

EDUCATION

LOCAL COLLEGES IN THE NEWS

For the Future

Holyoke Community College receives pledge of historic \$10 million-plus gift

HOLYOKE - Holyoke Community College has received a pledge of more than \$10 million, the largest single gift commitment in the college's 77-year history and one of the largest gifts ever to any community college.

The pledged gift is included in the estate plan of HCC alum Margaret (Peg) Wendlandt '58 and her husband, Gary Wendlandt, longtime supporters and frequent donors to the college. The money, estimated to be at least \$10 million, will go toward student scholarships and the college's greatest needs.

"Education has made a great deal of difference in our lives and how we have succeeded over the years," Peg Wendlandt said a few years ago. "Gary and I both received scholarships to assist us in achieving our goals of education and feel fortunate that we can help others do the same."

The Wendlandts' many gifts to the college in their lifetime already total more than \$1 million and include donations to the President's Student Emergency Fund and two endowed scholarships administered by the HCC Foundation: the Peg '58 and Gary Wendlandt Scholarship (for students with financial need) and the Peg '58 and Gary Wendlandt Health Scholarship (for students in nursing or health-related fields).

In each of the past two years alone, the Wendlandts have made matching gift donations of \$100,000 during the HCC Foundation's one-day "Together HCC: Drive to Change Lives" fundraising campaign. This year, the Wendlandts have again pledged to match up to \$100,000 in gifts from new donors and alumni for this year's campaign.

"Peg and Gary are our greatest champions for giving days and regularly offer challenges to inspire others to give," said Amanda Sbriscia, vice



Gary and Peg Wendlandt. Peg Wendlandt is a graduate of Cathedral High School in Springfield as well as Holyoke Junior College (predecessor to HCC), the University of Massachusetts, and Western New England School of Law.

president of Institutional Advancement and executive director of the HCC Foundation. "In this way, they are truly extraordinary donors - thinking about the needs students face today while also creating the conditions for future students to succeed."

President Christina Royal first met Peg Wendlandt at an alumni event at Pizzeria Uno in Springfield early in her tenure at HCC. She remembers Wendlandt chiding her for only mentioning alumni from "HCC" and not those from HJC - Holyoke Junior College - a mistake she never made again.

"I really appreciated that, and I've appreciated the friendship that has developed since then," Royal said. "The Wendlandts have been so supportive of the direction of the college and my vision for this institution, never forgetting that it's all about students."

She noted too that the Wendlandts are not absentee donors but remain intensely interested and engaged in college activities, initiatives, and programs.

"It's humbling to think about them providing the largest gift ever to

a community college in Massachusetts, and I'm deeply grateful," Royal said.

Peg (Laframboise) Wendlandt graduated from Cathedral High School in Springfield before enrolling at HCC when it was still called Holyoke Junior College. After graduating, she went on to the University of Massachusetts and later to the Western New England School of Law. Her career included work as a family law attorney, substitute teacher in Holyoke Public Schools and an actuarial assistant at MassMutual. As the first HCC alumna to earn a law degree, she received a Distinguished Alumni Award from HCC in 2007. In 2014, she received a Distinguished Service Award at Commencement. Gary Wendlandt is a graduate of Washington University and a retired insurance executive. They live in New York City.

"News of the Wendlandt's historic pledge comes at a time of leadership transition at HCC, and so their gift takes on even greater significance," said Robert Gilbert, chair of the HCC Board of Trustees. "On one hand, their commitment celebrates the relation-

ship they have developed with President Royal over the last six and a half years, and on the other, they are demonstrating their commitment to HCC's mission and vision with a gift that will impact future generations."

The Holyoke Community College Foundation, a 501(c)(3), has been a strategic partner of the college ever since it was founded in 1968 as the Friends of Holyoke Community College, in response to a devastating fire that forced the college to rebuild on a new campus. It now manages assets of more than \$20 million, the largest community college foundation endowment in Massachusetts.

Over the years, HCC has been the beneficiary of two \$1 million donations, one from HCC alum and Yankee Candle Company founder Michael Kittredge in 2003 and another from the estate of HCC alum, professor emeritus and textbook author Elaine Marieb, as well as a \$7.5 million donation in 2020 from the Marieb Foundation, which was then the single largest donation ever to a community college in Massachusetts.

The \$10 million-plus gift from the Wendlandts will be among the largest so far to any community college in the United States, rivaling a \$15 million gift from philanthropist MacKenzie Scott to Amarillo College in Texas in 2021 and a \$10 million gift to Arapahoe Community College in Colorado from the Sturm Family Foundation in 2019.

"Community colleges serve roughly 45 percent of all undergraduates in the United States and are deserving of our support," Gilbert said. "We are expanding access to higher education and preparing students for the workforce, and we intend to do that for decades to come. Peg and Gary's estate commitment enables us to advance HCC's mission well beyond any of our lifetimes." ■