

# THE CONNECTION

SPRING 2026

## FOR THE LOVE OF DOGS

With the help of HCC,  
Elizabeth Staples '03,'05  
turned her passion into  
a successful business.



### ALSO INSIDE

HCC celebrates  
25th anniversary  
of the Taber  
Gallery

And introducing  
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*Yaritza Barta '19  
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President George Timmons

Dear Alumni, Donors, and Friends,

It never ceases to amaze me how often I encounter the green thread of HCC woven through our community. Whether I'm at a local business, a regional event, or simply having a conversation with someone new, the connection to Holyoke Community College emerges – often in the most unexpected ways. A business owner who started here before launching their dream. A healthcare professional who discovered their calling in our labs. A parent whose own HCC experience now guides their child's educational journey. These connections are everywhere, and each one tells a story worth sharing.

That's what makes this issue of *The Connection* so special. In these pages, you will discover how storytelling itself has become a powerful thread binding our community together. Our new podcast, "The Green Thread," captures the voices and journeys of alumni across generations, creating an oral history of the HCC experience. You'll meet Elizabeth Staples, who transformed her passion for dogs into a thriving

business, armed with the practical business knowledge she gained right here. And you'll read heartfelt reflections from alumni and friends who continue to share – through social media, emails, and yes, even handwritten letters – how HCC has touched their lives.

What strikes me most about these stories is how beautifully they illustrate that HCC is so many things to so many people. Some arrive with a clear destination in mind. Others discover their path along the way, often ending up somewhere completely different – and wonderfully unexpected – from where they started. That's not just OK; it's part of what makes this institution so vital to our region.

These stories matter beyond nostalgia. They show today's students what's possible. Students can't become what they cannot see, and our alumni make the invisible visible. They prove that success takes many forms, that learning never stops, and that the HCC experience – whatever shape it takes – can be the foundation for extraordinary futures.

As you explore this issue, I invite you to see yourself in these stories, to recognize the threads that connect you to this remarkable community, and perhaps to share your own story with us.

Sincerely,

George Timmons, Ph.D.  
President

## HOLYOKE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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### 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, Megan Tady

### Photography

Chris Yurko, Chris Evans

### Alumni Council Officers

#### President

Trudy Monson '97

#### Vice President

Elizabeth Román '03

#### Alumni Trustee

Nayroby Rosa-Soriano '10

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Tom Rachele '96

Ryan Rege '08

Paul Rogers '81, '13

James Sheehan '74

### Change of Address:

Please contact the Alumni Office  
413.552.2576 or [alumni@hcc.edu](mailto:alumni@hcc.edu).

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SPRING 2026



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Cover photo: Elizabeth Staples '03, '05 and her dog, North

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## Praise from Retired Professor

After reading every page of the Fall 2025 issue of *The Connection*, I am compelled to congratulate you on an outstanding publication. As a parent of four and grandmother of 10, all of whom attended different colleges, I see many alumni magazines. None reach the level of excellence of *The Connection*, including several elite colleges.

Keep up the good work. It is impressive. The cover story, "More Than Money: 50 Ways to Give, Give Back and Connect to HCC" — a great, creative idea!

Sincerely,

Patricia B. Triggs  
Nursing Faculty Emerita, 1978-2000  
Springfield, Mass.



## Connection Kudos

*The Connection* received a first-place gold Medallion Award at the Fall 2025 District 1 conference of the National Council for Marketing & Public Relations. The Spring 2025 edition of the magazine took the top spot in the category of Large-Scale Magazine, for publications of more than 16 pages.

"The design looks polished and professional," said the NCMPR judges. "It's an engaging issue that highlights student and alumni success while showing how the college continues to grow and support its people."

In addition to the usual campus news and alumni briefs, the Spring 2025 issue included a cover story about the opening of HCC's Marieb Adult Learner Success Center and Parent Learning Center ("A Family Affair"); a profile of late alum JoAnne Wrobel '02, who launched a free food cart for students that grew into the Thrive Center and Food Pantry ("A Silent Hero"); and a feature story about HCC alum Brandon Towle '19, of Westfield, who founded the first sleepaway camp in New England for stuttering youth ("Freedom to Speak").

"Freedom to Speak," written by *Connection* editor Chris Yurko, received a second-place silver Medallion Award in the category of Long-Form Writing (stories of more than 800 words).

The magazine is designed by John Devanski, owner of Guy With Glasses Design in Ware.

"I'm incredibly proud of our marketing and communications team for earning this recognition," Amanda Sbriscia, former vice president of the Institutional Advancement division, said in November. "Their collaboration, creativity, and exceptional writing are what set *The Connection* apart. But credit also belongs to the HCC community — our students, alumni, faculty, and staff provide endless inspiration through their stories. Our team has the great honor of amplifying those voices, and it's that authentic storytelling that makes our work meaningful." 📖

## More 'More Than Money' Reaction

Congratulations on the Fall 2025 issue of *The Connection*. I really liked the focus on opportunities for staying connected to the college ("More Than Money"). I

didn't attend HCC but worked in administration for 13 years before retiring in 2019. I'd be happy to volunteer at the college. You listed a number of opportunities, including reviewing student scholarship applications (#21) and helping with campus events (#46). I'd be willing to volunteer wherever the need is greatest.



**Bill Fogarty**  
Retired vice president, Administration and Finance  
Wilbraham, Mass.

*Editor's Note:* Since reaching out, Bill Fogarty has been enlisted as a scholarship application reviewer.

Several other people also wrote in response to the "More Than Money" story, one seeking free HCC decals — #27, "Stick an HCC decal to ..." (Just send an email to alumni@hcc.edu), another, from Mary LaPlante '82, in response to #19, "Buy a Bowl," inquiring about the date of the next Empty Bowls fundraiser. (The event is typically held in December.)

# Something to Celebrate

## Kokui Adesokan '07

‘**A**s a first-generation college student and an immigrant who arrived in the United States not speaking English, HCC played a huge role in shaping my future. It was the first place that saw my potential and gave me the foundation to thrive.

I grew up in Togo, on the west coast of Africa. My father immigrated to the United States a few years before my mom did, and then, a few years later, we came — my brother, my sister and me. I was 16.

After one year at Springfield High School of Science and Technology, I was ready for college, but, I thought, what is college? My dad went to school back home. He understood the system there, but here there was no one to guide me and help me figure out what to do first, second, third. At Holyoke Community College, there was ESL support. It was a place to get your foot in, start taking classes, and figure out what you want to do.

***“HCC played a huge role in shaping my future. It was the first place that saw my potential and gave me the foundation to thrive.”***

I wanted to be a business major, because, back home, when I was younger, I would always sell things like sugar candy and try to make money. I thought, I’ll be an entrepreneur.

Math was something I always enjoyed, and it’s universal, even if you don’t speak good English. I took enough math classes for my business major, but I wanted more. My counselor said, if you want to take

more math, you should look into engineering. I said, sure, what’s engineering?

I did a lot of research. It seemed like you could do a lot of different things with engineering, different career realms. The starting salaries were good, and it could provide a good foundation.

Gail Hilyard, coordinator of the Math Center, was instrumental to my career. I spent a lot of time in there for tutoring. She would take the engineering students on field trips to other schools to see where to go when we were ready to transfer. I went to UMass.

There are not a lot of women or women of color in engineering, but that didn’t become apparent to me until later on, when I started working. I thought, OK, there’s not a lot of people that look like me here, but I’m here, right? That’s one of the reasons why I enjoy speaking and inspiring others to pursue engineering careers.

As an immigrant who didn’t know how to navigate the education system, HCC saved me a lot of money. I was working two jobs, one at Target. I didn’t have a car for the first year, so I had to take the bus from Springfield.

The counselors were very helpful. I didn’t know anything about financial aid and all that stuff. I paid everything out of pocket.


I graduated from UMass with my bachelor’s degree in chemical engineering. A special internship program called Inroads helped me land a full-time job at a renewable energy company in South Windsor, Connecticut. That’s where I started my career.



✧ Kokui Adesokan '07

Recently, I started a venture called Lead with Kokui. I’ve always enjoyed speaking and teaching and coaching others, because I didn’t really have a map for how to navigate my career. Lead with Kokui is a platform to help others navigate their careers with more confidence.

I’m glad I started at HCC. People seem to look at community college as, you know, not like the big dog of schools. But it helped me, and I’ve been in spaces with people from the big schools.

Going to a community college doesn’t mean you’re less than. Over the years, I’ve learned to embrace that story, the story of an African immigrant who has an accent, who started at community college. Heck, I graduated with honors from here, and it helped me start my journey. It’s not something to look down upon, but something to celebrate.” 

*Kokui (Dzefi) Adesokan is technical project manager for Bridgewater Associates and a frequent STEM conference speaker. She holds an MBA from Worcester Polytechnic Institute and sits on the Dean’s Advisory Council for the Riccio College of Engineering at UMass Amherst.*

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

# ‘Trust, cover, commit’

## HCC volleyball team completes historic season

The HCC volleyball team made its first-ever appearance in a national championship tournament after winning its first New England championship in 11 years. Although the team’s historic season ended in November, the accolades did not.

The Cougars were the stars of a Holyoke City Council meeting on Dec. 16 where they were recognized for their achievements. Councilors invited the players, HCC President George Timmons and Athletic Director Tom Stewart up on the dais, where they presented coach Ju’wan Collins with an official proclamation.

“Thank you to our president and our athletic director for their unwavering support throughout the entire season, for allowing us to go to nationals, and to represent the Birthplace of Volleyball out in Iowa,” Collins said. “These girls played hard. They had an amazing season — on and off the court.”

The Cougars lost to Finger Lakes Community College in the consolation bracket of

the National Junior College Athletic Association Division III Volleyball Championship on Nov. 14 after losing their opening game to the Dallas College Eastfield Harvester Bees, who won the tournament for the third consecutive year.

“They’re still one of the top 16 teams in the country — that’s pretty good,” said Stewart, who accompanied the team to Cedar Rapids for the three-day tournament. “The trip was a great experience for the team and a great experience for the players. Some of our kids had never been on a plane before. But that’s the epitome of what HCC is all about — giving opportunities to kids who might not get them elsewhere.”

The Cougars arrived in Iowa after compiling a record of 19 and 6 on the way to winning the Division III New England Championship. Some of the credit for the team’s success belongs to freshman Caidence White, who was named New England Player of the Year and third-team

All American in NJCAA Division III. She is the first All American volleyball player in HCC history.

