

# Alumni Connection

HOLYOKE  
COMMUNITY  
COLLEGE  
FALL 2019

## Ode to Joy

The busy, happy life and times of Prof. Jay Ducharme '78

**ALSO INSIDE:**

Alumni-tutors teach – and learn – at HCC

*Michael Kittredge '73 remembered*

## DEAR READERS



Christina Royal, Ph.D.,  
HCC President

**F**all semester at Holyoke Community College can be summed up by one word: possibility. Just weeks ago, we welcomed our newest students to campus. Ranging in age from 16 to 82 and coming from cities and towns all across the Pioneer Valley, the state, the nation and the world, each is attending HCC with a unique set of goals to achieve, barriers to overcome and priorities to juggle. In every case, their first step toward success – toward the possibility of a brighter future for themselves and their families – is HCC.

I see possibility in every corner of our campus. In a very tangible way, our new \$43.5 million Campus Center is making it possible for students to engage with faculty, connect with each other and pursue their dreams in a fully renovated, 66,000 square-foot space. Following two years of construction, the “heartbeat” of HCC has reopened its doors. Although our students will now enjoy a sleek new dining center, we also recognize that nearly half of HCC students face food insecurity and the prospect of going hungry. The college’s food pantry makes it possible for students to focus on achieving their degrees – because you cannot study or participate in class if you are unsure of where your next meal will come from.

Our alumni play a significant role in the success of our students – from support of the food pantry and the Student Emergency Fund, to providing mentoring and inspiration as guest speakers in our classrooms. We want to make it possible for you to engage with HCC in these as well as new ways – with myriad opportunities that add value to your life and enrich the lives of our students. With that in mind, Institutional Advancement recently welcomed two new staff members: Patrick Carpenter, director of Institutional Advancement, and Julie Phillips, coordinator of Alumni Relations and Annual Giving (see back cover photo). Patrick and Julie are eager to meet and work with you, so that together, we can make it possible for students to become the first in their families to achieve a college degree; find their voice and transfer to a prestigious four-year institution; or gain the knowledge and skills that lead to a successful career.

This fall also marks Year 1 of our Strategic Plan – a year of mission-driven action that will position HCC to be a college of academic excellence known for helping students overcome barriers to success. As our plans for initiatives and programs that enhance the student experience take shape, I hope we can count on you to help us make them reality. Because, with your support, anything is possible.

# Alumni Connection

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# Proud to be from @HolyokeCC

Yashir Ali is an American journalist whose Twitter post earlier this year generated the comments below from proud HCC, that is @HolyokeCC, alumni.

**Yashir Ali** @yashar Follow

Did you go to a community college? Quote tweet this and say which community college you attended and what you're doing today. I'll retweet as many as I can. People who attend community colleges deserve to be as proud as people who attend Harvard.

**Jessica Avery** @javery22 Follow

I spent a semester at @HolyokeCC as I was a spring admit at @mtholyoke. I received an incredible education at HCC, transferred my credits, and applied many of the skills learned at HCC to my MHC classes. Access to CC is crucial for all!

**Will Reichelt** @MayorReichelt Follow

.@HolyokeCC is my Alma Mater, love that school! Great, affordable, education and met a lot of incredible people of all ages and backgrounds!

**Lucie Schmidt** @LucieGSchmidt Follow

Went to @HolyokeCC after my daughter was born before transferring to @smithcollege. Now Professor of Economics at @WilliamsCollege.

**Katelyn Burns** @transcribe Follow

I went to @HolyokeCC and now I'm a Capitol Hill and federal policy reporter.

**Aly Putnam** @MarineBioAly Following

Replying to @yashar

I went to @HolyokeCC which set me up for success to transfer to @smithcollege I am now a published marine ecologist (MS) working at an amazing community college @GfldCommCollege soon to be starting a doctoral program in global change marine ecology. I am a #FirstGen #womaninSTEM

**Karianne S.** @k\_alied97 Following

I went to @HolyokeCC and from there transfer to @UMassAmherst where I'm currently a Public Health major. But the dream doesn't stop there, next stop med school!

**Riccardo Racicot** @r\_racicot Follow

@HolyokeCC Research technician in an evolutionary neurobiology laboratory.

**Katydid** @Katespillane55 Follow

Replying to @yashar

I went from a Community College @HolyokeCC to a director role at one of the largest tech companies in the world. #CommunityCollegesWork

## WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU.

HCC welcomes comments from readers. Contact us on social media, send an email to [alumni@hcc.edu](mailto:alumni@hcc.edu) or mail a letter to us at Alumni Connection, 303 Homestead Ave., Holyoke, MA 01040. Please include your name, class year, home address and phone number.

## AROUND CAMPUS



Clockwise, Pathways coordinator Irma Medina, HCC students Savannah Vezina of Agawam and Nicole Haswell of Chicopee and New Directions coordinator Lori Wayson hold a ceremonial check for \$1 million from the Elaine Nicpon Marieb Foundation; Attorney General Maura Healey talks to a student; early education students from HCC get ready to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Very Hungry Caterpillar at the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art in Amherst.

### AG Maura Healey visits HCC

During a May 1 visit to campus, Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey toured HCC's new Center for Life Sciences, the Thrive Center and food pantry, and talked to students, staff and faculty during a forum in the Kittredge Center with President Christina Royal, moderated by criminal justice Professor Alex Sanchez. Healey answered questions on a wide variety of topics, including the opioid crisis, gun control, criminal justice reform, affordable education, and consumer protection, particularly as it relates to social media sites sharing personal data.

See more photos at: [hcc.edu/healey](http://hcc.edu/healey)

### Caterpillar Action

Students in Professor Sheila Gould's Curriculum in Early Education class this spring helped celebrate the 50th anniversary of The Very Hungry Caterpillar at the museum founded by the beloved character's creator, the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art in Amherst. Teams of students were tasked with designing and facilitating an activity for guests visiting the museum's art studio for the anniversary celebration March 24. The winning idea, chosen by a team of judges from HCC and the museum, was to collaborate with museum guests to create a giant caterpillar on the studio windows. On Very Hungry Caterpillar Day, the students enlisted children and other visitors to help construct the body of the caterpillar from materials they prepared in the art studio a few days before. The students also made a large cardboard birthday cake and invited guests to "sign" it with their thumbprints.

Read more at: [hcc.edu/caterpillar](http://hcc.edu/caterpillar)

### Another Marieb Million

During her lifetime, alumna and former professor Elaine Marieb '80 donated more than \$1.5 million to HCC. Even after her death in December, Marieb's generosity continues. HCC is now the beneficiary of a \$1 million legacy gift Marieb set up as part of her estate plan, money earmarked for HCC programs that support nontraditional age students. The gift was officially announced May 28 at HCC's monthly Board of Trustees meeting, followed by the presentation of a \$1 million ceremonial check that is now on display in the Marieb Center, a study lounge and resource area for students in HCC's Pathways and New Directions programs. "This is incredible. We are so thrilled and grateful," said Amanda Sbriscia, HCC vice president of Institutional Advancement and executive director of the HCC Foundation, which will invest and manage the funds. "This gift will significantly enhance our efforts to support adult students and adult women at HCC."

Read more at: [hcc.edu/mariebmillion](http://hcc.edu/mariebmillion)





Clockwise from above, SHOUTS mentors welcome visitors to the grand opening of the group's new office March 27; HCC Foundation scholarship recipients Gabriel Artin, left, and Banen Mustafa, both of West Springfield, attend a May 9 scholarship luncheon; Sue Jones, left, HCC patient simulation technician and Michelle Sherlin, HCC simulation lab coordinator, pose with an award plaque in one of the simulation rooms at HCC.

## Internship program earns award

HCC's Center for Health Education received the 2019 Brian R. Johnson Outstanding Business Award for its commitment to a school-to-career internship program at Southwick Regional High School. The award is presented each year by the Business Education Alliance of Southwick, which was created in the 1990s by local business leaders to establish partnerships between schools and area employers. About 30 high school seniors participate in Southwick's Diversified Learning Program every year. During the past three semesters, HCC has hosted six interns as patient simulation technicians. The award was presented to representatives from the Center for Health Education during a celebration dinner Wed., April 10, at Southwick Regional High School. "It's quite an honor," said Michelle Sherlin, HCC simulation lab coordinator. "We're very proud of our association with Southwick and happy to be able to offer such meaningful work experiences to students considering future careers in healthcare."

