

THE CONNECTION

FALL 2025

MORE THAN MONEY

50 WAYS TO GIVE, GIVE BACK AND CONNECT TO HCC

Professional development, fun personal enrichment courses, and youth programming.

Grow your career and
enrich your life with
courses at Holyoke
Community College.
Register today.



hcc.edu/bcs



**HOLYOKE
COMMUNITY
COLLEGE**





President George Timmons

Dear Alumni, Donors, and Friends,

I am energized by what I witness every day at HCC – the profound impact education has to transform lives and open doors to opportunity. Every success story, every moment when a student realizes their potential reminds me why we do this work. It is this daily inspiration that drives my excitement about the journey ahead of us.

This academic year marks a pivotal moment in our history as we embark on developing our third Strategic Plan – SP 3.0 – a process that will chart our path into the future and ensure we continue serving our students and community with excellence.

HCC's strategic planning journey began in 2017 with remarkable community engagement. We then thoughtfully refreshed our plan in 2021, resulting in our 2023-26 Strategic Plan, and now we stand ready to launch the next chapter. This isn't just another planning exercise that will gather dust on a shelf. SP 3.0 will be a living, active document that guides every decision we make and shapes how we serve students and strengthen our community partnerships.

The development of SP 3.0 will unfold throughout the 2025-2026 academic year, and I am thrilled to engage our entire community in this collaborative effort. Because that's what this must be – collaborative. The best strategic plans emerge when diverse voices come together, sharing perspectives, insights, and dreams for what HCC can become.

Our planning process will be anchored by five strategic frameworks that represent our collective priorities and commitments: "Our Values In Action" – making HCC an exceptional workplace through our dedication to people, culture, and equity; "Academic Distinction" – elevating our reputation for integrative, responsive, and experiential learning; "Student Experience" – fostering transformational experiences rooted in community and belonging; "Collaboration and Partnership" – serving as a catalyst for community and business impact; and "Workforce and Post-Graduation Success" – preparing students with the skills and confidence to soar.

The stories in this issue of *The Connection* reflect our shared values. They highlight our commitment to collaboration and partnership, showcase the exceptional student experiences that define HCC, and demonstrate the exciting ways that you can engage – or reengage – with your friends at Holyoke Community College. This is precisely the work that strategic planning ensures we can continue and expand upon.

We cannot stand still. We must remain passionately committed to our students and their success, continuously innovating and adapting to meet their evolving needs. SP 3.0 will help us do exactly that, positioning HCC to thrive while staying true to our mission: Educate. Inspire. Connect.

I am excited to continue this journey together. Your voices, your insights, and your continued support will be essential as we shape the future of Holyoke Community College.

Sincerely,

George Timmons, Ph.D.
President

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

**Vice President of
Institutional Advancement**
Amanda Sbriscia, Ed.D.

**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 Writer
Doug Scanlon

Photography
Chris Yurko

Change of Address:

Please contact the Alumni Office
413.552.2576 or alumni@hcc.edu.

Alumni Council Officers

President
Trudy Monson '97

Vice President
Elizabeth Román '03

Alumni Trustee
Nayrobey Rosa-Soriano '10

Alumni Director
Matt McMahon '06

Alumni Council
Maureen Babineau '00
Karen Brown '04
Gloria Lomax '75
Kim Monson, '01
Lucy Perez '87
Tom Rachele '96
Ryan Rege '08
Paul Rogers '81, '13
James Sheehan '74

**HOLYOKE
COMMUNITY
COLLEGE**

REPORT

THE CONNECTION

FALL 2025



- 3 LETTERS
- 4 MY HCC STORY: Benjamin Keil '24
- 5 CAMPUS ROUNDUP
- 8 CALLING CAPTAIN JONES:
Brenda Jones '18 acts on a dream deferred
- 14 MORE THAN MONEY:
50 ways to give, give back and connect to HCC
- 20 SERVANT LEADER:
Trudy Monson '97 takes the helm as
Alumni Council president



- 24 HCC GIVING:
From Donor to Student
- 26 ALUMNI ... OUT & ABOUT
- 29 ALUMNI NOTES
- 32 IN MEMORIAM



Cover illustration by John Devanski

Hello HCC Alumni Community!

I'm Natalia Castagno, and I'm thrilled to join Holyoke Community College as your new assistant director for alumni relations. With more than eight years of experience in higher education and event management, I'm passionate about building the strong, lasting connections that make our community thrive. What excites me most about HCC is our incredible diversity — our 43,000 alumni include teachers, neighbors, authors, grandparents, and community leaders of all ages, backgrounds, and life experiences.

From first-generation graduates to those carrying multi-generational legacies, and from traditional students to adult learners, our alumni represent the full spectrum of educational journeys that make our community so vibrant.

Having worked extensively with organizations throughout western Massachusetts, I've developed deep roots in this region. I can't wait to create meaningful opportunities for alumni to connect with each other and stay connected to the college, fostering the kind of lifelong relationships that make HCC special.

When I'm not planning alumni events, you'll find me hiking local trails, painting, discovering new coffee shops, or exploring new cities. I'm excited to get to know each of you and hear your HCC stories. Please drop me a note anytime.

Let's build something amazing together.

Natalia Castagno
alumni@hcc.edu

Adding to the George Frost Legacy

In the Fall 2024 Connection, Chris Yurko wrote an article ("Junior Pride") that tells how President George Frost was involved in the lives of all his students. That part of the article brought tears to my eyes. In 1953, I had recently been discharged from the Army after serving in Korea and decided to enroll. Dr. Frost helped with the application and gave me my acceptance.

At first, I was not a very motivated student. First mid-semester marks came out and I think I had earned two F's, 2 D's and a C. By accident, I met Dr. Frost in the hallways of old Holyoke High. He invited me into his office. He started the conversation by asking me why I was attending classes and not putting in the necessary time studying, and why was I wasting his time and mine. He said this in a tone that made his meaning very clear.

Without his involvement, I am sure I would not have graduated and earned a degree from UMass Amherst. I would like my experience to be part of Dr. Frost's history.

Sincerely,

John P. Warren HJC '55, UMass '57
South Dennis, Mass.

Editor's Note: According to our records, with a birthdate of Sept. 22, 1929, Warren, now 96, is our oldest alum, followed by Michael Sears '49, of Fredericksburg, Virginia, who turns 96 on May 27, 2026.



Truly Inspired

Just letting you know, I read the Spring 2025 Connection magazine from cover to cover, and it was fabulous. So many great, inspiring stories.

I was especially taken by HCC alum Brandon Towle's journey to get Camp Words Unspoken up and running ("Freedom to Speak," about the founding of New England's first sleep-away camp for stuttering youth).

The story inspired me to make a donation to his camp, so I'm just letting you know that whoever continues to put the Connection magazine out is doing a great job, and I hope the effort continues.

Jon Roe '76
Los Angeles, Calif.

>> Jon Roe, a former actor, takes a bow after performing in the fall 2024 HCC Phillips Festival.





Benjamin Keil '24

Benjamin Keil graduated from HCC with an associate degree in chemistry. He is now a pre-med student at Commonwealth Honors College at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. A UMass teaching assistant and a member of the sailing team, Keil is working on his honors thesis exploring healthcare and equality in the United States. He gave a talk at HCC in April, from which these remarks were adapted.

My parents didn't particularly believe in college, or any kind of school system, really. My father had dropped out, started his own business and was successful with that. School just wasn't for him, and I grew up hearing that. My parents wanted me to be an independent thinker.

I was homeschooled. Pros and cons. I became an independent thinker, yes, but I grew up with a certain judgment about school. I didn't want to go to college.

Instead, I worked. Trader Joe's for five years. Two and a half years with a volunteer medical outreach program in Guatemala, and before that at the Institute for Holistic Health in New York.

I was kind of a wanderer, but I know I wouldn't have been interested in school if I hadn't wandered first.

I reached a point where I thought, what am I afraid of? I was living in Amherst and started classes at Berkshire Community College. I took classes online because I was afraid to go in person. I felt like online would be easier.

But online classes were not so fun for me, and one of my advisers recommended HCC. It was much closer and had a good reputation. That made sense to me. I didn't want to apply to UMass out of the gate, because I didn't have the confidence yet. HCC turned out to be a really good stepping-stone into that next level of education.

In the beginning, I didn't know what was going on. I didn't know how to navigate the system. I didn't understand anything. When I had questions, I would go to the Pathways Program. Pathways allowed me to move through with ease.

