vacuum tubes used in guitar amplifiers and audio equipment. "The business classes were very good," said Mell, 33. "I really liked my teachers, and I still look back on it now and really say that there's a ton of value." As a student, Mell ran an antiques operation as a side hustle. A pivotal class dedicated to creating a business from scratch propelled him to flesh out that idea. After coming across a rare selection of vintage vacuum tubes at a tag sale, he decided to focus on the niche market for vacuum tube configurations. The idea won him an award from the Harold Grinspoon Charitable Foundation Entrepreneurship Initiative and set him on the path to launching Viva Tubes in 2007. "I already had this half-functioning business," he said, "and HCC was just a great stepping stone to turning that into something real."



⤴ Dave Mell '03 at his Easthampton tube shop



Twice Honored

Alumni ... Out & About

Never one to sit on the sidelines, **Shawn Robinson '05** went all in on student government at HCC. On the way to an associate degree in sociology and political science, he served as both student trustee and a student representative on the state's Board of Higher Education. Later, at UMass Amherst, he became president of a statewide student lobbying group working on behalf of public education. It should surprise no one that at ServiceNet Inc., a Northampton-based nonprofit, Robinson rose through the ranks to become the founding director of Prospect Meadow Farm in Hatfield, Mass., a CSA that employs people with developmental disabilities and chronic mental illness. In honor of his exceptional leadership, Robinson was named the *Daily Hampshire Gazette's* 2023 Person of the Year and received the Black Excellence on the Hill Award from the Massachusetts Black and Latino Legislative Caucus. Robinson traces his successes right back to HCC, where he commuted to campus by bus, sometimes joined on the ride by one of his professors, Mark Clinton. "It epitomized the community college experience — to know your college president, to know all your professors," he said. "My experience at HCC was one of the best experiences of my life." 🌱

⤵ Shawn Robinson '05 at Prospect Meadow Farm

# Class Notes



CONROY-O'BRIEN

## 1975

**Marc St. Onge** (communication) has retired after a long career as a photographer. His work history included a stint at the *Holyoke Transcript* before moving into commercial and industrial photography, in addition to working as a lab technician at Monsanto in Springfield. He was working as a warehouse manager for FG Clean Wipes in Chicopee when the pandemic started and he decided to retire. Now he works part time as a news and sports photographer for the *Westfield News*. His interest in photography first blossomed at HCC, where he was the yearbook photographer. He lives in Russell, Mass.

professionals, they decided to write a psychological guide book for patients, loved ones, and healthcare providers.

## 1989

**Jeffrey Mackey** (business) was appointed president of Singer Kittredge (formerly Kittredge Equipment), a division of Singer Equipment, the nation's fourth largest dealer of commercial food equipment and supplies. Mackey oversees the New England and upstate New York markets.



ZAJCHOWSKI

**Christopher Robert** served as Aramark's head chef of Dining Services at HCC for 13 years. He is now teaching culinary arts at Chicopee Comprehensive High School.

## 1990

**Erin Conroy-O'Brien** (liberal arts) is the disability learning specialist for the Office for Students with Disabilities and Deaf Services at HCC and was honored with the Outstanding Professional Staff Member Award in 2018. She coordinated use of the Evac-U-Trac device for emergency evacuation and co-chaired the Smoke-Free Campus Committee. (HCC has been a smoke-free campus since August 2012.)



QUINONES FELICIANO

## 1979

**Cynthia Hutton** (environmental science) retired as a professor of biology from Northern Pioneer College in northern Arizona.

## 1991

**Joyce Emerle** (liberal arts) is the founder of the Wilbraham Art League. Her work has been shown at Baystate Medical Center, Monson House of Art, The Piedmont Art Center, and libraries in Wilbraham, Palmer, West Springfield, and Northampton.

## 1980

**Philomena (Napoli) Burke** (early childhood education) retired after teaching first grade for 20 years in the Springfield Public School system.