Read more at: [hcc.edu/cheaward](http://hcc.edu/cheaward)

## SHOUTS welcome here

SHOUTS – Students Helping Out Students – is an HCC mentor program that celebrated the grand opening of its office on the first floor of the Donahue Building on March 27. This volunteer group comprises students from two distinct but related HCC support programs: STRIVE (Students Together Reaching Individual Visions of Excellence) and OSDDS (Office for Students with Disabilities and Deaf Services). "We're like guides helping students find the right facilities and services," said SHOUTS mentor Valeria Flores of Holyoke. The door is hard to miss, marked on both sides by original, colorful cartoons, a sign that visually shouts, "Welcome All Students!" and a string of blue holiday lights that signal when the office is open.

Read more at: [hcc.edu/shouts](http://hcc.edu/shouts)

## Foundation sets record

The HCC Foundation awarded 231 scholarships worth nearly \$250,000 this spring to incoming, current and graduating students, surpassing the old record set last year. The HCC community recognized the awardees along with the donors at a May 9 reception in the HCC Bartley Center for Athletics & Recreation. Scholarship recipient and graduating art major Catherine Carija '19 of Deerfield was one of the keynote speakers. "I had been out of school for 34 years," said Carija. "Lucky for me I found my way to HCC. I was greeted so warmly by faculty and staff, and without the generosity of donors and HCC Foundation scholarships – all that belief in me – I wouldn't be graduating now and going on to Mount Holyoke College." Over the years, the HCC Foundation has provided nearly \$2.8 million in student scholarships while also investing in classroom equipment and technology for select academic and student support programs.

See more photos at [hcc.edu/scholarships2019](http://hcc.edu/scholarships2019)

# ODE TO JOY



Electronic Media professor Jay Ducharme checks in at the Holyoke Merry-Go-Round in Heritage State Park.

## The busy, happy life and times of Prof. Jay Ducharme '78

By CHRIS YURKO

The PVTA's B23 bus leaves the Westfield station at 7:25 a.m., and we are on it. This is how, at 61 years of age, after 22 years at HCC, and one year from his planned retirement, Professor Jay Ducharme '78 commutes to work.

He hates to drive. He would prefer to ride a bicycle, just as he

did when he was a student at HCC years ago, commuting over Mount Tom from his childhood home in Easthampton, but carpal tunnel syndrome he developed playing guitar makes his hands go numb holding the handlebars. "I taught myself to play," he explains, "and I taught myself wrong." (These days he composes music on a keyboard.)



Ducharme and Karen, his wife of 22 years, own one car, which she usually takes to her job in the music department at Westfield State University. Until about two years ago, he drove an electric Smart car but gave it up after the lease expired.

“Phenomenal car.” He says “phenomenal” a lot. “Whisper quiet. Smooth. Handled well in the snow. I just wasn’t a fan of the stress of driving. I spent all my time watching out for other people on the road. Now I leave the driving to professionals.”

He’s on a first-name basis with his driver, James. “And that’s Pete,” he says, pointing to another bus. “He used to run this route. I consider it having my own chauffeur.” He grins.

The bus station is about a two-mile walk from his house, a modest ranch across the street from Stanley Park. On this chilly May morning, Ducharme is cloaked in a knit hat, winter gloves and an insulated jacket that says “Six Flags Coaster Team” on the back, a gift from his kids. But it’s a joke. “There is no coaster team,” he says.

Nothing remotely dramatic happens on the 45-minute walk and half-hour bus ride, though it does give Ducharme the opportunity to talk. He likes to talk, and he has a lot to talk about.

Ducharme is one of two people chiefly responsible for building up HCC’s Electronic Media program over the past two decades. Besides that, he is a musician, composer, choir singer, preservationist, blogger, videographer, disc golf course architect, prolific writer, published author, archivist, historian, roller coaster enthusiast and amusement park aficionado, and that is by no means the extent of his interests and activities.

“I’m trying to do everything,” he says. “I don’t know if I do it well, but I just feel that life’s too short. I want to try everything.”

Asked to describe himself, he answers: “Renaissance man.”

## The Office

An office can say a lot about a soul.

In Ducharme’s, for instance, there’s a clock on the wall he built out of what appears to be an electric guitar, though it was once actually “a *synthithar*,” he explains, a guitar with an embedded keyboard he invented during his days as a singer-songwriter in the ’80s and ’90s – the heyday of the Pioneer Valley music scene, in his opinion – a time when he was writing, recording albums and playing out at local clubs as a solo artist and with his band, The Dots.

He keeps a 3-D printed robot clock on his desk, along with a collection of maquettes, plastic figurines he created for his fall Introduction to Animation course using a computer program called Blender and a 3-D printer. “I love 3-D printing,” he says. He loves it

so much, in fact, that he bought a 3-D printer for his home.

One day I note the chess set crafted from nuts and bolts on a shelf in his campus office. It’s handmade, he tells me, magnetic, a gift from someone who knew he loved the game.

“Interesting story,” he says.

Chess, it turns out, runs in his family. His father and brother, he goes on, were at one time both Class A champion players. When he was growing up in Easthampton, his family would host chess night every Saturday. His mother would cook franks and beans and the area masters, grand masters and challengers would assemble at the Ducharme home to eat and play into the wee hours of the morning.

Jay, however, never advanced beyond Class D. “I just never got hold of it. The thing that my father had was the ability to hyper focus for long periods of time, and I just can’t do that. My mind is so scattered, so I tend to get restless when I play. I can’t sit for hours. I go, ok, time to do something else now. I’ve got to feel like I am accomplishing something.”

Next to the chess set stands a framed, strobe-lit photo of Ducharme and his wife Karen on a roller-coaster, mid plunge. “That’s El Toro at Six Flags Great Adventure in New Jersey,” he says. “Phenomenal coaster.” They travel around the country, often by train, exploring new rides and touring amusement parks. Ducharme chronicles their adventures with videos on his YouTube channel and written narratives on his website, karenandjay.com.

By his own estimate, Ducharme has logged around 300 unique coaster experiences, and he doesn’t just ride. He conducts research. He studies the designers (Intamin of Switzerland, in this case), the construction (engineered wood, steam-formed, prefabricated track laminate vertically stacked), and how design affects performance. On El Toro, he says, “you get the experience of a wood coaster but the ride of a steel coaster.”

Being able to recall all that information is a kind of mental exercise.

“I purposely try to do that,” he says. “One thing I fear is getting Alzheimer’s, so I figure I’ll keep trying to work my brain.”

The dominant office décor, however, relates to Mountain Park, the former amusement park on the Holyoke side of Mount Tom that closed in 1987 and whose demise Ducharme still laments. There’s an original Mountain Park pennant tacked to the wall along with a poster montage of photos he put together for the 20th anniversary of the Mountain Park carousel’s reopening at Holyoke’s Heritage State Park in 2013. The screensaver on his computer is a slideshow of photos he’s amassed over the years, many that he scanned for his 2008 Images of America book, *Mountain Park*,



(Top) Ducharme offers some guidance to a student in his Introduction to Animation class. (Bottom) Ducharme shows off a maquette, a 3-D-printed figurine, to HCC student Michael Laflamme, one of his advisees. Opposite page top: Ducharme collects old memorabilia from Mountain Park, including these two hangings, the clown from the park's Merry-Go-Round, and the mask, from the Dinosaur Den. Middle: Ducharme talks to a student. Bottom: Ducharme makes repairs to one of the goal posts on HCC's disc golf course, which he designed.

and its pseudo-sequel, *The Happiness Machine*, which details community efforts to preserve the park's Merry-Go-Round.

Ducharme is without doubt the principal authority on the subject. Like many people who grew up in the Pioneer Valley, he visited the park regularly as a child and has fond memories of those days. Unlike most, he worked there for 13 years as a ride operator (before it closed) and a watchman (after), followed by a three-year stint as operator of the relocated Merry-Go-Round, which he is still involved with as a volunteer board member, fundraiser and mechanical consultant.

He expends a great deal of energy trying to keep memories of the park alive. One of his latest projects – a work in progress – is building a scale model of Mountain Park that is on display next to the Merry-Go-Round in the Holyoke Heritage State Park museum.