Freshman Jaylanie Nieves received first-team All New England honors, while sophomore Isabelle Garutti and freshman Serymar Santos received second-team All New England honors. Also contributing this year were their teammates Khimorah Aria, Sehkinah Delvalle, Alianiz Bonilla, Brittany Sumba, Aldene Scott, Nyvaeh Fisher, Desirae Robinson, Shaliyah Toledo-Cruz, and Yohadlie Pabon.

“Everybody knew what they could bring to this team,” said Collins. “The main part of having good team chemistry is everybody understanding their roles. Our motto is ‘trust, cover, and commit,’ and do it with discipline. That’s exactly what they did.”

Each player and Coach Collins also received a personal letter of congratulations from U.S. Congressman Richard Neal.

— CHRIS YURKO



⌘ The 2025 HCC women’s volleyball team celebrates at City Hall after being honored by the Holyoke City Council.

## HCC Opens Student Tech Center

HCC celebrated the grand opening of its new student tech center with a ribbon-cutting ceremony on Sept. 3. Located on the second floor of the HCC Campus Center, right off the cafeteria, the HCC Tech Center aims to provide students with all the technological resources they need to be successful. “We provide the first level of support to students and all their personal devices – laptops, cell phones, tablets,” said Tech Center manager Walter Pfau. “If it’s got a screen and a power button, we’ll help them troubleshoot it. But the heart of this space isn’t about fixing devices, it’s about helping students feel more capable, more technologically independent, and, ultimately, more connected.” In addition to one-on-one tech help, provided by Pfau, other IT staff members, and student interns, the Tech Center has computer stations, a classroom for interactive workshops, and cubicles where support staff, such as financial aid and admissions counselors, can set up during special events. “No other community college in the Commonwealth has a facility like this one dedicated to helping students succeed in today’s technological world,” said Chief Information Officer Kim Florek, head of the HCC IT Department.



⌘ HCC Tech Center manager Walter Pfau, right, leads a workshop in the new HCC Tech Center.

## Child Watch Hailed as Success



When the Itsy Bitsy Child Watch Center opened in 2022, officials heralded the free program as a potential game-changer for parents whose college aspirations floundered as they failed to find affordable childcare. Since then, the Itsy Bitsy Child Watch has proven its value, speakers said, during a Sept. 24 celebration of the center in a newly renovated and much larger space on the second floor of Frost. “Today, we’re not just celebrating the reopening of the Itsy Bitsy Child Watch facility,” said President George Timmons.

“This is a celebration of our unwavering commitment to student success and our understanding that students bring their whole lives with them when they walk through our doors.” By the end of its second semester, the center, then on the first floor of the Marieb building, had maxed out on the number of students it could serve. Expansion became possible after a \$600,000 grant from the Irene E. and George A. Davis Foundation. Kimm Quinlan, HCC director of early childhood initiatives, said student parents who use the child watch service are more likely to graduate. “We know it works,” she said, “and that’s the story.”

⌘ HCC’s Itsy Bitsy Child Watch Center opened in a larger, newly renovated space in September 2025.



## *'She'll always be with us'*


On the field, she was fierce, one of the toughest defenders ever to wear a Holyoke Community College soccer jersey, a two-time team MVP, two-time first-team All-New England player, and a first-team All-American. In 2011, her second and final year playing for the HCC Cougars, Amanda Cummings '14 led the team to a New England Championship and its highest ever national ranking in the National Junior College Athletic Association, number two. "Not just one of the best players to ever wear the Cougar uniform, but one of the greatest people," said Rob Galazka, HCC women's soccer coach. Cummings' family members and former teammates returned to HCC's O'Connell Field on Oct. 18 to honor the young woman who died tragically in 2023 at the age of 31 and bear witness as her soccer jersey – #7 – was officially retired, the first time HCC has ever retired a player's uniform. One framed jersey was presented to Cummings' mother and sister, Lynn and Katie Cummings of Agawam. A second will be displayed in the Bartley Center for Athletics and Recreation. "In my 32 years as athletic director, this is probably the toughest thing I've had to do in my career," said Tom Stewart. "Hopefully, this will bring some peace to her family. We're proud to have done this, and she will always be with us."



⤴ Amanda Cummings '14, during her playing days at HCC

**STILL EXCELLENT** For the third consecutive year – and sixth time in the past nine – the Gateway to College program at HCC has received a national excellence award from its parent network, Achieving the Dream. Achieving the Dream presents excellence awards to its affiliates when those programs meet or exceed four benchmark criteria: grade point average, retention (one-year persistence and two-year persistence rates), and graduation rate. The Gateway to College program at HCC, which started in 2008, has won one or more benchmark awards for the last 10 years, and the excellence award in 2016, 2017, 2020, 2022, 2024, and 2025. Through Gateway to College, students who have students who



have left high school or are significantly off track, complete their high school diplomas in college classes while simultaneously earning transferable college credits. "We earned this award because young people who disconnected from traditional education were willing to trust us and give school another chance, and our amazing instructors and staff were patient and flexible and willing to give some grace as our young people navigated really challenging lives," said (now retired) Gateway program director Vivian Ostrowski. "We now have 662 high school graduates from 25 school districts, and we hope that our community is stronger and kinder because of those grads and the hope and investment they bring." 

« Shannon Glenn, left, Gateway's new program director, and recently retired Gateway director Vivian Ostrowski, celebrate Gateway's national excellence award.



⌘ Elizabeth Staples '03, '05, and friend at The Good Dog Spot

# For the **Love of Dogs**

**With the help of HCC, Elizabeth Staples '03, '05 turned her passion into a successful business.**

By MEGAN TADY

Somewhere in the basement of her Easthampton home, stored away with other memorabilia from her youth, Elizabeth Staples keeps a kind of scrapbook of all the dogs she never had.

Growing up, Staples — then Elizabeth Powers — had begged her mother for a dog. But her mother, divorced, working nights and raising three kids, couldn't take on the extra responsibility. Still, Staples persisted. Whenever she saw a stray dog, she'd take a picture. Every year, she turned those photos into a calendar she used as a lobbying tactic: "12 Reasons I Need a Dog."

"Somewhere in the basement there are 165 pictures of me with random dogs," she recently said.

Staples laughs at the irony. These days she has more dogs than she ever imagined.

.....

The sleepyheads are just rousing from nap time, amped up, and ready to play. They might chase a ball, a friend, or a tail. It's all good at The Good Dog Spot, a doggy daycare facility in Northampton, Massachusetts, where more than 40 canines are poised to pounce on their afternoon recreation.

Staples walks through the cordoned play areas, setting off a stadium wave of enthusiastic barking as the dogs notice her.

"You get used to it!" she shouts over the din.

Staples founded The Good Dog Spot in 2007, first in Chicopee, then in Northampton. The business is the embodiment of her lifelong devotion to dogs. But it is also the product of hard work and careful planning.

To turn her passion into a sustainable enterprise, she enrolled at Holyoke Community College to study business

and accounting. "I went to HCC so I could set myself up," she said. "I was able to write my business plan and create realistic financial projections for bankers when securing my original loans. It's not just about doing what you love — you have to understand the business side."

Her time at HCC helped her hone and sharpen the details required to care for animals in a way that aligned with her vision.

Staples wanted her dogs to be supervised by trained pet care specialists and placed into playgroups carefully curated by size, personality, and play style. Today, The Good Dog Spot offers customized experiences based on each client's needs, including one-on-one interactions and small group activities.

*Continued on next page*

**"I went to HCC so I could set myself up. It's not just about doing what you love — you have to understand the business side."**

ELIZABETH STAPLES



» Staples checks in at The Good Dog Spot dog spa.

Her philosophy isn't simply to tucker dogs out until they collapse at bedtime. "It's more about enriching and fulfilling the lives of pets," she explains. "It's not just an eight-hour party where dogs run nonstop. We're really looking at what makes a well-rounded dog. Exhausted isn't the same as fulfilled."

Staples conceived of The Good Dog Spot as a one-stop-shop model, offering daycare, dog training, grooming, and overnight boarding services.

**"HCC was the perfect fit for me. It didn't feel too huge and overwhelming; it felt comfortable and easy."**

ELIZABETH STAPLES

"We wanted to be convenient for owners and comforting for the dogs," she says. "If the dogs already come for daycare and then come back for grooming, they already know us."

As Staples continues her tour, she stops in front of the dog spa window, where a woolly white Great Pyrenees is getting a bath, regally luxuriating under the warm suds. Nearby, a small dog perches on a

grooming table, tolerating a trim. Across the way, Staples steps into the Spot's Tots room, the socialization area for puppies, empty at the moment — and quiet — and reflects on turning her childhood obsession into a thriving business and community.

Her mother never did accede to her requests for a dog, but Staples settled for the next best thing, working at a dog kennel throughout her teens and early 20s. She was 21 and living on her own before she finally adopted her first dog, an American Staffordshire Terrier she named Haley, whom she had for 14 years.

"That dog was with me through everything," she says, "the beginning of the business, my wedding, and the kids."

Staples had also joined the board of directors for the American Boarding Kennels Association (now called the Pet Care Services Association) and began attending industry conferences, where she witnessed a major shift in pet care philosophy.

"I saw places moving away from the warehouse style of boarding — dogs in chain-link runs, safe and fed — to spaces that were more social and actually catered to dogs' emotional needs," she said. "My 'aha moment' came when I realized, 'There's nothing around here like this.'"

While working in life beneficiary services at MassMutual in Chicopee, Staples began drafting her business plan. She had passion but little collateral. "I didn't own a house," she said. "I didn't own a car. I didn't have anything I could leverage." Passion alone, she knew, would not secure an investment.

"I love dogs, and that's great, but I knew I couldn't be successful in business if I didn't know my numbers," she said.

That led her to HCC, where she earned an associate degree in business administration in 2002 at 22, followed by an associate degree in accounting in 2005 at 25. "Both degrees gave me practical tools to build a sustainable business," said Staples, adding that she had not been motivated to go to college after high school. "HCC was the perfect fit for me. It didn't feel too huge and overwhelming; it felt comfortable and easy."

Two years later, Staples leased a space in Chicopee, taking out a small bank loan and maxing out her credit card. She bookended workdays at Mass Mutual with hours at her new business.

« The Staples family poses for a photo: from left to right: Haley, 10, Grace, 12, Corey, Thomas, 8, Elizabeth, and North.





⌘ Staples works with her dog, North, at The Good Dog Spot.

There were naysayers, she recalls: “Some people said, ‘You’re opening a doggy day care? Dogs are fine at home alone while their owners go to work.’”

But Staples had tapped into a broader shift, with owners increasingly viewing their pets as family members in need of daily enrichment. “They don’t want to leave them home alone anymore,” Staples said. “We really see it like we’re being entrusted with somebody’s child.”

