THE CONNECTION

FALL 2026



ALSO INSIDE

A love for one horse inspired Gina Barry '94 to start an equine sanctuary

Jeronimo Monsalve '26 made the most from a D.C. internship

Homegrown

JULISSA COLÓN '13 RISES UP

80 YEARS
1946–2026

THE GREEN THREAD PODCAST

HOLYOKE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The Green Thread Podcast: An HCC Alumni Series

Exploring the connections, experiences, and threads that tie alumni to their alma mater, their communities, and one another.

Streaming now on Spotify! →

hcc.edu/greenthread



President George Timmons

Dear Alumni, Donors and Friends,

I write this on a beautiful, sunny, early fall day. I've just come from the Welcome Back Barbecue that we host every year to reconnect with one another after the summer and launch a new academic year as a campus community. This year's barbecue had a special addition to it — a cake-cutting to celebrate the 80th anniversary of Holyoke Community College.

On Sept. 9, 1946, the Holyoke School Committee voted to establish the Holyoke Graduate School, the first incarnation of what is now HCC. For eight decades, HCC has been a place of opportunity, access, and transformation. As I said to students, faculty, staff, administrators, and trustees, in celebrating this anniversary, we continue to honor the vision of HCC's founders, the dedication of generations of faculty and staff and the accomplishments of the many students and alumni whose lives have been shaped here.

Some of those accomplishments are highlighted in this issue of *The Connection*. Read our interview with Julissa Colón '13, who was recently named HCC's first dean of student experience. Julissa began working at HCC as a clerk 16 years ago, at the time a young mother of two with only a high school diploma. With the support of her HCC mentor Irma Medina '97 — and others — she went on to earn her associate degree from HCC, followed by a bachelor's degree from Smith College and master's degree from the University of Massachusetts Boston, working full time at HCC all the way.

Inside, you'll meet elder law attorney Gina Barry '94, whose love for a special horse led her to establish a nonprofit sanctuary for aging, abandoned, and abused horses. You'll learn about recent graduate Jeronimo Monsalve '26, a New York City native who found his way to HCC, discovered a passion for public policy, and is now at Cornell University on a full scholarship.

These stories reflect the determination of students and the enduring commitment of our faculty and staff. For 80 years, this community has provided the support and inspiration that help students overcome barriers and achieve success. As we mark this milestone, we are not simply looking back; we are renewing our commitment to the future.

Sincerely,



George Timmons, Ph.D.
President

HOLYOKE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The Connection is published two times per year by the HCC office of Marketing and Communications and distributed without charge to alumni and friends of HCC.

Director of Marketing and Strategic Communications
Jane Johnson Vottero

Editor-in-Chief
Chris Yurko

Creative Projects Coordinator
Althaea Carrol

Layout and Design
John Devanski (Guy With Glasses)

Contributing Writers
Doug Scanlon

Photography
Chris Yurko

Alumni Council Officers

President
Trudy Monson '97

Vice President
Elizabeth Roman '03

Student Representative
Zoë Bisbing

Alumni Council

Zydalis Bauer '09
Karen Brown '04
Maxine Bruel '24
Kim Monson '01
Tom Rachele '96
Cynthia Rodriguez '04
Paul Rogers '81, '13

Change of Address:
Please contact the Alumni Office
413.552.2576 or alumni@hcc.edu.

hcc.edu

THE CONNECTION
FALL 2026





Cover photo: Julissa Colón '13 stands in the MassMutual Center arena before the start of Commencement 2026.

3 **LETTERS**

4 **MY HCC STORY**: Patricia Sullivan '76

5 **CAMPUS ROUNDUP**

8 **HOMEGROWN:**
Julissa Colón '13 rises up

12 **GINA'S JOY:**
A love for a horse inspired Gina Barry '94 to start an equine sanctuary

16 **MR. MONSALVE GOES TO WASHINGTON:**
Jeronimo Monsalve '26 made the most of a D.C. internship



20 **ROCKIN' REUNION:**
WCCH alumni gather for radio station revelry

24 **HCC GIVING:**
The Gorman family creates a scholarship in honor of their daughter, Grace Gorman '25

27 **ALUMNI OUT & ABOUT**

30 **ALUMNI NOTES**

35 **IN MEMORIAM**

36 **CAMPUS KUDOS**



Musical Inspiration

I am writing after seeing the story about The Green Thread alumni podcast in the spring 2026 issue of *The Connection* ("The Ties That Bind").

I spent my years at HCC in the Music Department, 1977-1979.

At South Hadley High School, I played music but was not the best student. I struggled to get work done, and I did not like "playing" the student game. Entering HCC and the Music Department opened my eyes and mind to what was possible. For the first time, I was nurtured and guided through my studies, which fostered my love and passion for music. I even made the Dean's List, which was quite a shocker to my family. HCC lit fires within me rather than under me. I found inside a burning passion to be better, get better, and achieve.

After HCC, I finished my bachelor's degree in music education at the University of New Hampshire and later my master's degree in music education and musical composition.

Throughout my 39 years of teaching, I continued to play music professionally in the greater New England market. From lower Connecticut to Cape Cod and (mostly) the Boston market, I played with a variety of bands and musical genres from rock to jazz to theater shows. Additionally, I began composing music for school bands and jazz bands and working with music publishers to market my music internationally. To date, I have 40 pieces in print that are being sold to schools in and beyond the United States.

"HCC lit fires within me rather than under me. I found inside a burning passion to be better, get better, and achieve."

While I am no longer teaching, I don't like saying I'm "retired," as I focus now on my playing schedule and composing. Each week, I am working on music for publishers and/or schools. I often conduct an honor concert or jazz band or visit a school that is playing one of my pieces.

Bottom line: My life could have turned out very differently if it were not for Sidney Smith, Dan and Judy Oberholtzer, Amy Barber Kidd, and all of the mentors in the HCC Music Department. It all started at HCC, and I will never forget that, and letting some younger people know my story just might allow them to see their future selves and what's possible.

Respectfully,

Brad Ciechomski '79
Cape Elizabeth, Maine

You can learn more about Ciechomski's composing and musical activities on his website: Bradcmusic.com



Credit to HCC

I credit HCC with both the confidence and the solid academic foundation to transfer to Springfield College, where I earned a bachelor's degree in rehabilitation and disability Studies (2012) and master's degree in rehabilitation counseling (2013). As a person who now holds a Ph.D in health sciences from Northern Illinois University (2024), I am proud to say I began my educational journey at a community college. With over a decade of employment at various higher education institutions across the country and as the spouse of an active-duty U.S. Marine, I have settled back in Massachusetts, where I am currently sharing my knowledge and experience as an access coordinator in Disability Services at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. I sing the praises of HCC wherever and whenever I can.



Hira Byrne Paulin '10
Amherst, Mass.

A certified rehabilitation counselor, Paulin received the Young Alumna Award from Springfield College in 2025.

Connection Connections

Bravo to you and your staff at *The Connection* for an absolutely delightful spring issue. It was particularly meaningful to me to read about the achievements of Kokui Adesokan '07 ("My HCC Story: Something to Celebrate"). I was her French teacher at Springfield High School of Science and Technology and enjoyed both her and her brother, who so positively affected her class.



Kokui Adesokan '07

Thank you,

Nancy Gadbois
Southampton, Mass.

My Second Home

Patricia Sullivan '76

"I was a good student growing up, very conscientious, a very hard worker, but I didn't know that I was my high school valedictorian until I was sitting in an assembly and they announced class rankings. I thought, *holy cow*.

The principal said, 'You know, Mount Holyoke would give you a full boat if you decide to go there.' For a day, I thought about it, but that wasn't my plan. I wanted Holyoke Community College. I think some people thought I should have chosen a more prestigious school, but in my heart I just felt like it was right for me. It was one of the best decisions I've ever made. Because I came here, I made connections, and that's how I got my teaching job.

I was born and raised in Holyoke. I lived on Bray Park Drive, right near Schermerhorn's Seafood and not far from HCC. My husband Michael Sullivan '77, who later became mayor, also went to HCC, as did our son, Stephen '01.

At first, I wasn't sure what I wanted to study. I remember sitting in class — it was either a shorthand or business class — and this teacher really impressed me in a way that I appreciated. She related really well with students, and I thought, *I think this is what I want to do. I think I want to teach, and maybe I want to teach here.* But I'm naturally a shy person, and I also remember wondering if I could I stand in front of a classroom and live outside my comfort zone for the rest of my life.

I got my business degree from HCC and decided to focus on teaching. I went to Salem State for one semester. Then my dad got sick, and my mother was already sick, so I came home from college. My dad passed away, and I took a year off to help take care of my mom. I ended up finishing my bachelor's degree at American International College and my master's at Westfield State.



» Patty Sullivan '76 celebrates her 70th birthday with her six granddaughters.

By then, I was married and raising kids. I saw that HCC was looking for a part-time business teacher. That was perfect. I got my foot in the door. I started in 1981, teaching typing, shorthand, business communications, and business writing.

Later, the college asked several adjuncts to retrain to teach English, but to be an English teacher, you had to have a master's degree in English. My master's was in business. So, I had to take English classes with faculty here to qualify. I didn't mind.



It was a wonderful turn of events for me. I loved it.

Today I teach Developmental English I (085) and II (095) and English 101. My favorite is probably 085 because I'm with my students six hours a week. We bring in food. We become like family.

The first week of classes, we sit in a circle and talk about the best things in our lives, and then we talk about the things we might change, if we could. What they share in a room with 20 strangers is just incredible. I leave that first week of classes, and I cannot believe how vulnerable and raw they are. They say things you can't imagine, and they're in a safe space to say them, and it's pretty remarkable. I am always speechless by the end of class, and I tell them that.

I just turned 70. I could have retired years ago. Sometimes when I'm driving to campus, I think about retiring, but I can't.

The part of my job I like the least, though, the part that might make me retire, is the grading and isolation. That can get tedious. The best part is standing in the classroom and connecting with students.

HCC has been my second home. Truly. I am so lucky, and I really feel blessed. It's been a gift. I don't know if I'll ever be ready to leave.

I tell my students: I wish for you to find work that you love to do, because then it's not work. I know that's a saying, but it's true." C

Patricia Sullivan '76 is an HCC professor of English. She was the recipient of the 2026 Elaine Marieb Chair of Teaching Excellence Award and gave the faculty keynote address at Commencement on May 30.

My HCC Story narratives are adapted from alumni interviews with Connection *editor Chris Yurko.*

Nana's Legacy

Around her Holyoke home, JoAnne Wrobel '02 was known affectionately as "Nana," a friendly, guiding presence to neighborhood youth and her own grandchildren. At HCC, where she worked for many years before her death in 2022, she was equally beloved. As a clerk stationed at the main desk of the Kittredge Center, she recognized that many students came to campus hungry.



In response, she established the college's first grab-and-go food cart to offer free nutritious snacks to those in need.



JoAnne Wrobel '02

Over the years, the cart grew into a full-fledged food pantry that eventually became part of the HCC Thrive Center, which in fiscal year 2026 fielded 1,162 requests and distributed nearly 27,000 pounds of food and household goods.

This summer, Thrive unveiled Nana's Grab & Go Cart, a tribute to Wrobel's legacy funded in part by a donation from the Class of 2025. While previous iterations of Thrive grab-and-go carts remained stationary in the center itself, Nana's Grab & Go Cart is meant to go on the road, representing Thrive at special campus events, or whenever the food pantry has an overabundance of a perishable item, such as fresh produce.

"The idea is to get the food out to students as much as possible. We try to spread the goods," said business major Kris Miller, a work-study student at Thrive, who was pushing around the cart one August Monday. "Last time, we had a ridiculous amount of bananas. This time, it's pineapples."

Ben Ostiguy, Thrive Center special programs coordinator, called Nana's Grab & Go Cart "the public face of the program" that will be more visible around campus with the beginning of the fall semester.