As a STEM Scholar, I wasn't able to fit Learn-

I got free meal passes. They showed me around campus. I made connections with professors.

HCC had really helped me build a solid foundation. I felt there was always someone there to help me. I gained the confidence that I'm a good student, and I did not have that confidence going in. When I first came to HCC, I hoped I could study medicine. When I left, I knew I could.

I'm 34 now. I'll be in medical school and residency until I'm like 44. I don't care. I'm excited because I love to learn. I gave myself the time to mature, and it took me a long time. Each to their own.



⌘ Benjamin Keil '24, right, tutors a classmate during his student days at HCC.

ing Communities or Honors classes into my schedule, but I still feel like I got those experiences through the STEM program. The philosophy, the psychology — we were going in these really broad directions and asking really deep questions, like, what does the future of STEM look like? What does the future of education look like? And, honestly, that overprepared me for the honors classes I'm now taking at UMass.

Pathways also connected me with the UMass Summer Bridge Program that really helped me integrate. That allowed me to get some writing and classes out of the way.

When I first started college, my father just kind of looked at me, like, what are you doing that for? I was like, Dad, I'm gonna do it. I love you, but I'm gonna become my own person.

Once my father started to see me flourish here, he changed his mind about college.

I learned a lot at HCC. There's a receptivity here that's much harder to find at other places. There's a passion. There's a depth. There's a heart here that is just really beautiful, and I believe there needs to be more of that in the world. I'm trying to carry that on.' 🍀

campus roundup



⤴ HCC student musician Daymen Touissant performs during a "Live From Studio B" concert.

Live From Studio B

Inspired by National Public Radio's Tiny Desk series of in-studio musical performances, WCCH, the HCC college radio station, launched its own version last spring "Live From Studio B". So far, four HCC musicians have been recorded, and their episodes can be viewed on the WCCH YouTube channel (@103.5_WCCH_FM). "I'm really into live music," said radio station manager Patrick LaBelle. "I'm a musician as well, and I wanted to give more opportunities to people around HCC, specifically in the radio station, because there's a lot of musicians here." The first three performers were all solo singer-songwriters and also student DJs: Daymen Touissant, Alyssa Jost, and Mikayla Nelson '25. The fourth was HCC music student Andres Lopez Pozo, who plays the cuatro. For those unfamiliar with WCCH geography, Studio A is the DJ broadcast booth. Studio B is the WCCH podcast room across the hallway on the first floor of the Donahue Building. Each "Live from Studio B" episode features musicians performing two songs, one cover and one original, but LaBelle says each recording session takes about two hours, including setting up the recording equipment and lighting. "It wasn't just me," he said. "We had a whole team." Beyond solo artists, LaBelle said he would like to add musical groups and full bands into the mix. "That's a big goal of mine," he said, "so hold me to that."

Not So Common Heroine

Law enforcement officials from across the state, along with members of the HCC community, gathered May 5 to celebrate the swearing-in of Jacqueline Robles as chief of police. The oath-of-office ceremony was the first ever for a chief at the college. Born in Puerto Rico and raised in Springfield, Robles is a graduate of Holyoke High School and has been a member of the HCC police department for 22 years. With her promotion from sergeant, she not only became the first Latina to serve as HCC police chief but the first Latina police chief in Massachusetts. "I stand here as a proud Puerto Rican Latina," Robles said in her remarks, "and I carry that pride responsibly with grace, honor, and purpose. The department and I are excited and ready to continue serving this exceptional college, its students, faculty, and staff, with integrity, heart, and an unwavering commitment." Robles, a graduate of Springfield Technical Community College, is the youngest of 12 children and comes from a family of police officers, following three brothers and a sister into law enforcement. She is the mother of three boys and one girl, and grandmother of two. A fan of Wonder Woman who sports a tattoo of the Amazonian superhero on her arm, Robles was named a Commonwealth Heroine for 2025 in June by the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women.



« Chief Jacqueline Robles in her HCC office



⌘ HCC hosted its first ASL Pickleball Tournament on April 19.

HCC hosted its first American Sign Language immersion pickleball tournament in April. About three dozen players and spectators turned out for the Saturday morning event, which was held in the Bartley Center and sponsored by the Deaf Studies Department, the ASL Club, and Student Engagement. Carol Ann Smalley, HCC learning specialist and ASL interpreter in the Office of Students with Disabilities and Deaf Services, said the free, friendly tournament attracted players with a wide range of skill levels, which is what organizers were hoping for. To begin, ASL

instructors Minh Vo and Mick Posner led a short introduction to pickleball rules and strategy, followed by the tournament, awards presentation and social time, including a raffle and food. Smalley said the tournament, conducted entirely in ASL, was meant for people who are fluent in the language but also for students and others who are learning. Two-person teams were assembled through a random draw. “The idea was to immerse yourself both in the language and the sport,” she said. “There weren’t any cash prizes. It was just for fun.”

Keeping Things Chill

Since relocating to larger offices close by the Campus Center in September 2024, the Thrive Center and Food Pantry has seen requests for services and food skyrocket. During the last academic year (2024-2025), use of the food pantry doubled to more than 460 requests. All told, Thrive distributed more than 9,000 pounds of food last year to 259 HCC students and their families. “The numbers have jumped a lot because of this new location,” said Thrive Center coordinator Ben Ostiguy. “Our partnerships have also allowed us to offer more,” he said. Those partners include the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts and Stop & Shop, as well as donors such as Hyundai Motor America. In addition, state Rep. Pat Duffy recently secured \$70,000 in state funds for Thrive that paid to install a bank of refrigerated lockers in the hallway outside the food pantry, where consumers can pick up perishable items like cheese, yogurt, and fresh fruit and vegetables. “Students will be able to access the lockers with a secure pin number or bar code,” said Ostiguy, “and they can pick up their food whenever the building is open.”

» Food pantry manager Elizabeth Eastman loads groceries into a refrigerated locker.



Garden Treasures

While “bioblitz” might sound like some kind of mass extinction event, it is actually a term that describes a quick, non-invasive survey of biodiversity in a specific area. On the last Friday of the spring semester, Professor Leah Ewing sent her Bio 101 students out to bioblitz Hidden Treasures, a community garden behind the Sullivan Middle School on Jarvis Avenue in Holyoke. “The garden was a cultural center used by all the people living in the housing complexes around here and also by the school for a gardening



program,” said Ewing. “But it went by the wayside during the pandemic, and we’re trying in small ways to bring it back to life.” For the blitz, students counted as many plants, insects and other living things as they could find in 20 minutes. Each team of students found 15 to 30 different species. Among their key discoveries: wild strawberries, raspberries, wild chives, mushrooms, worms, spiders, lettuce, and bitterdock, an invasive plant toxic to dogs and cats. Ewing took on the garden as a Community Based Learning project in partnership with Nuestras Raices, a Holyoke nonprofit. The results will be used to figure out what plants should be kept and propagated and which should be removed. “Then,” said Ewing, “Nuestras Raices will bring its own groups in, and the school will also come in and help get the garden going again.”

« Biology students Mia McGregor, left, and Ginger Futrell search for life in the Hidden Treasures garden.



business and community services. “It’s a true community partnership.” The HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute also received a community partnership award May 14 from the Western New England University College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences. Led by Chef Tracy Carter, chair of the culinary arts program, the CAI team worked with WNEU to organize a six-week week “Cooking with Confidence” class for WNEU that focused on students with disabilities. 

» HCC student Gabriel Linares works in the kitchen at the HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute.





CALLING
CAPTAIN
JONES

Brenda Jones '18 acts on a dream deferred

By MEGAN TADY

Brenda Jones '18 had no plans to coast through her 40s. She'd already run a home-based bakery, home-schooled four children, managed the household solo while her husband, Steve Jones '15, was deployed to Iraq with the Marine Corps, and took in her mother, who had lost her own home to foreclosure.

Slow down? She was just getting started. Jones began to reflect on dreams she'd set aside. What had she always wanted? To be a nurse — and to join the military. But at 42, she figured she was “too old and not smart enough.” That's what she told herself, anyway.

Then, one day she accompanied Steve to the veterans services office at Holyoke Community College, where he was exploring a psychology degree. A nursing school diploma on the wall caught her eye. “I've always wanted to be a nurse,” she said offhandedly. The adviser replied, “You should do it.”

That was all the encouragement she needed. Jones started night and weekend classes to earn her associate degree in nursing at HCC, then transferred to Westfield State to complete her bachelor's.

