

## HCC to host Credit for Life Fair

HOLYOKE - Hundreds of high school seniors will spend the morning at Holyoke Community College (HCC) Thursday, April 4 for the 13th annual Credit for Life Fair, an interactive event designed to help young people develop financial literacy skills and learn the basics of money management.

The fair will run from 8:30 a.m. to about 11:30 a.m. in the gymnasium of HCC's Bartley Center for Athletics & Recreation. During a brief orientation, Gary Rome, owner of Gary Rome Hyundai, will offer remarks about the importance of financial literacy from a business owner's point of view.

This is the 10th year HCC has hosted this event, which is organized by a committee of financial experts from banks and other agencies in the Pioneer Valley, including Holyoke Credit Union, bankESB, Loan Depot, Mount Holyoke College, United Bank, PeoplesBank and Lambert & Pryor Insurance.

Participating schools include Holyoke High School (North and South), Easthampton High School, South Hadley High School, West Springfield High School, Agawam High School, Granby High School, Paulo Freire Social Justice Charter School, Lower Pioneer Valley Educational Cooperative and Mount Tom Academy, an alternative high school on the HCC campus.

"We are expecting approximately 500 students as well as about 80 vol-

unteers to help them navigate the fair," said Barbara Baran, marketing officer for Holyoke Credit Union and coordinator of the Credit for Life Fair. "Every year our goal is to give students a great financial learning experience that will stay with them for many years to come. They learn about credit and credit scores, the importance of saving money, how hard their parents have to work to support them and much, much more."

Rather than imparting this wisdom through lectures, Credit for Life attendees are given a scenario in which they are 25 years old and have a job, a salary and debt. They then proceed from booth to booth, where they are required to make financial decisions on essential elements such as housing, food, transportation and insurance, ultimately trying to balance their budgets and live within their means.

"What kind of living arrangements can I afford? Where should I buy furniture? What's the difference between leasing and buying a vehicle? Should I be saving for retirement? These are expenses and decisions we all face," said Wendy Palmer, an assistant vice president at PeoplesBank and Credit for Life committee member. "Every year, students at the fair are astonished, amazed and frankly stunned at how hard it is to buy everything they need. Teachers and students alike are always impressed by how realistic it is. We've been told this is one of the best field trips ever."