"It warms my heart," said HCC Registrar Allison Wrobel '00, Nana's daughter. "Her spirit will be around HCC to help students in need if they're hungry."

Read more about Joanne Wrobel and her legacy at *hcc.edu/nanas-cart*.

« HCC student worker Kris Miller pushes Nana's Grab & Go Cart loaded with fresh pineapples from the Thrive Center.



A **First** *for* **Forty**

HCC alumni are always well represented on *Business West magazine's* annual "40 Under Forty" awards list, and this year was no exception: **Alicia Brown '14** (human services) and **Brandon Towle '18** (business administration) were honored as members of the class of 2026. But, for what could possibly be the first time in the 20 years the regional magazine has offered its annual compendium, an HCC student was also named to the list: communications major **Mychal Connolly Jr.** Connolly, 19, is the chief executive officer of the Realistic CEO publishing platform and podcast and a frequent K-12 speaker. "The whole goal behind Realistic CEO is to help students with career readiness, workforce readiness, and financial literacy," he told *Business West*. "My goal is to help students prepare for careers — and we do it in a way that we want every single student to feel like they're worthy enough to be an executive." Connolly is the son of HCC alum and entrepreneur **Mychal Connolly '04,** himself a "40 Under Forty" awardee from 2009. Meanwhile, Brown, 39, an English teacher at Springfield's John J. Duggan Academy, is founder of "The Royals," an after-school mentorship and leadership program for young women she started in a church basement. And Towle, 29, is manager of Rolling Meadows Country Club in Ellington, Connecticut, and founder of Camp Words Unspoken, New England's first sleepaway camp for stuttering youth. (Towle was the focus of "Freedom to Speak," a feature story in the Spring 2025 issue of *The Connection*.)

« HCC communications major Mychal Connolly Jr. (Courtesy of *Business West*)



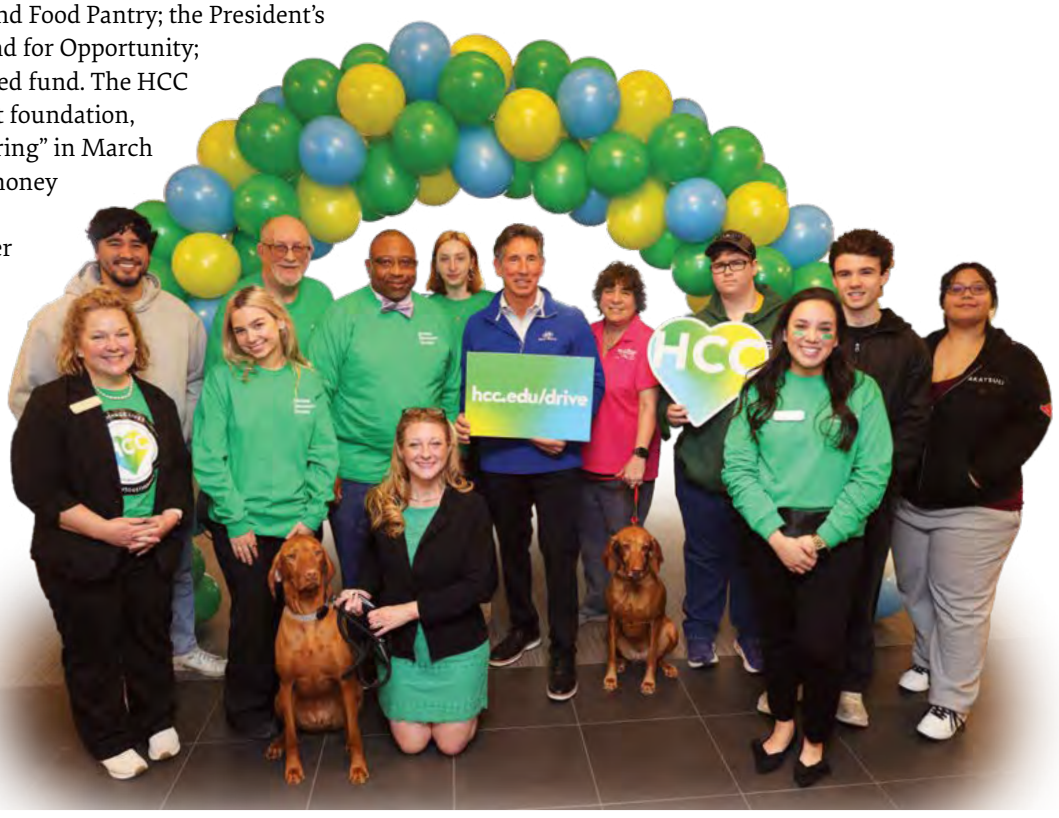
'Gun' Makes Noise

The HCC Theater Department's fall 2025 production of "The Last Living Gun" received three awards at the 2026 American College Theater Festival in Albany, New York. The play by Ryan Stevens follows a mercenary across a post-apocalyptic landscape on an epic quest to find the last gun in existence. The show was guest-directed by Cordelia Winters Dwyer, a graduate student from the University of Massachusetts theater program. Collectively, the cast and crew earned an ACTF award for Ensemble Work. HCC students Ivy Wrenne Demetriou, of Holyoke, and Toby Stearns, of Southampton, received individual awards for their work as stage manager and musical director, respectively. Stearns also performed in the production as an actor and musician. HCC belongs to ACTF Region I, which includes colleges and universities in northern New York and all six New England states. The HCC Theater Department has won more than 20 ACTF awards over the past 15 years in multiple categories, including individual acting, ensemble acting, dedication to a script, stage management, musical direction, best original music, playwriting, and collaboration.

« A scene from the HCC Theater Department's award-winning production of "The Last Living Gun"

Worth Showing Up For

The HCC Foundation raised more than $131,000 for scholarships and student-support programs during its March 4 "Together HCC" one-day giving campaign, surpassing a six-year, $1 million goal. The sixth annual "Together HCC: Drive to Change Lives" campaign received donations worth $131,278 from 455 alumni, students, faculty, staff, and friends of the college during the 24-hour fundraising drive. All of the money goes to six areas that support HCC students: academic excellence and innovation; scholarships; the Thrive Center and Food Pantry; the President's Student Emergency Fund; the President's Fund for Opportunity; and the HCC Foundation's general, unrestricted fund. The HCC Foundation, the college's charitable, nonprofit foundation, launched "Together HCC: A Campaign for Caring" in March 2020 to build community support and raise money for students experiencing financial distress during the pandemic. In 2021, with auto dealer Gary Rome signed on, HCC added the "Drive to Change Lives" theme. "When we invest in HCC students, we're investing in the doctors, teachers, and business owners who are going to build this region's future," said Rome, owner of Gary Rome Hyundai in Holyoke and a member of the HCC Foundation Board of Directors. "That's worth showing up for, year after year."



» Auto dealer Gary Rome, center, a donor and member of the HCC Foundation Board of Directors, joins HCC President George Timmons and others for the college's annual 24-hour giving day.

Night Watch

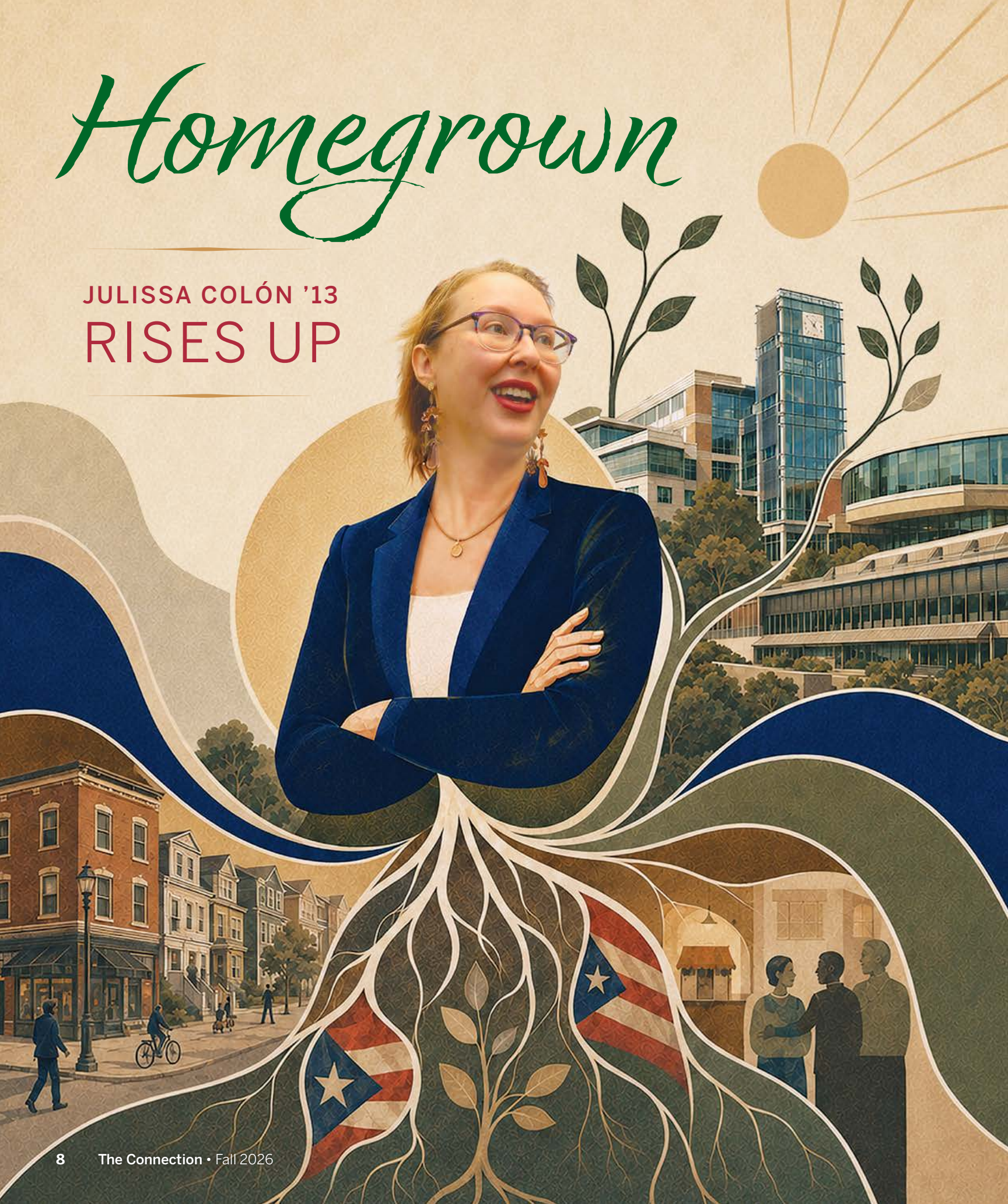
HCC received a $245,000 grant from the Irene E. and George A. Davis Foundation to add additional staff and evening hours to its Itsy Bitsy Child Watch program. The grant funded the hiring of two more staff workers (one full time and one part time). This will allow the center to increase capacity during its busiest daytime hours and add care hours in the evenings for students who take classes at night. "We're excited to be able to say yes to the parenting students who are taking those late afternoon and evening classes and need childcare," said Kimm Quinlan, HCC director of childhood initiatives. "It's been a couple of years since we were able to meet both the daytime and evening requests because our daytime enrollment became so full." Itsy Bitsy Child Watch opened as a pilot program in fall 2022 and was so successful it quickly reached capacity in its original location. In September 2025, the center moved to a larger space on the second floor of the Frost building, with support from a previous $600,000 grant from the Davis Foundation. Itsy Bitsy Child Watch is now open Monday through Thursday, 7:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m., and Fridays until 5 p.m.



» Ciaran Murphy, assistant director of the Itsy Bitsy Child Watch Center, works with a child in the center's gross motor room.