A few years later, with her nursing degree in hand and a job in the neonatal intensive care unit at Baystate Medical Center, she turned to her other dream: military service. She asked Steve if the idea was crazy. “I said, ‘Chase your dreams,’” he recalls. “You don't want to reach your 60s with regrets.”

The maximum age to enlist in the Air Force Reserves as a nurse is 48, so, at 47, Jones had to move quickly. The recruiter was skeptical: Could she lose 30 pounds? Could she pass the duck walk — a required entrance test involving a deep squat and forward waddle?

Yes, and yes. Once Jones sets her mind to something, there's no stopping her. She believes that both nursing and the Air Force were callings and draws inspiration from this quote from Florence Nightingale: “If I could

give you information of my life it would be to show how a woman of very ordinary ability has been led by God in strange and unaccustomed paths to do in His service what He has done in her.”

Dream job

Jones is the kind of person who takes in stray animals and shows up for friends in need. Always in motion, she hasn't watched a Netflix series in — well, she can't even remember. Most evenings, she's outside on her 44-acre West Chesterfield farm, plucking weeds or tending to her 65 chickens, 30 rabbits, six quail, three goats, two silver pheasants, and several guinea hens they keep around for tick control.

Nursing taps into two of her strongest instincts: caring for others and staying busy. “I've always been drawn to things that are broken and being able to fix them,” she says.

It wasn't an easy path. “Nursing school is so hard,” she says. “The tears are real. There were lots of them.” But Jones was invigorated by the level of support she received at HCC. “I had some amazing professors who really wanted to see me be successful. That program gave me a solid foundation to build on.”

In her training, she gravitated to neonatal intensive care. Every time Jones gets to work at Baystate, she scrubs in for a solid two minutes, and in those two minutes she mentally prepares for the newborns and families who will be under her care.

“I had some amazing professors who really wanted to see me be successful. That program gave me a solid foundation to build on.”

— Brenda Jones '18

Continued on next page

"I'm working with extremely sick infants, sometimes 24 or 25 weeks old, weighing only about a kilo," Jones explains. "They are so small and fragile. Sometimes the parents have been through four rounds of IVE, and this baby is their last chance to have a family. Sometimes this is the parents' sixth child, and they might have put the pregnancy in jeopardy with poor choices. I love them no matter what when they come in, and I give them all the best care and attention I can."

Despite the intensity, she sees the NICU as a place of hope, not sadness:

"We're helping these babies grow and thrive. I validate the parents and say, 'This isn't the birth story you expected, but we're here for you. We'll do everything we can.'"

Jones' colleague, neonatal nurse Shelli Gebo, describes her as a welcome addition to the Baystate team. "Brenda has true grit and dedication to her patients," Gebo says. "She is always striving to improve her critical skills. She has such compassion and empathy for our fragile population and is a wonderful support to their families."

"Brenda has true grit and dedication to her patients. She is always striving to improve her critical skills. She has such compassion and empathy for our fragile population and is a wonderful support to their families."

— Shelli Gebo

When days are especially challenging or emotional, Brenda uses her 59-minute drive home to decompress, turning off the radio to drive in silence. Still, she never views her job as drudgery.

"I'm in awe that I get to do this," she says. "I love coming to work every day. And I annoy my co-workers by constantly telling them how much I love it."

"Oh, yes," Gebo says, "Brenda loves her job."

Captain Jones

Deeply patriotic, Jones also loves the United States, and joining the Reserves allowed her to walk her talk. "I think our country is the best in the world," she says. "Serving in the military gives you more of a respect for the people who put their lives on the line to protect it. It teaches you to put other people first. When I'm in uniform, I'm not caring about

Captain Jones; I'm caring about the unit until it's mission accomplished."

That's right — Jones is Captain Jones now. She received a direct commission as a captain, thanks to her nursing credentials. She completed officer training in Montgomery, Alabama, and later served a three-month deployment in Okinawa, Japan, where she continued to provide neonatal care at the Camp Foster Naval Hospital.

"Military families overseas need NICU care, too," she says. "It was amazing to help families and care for babies in such a beautiful place. And it meant that I could give nurses a break who are stationed over there so they could come home and visit their own families."

On monthly drill weekends, Jones trains at the Westover Air Reserve Base in Chicopee. Among the younger recruits, she's affectionately known as "Mama Jones." Military service runs in the Jones family. Her daughter, Cheyenne, is a first lieutenant in the Army Reserves, and her son, Joseph, is a staff sergeant in the Marines who just finished a three-year tour as a drill instructor.

"They all have to salute me," Jones says with a wry smile. "It's validating, because it hasn't been easy."

Jones proudly recalls administering the oath at Cheyenne's commissioning ceremony. She also had the honor of serving as the promoting officer when Joseph advanced to staff sergeant in the Marines. "It was an *aw* moment — like one of those top 10 things that happen in life: getting married, having a baby," she says.

Jones speaks with concern about the ongoing mental health crisis in the military, particularly the high rate of suicide among both veterans and active-duty service members. Her husband Steve has been candid about the PTSD symptoms he experienced several years after returning from Iraq, and both he and Jones have lost fellow service members to suicide.

In response, the couple founded the Warrior's Art Room, a nonprofit art gallery and therapeutic space in Easthampton that offers art classes and a supportive community for veterans and their families. Including families was especially important to Jones.

"I know how hard it was to be a mother at home with three children while my husband was deployed to Iraq," she says. "To the people in uniform, we always say, 'Thank you for your service,' but it's the family members who are silently struggling at home. I wanted us to help take care of the families and the kids and partners."

Continued on page 13



⤴ Brenda Jones '18 and her husband Steve Jones '14 set up an exhibit at HCC about the Warrior's Art Room before a spring 2019 performance of "Ugly Lies the Bone," a play about a disfigured war veteran.

⤵ U.S. Navy veteran Patrick Hurley talks to Brenda Jones during a model building class he teaches at the Warrior's Art Room in Easthampton.





Since 2016, more than 1,500 individuals have participated in Warrior's Art Room programming — some taking classes, others stopping by to talk, and still others using the gallery as a springboard to exhibit their work elsewhere.

"It's not a bar; it's a safe, clean place to connect," Jones says. "Some people had never sold a painting because they didn't think they were good enough, and this legitimizes them. Many have been in dark, lonely places, and it's amazing to see them blossom."

No age limit

As Jones trained to place an IV in the arm of a two-pound preemie or passed the duck walk test or traveled internationally for the first time, she also learned something about herself. "I have a lot of resilience," she says. "I didn't think I could do these kinds of things, but I did. I pushed through a lot of challenges."

Her husband, on the other hand, was not surprised by her tenacity. "She's a go-getter, and she's so smart — and this just proves how smart she really is," Steve says.

"She's not afraid to take a challenge and run with it. And she will keep at it. If there's even a crack of daylight in a door, she's going to keep pushing for it."

At 51, with a full-time job, a military commission, grown children, grandchildren, and an admittedly "frenzied" schedule, Jones is more fulfilled than ever. And she wants to remind others that finding and serving your purpose doesn't have an age limit.

A few months ago, Jones was at a gas station still dressed in her nursing scrubs. A woman passed and made a wistful remark similar to the one Jones had made in HCC's advising office.

"She said, 'I've always wanted to be a nurse,'" Jones recalls. "And I said, 'Then do it! Just enroll in one class if that's all you can do. You can do more than you think you can do. Just trust yourself.'"

As for the future, Jones isn't slowing down. "This is finally my own journey," she says. "I'd like to serve in the military for as long as I can. And I want to be really good at the job I do now — be the best nurse I can be." 

« Jones works on a patient simulator during a training exercise at Westover Air Reserve Base in Cherokee.

≈ Jones, on her 44-acre West Chesterfield farm, which she and her husband, Steve, have named "Gallery Meadows," in keeping with the theme of their nonprofit Warriors Art Room.





MORE

THAN

MONEY

50 WAYS TO GIVE, GIVE BACK AND CONNECT TO HCC

WHILE MONETARY GIFTS

are a highly impactful way to address critical needs at the college, the reality is that your time, expertise, and connections can be just as valuable. HCC thrives on the strength of its alumni, whose participation enriches the experiences of HCC students. Whether you graduated last year or decades ago, there are many ways to make a meaningful impact and strengthen the institution that helped launch your success.

Here are 50 ways you can support your alma mater — without writing a check:

1 Keep reading this magazine.

When you're done, pass it on, or place it in the waiting room in your office.