## 1987

**Tracy Kurstwan Livecchi**, LCSW, published a book, *Healing Hearts and Minds: A Holistic Approach to Coping Well with Congenital Heart Disease*. Livecchi and her co-author Liza Morton, Ph.D., were both diagnosed with congenital heart conditions at birth, leading to a lifetime of invasive procedures, hospitalizations, and uncertainty. As mental health

**Stephen Zajchowski** is the new director for Chicopee's Human Resources department. Zajchowski has worked in human resources for more than 26 years for a variety of businesses from small startups to Fortune 500 companies and has operated his own consulting firm for nonprofits.



MITCHELL



## 1992

**Nicole (Ollman) Shea** (liberal arts) published her first book in March 2023, *Horst to Holyoke*, a father-daughter memoir about storytelling, memory, and meaning-making. In 2010, she co-founded FOE Gallery, a store for art and designer toys, in Northampton, with her spouse James Shea. After graduating from HCC, Shea earned a bachelor's degree in English from UMass Amherst and a master's in communication from Walden University.

## 1995

**Ellen (McCloud) Boyle** owns and operates two local businesses and is currently working on starting a third, all alongside her husband, Jim. ASAP Painting Inc., in its 25th year, is a residential and commercial painting business. Kitchen Concepts, in its 12th year, is a kitchen and bath remodeling business and has received several local awards. Their third business will be in self-storage. They sold their first facility in 2022 and are currently developing two new ones.

**Myriam Quinones Feliciano** (liberal arts) worked at HCC for 21 years and is now semi-retired and living in Puerto Rico. She is the founder of Aventuras Yuiza, a tourism and lodging business, with her wife, former HCC staff member Josse Valentin.

## 1996

**Sean Mitchell** (liberal arts) began a new role as director of business development for the new Valley Springs Behavior Health Hospital in Holyoke.

## 2001

After years in private practice as a licensed clinical social worker, **Kim Monson** (liberal arts) daughter of **Trudy Monson '97** and sister of **Sarah Monson '03** (see next item) is the new associate director of practicum learning at Smith School for Social Work at Smith College in Northampton.

## 2003

**Sarah Monson** (liberal arts) joined the Women's Fund of Western Massachusetts as the senior director of philanthropy. Previously, she was the assistant director of donor engagement and planned giving at New England Public Media. Monson has a bachelor's degree in health care administration from the University of Phoenix and a professional fundraising certificate from Boston University.

## 2004

**Nicholas Orgo** owns and operates the Bear Mountain Inn & Barn in Waterford, Maine, as well as the company M.A.N.E. Catering and Event Services, which is named after his nieces and nephews: Madison, Alexander, Nicholas, and Eleni. He credits his culinary training at HCC for providing the foundation for his career in the culinary and hospitality field.

## 2005

**Anna Zadworny** was named to the Northampton Dollars for Scholars Board of Directors. She is the assistant vice president, employee development manager for Greenfield Savings Bank.

## 2009

**Aly Putnam** (biology), a Ph.D. candidate in organismic and evolutionary biology at UMass, was profiled in July on the STEM with Disabilities website (STEMwithDisabilities.com), talking about why she loves marine ecology and how she has navigated the challenges that come with having Crohn's Disease.

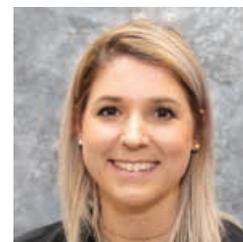
**Samantha (Frady) Morrigan** (human services) completed a bachelor's degree in psychology from Columbia Southern University in 2018 and a master of science in clinical mental health counseling in 2023 from Walden University. She completed both degrees with honors.



KIM MONSON



SARAH MONSON



PUTNAM



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303 Homestead Ave.,  
Holyoke MA 01040.

## 2014

**Jessica Bresnahan** (communication) was honored with a Pioneer Valley Excellence in Teaching Award for 2023. She teaches English language arts to seventh and eighth graders at Holyoke's Lt. Clayre P. Sullivan School.

## 2017

**Jesenia DeJesus** (elementary education) was honored with a Pioneer Valley Excellence in Teaching Award for 2023. She is a special education teacher at Holyoke Middle School.