Homegrown

JULISSA COLÓN '13 RISES UP





No one could ever accuse Julissa Colón '13 of being unrealistically ambitious. She was 28 years old and the mother of two when she got a job as a clerk for the HCC Gateway to College program. By then, she had pretty much given up on the idea of pursuing a college degree.

"When I got that job, I was so proud and excited to be working here," she said. "In my mind, I had made it. I was working in an office at a college. I thought, this is where I am going to work for the rest of my life."

She didn't mean working at HCC; she meant working as a clerk for Gateway.

That's not quite how it turned out. Encouraged and empowered by her HCC mentors, Colón earned an associate degree in liberal arts from HCC, then a bachelor's degree from Smith College in Latin American studies and history, whereupon she was promoted from clerk to special programs coordinator at Gateway, another job she thought she might one day retire from.

Ditto in 2022, when Colón, a Puerto Rican who grew up in Springfield's North End, left Gateway (with a heavy heart) to take the position of inaugural director of El Centro, HCC's bilingual student support program.

"I'm going to die *here*, is what I thought," she said. "El Centro was the perfect alignment between the work I had been learning about and growing into and experiencing, and everything that I love — my community, my culture, my people."

Nevertheless, Colón, now 44, left El Centro (with a heavy heart) in January to become HCC's first dean of student experience, a position she was initially reluctant to apply for.

> **"A dean? I can't be a dean. I remember just thinking of the absurdity of that**. I don't know who I thought a dean was, but I didn't think it was me."
>
> JULISSA COLÓN

"*A dean? I can't be a dean*. I remember just thinking of the absurdity of that," she said. "I don't know who I thought a dean was, but I didn't think it was me."

And yet it is. One of Colón's mentors, Irma Medina '97, former Pathways program coordinator now HCC dean of integrative and applied learning, called Colón's ascension a "proud moment for all of us."

"I think, as an institution, to see a student rise to that level, it just shows that, yes, we do put out leaders, leaders of the community and for the community," she said. "Julissa is a testament to that. It's a proud, full moment for us, as women, as women of color, women of this community and those shared experiences of being Puerto Rican, first gen, and young moms. Her success means success for us all. It validates what we knew all along, that this is where she belongs."

Colón sat down with Connection *editor Chris Yurko last spring to talk about her new job and her old ones.*

You started working at HCC before you ever enrolled as a student.

I started as a clerk in 2010. I only had a high school diploma.

It didn't occur to me to do school again. I thought I was too old. I had no idea what was possible. It was Vivian Ostrowski (now retired Gateway to College coordinator) who said I should go back to school. She can be very, very convincing, and she wouldn't let it go.

Mentors have been really important to you.

I have been really blessed with mentors consistently throughout my life. I wrote about this in my application essay for Smith. I wrote about these groups of mostly women who've helped me move into the next cycle of my life every time, usually when I didn't believe, usually when I thought they were crazy and couldn't see it for myself.

I used to work at Bickford's, the restaurant chain. I started as a hostess there, and then I was trained to be a server, and I learned so much about how to work with people and how to have integrity. The waitresses who worked there, some for as long as 25 years, they pushed me. They would bring me newspaper clippings for other jobs to encourage me to do something else. I think about that a lot.

When I was in that clerk's position at Gateway, Vivian did her magic and pushed me, and I got my associate degree. And then, Irma got me through my bachelor's degree at Smith. Once I had my bachelor's degree, I was able to get the job as special programs coordinator at Gateway.

Every new position has opened up another door to more people, to more ideas, to more potential for impact. That's why I'm in this job now.

Continued on next page

At the time, though, you thought being the director of El Centro was the be-all and end-all for you, right?

Absolutely. It was this beautiful symbiosis. That was some of the best work that I have done in my entire life. I'm deeply proud of what my team and I were able to do. And there is still so much more to be done. But when you suddenly realize that you're probably not going to retire in that role, there's fear, and there's also excitement. One of the parts that made it easier for me to move beyond that position and that space is that El Centro became a place that nurtured other staff, that nurtured other opportunities. Most of the staff that came through there ended up starting master's degree programs. That space became not just about the students, which is, of course, the priority, but it also became a space to grow our people, and I recognized that early on. In order for people to move up, you've got to move out. Watching this transition is one of the things I'm most proud of, creating an opportunity and space for those things to happen. I felt like I helped.

El Centro was brand new when you started there.

There was no program. There was an idea. I feel like we birthed that, and now they get to bring it to the next level.

Why did you want to be the first dean of student experience?

I wasn't sure I wanted it at first.

What convinced you?

I have some pretty good friends who said to me, let's read the job description, and see if you have any experience in any of these things. That's something I've done pretty regularly with my folks, talking out the things you're afraid of, having someone else help you make connections to the work you've done. I didn't know all of it, but I got this glimmer of like, oh, I think I might be able to do this job, and I think I should try, because if I do get this job, I could have an impact on a greater group of students, and that was really what it was about. And the worst that could happen if I didn't get it was that I stay working at El Centro, a job that I adore and love.

I have so many ideas about how we bring students to campus, and how we grow a sense of belonging, and the life cycle of students throughout the process. And that's literally what this job is.

So, what exactly are your responsibilities as dean of student experience?

It's the amalgamation of a lot of different pieces. The individual pieces are new student programs and orientation, student



» Colón in her new office



» Colón with Irma Medina, one of her HCC mentors



» Colón meets with Andrew Turgeon, HCC director of advising

engagement, our partnership for mental health services with CHD (Center for Human Development), student conduct, the HCC CARE team (Concerns, Assessment, Referrals, and Education), and commencement. I also oversee the HCC SUCCESS programs: ALANA, SAMP and El Centro.

I see students from the beginning to the end of their college life cycle, from new student orientation to commencement, from the minute students fill out their applications to the day they walk the stage. This feels very much like my work at El Centro but on a much bigger scale. Our job is really about facilitating for the student an experience of connection, of being seen, of doing well, of being supported. The experience students have on campus matters. The quality of their experience goes beyond having a great classroom experience. I think that's what this job was developed for.

I recently learned you also now oversee HCC's SUCCESS programs: ALANA Men in Motion, SAMP, and El Centro.

I'm really happy about the shift in the direction of this position. You know I love the support programs. The work that I've done on campus has been with them for a long time, and part of the reason I applied for the dean's position was because I wanted to have an opportunity to bring the work that we do in the support programs out to the rest of the campus community. I feel like the work they do, in terms of holistic healing and everything else, should be something that ALL students get to experience, not just students who happen to find the support programs.

This is your fourth job at HCC in 16 years. Since you started, you've earned your associate degree, your bachelor's degree, and a master's degree in public administration from UMass Boston. Why do you want to keep working here?

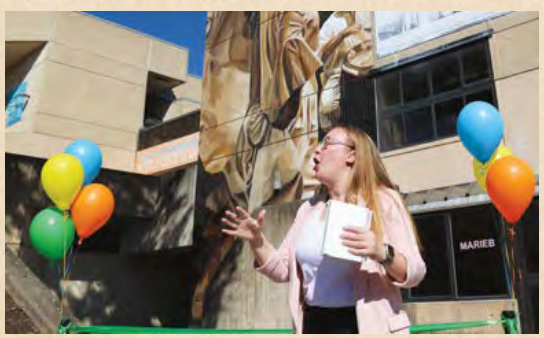
I genuinely love HCC. I love our students. I love the staff and the faculty that I work with. I love what HCC imagines itself to be. And I say "imagines itself to be" because we're not there. We haven't made it all the way to the vision of the greatness of what we are and could be. We're always striving. I like the honesty that we've been able to share with each other about parts that aren't good, that our students deserve better, and we have to do better and hold ourselves accountable. Sometimes we do things well, and sometimes we falter. There are times when we do great things that change the way people think about themselves and their education.

The support programs that we have across campus, with El Centro and SAMP and ALANA, make such a huge difference. Having Thrive — if a student comes to my office and is hungry, I have somewhere to bring them. If a student needs housing, there's

Continued on page 26



» Colón consults with a colleague during last spring's student-focused Fresh Check Day.



» Colón, then director of El Centro, introduces one of HCC's new Latinx murals in 2024.



» Colón, in 2019, when she was special programs coordinator of Gateway to College

GINA'S ♥ JOY

A love for one horse inspired Gina Barry '94 to start a sanctuary for others.

By JUDITH KELLIHER

A good chunk of every weekday, Gina Barry '94, Esq., wears a business suit and works in a professional office suite. More specifically, she spends her time helping clients navigate complex legal issues at Bacon Wilson, P.C., in Springfield and Northampton, Massachusetts, where she is a partner and chair of the Estate Planning and Elder Law Department.

Before that, though, nearly every morning, and even on weekends, she puts on casual clothes and heads to a much different kind of workplace, Legacy Farm in Easthampton.

The farm is home of the Legacy Equine & Therapy Center, owned by the Page family, and also home to Joy of Jasper, a nonprofit horse sanctuary Barry founded in 2007.

As an estate planning and elder law attorney, "I couldn't be in a better spot," Barry said. "I'm using my brain, and it's very people-focused. I've got the intellectual challenge, but also the connection to people and animals. It's all worked out. Sometimes you just have to trust and believe."

The connection between those two aspects of her life — helping elders plan their futures and tending to horses in their twilight years — is not lost on Barry.

"The parallel is that I help older people and I help older horses," she said.

Over the past 19 years, Joy of Jasper has provided a safe and loving haven for 20 abused, abandoned, neglected, or unwanted horses and ponies. Barry, through her nonprofit, has acquired some from slaughterhouses,



« Barry leads Monty, a rescued quarter horse, into the barn for grooming.

Two aspects of Barry's life are helping elders plan their futures and tending to horses in their twilight years.

some from the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, others directly from their owners. She even found one listed in a Craigslist ad. The sanctuary has no paid staff and relies on the generosity of donors and volunteers, many of them children, who help care for the animals. (Barry serves as president and has a volunteer board of directors.)

Because of their previous living conditions, the horses often arrive with unique physical ailments and diseases, requiring special attention. Some days, Barry spends hours at the farm administering medication and grooming the horses.

At the moment, Joy of Jasper owns three horses: Monty, Sgt. Pepper, and Bernard. Monty is a mid-20s quarter horse Barry adopted from another equine sanctuary that shut down. Twenty-year-old Bernard, or "Nardy," suffers from a degenerative bone disease in his hooves and has an arthritic spine, so can't be ridden by adults. Sgt. Pepper, the Craigslist pony, had become feral after being abandoned in a field for several years before Barry acquired him. Thanks to Joy of Jasper, the once fiery, mistrusting pony eventually reconnected with people, Barry said.

During a visit to the farm one afternoon in June, Barry came equipped with a large bag of peppermints, treats for the horses — hers and the farm's other residents — who emerge from their stalls and walk to the limits of their fenced enclosures when they see her coming. On this day, Barry wore trail shoes, blue denim jeans, and a green Joy of Jasper T-shirt, which said, on the back, "Have You Felt the Joy of Jasper?"



» Barry gives a talk about planned giving during an HCC event in 2023.

In starting the sanctuary, Barry sought partly to create a space for people who want to spend time with horses but perhaps can't afford to.

"The horses don't have to have a great resume to come here," she said. "They just have to be a horse in need. The Joy of Jasper is the joy of the horse knowing that they don't have to worry about where their home will be, and the joy of the person who comes and receives all the gifts from them in terms of the trust and love."

The story behind Joy of Jasper begins long before Barry earned her law degree from Western New England, or her bachelor's degree from Westfield State, or even her associate degree from HCC.

She grew up in a working-class family in Holyoke, raised by her parents, Joseph Barry, a welder, and Linda Barry, a waitress. As a young child, she had always expressed a love of horses, even though she had never seen one in person.