2 Write a letter to the editor.

Tell us what Connection stories you liked best, what memories they evoke, and who inspired you. Suggest a story idea or profile subject — how about you?

3 Submit an Alumni Note (formerly Class Note).

Share your personal and professional milestones at hcc.edu/alumninotes, and please include a photo!



4 Follow us on social media.

We're on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X.



5 Volunteer to work with the Alumni Association.

Help plan, organize, and run alumni events and fundraisers.

6 Schedule a meeting

with President George Timmons. He loves to talk to our alumni.



7 Attend our annual fall Alumni Happy Hour

for free hors d'oeuvres and cocktails.

Save the date: Nov. 20, 2025, at Fame in Holyoke.

RSVP to hcc.edu/happyhour

8 Mentor a current HCC student or recent grad.

We'll make the introduction!

9 Include "Holyoke Community College"

under Education on your resume and LinkedIn profile.



10 Work for us.

HCC counts at least 147 alumni as full-time employees. See what's available under Job Opportunities on the HCC website.

11 Dig up old photos

of yourself and your friends from your days at HCC and share them with us. (We might publish them.)

Continued on next page



12 Take new photos

that illustrate what you're up to now and where you've been.
(Share those too.)

13 Sign up for the HCC Alumni E-Newsletter

to get the most up-to-date information about HCC news and events, delivered monthly to your email inbox:
hcc.edu/enews



14 Get fit.

Alumni can join the gym at the Bartley Center for Athletics and Recreation for just \$250 a year, or \$10 per visit, with unlimited access to the fitness center, wellness rooms, saunas, and basketball courts.



15 Visit campus.

Stroll the grounds. Walk your dog. Take a tour. See what's old. See what's new. Send us a selfie or post it to social media and tag us [@holyokecommunitycollege](https://www.instagram.com/holyokecommunitycollege)



16 Stay for lunch.

Eat in at the HCC Food Court or dine out at the HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute for a gourmet meal prepared by our culinary arts students during our spring luncheon series.



17 Play a round of disc golf.

HCC has an 18-hole championship-level course (designed by alum and retired professor Jay Ducharme '78, above). See the scorecard: hcc.edu/discgolf

18 Buy a book.

HCC's Education Department holds Scholastic Book Fairs every fall and spring.



19 Buy a bowl.

The Visual Art Department's annual Empty Bowls benefit in December supports the college's Thrive Center and Food Pantry. For \$10, you get a beautiful, one-of-a-kind, hand-crafted bowl — filled with homemade soup!

20 Enjoy the city of Holyoke's annual Fourth of July celebration

and fireworks display, hosted by HCC on O'Connell Field.

21 Help the Scholarship Resource Center

review student applications for HCC Foundation scholarships. (We'll treat you to lunch!)
Email: scholarships@hcc.edu



22 Take a hike.

The HCC Natural Refuge and Trail System follows old trolley lines behind the campus and connects to the New England Trail, which runs north to Vermont and south all the way to Long Island Sound.

23 Take a class.

Explore our catalog of noncredit personal enrichment and professional development programs, like cooking, painting, and estate planning. (Seniors – 60 or older – can take academic classes for just \$50 per semester.)

24 Talk to a class.

Reconnect with your favorite professor and offer to be a guest speaker.

25 Teach a class.

HCC's Business and Community Services division is always looking for engaging alumni to teach noncredit classes in their areas of expertise.

26 Host a job-shadowing day

at your workplace or create an internship for an HCC student or recent graduate.



27 Stick an HCC decal

to the back windshield of your car, or put one on your office door or the window of your business. Email alumni@hcc.edu to get one free!

28 Donate groceries

to the HCC Thrive Center and Food Pantry: hcc.edu/thrive



29 Adopt a beagle or bunny,

gently handled and lovingly cared for by students in our Veterinary and Animal Science program.



30 Book conference space.

The HCC Kittredge Center for Business and Workforce Development is the Pioneer Valley's premier facility for conferences and professional meetings: hcc.edu/space.



31 Play pickleball.

The Bartley Center has seven indoor courts available to members or to the general public at a rate of \$5 per session, paddles and balls included.

32 Recommend HCC

to a family member or friend.

Continued on next page



33 Take part in the annual fall 24-Hour Phillips Theater Festival.

Actors, writers, directors wanted — no experience necessary

34 Honor those who made an impact on your life

by naming HCC as a beneficiary in your estate plan:
hcc.giftlegacy.com



35 Vote for HCC.

Best of the Valley, Reader Raves, and Readers Choice Awards present opportunities for you to tell the world that HCC is the best college in western Massachusetts.

36 Participate in alumni panels, workshops, and group discussions

and share your expertise and experience with students.



37 See a show.

HCC's award-winning Theater Department puts on two full-scale productions every year, one in the fall and one in the spring.



38 Attend a concert.

The HCC Music Department presents a series of free concerts each semester featuring HCC music students and faculty, in addition to the annual HCC Jazz Festival in March.

39 Watch a game.

We've got soccer, baseball, basketball, volleyball, golf, track and field, cross country, and eSports. Follow the athletics schedule at HCCcougars.com.



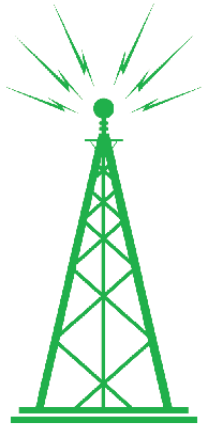
40 Join the president, other alumni and students

for Community College Night at Polar Park for our annual Worcester Red Sox outing.
Go WooSox!

41 Wear your HCC swag.

Need a new T-shirt or hoodie? Stop by the HCC Bookstore or order online at hcc.ecampus.com





42 Listen to the college radio station,

WCCH, on 103.5 FM.
Out of range? Stream it live through *Radioline*.

43 Promote HCC in your community and professional networks.

Encourage others to consider HCC for their education.

44 Visit the Taber Art Gallery

inside the HCC Library. Check the schedule of upcoming exhibits at hcc.edu/taber

45 Speak up.

If you're ever interviewed by a news reporter for a story, tell them you graduated from HCC and how much HCC has impacted your life and career.



46 Volunteer

to help us out during September's annual Welcome Back BBQ, May's Spring Fling celebration, Earth Day cleanups, and other special events, such as Cap and Gown Pickup Day, and, most importantly, Commencement!



47 Advocate for HCC

during our annual, one-day "Together HCC: Drive to Change Lives" fundraising campaign. We'll give you tools to help spread the word (#TogetherHCC) and help raise funds for the college. **Save the date: March 4, 2026.**



48 Write 'Thank You' cards

to our donors on Gratitude Day (the day after our annual giving day).

49 Join the Alumni Council.

See page 22 for details.



50 Stay connected.

Drop us an email or give us a call. Make sure we have your most current contact information, so we can keep in touch: hcc.edu/alumniupdate 

Ready to get started with one (or more) of the above?

Contact the Alumni Relations office at alumni@hcc.edu, call us at 413.552.2576 or send a note to *The Connection*, c/o Alumni Relations, 303 Homestead Ave., Holyoke, MA 01040.

Servant Leader

Trudy Monson '97 takes the helm as Alumni Council president

By DOUG SCANLON

Trudy Monson '97 stands alone on the black stage and under the bright spotlights of the Leslie Phillips Theater. The doors to the Fine and Performing Arts building are open, but finals are over, and the students are gone, making the hallways just as silent as the bare theater. Inside, the seats are empty, except for one in the back, occupied by communications professor Patricia Sandoval '84.

Monson stands up straight and looks down at the papers in her hands. She finishes reciting the words in a slow and steady tone and looks up at Professor Sandoval in the last row.

"You've got this, Trudy! You've got this," says Sandoval, who has taught public speaking to scores of HCC students.

In two days, Monson will deliver her first speech as president of the HCC Alumni Council to the graduating class of 2025. She's nervous about speaking in front of such a large crowd, so the opportunity to practice in the Leslie Phillips Theater and get feedback from Sandoval is building Monson's confidence.

While speeches might not be in her comfort zone, talking is something Monson relishes, especially about HCC. Few things bring her more joy than putting on her

green HCC T-shirt, walking around the city where she was born, and telling people about her alma mater.

"Being out in the community, doing outreach, and talking about HCC — it's what I love," she said.

Julie Phillips, executive director of development, oversees the Alumni Council and has watched Monson's dedication firsthand.

