
HCC snags biggest-ever private grant

Holyoke Community College has received by far the largest donation in its 74-year history, \$7.5 million, which may be the largest donation ever recorded by a community college in Massachusetts.

The gift comes from a familiar source, the Elaine Nicpon Marieb Foundation, established by the late Elaine Marieb, a longtime HCC faculty member, alumna, best-selling textbook author and Northampton native. It was announced by HCC President Christina Royal on Feb. 28, during a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the renovated Campus Center.

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The \$7.5 million includes \$5 million outright and a \$2.5 million matching gift that will go toward future renovations of HCC's main science facility, the Marieb Building, as part of a multiphase plan to expand the recently opened Center for Life Sciences to encompass the entire, three-story structure.

"This gift is a testimony to the importance of community colleges in the lives of their students," said Carlos Santiago, commissioner of the state Department of Higher Education. "Under President Royal's leadership, HCC is to be congratulated for raising the bar for community college philanthropy that will benefit all of our public institutions."

Marieb died in December 2018. During her lifetime, she was the college's biggest benefactor, donating more than \$1.5 million to HCC in large and small amounts, including a \$1 million gift in 2014 to support construction of HCC's Center for Health Education & Simulation and the Center for Life Sciences.

Until then, HCC had received only one other gift of that magnitude, a \$1 million donation from alumnus and Yankee Candle Company founder Michael Kittredge in 2003 to establish the Kittredge Center for Business and Workforce Development.

Last year, the Marieb Foundation made a \$1 million legacy gift to the college that Marieb had set up as part of her estate plan, money targeted for HCC programs that benefit nontraditional-age students, particularly women.

The Center for Life Sciences opened in 2018 on the first floor of the Marieb Building, featuring state-of-the-art microbiology and biotechnology labs as well as an ISO-certified instructional cleanroom.

"This is thrilling," said Royal. "We are honored and incredibly grateful for the Marieb Foundation's generous and unprecedented gift. This will support HCC's continued investment in high-demand, high-wage fields in STEM and healthcare and help us provide generations of students with the academic space and experience they need and deserve.



Professor Emily Rabinsky, seated, leads a biotechnology lab in the Holyoke Community College Center for Life Sciences, which will benefit from a \$7.5 million donation from the Elaine Nicpon Marieb Foundation. *Submitted photo*

The Marieb Building represents the heart of her life's work, since HCC is where her career began."

According to a database maintained by the Chronicle of Philanthropy, the \$7.5 million gift to HCC is the single largest private donation ever made to a community college in Massachusetts. The largest previous gift was a \$5 million donation to Cape Cod Community College in January 2019.

"Dr. Marieb's belief in HCC was extraordinary," said Amanda Sbriscia, HCC's vice president of institutional advancement and executive director of the college's nonprofit fundraising corporation, the HCC Foundation. "Private and individual philanthropy to our community colleges sends a powerful message about the exceptional quality of education our students receive, because these gifts come most often from the alumni and friends who have experienced those classrooms first hand."

The \$7.5 million Marieb donation follows the two-year, \$43.5 million renovation and expansion of the Campus Center.

"While we are here today to celebrate the grand opening of this new space and what it means for our students today, we know that the higher education landscape requires us to look ahead, so

we're already preparing for tomorrow with our next building project," Royal said at the Feb. 28 event.

A native of Northampton, Marieb started working at HCC in 1969 as a professor of biology after earning a bachelor's degree from Westfield State College, a master's degree from Mount Holyoke College, and a Ph.D. in zoology from the University of Massachusetts.

She started writing textbooks on anatomy and physiology to address complaints from her nursing students that the materials then available were ineffective. To inform her writing, she enrolled in HCC's nursing program, graduating with an associate's degree in 1980. She retired in 1993 to devote herself full-time to writing, becoming the author or co-author of more than 10 best-selling textbooks and laboratory manuals on anatomy and physiology.

Former HCC president David Bartley used to introduce her as "the Stephen King of A&P."

In 2016, Marieb ranked seventh on Time Magazine's list of the "100 Most Read Female Writers in College Classes," just behind Mary Shelley at number 6 and beating out the likes of George Eliot, Alice Walker, Charlotte Bronte and many other famous authors.