“I’m one of the few people who remembers it in great detail,” he says, “and I figure I’d like to share it and let others see what a beautiful amusement park Holyoke used to have.”

### That’s Jay for ya

People who’ve been on the HCC campus long enough will recognize Ducharme by sight if not by name. He’s tall and bald, wears large, round, wire-rimmed glasses, blue jeans, button-down chamois shirts and suspenders – the trademark accessory to his work uniform.



He is neither shy, nor quiet, and likes a corny joke. Recently retired professor Justin West, founder and longtime coordinator of the Electronic Media program, who hired Ducharme in 2000, describes his close colleague as “ebullient.”

“What I’m trying to get across there is not just that he’s enthusiastic, but super enthusiastic,” says West, “like over the top. For instance, I think you could ask anybody if they’d be able to identify Jay’s laugh. It’s kind of a bark, and when we’re in division meetings, Kim” – Kim Hicks, the division dean – “will say, ‘Do I have a motion to –’ ‘SO MOVED!’ He’s the first one off the mark. It’s loud, and everyone can hear him.”

“I always ask him what he’s up to cause he has so many hobbies,” says Mary Starzych, the administrative assistant in the Fine & Performing Arts office, where Ducharme stops first thing every morning to check his mail, fill his water bottle in the staff room next door – and talk. “He loves to talk to students about the Electronic Media program. That’s his big thing.”

Students report that, while tough, Ducharme brings a tireless energy to his classes that never flags, even as the semester winds down.

“One thing I noticed is how happy he always is,” said Michael Indomenico, a student in Ducharme’s fall 2018 Introduction to Animation class. “The biggest smile I ever saw on him was when the class was working with 3-D printers. He was doing his own project at the time, making a desk clock. When the clock was complete, I could see how proud he was.”

Ducharme demonstrates that same ebullience during visits to HCC’s Marketing & Communications office, where he likes to debut his latest 3-D creations – a kitchen measuring cube, a tea light embossed with a photo of the new Campus Center, a gear cube, a nautilus, a bearing, a fidget spinner, a gecko with articulating joints. For his backyard garden, he 3-D printed a birdhouse and wind-spinner in the shape of a seagull. He emailed photos.

He’s very complex, says West, but not inscrutable: “He’s wysiwig. What you see is what you get. There’s no artifice there.”

West shares a “little known fact about Jay” – that he’s memorized all of the Harry Potter movies, including the music. He marvels at such a feat. “You have to ask yourself, what purpose does this serve? But that’s Jay for ya. Imagine being able to do that.”

## Theater Threads

Ducharme never set out to be a teacher. He describes the way his life has played out in a word: “Serendipity.” Theater, more than anything else, connects the threads. Theater brought Ducharme to HCC as a student and later as staff. Through theater, Ducharme met his wife.



“Interesting story,” he says.

Ducharme started acting at Easthampton High School, where he graduated in 1976. That spring, he auditioned for an original, “massive,” “horrible,” doomed, American Bicentennial production of “Daniel Shays Rebellion” at a newly renovated Pines Theater in Northampton’s Look Park. Cast as an extra, he learned to dance the cotillion and fire a musket during intensive rehearsals. “The show was an impressive achievement for its day,” he says. “Unfortunately, every weekend during the run it poured and poured; they ended up going bankrupt, and that was it.”

However, a friend in the show encouraged him to come to HCC to audition for the theater program and to meet the college’s legendary theater professor, Leslie Phillips. “I said, ok, cause I wasn’t planning to go to school. I didn’t know what I was going to do.”

Phillips became a mentor. “That got the theater bug in me,” says Ducharme, the youngest of four children and the first in his family to go to college. “I think I did seven shows in my first semester. We were just constantly learning lines and working and memorizing stuff, and I would be here til two in the morning, and then I’d take my bike and go home.”

Ducharme graduated in 1978, transferred to the University of Massachusetts to complete his bachelor’s degree in theater then headed to Columbia University to study playwrighting in New York City. He even wrote the music and lyrics for an off-Broadway show, but artistic differences with the university’s theater program director led him to quit.

“He was a mainstream guy,” Ducharme says. “He wanted everyone to do Neil Simon and Rodgers and Hammerstein – middle-of-the-road, white, middle-class American musical theater or just American funny drama. Nothing experimental, and I didn’t like that, cause it wasn’t me. I couldn’t write that stuff, and I didn’t want to be in that stuff, so after a year I said, seeya. I’m done with this.”

After that, he tried changing coasts and moved to San Francisco to work for the Hunger Project. “It literally turned into MY hunger project,” he says. “They didn’t pay.” For a while, he designed lighting for the San Francisco Repertory Theater, supplemented by a job with a senior citizen’s musical theater group. “I was just starving.”

He submitted a treatment for an experimental film to Francis Ford Coppola’s Zoetrope Studios that piqued the interest of the famous director, who asked for a test reel. Instead, Ducharme entered a master’s degree program in theater at the University of Mississippi in Oxford that paid \$5,000 a year. “I followed the money,” he says. “It was hell. Three years of hell. It was a massive culture clash. I was a damn Yankee down there.”

Ducharme swore off theater, returned to western Massachusetts and started writing music, performing and hosting open mics at

cafes and clubs around the Pioneer Valley like the Black Sheep in Amherst, the Iron Horse in Northampton and a place that no longer exists called the Soup Kitchen Café, where Ducharme had a regular Sunday gig. “I would play for four hours straight to nobody,” he says. “Nobody cared what I was playing. Nobody was listening, but it gave me the freedom to do whatever I wanted to do, and I really refined my chops.”

Meanwhile, as a favor to a friend, he agreed to record his own voice for the part of Ed Sullivan in the Westfield Theater Group’s production of “Bye Bye Birdie.” The next year, as another favor, he reluctantly agreed to take an on-stage role as the sinister farmhand Jud Fry in the production of, ironically, Rodgers and Hammerstein’s “Oklahoma.” After the last performance, a woman came back stage to see him. “She said, you scared my children,” Ducharme recounts. “I said, good, that’s what I was supposed to do.”

Two years later, in 1997, Karen and Jay were married on the stage where she first saw him. “They were doing a production of Cinderella at the time,” he says, “so Cinderella’s coach was hanging in the air above us.”

With a wife and three young step-children to help support, Ducharme left his job at Radio Shack to take the position of technical director of HCC’s Forum (later dedicated as the Leslie Phillips Theater). Three years later, West, recognizing Ducharme’s technical expertise and knowledge of computers, recruited him as the second, full-time faculty member in the fledgling Electronic Media program. “He’s really been invaluable,” says West. “He’s done a huge amount for the program, and I think he’s also grown into a really phenomenal teacher.”

## Mountain Park – the Model

I first visited Ducharme at his Westfield home in the summer of 2018 to get a look at the Mountain Park model he was building in his basement before he moved it to the museum for the 25th anniversary celebration of the Merry-Go-Round’s reopening in Holyoke. At the time it consisted of a few buildings (Clambake Pavilion, Arcade Row, Merry-Go-Round, Dodgems), some trees and the buttresses for the Mountain Flyer roller coaster, with the rest of the attractions sketched out on the painted surface.

Ducharme decided to build a model of Mountain Park about 10 years ago. His original idea was to construct the model in HO scale – standard model railroad size – and include working replicas of all the amusement park rides. “My idea was to have the whole thing working,” he says. “Working roller coaster and all working rides.”

Years ago, with that in mind, he purchased models from the International Hobby Corporation, which, before it went out of business, manufactured HO-scale replicas of amusement park rides, just like those at Mountain Park, including the Scrambler, Ferris Wheel, Flying Jets and Mountain Flyer. “They were all pre-





painted, they came with motors and they worked,” he says.

At HO scale, though, his Mountain Park model would have been 28-feet long. He asked around. “Nobody wanted to put a 28-foot model in their building,” he says. “It was just too big.” Even at small model railroad scale (N gauge), it still would have been 18-feet long.

Instead, Ducharme settled on a more modest, static model that measures eight by five feet, or 1/16th of an inch to a foot. “That makes it a real challenge to try to recreate; it’s pretty tiny,” he says. He grew frustrated trying to build the rides out of cardboard and foam core. Then, he thought, 3-D printing might work, “so I got myself a 3-D printer, and sure enough it does.”

