

# HCC celebrates expansion of college food pantry

HOLYOKE – The new Holyoke Community College food pantry is more than four times the size of the old one. More than that, it is now just steps away from the HCC Campus Center and cafeteria.

“This new location feels so much more like a hub for our students to receive the support they need,” said Amanda Sbriscia, HCC vice president of Institutional Advancement. “The shelves are well stocked. It’s bright, it’s accessible, and it’s judgment free, which is so important.”

The occasion for her remarks was a Sept. 10 ribbon-cutting celebration marking the relocation and expansion of both the HCC Thrive Center and the food pantry. Prior to the move, the food pantry occupied a small space within the Thrive Center, which was located in a tight, reconfigured classroom on the second floor of the Frost Building.

Now, the Thrive Center and food pantry occupy dedicated, more spacious rooms side by side on the second floor of the Kittredge Center for Business and Workforce Development, which adjoins the Campus Center.

The Thrive Center (formerly called the Thrive Student Resource Center) helps students address nonacademic issues that can interfere with their studies, such as food and housing insecurity, transportation, healthcare, childcare, utilities, and credit. Thrive also manages the food pantry.

“When you think about college and what it takes to be successful, there’s so many things that can prevent you from learning,” said President George Timmons. “So, this is just another opportunity for us to live up to our mission, which is being an institution of academic excellence that helps remove barriers to student success.”

Now, inside the Thrive Center, Ben Ostiguy, Thrive coordinator, and Elizabeth Rivera, Thrive’s bilingual program assistant, each have their own offices where they can meet privately with students. There’s also an additional office for a soon-to-be hired food pantry manager.

Next door, in the food pantry itself, black wire shelving units hold nonperishable food as well as school supplies, baby supplies, and personal care items - all free. There is also a freezer for frozen food items and a refrigeration unit for drinks and perishable items.

“What I always tell folks is that our first impression is our first intervention, so the first impression we make with students is pretty critical,” said Ostiguy. “I think having a fresh space with updated equipment and designs sends the right message to students. It shows that the campus cares, that this is a priority, and that we are prepared to help them in meaningful ways.”

Before the ribbon-cutting, Sbriscia thanked the many donors and partners responsible for making the Thrive Center and food pantry successful, including the United Way of Pioneer Valley, the Holyoke Housing Authority, Rachel’s Table, the Caring Health Center, PeoplesBank, Stop and Shop, Gary Rome Hyundai, Hyundai America, One Holyoke CDC, Enlace de Familias, and Tech Foundry.

“If you could, for a moment, just think about what it feels like to be hungry,” said Sbriscia, who is also executive director of the HCC Foundation, which manages a special fund on behalf of Thrive. “You’re irritable, you’re tired, you’re distracted. No student should have that feeling as they go through their day. This is a space that ensures that they get what they need so they can do what they are here to do, which is to succeed in college and graduate.”