**Staples had tapped into a broader shift, with owners increasingly viewing their pets as family members in need of daily enrichment.**

Like any daycare, Staples plans fun and creative activities for the dogs, such as birthday “pawties,” pet-of-the-month spotlights, paw-print art and picture days. “Parents put their kids’ artwork on the

fridge, and we wanted to give our pet parents the same thing,” she said. Owners can even peek in on their pets during the day via webcam.

Word about The Good Dog Spot spread at Greyhound speed. “Early on, if we had eight dogs, it was a win,” Staples said. Just two years after opening, The Good Dog Spot outgrew its original 2,400-square-foot space, expanding to a nearby 13,000-square-foot facility. The Northampton location, which opened in 2017, is 5,000 square feet.

Each location supports an average daily clientele of 50 daycare dogs, with numbers of overnight boarders fluctuating

seasonally between 10 and 30. Staples employs 43 staff members across both facilities, serving more than 5,000 clients a year.

One of those clients is Lynn Pellerano ’06, also an HCC alum and business operations director at MassMutual. Although Staples left MassMutual around 2010, Pellerano remembers her sharing plans about opening a dog daycare. Ten years later, when Pellerano became the owner of a Pomeranian named Rose, off they went to The Good Dog Spot.

“I knew Elizabeth and her team would take care of our Rose as if she were their own,” said Pellerano. “Elizabeth always had a true commitment to service, which I knew would translate into her being a great business owner. She has clearly instilled this attribute in her staff.”

*Continued on page 26*



» Staples consults with one of her 43 employees.



» Visual art student Ariana Jones examines the work of her classmates during the 2025 Student Art Exhibition at the Taber Art Gallery.



# ART for EVERYONE

## HCC marks 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Taber Art Gallery

By CHRIS YURKO

***“Art is not a luxury. A work of art should be a tool for learning, just as a book.”***

– President David Bartley, Aug. 25, 2000

Not long after starting her job at HCC, Rachel Rushing felt she needed some sort of guiding statement to help make sense of her new position as director of the Taber Art Gallery and figure out what role the gallery should play in campus life.

She settled on a simple, four-word phrase and had it printed on little stickers in both English and Spanish that she handed out at college resource fairs and other campus events:

*Art is for Everybody / Arte es para Todos*

“That’s the message I wanted to internalize,” said Rushing, herself a working artist and educator. “I wanted students to know that no matter what their upbringing, or their first language, or even their major, everyone belongs in an art gallery.”

Although it might not have been expressed before in those exact words, that sentiment has pretty much been the mission of the Taber Art Gallery since it opened on Aug. 25, 2000.

*Continued on next page*



⌘ A gallery visitor views the annual Student Art Exhibition in 2023.

“It’s important that an art gallery feel inclusive,” said Amy Johnquest, HCC’s first Taber director, who retired in 2023. “Something that a college art gallery like the Taber can do is make students feel comfortable walking into galleries. If you’re in New York City – that’s the place to go gallery hopping – if you’ve never walked into a gallery off the street before, it can feel intimidating, and it shouldn’t.”

Last fall, HCC celebrated the anniversary of the Taber’s opening with a series of special events, including an art faculty (past and

present) exhibition called “Milestone: 25 Years of the Taber Art Gallery.” For Rushing, Johnquest and others, the anniversary provided an opportunity to reflect on the history of the gallery and what it means to the college and surrounding community.

No one has been part of the HCC art scene longer than retired professor Frank Cressotti. He started his teaching career at HCC in 1969, shortly after the great fire of January 1968 destroyed the principal downtown campus, dispersing college offices, departments and classrooms out among several small city buildings. Visual art, a relatively new academic offering, was housed in the basement of the old Elmwood Building on South Street.

“We had no real studio space or anything,” Cressotti said. “For our first student art show, we just pinned things up on the walls wherever we could.”

Initially, the new HCC campus, when it finally opened on Homestead Avenue in February 1974, provided few amenities for art. The Fine & Performing Arts Building



⌘ HCC Visual Art Professor Raishad Glover works on an installation for a solo show in 2024.

was still under construction and would not open until more than a year later.

The first “HCC art gallery” – it had no official name – where work from outside artists and students could be formally displayed, debuted sometime after the construction of the Campus Center in 1980, but that too was far from ideal. The gallery shared space on the third floor with the student lounge.

“If one were to visit the HCC art gallery today, the needs and shortcomings of this space would become immediately apparent,” Johnquest, the gallery director, wrote in a 1998 proposal for a dedicated space that would “provide artists with a secure and professional atmosphere to exhibit their work.”

Among the gallery’s shortcomings, she and others noted: dingy fabric peeling off the walls, thermostats awkwardly located in the middle of display areas, dysfunctional track lighting, theft, furniture pushed back against the walls to accommodate the room’s many uses, such as kickboxing classes and, at times, indoor soccer. There were other distractions: TVs, a large stone fireplace, a piano, trash, students sleeping – and, sometimes, “necking.”

*“Something that a college art gallery like the Taber can do is make students feel comfortable walking into galleries.”*

AMY JOHNQUEST

“None of this is unusual for a student center,” Johnquest wrote, “but unfortunately degenerates the experience of viewing art and implies a lack of respect to the artist.”

Her proposal, with the support of the visual art faculty, found a champion in HCC President (and alum) David Bartley '54.

“David was big on the arts,” said Cressotti. “He even took a photography class himself, maybe more than one, and made a point of coming over to the art department all the time.”

Bartley, a Holyoke native, former city councilor and state representative (and speaker of the house) maintained his community connections and never hesitated to leverage them for the benefit of HCC. He reached out to longtime friend Donald Taber, a retired Holyoke businessman and philanthropist.

In 1992, Taber, the former chairman of the American Pad and Paper Company, had donated his private art collection to HCC, 45

paintings and prints, some quite valuable. “I felt the college art department could find it useful for teaching,” Taber later told a newspaper reporter.

Without a dedicated gallery space, however, the works could only be displayed safely in secure campus locations, such as administrative offices, behind lock and key.

“Taber donated his collection, and that opened the door to the idea of a gallery,” said Cressotti. “Mr. Taber wanted the work shown. He didn’t want it hidden away.”

Taber donated \$50,000. Bartley designated an office suite adjacent to the HCC Library for the creation of a new art gallery named for its benefactor.

“The college was growing,” said Cressotti. “Space was at a premium. The biggest thing David did was commit that space to a gallery, and Amy was the one who had the vision for how the gallery should look and how it should work.”

Looking back, Johnquest says she was pleased with the way it turned out.

“I know it was probably out of their comfort zone to dedicate that much space to something that wasn’t a classroom,” Johnquest said, “but, in essence, it serves as a classroom extension.”

HCC held a grand opening ceremony for the Taber Art Gallery on Aug. 25, 2000.

“Students entering HCC expect excellent faculty and staff, state-of-the-art technology, and a well-stocked library,” Bartley said in his welcome remarks. “Beginning this fall, they can study and enjoy actual art works in a serious space.”

Bartley said it was fitting the gallery adjoined the college library.

“They really belong together,” he said. “They are both essential resources. Art is not a luxury. A work of art should be a tool for learning, just as a book.”

*Continued on next page*



» Students visit the Taber Art Gallery for “HyperColor,” a fall 2025 group exhibition.

For its first show, the gallery exhibited the Taber Collection. Since then, the Taber has hosted 134 exhibitions and featured more than 330 different artists, most directly connected to the western Massachusetts' arts scene.

"One of the things we wanted to do was feature local artists, because there's so many of them in the area," said Cressotti. "Holyoke was really beginning to be kind of an arts town, and the gallery gave us a focus for that."

And there was never a shortage of artistic talent to draw from in the Pioneer Valley.

*"Galleries are places of discovery, of wonder, of joy, that offer a wide range of audiences face-to-face and sometimes hands-on experiences with art."*

RACHEL RUSHING

✧ Director Rachel Rushing, seated, talks to a class of students during a gallery tour in November 2025.

"That wasn't an issue," said Johnquest. "It's so hard for people to find places to show their work, so why give it to someone in New York who has so many more opportunities at their doorstep? We wanted to celebrate our neighborhood."

The gallery has also provided opportunities for the HCC Visual Art faculty to show their own work. Over the past 25 years, Cressotti has been part of four Taber exhibitions, two as a solo artist, his last in 2022, "Pages: Paintings on Newspaper." He was also part of the fall 2025 "Milestone" group show as both an exhibitor and an exhibit; photographer and former HCC professor Chris Willingham submitted a black and white photo of Cressotti sitting in his Southampton studio.

"That was always nice, because, if you're making art, you want to show it," said Cressotti, who retired from HCC in 2014, but stuck around until 2024 as the curator for the HCC Permanent Collection, which now numbers around 350 works of art, including the Taber Collection.

In addition to the faculty shows, the gallery has periodically featured the work of area high school student artists and hosts the annual HCC Student Art Exhibition to culminate the spring semester. The show's opening reception, held in the gallery and library lobby, also provides the backdrop for the visual art department's annual faculty awards ceremony.

"Every year we dedicate the gallery to the student show, so students, their parents, friends and families can see their work in a gallery," said Cressotti. "It has always been a big deal and a big draw. That's an experience that makes HCC special."

Exhibition receptions attract students, faculty, staff, local artists, as well as arts alumni.

"I've had a lot of people come up to me and tell me how much the gallery means to them," said Cressotti. "Textbook and magazine and newspaper photographs of art are nice, but when you're in a gallery standing in front of something and seeing it, that is a completely different experience."

The question of why it matters that a college has an art gallery was asked and answered by Taber Director Rachel Rushing

✧ Retired visual art professor Frank Cressotti stands next to a portrait of himself during "Milestone," the Taber's fall 2025 anniversary exhibition.



# The Taber Legacy


In 1992, Donald R. Taber and his wife Wilmina donated 45 paintings and prints from their private art collection to Holyoke Community College.

In recognition of that donation, the HCC Foundation established the Donald Taber Scholarship in Art with proceeds from the annual golf benefit and money from “A Feast of Fine Art,” a May 27, 1992, gala event celebrating the first public viewing of the Donald and Wilmina Taber Collection.

Subsequently, Taber himself donated \$5,000 to the scholarship fund, which has since supported the education of more than 50 HCC art students.

Upon Donald Taber’s death in March 2002 at the age of 100, his estate provided a \$150,000 gift to the college specifically for the maintenance, preservation and upkeep of paintings owned by the college, the purchase of artwork by living artists, and the display and exhibition of artwork.

The HCC Permanent Collection now includes roughly 350 works of art, including the original Taber Collection, as well as 40 pieces purchased from HCC alumni, many of which will be on display in the gallery in August. (See back cover for details.)