He established the park footprint based on an aerial photograph of the grounds from 1972 that he analyzed with an architect’s scale ruler to get the proportions exactly right. As he builds he continually references the nearly 1,000 photographs he’s collected over the years and maps digital images captured from those photos into the scenes.

“It’s now been more than 30 years the park is closed, so my memory is starting to fade,” he says. “I used to know this place like the back of my hand I worked there so long.”

The park was open in various configurations for nearly a century.



(Top) In his basement workshop, Ducharme glues a pine tree to his model of Mountain Park. (Bottom) A more recent photo of his Mountain Park model, in its permanent home at the Heritage State Park Museum in downtown Holyoke.



Pinball is a game Ducharme doesn't have to sit still for. He salvaged this 1962 vintage Bally pinball table from the arcade at Mountain Park. He used to have three.

Ducharme's model captures one moment in time. In Ducharme's miniature world, it will always be 1980, the year he started working there. Back then, the park still included one of his all-time favorite attractions, Out of this World, a space-themed fun house that had giant robots guarding the entrance and an alien spaceship crashed into the side.

"That was an amazing piece of work, and I wanted to recreate that," he says. "I was really sad when they tore it out."

## Reflections and Collections

Ducharme's love of roller coasters and amusement parks flows directly from his experiences at Mountain Park. He remembers visiting with his family at the age of five or six, his father grilling burgers and dogs in the picnic grove while the kids rode the wobbly Toonerville Trolley and cranked the handcars on Paddy on the Railroad. Ducharme started working at Mountain Park during summers to earn money for graduate school, recruited there by his father, a former drop forger who lost his job and pension when the steel mill where he worked went bankrupt. (Ducharme dedicated his book about Mountain Park to his dad, "the world's greatest Dinosaur Den operator.")

"I ran pretty much all the rides at Mountain Park at one time or another," Ducharme told me.

His first was the Merry-Go-Round. None of the other park employees wanted it. They couldn't stand the music from the band organ. Ducharme requested it. "I loved the band organ," he says.

When the supervisor Roger Fortin, another mentor, abruptly retired in 1987, owner Jay Collins suddenly shut the park down. By then, Ducharme had taken on more and more of the day-to-

day responsibilities, checking in workers and handing out ride assignments. "I just assumed that eventually I would take over for him, but when he retired, everything just came to a grinding halt," Ducharme recalls. Collins kept him on as a security guard for another six years, and Ducharme watched despairingly as his beloved park was dismantled. When the Merry-Go-Round reopened at Heritage Park, he followed and ran it there for another three years.

Ducharme collects all kinds of Mountain Park memorabilia, including a blueprint of the Mountain Flyer he obtained directly from the manufacturer, the Philadelphia Toboggan Company, whose early president, Herbert Schmeck, designed it. "One of my idols," Ducharme says. "He designed some of the greatest coasters of the era."

Studying the structure and engineering of roller coasters is what hooked him. "You notice there are all of these camelback or parabolic hills, and so you get to the top of them and you come out of your seat, and you're floating. It's like you're weightless. You go down, you go up again. Most of his coasters are like that. Lots of air time. I love the sensation like I'm flying."

He scours eBay for old Mountain Park postcards – "They're still out there," he says, "tons of 'em – and owns a vintage 1962 Bally pinball machine he salvaged from the park. He used to have three. "This is one of my favorite machines of all time," he says. "There's just a beautiful flow to this, the way the ball moves." Every summer, he attends Pintastic, a four-day pinball and game expo. "I love pinball," he says.

In another basement room, mounted on a wall, there is a giant, creepy mask from the Dinosaur Den, a ride-through Mountain Park fun house, and a clown from the original Merry-Go-Round



building, both made by an Italian craftsman named Dominic Spadola, who created much of the park's iconic scenery, figures and flashing. "Dominic is long gone," he says, "and there's very little of this stuff left."

The depth of his affection for all of it seems to be limitless. I had to ask, "if Mountain Park was still open today" — and before I even finish the question, he answers:

"I would be still be there. Without a doubt. I loved that place. I could have stayed there for the rest of my life with no problem, and I was ready to do that too."

"But," he adds in a Shakespearean stage voice, "it was not to be."

### Postum & Potter

On the bus, I hear more details and anecdotes about Mountain Park, such as the importance of learning to estimate people's weight so you can properly balance the load on a ferris wheel. "If you load too heavily on one side," he says, "it won't make it around."

He tells me that he recently 3-D printed 200 key chains in the shape of champagne flutes as a give-away for the Holyoke Merry-Go-Round's annual spring fundraiser and also 3-D printed replacement parts called pillow block inserts for the 92-year-old Merry-Go-Round itself, and that over the summer he planned to reconfigure the front nine of HCC's disc golf course, which he had designed and built between 1999 and 2005.

He lets on that he is a big fan of the Harry Potter books and some of the movies but couldn't care less about Star Wars or the Marvel Avengers universe. As it turns out, he has only memorized TWO of the Harry Potter movies and music — so far — the first, "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone," and the third, "Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban."

"The third is one of my favorite all-time movies," he says. He practices while he walks. "That's usually what I do, just to occupy the time, try to keep my memory moving. I'll recite one of the movies."

He doesn't drink coffee ("I'm too wired. I'll start shaking."), prefers Postum, a powdered drink made from bran, wheat and molasses that you brew with hot water ("An acquired taste.") and rarely drinks alcohol ("Once a month, I'll sip some Bailey's Irish Cream because it doesn't taste like alcohol. It tastes like a milkshake.").

All of his music, old and new, is available on streaming music services including Spotify, Apple Music and Amazon. One day, to his surprise and delight, he had 100 listens to one of his experimental classical pieces, for which he was paid .06 cents. In two years, he has earned a grand total of \$2.65. "But he doesn't care about the money."



No fan of driving, Ducharme commutes to HCC most days by bus from his home in Westfield.

"Music is meant to be listened to," he says. "It's a little like casting a bottle in the ocean. I wanted my stuff out there. It doesn't do any good sitting in a closet."

He gives away CDs to friends. His recordings — classical, piano works, pop, rock, ballads, solo stuff and collaborations with his wife Karen — are also available on his website, where I found a pop ditty he wrote in 1993, titled, appropriately, "Riding on the Bus."

"Music is still the thing I have the most passion about," he says. "That and teaching, of course. I still love teaching. That's what gets me up in the morning."

### Merry-Go-Round — the Ride

One July morning I see a "Tip War" question on the counter of an Easthampton bagel shop that brings Ducharme immediately to mind:

"Roller Coasters vs. Merry-Go-Rounds"

I put my change in the coaster cup. Later that morning, I ask him which he'd pick. He laughs loudly then ponders solemnly: "To run, a merry-go-round. To ride, a roller coaster."

Then he qualifies his answer. "It depends on the roller coaster." Coney Island Cyclone, for instance: "Very violent." Goliath at Six Flags New England: "Incredibly painful." Batman the Ride? "I almost passed out because of the G-forces."

"I'll never ride those rides again," he says. Six Flag's Wicked

Cyclone, though, “Phenomenal. Best ride in the park now. RMC – Rocky Mountain Construction – is the new king of roller coasters.”

As it turned out, Ducharme was heading to Heritage State Park that morning to do a television interview for National Merry-Go-Round Day. He planned to take the bus downtown, but I volunteered to drive him instead.

First, though, we stopped at the museum to see his Mountain Park model, which is on the second floor set behind theater ropes and a “Do Not Touch” sign. Of course, that does not apply to him, given that the model is not complete. Ducharme installs new rides in batches once he 3-D prints and paints them. The Ferris Wheel is in, the Satellite, Tilt-a-Whirl, some of the kiddie rides. There are even bumper cars inside the Dodgems building, and though there are some blank spots, it looks like a place a kid could grow up feeling nostalgic about.

Next door, Luke Burgess, the carousel’s current head of operations, unlocks the Merry-Go-Round building for us. His job? “I take care of the ride and I do the maintenance and when I have a problem, I call him.” Ducharme.

Burgess says him the 3-D printed pillow block inserts seem to be holding up. Ducharme climbs up on a carousel horse to inspect the bearing joints where they’re housed. Burgess says he’s been following Ducharme’s advice and fires up the carousel’s band organ once a month to keep it working. Otherwise, he plays recordings of the band organ music Ducharme made when he worked at Mountain Park.