"Trudy embodies what it means to be a servant leader in every sense — she doesn't seek recognition for any of the work she does, but her passion for HCC and her commitment to our community are infectious," said Phillips. "When she talks about the college, you can see her eyes light up."

Finding Inspiration

Monson retired in 2002 from Verizon, where she worked as an engineering clerk, but has yet to slow down. Whether serving as fundraising chair at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Holyoke or attending events hosted by the Greater Holyoke Council for Human Understanding, Wistariahurst Museum, and the Women's Fund of Western Massachusetts, she's deeply embedded in her community. She draws inspiration from her late father, Robert Evans Jr. '50, who taught at HCC and served as its first affirmative action officer.

Evans grew up in Marion, Alabama, and was a sharecropper on the same farm where his grandfather was a slave. He enlisted as a Tuskegee Airman, but an injured knee that he later discovered was rheumatoid arthritis prevented him from completing his training, and he was honorably discharged. Of the remaining airmen from the flight to which he was assigned, none survived battle.

According to Monson, her father believed in the power of education to transform lives, so he enrolled at Hampton Institute — a historically Black university in Hampton, Virginia, now known as Hampton University — where he met Monson's mother, Agnes. The couple took a pause from school to move back to Holyoke, her hometown, and raise a family while Evans continued his education at Holyoke Junior College.

They found a home in south Holyoke, a community of mostly French and Polish neighbors, and Monson found that they fit right in.

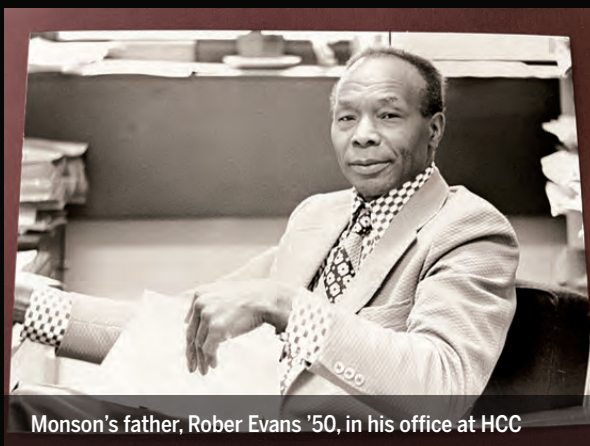
"I loved growing up in south Holyoke. My mother learned how to cook golumpki and French meat pie, and she taught her neighbors how to fry chicken," Monson said of the other mothers in their neighborhood.

Continued on page 22



“Trudy embodies what it means to be a servant leader in every sense – she doesn’t seek any recognition for any of the work she does, but her passion for HCC and her commitment to our community are infectious.”

— JULIE PHILLIPS



Monson's father, Rober Evans '50, in his office at HCC



Trudy Monson, right, with her daughters Kim '01 and Sarah '03, left

The HCC Alumni Council

The HCC Alumni Council serves as the governing body of the college Alumni Association, working to strengthen the bond between graduates and their alma mater. As the driving force behind alumni engagement, the Alumni Council focuses on four key areas:

Staying Connected: The Alumni Council organizes activities, events, programs, and publications that keep our diverse alumni community linked to HCC and to each other.

Supporting Current Students: Council members actively encourage prospective and current students to pursue their educational goals at HCC, sharing their success stories and expertise.

Providing Services: The Alumni Council coordinates professional, vocational, and cultural services specifically designed to benefit our alumni network.

Building Support: Through various initiatives, the Alumni Council works to generate both alumni engagement and financial support for HCC from alumni and the broader community.

Interested in getting involved? Contact the Alumni Council at alumni@hcc.edu to learn about upcoming opportunities to serve.



Monson speaks to graduates at Commencement 2025.



Monson takes part in the Commencement 2025 procession at the MassMutual Center.

Evans transferred to the University of Massachusetts and continued his studies there until his car died. After missing several classes, his professor reached out to Evans and offered to tutor him out of his Easthampton home during the evenings to catch up on the lectures. Every Tuesday evening after dinner, Monson would watch her father get bundled up, walk out of their house on Summer Street, travel up Cabot, and head for Easthampton Road on his way over Mount Tom. When the professor realized Evans was walking through the cold on dark and dangerous roads, he arranged to pick him up for the rest of the sessions.

Moving Up

Eventually, Evans graduated from UMass and went on to earn a master's degree from Springfield College before becoming the first Black teacher in Holyoke public schools. The family moved to the Smith's Ferry neighborhood of Holyoke and into a big white house next to the Holyoke Canoe Club.

Monson was the third of seven kids, and the only one who remained in Holyoke, living and working her entire life in the city, where she raised two daughters (Kim '01 and Sarah '03) with her husband Jessie.

When her daughters were in high school, they challenged Monson to enroll in college and graduate with an associate degree before they finished high school. She agreed — with reservations. As an adult learner, she worried about fitting in with her younger classmates at HCC.

"I thought, 'they're going to think I'm the old lady, and they're going to make fun of me,'" she said.

One day during her first semester, she drove to campus early and sat in her car, reviewing the course material for her next class. One of her younger classmates walked by, and struck up a conversation.

"He said, 'Come on inside.' So we went inside, and we just sat in the empty classroom," Monson recalled. "And then somebody else came in to join us. Within a couple of weeks, almost all of my classmates came early, and we had our own study hall. So, all my classmates, instead of laughing at me, they really helped me."

Monson graduated in time to meet the challenge. Kim and Sarah later followed, continuing the family's three-generation legacy at HCC. Today, Monson continues to push the college's influence in her daily life.

She has worked part time at Cracker Barrel in Holyoke for many years and still enjoys the convivial atmosphere and

"Trudy understands that HCC's strength comes from embracing everyone's story."

— JULIE PHILLIPS

the company of her co-workers. She also runs a home-based business called Gem's Creations, designing jewelry and teaching jewelry making. Monson is not only a consistent donor, making annual gifts to the college, she has also convinced several of her younger Cracker Barrel colleagues to donate as well, many of whom are not even alumni.

"It doesn't matter how much you give, just give something," she tells them.

In Service

Monson joined the Alumni Council in 2005, seeing an opportunity to serve HCC that matched her own interests in community outreach. Now, as Alumni Council

president, she wants to do more community programming and engage with local schools with the goal of introducing prospective students to the campus and encouraging them to think about applying.

She hopes to infuse the council with alumni who bring different perspectives, recalling the melding of cultures in her South Holyoke neighborhood. Additionally, she wants to be more involved with the students on campus. Monson pictures herself sitting in on student club meetings, hearing student stories, and making sure they know they have a family of supporters ready to embrace them when they graduate.

"Trudy has the ability to bring people together from all different backgrounds and make them feel like family," said Phillips. "She understands that HCC's strength comes from embracing everyone's story."

Experience and Wisdom

On May 31, during the college's 78th Commencement ceremony, Monson walked up to the podium in her black gown, her shoulders draped in the same African-American stole she wore to her own graduation ceremony in 1997. The Mass-Mutual Center was much larger than the Leslie Phillips Theater, and the seats were filled with hundreds of students, proud parents, spouses, children, and alumni. She read confidently, pausing to gather herself when speaking of her father and how his HCC education changed the trajectory of his life and her own.

"Your journey with this institution doesn't end today," she told the new alumni sitting before her. "Come back to campus to share your success stories. Consider becoming a mentor to current students. Join us at alumni events. Volunteer your time and expertise. Your experiences and wisdom can inspire the next generation of HCC students." **G**

Donor to Scholar

DONOR SPOTLIGHT LouAnn Daly

Yes to a Dream

Donor LouAnn Daly was one of the featured speakers at the HCC Foundation's May 15 Scholarship Reception. These are her remarks.

I am so honored to be here. Could I please see the hands again of every student recipient of any scholarship — up high? Look at this.

So, I have something to say to every one of you.

All of us are here because you said yes to a dream. Too many people give up on dreams. They buy into the notion that they won't have the support, that they can't do it; life is too much of a struggle; they can't see the way through. So, for whatever reason, they don't start.

Well, because you said yes to a dream, faculty at Holyoke Community College get to live their dream because they get to teach you. And the staff at Holyoke Community College gets to live their dream because they learned to do whatever it takes to support you in any way.

Everybody lives a dream when one person says yes, because one person doesn't go to college — the whole family goes to college, and all their friends go to college, because that's what you talk about, and that's what you bring home — other than laundry — and your kids get to watch what's possible — because you said yes.