When she was about 9, her father saw a newspaper ad for a 4-H group at the Therapeutic Equestrian Center at Jericho on Northampton Street in Holyoke, not far from the home she grew up in and still lives. The center was operated by Geraldine (O'Connor) Page and her husband Bill, now the owners of Legacy Farm in Easthampton.

Continued on next page



« Barry and Jasper, sporting one of their blue ribbon awards

Barry and the other young girls in 4-H were responsible for a variety of barn chores, including cleaning up manure, changing the urine-soaked bedding in the horse stalls, and other tasks most of the members did not enjoy. One by one, they all dropped out, leaving only Gina.

> Barry looks back at her time at HCC as setting the foundation for her career.

"Doing all that work didn't bother me," she said. "It didn't matter. That's what I had to do to see horses. In the end, it was just me and Gerry. She poured so much of her energy and horse knowledge into me."

Page connected Barry with Jasper, a quarter horse from Montana who had come to the center underweight, with a dull coat, and eyes "full of worry, having lost his former home," Barry remembers.



» Barry takes a horse fly mask off Bernard.

At the same time, Barry was herself struggling with an unsettled home life due to her father's post-traumatic stress after having served as a helicopter gunner during the Vietnam War.

Through shared moments, Barry and Jasper bonded, blossomed, and healed together. Page gave Barry riding lessons, and Barry and Jasper competed in local horse shows, often taking home top ribbons. Barry remembers a glorious summer as an 11-year-old who had found seemingly unending joy with Jasper.

"From the moment they came together, there was something gentle and unmistakable between them," recalls Gerry Page. "Jasper had a calm presence that seemed to draw Gina in. For a teenager navigating change, emotions, and growing independence, Jasper became more than just a horse. He was a trusted companion. He taught her responsibility, confidence, and the value of caring for another living being."

"He and I could talk to one another — I know that sounds insane," Barry said. "What he provided were moments of unconditional love, of trust, just everything you would want. I could just be myself."

Then, the unthinkable. In the fall of 1984, Jasper tripped and shattered the bone in his hoof, a debilitating injury that could not be fixed. He had to be euthanized.

The quiet, calm, and predictable existence Barry felt with Jasper was gone too.

"There are literally no English words for what I felt," she said. "It was horrible. Nobody knew what to do with me. Everybody tried. My grief was beyond anything they were capable of dealing with."

For a while, Barry stayed at the center and worked with other horses, but could not connect with any of them like she had with Jasper. Eventually, she left.

Fast forward to Barry's entry into HCC in 1990. She admits not taking her classes seriously her first year. In her second year, though, a classmate made a remark she will never forget:

"You couldn't get an A if you tried."

Game on. From that moment, Barry applied herself in the classroom, getting mostly straight A's and earning her associate degree in four years, as she worked several jobs to put herself through school.

She looks back at her time at HCC as setting the foundation for her career.

"If I hadn't gone to HCC, I wouldn't have gone to Westfield State; I wouldn't have gone to Western New England," she said. "The whole path unfolded from HCC, and HCC gave me an opportunity to be a 17-year-old girl with no idea what I wanted. My parents never went to college. I never even took the SATs. Without HCC, there is no Attorney Barry. The path would have never opened."

In the early 2000s, Barry began taking leadership training with Tony Robbins, the nationally recognized self-help coach and motivational speaker. She was trying to figure out how to go beyond what her family had



» Barry brushes Monty in the barn at Legacy Farm.

achieved, how to make something of herself. But there was something missing — and a whole lot of healing that hadn't happened yet.

She got the idea for Joy of Jasper during one specific training exercise when Robbins asked the group to remember a place where they had felt unconditional love and complete trust.

Barry thought of Jasper.

"Memories of being in his stall and sitting on a bucket and him falling asleep with his head in my lap. That is what I went back to," she said. "And I remember thinking how crazy it is that the huge wound that I received from him turned out to be the catalyst for all of this. If he had passed in a different way, I don't think Joy of Jasper would exist. Because this was my catharsis."

Barry said she has seen that same connection, healing, and catharsis in the more than 100 children and young adults who have volunteered with Joy of Jasper through the years.

When she started the nonprofit, she boarded her horses at the Therapeutic Equestrian Center at Jericho, where she had first met Jasper. When the center closed in 2025, she moved Joy of Jasper to Legacy Farm.

"I have watched some of our kids go from failing out of high school to going to college," she said. "We had one young man whose father was in jail. He was probably destined for a similar path. He just graduated from junior high and is going to Springfield Honors Academy, which is a big deal."

Besides HCC and her other educational endeavors, Barry credits Bacon Wilson with teaching her the know-how and skills to start a nonprofit.

"As a young lawyer, I sat on many boards, and that is how I learned how boards operated, so when it was time to start a nonprofit, I knew what to do," she said.

Bacon Wilson was also extremely supportive of her work with Joy of Jasper, including being an original and continuing sponsor.

Meanwhile, Barry's connection to HCC remains strong. Over the years, she has returned to campus to share the story of her college experience and how it was instrumental in shaping her life, and also to discuss the importance of planned giving at events sponsored by HCC's Institutional Advancement division.

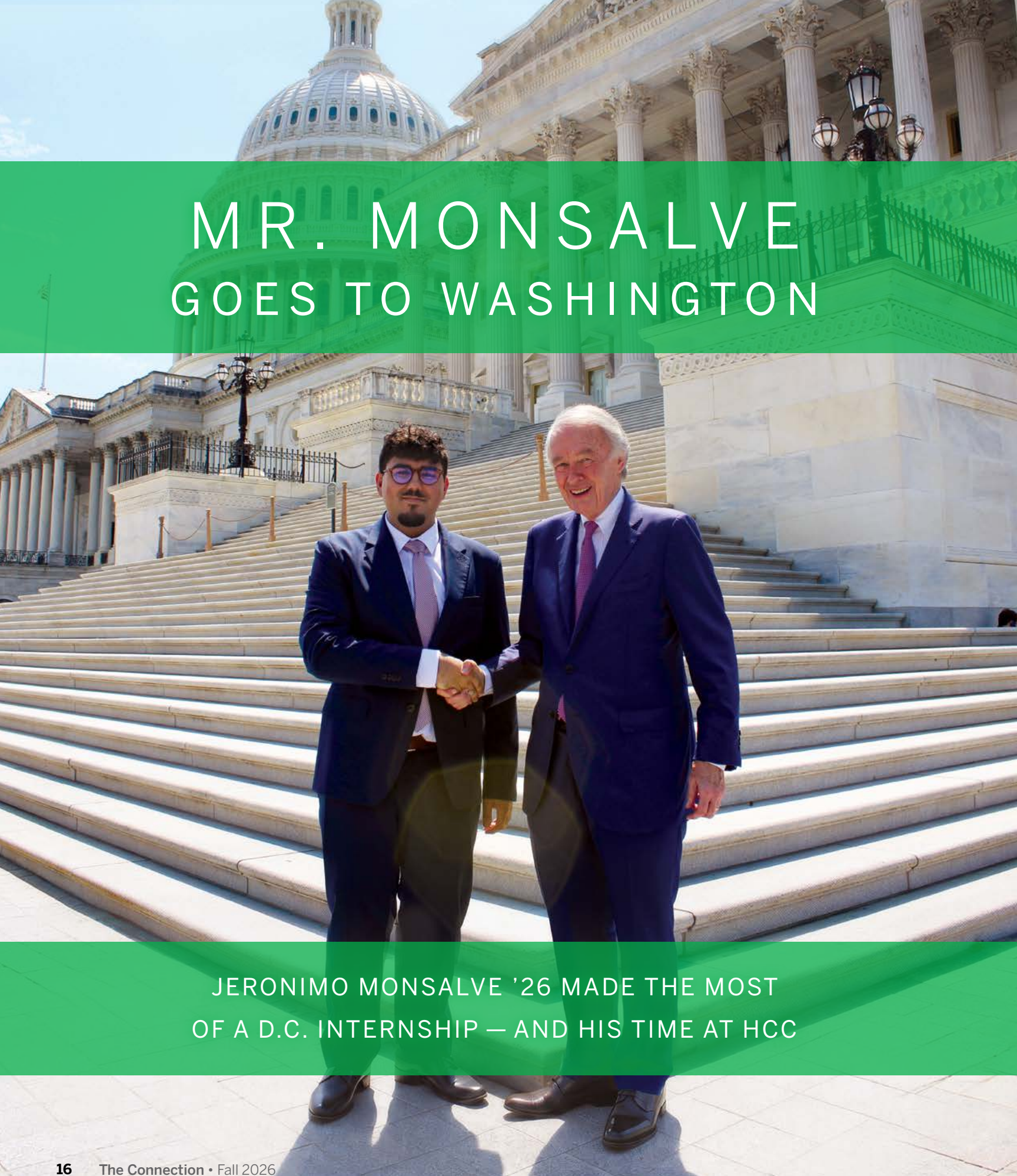
As she looks to the future and continues her work at Joy of Jasper, she is reminded of the love, care, and lifeline the horses there receive, even though she knows, ultimately, she will lose them again.

"Nothing is promised," she said. "You treat every day like it's their last and just cherish every moment. And I will tell you that I have never lost the awe for horses. I always look at them and think, I am so lucky."



» Attorney Barry in the office at Bacon Wilson, P.C.

MR. MONSALVE GOES TO WASHINGTON



JERONIMO MONSALVE ’26 MADE THE MOST OF A D.C. INTERNSHIP — AND HIS TIME AT HCC



» Monsalve in the HCC Courtyard



» Monsalve, with HCC alum Joe Black '25, during a 2025 Earth Day cleanup in Holyoke

By CHRIS YURKO

Jeronimo Monsalve '26 didn't plan to start his college career by dropping out.

Nevertheless.

A transplant from Oakland Gardens, a Queens, New York City, neighborhood, Monsalve, then 18, had moved to Amherst to attend the University of Massachusetts as a biology major, a subject he didn't have much interest in but one his parents, Colombian immigrants, thought might lead toward a career in medicine.

"I didn't want to study biology," he said.

More interested in public policy, Monsalve tried to change majors at UMass but was denied. He couldn't break his lease, so felt stuck. Instead, he decided to research community college options in the Pioneer Valley and discovered Pathways, HCC's celebrated transfer program.

"I knew if I put my head down and worked hard enough, there would be a great chance for me to transfer to a selective college," he said. "That was my dream. I dropped out of UMass before I even started. It all worked out, thankfully."

Indeed it did.

During his two years at HCC, Monsalve, a first-generation college student, literally became the poster child for Integrated Learning, a division that encompasses Pathways, Honors, Learning Communities, Community-Based Learning, and Academic Internships. By his second semester, he'd already been hired for a work-study position as the Integrated Learning division's sole student ambassador. In that job, he did everything he could to promote the Integrated Learning programs to his peers, from assisting with office work to giving public presentations.

Monsalve, now 20, graduated from HCC in May with high honors and his associate degree in liberal arts. In September, he started the next leg of his academic journey on a full scholarship to Cornell University, the private Ivy-League college in Ithaca, New York.

"I think that speaks to what is accessible at HCC," Monsalve said. "It's so much more than what you do in the classroom."

By his own admission, Monsalve had had a "lackluster" high school experience.

"I wasn't one of the shiny apples," he said. "I wasn't a great student. I had a lot of hardships, especially through COVID."

Early interactions at HCC set him on a new trajectory. During his first semester, Pathways Coordinator Camille Close — Monsalve calls her "Miss Camille" — registered him for Cultural Anthropology with Professor Vanessa Martinez, the community-based learning program coordinator, who quickly became one of his mentors. Through that class, Monsalve participated in an oral histo-

Continued on next page

"I knew if I put my head down and worked hard enough, there would be a good chance for me to transfer to a selective college."

