

THE CONNECTION

FALL 2024

A portrait of Shaitia Spruell '14, a woman with long dark hair and glasses, wearing a dark blazer over a light-colored top. She is smiling and has her arms crossed. A purple pin is visible on her blazer. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with green foliage.

A Quiet Fire

Shaitia Spruell '14, Massachusetts' top advocate for women, leads by example

ALSO INSIDE

First-ever Holyoke Junior College reunion a walk down memory lane

'Truly Momentous': The inauguration of President George Timmons



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President George Timmons

Dear Alumni and Friends,

My grandmother always told me that an education is the one thing no one can ever take away from you. It's the most powerful gift we can receive.

On July 29, 2024, Governor Maura Healey signed into law MassEducate, a program that will provide free community college across the Commonwealth to eligible Massachusetts residents.

What an extraordinary gift, indeed.

This marks a watershed moment in the history of education in Massachusetts. The announcement of free community college for all eligible residents is not just a policy change — it's a catalyst for transformation across our state. MassEducate will now offer tuition- and fee-free community college to all eligible Massachusetts residents, regardless of age or income, who have yet to earn a bachelor's degree.

This is about more than just free tuition and fees — it's a promise to our community. A promise that says no matter your background or circumstances, you have the opportunity to pursue higher education and build a brighter future.

I realize that our *Connection* readership is composed largely of HCC alumni, and, as such, you may already have earned a college degree. Therefore, you are among the best advocates for a Holyoke Community College education, so I ask you to join me in sending this message to your friends, family members, and neighbors: Don't let this chance pass you by. Community college can be a launchpad to a four-year degree or a direct path to a rewarding career. Your future self will thank you for the decision you make today. Whether you're a recent high school graduate, a parent considering a career change, or someone who has long dreamed of pursuing higher education, this is your moment. The opportunity to obtain a college degree without the burden of tuition and fees is unprecedented. Seize it.

While MassEducate covers tuition and fees, we recognize that the total cost of education extends beyond these expenses. At Holyoke Community College, with your support, we are committed to providing an exceptional academic experience and robust support system that enables every student to graduate without crushing debt.

With gratitude,

George Timmons, Ph.D.
President

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THE CONNECTION

FALL 2024



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Letters



Forever Indebted

The Spring 2023 issue's "In Memoriam" describes Kathryn H. Holmes as "retired staff." She was, more specifically, a professor of English and the person at Holyoke Community College who most changed my life.

Three months after graduating from high school, I arrived on campus for an 8 a.m. section of English 101; it was my first class at HCC. Right on time, Kathy Holmes walked in, leaned against the front table, and effortlessly launched a discussion.

From the start, I was awed by Kathy's keen intelligence. She also was unapologetically straightforward and extremely funny. I learned fast that her classroom was no place for laziness. She expected us to think. And keep thinking.

By the fourth class, I knew I'd register for her English 102 class. That experience turned out to be equally remarkable, and Kathy patiently oversaw my honors option project on the precursors of the Arthurian grail legends.

The next fall, Kathy walked by one morning when I was sitting on the floor in a hallway before a class. She stopped and — with no preliminaries — asked where I was applying for transfer. I told her I was thinking of UMass.

"Apply to Mount Holyoke and Smith," she said, then walked on.

There's no way to adequately explain the impact of those six words. Mount Holyoke and Smith weren't on my radar, even as long shots. That October morning, Kathy offered me possibilities I never would have given myself.

I attended Smith, stayed on for a graduate degree, and then earned an M.F.A. at Indiana University. So many doors opened to me because Professor Kathy Holmes chose to teach at HCC. I am forever indebted.

Michelle Ducharme '87
Freelance writer
West Springfield, Mass.

Editor's Note: A graduate of the University of Massachusetts, Holmes served on the HCC English faculty for more than 25 years until her retirement in 2012. In 1999, she was the recipient of the Elaine Marieb Faculty Chair for Teaching Excellence.

For All the Good Things

I am writing to thank you for all the good things in the Spring 2024 edition of *The Connection*.

The description of the new HCC president was properly of some length. The article on David Bartley went from his days at Holyoke Junior College through his days in the Massachusetts legislature to his presidency of the school and beyond.

But the part of *The Connection* that I like best are the short profiles on pages 4, 5, 6 (Campus Roundup), and 27, 28, and 29 (Alumni Out & About).

Anyone can write long. But it takes discipline and extra effort to get a person's worth, credentials, and achievements within several paragraphs.

Congratulations to you and your staff for doing so. Keep it up.

Austin Kenefick
Retired editor and journalist
Chicopee, Mass.

P.S. In my long life I have been married to two special women, now sadly both deceased: Barbara J. (Levy) Kenefick, HCC '82, and earlier, Mary Flanagan Kenefick, HCC '83.

In His Own Milieu

This is a quick note of praise about an article in the Spring 2024 edition of *The Connection*.

I enjoyed your profile of President Bartley ("A Force in the Right Place"). Because I had the honor of being the cooperative education student working in the Office of the President, I got to see Dr. Bartley close up in his own milieu.

I think you did a fine job of capturing his essence as a strong leader of HCC and one who had a deep feeling of connection to students who were working and raising families as they attended college. He was ahead of his time in some ways.

Well done! I look forward to more articles in a similar vein.

Melissa Latour '01
Retired HCC staff
Westfield, Mass.

Now Serving



⤴ Marangelly Vargas-Gonzalez '24 and Luis Centeno '24 show off some of their lunch options from the window of the HCC Culinary Arts Truck.

A few years ago, when she was enrolled in HCC's free, six-week Aline-cook training program, Marangelly Vargas-Gonzalez '24 told a television reporter that her ambition was to one day run a food truck operation. After graduating from HCC in June with her associate degree in culinary arts, Vargas-Gonzalez had the chance to do just that. She and her culinary arts classmate Luis Centeno '24 spent their summer selling lunches in the HCC Courtyard on Tuesdays and Thursdays out of the college's culinary arts truck. "We're trying to bring diverse cultures to the menu. This week is Mediterranean," Vargas-Gonzalez, 34, said during the June 11 grand opening. For \$10, customers had their choice of a Greek-style quinoa salad with either grilled chicken or crispy chickpeas, bottle of water and cookie included. The meals were prepared in advance at the HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute, where they both also work as lab techs, and then packaged for sale in to-go containers. Other weeks' menus featured Asian fare, American classics, and Jamaican. Centeno, 57, a retired U.S. Army veteran, said they wanted to offer something unique. "We didn't just want to offer tacos, hot dogs, and hamburgers." Summer sales were so successful, they are continuing their operation this fall outside the culinary arts institute on Mondays, in the campus courtyard on Wednesdays, and at select community events.

MODEL MODELS

Whatever legacy they might leave behind as they ultimately move on from HCC, their images will remain for many years to come, captured in acrylic in the new mural that covers the main wall in the Campus Center cafeteria. Last spring, students Tahir Bey, Carineh Santana '24, and Arnaldo Lassend posed at the request of artist Betsy Casañas, who took a photo of the trio reading books on a Campus Center stairway. Casañas used the photo to sketch out the mural, which was commissioned by the HCC Foundation for the inauguration of President George Timmons and meant to showcase the values of HCC: kindness, inclusion, trust, innovation, and collaboration. During Inauguration Week (April 16-19), Casañas invited students, faculty, and staff to help paint it. After the mural was complete, the models took a moment to reflect on the impact of their larger than life-size likenesses. "It's a little bit weird, walking by and seeing yourself. It's going to take some time getting used to," said Bey, a student from Springfield who is part of the Gateway to College program. "It is weird, but also, it's moving. I wouldn't imagine myself being on a wall at HCC. Now everyone walking by can see it," said Santana, an engineering major now at the University of Massachusetts. "I thought it was going to be on some hidden wall," said Bey. "And then I saw them painting over here. I was like, whoa. Not hidden at all."

» Tahir Bey, Carineh Santana '24, and Arnaldo Lassend stand in front of the new campus mural that bears their likenesses.



The Fabulous HCC

Most people might know Monte Belmonte from his many years as a DJ for Northampton, Mass.-based WRSI (99.3 FM The River) or for Monte's March, his annual fundraising walk against hunger. Monte's current gig is The Fabulous 413, a daily afternoon radio interview show on New England Public Media (88.5 FM) that celebrates life in western Massachusetts — "a kind of 'Mister Rogers' Neighborhood' for grown-ups," according to the show's online description. One day last October, inspired by Hispanic Heritage Month, Monte and his co-host Kaliis Smith brought their mics to HCC, the only community college in Massachusetts with a Latinx Studies program. For an hour before HCC's annual Latinx Fiesta, they set up in the Learning Collaborative to record a segment titled "Transforming HCC" with Spanish Professor Raúl Gutiérrez, chair of the Latinx Studies program, and two of his students, Mishie Serrano and Alannah Brunt '24. The spot aired Thursday, Oct. 5, 2023, but you can still stream it online anytime from The Fabulous 413 Podcast page on the National Public Radio website: npr.org.