On Aug. 25, 2000, exactly 25 years to the day after the opening of the Taber Art Gallery, members of the Taber family toured the gallery and viewed pieces from the original collection. Over the years, the Taber family has continued to donate to the scholarship fund. That night, at a Taber Art Gallery anniversary kickoff event, Donald Taber’s granddaughter, Laura McGrew, pledged an additional \$10,000 on behalf of the family for the scholarship fund. 



» Members of the Taber family visited the Taber Art Gallery on Aug. 25, on the 25th anniversary of the gallery’s opening in 2020. Donald Taber’s great-granddaughter, Haley Snyder, and daughter, Ann Nugent, hold a portrait of Donald Taber, flanked by his great-granddaughter Morgan Snyder, far left, and granddaughter, Laura McGrew, far right.


» Donald R. Taber at the gallery’s grand opening in 2000

herself during an anniversary celebration held in downtown Holyoke on Aug. 25, 2025, exactly 25 years after the gallery opened.

Beyond the public obligation to care for the artwork in its collection, she told a crowd that included the grand-daughter and great-grand daughters of Donald Taber, galleries are “places of discovery, of wonder, of joy, that offer a wide range of audiences face-to-face and sometimes hands-on experiences with art.”

Since the Taber is not a commercial gallery, its sustainability does not depend on art sales. Because it isn’t a nonprofit, public museum, “we don’t have to stick to a canon; we can be experimental,” she said. “We can try new things. We can prioritize people and their experiences.”

The educational value that the gallery brings to HCC is in providing an informal learning space, where students can seek out art because of their own curiosity, and have their thoughts and their feelings and their interpretations validated, she said, “and that’s empowering.”

“We are,” she said, “a place where different people and ideas can meet and connect, where everybody belongs.” 



# Kids at Heart

For Samantha Stackpole '25, philanthropy is a personal matter

By CHRIS YURKO

As president of the HCC Student Philanthropy Council, Samantha Stackpole learned a lot about fundraising operations at the college. But a personal history of giving is something she brought with her to that role.

“Philanthropy has always been a big part of my life,” she said.

Over the years, “Sami,” as she’s known, has been deeply involved with charities such as the Make-A-Wish Foundation and the Scleroderma Foundation of New England. But there is one nonprofit even closer to her heart – the Double H Ranch in Luzerne, New York, a summer camp in the Adirondacks for seriously ill children, founded by the late Paul Newman.

“The two H’s stand for health and happiness. That’s our motto,” she said,

For the past two summers, the 21-year-old from Westfield, Massachusetts, has worked at the Double H Ranch as a camp counselor; she also volunteers there during special off-season weekends.



(Above) Samantha Stackpole '25 prepares to record a video as president of the HCC Philanthropy Council. (Top) Stackpole, as a child, and a friend at the Double H Ranch.

However, her association with the Double H Ranch began long before that. As a child, Stackpole was diagnosed with systemic scleroderma, an autoimmune disease.

“It’s a chronic illness that I have to live with for the rest of my life, but it is manageable,” she said. “There are treatments

for the symptoms, so I’m able to live as much of a full life as I can.”

From the age of 10 to 18, Stackpole attended the Double H Ranch as a camper for one week every summer. The experience changed her life.

“What’s most important is to stay in the moment,” Stackpole learned. “That’s the one thing we want campers to focus on. There may be hard things that they’re dealing with outside of camp, but during that week your only responsibility is to be a kid.”

The Double H Ranch is part of the SeriousFun Children’s Network, which runs camps all over the United States. (The first was the Hole in the Wall Gang camp, started by Newman in 1988.) Of all the SeriousFun camps, the Double H Ranch takes children with the widest range of medical conditions, including those with blood diseases, cancer, and neuromuscular disorders, and children who have had organ transplants. One week each sum-

mer — “Camp Inspiration,” they call it — is devoted to children who use breathing support devices.

“My counselors had a very big impact on me,” Stackpole said. “They treated everyone with the same kindness, no matter their disability or disease.”

During her first summer as a full-time employee, Stackpole worked as a cabin counselor. Last summer, she returned as an archery instructor. In the fall, winter and spring, she volunteers there on weekends devoted to people with specific medical conditions. One week, called “Bravehearts,” is for adult women who have had some form of cancer. In the winter, the camp runs adaptive skiing and snowboarding programs.

In December 2024, on national Giving Tuesday, Stackpole made a donation to the Double H Ranch. She wrote a note with her gift that caught the attention of camp administrators. In the spring of 2025, as NBC’s TODAY show was preparing a segment about the philanthropic legacy of Paul Newman, for what would have been the actor’s 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, producers approached the Double H Ranch for one staff member to interview. Based on her note, camp officials suggested Stackpole.

“I wrote something along the lines of how the camp had shaped me into the person that I am, with all the beliefs that I have today, which are based on inclusivity and respect and kindness, and how I wouldn’t have had that if I hadn’t gone there,” she said.

One Friday last May, the TODAY show team visited the Double H Ranch, where Stackpole was interviewed by TV personality Al Roker.

“When you first came here,” he asked, “how did it change you?”

Quoting Paul Newman himself, Stackpole said, “There is no such thing as sick kids; there are children who happen to be sick.”



Stackpole, with TV personality Al Roker, after recording a segment for NBC’s TODAY show



***“As a kid growing up with a chronic illness, it’s easy to believe that you’re different from everyone else, that you’re just a sick kid and not being given the love and respect and appreciation that everyone else gets”***

SAMANTHA STACKPOLE

“We were just treated like normal kids here,” she added.

As a child, Stackpole was a Make A Wish Kid herself, going to Hawaii for two weeks with her parents and her sister. They attended fundraising events. Her mom

gave speeches. Stackpole was in commercials. She also participated in annual “walk for a cure” fundraising events for the Scleroderma Foundation.

The HCC Student Philanthropy Council started in fall 2024, Stackpole’s first semester at HCC. She joined right away. The council is part student club and part advisory board. Members work closely with the college’s Institutional Advancement team and Scholarship Resource Center to plan fundraising and friend-raising events and encourage other students to get involved in college campaigns.

“The council was perfect for me,” she said. “I felt like I found my purpose at HCC.”

A business administration major, Stackpole’s long-term goal is to get a master’s degree in nonprofit management. Beyond that, she can see herself one day working professionally for the SeriousFun Network, perhaps as camp manager of the Double H Ranch.

“As a kid growing up with a chronic illness, it’s easy to believe that you’re different from everyone else, that you’re just a sick kid and not being given the love and respect and appreciation that everyone else gets,” Stackpole said. “That can be really hard for kids growing up, not to feel like their peers at all. So being able to give these kids that love and warmth and kindness that they don’t get in the regular world is so important in my eyes. I want that to keep happening.”

Stackpole is already a giant step closer to her goal. In January, she transferred early to Siena College to get a headstart on her bachelor’s degree. She plans to major in business and was accepted into a special experiential learning fellowship program called NExT, which stands for nonprofit excellence and transformation.

Siena College is only 11 miles north of Albany, N.Y., and just 50 miles south of the Double H Ranch. 📍



# The Ties That Bind

By CHRIS YURKO

For first-year communications major Mikey Connolly, the green thread begins circa 2003, several years before he was born.

That's when his father, Myke Connolly '04, then a graphic design major and a student senator, attended an HCC fundraising event at Juggler Meadow in Leverett, Massachusetts, the sprawling estate of Michael Kittredge '73.

Connolly was eager to meet the legendary founder of the Yankee Candle Company and points to their conversation that night as a pivotal moment in his own development as a serial entrepreneur. The advice Kittredge offered gave Connolly the confidence to pursue his own business ideas.

He is now founder and CEO of Launch and Stand Out, a Springfield-based advertising and marketing agency, and Stand Out Truck, a mobile billboard company, as well as an author, publisher, motivational speaker, and teacher. The lessons Connolly gleaned over the years from the man he calls his mentor he is now passing

## HCC LAUNCHES THE GREEN THREAD, A PODCAST OF ALUMNI INTERVIEWS

on to his son, Mikey, himself a budding entrepreneur and creator of The Realistic CEO podcast, which he started in high school.

"I knew I wanted to get into business from watching my dad," said Mikey, who started raking leaves for money while still in elementary school. "Michael Kittredge definitely still lives through us. Every day, my dad mentions some example of what Michael Kittredge taught him."

Kittredge to Connolly to Connolly.

You can't see it, but there's an invisible thread that binds them.

Fittingly, the Connollys, father and son, were the first guests to appear on The Green Thread, a new monthly podcast developed by the HCC alumni office in conjunction with WCCH, the college radio station.

"We had been kicking around the idea of a podcast for a few years," said Julie Phillips, HCC executive director of development. "There are so many alumni stories to tell.

*Continued on page 22*



⤴ Green Thread co-hosts Patrick LaBelle, left, and Natalia Castagno get ready to record their interview with guests Mikey Connolly and his father, Myke Connolly '04

≈ Jason Perez '22



≈ Elizabeth Román '03





^ Co-hosts Natalia Castagno, left, Patrick LaBelle, right, and alumni guest Louis Burgos '14, '18, hold a green string symbolizing the theme of the podcast.

We were looking for another way to put those stories out there front and center in a way that our community can listen to them where they want and when they want, on their commute, while they're doing chores, wherever.”

The podcast title derives from the “Red String of Fate” theory from East Asian mythology, where, it is said, an invisible string, or thread, connects people who are destined to meet.

“The theme came out of a collaborative conversation,” said Phillips. “We were talking about HCC’s mission — ‘Educate, Inspire, Connect’ — and trying to come up with something that captures the essence of our community and our alumni.”

During a development committee meeting, Jane Johnson Vottero, director of marketing and communications, mentioned the idea of the red thread.

“That made us think of the green thread,” said Phillips, “the thread that connects us all at HCC.”

The podcast is co-hosted by Natalia Castagno, HCC assistant director for alumni relations, and Patrick Labelle,

WCCH station manager. The shows are recorded in the HCC podcast room, recently upgraded with new recording equipment and soundproofing, paid for in part by the HCC Foundation’s microphilanthropy campaign.

As of this writing, six episodes of The Green Thread have been produced and are available for streaming directly from the HCC website ([hcc.edu/greenthread](http://hcc.edu/greenthread)) and on Spotify.

Since Episode 1 debuted in October, Castagno and Labelle have interviewed Alumni Council vice president Elizabeth Román '03, executive editor of news at New England Public Media (Ep. 2); Jason Perez '22, a criminal justice major and 2025 legal studies graduate of Commonwealth Honors College at the University of Massachusetts

Amherst (Ep. 3); Zydalis (Zayas) Bauer '09, digital/multimedia producer and editor with the New England News Collaborative (Ep. 4); Louis Burgos '14, '18, HCC multimedia specialist (Ep. 5); and Sarah Monson '03, senior director of philanthropy and external relations at the Aurora Women and Girls Foundation (Ep. 6). Many more episodes are in the pipeline.