“So,” I ask him, “you made the recordings to help preserve the Merry-Go-Round’s band organ?”

“No,” he corrects. “I recorded the band organ so I could listen to it at home.”

Ducharme keeps track of old Mountain Park rides that are still in operation. Four – the train, Scrambler, Ferris Wheel and the Herschell Kiddie Cars – went to Sandspit Amusement Park on Prince Edward Island. The roller coaster trains were sold to Arnolds Park in Iowa, but those have since been retired. The Tempest – “we used to call it the puke machine” – is now owned by Fanelli’s Traveling Amusement Park, a New England-based, traveling carnival company, and shows up periodically at local fairs. The Merry-Go-Round, though, is the last, living vestige of Mountain Park in Holyoke, and that means everything to him.

“It reminds me of my childhood,” he says, “which, as we get old, becomes more and more important.”

## Coda

Perusing “Jay’s Blahg” on the Karen and Jay website, I find an

interesting entry from March 2019 that begins, “For as long as I can recall, I’ve been obsessed with the concept of leaving something behind.”

By any measure, he’s already left a lot. The website itself is an impressive body of work. Besides the blog and the music, there are pages chronicling the progress of the Mountain Park model, musings on the park itself, the Merry-Go-Round and other rides; a two-part history of roller coasters, poetry, a history of the Pioneer Valley music scene, a tribute to his band, The Dots.

He’s got a page displaying photos of his amusement park souvenir T-shirt collection and another devoted to the HCC Disc Golf Course, complete with details on the recent renovations, with accompanying photos and videos. He writes detailed narratives of his amusement park explorations and adds new guided tours to the hundreds of videos he has already uploaded to YouTube. “It’s the most popular thing on my channel,” he says. “People say it’s helpful before they go for a visit.”


If history predicts, Ducharme will find no shortage of activities to keep himself busy in retirement after the 2019-2020 school year. So far, he has plans to set up a model railroad track in his basement that he inherited from his uncle, incorporating the miniature amusement park rides that wound up being too big for his Mountain Park re-creation.

Someday, he says, he wouldn’t mind renting a cottage on the midway at Knoebels Amusement Resort, a family-owned park in the tiny, coal-mining town of Elysburg, Pennsylvania. (Yes, you can actually do that.)

“It’s probably the most gorgeous, traditional park in the world,” he says. “I would go live in a cottage in an amusement park. That’s what I keep telling Karen. After I retire, I want to get a cottage there.”

There’s also music. In all likelihood, he’ll continue to sing in the choir at the Second Congregational Church of Westfield, where Karen is the music director, and stay involved with the Greater Westfield Choral Association, for which Ducharme wrote a commissioned piece called “Psalm” for the association’s 35th anniversary concert. At some point, he says, he’d like to finish the “massive choral mass” he’s been working on.

“Is that like your magnum opus or something?” I say.

“I hope it’s not. I’m hoping to get to nine,” he says. “That’s the magic number. Beethoven’s Ninth. Mahler’s Ninth. Bruckner’s Ninth. This will be my first. I’m hoping there’s a lot more to come.” 



# Tutor U. HCC alumni teach – and learn – in the Center for Academic Program Support

By JANICE BEETLE

Six or seven years ago, a new student sat down in the HCC Writing Center across from tutor Kim Demers '96. As she often does, Demers asked where the student was from. The answer was Tenerife, a small island off the west coast of Africa.

“What are the odds that someone from a tiny dot in the ocean would show up at my table?” Demers, 53, asked herself that winter day. “I decided to start keeping track to see where people come from.”

She hung a laminated map of the world on the wall. It now has 126 red dots on it, each one indicating the country of origin of a student who visited one of the three tutoring centers that make up the Center for Academic Program Support at Holyoke Community College – the Writing Center, Math Center and Tutoring Center.

Since Demers started taking notice, CAPS, as it is more commonly called, has served students from nearly two-thirds of the countries in the world. She happens to know that among those still missing are French Guiana and Uruguay, in South America.

Demers, who lives in Chicopee, studied liberal arts at HCC before transferring to Mount Holyoke College for her bachelor's degree in English literature. She also has a master's degree in education from Ashford University in San Diego. Over the years, she has worked for Mass Relay, a service for people who are deaf or hard of hearing; she's taught summer ESL classes at the Williston Northampton School, and she's been a tutor at HCC since she was a student here, now working about 20 hours per week.

“I love this job,” said Demers. “I get to sit



Like many HCC alumni-tutors, Andrew Morse '12 sought the services of the Writing Center as a student before he started working there.

in the same chair and talk to people from 126 different countries. I learn a lot from these students. I don't travel, so I learn all manner of things I'm never going to see.”

HCC employs some 70 part-time tutors in CAPS. About 25 percent of them are alumni like Demers. Many of them took advantage of tutoring services while they were students, says CAPS director Andrew Fletcher, and then sought work there as peer tutors and later as professional tutors as they continued on to earn advanced academic degrees at nearby institutions.

“The heart of what we do is serve students and help them on their trajectory,” he said.

Tutors are key to that, and while they may each have their personal reasons for staying on, they all seem to enjoy the work.

“I really like to help people, and I get to work on a variety of subjects,” said tutor Andrea Graziano '14 (biology) of Agawam who works in the Tutoring Center, where she primarily assists students with science and math.

Graziano, 23, earned her bachelor's degree in biology and minor in chemistry at Bay Path University in 2016 and works for the Opportunity Academy, an alternative high school within the Holyoke Public Schools and leads MCAS prep workshops, in addition to her CAPS position.

“This is a really good job,” said Graziano, who is considering graduate school. “It keeps me active in my subjects. I get to meet a lot of people and still stay current in all my material.”

At any given moment, there may be half a dozen or more HCC alumni working with



Kim Demers '96 works about 20 hours a week as a professional tutor in HCC's Writing Center.

students in in the three CAPS centers. On one particularly busy morning last May, Demers was seated at her usual table facing the Writing Center entrance. Andrew Morse '12 (communications) was at the next table and Emily Burns '16 (liberal studies) at the next.

"I continue to work at the Writing Center because I highly value the work that we do," said Andrew Morse '12 of Easthampton. "Many of our students face rigorous challenges and responsibilities both inside and outside of school, so to me it feels good to be in a position where I can offer students both encouragement and help in refining their academic skills."

"I can also speak from both sides to the value of academic support," said Morse, a first-generation college student who went on to earn his bachelor's degree at UMass. "Without support services that were available to me when I was a student, I may not have stayed in school."

Meanwhile, in the adjoining Tutoring Center, Graziano was helping a student with biology while Gwen Whitehurst '96 worked with a student in a private room there. Not far away, in the Math Center, Ludmila Tsikhotskiy '11 waited as a student she was working with reviewed an assignment.

Tsikhotskiy, 34, came to the U.S. from Ukraine in 1999 when she was 16, earned her associate degree from HCC in liberal arts and science and now works as a pharmacy technician in addition to the eight hours a week she puts in at the Math Center.

"I'm excited to be here," she said. "We can learn from every person that we meet. I can learn from students as much as the student can learn from me."

Tsikhotskiy said some of her older students have not been exposed to math for 15 years; they come to HCC, take a refresher course and she works them on basic math principles. Some days, she works with students on more advanced subjects, such as statistics.

"It's a lot of inspiration," she said. "People are not giving up."

CAPS records more than 17,000 contact hours annually, according to Fletcher. The mood and pace discernably shift as each semester progresses.

"There is anxiety at crunch time with exams and papers due," he said. "Students are dependent on getting a good grade. There is also a lot of energy and cross-pollination. Students learn from each other. We have a lot of nice dynamics here. It's pretty powerful."

In this mini-melting pot at HCC, all students benefit.

"It lends to the educational mix," Fletcher said.

Key to CAPS' success is the tutoring staff. Roughly 15 are classified as "Peer I" tutors, current HCC students recommended by faculty. Another 15 are "Peer II" tutors, alumni and others who have their associate degrees. Most, though, about 40, are "Professional" tutors – alumni, adjunct faculty members or retired educators who hold a bachelor's degree, master's or PhD.

"Some people have gone through the whole cycle," said Fletcher, "like Kim."