⚡ Fabulous 413 hosts Kaliis Smith, left, and Monte Belmonte, right, with Professor Raúl Gutiérrez and students Mishie Serrano and Alannah Brunt



⚡ A red eft salamander found in the woods behind HCC.
» Assistant Professor Laurel Carpenter swabs a salamander for the presence of a lethal fungus known as *Bsal*.



Salamander Study

Environmental science students at HCC spent their last Friday class of the spring semester searching the wet woods behind campus for something no one wants to find — *Batrachochytrium salamandrivorans*, an emerging pathogen lethal to salamanders. The good news is the virulent *Bsal* fungus that has ravaged certain salamander species in Europe and Asia has not yet been found in North America. The search for it, though, is on. Students from HCC and other colleges across the country are participating in a group project called the Student Network for Amphibian Pathogen Surveillance, which is supported by the U.S. Geological Survey and Environment, and Climate Change Canada. To detect *Bsal*, however, one must first locate

salamanders to examine, and lots of them. Fortunately, there are many in and around the stream that runs behind the west side of the HCC campus. Once in hand, students swabbed the little critters and then returned them to their habitats. Vials of collected swab samples were sent to a lab at the University of Vermont in Burlington for analysis. People should care about the results, said Laurel Carpenter, assistant professor of environmental science, because salamanders, like amphibians in general, are important environmental indicators. "Their health or absence can alert us to possible concerns," she said. "They act as a sort of canary in the coal mine for us."



Scholarship Central

Feroza Sherzai holds the distinction of being the first HCC student to apply for a scholarship through the new HCC Scholarship Resource Center. The Holyoke resident arrived at the center on Jan. 31, just as the grand opening celebration had begun. She immediately sat down at one of the center's three computer work stations. "This is a very good opportunity for students," said Sherzai, a student in HCC's Academic English as a Second Language program. "I came here to fill out the application. I had a lot of questions." On hand to answer those questions was Laura Freeman, manager of stewardship and donor relations for HCC

and coordinator of the center. "She was very good," Sherzai said. "She was very patient with me." The Scholarship Resource Center, on the first floor of the Donahue Building, is the first of its kind among community colleges in Massachusetts. Its purpose: to make it easier for students to apply for scholarships that are available through the HCC Foundation. The center saw a steady stream of students throughout the four-hour open house, which culminated with a ribbon-cutting ceremony led by President George Timmons. "It's not always easy navigating financial aid or understanding expectations when you're filling out an ap-

⌘ President George Timmons cuts the green ribbon celebrating the grand opening of the Scholarship Resource Center while manager Laura Freeman applauds.

plication," said student Sunrise Iaim Smith of Chicopee. "Just having people who know the process there to support you makes it feel a little better, especially since it's my first time." The center's opening seems to have had a positive impact. This year, the HCC Foundation awarded 388 scholarships worth more than \$335,000 to 323 incoming, current, and transferring HCC students.

Fall Grads Feted for First Time

The first time Alannah Brunt tried HCC, she flunked out after one semester. The next semester, she only passed one class. "I was working a ton of hours and had not yet invested in school," she said. "I hadn't found a way to get excited about being a student. It was COVID times, folks, and it was not fun." But Brunt eventually did find a way to get excited about college, and her success led her to the stage of the Leslie Phillips Theater as a student speaker for the college's first-ever Fall Graduate Reception on Nov. 29. According to the Registrar's Office, 172 students qualified as fall 2023 graduates. Like Brunt, many of them planned to transfer to four-year schools. Although fall graduates are always invited to attend Commencement in the spring, historically, many do not. The fall graduate reception was meant to change that. "This is really just the beginning of your celebrations as a college graduate," said President George Timmons. "Today, we honor your achievements with this reception because what you just achieved deserves immediate recognition. In June, we will come together again and formally welcome you as HCC alumni." Brunt was there for the June 1 event at the MassMutual Center in Springfield, having recently completed her first semester at the University of Massachusetts. 📍



⌘ Alanna Brunt '24 at Commencement on June 1. She was one of the student speakers at HCC's first fall graduate reception last November.

A Pretty Good Life



Elizabeth Román '03

“I came to HCC in an act of desperation and obligation.

The year: 2001. The aimless high school graduate: Me.

The eldest daughter of Puerto Rican migrants, I understood the value of education. I grew up hearing my dad start the car every morning at 4:30 a.m. to leave for a factory job. Rain, sleet, snow. Every day for 38 years he got up early for work to provide for our family. My mom also spent 26 years of her life working a factory job.

There was never any shame associated with hard work and long days at a factory job, but I knew they wanted me to have other options. Maybe something that required less physical labor. An office job. Maybe a teacher.

I grew up in a home filled with books and music and a love of learning. For years my father would take me and my brother to the public library to pick out stories that would expand our worldview. Though they assumed I would go on to college, my parents had no knowledge of how to get me there, and I was too shy to ask for help.

In the spring of my senior year, I started secretly freaking out because I had not applied anywhere. Fortunately, I had several nosy teachers who asked about my plans. They reached out to their college contacts, and I ended up at HCC.

I was both nervous and excited to attend, but I'm ashamed to say I was a little embarrassed. Because, back then, I believed community college was not as good as all the prestigious private schools my friends had been accepted into.

Little did I know that HCC would define the course of my life, both personally and professionally.

Starting out, I had no idea what I wanted to be, but I knew I loved to write. I took a journalism

course and discovered that my natural inclination for *bochinche*, that is to say, my curiosity for other people's business, fit perfectly for a career in journalism.

I met professors like Tom Shea (journalism) and Joanne Kostides (communications), both of whom I still keep in touch with. They believed in my skills and taught me to be confident in them. That first journalism class led to a position on the college newspaper, *The Phoenix*, and an internship at *The Republican* newspaper.

can help amplify the voices of people who are often forgotten about in media.

Through all those life and career changes, my alumni family at HCC has been a constant, offering me encouragement and support, inviting me to be a mentor to new HCC students, and believing in me even when I sometimes doubted myself.

I went from an aimless high school kid who was a little embarrassed to go to community college, to the woman who stands before you




✧ Elizabeth Román, outside the New England Public Media offices in Springfield, Mass.

That internship turned into a 20-year career as a bilingual reporter covering education, politics, health care, human interest, and communities of color in western Massachusetts.

Just over two years ago, I took another leap in my career, accepting a job as the managing editor for news at New England Public Media, a local affiliate of National Public Radio based here in my hometown of Springfield, where I have a say in what stories air on the radio and

today eternally grateful for the path that led me to HCC.

I am a proud graduate of this school that had such a large part in shaping my life — and it's a pretty good life.” 

Elizabeth Román is vice president of the HCC Alumni Council. This column is adapted from remarks she delivered June 1 in a Commencement address to the class of 2024.

A Quiet Fire



As executive director of the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women, Shaitia Spruell '14 leads by example

By DOUG SCANLON

Shaitia Spruell '14 has always defied expectations. She was the youngest stage manager in her high school's theater department. She was the youngest board chair for the Springfield chapter of Neighbor to Neighbor, a nonprofit social service agency. And in 2022, at 28 years old, she became the youngest-ever executive director of the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women.

"I still struggle with imposter syndrome all the time," said Spruell, now 31. "But I have to remind myself: I paid my dues."

The Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women, MCSW for short, reviews the condition of women in Massachusetts, offers policy recommendations to improve access to opportunities, endorses and tracks legislation related to women's rights, and provides various programs for women.

Spruell's days are busy, bordering on hectic. She might be leading a day-long workshop for young women in Girls Empowerment Leadership Initiative, the commission's program for developing leadership and civic engagement skills to empower girls to advocate for themselves and their communities.

Some days she will host a Zoom call with the 19 volunteer commissioners across the state to gather details on what issues are affecting women in their communities. She might represent the commission at a conference, forge alliances with like-minded organizations to advocate for legislation, or contact the governor directly to advocate for a bill.

Through it all, Spruell often has a young woman shadowing her — an intern she's mentoring, offering a firsthand look at what it means to be a leader in women's advocacy. This commitment to nurturing the next generation of female leaders adds another layer to her

already demanding schedule.

It's exhausting work, but she is inspired.

On Spruell's desk there are two things that not only keep her driven but remind her of her humble beginnings at Holyoke Community College: a photograph of her two young boys smiling back at her and a packet of assigned readings on the causes of crime.

The photograph brings Spruell back to her early days at HCC when she discovered she was pregnant with her first child. Spruell had recently graduated from the Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter School, where she studied theater, a path she planned to continue at HCC. But becoming a mother caused her to reassess her priorities.

"I needed to figure out what I was going to do to make sure this little human grows up to be somebody who I will be proud of," said Spruell. "And I thought the best way to do that is to lead by example."

The other item is a keepsake from an influential Learning Community course co-taught by Nicole Hendricks, former HCC professor of criminal justice, and Mary Orisich, professor of economics. The course, "Keep the Devil Way Down in the Hole: Exploring the Social, Political and Economic Causes of Criminality," used the HBO series "The Wire" as a semester-long case study to examine why people commit crimes and how society, politics, and money play a part.

