
Holyoke Community College named ‘Nonprofit of the Year’

HOLYOKE – Holyoke Community College has been named Nonprofit of the Year by the Greater Chicopee Chamber of Commerce.

HCC was one of four recipients of the chamber’s Shining Star Awards for 2023, which were presented March 3 during a celebration at the Castle of Knights in Chicopee. The Greater Chicopee Chamber of Commerce presents Shining Star Awards each year to an outstanding business, citizen, nonprofit, and volunteer.

President Christina Royal accepted the award on behalf of HCC.

“We are honored to be the recipients of the 2023 Nonprofit of the Year award from the Chicopee Chamber of Commerce,” Royal said. “Chicopee is one of the top communities from which we draw students, and we serve them proudly. We also have great partnerships with Chicopee businesses and organizations, including Sunshine Village, Chicopee

High School, and Elms College, as well as several faculty, staff, and board members who live there. We continue to invest in developing creative pathways for students that address workforce needs in this region.”

Event emcee Michelle Wirth, co-owner of Mercedes-Benz of Springfield and founder of Feel Good Shop Local, said that HCC has come a long way since 1946 when it was founded as the city-sponsored Holyoke Junior College, but that its mission and commitment to community has remained a constant throughout the decades.

“We are proud to celebrate HCC not only as a member of the Chicopee Chamber of Commerce since 1998, but as an important pathway to education for so many Chicopee residents,” Wirth said.

In selecting HCC as Nonprofit of the Year, the chamber nominating committee noted that HCC is the oldest

two-year college in Massachusetts and serves as a critical pathway for education for Chicopee residents: “More than 7,000 students are enrolled in the college’s credit and workforce programming annually, with Chicopee ranking third among its top communities,” Wirth said. “A partnership between Chicopee High School and HCC provides a health science academy to students looking to explore career options. And the HCC Foundation, which manages the largest endowment of any community college in the Commonwealth, awards more than 30 scholarships to students residing in Chicopee each year.”

“HCC’s mission to Educate, Inspire, and Connect is embedded in everything they do,” Wirth said. “As a college of and for the community, HCC exists to create opportunity for learners of all ages, coming from all backgrounds, so that students can create better lives for themselves and

their families ... and ultimately strengthen our region in the process.”

The committee also recognized HCC’s emphasis on addressing needs of students beyond academics, citing the President’s Student Emergency Fund for immediate financial needs, the Itsy Bitsy Child Watch, which provides free on-campus services to student-parents, the Career Closet, which supplies free business attire for students for job interviews, free PVTA bus passes, and Homestead Market, the first campus store at any public college or university in Massachusetts to accept SNAP benefits.

“HCC is passionate about helping students overcome all the barriers that often get in the way of a college education,” said Wirth.

Wirth also noted some other “shining stars” at the chamber event – the students from HCC’s culinary arts program who baked black-and-white cookies for guests.