JERONIMO MONSALVE

« Jeronimo Monsalve '26, with U.S. Senator Ed Markey, during his summer legislative internship

"Collecting oral histories helped me figure out what I want to study and accomplish in my future. I knew that politics was something I wanted to learn more about."

JERONIMO MONSALVE

ry project for Wistariahurst Museum, conducting interviews with Holyoke residents about their experiences during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

"That was eye-opening," he said. "I learned a lesson that was vital to the work I do today, which is cultural humility. Understanding the backgrounds of every individual, understanding the context of how they got where they are. Collecting oral histories helped me figure out what I want to study and accomplish in my future. I knew that politics was something I wanted to learn more about."

For the summer of 2025, Monsalve secured a competitive and much-coveted internship in Washington, D.C., in the office of U.S. Senator Ed Markey, a Boston Democrat. To get that position, Monsalve had to survive a rigorous application and interview process that included a final meeting with the Senator himself, who asked, point blank: "You're from New York; why should you represent the people of Massachusetts?"

Monsalve had thought about that. He said he was dissatisfied with the current representation in the community where he grew up and that one day he would like to represent the Sixth Congressional District of New York in Washington.

"We are so far behind compared to Massachusetts," Monsalve said. "I love the way Massachusetts carries itself, and I love how the legislators currently holding seats represent their people and how they push legislation and progress the state of Massachusetts. I would love to learn from them before returning to New York."

With his selection, Monsalve joined just a handful of college interns in Markey's office, all from Ivy-League schools. Among the hundreds of interns working in Senate offices, "I was the only community college student that summer, and the only man of color, at least that I met," Monsalve said.

As a rising second-year student, he was also among the youngest.

At first, he felt nervous, that he didn't belong and would not fit in. "The truth is I was wrong," he said. "The other interns were incredibly accepting. They saw I was chosen for a reason, that I brought perspective. I brought lived experience. I had a community backing me that was unique in its own way that was not represented in the Senate, and that made me valuable."

For the most part, Senate interns perform basic, administrative tasks — "constituent services," said Monsalve. They respond to email and voicemail messages, draft letters and put together a digest of the day's news for legislative staffers. But Monsalve was also soon assigned to work on issues before two committees on which Markey serves: The Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions; and the Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, for which he helped draft two bills Markey proposed, the AI Civil Rights Act and the Small Business Relief Act.



» Monsalve, with his HCC mentor, Anthropology Professor Vanessa Martinez



» Monsalve, the headliner, gives a presentation about his Washington, D.C., internship during a fall 2025 campus event.

He also worked with health industry experts at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill and other universities to pull together estimates of the number of rural hospitals expected to close nationally if the Medicaid tax cuts included in the Administration's "One Big Beautiful Bill" went through.

"We had a one-hour turnaround on that project, and it was incredibly stressful," he said, "but it became the most notable part of my internship because it was used by virtually every senator on the floor and news anchors across the nation. I mean, we're talking BBC, CNN — they all used our research, and it felt pretty good."

That internship led to another back in western Massachusetts, when Monsalve was offered a three-day-a-week position with the law firm Bacon Wilson in its corporate commercial unit.

During his second year at HCC, he managed to balance the law internship with his classes and his work-study job in Integrated Learning, while also volunteering at the Amherst Survival Center on weekends, and assuming the presidency of Alpha Xi Omega, the HCC chapter of the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society. In the spring, he worked with OneHolyoke and other community groups to organize the city's 2026 Earth Day cleanup and was the keynote student speaker at the Community-Based Learning program's end-of-the-year celebratory luncheon.

All that work paid off. In addition to Cornell, Monsalve was accepted for transfer to six competitive schools: Boston University, New York University, Fordham University, the University of Virgina, Amherst College, and Cornell.

He chose Cornell, because, in addition to a full scholarship, they offered him a job as an analyst in the policy lab of its Center for Applied Research on Work, in the university's School of Industrial and Labor Relations.

Not long before he got his acceptance letter, he received a phone call from a Cornell admissions counselor.

"I expected a soft rejection," Monsalve said, "or maybe some problem with my application."

Instead, he was told, he'd done an excellent job: "Our committee decided on you in less than five minutes, and I had to be the one to tell you, you got it."

"Instantly, the tears started flowing," Monsalve said.

Despite his successes, Monsalve said he didn't consider himself an exceptional student, but he did have exceptional teachers and advisers, and he told them so at the end-of-the-year lunch.

"The work you do really brings growth," he said. "It brings opportunity. It brings scholarship. There are so many HCC students who can do the same exact things that I did. All they need is empowerment. If you invest in these students, I promise you, they will lead tomorrow." C

"There are so many HCC students who can do the same exact things that I did. All they need is empowerment."

JERONIMO MONSALVE


ROCKIN'
REUNION
WCCH alumni gather
for radio station revelry



« Alum Jimm O'Donnell '80 arrived with an old WCCH bumper sticker on his head.

Some people might have been confused.

Jimm O'Donnell '80 arrived with a green bumper sticker curled around his black knit hat announcing "WCCH: 89.5 FM Stereo."

89.5 FM?

Indeed, before WCCH could be heard where it is now, at 103.5 on your FM dial, the station first broadcast its 10 watt signal on 89.5 FM, a piece of nearly forgotten history gleaned during the college's first-ever WCCH radio station reunion on April 30.

As more than 100 alums, faculty, and students gathered in and around the WCCH studios to reconnect and reminisce, O'Donnell and his former classmate John Epstein '77 lingered in station manager Pat Labelle's office, jabbering and posing for a photo by a piece of antiquated audio technology, a reel-to-reel tape machine.

"Old technology in the foreground too," said Epstein.

"Some older than others," O'Donnell replied.

Some alumni were surprised to see their names still etched into the ceiling outside the broadcast booth. Others brought in old LPs to autograph and post on the station's vinyl wall of fame. They toured Studio A (the broadcast booth) and Studio B (the podcast room across the hallway), and hammed it up for cameras.

Continued on next page



WCCH reunion attendees gather on the courtyard staircase.

"It was an amazing night," Labelle said later. "Even afterward, people were still pouring on the love. It was cool for me too to see all the generations and see how we fall in the lineage of the station."

Along with the bumper sticker on his head, O'Donnell wore a white, Poco "Legend" album T-shirt under a black, pin-striped vest. In his arms, he cradled a 1983 record by The Cardiac Kids, a local band he worked with back in the day.

When he was a student at HCC in the '70s, O'Donnell had a radio show called "The Dusty Turntable" and went by the handle "DJ Jimm O'D."

"That was my name on the air, and I've been using it ever since," he said. "Yeah, I was almost going to get it legally changed."

"I should never have used Charles Manson for mine," said Epstein. "That was a bad idea."

(Disclaimer: The repartee between O'Donnell and Epstein left the impression that they were having more than a little fun at their interrogator's expense.)

Nevertheless, Epstein and O'Donnell did confirm the accuracy of some previously published details on the radio station's founding some 50 years ago.

The HCC Radio Club started in 1974, and, under the guidance of Everett Clegg, director of the college's audio-visual center, began "broadcasting" as WHCC into the first-floor lounge between the Frost and Donahue buildings, the area now known as the POD. Epstein later joined the club and eventually became the station's general manager as it sought funding to become a fully fledged FCC-licensed FM station.

On Nov. 14, 1977, the station aired its first sanctioned broadcast as WCCH, the original call letters having already been claimed by the FM radio station at Holy Cross College.

"That's when I came along," said O'Donnell.

In those days, O'Donnell reminded Epstein, the DJs themselves had to be licensed before they were allowed on the air.

"We took a van to Boston," said Epstein. "We all had to take a test."

Eventually, Epstein, who still lives in Holyoke, got his degree in business administration and went on to start an advertising and marketing agency.

O'Donnell, now retired, also majored in business administration, after trying a few other things, but don't ask him what he used to do for work.

"I quit," he said. "I was overqualified. I got tired of punching clocks and people."

"Punching people?" said Epstein. "That's a little concerning."

DJ Jimm O'D lives in Easthampton and now writes for "Live Music News & Review," a website about music and concerts in the Northeast. You can read his reviews at: *livemusicnewsandreview.com/author/jimmod/*

He may — or may not — also be a chef.



Paul Rogers (DJ Paul) '81, '13, and marketing major Zoë Bisbing



Jim Overton (DJ Tripper) holds up a piece of WCCH history.



Meredith Mielke '25 (DJ Meredith) visits the WCCH station Studio A with its collection of vinyl memorabilia.



HCC multimedia specialist Louis Burgos '14, '18, WCCH station manager Pat Labelle (DJ Professor Pat), and HCC assistant director for alumni relations Natalia Castagno



Alannah Brunt '24 (a.k.a. DJ Ribbit / DJ Alannah) reunites with retired HCC communications instructor and former WCCH station manager Stevie Converse (DJ Stevie C).



Station manager Pat Labelle and student-DJ Trent Torres



Communications major Todd Therien (DJ Bustahip) streams some live tunes for the reunion.



Alumni Cynthia Ravosa '88 (DJ Angel of Rock) and Jim Overton (DJ Tripper) brought albums to add to the WCCH wall of fame.



Meredith Mielke '25 (DJ Meredith) stops at the photo station outside the WCCH broadcast booth.



HCC nursing resource coordinator Dee Westcott '13 (DJ Skittles) and Kevin Grady '10 (DJ Kev G) made an appearance.



Jimm O'Donnell '80 (DJ Jimm O'D), left, and John Epstein '77 visit the WCCH station manager's office.



Alum Bob Hyde '87, '93 brought "Sports," a 1983 album by Huey Lewis and the News, to add to the WCCH wall of fame.



Recent graduate Patrick Sweeney '25 (DJ Bun), right, catches up with Communications Professor Tim Cochran.

Grace Under Pressure

The Gorman family establishes a scholarship in honor of their daughter.

The COVID-19 pandemic proved to be a major source of anxiety and isolation for a lot of people. For Grace Gorman '25, though, it provided a chance to set a new direction.

In 2013, she had graduated from Westfield State University with a bachelor's degree in criminal justice. She subsequently found a job working with children and adults with disabilities. She'd even had a stint as a nanny. None of it felt right.

Gorman regularly reminded her parents, Tina and Gary, that she loved working with animals. Her father Gary, a chiropractor, knew of a woman in his office who was enrolled in the veterinary technician program at Holyoke Community College. He suggested Grace consider that as a possible pathway to a new career.

In 2021, Gorman enrolled in the one-year veterinary assistant certificate program, figuring that, by the end, she would know if she wanted to continue on for her associate degree. By her third week of classes, she knew.

"She came home and told me, 'This is it, this is what I want to do. I'm going to finish this program,'" Tina recalls.

Things were going great for Gorman. She approached her courses with a passion she had never known before. She completed an externship at the VCA Montgomery Road Animal Hospital in Westfield, Massachusetts, and was offered a part-time job there. But after completing her certificate program in 2022, she discovered she was pregnant.

"My professors were some of the first people to find out since I missed a few classes due to morning sickness, but they were very understanding," she said.

After her daughter was born in 2023, Gorman wanted to return to her courses full time so she could graduate with her classmates. Her professors made every accommodation, rearranging her classes around her pumping schedule and encouraging Grace to bring her daughter, Charlee, to lab when day care was not available. Still, it proved to be too much, and she reduced her course schedule to part time.

"I was getting up three to four times a night with a newborn, while going to school, work, and externing," she said. "I was running on fumes, but was determined to graduate."

> *"Grace absolutely thrived at HCC, and I think a lot of it had to do with the support that she got from the college."*
>
> TINA GORMAN

In May 2025, she did — with honors. She also received the Award for Excellence in Veterinary and Animal Science (and had made the Dean's List three times in four years).

"Grace was helpful to other people, friendly, a good team worker, and an all-around good student, even though she was juggling a lot," said Jennifer York, DVM, chair of the veterinary and animal science department.