"Shaitia gravitated to strong women on campus, and Nicole and Mary made a huge impression on her," said Irma Medina, interim director of Integrative Learning programs and Spruell's former adviser in the Pathways program. "During our conversations, I could see her grappling with the material and talking about how something had to be done, how these systems have to change."



Continued on next page

Awakening to Social Issues

As a Learning Community, the course was structured around three-hour blocks of class time, allowing the instructors to dive deep into the material. For Hendricks, that time was necessary for covering the heavy material in the show.

“Using ‘The Wire’ made it very accessible. It allowed me to talk about structural disadvantage and a lot of the criminological theories through this amazing series,” said Hendricks.

Spruell was an active and engaged student in the class, but her interest in the course material continued long after the semester had ended. In the weeks and months that followed, Hendricks would frequently open her inbox to find emails from Spruell with articles and stories about topics related to the class — the origins of gang violence, the effects of lead exposure, or the impact of police presence in schools.

“I think the course gave Shaitia a framework and

“I think the [Learning Community] course gave Shaitia a framework and a language to understand her lived experience. She’s somebody that seems very soft-spoken. But then behind that is so much substance. It’s like a quiet fire.”

Former HCC Professor Nicole Hendricks

a language to understand her lived experience,” Hendricks said. “She’s somebody that seems very soft-spoken. But then behind that is so much substance. It’s like a quiet fire.”

That fire began to spread.

Spruell gave birth to a healthy baby boy, finished her classes, and transferred to Bay Path University where she majored in business. At the urging of a classmate, she began volunteering in the Springfield chapter of Neighbor to Neighbor, which works to address housing issues, prevent homelessness, and build political and economic power for people in the community.

It was during those meetings that she became aware of the school-to-prison pipeline, which is characterized by a disproportionate tendency for minors from marginalized communities to become involved in the criminal justice system due to factors such as educational inequality, zero-tolerance policies, and increased police presence in schools. And when Spruell began to look at the demographics of who is most likely to end up on the wrong end of the pipeline, it painted a picture that closely resembled her son.

“And that’s when I started asking questions and trying to understand what was going on in my community,” Spruell said.

Building a Career in Public Service

By the time she graduated from Bay Path University, Spruell had an impressive resume and a clearer sense of who she was and how she wanted to change her community. She accepted a position with the Massachusetts Office of the Treasurer and Receiver General, working as a community engagement organizer.

At the same time, she was appointed as a commissioner on the Hampden County Commission on the Status of Women.

“And that’s how I got engaged civically,” Spruell said. “So, I learned how to be on a board and a commission and what leadership looks like for women in western Mass.”

After a few years on the job, Spruell was promoted and tasked with managing women’s programming within the treasurer’s new Office of Economic Empowerment. The office is tasked with ensuring economic opportunity for all state residents, specifically concerning things like wage equality, making college affordable, and providing resources for small businesses.

The quiet fire started to rage.

Spruell found that she had a passion for legislation, working through the process of getting a bill to the governor’s desk and signed into law. Identifying current bills and advocating for their passage was no longer enough. She wanted to spot unmet needs and help create the policies that would resolve them.

“The Office of Economic Empowerment really nurtured me, encouraging me to ask questions and giving me the space to explore what the department does and how the government and all these different constitutional offices worked,” she said.

“And I just started daydreaming, thinking it would be so cool if I could get a job like this.”

Continued on page 12



⋈ President George Timmons shakes hands with Spruell's son Aaden before a spring event at HCC.

⋈ Spruell and her oldest son, Aaden, whom she was pregnant with during her time as an HCC student.

⋈ Spruell, center, speaks at HCC during a spring panel discussion focused on leadership.



Rising Through the Ranks

When Spruell moved her family to the Worcester area she had to step down from the Hampden County commission. However, she wasn't interested in starting over with another regional commission. She wanted to do bigger things.

Spruell successfully applied to become a member of the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women through the Massachusetts Caucus of Women Legislators. She was appointed as the secretary for the legislative and public policy committee, eventually working her way to chair of the committee.

During that time, the commission helped the Commonwealth pass several bills to address equity gaps, including the Massachusetts Equal Pay Act in 2018, which prohibits employers from seeking salary history from potential employees and ensures that employees can discuss their wages without retaliation.

"I see her using the skills she developed at HCC in her current role; looking at gender gaps, looking at state-wide data," Hendricks said. "I feel really lucky that the state has someone like her advocating on behalf of women and girls; we're really fortunate that she's in that role."

Empowering the Next Generation

In the last legislative session, the commission prioritized 14 bills, including the "I Am Bill," which would increase access to menstrual products in schools, prisons, and homeless shelters.

Spruell has learned the value of building relationships. Although MCSW is blessed with dozens of passionate volunteers and employers, many legislative victories are won by partnering with like-minded organizations.

For the "I Am Bill," Spruell has been strengthening her relationship with the Massachusetts Menstrual Equity Coalition, a young activist group that advocates for menstrual equity. The bill unanimously passed the Massachusetts Senate in 2023 and is being considered by the House of Representatives.

"We found that we really get their attention through the youth," Spruell said. "And if you can master bringing in multiple audiences it just seems to work so much better."

In the spring of 2023, the commission hosted the first in-person event for the annual Girls Empowerment Leadership Initiative. Spruell had to coordinate the bus transportation to move more



"I see her using the skills she developed at HCC in her current role ... I feel really lucky that the state has someone like her advocating on behalf of women and girls; we're really fortunate that she's in that role."

Former HCC Professor Nicole Hendricks

» Shaitia Spruell, during a spring 2024 visit to HCC



⌘ Spruell, with Irma Medina, one of her HCC mentors

» Spruell greets Mary Orisich, one of her HCC professors.



than 100 girls from different corners of the state to the day-long experience in Worcester, where they participated in workshops around conflict resolution, public speaking, advocacy, and skill building.

“And we just really gave them space to ask the questions that they don’t really get the opportunity to ask,” she said.


Spruell is thrilled to be working in her dream job but looking forward to the day when she can pass off the reins to the next generation. So, seeing the ambitious young women who care about creating a more just society gives her hope for the future.

“I don’t want to be 90 years old still fighting this,” she said. “But in the meantime, I want somebody to rise up and lead.”

Balancing Career and Family

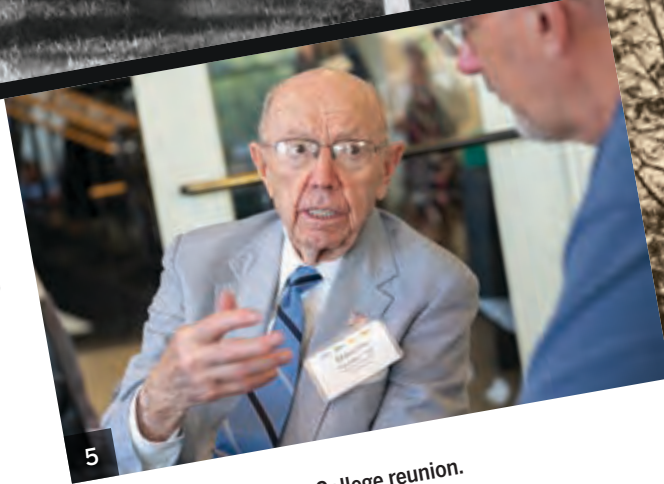
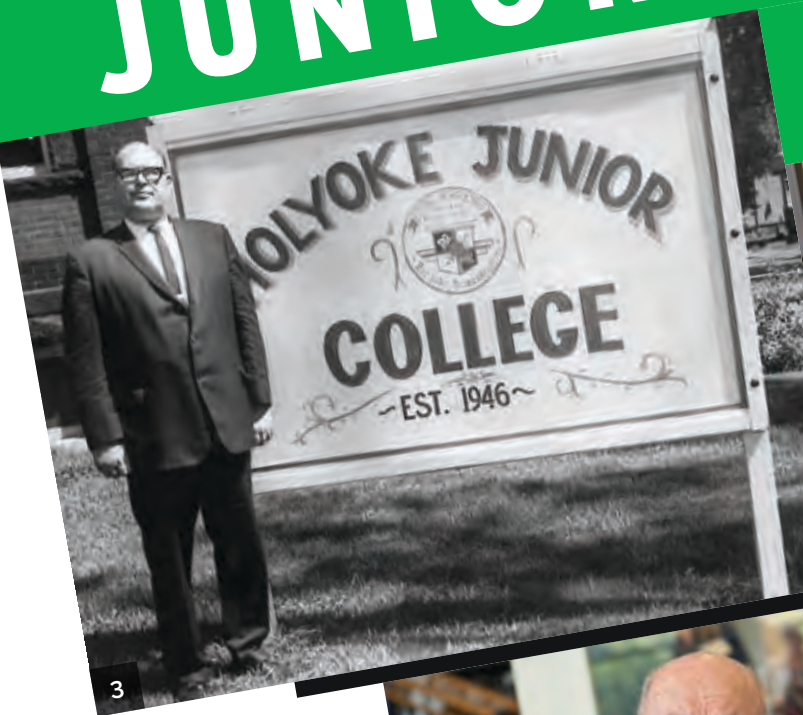
Spruell lives in the Worcester area with her partner and two sons while working on her master’s degree in business administration from Fitchburg State University. During the spring of 2024, Spruell visited HCC to participate in a panel discussion on leadership and finding inspiration.