And people like me get to give a little back. I've met the most extraordinary students today, because I was a first-generation college student. One of the two scholarships

I support is for my parents, the Edward and Ruth Daly Family Scholarship. They didn't get to go to college. They were both super intelligent, but they didn't have the funds, and they didn't have the opportunities.

The other scholarship is in memory of my godmother, Jean Armitage. She had one dream in life, and that was to go to college, although she couldn't go because the family was on welfare, and, in those days, when you turned 18 you were required to go to work to support the family.

Though they're not here physically, they get to be honored because you said yes to a dream.

Please remember something: when any one of us says yes to something we hold deeply in our hearts, we don't always know how it's going to happen, or how we're going to get there.

I didn't have the money to stay in school for four years, so I finished in three and worked two jobs the whole way. And then my undergraduate school said, here's some money, go to grad school. So I did, and at 39 years old,

I paid off my loans, and even that was a long time ago. Even my grammar school gave me money to go to school.

You never know the opportunities you give people to feel like they can help you make a difference. Never, ever question your ability to live into everything you're here to do, because all of us want to find a way to raise up a community. You've chosen a brilliant school with caring, heartfelt people. And you've said yes. Please keep saying yes. We all benefit." 

"When any one of us says yes to something we hold deeply in our hearts, we don't always know how it's going to happen, or how we're going to get there."

— LOUANN DALY



SCHOLAR SPOTLIGHT

Diana Rodriguez

Relighting the Spark

Diana Rodriguez is pursuing an associate degree in Human Resource Management. Last spring she was awarded the LouEllen Dabbs Scholarship from the HCC Foundation. She gave these remarks during the foundation's May 15 Scholarship Reception.

‘Being here today is more than just a milestone. It’s a full-circle moment for me, because, for a long time, I didn’t think I’d ever get here. Growing up, I believed I could do anything. I wanted to be a doctor, a lawyer — a doctor-lawyer — but life doesn’t always go as planned.

Originally, I attended a prestigious private college, but even with financial aid, I had to work three jobs to afford to stay in school. To say I was overwhelmed would be an understatement. And worse, I didn’t feel like I belonged.

I struggled to find community, to find encouragement from school personnel, and the imposter syndrome was in full force. When I eventually dropped out, I felt like I had failed. I carried the hopes of my family that I would someday be someone great, but I had let them down. And for a really long time after that, I felt defeated and unfulfilled. When I decided to take the leap and go back to school years later as a mom in her 30s, I was nervous. Really nervous. I wasn’t sure I could do it. I was so scared that I was throwing away a secure job and an affordable apartment, just to fail again.

When I began my first semester classes, I started slow and stayed in the comfort of my own home. I just wanted to prove to myself that I could do it, and I did. I ended the semester with straight A’s.

This spring, I wanted to take things a step further. I decided to go on campus and

finally check out some of those clubs and activities that HCC sends me notices about every week. And as the weeks went by, even though I’m a fully remote student, I found a sense of belonging on campus.

I joined in-person study groups. I joined the Radio Club, and I started learning new skills from peers that I met at the radio

I’ve pushed myself, I’ve stayed involved, and I’ve already achieved more than I thought I could. Bit by bit, my confidence has been restored, and this scholarship you’ve given me — it’s not just financial. It’s time, time to study, time to be a mom to my two kids, time to take care of myself, and that time has been vital to my success.



Student speaker Diana Rodriguez and her children, Jaden and Karina Rosa, at the spring 2025 HCC Foundation Scholarship Reception

station. I visited my professors during office hours, and they welcomed me with warmth and encouragement. I joined TRIO Student Support Services and even was accepted into the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society.

Every staff member I’ve interacted with, from those at the Scholarship Resource Center, to the Thrive Center and the Campus Center, has made it clear they want me to succeed. And I’m not just succeeding, I’m thriving.

To all the donors in the room, you didn’t just write a check. You changed the trajectory of someone’s life. You relit the spark, and for someone who was so sure they had burned out, you gave me a second chance.

So, thank you. Thank you for investing in students like me. Thank you for believing that we’re worth it. Because of your generosity, I’ve gone from someone who doubted she could finish college to someone who knows that she can.” 

Heading West

As an HCC theater student, **Tom Roche '16** once played a dancing sandwich. That was in a dream sequence during the fall 2015 production of “American Hero.” It was also the last time Roche had appeared on an HCC stage – until April, when he took on one of the lead roles in Sam Shepard’s Hollywood allegory “True West.” “Being back was surreal,” Roche said. “It felt like coming home, but with a whole new perspective. There was a mix of nostalgia and growth. After seven years away from acting in the theater, stepping back onto the stage felt like reactivating a part of myself that had been dormant.” Directed by HCC theater professor Tim Cochran, the play explores themes such as sibling rivalry and paternal worship while also questioning myths about Hollywood and the American West. Roche played Austin, a screenwriter at odds with his older brother Lee, a petty thief. Roche’s theater credentials aren’t confined to acting. In 2017, soon after graduating from HCC, he took first

place in a seven-day film contest for a spy spoof called “A La Mode” that he wrote, directed and starred in. He has also maintained his connections to HCC, writing an original play for Cochran called “Fatal Fisticuffs” that was streamed live in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. “Getting to work with Tim again and this new generation of students was awesome,” Roche said. “So much has changed, but so much has stayed the same. There’s something beautiful about that. The passion, the work ethic, the camaraderie – it’s still there.”



✧ Tom Roche '16 of Holyoke, right, and Miguel Dailey of Agawam, left, played battling brothers in HCC's spring 2025 production of True West.



Jean Hobbie '05 worked as the community health educator for the Red Cross for 17 years before her position was eliminated, prompting her to pursue a nursing degree at HCC. She found the program perfect for adult learners making a mid-career change. “My experience at HCC was a very positive one,” she said. “It began opening doors for me.” One door led to a job as school nurse at Hatfield Elementary School, a position she has held since 2014. Last spring, “Nurse Jean,” as she is known to her charges, was named School Nurse of the Year by the Massachusetts School

Nurse Association. This prestigious annual recognition honors “out-standing contributions in the nursing specialty of school nursing.” Hobbie said she was “overwhelmed, deeply grateful, and honored” for the recognition. The job, she told the *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, is about

ensuring all students have a good environment in which to learn: “If they feel healthy and safe, they can be ready to learn and have success in school.” She said the experiential learning at HCC trained her to take a holistic approach to her job. “At HCC, they really worked with the student nurses to help them look at the whole picture when doing physical assessments, to look at what else is going on,” she said.

» Nurse Jean celebrates her award with students at Hatfield Elementary School.



LEARNING TO SEE



✧ Catherine Carija '19 and her "Optics" exhibit at Mount Holyoke College

“Optics” is the name **Catherine Carija '19** gave to her art exhibit and senior capstone project at Mount Holyoke College. The 10-piece show was a series of words written in colorful, overlapping geometric forms, with messages both obvious and subtle. The work was inspired by the artist and color theorist Josef Albers, with the show's tagline being “Question what you see. Think for yourself.” “I find life and people so perplexing that I can't help but make puzzles just in the hope of making sense of it all,” she said. “Albers wanted to teach people how to see, and I'm interested in that too.” Carija worked as a massage therapist for 30 years before enrolling at HCC. She had been experiencing some heartbreak and found art classes with the late Alix Hegeler to be the perfect remedy. After graduating, Carija transferred to Mount Holyoke but took time off during the pandemic to help her 92-year-old mother. After returning, she turned her focus from healing others' pain to healing her own through art. She completed a bachelor's degree in studio art in 2025 and is now working on a new career as an artist. “When I started taking art classes, I realized that making art makes me very happy,” she said. “I can't help but feel there is something inside me that is searching for expression.”



One morning in March, **George Counter '57** and his older brother, Joe, stopped by the HCC radio station to drop off dozens of vinyl records, CDs, and educational tapes. The station lobby was packed with students from the HCC Radio Club who were there for their weekly meeting. “This is the most people we've ever had,” said station manager Pat Labelle. “It's a little crazy.” The records belonged mostly to Joe, 94, but George had arranged the donation. “I mentioned vinyl records, and people got excited,” said George. A Radio Club member hunted down a turntable and put on a Frank Sinatra album. “I was always a jazz fan,” said Joe. “At least in my era, the '40s and '50s, some of the greatest bands that ever existed played here in Holyoke at a place called the Valley Arena.