Gorman's parents had taken notice of their daughter's resilience and were inspired to take action. Tina wrote a letter to President George Timmons: "We feel strongly that it is time for the Gorman family to pay it forward."

"Grace absolutely thrived at HCC, and I think a lot of it had to do with the support that she got from the college," her mother said. "We feel very indebted to HCC. We can't say enough great things about the school."

In April 2026, Tina and Gary Gorman established the Grace and Determination Scholarship through the HCC Foundation, an annual scholarship for students in the veterinary and animal science program, with a preference for nontraditional students.

"The one thing that kept going through all this was her determination," said Tina. "She wanted to prove to herself that she could do it, and so that's where the name came from."

When her parents shared the news, their daughter was amazed. "That's literally me. That's my life. I was very honored," said Gorman, who was herself a recipient of an HCC Foundation Scholarship in 2023.

During the 2026 Scholarship Reception, Gary and Tina met Nicole Couture, the first recipient of the Grace and Determination Scholarship. Like Grace, Couture also had to take time off from her studies for the birth of a child.

"I've had a lot of struggles but I just pushed through, kept working, trying to better my life," Couture said. "The Grace and Determination Scholarship perfectly describes the way that I've made it through those struggles."

"We couldn't have handpicked a more appropriate and better candidate," said Gary. "She was just above and beyond my expectations."

As for Grace, she is now working full time as a veterinary assistant at the animal hospital where she started as an HCC student.

If you are interested in establishing a scholarship, please contact the Institutional Advancement division at 413.552.2737 or send an email to foundation@hcc.edu.



» Grace Gorman '25 at HCC Commencement in 2025



» Gary Gorman, Tina Gorman (seated) with HCC student Nicole Couture, the first recipient of the Grace and Determination Scholarship

access to that; if they need support because they're having trouble in the classroom, I know the people, and I know what they're striving to do, and I just feel like this has been my home for so long.

I've been here for 15 years, and I've experienced a tremendous amount of growth, as a student, as the parent of a student (Luna Aponte '21), as the aunt of a student. My family has been here. My friends are here. My commitment to my community is here.

Who comes to the school? My folks come to the school. My family. My community. My friends. And so, if my vision for my life is about engaging in things that make a difference for my community, then it has to be here.

There's lots of other places, but this is where I grew. This is where I was planted. And if I'm going to flower, I want to flower for my people. I want to flower for the students here. If for the rest of my life my work is nurturing that, figuring that out, making it better, why would I want to leave?

When you first started here, you had no ambition to be anything but a clerk?

No, and that was great. That was a wonderful job. I couldn't imagine anything else.

I even think about this job as dean and the fact that it didn't even occur to me. I've always been someone who loved to learn. I didn't do three degrees in 15 years because I hated it, right?

One of the best parts about this job is that I'm learning so many new things, and it's fascinating. I'm learning about conduct and the way that the CARE team runs. I'm learning about student engagement and how to how to bring in high impact practices. We're talking about student government and how we engage students to be more civically minded. This is giving me an opportunity to figure out what I bring into this space that only I can because of my history and my experience and my knowledge. And that's been cool.

Can you talk about the tattoo on your left arm?

It's Atabe. She's a Puerto Rican goddess, basically. Her legs are a frog, and she is the representation of femininity, of motherhood, of power, of water and rebirth.

That seems fitting.

(She laughs.) Yea, it is.



» Colón with Mishie Serrano '26, one of her former El Centro advisees, at Cap and Gown Pickup Day in May 2026



» Colón introduces panelists before a discussion outside El Centro in November 2025.



» Colón joins President George Timmons and others for a ribbon-cutting unveiling a mural outside El Centro in 2024.

Finding Good

Elena Ciampa '22 already had bachelor's and master's degrees in Spanish — and a career as a Spanish language teacher — when she enrolled at HCC to study music, satisfying a long-suppressed passion. "I'm one of seven kids, and my parents told me, no, you don't go to school for music; you find a job that makes money," said Ciampa, a 56-year-old married mother of two. "I think I was gonna go crazy if I didn't make this move. I was holding 30 years of melodies inside my head." Six years later, Ciampa graduated with high honors and performed one of her original songs at HCC's 75th Anniversary Commencement in 2022. Since then, she's earned a master's degree in composition from the Hartt School of Music in Hartford and kept busy writing, recording, and performing. In March, in advance of the second nationwide No Kings Day protests, the *Daily Hampshire Gazette* profiled Ciampa for a story about a musical collaboration she orchestrated that resulted in the release of a protest song and video called "Finding Good," a memorial to Renee Good, who was shot and killed by an ICE officer in Minneapolis. Ciampa shares writing credit on the song with Brooklyn-based, Emmy-award-winning music engineer Cory Choy. For "Finding Good," Ciampa turned the living room of her Florence, Massachusetts, home into a music studio — and turned to HCC for backup, recruiting vocalists **Chestina Thower '25, Brandon Phommasith '26, Sarah Belote '26**, and keyboardist **Kyren Harris '25**. "HCC was my incubator," said Ciampa. "Without it, this thing I'm doing never would have happened." You can find "Finding Good" and Ciampa's other original recordings on her Linktree page and on YouTube.



» Elena Ciampa '22, at her piano



Just Makes Sense

One of **Aaron Vega**'s earliest memories of HCC is tagging along with his mother to class when he was a young child. "My mom came here, my dad came here, and I came here as a little kid," he said. "That really stuck with me." In March, Vega '90, a former Holyoke city councilor and state representative who is now the president and CEO of the Western Mass Economic Development Council, was appointed to the HCC Board of Trustees by Gov. Maura Healey. Until the end of 2025, Vega was the director of the Office of Planning and Economic Development for the City of Holyoke. From 2013 to 2021, he represented the 5th Hampden District in the Massachusetts House of Representatives. No stranger to HCC, Vega received a Distinguished Alumni Award from the college in 2015 and is the son of the late **Carlos Vega '71**, a social activist and co-founder of the Holyoke nonprofit Nueva Esperanza, who received HCC's 2004 Distinguished Service Award. Vega's daughter, **Courtney Joaquin**, graduated from HCC in 2018. "HCC is one of my favorite places in Holyoke, absolutely," said Vega, who earned a bachelor's degree in psychology from Keene State University before embarking on a short career as a documentary filmmaker. "My dad was such a proponent of public education, and then as a state rep I served on the higher education committee, supporting HCC, so joining the board just makes sense."

« President George Timmons and new trustee Aaron Vega '90

Leading by Example

When **Nayroby Rosa '10** was working as a case manager for the YMCA in Springfield, Massachusetts, she spent her days urging young women in her care to stay in school. After repeatedly dispensing that advice, she decided it was time to take it herself and enrolled in the human services program at HCC. Through her practicums, she discovered her passion: working with youth and the elderly. "HCC shaped the journey that I have been on," said Rosa, the alumni representative on the HCC Board of Trustees. "Because of the exposure I had in the human services program, I learned what I wanted to do." Rosa used her practicum experience and previous roles in human services to build her bachelor's degree through the UMass Amherst University Without Walls program. She eventually became director of community engagement and resident services at OneHolyoke, a nonprofit organization focused on affordable housing, property rehabilitation, and neighborhood improvement. When the executive director began thinking about retirement, he approached Rosa about being his successor. She asked for 10 years to build up the necessary experience. He countered with seven. "And it's been five," she said with a laugh. In early 2026, OneHolyoke named Rosa as its chief operating officer, and in July as its executive director. "I want to see the organization continue to grow, put in more housing, and make sure our community engagement department continues to thrive," she said.



» Nayroby Rosa '10

EXIT, STAGE LEFT

The fall 2026 semester marked the first time in 26 years that the familiar face of **Steve Bailey '77** will be absent from the sound booth during performances in the Leslie Phillips Theater. After supporting more than 500 shows since joining HCC as technical director in 2000, Bailey has retired. Bailey's love of theater dates back to Agawam High School, and that passion followed him to HCC, where he performed in campus productions before transferring to Hofstra University in New York. After earning his degree, he performed at the Coachlight Dinner Theatre in East Windsor, Connecticut, and at high schools throughout the region, until he realized there was more money to be made on the technical side. When his alma mater posted an opening for a technical director, he returned to Homestead Avenue, and he's been here ever since. Over the years, he has taught countless students how to build stage props, dangled from the bosun's chair as he adjusted stage lights, and climbed an 18-foot ladder to change bulbs. Once, mid-performance, the hinge on a staircase cracked. Bailey rushed to the stage and held it in place until the act ended, then fixed it during intermission. "You have to be ready to improvise," he said. "You have to be ready to fix it if it's broken. You have to be ready to switch into plan B, plan C, plan Q, plan X." Bailey will miss the camaraderie of putting on productions with students and faculty — but not the never-ending deadlines. "My heart's always here," he said, "but my body might be someplace else."

« Steve Bailey '77 in the technician's booth above the Leslie Phillip Theater

A SEAT AT THE TABLE



« Betty-Jo O'Brien at Commencement in 2018

When her son Kevin, an Air Force veteran and avionics technician, was diagnosed with brain cancer at 23, **Betty-Jo O'Brien '18** made it her mission to get him the help he needed. It wasn't easy. First, Fisher House Boston, which provides lodging for military and veteran families, had no space available. Her determination to stay close during his recovery became the catalyst for what is now the Fisher House Boston Medical Lodging Program, which partners with local hotels to provide free accommodations for military and veteran families. O'Brien faced her next obstacle when Kevin left the hospital and she discovered that he was also excluded from VA caregiver benefits because his illness didn't qualify as a catastrophic injury. "There were so many things wrong with the system, I had nowhere to start," O'Brien said. "I tried getting a seat at the table, but was unable to because I didn't have a degree." At 50, as a full-time caregiver, O'Brien enrolled at HCC and earned an associate degree in business. She went on to earn a bachelor's degree from Bay Path University and an MBA from Colorado Technical University. That education gave her the credentials and the confidence to advocate for change. As a 2018 Elizabeth Dole Foundation Caregiver Fellow representing Massachusetts, she successfully lobbied to expand the VA caregiver program to include veterans with serious illnesses, not just catastrophic injuries. For these efforts, O'Brien was named a finalist for the 2026 WWLP-22News Remarkable Women Award. O'Brien is finishing her memoir, *Scars and Miracles*, chronicling her journey with Kevin, who will celebrate 13 years cancer-free this November. "I hope people see that even the hardest experiences can become an opportunity to make things better for someone else," she said. "Education gave me the ability to turn obstacles into solutions — not just for my family, but for families who would come after us."

Creative Connection

In 1984, when Sherri Morini's son attended the preschool where **Fran Frere '81** was teaching, the two connected over a shared passion for early childhood education, and they began talking about starting a preschool of their own. Two years later, they did it, launching Creative Kids in Westfield, Massachusetts. Frere brought years of classroom experience and knowledge of early childhood education, while Morini brought her business background, having worked in her parents' bridal shop in West Springfield. (To become a certified preschool teacher, Morini took a course in children's health care at HCC.) Forty years later, Creative Kids is a thriving business that has educated more than 4,000 children. While Frere trains the staff and develops the curriculum, Morini oversees accounting, insurance and compliance. Together, they share a philosophy that goes beyond educating children — they believe in teaching the importance of giving back to their communities. Over the years, Creative Kids has hosted HCC early childhood education students for their practicums and hired many HCC graduates. Approximately half of the school's 20 teachers are HCC alumni. "We've been very fortunate to have a lot of great teachers who went to HCC, and many were once our students," said Frere.