The event gave her the opportunity to reflect on how she remains resilient despite all of life’s demands. She recalled juggling multiple jobs as a student at HCC to afford daycare for her son — working retail at Finish Line, as a cashier at the MassMutual Center, and as a floating teller for United Bank. She pointed to her oldest son, Aaden, sitting in the back of the room.

“Ultimately, everything that I do is for them,” she said. “He is showing me that it was worth it.” 

JUNIOR

PRIDE



1. John Sieracki, HCC leadership gift officer, center, with Holyoke Junior College alumni Barbara (Sullivan) Meckel '54, left, and Angela (Cataldo) Wright '54

2. Holyoke Junior College cheerleaders, 1958

3. George Frost, director and first president of Holyoke Junior College

4. HCC student-trustee Barney Garcia '24 speaks to alumni at the first-ever Holyoke Junior College reunion.

5. Maurice Ferriter '52

6. The former Holyoke Junior College building on Sargeant Street

Holyoke Junior College alumni take a walk down memory lane

By **CHRIS YURKO**

A former president of HCC once made the mistake of referring to Angela Wright as a graduate of “Holyoke Community College.”

It’s true that Wright — originally Angela Cataldo — is listed in the HCC alumni database as a member of the class of 1954. But at that time, the school was still known as Holyoke Junior College, which Wright was quick to point out.

“It was different back then,” Wright said recently. “If you look in the yearbook, you can see we’re practically in every picture. We were such a small group. Whatever there was to do, we did it — together. It was special. We were all in the same boat. We didn’t have any money. We were all working. We all had that bond because we saw each other in all our classes.”

For Wright and many other Holyoke Junior College graduates, the distinction is a matter of personal pride, their memories worth preserving. That pride was on display — and many memories shared — on June 5, as HCC hosted the first-ever Holyoke Junior College reunion at the HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute.

“We didn’t know how lucky we were back then,” Wright said of her time at HJC. “But, to this day, if somebody says anything about where we went to school, if they say, ‘Holyoke Community College,’ we say, ‘No, it was Holyoke Junior College.’”

Holyoke Junior College wasn’t the first incarnation of HCC. It was founded in 1946 as Holyoke Graduate School. The following year, after

the state passed legislation authorizing junior colleges, the name was changed. It remained Holyoke Junior College until 1964 when the school joined the newly created Massachusetts community college system.

In those early years, the college shared space with Holyoke High School on Sargeant Street, holding classes in the late afternoons and

The Holyoke Junior College years encompass all the graduating classes from 1948 (the first) to 1964 (the last).

evenings. Many students worked in the morning, some at their family-owned businesses. For the most part, they walked to school. The student body largely comprised teenagers who had just graduated from high school and slightly older young men returning from military service.

The school was led by the legendary George Frost, the first president, who shepherded the college through all its iterations, as well as recovery from the 1968 fire that burned down the school and the college’s 1974 relocation to a new campus on Homestead Avenue.

Continued on next page



JUNIOR PRIDE

The Holyoke Junior College years encompass all the graduating classes from 1948 (the first) to 1964 (the last). As far as anyone knows, Maurice Ferriter '52 is HJC's oldest living graduate, and, by extension, the oldest living Holyoke Community College alum.

"I think that's right, but I can't get anyone to vouch for it," he said at the reunion.

Like many HJC students, Ferriter grew up in Holyoke and attended one of several parochial high schools in the city.

"When I was graduating, George Frost came down to Saint Jerome's recruiting," Ferriter recalled. "He said, 'Where are you going to school? If you want to go to UMass it's \$50 a semester. If you come up to Holyoke Junior College, you can work, go to school, and it's only \$25 a semester.' That was a good enough for me."

Ferriter is not the only alum who credits Frost as a motivating force.

"George Frost happened to be a neighbor of mine," said Carl Eger '56. "As much as my family had a business and I was part of that from a young age, Holyoke Junior College gave me my start in life. It gave me the foundation to be able to succeed."

"My mother and father were good friends of the Frost family," said Frances Kane '56. "I was an only child and I don't think my parents were interested in seeing me leave the house. They said, why don't you try junior college? At the time it sounded good, and it's been a lifesaver."

To a person, HJC alumni hold George Frost in the highest regard, describing him as a father figure and mentor.

"Ronnie (Veronica), George Frost's daughter, was in my class," said Peg (Laframboise) Wendlandt '58, "so we got to know George pretty well. We were always welcome in his home (on Claremont Avenue). We were treated like family. He was quite a guy."

"A towering guy," said Patrick Bresnahan '57. "My father was a milkman. We had a very small dairy. When I got out of the Marines, that's what I felt I had to do, but with my father's encouragement and George Frost's acceptance, I went to Holyoke Junior College, and it has meant so much to me."

Soon after graduating from HJC, Bresnahan, now retired, founded the Bresnahan Insurance Agency, which still operates offices in Holyoke and Amherst.

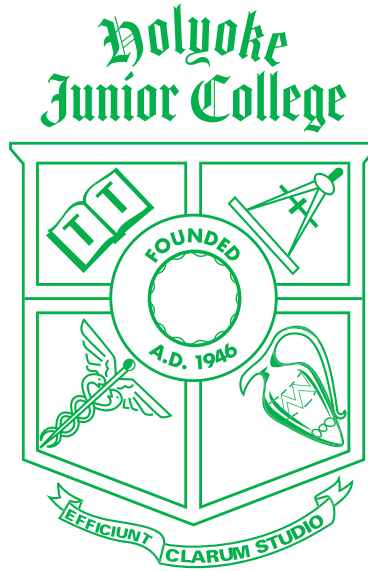
"If it wasn't for junior college, I would probably be a milkman, if there still were such things," he said. "I owe my debt of gratitude to George Frost, Ellen Lynch (Frost's longtime secretary), and the faculty."

For a long time, Frost was the only college administrator and performed just about every college function himself: admissions counselor, bursar, academic adviser, transfer coordinator, and, when

needed, custodian (not above climbing a ladder to change light bulbs in the hallway) and chauffeur (driving students to four-year colleges for admissions interviews).

"He was the go-to guy, no matter what kind of problem you had," said Wright. "A class problem, scheduling problem, teacher problem. It's not like there was a cadre of people specializing in everything. We only had George. He was an incredible mentor. He adopted you and really made you feel like you were one of his children."

"He wanted everyone to succeed, whether you were just out of high school or just out of the army," said Barbara (Sullivan)



Meckel '54. "You got that feeling he really, really wanted you to succeed."

Frost did everything he could to make sure HJC offered the highest quality instruction. Although Holyoke Junior College didn't have a full-time faculty, Frost recruited the best professors from nearby four-year colleges and universities to teach part time.

"They were all heads of their departments, doctors all," said Bresnahan. "For English, I had a professor from Mount Holyoke College. For speech, I had a professor from Amherst College. Teaching me French was Mademoiselle Bourgoin from Smith College. I had Professor Sollenberger for sociology. He was also from Smith."

Professors from the University of Massachusetts, Westfield State, Springfield College, and American International College were also on the teaching roster.

"It was a wonderful faculty," said Ferriter, who went on to UMass and Western New England School of Law before opening his own law firm. "Really, an outstanding faculty."

You knew coming to Holyoke Junior College you were going to get an education second to none. If I had had an offer to go to Harvard, I wouldn't have gone, because this place had much better education and much more opportunity."

Those faculty members eased the pathways for students looking to continue their education at four-years schools.

"I think they helped us get in," said Wendlandt, who transferred to UMass, graduating in 1960 with her bachelor's degree in math.

"I got a job right away at MassMutual," she said,

Continued on page 22

7. A 1968 fire burns down the main college building on Sargeant Street.
8. The Holyoke Junior College class of 1954
9. Patrick Bresnahan '57
10. President George Timmons with the Holyoke Junior College reunion committee
11. Holyoke Junior College staff and faculty, 1954 yearbook photo
12. Future HCC President David Bartley '54, front row, far left, with his Holyoke Junior College classmates
13. President George Frost, from the 1954 college yearbook
14. Peg (Laframboise) Wendlandt '58 holds her college yearbook.



9



11



10



14



13




12

A photograph of George Timmons, the fifth president of Holyoke Community College, speaking at a podium during his inauguration. He is wearing a blue and black academic regalia with gold stripes on the sleeves. He is pointing his right hand towards the audience. The background is a blurred green wall.