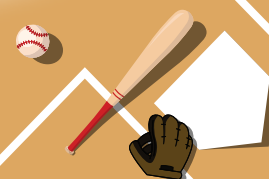
“I started collecting. I never did catch onto Bebop. I was a big Sinatra fan, until Tony Bennett came along.” The brothers shared stories about growing up in Holyoke on Congress Avenue. They lived right above Mrs. Frost, the mother of HCC's first president, George Frost. “He would come over on weekends and play piano,” said George. Mrs. Frost always gave them treats. Joe, George and their brother Dave called her “the cookie lady.” “For those of you who might be in your freshman year and struggling a little bit,” George advised, “let it be known that I made it with four D's and a C and then changed it around my sophomore year, and then I went on to Westfield State, and the rest is history.”

» George Counter '57, far right, and his brother Joe, join members of the HCC radio club in the WCH studio lobby after donating dozens of vintage vinyl records.



HEY, COACH

Terry Murphy '68, '77 has been involved in baseball in one form or another for roughly 70 years, as a player, coach, camp director, and league administrator. He played shortstop and second base for HCC during his student days and later returned for two stints as head coach (1977-1982, 2009-2013). After HCC, he played baseball for Stonehill College and later in the Tri-County League of Western Massachusetts. He also coached Dean Technical High School and American Legion teams, ran HCC's summer youth baseball program, and, more recently, founded the John Murphy Youth Baseball League (in honor of his father). Now, for all of that, he is a member of the Western Massachusetts Baseball Hall of Fame. Murphy could not attend the June 5 ceremony at Wycoff Country Club because he was recovering from back surgery, but one of his former players and assistant coaches, **Mark Monroe '79**, attended in his stead, picking up the award, and reading his induction speech. "I wasn't a bad player, but I'm not being recognized because of my playing ability as much as my coaching ability and my ability to promote the sport with kids throughout the area. To me, that's the thing," he said. "One of the things that always pleases me, when I see someone I haven't seen in maybe 40 years, and they'll say, 'Hey, Coach. I just want to thank you. You made a difference in my life.'"



Joy Amidst the Pain

Her hands trembled and her voice shook as **Mydalis Vera '11** read the lines from her poem "The House" to the audience of more than 100 people at the Northampton Center for the Arts. The spectators were there to celebrate a book launch for *Survival and Beyond*, an anthology of essays and poems written by survivors of domestic violence. The book is the third in a series published by Safe Passage, a Northampton-based human services agency. Writing "The House" about her experience with domestic violence was challenging for Vera, bringing up buried emotions. But she reminded herself that "joy still exists, even after pain." "Many in the audience were survivors too, and I felt I was speaking for every woman still hiding her story," said Vera, who completed a bachelor's degree at Mount Holyoke College and a master's degree in fine arts at Bay Path University. Currently, she is a social worker who specializes in foster care and founder of Guerra Writer LLC, which provides editing and consulting services to help empower women through writing and storytelling. "As a social worker, I've spent years supporting women and children who've experienced trauma," Vera said. "Writing became a healing tool for me, and I encourage others to use it too."

« Mydalis Vera '11 holds a copy of the book, *Survival and Beyond*, an anthology that includes her poem, "The House."

Alumni Notes



Heather Haskins (formerly Heather Lannon) with her husband, Xavier Haskins, at their June 14 wedding

'Back To My Roots'

Heather (Lannon) Haskins '20 began her HCC education as a teenage dual enrollment student from Westfield Technical Academy. A 2020 graduate, she returned to HCC in July as the assistant director for annual giving. "I wanted to work here because this is the place I started coming my freshman year of high school," she said. "I was like 15 years old, wandering around the campus, getting dropped off by my mom, and that was a really scary thing to do that young. But I felt super comfortable here." After receiving her associate degree in business administration, she transferred to Bay Path University, where she earned a bachelor's degree in nonprofit management and marketing, and later went to work as advancement operations associate at the Harold Grinspoon Foundation. "This is very nostalgic campus for me because of how many years I spent here," she said. "And I thought it was just a really beautiful full-circle moment, getting back to my roots as a first-generation college student, to be able to give back to where I started."

1978

Donald Jourdain spent 25 years working as a member of the national guard security force at Barnes Air National Guard Base in Westfield. He graduated from HCC with his associate degree in law enforcement, then earned a



Donald Jourdain

bachelor's degree in history and a teaching certificate from Westfield State, followed by six years as a military police officer in the U.S. Air Force. Now retired, he enjoys singing with the Greater Westfield Choral Association, the Second Congregational

Church of Westfield and Voices of the Valley in Southampton. In February, Jourdain and his wife, **Wendy Taylor-Jourdain '02**, visited the HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute for a special culinary arts luncheon. After graduating in 1977 from Tufts with a degree in occupational therapy, Wendy returned to school for a certificate as a pharmacy technician. Together, the Easthampton, Mass., couple often volunteer at area churches and food pantries.

1989

Elizabeth Cole (early childhood education) published her first children's picture book, *Elizabeth and the Magic Mirror*. After graduating from HCC, Cole earned a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Massachusetts Amherst and a master's degree in social work from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. For almost 20 years, she served as owner/director of Dolphin Daycare, an early childhood education center in Northampton. Currently, she is a licensed clinical social worker.

1992

Nikki Burnett (arts and science) has been elected to the Monson Savings Bank Board of Directors. After graduating from HCC, Burnett completed a bachelor's degree in leadership and organizational sciences and a master's degree in leadership and negotiation from Bay Path University. In the spring, she completed her doctorate in higher education leadership and organizational studies from Bay Path University. Burnett serves as executive director at Educare Springfield and holds numerous leadership positions, including trustee for the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts, where she co-chairs the distribution committee and serves on the DEI subcommittee and executive committee.

2002

Gerardo Sanchez (business) was promoted to digital banking officer at bankESB. After graduating from HCC, Sanchez completed a bachelor's degree in business management and human resources at Bridgewater State University and a financial studies certificate from Mass Bankers Association's New England School for Financial Studies. He has 26 years of banking experience, including positions at Bank of America and Florence Bank.

2003

Francine Murphy (accounting) was promoted to tax supervisor at Meyers Brothers Kalicka, P.C. in Holyoke. After graduating from HCC, Murphy completed a bachelor's degree in accounting at Westfield State University. She is currently a member of both the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants and the Massachusetts Institute of Certified Public Accountants.

2004

Chris Maza (communication) has been promoted to executive editor of *The*



Chris Maza

Reminder. Maza previously worked as a journalist for *The Reminder* and also contributed to the HCC newspaper while he was a student. In addition to his professional responsibilities, Maza is the head coach of the Cathedral High School swimming and diving teams.

Elizabeth Román (liberal arts) has been promoted to executive editor of New England Public Media. Román joined NEPM as managing editor in 2022 after reporting for nearly two decades at the *Springfield*

Republican newspaper. In her new role, Román will oversee NEPM's award-winning local newsroom, ascertaining community needs, setting editorial priorities and supervising journalists, local program



Elizabeth Román

hosts, freelancers and interns. After graduating from HCC, Román earned her bachelor's degree in journalism from UMass Amherst. At 19, she started reporting for *The Republican* as an intern. As the bilingual reporter for the *Republican* and MassLive, she also served as editor of *El Pueblo Latino* for seven years. She was also the co-founder of *Colectivo de Medios Latinos*, a network of media organizations and individuals that focus on the representation and empowerment of Latinx communities, particularly through media production and dissemination.

2008

Kerri Tichy (criminal justice) was named to the *Business West* 40 Under Forty Class of 2025. Tichy is the senior director of philanthropy at Shriners Children's New England. Before joining Shriners, Tichy



Kerri Tichy

worked at Aero Fastener Co. in Westfield, MassMutual, and Babson Capital, then managed more than 430 philanthropic funds at the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts. Last year, she led her team to raise over \$8 million, 272 percent above their \$3.1 million goal. She remains active in her community, volunteering with organizations including the Ladies of the Oriental Shrine of North America, serving as PTO president at her daughter's school, and is a former board member of Easterseals of Western Massachusetts.

Emmy Award Winner



Angelina Reyes '02 (visual art), assistant director of multimedia productions at the University of Connecticut, received a Boston/New England Regional Emmy Award for Outstanding Video Essayist in June for her piece "The Return of Men's Polo at UConn." Reyes, a Holyoke native, transferred from HCC to Worcester State University, where she completed a bachelor's degree in communications. She went on to complete a master's degree in interactive communications from Quinnipiac University. She started her career media at WGGB-TV 40, WTNH-TV 8, and then WTIC-TV 61 before landing at UConn.