» Left to right: Creative Kids staff: Sherri Morini, co-owner and business administrator; Fran Frere '81, co-owner and director; Kate Chapdelaine, associate director

Alumni Notes



» St. Patrick's Day Grand Marshal Bill Harris '67

Grand Marshal

Bill Harris '67 (arts and sciences) was named the 2026 St. Patrick's Day Grand Marshal by the St. Patrick's Day committee of Flint, Michigan. The distinction included presiding over Flint's Miss Hibernia pageant as well as participating in several other events where he was honored. Harris worked in broadcast news for more than 50 years, starting as a camera operator for WWLP-22News in Springfield, Massachusetts, and eventually becoming a news anchor for WJRT-TV in Flint. He has served on the Holyoke St. Patrick's Day parade committee and is a member of the Ancient Order of Hibernians Sullivan & O'Sullivan Division in Flint.

1973

Jo-Anne Manijek Sbrega (early education) retired as executive director at the Children's Museum of Greater Fall River, in Fall River, Massachusetts in 2022. She previously served on the museum's board and led fundraising, operations, educational programming, and the museum's expansion into its permanent facility. She married her husband a year after graduating from HCC.

1975

The Sons of Erin recognized **James Kane** (business) with the 2026 Billy Buzzee "St. Pat on the Back Award" in honor of his hard work and dedication. He was the third charter member of the Sons of Erin, an Irish-American social club that brings heritage and culture to Westfield, Massachusetts. The Sons of Erin participate in local sports activities, seasonal festivals, and parades. Kane dedicated 36 years of his life to the Westfield Fire Department before retiring in 2016 as deputy chief.

1976

Mark Marchand is writing his fourth book, this one about his cross-country travels from Oregon to Boston. He is a frequent traveler to Europe with his wife, Elisa, with whom he recently returned from a two-week expedition in Antarctica. After HCC, Marchand earned his bachelor's degree in physical sciences with a concentration in chemistry from the University of Massachusetts Amherst, where he subsequently served three terms on the UMass Alumni Association Board. He began his career at Verizon, where he worked for 25 years in senior management and communications. During his career, he served as a national spokesman on technology and taught journalism for 10 years at the University of Albany.

1986

The Agawam St. Patrick's Committee recognized **Kristine Miller Sills** (computer electronics technology) with the Anne Sullivan Award. Sills has proudly served as a member of the Agawam St. Patrick's Committee for the past two years and recently was elected as the committee's vice president. She recently retired after working 35 years with the U.S. Postal Service.



Happy Returns

Patricia Sandoval '84 (arts and sciences) is enjoying retirement from Holyoke Community College, where she was a professor of communications and theater for 27 years, by taking nice walks, spending time with family, and catching up on reading and projects around the house. She returned to campus a few times last spring, attending the 2026 Scholarship Reception in May with her grand-daughter, HCC student and scholarship recipient **Nicole Couture**, and the WCCH Reunion on April 30, where she caught up with colleagues and former students, including marketing major and Institutional Advancement intern **Zoë Bisbing** of Holyoke.

« Pat Sandoval '84 greets former student Zoë Bisbing at the WCCH reunion party on April 30.

1987

Robert Ziomek (arts and sciences) was recently appointed vice president of institutional advancement at Westfield State University. Ziomek has held multiple leadership roles at different institutions, including Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts and Johnson & Wales University. He worked as assistant of advancement and university relations at Westfield State from 2000 to 2010, where he focused on strengthening alumni outreach and institutional growth. Ziomek focuses on making education accessible and financially sustainable for students.

1988

Joanne Ollson has joined the senior leadership team at ServiceNet as chief human resources officer. ServiceNet is a nonprofit mental health and human service agency based in Northampton. Ollson earned a double bachelor's degree in business administration and executive management from Bay Path College and a master's degree in human resource development from American International College. Ollson has served in board leadership roles at Springfield Technical Community College, the Employers Association of the Northeast, the Ludlow Boys and Girls Club, and the Town of Ludlow Personnel Board, and volunteers to serve meals at an area homeless shelter.

1989

Elizabeth Cole a.k.a. EJ Cole (early education) published her second children's book, *Elizabeth and the Enchanted Elevator*, in March 2026. The book, from Miriam Laundry Publishing, is the second in her Inspired Imagination Series, which aims to teach children to use their imagination while doing chores to help the time pass. For almost 20 years, Cole was the owner/director of Dolphin Daycare, an early childhood education center, after which she turned to a career as a social worker for children and families. She earned a master's degree in social work from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, became a licensed therapist, and published her first children's picture book, *Elizabeth and the Magic Mirror*, in April 2025. "I never lost my joy of sharing stories that I discovered during my student teaching days and am now a best-selling children's author!" she writes.



Elizabeth Cole

1993

Aaron Wood (visual arts) shares that 2026 marks 25 healthy years after his kidney transplant. A graphic designer, Wood is the owner of Aaron Wood Designs in Holyoke.

2001

Crystal Childs (graphic design) is the co-founder and chief executive officer of DOMORRE Marketing in Agawam and has been a marketing consultant for more than 20 years. She was a *Business West* "40 Under Forty" award recipient in 2018 and is on the Westfield State University Foundation Board.

2006

Kahntapaht Wilson (graphic design) is an adjunct faculty member in business and professional studies at MassBay Community College. Wilson is the owner of Mr. C's Sauce and Marinade, which produces her family's signature recipes and can be found in grocery stores and eateries from Westfield to Boston. She completed a bachelor's degree in business management and marketing from Westfield State University and an MBA from Bay Path University.

2008

Ryan Rege (liberal arts) was named superintendent of the Franklin County Regional Vocational Technical School District in Turners Falls, Massachusetts. He previously served as principal at Pathfinder Regional Vocational Technical High School. A resident of Belcherton, Massachusetts, he is also an adjunct professor at Westfield State University and Fitchburg State University, a member of the Holyoke Community College Alumni Council, and sits on the board of directors of the HCC Foundation.

2010

Johnnie McKnight (business administration) is running for election as the Massachusetts state representative for the 11th Hampden District with a focus on issues including affordable housing, quality education, public safety, workforce development, and lower costs for working families. After graduating from HCC, McKnight completed both a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in business administration management at American International College. Today, McKnight serves as a middle school math teacher in the Springfield Public Schools. In addition to working in education, he serves on several community boards and advisory committees focused on workforce development, educational equity, and economic opportunity. McKnight says that Holyoke Community College played an important role in his journey by providing a foundation that helped him grow as a student, professional, and community leader.

Christopher Rhodes (administrative information systems) recently joined Collins Aerospace as a production control specialist. While studying at HCC, Rhodes worked at Lenox Tools as a part-time customer service specialist.



Christopher Rhodes

After graduation, he was hired full time in their logistics department. Later, Rhodes was named production planner supervisor at CRRC in Springfield. Recently, he celebrated 16 years of marriage with his wife, and they plan to spend their next anniversary on a trip to Portugal.

2011

Sheril Cooley (liberal arts) was awarded the 2026 Leadership in Suicide Prevention Award by the Massachusetts Coalition for Suicide Prevention. As a licensed clinical social worker, Cooley works with diverse communities across western Massachusetts, including veterans, suicide loss survivors, LGBTQ individuals, older adults, and youth. "Through her leadership with the Pioneer Valley Coalition for Suicide Prevention, she has displayed her deep commitment to suicide prevention and strengthening connections within the Black community, and has shown her passion for leading initiatives focused on older adult mental health," the award committee said. After HCC, Cooley earned her bachelor's degree in psychology from Elms College and a master's degree in social work from Westfield State University.

2012

Dylan Pilon (business administration), owner of Cloud 9 Marketing Group in East Longmeadow, was inducted into Sigma Nu Tau, a national honor society for excellence in entrepreneurship. After graduating from HCC, he transferred to the Isenberg School of Management at UMass Amherst, graduating with a bachelor's degree in marketing. Pilon currently serves as board president of the ERC5 Chamber of Commerce and as president of the Western Mass Referral Exchange. He is a board member for the nonprofit community development organization Living Local 413, and has served on numerous boards and committees, including the HCC Business Advisory Board, the Roger L. Putnam Vocational Technical Academy Marketing Advisory Committee, the Ronald McDonald House Planned Advisory Committee, and the East Longmeadow Media Communications Sub-Committee. Pilon funds an annual HCC alumni donor matching challenge during the annual spring "Together HCC" giving day campaign, and is the founder of the Cloud 9 Scholarship through the HCC Foundation.



Dylan Pilon

2014

Louis Burgos (criminal justice 2014; communication, media, and theater arts 2018) recently completed a master's degree in applied communication at Fitchburg State University. Before that, he received his bachelor's degree in communication and media studies at Westfield State University. For the last two years, Burgos has been HCC's multimedia specialist. "It's been a full circle experience to now work at the same place that helped shape my educational journey," he says. "Looking back, it's great to see how much growth, dedication, and perseverance these last two years required."



Louis Burgos

After beginning her journey with HCC, **Rachelle (Houle) Warwick** (communications, media, and theater arts; human resources management) transferred to Asnuntuck Community College



Rachelle (Houle) Warwick



Lucien Dalton '16 and Hannah Trobaugh '16 at the Quogue Wildlife Refuge on Long Island

Summer Sojourn

Hannah Trobaugh '16 (liberal arts) and her husband **Lucien Dalton '16** (math) took a summer trip to the south fork of Long Island, logging some beach time in Hampton Bays and visiting the Quogue Wildlife Refuge (pictured) in Quogue, New York. Trobaugh, daughter of HCC English Professor Elizabeth Trobaugh, is the technical director at Connecticut Repertory Theatre and a master's degree in fine arts candidate at the University of Connecticut. She received a bachelor's degree in technical theater/theater design and technology at Hampshire College. With a passion for construction and welding, she is an experienced carpenter with a background in theatrical production in the professional and community theater industry. In 2025, as an HCC math tutor and the engineering pathways coordinator, Dalton received the college's Outstanding Part-Time Staff Award. He now works full time as the HCC STEM support and retention specialist. The couple lives in South Hadley, Massachusetts.

in Connecticut to major in communications and radio broadcasting. She began her radio career at WCCH 103.5 and has continued to work with local stations NEPM 98.3 and The Q 99.7. She currently works as the groups and events manager at Six Flags New England in Agawam, Massachusetts.

2015

Emily Mendez (nursing) recently accepted the new role as quality improvement coordinator for the Hospice of Western & Central Massachusetts. Mendez received her master's degree in nursing from American International College. Since graduating from HCC, she's explored a wide breadth of jobs in the nursing field — from dialysis and medical surgery to leadership roles in management and quality.



Emily Mendez

Adriana Piantedosi (liberal arts) is on course to complete her master's degree in social work from Smith College next year. After graduating from HCC, Piantedosi transferred to Smith College as an Ada Comstock Scholar and earned a bachelor's degree in film and media studies in 2023. Piantedosi credits **Irma Medina '97** (former Pathways coordinator, now dean of Integrated and Applied Learning) for supporting her transfer applications, which resulted in offers of full scholarships from Smith and Mount Holyoke College.

2017

Betsy Cortis Lancto (liberal arts) is the sales operations associate at New England Public Media, a career path she attributes to her experience with the HCC college radio station, WCCH. In the last few years, Lancto got married, had a daughter, and bought a house Belchertown, Massachusetts.

Karianne Santiago-Ruiz (biology) is patient family relations specialist at Mass General Hospital in Boston. After graduating from HCC, Santiago-Ruiz transferred to UMass Amherst for a bachelor's degree in public health and health sciences. She then completed a master's degree in public policy at the University of New England in Maine. "I am truly grateful for the foundation that HCC instilled in me because it deepened my commitment to work not only with community, but for community," she writes.



Karianne Santiago-Ruiz

Send us *your* news!

Fill out the form on page 37 to submit by mail or scan the QR code to submit online.

