

SAT.-SUN.

Nov. 4-5, 2017

NEW ENGLAND NEWSPAPER
OF THE YEAR 2017

GAZETTE

GAZETTENET.COM

A 'Royal' start at HCC

Christina Royal officially inaugurated as Holyoke college's 1st woman president, 4th overall

By **DUSTY CHRISTENSEN**
@dustyc123

HOLYOKE — Christina Royal's parents struggled to make it from one paycheck to the next as she was growing up in upstate New York. Nobody in her family had ever graduated from college, so the idea of attending one wasn't foremost on her mind.

"That also meant that there were no mentors or anybody to tell me what college is about," she said.

Despite the lack of a clear and easy path, Royal went on to earn first a bachelor's degree, then a master's and then a doctorate. And on Friday, Royal was surrounded by congratulatory politicians, university presidents, college professors and other dignitaries as she was officially inaugurated as Holyoke Community College's fourth president and the first woman to assume that post.

"If I wanted to create a future that was less burdensome than the one my parents had, I needed to do something differently," Royal said to those gathered to honor and welcome her. "Not knowing the particulars, I made a decision that college was my gateway to a more prosperous life."

She wants to provide that same path to others.

In an interview prior to her inauguration, Royal said that her upbringing is partly what drove her to begin working in community colleges. She started her career in higher education working at her alma mater, Marist College in Poughkeepsie, New York. She loved her job at the private liberal arts school, but felt something was missing. After administrative stints at Cuya-



Holyoke Community College President Christina Royal hugs HCC student speaker Boshan Zheng after delivered his salutation at her Inaugural ceremony in the Leslie Phillips Theater Friday. At right are Holyoke Mayor Alex Morse and state Rep. Aaron Vega, far right, a 1990 alumni of HCC.



Christina Royal pictured this week at Holyoke Community College. Royal is the first female president at the college.

"If I wanted to create a future that was less burdensome than the one my parents had, I needed to do something differently. Not knowing the particulars, I made a decision that college was my gateway to a more prosperous life."

CHRISTINA ROYAL, HCC PRESIDENT

SEE ROYAL A4

GAZETTE STAFF/SARAH CROSBY

Royal inaugurated as president of HCC

FROM A1

hoga Community College in Ohio and Inver Hills Community College in Minnesota, she has now landed in Holyoke.

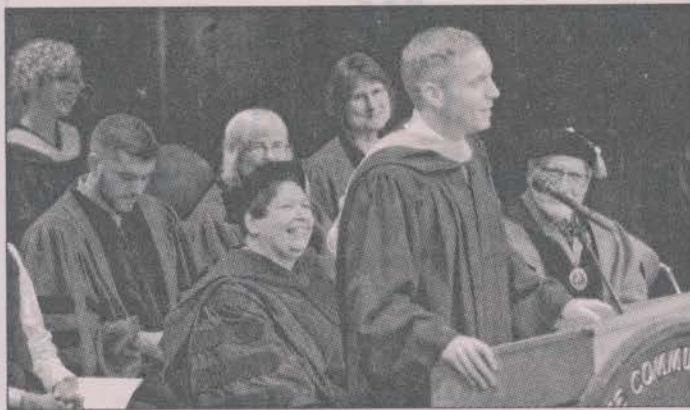
"For me, I really fell in love with the community college mission because we are specifically focused on the community, so what that means is we can't exist in isolation," Royal said.

That mission, she said, is incredibly important at an institution like HCC, which has a racially and economically diverse student body. In fact, that was one of the strengths that led her to apply to the institution in the first place, she said, adding that community focus means recognizing the challenges that students walk in the door facing because of their various backgrounds.

"When my family dropped me off at college, we were thinking that I was set for the first year, only to arrive and find out that I needed another \$400 for books for my first semester. We just didn't have it," she said during her speech. "We didn't realize that we would have to pay separately for textbooks, every semester, or how costly they would be."

Royal said she is proud to work at an institution that's committed to serving students from all backgrounds.

"You'll be in class with a single mother, with an adult student, with someone serving in the military, with someone with



GAZETTE STAFF/KEVIN GUTTING

Holyoke Community College President Christina Royal listens to Holyoke Mayor Alex Morse deliver his salutation at her inaugural ceremony in the college's Leslie Phillips Theater on Friday.

a disability, and of course many other students that come from other places with other cultural experiences," she said with a smile.

HCC has recently been named as a federally designated Hispanic-serving institution, she noted, meaning that at least 25 percent of full-time equivalent undergraduates self-identify as Hispanic.

As someone who grew up in a low-income, biracial family, Royal said she's committed to fostering racial and socioeconomic inclusion at the institution, as well as tackling issues including homelessness, lack of transportation, food insecurity and, of course, affordability.

Boshan Zheng, who serves on the student senate and studies physics at HCC, talked Fri-

day about how the college provided him an outlet during a difficult moment. After feeling trapped working 40 hours per week and taking care of a disabled parent, he said he found a home at HCC.

"When I see HCC, I see the future," he said, welcoming Royal to the school on behalf of the student body.

As the first woman to hold the position of president, Royal said she hopes to be a role model for other women wanting to do the same.

"I feel fortunate, because I do have women come up to me and just thank me for being in this role," she said. When she was coming up in the world of higher education, she said, she didn't have as many female role models in top positions. "Repre-

sentation matters, visibility matters."

Her upbringing gives her a passion to take on many challenges, she said, but those formative years in New York do have one drawback when it comes to living in Massachusetts, where Royal has taken up residence in Northampton.

"My biggest question is what do I do with my New York Yankees hat?" she asked with a big laugh.

When asked if she still dons her team's gear in Massachusetts, home of the rival Red Sox, she couldn't resist the joke: "I'm afraid to!"

Royal is not all that new to the area, however. She was installed as president after the state's Board of Higher Education approved her last November, and has been working on campus since January. She makes an annual salary of \$190,000 in the position, according to state records.

The college has begun some big projects during that time, including breaking ground at the new \$6.2 million, 19,888-square-foot HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute — a partnership with MGM Resorts, which owns and will operate the under-construction MGM Springfield casino. MGM gave \$100,000 to the institute.

Royal said that some 94 percent of HCC students come from within 20 miles of the college, so projects that train stu-

dents for local jobs are vital.

"There is an intense relationship with the college," she said, and the college, she said, subjects with local impact, she added, will be partnering with businesses or providing services like English language instruction.

Before her focus on those goals, however, was an ambitious and successful woman who went through the loss of Tina, a close friend and colleague who died of cancer, gathered at Friday's ceremony.

Referring to the president's last name, McKnight-Tutein said, "she was born for greatness, her name was no fluke."

McKnight-Tutein said men would often refer to her as she rose through the ranks of education. "What I estimated most was her name was no fluke."

As dignitaries, and well-wishers filled the auditorium on Friday for the inauguration ceremony for Royal, surrounded by people, get a selfie with her.

"I thought she was David Bartley, who was HCC president from 2003, said after the ceremony. "She's got a passion for HCC."