“We’re building an oral history of the HCC experience,” said Phillips. “With each alumni guest, we’re capturing not just their individual journey, but a snapshot of HCC at a specific moment in time, preserving the voices, stories and lived experiences that define what this institution has meant across generations.”



^ Sarah Monson '03

It’s already become a hallmark of the show for the hosts to tease out the green threads that connect alumni to the college – and to each other.

For instance, as it turns out, Román (Ep. 2) was a mentor to Bauer (Ep. 4). They met while Román was the bilingual reporter for the *Springfield Republican* and Bauer was in her first year at HCC and an intern for the Latino Youth Media Institute at WGBY, the public television station in Springfield that is now part of New England Public Media. They worked together on “Presencia,” a bilingual series on WGBY and still work together now at NEPM on a show called “Conexión,” a video series that explores Latinos’ connections to the outdoors.

“It’s been the most amazing experience,” Bauer said on *The Green Thread*. “She’s such an inspiration.”

The threads aren’t just linear, from one generation to the next, though, but can go in any direction, or split and take new turns. Like sideways, as in Román’s connection to her classmate Chris Maza ’04, executive editor of *The Reminder* publications. Román and Maza met when they were studying journalism at HCC and writing for *The Phoenix*, the HCC college newspaper.

“We’re both doing the same kind of work,” Román said. “But HCC affected my personal life too. The fact that we’re still friends now is really meaningful to me. I saw him

get married. I saw when he and his wife had their baby, and that is a really special thing.”

For his green thread, Perez cited a continuing relationship with his HCC adviser and mentor Adina Giannelli, dean of social services, arts and humanities, as well as his ongoing work with the HCC criminal justice advisory council and pre-law club.

“I want to do mentoring of criminal justice students,” said Perez, who plans to attend law school. “I want to be able to show them that transferring to a four-year university is possible, and even graduate school is possible.”

Sometimes the thread loops back on itself. Burgos earned his first associate degree from HCC in criminal justice, then came back for a second in communications, media, and theater arts. That led him to Westfield State University for a bachelor’s degree in communications, a career in digital media, and eventually back to the college as HCC’s videographer and social media manager.

“As we’ve gotten to know the guests, it’s been interesting to really see the green threads that bind them, either to the college or to each other,” said Castagno.

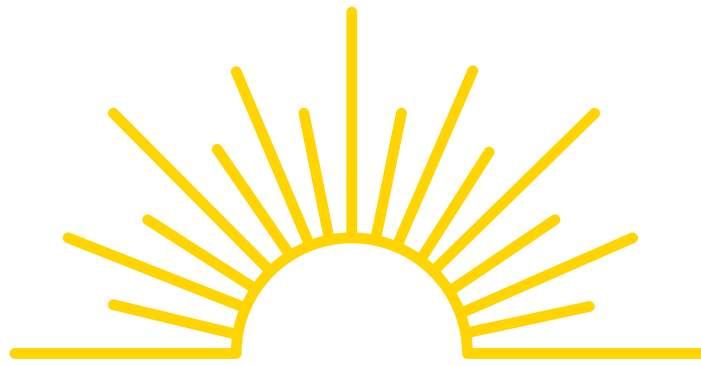
In his staff position and as a volunteer adviser to the HCC Photography Club, Burgos now gets to share his technical expertise and HCC wisdom with a new generation of students.

And the green thread continues. **G**

### Do you know an HCC alum with a story worth sharing?

The Green Thread is a podcast where we invite alumni to share their stories and explore connections and experiences that tie them to HCC, their communities, and one another.

Please send an email to [alumni@hcc.edu](mailto:alumni@hcc.edu) to recommend yourself or someone else, or go to [hcc.edu/greenthread](http://hcc.edu/greenthread) to fill out our online form.



# WHERE CHARITY BEGINS

Why two sisters from Connecticut shifted their giving to HCC

By DOUG SCANLON

One of the earliest memories Valerie and Elissa Barr share is trick-or-treating in their Norwalk, Connecticut, neighborhood with little orange cardboard UNICEF boxes, asking for donations. They would return home to stack pennies by the door to hand out to trick-or-treaters who came by with their own boxes.

Those pennies helped support the international humanitarian work of UNICEF (The United Nations Children's Fund). But all these years later, the memory sticks with the sisters for a different reason. From a young age, they were instilled with a value that their parents and grandparents cared deeply about: charity.

Their father, Fred Barr, lived those values throughout his life. A World War II Navy veteran and electrical engineer with a warm sense of humor, Fred helped establish the nonprofit foundation at Norwalk Community College and remained deeply committed to making education accessible – and to ensuring his daughters could change a tire and handle life's practical challenges themselves.

Decades later, while reading an article in *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, Valerie was shocked to discover how much alumni giving goes to the wealthy-



⤵ Elissa Barr



⤵ Valerie Barr

est universities. She began to rethink her own philanthropic priorities.

“The rich get richer,” she said.

Valerie, a computer science professor and Mount Holyoke College alum, felt that giving to her alma mater was not having as big an impact as it could elsewhere. Living and working in the Pioneer Valley, she was familiar with Holyoke Community College and the students it served. After doing some research on the HCC website, Valerie decided to make a donation to the Kathryn “Kitty” Broman Scholarship, which supports adult women studying at HCC. The more Valerie got involved with Holyoke Community College, the more she could see the results of her giving.

“Community colleges have a very real impact on people's lives,” Valerie said. “A student's education could be derailed because they can't buy a new tire for their car, but targeted support helps make it possible for that student to continue their education.”

Elissa, a Simmons College alum, had her own eye-opening moment while visiting Portland, Oregon. The professional calligrapher based in Northampton, Massachusetts, was attending a conference at Reed College and

noticed that whatever food the students in the cafeteria chose not to eat could be left in a designated area for the students who could not afford a meal plan.

“I stopped and I talked to these students,” Elissa said. “They said there was no easy way for them to get food. I became more and more aware of what was going on in colleges with students who just can’t make ends meet and want an education desperately.”

When Elissa relayed this story to her sister, Valerie told her about all the work Holyoke Community College was doing to combat food insecurity. Pretty soon, Elissa became an annual donor, designating her contributions to the Thrive Center and Food Pantry and to the college’s “area of greatest need,” which allows HCC to direct funds where they’re needed most.

As Elissa and Valerie watched their philanthropic impact grow at Holyoke Community College, they faced a difficult reality closer to home: their father’s health was failing.

“[Our father] believed everybody is entitled to an education, and he would be pleased to know that people are getting a scholarship in his memory.”

ELISSA BARR

As his daughters helped get his affairs in order, they approached Fred with a request. He had several organizations designated as beneficiaries in his estate plans, including a university. They asked if he would consider changing his estate to support HCC instead, and he graciously obliged.



⌘ Left to right: Noah Merhar (Elissa’s son), Valerie, Fred Barr, and Elissa at a family gathering in Belmont, Massachusetts

Following his passing in November 2024 at age 98, the Barrs worked with the HCC Foundation to establish the Fred M. Barr Endowed Scholarship from his estate, ensuring his legacy will support students for generations to come. The scholarship gives preferences to a visual art major (in honor of Elissa, the calligrapher) or a STEM major (in honor of Valerie, now the Margaret Hamilton Distinguished Professor of Computer Science at Bard College).

The estate gift also supports expenses for students who participate in the college’s annual Innovation Challenge entrepreneurship com-


“Community colleges have a very real impact on people’s lives. A student’s education could be derailed because they can’t buy a new tire for their car, but targeted support helps make it possible for that student to continue their education.”

VALERIE BARR

petition and the purchase of laptop computers students can borrow from the HCC Library.

“The Barr family has been, and will be, incredibly helpful to so many HCC students far into the future,” said John Sieracki, leadership gift officer and manager of campaign initiatives.

For Valerie and Elissa, knowing their father’s values live on through HCC students brings comfort.

“He believed everybody is entitled to an education, and he would be pleased to know that people are getting a scholarship in his memory,” Elissa said. 

Along the way, The Good Dog Spot has truly become a family business. While Staples is the company president, her husband, Cory Staples, manages daily operations, and her father, Keith Powers, is director of finance and technology. Even their three young children — Grace, Haley (yes, same as her first dog), and Thomas — star in Instagram videos that promote the community spirit of The Good Dog Spot, such as one showing them feeding dog-friendly pumpkin pie to the pups on Thanksgiving.

At home, the Staples have a “small zoo” that includes four turtles, two leopard geckos,

the past four years,” Staples said. “Not the journey I was hoping for, but the one I got and, as a family, we try to give North the best life she can have while she’s with us.”

Staples is also deeply committed to helping animals in need, organizing fundraisers and donation drives that primarily support the Foundation for TJO Animals, the non-profit arm of the Thomas J. O’Connor Adoption Center in Springfield. This year, The Good Dog Spot’s Santa Pictures fundraiser, which offers clients a digital image of their pet with Santa, raised nearly \$2,000 for the foundation. The business also sponsors an-

“With the economy right now, there’s a lot of food insecurity, and folks are struggling,” Carra said. “The first thing that’s usually affected is pets. We’ve seen a lot of difficult animal cases come into the shelter — situations where people can’t keep their animals, or the animals are severely underfed and require emergency vet care. Every dollar goes toward addressing those needs. The Good Dog Spot is a huge part of the success of what we do, and they are always advocating for us.”

In addition to giving back to the broader community, Staples fosters a strong sense of connection among Good Dog Spot pet families. In October, they threw a Halloween party, complete with a fog machine, with dogs and owners alike showing up in costumes. For Christmas, they hosted an Ugly Sweater “Pawty,” inviting fur friends to search for treats under the Christmas tree skirt.



↗ Staples and North, a direct descendant of her first dog, Haley

a freshwater aquarium, and seven birds, including four cockatiels, a sun conure named Pickles, Piper the Quaker parrot, and Kevin, an Indian Ringneck Parrot, adopted from an animal shelter.

And then there is North, the family’s American Staffordshire Terrier, who is, in fact, a direct descendent of her first dog. North, though, suffers from idiopathic epilepsy, which has caused brain damage, and requires medication to manage the frequency and magnitude of her seizures.

“I have definitely built a wealth of knowledge in dog training, behavior, and managing her medical condition over


nual fundraising events such as “Pets Rock” and “Designer Purrse Bingo.”