Angelina Reyes holds her Emmy.

2011

Liz Martinek (paramedic) was named to the *Business West 40 Under Forty Class of 2025*. She serves as EMS coordinator for Baystate Health, bridging the gap between EMS agencies and hospitals. During the pandemic, she expanded her role to include more patient outreach and was honored as a Pandemic Response Hero for her patient-assessment efforts at a Westfield assisted-living facility. Martinek serves as Baystate Health's medical captain for the Ironman competition in western Mass., recruiting and overseeing volunteer services provided by physicians, nurses, paramedics, EMTs, and other emergency responders.

2012

Wil Morales (business administration) has been promoted to assistant vice president community lending officer at Monson Savings Bank. Previously serving as branch manager and security officer, Morales has been with the bank for more than eight years.

2014

Rosana Colon-Menendez (business administration) is a registered CPA employed at the accounting firm Draffin Tucker, where she was promoted to a senior accountant in the company's Atlanta office, serving clients in the commercial practice. After HCC, Colon-Menendez continued her education at UMass Amherst, receiving a bachelor's degree in accounting. She went on to earn two master's degrees from Mercer University, one in accountancy and the other in business administration.

2015

Payton North (communication) has joined the Hampden District Attorney's office in Springfield as communications director. After graduating from HCC, North earned a bachelor's degree in journalism and



Payton North

a master's degree in public relations, advertising, and applied communication from Western New England University. She comes to the DA's office after eight years with *The Reminder*, where she most recently served as executive editor. North began her journalism career as a freelancer for *The Reminder* during her senior year at WNEU.

2018

Zachary Towle (business administration) is a senior purchasing agent for BAE Systems US, a Nasua, New Hampshire, based company that develops and manufactures security systems for the defense and



Zachary Towle

aerospace industry. After completing his associate degree at HCC, Towle transferred to UMass Lowell, where he graduated with a dual concentration in management and supply chain. He joined BAE soon after as a procurement analyst. Towle, a native of Westfield, Mass., is the twin brother of **Brandon Towle '19**, founder of Camp Words Unspoken, a camp for stuttering youth, the subject of a feature story in the Spring 2025 issue of the *Connection*.

2020

Brigid Owino (psychology) was named to the *Business West 40 Under Forty Class of*



Brigid Owino

2025. She launched Perinatal Wellness Partners, a company providing trauma-informed, mindful care for women throughout pregnancy, birth, and beyond. After earning a bachelor's degree in psychology from UMass Amherst and working in mental health, Owino began volunteering in perinatal care before pursuing it professionally. Now she's working toward a master's degree in mental health at

Framingham State University. Owino also serves as a peer mentor doula with Moms Do Care and is a board member with the Green River Doula Network, supporting families and fostering community for birth workers.

2021

Briana Lucia Figarella (liberal arts) has been appointed executive and editorial assistant to the vice president of national programming at GBH, the public broadcasting company formerly known as WGBH. After graduating from HCC, where she was an honors student, a member of Phi Theta Kappa and the National Society of Leadership and Success, and named to the Dean's List in 2020, Figarella transferred to Emerson College. There, she earned a bachelor's degree in media arts production in 2023, served as a senator of the student government association, worked as an off-campus services student ambassador, made the Dean's List, and was a logistics producer at IMI Productions. Most recently, Figarella served on the features selection committee for Salem Film Fest 2025 before starting her new position at GBH in October 2024.

Samantha Calvao (accounting) has been promoted to senior associate at Meyers Brothers Kalicka, P.C. After graduating from HCC, Calvao earned a bachelor's degree in accounting from Southern New Hampshire University, where she was a member of Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society. She went on to complete a master's degree in business administration from Fitchburg State University. Calvao is currently a member of the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants and the Massachusetts Society of Certified Public Accountants.

Nicholas Mishol (business administration) has been promoted to audit and accounting senior associate at Meyers Brothers Kalicka, P.C. Following his graduation from HCC, Mishol went on to earn a business administration degree from UMass Amherst before beginning his career in accounting.

2023

Angela Gula (English and creative writing) won the first-place award for an essay submission to Westfield State University's literary arts journal, *Persona*. Gula is currently maintaining a 3.98 GPA as a student of WSU, majoring in English, literature concentration, with a minor in communications. Gula is a member of several honors societies: Sigma Tau Delta, an international English honors society; and Tau Sigma, a transfer student honors society.



Angela Gula

Graciana Phillips (psychology) recently earned a bachelor's degree in forensic psychology from Bay Path University, where she was inducted into the Maroon Key Honor Society and received the traditional undergraduate award for excellence in psychology. She was accepted to the University of Hartford's graduate program for school psychology.

Jessica Johnson (nursing) published her first book, *It's Already Mine*, a motivational and inspirational guide that helps readers set goals, pursue dreams, and unlock their

full potential. Since graduating from HCC, Johnson has earned a bachelor's degree in nursing from Capella University. She credits her HCC education for helping her reach her goals. "The foundation I received as a student there gave me the confidence, discipline, and determination to keep pushing forward," she writes. "The experience, the support, and the education I received were instrumental in catapulting me to the next level, and for that, I am deeply grateful."

2024

Lorraine Askew (business administration) has been promoted to assistant vice president and retail banking officer at Country Bank's Ludlow branch. A 23-year veteran of the bank, Askew is a graduate of the Massachusetts Bankers Association School for Financial Studies and remains actively involved in her community through the Ludlow Community Center/Randall's Boys and Girls Club, the VFW Auxiliary, the Get Your Pink On committee, and the Ludlow Rotary.

Max Bruel (liberal arts and sciences) finished his degree program at HCC with a 3.9 GPA before being accepted into Amherst College to study history and law. He diligently continues to work toward

a bachelor's degree in law, jurisprudence, and social thought.

Emily Colon (business administration) started off 2025 with a new job as the legal administrative assistant II with the Committee for Public Counsel Services, a Massachusetts state agency responsible for providing legal representation to individuals who cannot afford an attorney. For the previous two years, she worked as the executive assistant to the chief administrative and financial officer for the city of Springfield, Mass.

Jacob Kris (business administration) is working on his bachelor's degree in economics at Amherst College. Kris graduated from HCC



Jacob Kris

with a 4.0 GPA but still made time for extracurriculars. During his time at HCC, Kris tutored students in accounting and mathematics, in addition to interning through the Massachusetts

Department of Revenue's Local Finance Commonwealth Fellowship. 

In Memoriam

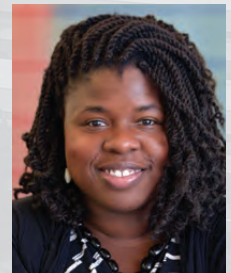
We are saddened to learn of the passing of the following members of the HCC community:

Norman R. Routhier '60
Charles P. Lavelle '65
Carol A. Lak '68
Marie A. Bates '79
Thomas J. Breen '80
Walter Peret Jr. '90
Jo Ann Howlett '92,
retired staff
Maureen A. Barry '95
Douglas Gordon '96

Dennis J. Malo '96
Philippa J. Owen '97,
retired staff
Ruby S. Maddox '03
Annette Davis-Harris '04
William D. Crawford, III '10

And our longtime friend
and supporter:
Donald R. Dwight

Ruby S.R. Maddox '03 passed away April 17, 2025. She earned a bachelor's degree in public policy from the University of Massachusetts Amherst and a master's degree in nonprofit management and philanthropy from Bay Path University. She transformed her educational foundation into meaningful change as an advocate, purpose coach, entrepreneur, and volunteer. She founded Direct Your Purpose consulting firm and co-founded two local nonprofits: Gardening the Community and Leaders of the Free World. Her leadership, creativity, dedication to social justice, and service to HCC will continue to inspire our community.



SEND NEWS

Name Now in Use

Class Year

Name While Attending HCC

Spouse/Partner Name

Class Year

Address

Telephone (Residence)

(Business)

Email Address

Your News



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 or to The Connection, c/o Alumni Relations, 303 Homestead Ave., Holyoke MA 01040.

THE CONNECTION

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

NONPROFIT
ORGANIZATION
US POSTAGE PAID
SPRINGFIELD MA
PERMIT NO 228



Getting multiple copies at your address?

Let us know at alumni@hcc.edu



**Your support transforms
possibilities into realities.**
Together, we will create life-changing
opportunities for our students.

Give now at hcc.edu/give