And Burns. Burns, who lives in Belchertown, started as a Peer I tutor while she was an HCC student, advanced to a Peer II tutor while she was studying neurobiology and psychology at Bay Path University. Now, with her bachelor's degree, she plans to stay on as a Professional tutor.

"Having the opportunity to work as a student with other students has been the most meaningful experience to me because I've had the opportunity to encourage and understand what others are going through in their college experience," Burns said. "I've gained a whole other perspective of what college is like."

On that same morning in May, Demers was helping an adult student from Iraq. He had first enrolled at HCC to learn English and is now working toward his associate degree. He asked Demers to review a paper he'd written.

Pen in hand, she scanned the report, making light edits here and there. She questioned him on one word. Together they chose another and she told him he had done a nice job.

She believes in the mission – that students who visit CAPS perform much better in their classes than students who do not.

"I think we're helping," she said. 



# Class Notebook

## What's going on in your life?

We want to know what you've been up to since your school days at HCC. Send news of your wedding, retirement, promotion, travels, children/grandchildren, awards, academic achievements, military honors, whatever! Email news and photos to [alumni@hcc.edu](mailto:alumni@hcc.edu) or mail us at the Alumni Connection, c/o Alumni Relations, 303 Homestead Ave., Holyoke, MA 01040. The deadline for the Spring 2020 publication is December 15, 2019.

### 1970

**Joe Peters**, vice chairman and former president of Universal Plastics in Holyoke, was named a Difference Maker for 2019 by *Business West*. The regional magazine's annual awards recognize "individuals, agencies, and institutions that are finding profound and often unique ways to improve the quality of life in the community we call Western Mass." In its Feb. 5 edition, the magazine cited Peters for his involvement in community-based activities and groups including the chamber of commerce, the Rotary Club, and his church, as well as taking the lead on regional efforts to create summer jobs for area youth, working on statewide business issues and helping to create the "sandwich ministry," an outreach program for the homeless in Chicopee, Mass.

### 1971



**Robert Kelley** has been named director of Operations at the Eastern States Exposition in West Springfield. A graduate of Agawam High School, he earned his associate degree in arts and science from HCC before starting his career at ESE in 1975. Since then, he served ESE as its contractor coordinator and supervised the construction of 10 buildings at the site of the annual Big E fair, including the Mallary Complex, Visitors Center, Transportation Center, Indoor Warm-up Horse Ring, and Young Building. As director he will manage all grounds operations including maintenance, construction, landscaping and contractors and continue to supervise all building projects on the grounds. "Bob knows the 175 acres of

Eastern States Exposition better than anyone in the history of the company," said Gene Cassidy, ESE president and CEO. Kelley and his wife Jean live in Westfield. An accomplished golfer and fisherman, he enjoys all sports and was elected to the Softball Hall of Fame in 1991 as a member of the Pierce Construction team.

### 1979

**Richard Kowal** has joined the Polish National Credit Union based in Chicopee, Mass., as vice president of commercial lending. After earning his associate degree from HCC in business administration, he transferred to Western New England University for a bachelor's degree in marketing. He has been working in the financial industry for nearly 30 years of experience in 29 years in the financial industry. He is an instructor for the Center of Financial Training Atlantic States, an educational training partner for banks and other financial institutions. He is also an associate member for the Risk Management Agency. He and his wife, **Angela T. Kowal '78**, live in Belchertown.

### 1981

**Terri Brown** is the new manager for Creative Arts for the New England Center at the Eastern States Exposition, where she has worked since 2011 as the 4-H coordinator, assistant to the Creative Arts coordinator and co-coordinator of the department. In her new position, she will oversee the management and administration of all contests, 4-H participation, displays and the New England Center stage. She graduated from Southwick High School and earned her associate degree in arts and science from HCC before transferring to the University of New Hampshire for her degree in zoology. She is a retired government accountant and is active in 4-H in her hometown of Southwick, Mass.



The Greater Holyoke Chamber of Commerce selected **Barry Farrell** as its Business Person of the Year for 2019. Farrell is the co-founder with his father, James J. "Barry" Farrell, of the Barry J. Farrell Funeral Home in Holyoke. A lifelong Holyoke resident, Farrell attended Blessed Sacrament School, Holyoke Catholic High School, HCC and the New England Institute in Boston. He is a member, past president and former grand marshal of Holyoke's St. Patrick's Day Parade Committee and an active community member. The Business Person of the Year award is presented annually to an outstanding business person who is community oriented and innovative, possesses a high degree of integrity and is known for their contributions to the greater Holyoke business community.

### 1984

HCC Foundation board member and former HCC trustee **James Lavelle** received the 2019 Louis F. Oldershaw Community Service Award from the Greater Holyoke YMCA for his significant volunteer efforts on behalf of that organization and for the community at large. Lavelle, general manager of Holyoke Gas & Electric, is a former board member for the Greater Holyoke YMCA and the Holyoke Visiting Nurse Association. "Jim Lavelle's service to both the Y and the community at large is well known," said Kathy Viens, CEO of the Greater Holyoke YMCA. "He is someone who always shares his time and talent unselfishly." 

# ALUMNI IN ACTION

**Distinguished Service** **Lucy Perez '87** was the recipient of the 2019 Distinguished Service Award, which is given annually to individuals for their dedication and service to HCC. In presenting the award June 1 at Commencement, President Christina Royal cited Perez's work as a volunteer member of the HCC Board of Trustees, the HCC Alumni Council and HCC Foundation board as well as her work as an educator. Perez started her career at HCC as a counselor for the college's academic ESL program and later as its coordinator. Recently, after many years with the Springfield Public Schools, she started a new job as the talent acquisition manager for Mount Holyoke College, where she earned her bachelor's degree in psychology after graduating from HCC. In June, she endowed an HCC Foundation scholarship in memory of her brother, Orlando Perez, who passed away in 2013.

*1. President Christina Royal presents the Distinguished Service Award to Lucy Perez '87 at the MassMutual Center in Springfield during Commencement 2019.*

**Droning On** Since graduating from HCC eight years ago with his degree in electronic media, **Rich Bravman '11** has been a frequent visitor to campus, both as a professional videographer working with the Marketing department and a guest lecturer in the classes of Prof. Justin West, one of his HCC mentors. Bravman returned again in April to talk to students about his photo/video production business, Mad Capture Media, and fly a drone over the HCC campus with one of his hires, **Jon Martinez '10**, as West and his students, including prospective Mad Capture intern Dan Ireland, looked on. "That's three generations of electronic media arts students," West said. "That's a pretty good success story."

*2. Rich Bravman '11, right, and Jon Martinez '10, both of Easthampton, fly a drone around campus for Justin West's electronic media class in April.*

**Tic, Tic Boom!** **Nicholas Parenteau '18** followed up his powerful spoken word performance at Commencement 2018 with a graduation speech this June to 5th graders at Acorn Woodland Elementary School in Oakland, Calif., where he teaches physical education and studies early childhood education at California State University East Bay. In characteristic fashion, the Holyoke native and U.S. Army veteran didn't just dole out advice to the young students who had selected him as their keynote speaker. He sang, rapped, bounced around the stage and led a morale-building chant that has become his trademark:

*We are dynamite, I said we are dynamite ... Say what  
We are dynamite, I said we are dynamite.... Say what  
Tic, tic, tic, tic BOOM!*

*3. Nicholas Parenteau '18, shares a moment with one of his students after the 5th grade graduation ceremony at Acorn Woodland Elementary School in Oakland, Calif.*

**'My success is your success'** Adjunct criminal justice professor **Julio M. Toledo Jr. '04** was recently promoted to the rank of lieutenant with the Springfield Police Department and remains in charge of the department's North End C3 Unit, where he served as sergeant. "My hope is that my new position will allow me to provide opportunities for students enrolled in our Criminal Justice program, such as internships and community building projects," Toledo wrote an email to his HCC colleagues. "I share this with you as some of you were my professors when I was a student at Holyoke Community College. All of you have served as mentors to me throughout my career. Each of you have left a positive and lasting impact on my career. My success is your success; for this I thank you."