2019

Joviana Rosario-Diaz (administrative professional studies) recently accepted a position as office administrator in the office of the dean of students at UMass Amherst. Since graduating from HCC, Rosario-Diaz has worked in various administrative roles with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. In March 2025, Rosario-Diaz married her long-time partner, Ryan Diaz, and welcomed their son, Luis Diaz. She has continued her education, taking classes part time at HCC with plans to pursue a bachelor's degree in legal studies with a concentration in hospitality and tourism law. She says the dedicated faculty and staff at HCC have been an integral part of her growth and professional success.

2020

Samantha Robinson (liberal arts) is enrolled in the digital photography program at Springfield Technical Community College. After graduating from HCC, Robinson studied digital media and communications at Bay Path University, graduating with a bachelor's degree in 2024. Robinson is an avid Springfield Thunderbirds fan, enjoys attending sporting events, and has experience as a disc jockey for sports radio, along with promoting and DJing local events.

Naiomi Robles (liberal arts and science) is the student success counselor at El Centro, HCC's bilingual student support program. After HCC, Robles completed a bachelor's degree in critical race theory and political economy at Mount Holyoke College. She has worked in the Holyoke Public School system as an educator and manager of culturally responsive education, which involved overseeing the ethnic studies program and leading professional development throughout the district on antiracism and dismantling ableism in pre-K-12 education.



Naiomi Robles

2021

Banen Mustafa (secondary education) is pursuing a Ph.D. at UMass Amherst in language, literacy, and culture. Mustafa received her bachelor's degree in English, secondary education and teaching at Westfield State University. She went on to get her master's degree in education at UMass Amherst, specializing in bilingual and multicultural education.

2022

Miren Neyra Alcantara (Latinx studies) was accepted into the Ph.D. program in public history at UMass Amherst. After graduating from HCC, Alcantara transferred to Smith College to complete a bachelor's degree in Latin American studies with a concentration in archives. When Alcantara was a student at HCC, she was the president of the Latinx Empowerment Association, created a social media campaign titled "Celebrating the Latinx Community," led peer discussions, and and received a Newman Civic Fellowship from Campus Compact, a Boston-based nonprofit.



Miren Neyra Alcantara

Gwenn Nabad (liberal arts and science) won election to the Northampton City Council in November 2025 and is a member of the Northampton Housing Partnership, a city board. After graduating from HCC, Nabad received a bachelor's degree from Hampshire College, where she concentrated in Native American and Indigenous Studies. She also served on the college student advocacy board, where her leadership was recognized with the division of student affairs Ingenuity Award for 2023 and 2024. "HCC taught me so much I needed to know, not just academically, but how to move forward in life these days," she writes.

2024

Alanna Brunt (Latinx studies) graduated from UMass Amherst in May with a bachelor's degree in women, gender, and sexuality studies and a minor in African-American studies. She is now pursuing a master's degree in higher education in student affairs at Salem State University.

Idalice Serrano (business administration, Latinx studies) has been hired as an accountant II at HCC. Serrano worked part time in the IT department while taking classes and now works in the Business Office.

2025

Alicia Beaton (secondary education) was inducted into the Eta Theta Chapter of the Tau Sigma National Honor Society at Westfield State University. Tau Sigma is an honor society for transfer students who have demonstrated academic excellence within their first semester of transferring. Beaton writes that she is grateful to be recognized as an excellent transfer student and looks forward to being actively involved in the chapter.



Alicia Beaton

After dropping out of HCC in 2010, **Jorge Claudio** (liberal arts) pushed himself to re-enroll. With the support of ALANA, TRIO, and many other support programs on campus, he succeeded, earning his associate degree. He writes that the HCC community made him feel welcomed and valued. Claudio plans to transfer to Southern New Hampshire University to continue his education and hopes to find the same sense of belonging and support that helped him thrive at HCC. "No matter where my journey takes me next, HCC will always be an important part of my success story," he said.

Jalen J. Cortes (physics) is pursuing a bachelor's degree in astronomy at UMass Amherst. He says he is grateful for his time at HCC and the instructors and advisers who encouraged him to continue along the way. At UMass, Cortes enjoys being a part of Astro-TROUP, a program that supports first-generation and underrepresented students in astronomy research opportunities.



Jalen J. Cortez

Jamal Cumberbatch (liberal arts), a Commencement 2026 valedictorian, transferred to Pomona College in Claremont, California. A Fall 2025 HCC graduate, he had been working as development and engagement associate with Eagle Eye Institute (EEI), a nonprofit in Holyoke that focuses on providing outdoor experiences to youth who face barriers to accessing nature. At HCC, he was named to the 2026 Phi Theta Kappa All-Massachusetts Academic Team during an awards ceremony held at the Massachusetts Statehouse. He intends to maintain his connection to the region as a member of the HCC Alumni Council and EEI board of directors. He credits HCC, especially the Integrative Learning, Pathways, and ALANA programs, for providing him with growth opportunities, community connections, and support.



Jamal Cumberbatch

In Memoriam

Petriana Monize

English Professor Petriana Monize, of Leverett, Massachusetts, died on June 22, 2026, of BRCA1/2 metastatic breast cancer.



Petriana Monize

From 2003 until her death at the age of 61, she was a tenured professor of English at HCC.

Monize was born in Georgetown, Guyana, and moved to New York City when she was 14. She earned a bachelor's degree from Hunter College and a master's degree from New York University, where she had been a doctoral student in the English education and pedagogy program. Prior to HCC, her teaching experiences included colleges in New York City and high school in Florida.

Monize encouraged her students to acknowledge the value of their own richly personal experiences in their writing and to honor those lived experiences by writing from their hearts. She built deep and abiding relationships with her HCC colleagues, connecting with them through both teaching and socializing.

She loved literature and poetry and had an extensive collection of literature, pedagogy, philosophy, psychology, Zen, and poetry books. She particularly liked the works of more contemporary Buddhist writers. She was active in all seasons, either jogging, hiking in the woods, or snowshoeing. She was a teacher in the Green River Zen Center.

She is survived by her husband Reuven Goldstein and children Naomi and Jahian Cooper-Monize.

We are saddened to learn of the passing of the following members of the HCC community:

Robert P. Foley '59
Mitchell J. Salamon '62
Carol Salamon '63
Marsha Ryan '70, *retired staff*
Patrick J. Monahan '71
Frederick I. Holton '72
Gary B. Szymaniak '74
Robert J. Kotfila '76
Laura Kida '80
Ina Y. Klimczuk '81
Roland W. Monfette '83
Paul M. Benware '87
Christopher J. Clark '89
Michael R. Favreau '90
Peter J. Liptak '95
Victor F. Caputo, III '10

CAMPUS **KUDOS**



Honored for Innovation

For the second year in a row, Chef Tracy Carter was recognized with a national award for her work as chair of the HCC culinary arts department. In July, Carter received the 2026 Innovation Award from Real Milk California and the Center for the Advancement of Foodservice Education (CAFÉ). Carter was recognized in part for implementing the Culinary Learning Hub, a digital platform designed to reinforce in-person instruction and provide students with widely accessible learning materials. Beginning this fall, English 101 (Composition) was embedded in the culinary arts education, allowing culinary students to complete foundational coursework in their own learning environment. In 2025, Carter received the Community Outreach Award from CAFÉ and the Auguste Escoffier School of Culinary Arts.

« Chef Tracy Carter, left, with HCC culinary arts student Tiffany Mackey

Who I Am

Anthropology Professor Vanessa Martinez was honored March 9 for her work engaging students in civic learning. During a ceremony at Holyoke's Wistariahurst Museum celebrating Civics Learning Week, Martinez received proclamations from Holyoke Mayor Joshua Garcia and state Rep. Patricia Duffy. Martinez, Ph.D., a health anthropologist, is coordinator of community-based learning at HCC. In 2023, as part of their coursework, her students started collecting stories from Holyoke residents for two oral history projects, one on the COVID-19 pandemic and another that examines living conditions in the city and their impact on public health. Those interviews have become part of the Wistariahurst Museum's permanent archives. "I hope you know that for the rest of my life I will support this community and do this work, because that's how meaningful it is" she said. "It is who I am."



» HCC Professor Vanessa Martinez with Holyoke Mayor Joshua Garcia at Wistariahurst Museum

Hall of Famer

HCC Director of Athletics Thomas "Tommy" Stewart was inducted into the National Junior College Athletic Association Track and Field Coaches Association Hall of Fame during a March 5 ceremony at Washburn University in Topeka, Kansas, site of the 2026 NJCAA Track and Field Championship, where he served as meet director. Stewart has served on the NJCAA Track and Field Committee for 20 years, but he has been involved with the NJCAA in various roles for 25. During Stewart's 30 years at HCC, the college has hosted nine NJCAA national cross-country championships and one national track and field championship. "I've had a good run and a wonderful career," said Stewart, who plans to retire in January 2028. "I'm very lucky to do what I do. At some point, you've got to pass the baton."



» HCC Athletics Director Tom Stewart in the fitness room at the Bartley Center for Athletics and Recreation

Lifetime Achievement

During the past three decades, thousands of graduating students have passed through the office of Transfer Affairs Coordinator Mark Broadbent on their way to other colleges and universities. For all his work helping HCC students progress to the next level of education, the New England Transfer Association honored him with the 2026 Dr. Mary E. Dunn Lifetime Achievement in Transfer Award. Broadbent started working at HCC in 1990 as a graduate intern from Springfield College, moving into Admissions and TRIO before landing in Transfer Affairs 34 years ago.



» Transfer Affairs Coordinator Mark Broadbent in his HCC office

SEND NEWS

Name Now in Use

Class Year

Name While Attending HCC

Spouse/Partner Name

Class Year

Address

Telephone (Residence)

(Business)

Email Address

Your News



Share news of your wedding, retirement, promotion, travels, children/grandchildren, awards, academic achievements, military honors, *whatever!*

Scan to share

Send news and photos to alumni@hcc.edu or to* The Connection, *c/o Alumni Relations, 303 Homestead Ave., Holyoke MA 01040.

THE CONNECTION

Holyoke Community College, 303 Homestead Avenue, Holyoke, MA 01040

NONPROFIT
ORGANIZATION
US POSTAGE PAID
SPRINGFIELD MA
PERMIT NO 228



Getting multiple copies at your address?

Let us know at alumni@hcc.edu

U SOU HCC. 我是HCC。 MWEN SE HCC. BEN HCC'YIM. Я — HCC. من HCC هستم. TÔI LÀ HCC. أنا HCC. Я - HCC. I AM HCC. E
OU HCC. 我是HCC。 MWEN SE HCC. BEN HCC'YIM. Я — HCC. من HCC هستم. TÔI LÀ HCC. أنا HCC. Я - HCC. I AM HCC. EU SO
CC. 我是HCC。 MWEN SE HCC. YO SOY HCC. BEN HCC'YIM. Я — HCC. من HCC هستم. TÔI LÀ HCC. أنا HCC. Я - HCC. I AM HC
U SOU HCC. 我是HCC。 MWEN SE HCC. BEN HCC'YIM. Я — HCC. من HCC هستم. TÔI LÀ HCC. أنا HCC. Я - HCC. I AM HCC. E
من HCC هستم. TÔI LÀ HCC. أنا HCC. Я - HCC. I AM HCC. EU SO
C هستم. TÔI LÀ HCC. أنا HCC. Я - HCC. I AM HCC. EU SOU HC
هستم. TÔI LÀ HCC. أنا HCC. Я - HCC. I AM HCC. EU SOU HCC. 我
ن HCC هستم. TÔI LÀ HCC. أنا HCC. Я - HCC. I AM HCC. EU SO
C هستم. TÔI LÀ HCC. أنا HCC. Я - HCC. I AM HCC. EU SOU HC


Naylani Collazo-Cartagena '26

YOU ARE HCC.

HOLYOKE COMMUNITY COLLEGE Foundation, Inc.

When you give, you power our mission to *educate, inspire and connect.*

hcc.edu/give2