“Our four-legged clients have amazing lives and amazing homes,” Staples said. “There are so many shelter pets that deserve the same.”

Jill Carra, marketing and communications manager for the Foundation for TJO Animals, said The Good Dog Spot has been a dedicated supporter over the years, continually demonstrating its strong sense of community, especially during times of heightened need.

**“We want to keep giving dogs a great day and giving owners peace of mind. They put an awful lot of trust in us to be the home away from home for their dogs, which is incredibly humbling, and we’ve gone a long way to earn that trust.”**

ELIZABETH STAPLES

Staples already has her gears spinning about how to celebrate the 20th anniversary of The Good Dog Spot in 2027. Until then, “We want to keep giving dogs a great day and giving owners peace of mind,” she said. “They put an awful lot of trust in us to be the home away from home for their dogs, which is incredibly humbling, and we’ve gone a long way to earn that trust.” 

### Connection Online Extra

Talking Dogs, a Q&A with  
Elizabeth Staples  
[hcc.edu/talking-dogs](http://hcc.edu/talking-dogs)

## Help on the Range



For his first job at HCC, **Gene Kingsley '91** checked student IDs in the computer lab as a work-study student. Proving adept at fixing broken terminals, a skill for which he had no formal training, the liberal arts major was later hired as the college's first help desk manager. "There was no desk, no phone, no computer, and no people," Kingsley recalls. "They allowed me to build it from scratch." Today, Kingsley's resume reads like a history of the information age. For 13 years, he helped guide HCC through many technological advances, including the introduction of digital phones, the first internet-accessible network, and campus wi-fi. Along the way, his title changed to reflect his increasing responsibilities: networking manager, director of information technology, and, finally, director of information security. He finally left HCC for IT jobs in Boston, and at UMass Amherst and other places, including Springfield, where he is now the cyber range manager at the Richard E. Neal Cybersecurity Center of Excellence. "I love to help people get into the field, understand it, love it," he said. Even though his job is technically oriented, he still applies the same principles he learned working on the HCC help desk. "Soft skills are important," he said. "Computers are easy. People are the challenge. One of the things I used to tell the staff was, take care of the person first, then take care of the problem."

« Gene Kingsley '91 is the cyber range manager at The Richard E. Neal Cybersecurity Center of Excellence.

## ASSEMBLING SOLUTIONS

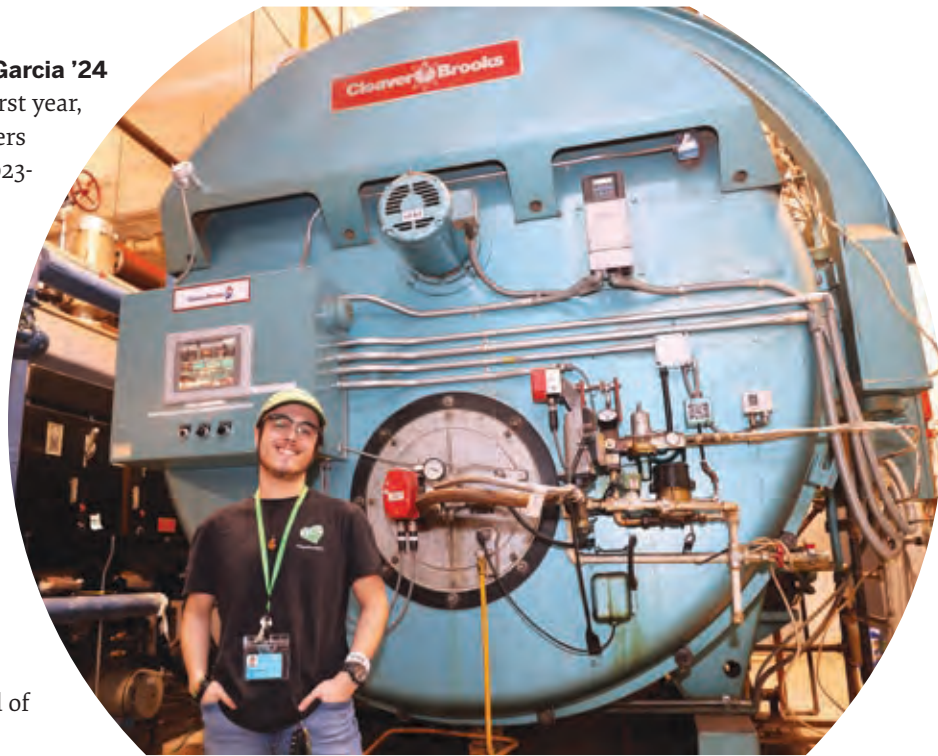


As a new resident of Presque Isle, Maine, **Ashley Anderson '14** found work as a crisis counselor for The Opportunity Alliance, a nonprofit social service agency. In that role, she learned of the unique struggles facing citizens in rural Maine. Many owned homes that had fallen into disrepair and become uninhabitable. They either lacked the money for repairs or access to reputable contractors. Her solution: tiny houses. Anderson recalled her days as a work-study student in the theater department at HCC. Working under theater technician **Steve Bailey '77**, she learned how to design and build stage sets that were easily assembled. Using those skills, she started building kits for tiny, micro-shelter cabins. Each kit can be assembled by two people using basic tools in one to three weeks. Prices range from \$9,500 to \$25,600 and can be shipped anywhere in New England. She drew even more from her experience at HCC when she launched her business, Anderson North, LLC. "My electronic media classes with Justin West and Jay Ducharme (both retired) really helped with promotion, marketing, and setting up videos and content," she said. "They were incredibly encouraging." Anderson's business plans include adding solar panels, water purification systems, and bathroom kits. "When I leave this earth," she said, "I want to have done something that made a difference."

« Ashley Anderson '14

# Trusted Operator

As a new student recently relocated from California, **Barney Garcia '24** didn't waste any time getting involved at HCC. During his first year, he joined Student Senate, restarted the Emerging Business Leaders Club, and took a job in the Business Office. In his second year, 2023-2024, he served as student trustee. "I felt like folks here already knew me, as if it was a familiar place I'd been before," Garcia said back in 2023. Still not one to lurk, Garcia, 23, was recently elected student trustee at Westfield State University, where he is completing a bachelor's degree in political science and public administration. He is also co-founder and president of the Queer Straight Alliance at Westfield and the commuter representative on the Student Government Association. Outside of that, he maintains a strong connection to HCC, where he works part time in the facilities office and helps manage the department budget. But he's hoping to do more there, having recently completed the certification process for a second-class fireman's license. "That's what you legally need to operate a high-pressure boiler," he said. HCC has three of them, and Garcia finds himself on a possible career path he did not expect. "The operators who work here say this is the perfect kind of plant to really learn," he said. "I'm really excited."



✧ Barney Garcia '24 stands next to boiler 3 in the HCC Facilities building.



✧ Luis Rodriguez '19 is the creator of Luturas, a Latin-Caribbean influenced tabletop card and dice game.

# Game Time

The coquí is a common tree frog in Puerto Rico. Coquí is also a main character in the world of Luturas, a tabletop card and dice game created by **Luis Rodriguez '19** that incorporates Latin-Caribbean culture and storytelling. "Luturas" itself combines the Spanish words for light (*luz*) and creatures (*criaturas*) – thus, "creatures of the light." "The Taíno were the indigenous people from Puerto Rico, and they were very famous for their symbols, and one of them was the coquí," said Rodriguez, a Puerto Rican native who now lives in Springfield. "All those cards imprinted in my coquí design – sun, a shield, a sword – are a reference to Taíno symbols." A few years ago, during his spare time, Rodriguez, a supervisor at the nonprofit Center for Human Development, founded a graphic design company called Hyperagua Studios and enrolled at HCC to learn more about visual arts. He cites influences from graphic design instructor Kenneth "Vance" Chatel and art historian Victor Katz. "Professor Katz taught us how to do professional critiques about history," said Rodriguez. "With that in mind, my characters can reflect accurate history, and I can do an appropriate reflection in my character designs and references to different cultures." While Rodriguez hopes Luturas will one day be available in retail stores, games can be printed on demand and purchased through [luturas.net](http://luturas.net).



⤵ Thrive coordinator Ben Ostiguy, left, food pantry coordinator Elizabeth Eastman, and Sheila Dion '93, center, with Dion's son John and her fiancé Dean, during an August 2025 visit to HCC.

## Rising Together

It seems fitting that **Sheila Dion '93** would be interested in HCC's Thrive Center and Food Pantry. Dion is the founder and volunteer director of Erin's Angels, a nonprofit agency in central New York that delivers free meals to hungry children. "Food is essential to growth, learning, and a bright future," Dion said in an October 2024 HCC Spotlight interview. "It is more than sustenance. It is the foundation of health, happiness, and dreams. But, for too many kids, it is a daily struggle. I believe that every child deserves the opportunity to grow, learn, and thrive without the burden of hunger." Late last summer, Dion, who grew up in Springfield, stopped by the Thrive Center to talk to Thrive coordinator Ben Ostiguy and food pantry coordinator Elizabeth Eastman. It was Dion's first time back on campus since she graduated. She left impressed. "Returning to HCC and seeing the Thrive Center filled me with so much pride and gratitude," Dion said.

"To know that my alma mater cares for students not only with education but also with food, school supplies and hygiene items shows the true heart of western Mass. It really proves that when we lift each other up, we rise together."

## 'A REALLY SPECIAL PLACE'

**Ted Hebert '71** attended HCC when it was still downtown, after the 1968 fire that destroyed the main college building but before the new campus opened on Homestead Avenue. "I went to the old school when it was just three buildings," he said. Hebert has spent a lot of time on the "new" campus in the past 11 years, having been first appointed to the Board of Trustees by Gov. Deval Patrick in 2014 and reappointed in 2020 by Gov. Charlie Baker. Although he completed his final term last summer, he stopped by the board's November meeting to say a formal farewell. "I have so many good memories here," he said. "Thank you for this journey that I've been on." Aside from his work on the HCC board, Hebert, founder and owner of Teddy Bear Pools & Spas in Chicopee, has been a longtime financial supporter of the HCC Foundation. The scholarship he and his wife set up, the Ted and Barbara Hebert Teddy Bear Pools Scholarship for Working Students, supports 10 HCC students every year. "He's been a great ambassador for HCC," said President George Timmons. And he will continue to be, having accepted an invitation to serve on the HCC Foundation's Board of Directors. "HCC has meant a lot to me," he said. "This is just a beautiful campus, but I think it's not the structures that makes it great; it's the people. It's just a really special place." 🍀

» HCC Foundation board member Ted Hebert '71, left, and President George Timmons.