*4. Julio Toledo '04 in his classroom at HCC.*

**Warrior's Art Room** Iraq war veteran and alumnus **Steve Jones '14** studied psychology and art at HCC and is now combining both those areas of study in a nonprofit venture called the Warrior's Art Room in Westfield. As the name suggests, the Warrior's Art Room is a therapeutic space for veterans and their family members who want to explore their creativity through art. Earlier this year, the cast and crew of the HCC Theater Department's spring production of "Ugly Lies the Bone" visited the Warrior's Art Room to talk to Jones and veterans engaged in art therapy there to gain insight into the script, which is about a battle-scarred soldier returning home. For the show's opening night, Jones and his wife, **Brenda Jones '18** (nursing), set up a display of artwork from the Warrior's Art Room in the lobby outside the Leslie Phillips Theater.

*5. Steve '14 and Brenda Jones '18 in the lobby of the Leslie Phillips Theater before opening night of 'Ugly Lies the Bone.'*

**Words Unspoken** **Brandon Towle '19** is the founder and board president of Camp Words Unspoken, an overnight camp for stuttering youth scheduled to open in the Berkshires in August 2020. The 22-year-old Westfield resident has been working on the project since 2017 while studying business at HCC and launched it with the assistance of his HCC business professors, chiefly Karen Hines (marketing) and Kelly O'Connor (business law). "They've both helped me immensely," said Towle, who wanted to open an overnight camp for stuttering youths because no other camp like it now exists in New England. He said he benefited greatly from his own experiences at a camp for stuttering teens that he attended out west. His camp will combine therapy sessions by speech and language pathologists with the recreational activities of a typical overnight camp. "I chose the name Camp Words Unspoken because as stutterers there are time when we want to say something but we just can't or we change the wording," he said.

*6. Brandon Towle '19, during a recent visit to HCC, wearing some merchandise advertising his camp for stuttering youth.*







# 'An incredible inspiration'

## YANKEE CANDLE FOUNDER MICHAEL J. KITTREDGE '73 REMEMBERED

By CHRIS YURKO

As a teenage entrepreneur, Michael Kittredge '73 was already running a fledgling candle business out of his parents' South Hadley home when he started taking classes at Holyoke Community College. In subsequent decades, as his start-up grew – and grew – he often credited the college for providing the lessons that helped him turn that one-man operation into the Yankee Candle Company, the global retailing giant, popular tourist attraction and one of the region's largest employers.

"HCC played a huge role in my social and career development," Kittredge said at Commencement in 1996, where he was honored with a Distinguished Service Award for his many contributions to the college and the community. "My high school grades and my family's finances would have otherwise prohibited me from furthering my education. Fortunately, HCC was there and accepted me. It gave me the important start that I needed."

In more recent years, he went even further than that: "Without HCC, there would be no YCC."

A two-time cancer survivor who suffered a debilitating stroke in 2012, the 67-year-old Kittredge died July 24 at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston after a brief illness, his family announced.

After his death, Kittredge, the entrepreneur and philanthropist, was remembered at HCC for his business success, generosity and dedication to the college and its students.

"The passing of Mike Kittredge is a tremendous loss to our community," said

HCC business professor Ellen Majka. Kittredge often hosted Majka's class, "Topics in Business: Living Case Studies" at Kringle Candle in Bernardston, which he founded with his son, Michael J. Kittredge III, years after selling Yankee Candle. "Mike was an incredible inspiration to our students and will be forever remembered for the impact he had on our student entrepreneurs."

"Mike's creative spirit was the spark that led to his founding Yankee Candle, a project that began in his mother's kitchen and grew into a global enterprise employing thousands," President Christina Royal said in a statement to the campus community. "He saw his success as a means by which he could contribute to the betterment of others. His legacy lives on at HCC, and he will be sorely missed."

Kittredge was the first person in his family to attend college. He came to HCC in 1971 unsure about his future and never forgot the HCC adviser who inspired him.

"He was the first person to suggest I might make a living in the candle business," Kittredge said in 2003, "while family and friends insisted that passion would be nothing more than extra income to supplement a 'real job.'"

By 1972, while still a student, Kittredge had moved his candle business to a 2,000-square-foot factory in Holyoke and by 1983 had reached \$1 million in sales and began building what became Yankee Candle's signature manufacturing plant and showroom on Route 5 in South Deerfield.

In 1988, Kittredge received HCC's Outstanding Alumni Award. In 1996, *USA Today* named him Entrepreneur of the Year.

Outside of business, Kittredge was well known throughout western Massachusetts for his love of music and his philanthropy. He shared his financial success with HCC through regular unrestricted donations to the HCC





Kittredge donated \$1 million toward the construction of the Kittredge Center for Business and Workforce Development (left). Right, Kittredge puts his mark on one of the interior walls during a construction tour.

Foundation. Beyond that, he and his wife Lisa gave \$25,000 in 1999 to endow a scholarship in the name of their son, Michael, which is awarded each year to a business or music major who shows “entrepreneurial spirit.”

The most recent Kittredge scholarship went to one of Majka’s students, 19-year-old business administration major Eric Grigoryan of Westfield, who had hoped to meet Kittredge to thank him personally – and talk about business.

“Coming from a low-income family, the scholarship was definitely a big boost, especially since it is awarded for entrepreneurial spirit,” said Grigoryan, who, like Kittredge, started a home-base business when he was in high school – GrigCinema. “I’m planning to use that money toward my education and my filming business.”

The Yankee Candle founder’s principal legacy at HCC is the Kittredge Center for Business and Workforce Development. Kittredge and his wife donated \$1 million to HCC in 2003 to jumpstart a \$4 million capital campaign for construction of the five-story, 55,000-square-foot facility. At the time, their gift was the largest individual contribution ever made to the college and the largest alumni gift to any community college in Massachusetts.

“Giving back to Holyoke Community College makes a lot of sense,” Kittredge said then. “Without it, our ‘little dream’ probably would not have happened. Entrepreneurialism is in the soul, but colleges like HCC can release that spirit and teach the skills needed to apply it. Plus, we are going to need more business people in the area. Next time I launch a business, I’m not going to try to do everything myself. I’m going to hire a lot of good, well-trained people, and I hope they come from HCC.”

The center opened in May 2006. During the ribbon-cutting ceremony, Kittredge received a gift of “professorial” blazer and during a speech urged students to explore opportunities for new businesses.

“Every day I find things I am dissatisfied with out in the marketplace,” he said. “The opportunity is to go out there and do it better. I did not invent scented

candles. I just did it better.”

His hope for the Kittredge Center, he said, was that it would bring “curious budding entrepreneurs” to HCC. And it has.

Since its opening, the Kittredge Center has become a hub of activity for campus and community education, as well as one of the region’s premier conference spaces, accessed by about 20,000 people annually, including business students, professionals and community members, according to Jeff Hayden, HCC vice president of Business and Community Services.

“This building is really a unique place where the community gathers, whether it’s the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, the Regional Council on Homelessness, or a business that decides to do training here,” he said. “People come here to, as I like to say, get a job, get a better job or to do their job better.”

For many years, Kittredge returned to campus as a guest lecturer. One of Hayden’s favorite recollections is that of a casually dressed man sitting on the instructor’s desk, relaxed and excited, encouraging students to pursue their passions.

“He so loved the things that he had learned about entrepreneurship, especially here at the college,” Hayden said. “He wanted to share those lessons with students, and he did that over and over again.”

“Unforgettable” was one word students frequently used to describe their conversations with Kittredge, according to Majka.

“He gave our students a unique opportunity to learn what it takes to be successful in launching and developing a successful business,” she said. “Students truly appreciated his genuine desire to share his vast knowledge. One of the many great quotes I remember from Mike was, ‘Without HCC, there would be no YCC.’ He felt that strongly about his educational experience at Holyoke Community College.” 