## 2018

**Francis Sypek** (liberal arts) got his start in journalism writing sports for the *Phoenix* student newspaper and interning with the *Daily Hampshire Gazette* in Northampton. He is now retired after a 35-year career as a sportswriter for the Springfield Newspapers.

## 2020

**Emily Rivas** (criminal justice) was named a patrol officer for the Amherst Police Department. She previously worked for the Hampden County Sheriff's Department as a corrections officer.

**Kendall Weake** (criminal justice) was sworn in as a police officer for the West Hartford Police Department. She had previously worked as a summer correctional officer at a men's medium-security jail in Ludlow. Weake was offered a position with the United States Secret Service before applying to the West Hartford Police Department, but decided she preferred to remain closer to her family in New England.

## 2021

**Caitlyn Feeley** (communication) was named Springfield Colleen by the St. Patrick's Parade Committee at the coronation ball and awards ceremony in February 2023. She is taking courses through the Commonwealth Institute of Funeral Service out of Houston, Texas, and volunteers for The Miracle League of western Massachusetts.

Six years after Hurricane Maria destroyed her home, **Tamika Shawnell Ortiz Acosta** (liberal arts) received her bachelor's degree in legal studies in May from the University of Massachusetts Amherst. She works as a legal clinic coordinator for the Hampden County Bar Association and plans on staying in western Massachusetts and providing legal services to underserved communities.

# In Memoriam

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

David M. Bartley '54, former president

John E. Armata '57

Ralph F. Whelihan, Jr. '57

Frank S. Godek '59

Hugh J. Richards '62

Joseph G. Williams '70

Leon C. Loiselle '71

Charles E. Manion '71

Robert W. Jolly Jr. '73

Sr. Catherine M. Zajac '73

David J. Bessette '73

Arthur R. Lemire '74

Thomas B. Kusek '76

William T. Cokotis Sr. '78

Alex Sajkovic '78

Marilyn Katz '79

Jacqueline M. Sullivan '79

Ann M. Czuchra '80

Michael F. Paszek '80

Denise E. Tousignant '81

James F. Zabik '82

David M. Gomez '82

Eileen A. Kane '82

Luke A. Brunelle Jr. '83

Karen E. Ross '83

Jerald M. Duffy '84

Susan Wilbur '90

Kris A. Sanders '90

Jennifer L. Englert '91

Helen E. Wilson '98

Kelly F. Simpson '00

Patricia A. Cupak '01

Mark L. Godaire '03

Daniel G. Bouquillon '06

John P. Howard '10

Edward R. St. Amand

Stanley Dunny, retired faculty

Helen L. Field, retired faculty

Elizabeth G. Tite, retired faculty

**And our longtime friend and supporter:**

Patricia Taupier



# Strength, Success, Bravery, and Joy

One stands three stories tall over the Holyoke Community College courtyard, featuring a sepia-toned likeness of a bomba dancer and drummer. Another lines an entire wall on the second floor of the HCC Campus Center, spelling out “E-L-C-E-N-T-R-O” in bold, blue letters from floor to ceiling behind silhouettes of icons of Latin American history. The third, a brightly colored image of a traditional Puerto Rican vejigante mask, welcomes visitors into El Centro, HCC’s bilingual student-support program, while also, it is said, warding off evil spirits. All three were painted by muralist Betsy Casañas in collaboration with the City of Holyoke and the nonprofit Beyond Walls project. “There is such a large Puerto Rican presence here in Holyoke,” she

said. “I wanted to bring a little bit of Puerto Rico here to HCC.” She called the large indoor mural a kind of “starter package of Latin American history.” Among the 16 figures represented there are baseball legend Roberto Clemente (of Puerto Rico), Nobel-prize winning author Gabriel Garcia Marquez (Colombia), and many more lesser-known but no less important people, such as the Mirabal sisters, who were murdered after demonstrating against the dictator Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic. “Not only are the murals beautiful,” said El Centro director Julissa Colón, “but they show our students that their history has value, that they come from incredible stories of strength, success, bravery, and joy.”

~ CHRIS YURKO

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To see a video from Luz, please scan the QR code »