TRULY MOMENTOUS
HCC CELEBRATES THE INAUGURATION OF PRESIDENT GEORGE TIMMONS

Photos by CHRIS EVANS
and CHRIS YURKO

On April 19, 2024, Holyoke Community College inaugurated George Timmons as its fifth president. During the ceremony, people from nearly every stage of President Timmons' life and career in higher education stepped forward to honor him and attest to the qualities that make him "the right person for this job," said Patrick Tutwiler, Massachusetts secretary of education. Meanwhile, hundreds more — relatives, college friends, former and current colleagues among them — filled the Leslie Phillips Theater to celebrate his official installation as president and ascendance as the first African American man in that position, a historic event Vanessa Smith, acting chair of the Board of Trustees, called "Truly momentous."

Accompanying photos from the event are quotes from President Timmons' Inauguration speech, the full text of which can be found on the HCC website: hcc.edu/inauguration-timmons 

“ The tremendous responsibility of this role — of leading this institution — is not lost on me. I believe the answer to how I got here is the same collection of qualities that have led to the success of thousands of Holyoke Community College students over our 78-year history: Mindset. Hard work. And people believing in you almost more than you believe in yourself. ”



“ From the moment I was first introduced to Holyoke Community College, I knew this was the place for me. I was immediately drawn to words that seemed to jump off the page, calling me to explore the possibility of leading this extraordinary institution: Educate. Inspire. Connect. A mission so simple, so direct, and yet so powerful that there can be no mistaking what we are about. ”



“ Holyoke Community College is a place where lives are transformed. We are a community that welcomes any individual seeking to find their path. And not only are you welcome here, you belong here. ”

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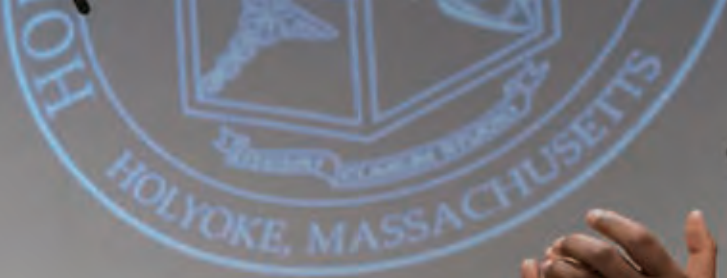
THE INAUGURATION
President
George Timmons

“ Look in the mirror and believe that you are capable of greatness. It begins with you. ... You have the ability to manifest your success by beginning to see it for yourself. ”



“ No one can determine how hard you work toward your goals. Get involved, put yourself in situations that challenge and surprise you, and let people get to know you. Develop the discipline to remain focused on what matters most — and go after it with everything you’ve got. ”

“ Our job is to create the conditions under which students will be inspired to succeed. We must enlighten and empower them to reach their goals. We do this by trusting one another to do our best work, by celebrating the diversity of perspectives that make us great, and by simply being good human beings. ”



“ Among the things that inspire me about Holyoke Community College is our commitment to living our values of innovation, collaboration, kindness, inclusion, and trust. Each word suggests the need for others, for unity and togetherness. None can be accomplished alone. ”

“ We are not just providing an education to the students enrolled in our courses. We are enabling students to set an example for their families, to earn a livable wage, to address challenges within their community, to chart a completely new path filled with potential for themselves and their children. We are elevating society. ”



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

JUNIOR PRIDE

Junior College. Holyoke Junior College accepted me, treated me well, and taught me well. I've never regretted going there. Never."

On page 10 of the 1954 edition of "The Latchkey," the Holyoke Junior College yearbook, you will see a graduation photo of Angela Cataldo, now Angela Wright. In the description of her college activities, it says she was a member of the yearbook staff, the college newspaper ("The Junior College Chief"), the Dramatic Club, Variety Show co-director, and a member of the committee that organized the annual Brightside Christmas Party.



⤵ Angela (Cataldo) Wright '54

But that is not all she was up to. She also served on planning committees for the Student Alumni Hop and the Spring Dinner Dance.

Many of her classmates — there were a mere 39 in the class of 1954 — have equally impressive college resumes, including future state House Speaker and HCC President David M. Bartley, who was chosen by the faculty as the student in his class "who contributed most to Holyoke Junior College."

"Holyoke Junior College really gave us the opportunity to do everything," said Wright. "It gave us opportunities to do things that you couldn't have done in a bigger college."

Both "The Latchkey" and the "Junior College Chief", in fact, debuted in 1954.

"We invented a lot of those things," said Wright, "whether it was speech club or student council — we had a prom — because there wasn't much going on at the school, club wise or fun wise or sport wise. We felt there should be more."

Classes let out at 8:30 or 9 p.m., but students stayed late for extracurricular activities.

"I think the unity is one thing that made Holyoke Junior College so special," said Meckel, "everybody working together on committees, any activity that was going on. We all got together and tried to cooperate. It was so unique, and it was so small. It was just the perfect formula."

Those good feelings have kept many HJC alumni in close contact with the school as it evolved, endowing scholarships through the HCC Foundation and serving on college boards.

"I've been around the campus for many years," said Kane, who served on both the HCC Board of Trustees and the board of the HCC Foundation. "My son went to Holyoke Community College. My daughter-in-law went to Holyoke Community College. Both have done well in life. Their children, my grandchildren, went to Holyoke Community College. One is now in law school, and the other in pharmacy school. So, Holyoke Community College has been great to me through my whole life. That I'll never forget."

About two dozen Holyoke Junior College alumni and their spouses attended the June reunion. During an open mic portion of the evening, President George Timmons asked alumni to answer the question: What made Holyoke Junior College so special?

"Our classmates. George Frost. Ellen Lynch."

"We were a family."

"It was a small group of people, close knit."

"At a point in time, it served a purpose for many who otherwise wouldn't have achieved advanced education," said Eger, whose 45-year career included senior administrative positions in federal and state departments of commerce and transportation.

"I found Mr. Right here," said Angela Wright, referring to her late husband Joseph Wright '54, who died in 2022.

Among the reunion speakers was one of HCC's youngest graduates, 2023-2024 student-trustee Barney Garcia '24, who talked about how much Holyoke Community College has changed his life. In preparing his speech, he noted he had studied some of the history of Holyoke Junior College. And that evening, before and after his speech, he mingled among his elders.

"If by some chance in the future HCC becomes a four-year school and becomes Holyoke State College or Holyoke State University, I'll still refer to myself as an HCC alum," Garcia said. "I understand their pride. They should be proud." 📍



⤵ Student-trustee Barney Garcia '24, right, with HCC Business Professor Michelle Cabral, at the June 5 reunion

DRAWN TO GIVE

Why Holyoke entrepreneur Gary Rome is passionate about HCC

By DOUG SCANLON

As owner of Gary Rome Hyundai, one of Rome's favorite community events is the annual Holyoke High School Car Giveaway, in which the dealership donates a car to one graduating high school senior. It's always a fun and rewarding experience to see the jubilant expression on the young recipient's face, but it is also Rome's way of giving back to the community that has supported his business for so many years.

Of all the winners through the years there is one Rome will never forget. The young woman was grateful for the car and planned to use it to commute to the HCC campus to continue her education. But she was worried she could not afford to pay the tax and fees on the new car.

Her mother was not able to help, as she was living on social assistance and recovering from cancer treatment. Despite both parents' best efforts, the family's financial circumstances made it difficult to cover the unexpected expense of their daughter's new prize.

While Rome was able to find a solution, the eye-opening conversation illuminated the hurdles many local youths encounter while pursuing their educational dreams.

"We really have no idea what's going on in other people's lives," Rome said.

That moment reminded Rome why he first joined the Holyoke Community College Foundation Board of Directors and what has inspired him to help the college collectively raise more than \$700,000 through the college's annual giving day, "Together HCC: Drive to Change Lives."

For four consecutive years, Rome has partnered with the college to support the Together HCC campaign, which raises money for scholarships and programs that support



♠ Gary Rome

students facing sudden financial emergencies as well as those experiencing housing and food insecurity.

"I wanted to find other ways to give back and to let people know about HCC," he said. "It is a crown jewel."

With deep roots in the local community, Rome's commitment to supporting the city of Holyoke is ingrained in his family's history. His ties to the region date back more than a century. His great-grandfather Louis Ricklas moved to Holyoke in 1890, opening a shoe store on Lyman Street and a grocery store on High Street.

Rome's grandparents, Dorothy and Samuel Rome, opened a haberdashery on High Street in 1926. His father, Jerry Rome, started Bay State Motors on Maple Street in 1958, which became Jerry Rome Motor Company and later Jerry Rome Nissan.

In 1997, Gary started Gary Rome Hyundai on Main Street in Holyoke, renting the building from his father before eventually purchasing the business and continuing the tradition of

operating in Holyoke (in addition to opening a second dealership, Gary Rome Kia, in Enfield, Conn.).

"Our family has been in Holyoke for over 130 years so it's important to me that we continue the tradition of being active and supporting our community," he said.