# Alumni Notes



## Going for GOLD

**Lindsay Hernandez '22**, left, and **Cassandra DaSilva '15** have some photo fun during the college's first "Fall Back Together: Graduates of the Last Decade" alumni event Oct. 20 at the HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute. Attendees enjoyed complimentary gourmet appetizers and desserts prepared by students and faculty in HCC's culinary arts program, built their own HCC

swag bags, reconnected with professors, won raffle prizes, and also got free professional headshots. Both Hernandez and DaSilva now work at HCC, Hernandez as classroom coordinator for the Itsy Bitsy Child Watch Center and DaSilva as the talent acquisition coordinator in the Department of People and Talent. The next GOLD event is tentatively scheduled for October 2026.

## 1962

**Neil Curran** lives in Midlothian, Texas, and is the founder and chief executive officer of Biblical Communications International. He recently published a new book, *Teachings of Jesus: Major Bible Themes*, which is available on Amazon — and in the HCC Library, thanks to his donation.

## 1989

**Jeffrey Gosselin** (liberal arts) was elected to the Westfield School Committee on Nov. 4. A former teacher in both Springfield and Northampton schools, Gosselin has also served as a member of the adjunct faculty at Westfield State University. Now retired, Gosselin is living in Westfield.



Jeffrey Gosselin

## 1991

**Susan Manewich** (early childhood education) is the founder of IET Evolve Consulting, a trainer, organizational counselor, published author, researcher, and speaker with expertise in emotional intelligence, consciousness, emerging moral technologies and geomagnetic changes affecting the planet and humanity. She has worked with thousands of people globally and with multiple Ivy League institutions, including Harvard Business School, Yale Medical School, University of Singapore,

London Business School, Cambridge University, and University of Chicago Business School, as well as organizations involved in the aerospace industry and inner-city youth education. A certified hypnotherapist and medical Qigong practitioner, she holds a master's degree in organizational development and behavior and is pursuing her Ph.D. in consciousness and cosmology with a focus on geomagnetic changes and human evolution.

## 1994

**Gina Barry** (arts and science) was recognized in Best Lawyers in America and named the 2026 Lawyer of the Year



Gina Barry

in Elder Law for Springfield. Barry is partner and chair of the Estate Planning and Elder Law department at Bacon Wilson, P.C. in Springfield. Barry was the featured speaker at HCC's "Inspired Giving: Pro Tips for the Savvy Philanthropist"

event in February at the HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute.

## 1997

**Trudy Monson** (business administration) celebrated her 25th anniversary working at Cracker Barrel in Holyoke. Although Monson retired from Verizon in 2002, she has continued to work part time at Cracker Barrel to keep herself busy and connected to the community, boasting about HCC to anyone who will listen. Monson is the president of the HCC Alumni Council.



Trudy Monson

Monson is the president of the HCC Alumni Council.

## 2001

**Sarah Johnson Court** (visual art) graduated with honors from the University of Massachusetts Amherst with a bachelor's degree in art history and completed a master's degree in art history from Richmond American University in London. She lived and worked in London for seven years as a Lloyd's of London art insurance broker before returning to the United States to work in high net worth and art insurance broking. Court served as director of development for Design Miami and taught art history at Barry University. She returned to art and high net worth insurance broking in 2024 and travels frequently to speak on art, risk management, collection preparation, and maintenance.

## 2003

**Sarah Monson** (arts and sciences) is senior director of philanthropy and



Sarah Monson

external relations at Aurora Women & Girls Foundation, Inc. in West Hartford, Conn. Monson previously worked as the senior director of philanthropy at the Women's Fund of Western Massachusetts in Springfield. She has a bachelor's degree in health care administration from the University of Phoenix and a professional fundraising certificate from Boston University. She was the alumni guest on Episode 6 of HCC's The Green Thread podcast. See page 20.

## 2004

**Delia Hickey** (visual art) earned a bachelor's degree in fine arts from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2012. She took classes at The Palette and Chisel Academy of Fine Arts, where she was a recipient



Delia Hickey

of the 2023 Palette & Chisel Scholarship. Hickey also published illustrations in the book *Threadbare* in 2016 and was the 2014 Eagle Hill artist in residence at Eagle Hill School in Hardwick.

**Amneris Narvaez** (Deaf studies) is regional director for Central and Western MA Programs for Generation Teach, a nationwide AmeriCorps-funded program, where she has worked since 2019. After



Amneris Narvaez

HCC, she went to Westfield State University for her bachelor's degree in special education and Lesley University for her master's in math education. During the summer, she leads a teaching internship program

in Holyoke for high school and college students. She attended HCC's community networking and internship fair in October, where she was recruiting students for the program.

**Rashad Uqday** (arts and science) completed a bachelor's degree in communications from UMass Amherst. He now works as a chef at Smith College during the school year and at Belvoir Terrace in Lenox. during the summer. He married **Nelly Carmona '05** in 2002 and the couple live in Northampton, with their daughter.

## 2005

**Nelly Carmona** (criminal justice) was a finalist for the 2021 Remarkable Women initiative, honoring local women who make a significant impact in western Massachusetts through community service, leadership, and advocacy. In 2017, she completed a master's degree in social work from Smith College and was named the National Association of Social Workers Student of the Year. Carmona currently works as a social worker for Northampton Public Schools and is married to HCC alum **Rashad Uqday '04**.



Westfield police officers John Blascak '93, left, and Chris Coach '97 at HCC's fall community networking and internship fair

### 'I would have stayed here'

In October, HCC's Integrated Learning Programs hosted a community networking and internship fair. Behind one of the tables sat police officers **John Blascak '93** and **Chris Coach '97** from the Westfield Police Department's Community Service Unit. Blascak and Coach both graduated from HCC with their associate degrees in criminal justice. "I think I speak for most people who attended HCC who studied criminal justice," said Blascak. "They like this program the best out of any they've attended because most of our teachers were professionals from the real world and brought real world experience." "One hundred percent," said Coach. "I went on to a four-year college, and I felt I learned way more from the professors at HCC." That's not to disparage Westfield State University, where both collected their bachelor's degrees. Blascak also holds a master's degree in criminal justice and police science from California Coast University. "It seemed like, one, the students really wanted to be here," said Blascak, "and two, the professors wanted to be here. If it had been four years, I would have stayed here."

### 2006

**Matt McMahon** (psychology) is the senior technical advisor for the Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health. He was awarded the 2025 Partnership Medallion from the Healthcare Sector Coordinating Council



Matt McMahon

and Cybersecurity Working Group in honor of his commitment to HSCC's imperative "Cyber Safety is Patient Safety." The Healthcare Sector Coordinating Council works to protect the security and resilience of the health sector.

### 2010

**Brian Nadeau** (liberal arts and science) completed a bachelor's degree in biology

and communications at Westfield State University, a DMD (doctor of medicine in dentistry) at Boston University Henry Goldman School of Dental Medicine, and a master's degree in oral health at Uniformed Services University at Walter Reed National Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland. He lives in Yucca Valley, California, and is currently serving as a lieutenant commander in the U.S. Navy.

### 2015

**Cassandra DaSilva** (liberal arts and science) has been the talent and acquisition coordinator for HCC's Department of People and Talent (formerly Human Resources) since March 2025. After graduating from HCC, she received her bachelor's degree psychology from Bay Path University.

**Jason Haskins** (criminal justice) was named police chief of the Montague Police



Jason Haskins

Department in January. A Montague native, Haskins has 25 years of law enforcement experience working for the Greenfield Police Department for 18 years and serving as police chief in Colrain from

2009 to 2016. After HCC, he went on for a bachelor's degree in criminal justice from UMass Amherst. He is now working on his doctorate through Keiser University.

**Tracy Thompson Viola** (accounting) has established the Thompson Real Estate Group in Springfield. She is also a mobile notary public and an ordained minister.

### 2017

**Noah Paradis-Burnett** (engineering studies) received a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering in 2020 and a master's degree in mechanical engineering in 2022 from UMass Amherst. He has worked as a quality engineer in the aerospace industry for three years and is

now the ISO quality assurance manager at Instrument Technology, Inc. Paradis-



Noah Paradis-Burnett

Burnett came to HCC through the Gateway to College program. At HCC, he was part of the STEM Scholars program and graduated with high honors.

**Brianna Owen** (liberal arts and science) received the 2025 “Her Legacy: Women of Western Massachusetts Award” from the Springfield Creative City Collective during the Springfield Legacy Celebration, an event that honored the contributions of 80 women leaders in the region.

## 2019

**Adam Chapman** (liberal arts and science)



Adam Chapman

started his second year of teaching at Springfield International Charter School. After graduating from HCC, he completed a bachelor’s degree in history from UMass Amherst. He lives in Chicopee.

**Jeniliz Rodriguez Morales** (business administration) was promoted to human resources senior generalist at Holyoke Chicopee Springfield Head Start. She had previously served as a human resources assistant.

## 2020

Aspiring actress **Hannah Labreche** (theater arts) has played lead roles in several shows, including the witch in *Into the Woods*, Ms. Scarlet in *Clue*, and Mrs. Greene in *The Prom*, all at Exit 7 Players in

Ludlow. She lives in Holyoke and works in retail while also working on a short film in



Hannah Labreche

Los Angeles. She has traveled to Germany, New Zealand, and Los Angeles multiple times and has had the honor of working with actors David Arquette, Tyler Hoechlin, and Sean Maguire. Among her roles on the HCC stage,

Labreche played Dr. Catherine Stockman, the lead in a gender-reversed production of Henry Ibsen’s classic play, *Enemy of the People* in the spring of 2018.

**Samantha Robinson** (liberal arts and science) is enrolled in the digital photography program at Springfield Technical Community College. She is currently a work-study student in the athletics department at STCC and lives in East Longmeadow.

**Brendan Rooney** (creative writing) teaches 12th grade English at Chicopee Comprehensive High School



Brendan Rooney

and also works as a freelance reporter for multiple publications, including MassLive, and Turley Publications, and has published more than 2,000 articles.

**Amy Stefanik** (criminal justice) relocated to Orlando, Florida, where she works on



Amy Stefanik

Expedition Everest at Walt Disney World Resorts Animal Kingdom. She is also participating in the Disney College program and will soon be working as a park greeter.

## Family Ties

**Kya Ransom '24** (liberal arts and science) is completing her bachelor’s degree in psychology at the UMass Amherst and recently married her partner, Max, in Salem. She recalls feeling deeply supported by the HCC community when she was a single parent who relied



on the Itsy Bitsy Child Watch to care for her son, Renwick, while she was in class. “Many of you may remember Renwick from my time at HCC,” she writes. “He was the baby in the stroller at advising meetings, the little one exploring the library during study sessions and campus events, the source of giggles down the hall as we went to child watch. Today, he’s an energetic preschooler, exploring and learning, and Max plans to adopt him as we continue building our family together.” Along with other alumni featured this section, Ransom attended HCC’s Spring 2026 Alumni Happy Hour at Fame in downtown Holyoke.

