

RARITAN VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE FOUNDATION **ANNUAL REPORT**

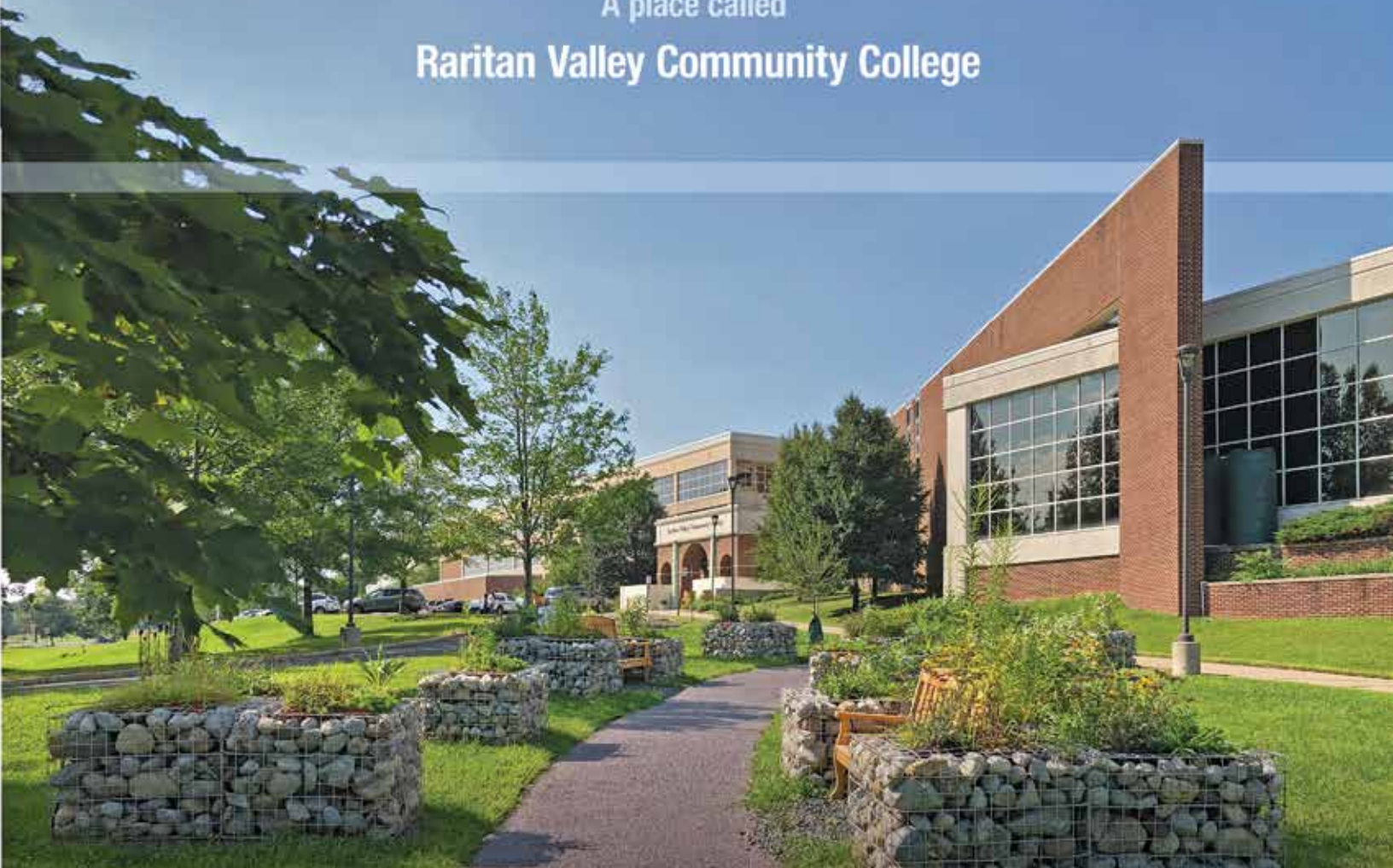
2025



A community committed to learning, growth, innovation, and transformation.
An institution whose impact is recognized locally, regionally, and nationally.
A launchpad for emerging talent ready to serve the needs of an evolving workforce.

A place called

Raritan Valley Community College



Michael J. Marion, Chief Development Officer & Executive Director
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#RVCCPROUD

JUNE 9, 2025

WELCOME & THANK YOU



“It’s finally time for community colleges
to be the star of the college show.”

Dear Friends, Supporters, Partners, and Alumni of RVCC,

What an apt declaration from the Lumina Foundation—something we’ve been saying for years. And as the 2025 RVCC Foundation Annual Report reveals, there’s no shortage of superlatives to describe the past 12 months for *a place called Raritan Valley Community College*.