Active might be an understatement. Since helping HCC launch the first "Together HCC: Drive to Change Lives" campaign in 2021, Rome has been a catalyst for the campaign's success. Each year he works with HCC staff to develop a campaign strategy, arranges and funds promotional videos, schedules interviews with area media outlets, sets a major challenge gift,

and makes personal solicitations on behalf of the college.

"Gary brings so much energy to our giving day," said Julie Phillips, HCC director of development. "He truly believes in education as a vehicle for social mobility."

Rome's philanthropic efforts were recognized on the national stage when he was named the 2023 TIME Dealer of the Year after being nominated as the Massachusetts Dealer of the Year, both in recognition for his community service and accomplishments in the auto industry.

Rome continues to sing the praises of HCC to everyone he meets. He has hired many HCC graduates and encourages his employees without a degree to enroll at the college just up the hill from his Whiting Farms Road business.

"I want to see HCC grow and develop and have a very rich and vibrant future, and I will do whatever I can to be a part of that," he said. 🍀



MAJOR

MICRO

JUST BECAUSE IT'S CALLED "MICRO-PHILANTHROPY" DOESN'T MEAN THE IMPACT ISN'T MAJOR

By DOUG SCANLON

Last fall, the HCC division of Institutional Advancement launched its first micro-philanthropy campaign, raising \$23,437 to fund nine low-cost, but much-needed, program-specific projects, including 20 new smart pens that students can borrow from the Office for Students with Disabilities and Deaf Services, otherwise known as OSDDS. The pens not only record audio but create annotated notes that can be uploaded to a computer, cell phone or tablet.

The micro-philanthropy campaign also paid for equipment and furnishings for the Western Mass CORE lounge, an interactive sensory wall for the Itsy Bitsy Child Watch Center, charging stations for the HCC Library, a canine simulator for the Veterinary Technician program, field data collection equipment for the Biology department, soundproofing for the college radio station podcast room, and amplifiers and stage monitors for the Music department, while also funding five new student scholarships for Latinx students.

The campaign was the brainchild of Julie Phil-

lips, director of development, who wondered if HCC could create a truly inclusive fundraising project, something that would make charitable giving accessible to people of all income levels.

That notion led to the college's first-ever micro-philanthropy campaign, "Your Gift. Your Choice." — nine unique giving opportunities to which donors could make small, manageable gifts that would collectively generate a significant impact. The cost to fully fund each project ranged from \$1,040 (for seven mobile

charging stations for the HCC Library) to \$5,400 (for the OSDDS smart pens).

"Past fundraising has been for big items," said Phillips. "But we were aware of other smaller, but still important needs. Creating the micro-philanthropy project was a way to show our supporters that there are many opportunities for donations of all sizes to remove barriers for our students."

The campaign concluded at the end of 2023, fully funding all nine projects. In total, 172 donors contributed, nearly half alumni, a third members of the faculty and staff, with the remainder parents and friends of HCC. Individual gifts ranged from \$10 to \$3,000. Each donor could direct where they wanted their dollars to go.

"It was a unique program," said Phillips. "People answered the call to give."

One of the beneficiaries of the campaign was Damanir Carrasquillo of Springfield, a student

"Creating the micro-philanthropy project was a way to show our supporters that there are many opportunities for donations of all sizes to remove barriers for our students."

⌘ (L-R) Music students Ania Jantas, Rochelle O'Connor, Amy Scott '23, and Arlo Gannon celebrate the arrival of new stage monitors.



<< OSDDS Learning Specialist Denise Roy '94 tries out a new smart pen.



<< HCC Vet Tech student Meaghan King of South Hadley holds Pinta, a veterinary technician training simulator, while program coordinator Erin Jackson demonstrates how to perform an injection.

in the Veterinary Technician program. Carrasquillo works part time at a small animal clinic that frequently requires her to take blood samples — a procedure she wants to perfect. But, in her HCC classes, practicing on live animals isn't always an option.

But now, thanks to the donor-funded purchase of "Pinta," a simulated male black Labrador retriever with movable limbs and named after a donor's cat, Carrasquillo can practice the elusive technique.

"I was confident doing everything but drawing blood from the jugular vein," she said. "So having a model where you can actually practice drawing from those veins helps so much."

Vet Tech program coordinator Erin Jackson said Pinta is a welcome addition to the lab.

"We're excited to have him," Jackson said one day while practicing injections on Pinta,

assisted by student Meaghan King. "He'll serve his purpose."

Meanwhile, Jake Palmer, a music student studying guitar, said the new stage monitors and amplifiers have helped bring together an already tight-knit group of classmates.

"Before, we only had a couple of amps, so it was hard when multiple people wanted to practice at the same time," he said. "But with access to the new equipment we can all play together as we further our knowledge and pursue our passions."

The library has seen a change since they have been able to purchase new mobile charging units.

"The students like having an option for charging their devices without having to wait for a table that has access to a wall plug," said Liam Brackman, library assistant. "It's great that we have a plan B for when someone has forgotten their computer charger and needs to recharge for their next class."

Overall, Phillips said the campaign re-engaged past donors and attracted new ones, and its success was evident in the variety of projects funded and the broad participation.

"This campaign was in line with our mission and our values," Phillips said. "It allowed community members to give to something that resonated with them. And the community responded beautifully." 🍀

<< Music students Tyler Cote, left, and Jake Palmer hold two guitar amps purchased with micro-philanthropy funds.

Your Gift. Your Choice.

HCC's first micro-philanthropy campaign raised \$23,437 from 191 donors. Here's how that money was spent:

\$1,044 for seven mobile charging stations for the HCC Library;

\$1,128 to furnish a study lounge for Western Mass CORE, an HCC support program for students impacted by the criminal justice system;

\$1,160 for two guitar amps and a stage monitor for the HCC Music department;

\$2,463 to outfit an interactive sensory wall for the Itsy Bitsy Child Watch Center;

\$2,635 for soundproofing material for the WCC 103.5 FM radio station's podcast room;

\$2,749 for a canine veterinary training simulator for the Veterinary Technician program;

\$2,855 for five PODEMOS Scholarships, which provide financial support to first-time, degree-seeking Latinx students;

\$4,003 for 10 Vernier LabQuest 3 data collection tablets for the Biology department

\$5,400 for 20 new Echo 2 Smartpens for the Office for Students with Disabilities and Deaf Services. 🍀



HCC Giving

A Space for All



✧ Tiffany Cavanaugh '19 in HCC's Sensory Space

In an HCC Commencement address to her classmates, **Tiffany Cavanaugh '19** explained how serving as president of the Students on the Autism Spectrum Club had taught her to be an advocate for herself and others. "I learned how to use my voice, and show others that their voices are just as important," she said. Not long after graduating, she was hired as a peer inclusion consultant for the Office for Students with Disabilities and Deaf Services, where she continues to use her voice for the benefit of HCC students. In this role, she pushed for the creation of a sensory friendly space where students can "relax and recover" from the often-overstimulating environments a college campus presents. "I am neurodivergent," said Cavanaugh. "I am openly autistic and have an anxiety disorder as well. Growing up, there weren't a lot of inclusive, sensory spaces that I could go to. I thought it would be beneficial, not only for our neurodivergent and disabled students, but for all students." The multiroom Sensory Space on the first floor of Frost has adjustable lighting, bubblers, white noise machines, weighted blankets, a variety of seating options, earplugs, noise cancelling headphones, fidgets, coloring sheets, crafts, board games, free snacks, and more. "Students come for a variety of reasons," said Cavanaugh, whose office is inside. "Some students like to study. Some come for the social aspect. We've even had some staff come in. It's for anyone."

Hearing the Future

Most people are used to seeing Music Professor **Bob Ferrier '77** with a guitar in his hand. Not so much with a crown on his head. But, during a spring celebration of his 40th year teaching jazz at HCC, he played along with the joke and reluctantly put one on at the behest of the students and colleagues who came to pay tribute to the man who literally brought jazz instruction to the college in the 1980s. "When you think of all the people who have studied with him and been influenced by him, and had a love of music engendered by him, it's really something, isn't it?" Music Department Chair Elissa Brill Pashkin said before introducing Ferrier and the jazz guitar ensemble during the spring ensemble concert. "Even just the number of people who have had the chance to hear him play and experience that joy." Ferrier, who studied music himself at HCC in the mid-70s, has been playing guitar since he was about 10 years old and started teaching at a Springfield music store as a teenager. "A lot of people teach because they don't have enough gigs," he said. "Some cats, they settle for teaching, but I always loved it. I knew at 16½. I knew that this was deep, this teaching thing, and it never wore off. It's just as satisfying as playing to me." When I teach, he said, "I'm hearing the future. I have this thing for supporting and nurturing along the future of guitar playing. And I love it. I never got sick of it." Music to our ears.



✧ Bob Ferrier '77, with HCC music student Amy Scott '23, wears a crown marking his 40th year teaching music at HCC.