## In Memoriam

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

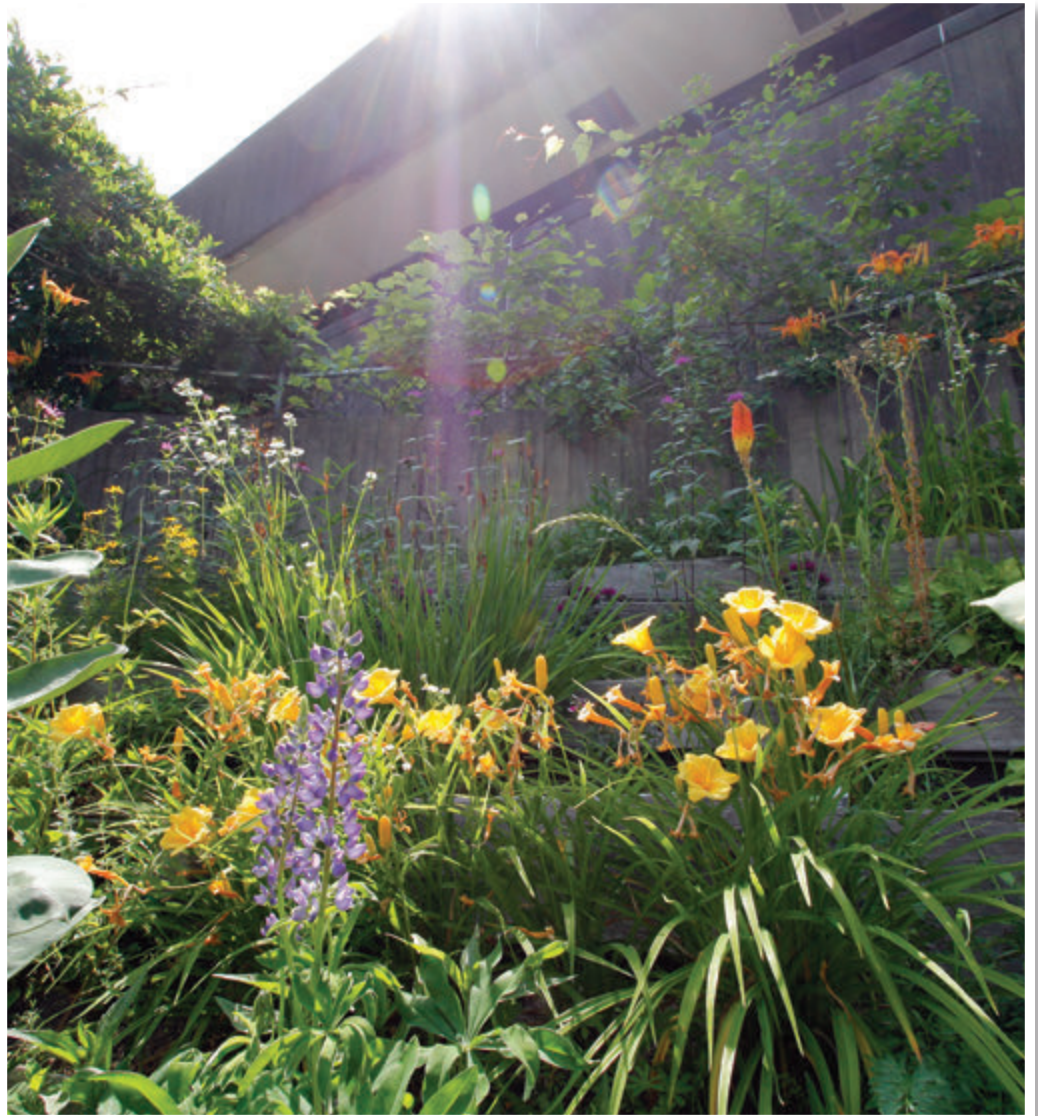
Marilyn I. Nolan '66  
Barry Quinn '69  
John R. Kirchhof '71  
Joyce M. Bellew '72  
Mary F. O'Leary '72  
David Boucher '76  
Norma Bagnall '77

Michael J. Bolko '79  
Michael J. Coffey '82  
Dorothy A. Windoloski '89  
Elizabeth A. Ostiguy '94  
Daniel C. Rosazza '94  
William Wieliczka '13


Joseph DeMuro, *retired professor*  
Joseph V. Gosselin '68, *former HCC Foundation board member*  
Roberta Kelly, *staff member*  
Thomas F. McCarthy, *retired staff*  
Roger F. Sugrue '57, *former HCC trustee*

To contribute in memory of a classmate, friend or relative, visit [hcc.edu/donate](http://hcc.edu/donate) or call Patrick Carpenter at 413.552.2746.

# HCC Albums



## Summer Blooms

In 2005, when HCC ceded the grounds behind the Marieb Building to the newly created Sustainability Studies program, there wasn't much to see there. "Just a steep hillside covered with brambles" is the way Professor Kate Maiolatesi, founder of the program, describes the spot. "We had to clear it off." Below the overgrowth, she and her students uncovered a forgotten playground once used by the school's Early Education program. A small silo was part of it. "That's where they kept all the toys," she said. Now, more fittingly, the silo holds garden tools. Since then, they have terraced the hillside with cinder blocks and railroad ties and built raised beds where they grow tomatoes, peppers, onions, beets, eggplant, ground cherries, peas, green beans, collard greens, broccoli, kale, basil, strawberries, and a lot of flowers, as you can see in the photo above, taken on July 3. Everything they've done, she said, has been guided by students, who work in the Rock Valley Organic Garden (as it was dedicated in 2010), and the nearby permaculture garden, for college credit or as volunteers. "They design, they pick, they decide what to plant," she said. In the spirit of community, everyone is welcome, to work, to look, or to eat. "Anybody who walks through, if they want something, they can just pick it." 





2019

# EVENTS

## HCC on the road!

Enjoy an evening of shared experiences with your fellow alumni. President Christina Royal wants to connect with you and hear your stories of perseverance and inspiration. Three events are scheduled for this fall.

Register at [hcc.edu/alumni](http://hcc.edu/alumni)

### Wednesday, September 18, 2019

#### BOSTON

*Tia's Boston on the Waterfront, 200 Atlantic Avenue*  
5:30 – 7:30 p.m.

Enjoy a casual cocktail reception with fellow alumni and President Royal at Boston's "Heartbeat of the Harbor."

\$10 per person

### Thursday, October 24, 2019

#### WORCESTER

*Location: Stay tuned! 5:30 – 7:30 p.m.*

Check online for details

### Wednesday, November 6, 2019

#### SPRINGFIELD

*Location: Stay tuned! 5:30 – 7:30 p.m.*

Check online for details



### Saturday, September 28, 2019

#### Phillips Festival 2019: An Evening of One-Act Plays

A tribute to former theater professor Leslie Phillips, with special guest performances by HCC alumni

7:30 p.m., Leslie Phillips Theater, Fine & Performing Arts Building

Continuing for the fourth year, a talented crew of returning alumni, theater students, faculty and staff gather to write, direct, rehearse and perform 4-6 new and original plays in just 24 hours.

The event, which is filled with theatrical drama and madness, pays tribute to Leslie Phillips, a dedicated faculty member who died in 1988. Phillips played a pivotal role in the formation of HCC's theater department and lent her creative talent and intense focus to inspiring students to explore and discover their passion for the performing arts.

All proceeds to benefit HCC's Leslie Phillips Fund for Theater Arts and Education.

Tickets: \$15 (general admission) and \$10 (students, seniors, HCC faculty & staff)

Buy online at [brownpapertickets.com](http://brownpapertickets.com) and search "Phillips Festival"



### Thursday – Saturday, November 7-9

#### Our Town

7:30 p.m. (and 2 p.m. on Saturday, November 9)

Leslie Phillips Theater, Fine & Performing Arts Building

Thornton Wilder's classic drama about daily life, love, marriage and death in the small, new England town of Grover's Corners.

Directed by HCC theater professor Pat Sandoval '84

Tickets: \$10 (general admission); \$8 (students and seniors); \$5 (HCC students, faculty and staff)

For more information or to reserve a seat, call the HCC Box Office at 413.552.2528



### Monday, December 31, 2019

#### Year-End Giving

Your gift to the HCC Foundation has a profound impact on the lives of our students. Before 2019 comes to a close, make your gift to support HCC scholarships, programs and initiatives by visiting [hcc.edu/donate](http://hcc.edu/donate). Thank you!

# Alumni Connection

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

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## Meet the A-Team

HCC's Institutional Advancement division welcomed a new team of staff members in 2019. Joining Amanda Sbriscia (center), vice president of Institutional Advancement and executive director of the HCC Foundation, is Patrick Carpenter, director of Institutional Advancement, and Julie Phillips, coordinator of Alumni Relations and Annual Giving. Together, the trio is committed to serving HCC's alumni and donors – as well as new friends and the greater community – in ways that inspire engagement and investment in Holyoke Community College.

Read more about HCC's new A-Team at:  
[hcc.edu/A-team](http://hcc.edu/A-team)