Kya Ransom '24, left, with her son Renwick and Max, her spouse

## 2021

**Alexandra Clark** (entrepreneurship-business administration) operates her own hot dog cart business, The Good Dawg, out of Westfield, Massachusetts. She recently got engaged.

**Karina Lineras Ly** (business administration) works as a commercial underwriter at United Services Automobile Administration, where she has earned several professional designations. In 2025, she graduated with a bachelor's degree in information technology management from Western Governors University, where she was honored with the Capstone Excellence Award. She is the first in her family to graduate with both an associate degree and a bachelor's degree. She got married in 2023.

## 2022

**Jason Perez** (criminal justice) earned a bachelor's degree in legal studies from Commonwealth Honors College at UMass Amherst, graduating with "Greatest Distinction" and a GPA of 3.97. He plans to attend law school.

Jason Perez

He was the alumni guest for Episode 3 of HCC's Green Thread podcast. See page 20.

**Edwin Torres** (criminal justice) became a Springfield police officer in November 2008 and has since been promoted to sergeant. During his career, he has been honored with two departmental commendations for outstanding performance of duty and received a citation in June 2023 for his professionalism during a funeral. Since officers began carrying Narcan, Torres has saved two individuals suffering from opioid overdoses. He is working toward his bachelor's degree in criminal justice at American International College.

## 2023

**Miguel Cruz** (psychology) is completing a bachelor's degree in early childhood education at UMass Amherst. He also served as choreographer for the musical *Alice by Heart*, which was performed at Amherst Regional High School in March.

**Lance Fydenkevez** (veterinary technician) earned a bachelor's degree in veterinary technology from UMass Amherst after graduating from HCC. They joined the Minuteman Marching Band and marched in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in 2024. Fydenkevez is now beginning a career at the Cummings School of Veterinary



Lance Fydenkevez

Medicine at Tufts University in emergency and critical care.

**Michael Mitchell** (liberal arts and science) earned a bachelor's degree in business administration with a concentration in leadership from Southern New Hampshire University and is completing a master's degree in business administration. He works for the YWCA of Western Massachusetts as a direct service advocate. He credits



Michael Mitchell

HCC and his mentors from the ALANA Men In Motion program for helping him become an educated Black man and leader.

## 2024

**Alannah Brunt** (Latinx studies) is studying women, gender, sexuality studies, and African American studies at UMass Amherst, and expects to graduate in May 2026. At




Alannah Brunt

HCC, Brunt was a SAMP ambassador, a DJ on the college radio station, WCCH, a member of El Centro, and one of the student speakers at HCC's first Fall Graduate Reception in December 2023.



Chestina Thrower

**Chestina Thrower** (music) was selected as a member of the 2025 Pay It Forward residency at CitySpace Easthampton, which provides performance artists with venue access, rehearsal space, financial support, and one-on-one coaching. As a resident musician, Thrower headlined a show at CitySpace in August 2025. Thrower is studying jazz and African American studies at UMass Amherst and performed alongside western Massachusetts musical legend Charles Neville at the Springfield Jazz and Roots Festival, as well as at the Jazz in July All-Stars Concert at UMass. As an HCC student, Thrower was a featured singer at the Inauguration Ceremony for President George Timmons and at HCC's 77<sup>th</sup> Commencement on June 1, 2024.

A junior majoring in critical race and political economy, **Noah Neiweem** (liberal arts and science) represented Mount Holyoke College at Wellesley College's First-Generation Summit, a student-centered conference that brings together first-generation college students to build community, share experiences, and develop strategies for equity and inclusion in higher education. 

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## 'He loved this'

**Louis M. Barry '73**, of Granby, Massachusetts, an adjunct professor of criminal justice at HCC for more than 30 years, died Dec. 30, 2025, at the age of 72.

In a long and distinguished career in law enforcement and education, Barry, a retired chief of police in Granby, served HCC as interim director of public safety on two occasions and was founder of the HCC Criminal Justice Academy Summer Youth Program.

In 2017, he received the college's Distinguished Service Award at Commencement, an honor not typically bestowed on staff or faculty members.

"This work at HCC is payback for getting my career going," Barry said in a June 2017 story about that award. He noted that he would not have transitioned well from high school directly to a four-year college. "If HCC didn't get me started," he said, "I have no idea what I would have wound up doing."

A native of Norwood, Massachusetts, Barry was a graduate of Agawam High School, HCC, and Castleton State College in Vermont. He went on to earn a master's degree in criminal justice from Anna Maria College, but it was at HCC, as a criminal justice major, that his interest in law enforcement began.

In his early career, he worked for the Orleans Police Department on Cape Cod, where, for 11 years, he served as

patrolman, detective, and then sergeant. In 1988, he was named chief of police for the town of Granby, serving until his 2010 retirement.

About the same time he started as Granby chief, he returned to HCC as an adjunct professor of criminal justice.

Alejandro "Alex" Sanchez '90 was in one of Barry's first classes. A few years later,

Teaching was just as important to Barry as police work, Sanchez said.


"He taught here," said Sanchez. "He taught at the academy. He taught night classes at Cambridge College. He also taught at Western New England and at the University of New Hampshire. He was always teaching. Always in the classroom. He loved this."

In addition, Barry was the founder and coordinator of HCC's Criminal Justice Academy Summer Youth Program, and served as HCC interim police chief in 2015-2016 and 2018-2019.

He also went on to build a reputation as a private investigator, founding Harris Mountain Investigations, LLC, and serving as a volunteer investigator for the nonprofit Private Investigations for the Missing.

His commitment to the community extended beyond law enforcement. He served two

three-year terms on the Granby Board of Selectmen and also created a series of sports-focused children's camps that fostered community engagement and youth development.

Barry was a deep-sea fisherman, enjoying the waters off Cape Cod. He is survived by his wife, Dianne (Griffen) Barry, sons Nicholas Barry (Jennifer) and Matthew Barry (Elizabeth), grandchildren, and numerous other family members. 



Lou Barry '73 talks to a student during the Criminal Justice Academy Summer Youth Program at HCC in 2014.

as a police officer in Springfield, he had Barry again as an instructor at the Massachusetts State Police Academy. Sanchez himself joined HCC as a member of the criminal justice faculty in 2006. He and Barry were campus colleagues for nearly 20 years.

"Lou was an amazing guy. A very smart guy," Sanchez said. "He knew a lot of people, and if you went to him for help or for guidance, or for a name, he had one for you. He helped a lot of people."

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

Lucille J. Gallagher '53

Barbara Luce '63

Donald M. Laduzenski '64

Francine A. Belden '68

Christine O'Connell '71

Francis R. Lafond '73

Louis M. Barry '73, *retired instructor*

Bernard A. Marois '76

Shirley M. Hardcastle '76

David A. Volpe '78

James A. Lewis '78

Alberta M. Humason '79

Stuart J. Spafford '80

Daniel A. Sudsbury '80

Suzanne F. Soliwoda '82

Frances Jones '83

Charlotte D. Conchieri '83

Dorothy M. Funaro '91

Kevin M. McMahon '00

Richard F. Leger

Lawrence A. Leavitt, *retired professor*

# CAMPUS KUDOS



⤵ Lindsey Pare '18, '20, left, and Jessica Heredia '26

**B**usiness administration major **Jessica Heredia '26**, president of the HCC Student Government Association (formerly the Student Senate), received the 2025 Dean Sullivan Award from the Community College Student Leadership Association. The CCSLA is a consortium of student life leaders from the 15 community colleges in Massachusetts and other community colleges in New Hampshire and Rhode Island. The award is given annually to one student leader who exemplifies enthusiasm and dedication and demonstrates achievement. The award was presented to Heredia at the CCSLA's annual fall conference in Gardner, Massachusetts, and delivered by HCC Student Activities Coordinator **Lindsey Pare '18**, who won the Dean Sullivan Award herself in 2017.



⤵ AJ Jones

**E**nvironmental science and natural resources major **AJ Jones '26** was awarded a Newman Civic Fellowship by Campus Compact, a national coalition of colleges and universities working to advance the public purposes of higher education. The Newman Civic Fellowship recognizes students who stand out for their leadership potential and commitment to creating positive change in their communities. Jones, who uses a wheelchair, has been working with college science departments to make field study more accessible to people with disabilities.

**C**hef **Tracy Carter**, chair of the HCC Culinary Arts program, received the 2025 Community Outreach Award from the Auguste Escoffier School of Culinary Arts and the Center for the Advancement of Foodservice Education (CAFÉ). The national award recognizes a culinary/hospitality program or individual making a positive impact in their communities. Last year, Carter facilitated a partnership with the Western New England University College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences to develop an adaptive cooking series designed for people with disabilities and their caregivers.



⤵ Tracy Carter

**P**resident **George Timmons** and **Police Chief Jacqueline Robles** were both honored by the June Archer Foundation at separate gala events held at the Bushnell Theater in Hartford, Connecticut. President Timmons was named one of the "100 Men of Color" and Chief Robles one of the "100 Women of Color" for 2025. The awards recognize the contributions of men and women of color in education, business, government, entertainment, healthcare, and community service, and the impact they have made on the lives of people in Connecticut and western Massachusetts. At the men's event, President Timmons was chosen to speak on behalf of all 100 honorees as the 2025 class "valedictorian."

» President George Timmons, top, and Police Chief Jacqueline Robles, bottom



**W**CCH radio station manager **Patrick LaBelle** was named a news champion for 2026 by the Center for Community News at the University of Vermont. The award, which comes with a \$1,000 stipend, supports efforts by college leaders to build community news programs. LaBelle, who comes from a professional background in community news, is developing a program that would get students out in their local communities reporting news stories with the goal of getting those published or broadcast by area media. 📻



⤵ Patrick LaBelle

# SEND NEWS

Name Now in Use

Class Year

Name While Attending HCC

Spouse/Partner Name

Class Year

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Your News



Send news,  
get a free  
sleeve of Tech  
Tattoos!



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

Send news and photos to [alumni@hcc.edu](mailto:alumni@hcc.edu) or to The Connection, c/o Alumni Relations, 303 Homestead Ave., Holyoke MA 01040.

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## **“Constellations” Alumni Art Show**

Aug. 3-21

Reception Aug. 6, 5-7 p.m.

*Featuring Artwork from the HCC Permanent Collection*

## **Taber Art Gallery**

HOLYOKE COMMUNITY COLLEGE