ON THE (COLD) CASE

Although HCC alum and Criminal Justice Professor **Lou Barry '73** makes no boasts about his musical talent — “none whatsoever” — he did make it into the Dec. 21, 2023, issue of *Rolling Stone* magazine. Barry, an Agawam native and retired Granby police chief, was interviewed by *Rolling Stone* investigative journalist Caitlyn Flynn for the story, “Her Daughter Disappeared. That’s When the True-Crime Nightmare Began.” Barry, a cold case investigator and owner of Harris Mountain Investigations LLC, had looked into the disappearance of 21-year-old Sofia Mckenna at the request of her mother, four years after various agencies had failed to solve the mystery. (In 2018, Mckenna and a friend set off in a small rowboat off the Connecticut coast; neither made it back. The friend’s body was recovered, but hers was never found, fueling internet speculation that she might have been abducted or the victim of a violent crime.) Spoiler Alert: Barry ultimately concluded that Mckenna probably drowned, as had her friend, her body carried away by currents. “Due to the influence of some on social media and a few exploitive podcasters, the case was under constant bombardment of different theories, none of which had any basis in anything except baseless speculation,” Barry said. “Once everything was clarified for her (Mckenna’s mother), she was able to accept the reality of the situation.”

» Alum and cold case investigator Lou Barry teaches a criminology class at HCC.



Soul Exhaustion (and Care)



✧ Sarah Gaer, after her fall 2023 presentation at HCC

The photos **Sarah Gaer '98** displays at the beginning of her presentations all show the same unhappy little girl, chin down, never smiling. Gaer understands this child’s sorrow and pain, because it’s her, born the daughter of a brilliant but violent and dangerous man who wound up in prison by the time she was 5. It wasn’t until years later, after graduating from HCC and earning a master’s degree in clinical mental health counseling from Antioch New England University that she learned to describe the long-term effects of that trauma as “soul exhaustion.” Now, as a suicide preventionist, trauma responder, and author, Gaer travels the world talking about soul exhaustion as well as its remedy, “soul care.” “Soul Exhaustion takes a deeper exploration of life circumstances such as poverty, adverse childhood experiences, racism, trauma and loss, and burnout and the holistic impact it has on who we are,” she has written. Those experiences may be familiar to many community college students, she said last fall as the first guest in the HCC Alumni Association’s new Alumni Speaker Series. “I want to acknowledge that education is soul care,” she said during her talk. “Education is the opportunity for something better. Education is the opportunity to figure out the essence of who you are. Education allows you to make meaning out of the experiences you’ve had. If it wasn’t for Holyoke Community College, and later Antioch, I would never have been able to get out and fight for the things I fight for now.”

A Match Made at HCC

They met as students, where they couldn't help but get acquainted given their mutual interests and shared HCC activities — theater, Student Senate, Green Key Honor Society. He was a math major who went on to get his bachelor's degree from UMass; she studied liberal arts and earned her bachelor's from Hampshire College. On Oct. 1, 2023, **Lucien Dalton '16** and **Hannah Trobaugh '16** got married. Lucien now works at HCC as a tutor in the Math Center and a supplemental math instructor, while pursuing his master's degree. Hannah, daughter of HCC English professor Elizabeth Trobaugh, is at the University of Connecticut, working on her MFA in technical direction with a focus of engineering and puppetry. The couple officially started dating in the fall of 2016. "We bought a two-family house in South Hadley in March 2023," Lucien reports. Many HCC-affiliated folks attended the nuptials, which were held at the Water's Edge Resort and Spa in Westbrook, Conn., including, pictured at right: the mother-of-the-bride (Professor Trobaugh); Kim Hicks, dean of Arts and Humanities; former students and alumni **Aleeza Kropf**, HCC simulation technician **Andrew McMahon '16**, sister-of-the-bride **Tess Trobaugh**, brother-of-the-bride **Gabe Trobaugh**, **Nina Devine**, **Lia Ashburn '22**, and **Martha Whitting '16** (formerly Martha King-Devine). That's the bride in the yellow dress, third from the left, and the groom wearing the burgundy bow tie, far right.



PHOTO BY JEFFERSON APUZZO

GIVING VOICE TO UNTOLD STORIES

The parents of **Yanna Ok '13** were part of the wave of Cambodian refugees who fled the Khmer Rouge genocide in the late 1970s and resettled in Amherst, Mass. With the help

of local churches, schools, and the health department, the small college town rallied together to make the newcomers feel at home, providing resources and support. However,

their harrowing stories of survival largely went untold publicly. As director of programming and digital content for Amherst Media, Ok took it upon herself to change that by spearheading a 2024 exhibit at the Amherst Historical Society. After securing grants, she interviewed elders and collected artifacts like traditional garments and her father's intricate paintings. The result was "Cambodians in Amherst: A History of the Khmer Community," an interactive multimedia experience that allows visitors to grasp the hardships and resilience of the Cambodian people. For Ok, who was recently promoted to interim executive director, the project held deeper meaning. While a student at HCC, she joined the Asian American Student Association, which helped her reconnect with her roots. "It made me fall in love with my culture even more," she said. 



« Sokhen Mao, Joan Snowdon, Yanna Ok, Mick O'Connor, and Rebecca Fricke, all members of the exhibit committee, stand in front of the Amherst Historical Museum.

Class Notes

1967

Elizabeth (LaFreniere) Willard (arts and science) enjoyed attending the alumni welcome reception for President George Timmons last fall at the HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute, describing the event as “a big part of getting back to where I started at HCC so long ago.” She described the new president as “a George Frost kind of guy,” “down to earth about making things better!” Willard shared: “It’s good to feel part of something as important as intergenerational education; I think HCC has it covered... very well!”

1968

Walter Mozgala (liberal arts) retired in 2003 after a rewarding career teaching at HCC for more than 30 years. After graduating, Mozgala received bachelor’s and master’s degrees in botany from University of Massachusetts Amherst. He returned to HCC and taught several courses in the Biology department. One of several highlights was twice taking a winter class to Caribbean field stations, where students learned about coral reef organisms and ecology, both in the laboratory and in the sea.

1972

Roger Croteau (arts and science) has spent the last 50 years working as an educator in several high schools in Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, Maryland, and Texas; as well as being a homeless advocate in New York, Texas, Maryland, and Washington, D.C. He is currently a chaplain in a correctional facility in San Antonio.

1974

Janis Santos (liberal studies) is celebrating 50 years since graduating from HCC. She enrolled in the evening division in 1969 as an adult – with a family – to fulfill her dream of getting a college degree. Graduation was one of the proudest moments of her life, and her entire family was there to cheer her on. “My degree opened the door for me to have a 48-year career in Head Start that I loved so much,” she wrote. “Thank you, HCC. You are my HERO!”

1976

Donna (LaChapelle) O’Connor (arts and sciences) has retired from her career as a financial analyst.

Tobias Roche, who has worked in law enforcement and criminal justice for almost 50 years, is the subject of a new book, *Behind Blue Eyes*. Written by award-winning author and former NYPD Detective Pete Thron, the story covers Roche’s career and investigative casework from 1981-2021. The book debuted on Amazon as number one in the law enforcement category. Two of its chapters have resulted in a documentary film being made by Citrus Productions called *A Lost Life Found*, detailing the life of a notorious female narcotics smuggler.

1980

Andrea (Haskell) Locke (computer information systems) retired after a 38-year career with Compu-Com. She lives in Georgia with her husband, David.

1983

Denise (Karcz) Devine (computer information systems) of Hadley, Mass., is co-owner of Devine Overhead Doors. She volunteers for many nonprofits, including Hadley Mothers’ Club, National Fragile X Foundation, Most Holy Redeemer Church, and Citizens Advisory Council for the Department of Developmental Services.

1986

Lisa Besse (arts and science) has completed her bachelor’s degree in psychology from Westfield State University, 38 years after graduating from HCC. During her final semester at HCC, Besse lost her home to a fire. Faculty members were able to grant her an extension to complete her exams, and staff provided her with new blankets, clothes, as well as vouchers for beds. “HCC helped me build a strong foundation in my life journey and helped me raise my self-esteem by helping me believe in myself and that anything is possible,” she writes.



MICHAEL ANDERSON

1989

Michael Anderson (hospitality management) and **Karen Anderson '90** (business management) are celebrating the 25th anniversary of their restaurant, Tucker's, in Southwick.

1991

Margaret Downing (arts and science) received a bachelor's degree from Westfield State University in communications and a master's degree in education from Springfield College. Downing worked at Springfield College for 15 years before coming to HCC in 2012 as the coordinator of career planning and placement. She is now acting associate dean of the division of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities.

1993

Sheila (Long) Dion (liberal arts) received the Chamberlain Scholarship to attend the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) World Conference. This prestigious event brings together fundraising professionals from around the globe to share insights, best practices, and innovative strategies for advancing philanthropy.

1998

Jennifer (Allis) Provost (environmental science) released her first young adult fantasy novel, *Merrowkin*, in March 2024. It is available on Amazon and through other online retailers. She lives in Springfield, Mass.

2001

Richard Alvord (arts and science) works as a compliance consultant for MassMutual, after holding similar positions with both Santander Securities and Eaton Vance. In 2005 he married his wife, Jennifer. They have two daughters, Katelyn and Grace.

2003

Talia Romana, the daughter of **Zachary Masi** (history), was born on Oct. 19, 2023. Masi currently works as an interventional radiologist at Guthrie Clinic, in Newfield, N.Y.

2006

Barbara Paulo (liberal arts) has been the owner and artistic director of Shear Xtreme in Northampton, Mass., since 2003. After her niece lost her hair from radiation treatment for cancer, Paulo was inspired to become an ambassador for Wigs for Kids.

Now she works in a dual role with Wigs for Kids, as she cuts hair of donors and fits kids for their new wigs. Additionally, she has become a certified hair loss practitioner and teaches yoga.

Bobbi Rougeau (early education) opened a group childcare center shortly after graduating from HCC. Since then, she has expanded her business to three locations with about 40 employees caring for up to 114 children (infant through preschool age) daily. She celebrated 18 years in business on August 6, 2024. Rougeau also recently re-entered college in an accelerated online bachelor's degree program at Bay Path University. Further, she is proud to announce that her scholarship, the Alphabet Soup Childcare Center Scholarship, has been endowed through the HCC Foundation. "I am particularly proud of this accomplishment because it was scholarships that allowed me the luxury of obtaining my first degree," she writes.

2012

Michael Theroux (liberal arts) is the new health director for the city of Greenfield, Mass. He previously worked for the town of Agawam for 20 years, playing a crucial role in various city departments, such as building, engineering, and health, as well as serving as Agawam's health director for 12 years.

Camille Theriaque (liberal arts) has been named director of Amherst's Community Responders for Equity, Safety and Service (CRESS) department. This innovative program provides an unarmed alternative to police response. Theriaque is a member of the Holyoke Community College Foundation Board of Directors.

2014

Kristen Rivers (creative writing) is the editor of the *Chicopee Register* and *Wilbraham-Hampden Times*, both part of the Turley Publications newspaper chain. Rivers, a Chicopee resident herself, got her start in journalism at HCC, where she covered campus events as an intern in the Marketing and Communications office. After HCC, she received a bachelor's degree in English language and literature from Smith College. Before landing at Turley in 2023, Rivers, 31, ran her own blog, "The Writer's Soul," reviewed books for Hallmark Publishing and Harpeth Road Press, and worked as a freelance reporter *The Republican* newspaper. "As long as I'm writing, I'm happy," she told *The Connection*. Outside of that, she is an advocate for mental health and suicide preven-



KAREN ANDERSON



THERIAQUE



RIVERS

tion, participating in the Greater Springfield Out of the Darkness Community Walk since 2021 for the Massachusetts Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.

2015

Patricia (Taylor) Rodriguez (business administration) received a bachelor's degree from Southern New Hampshire University and is pursuing a master's degree in professional studies at Penn State University. She married in 2018 and now has two boys, 2 and 3. Rodriguez currently works as the human resources director at the Center for Human Development, a nonprofit based in Springfield, Mass.

Tracy Viola (accounting) is a licensed real estate broker in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Colorado. In addition to helping sellers, buyers, and investors, she runs first-time homeowner classes and networking events for investors and wholesalers.

2018

Louis Burgos (criminal justice 2014; communications, media and theater arts 2018) joined the HCC Marketing and Communications team in January as the multimedia specialist. He has worked in communications since graduating with his bachelor's degree in communications from Westfield State University, beginning as a bilingual retail marketing specialist for the nonprofit Center for Eco Technology. In 2022, he joined the staff of Springfield Technical Community College as digital and social media manager. Burgos is also the lead vocalist for the Springfield-based band LastMinute, which includes his twin brother **Jon Burgos '14** on guitar. The band released its first single, "Out of Time," earlier this year.

2019

Yaritza Barta (liberal arts) has joined the division of Institutional Advancement at HCC as the administrative assistant for scholarships and donor relations. In that role, Barta works in the Scholarship Resource Center, administering the scholarship process and assisting with donor relations programming and events. She has worked at HCC since 2022, previously in the Human Resources department. She earned her bachelor's degree from Bay Path University in 2023.

2020

Joi-Faith (Torres) Desrochers (liberal arts) married her best friend in 2020. Two years later they welcomed their first child, Pj, in 2024. Desrochers graduated in May from Elms College in Chicopee, Mass., majoring in information technology and security.

2021

Zadia Valenze (liberal arts) is pursuing a master's degree in library and information science at the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign.

2022


Alyssa Czupryna (human services) completed a bachelor's degree in human services with a concentration in gerontology from Southern New Hampshire University.

Emma Pouliot (criminal justice) graduated in May summa cum laude from Southern New Hampshire University with a bachelor's degree in criminal justice. Pouliot was awarded a spot on the Honor Roll and President's List each term. Her next step will be law school.

2023

Jessica Cogoli (information technology management) has been promoted to instructor at Tech Foundry. She previously worked at Tech Foundry as an assistant instructor and technical lead for the IT support training program. Cogoli is now working toward her bachelor's degree at Southern New Hampshire University.

2024

Dan Conway (environmental science) transferred to UMass Amherst to complete a bachelor's degree in building and construction technologies. 



BURGOS



BARTA



CONWAY

In Memoriam

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

Edward C. Bieber '51

James A. Raschilla '73

Mariette C. Leidl '94

Donald A. Lacoste '52

Vincent J. Mattia '78

Timothy G. Perry '01

David Keith '54

Frederick L. Wilson '78

Sandra McCulloch-Schmidt '08

Charles H. Robinson '58

Robert A. Laughlin '81

Harold A. Smith '12

June Beattie '61

Marc A. Fuller '83

Elizabeth A. O'Brien-Means, retired faculty

Vincent L. Remillard '61

Desiree L. Santos '87

Rene P. Thomas, retired faculty

Bruce C. Magliola '62

Patricia A. O'Connell '88

And our longtime friend and supporter:

Phillip R. Jones '63

Jane I. St. Sauveur '88

Eugene M. Sheehan

Ferdinand M. Paluch '63

Stephanie Shimeld '89

Peter F. Lenkowski '66

Diane J. Gallagher '90

Karen Carbonneau '73

Emily A. Mann '93



Send news

*of your wedding, retirement,
promotion, travels, children/
grandchildren, awards,
academic achievements,
military honors, whatever!*

*Send news and photos to
alumni@hcc.edu or to
The Connection,
c/o Alumni Relations,
303 Homestead Ave.,
Holyoke MA 01040.*

.....
Name Now in Use

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Class Year

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Name while attending HCC

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Spouse/Partner Name

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Class Year

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Address

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Telephone (Residence)

.....
(Business)

.....
Email Address

.....
Your News

Top Forty

Shannon Glenn, academic counselor of HCC's Gateway to College program, and HCC alum Payton North '15, executive editor of The Reminder Publications, were selected by *Business West* magazine as 40 Under Forty award winners for 2024.



Shannon Glenn



Payton North



Joe Black

Catalyst for Change

Environmental science major and STEM Scholar **Joe Black** was selected for a Newman Civic Fellowship, a national award that recognizes leadership potential and a commitment to positive change in the community. "My love of nature has always been paramount in my life," said Black, 21, a first-generation college student who lives in Palmer. "I want to use the skills and resources that schooling gives me to advocate for better environmental protections."

Emerging Leader

Julissa Colón '13, director of El Centro, was featured on MassLive last fall as part of a series of profiles about emerging Hispanic leaders. The Sept. 17, 2023, story recounts how Colón, raised a proud Puerto Rican by her mother in Springfield's North End, found her passion in human service, eventually landing at HCC.



Julissa Colón

Excellence Award



Tom Stewart

Tom Stewart, HCC director of athletics, received the 2024 George E. Killian Award of Excellence, the highest award bestowed each year by the National Junior College Athletic Association, the largest athletic association for two-year colleges in the United States. Stewart has worked in college athletics for more than 35 years, the past 26 at HCC.

Stewart has worked in college athletics for more than 35 years, the past 26 at HCC.

Equity Award Winner

Anthropology Professor **Vanessa Martínez** received the inaugural Dr. Christina Royal Equity and Action Award May 15 during the annual faculty and staff awards ceremony. The award was created by the Board of Trustees in honor of HCC's fourth president. Martínez is chair of Community Based Learning.



Vanessa Martínez

STEM Fellow

Laurel Carpenter '12, associate professor of environmental science, was awarded a national fellowship from the Community College Presidents Initiative in STEM. The fellowship is intended for community college faculty and administrators who are pursuing graduate degrees and conducting research related to STEM education and workforce development. Carpenter is a wildlife biologist, chair of the Environmental Studies Department, co-coordinator of the HCC STEM Scholars program, and a doctoral student at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.



Laurel Carpenter

Still the Best

HCC received the top spot as Best Two-Year College for 2024 in the *Daily Hampshire Gazette's* annual Readers Choice Awards. This was the 11th year in a row HCC has won the award. Also, HCC was voted Best College or University in the Republican/MassLive 2025 Reader Raves poll.



THE CONNECTION

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#TogetherHCC