Consider these truths: RVCC’s leadership role in an epic public-private partnership launch—NJBioFutures—and a major investment received from J&J to accelerate the launch; a massive expansion of the RVCC Workforce Training Center and birth of a new track for meaningful employment: Aseptic Processing and Biomanufacturing; the largest single scholarship gift in the College’s history and the most successful Giving Day in RVCC history; earning entry into the national tourney for the RVCC Men’s basketball team—another “first ever” for Raritan Valley Community College; a 30th anniversary of the nationally lauded service learning program whose credo—“Learning to Serve. Serving to Learn”—is helping develop students as ethical, caring, enlightened, global citizens.

For the faculty, staff, and alumni, these truths are no surprise. It’s also no surprise that our students are front and center in everything we do. Their art and music are showcased at our largest events, their voices represented in leadership roles (including on our RVCC Foundation Board of Directors), their journeys are worthy of impressive corpo-

rate-supported mentorship programs—one longstanding and the other launched this year. Our students are sought after by four-year institutions and local employers alike. In short, they are our secret sauce.

To the ever-expanding community of RVCC friends, supporters, and donors, it’s also no surprise that the rest of America has finally caught up with our simple truth: that we are more than comfortable in the spotlight and more than worthy of being recognized as a star on the “college show.” Consider this perspective from the RVCC’s largest single benefactor, Jim Gibson, on why he and wife Jill so generously support this College: “We’re huge believers in RVCC, its impact, and its students. It is an exceptional institution.” Enough said.

An annual report presents a perfect opportunity to reflect on the moment, and to appreciate all that is represented by our humble institution. These pages celebrate just *some* of the successes for which we—students, faculty, staff, alumni, and especially donors—can be proud.

We hope you, too, feel pride in this College, the work that its faculty and staff do, and the student journeys it helps steward.

On behalf of the RVCC Board of Trustees, the RVCC Foundation Board of Directors and Foundation staff, and the entire RVCC community, thank you for your belief in, and support of, *a place called Raritan Valley Community College*.

Cheers,

RARITAN
VALLEY
COMMUNITY COLLEGE
FOUNDATION

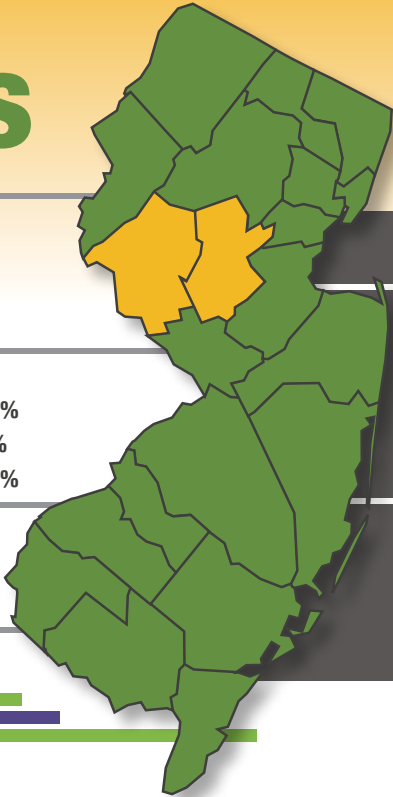


“It’s finally time for community colleges
to be the star of the college show.”

Mary Laphen Pope, Lumina Foundation



RVCC Fast Facts



2024

STUDENT ENROLLMENT

Headcount..... 6,762

Credit Hours..... 62,428

Term Full-time Equivalent (FTE)..... 4,062

STUDENT STATUS

First Time Student.....21.8%

New Transfer Student5.3%

Continuing / re-admit / non-degree73.0%

FULL-TIME / PART-TIME STATUS

Full-Time 39.9%

Part-Time 60.1%

STUDENT ETHNICITY

AMERICAN INDIAN / ALASKAN NATIVE	0.2%
ASIAN	9.6%
BLACK / AFRICAN AMERICAN	11.4%
HISPANIC / LATINO	30.0%
NATIVE HAWAIIAN / PACIFIC ISLANDER	0.1%
TWO OR MORE RACES	3.1%
NOT REPORTED	6.2%
WHITE	39.4%

NUMBER OF SECTIONS

Sections Offered1,150

Average Class Size17.5

ANNUAL ENROLLMENT 2023-24

Headcount..... 9,716

Term Full-time Equivalent (FTE)..... 4,519

STUDENT GENDER

Not Reported 1.9%

Female 49.9%

Male 48.3%

POPULAR MAJORS

Liberal Arts (AA) 876

General Business (AS) 498

Health Science-Nursing (NS) 495

Engineering (AS) 213

Criminal Justice (AS) 211

FAST FACTS data from Fall 2024

TOP TRANSFER DESTINATIONS

Rutgers New Brunswick

Rutgers Newark

Kean University

Montclair State University

TCNJ The College of New Jersey

STUDENT RESIDENCE

99% IN STATE

57% Somerset

24% Hunterdon

FIVE YEAR TREND (HEADCOUNT)

2020 2021 2022 2023 2024

STUDENT AGE

UNDER 21	54.3%
21-24	22.7%
25-34	12.5%
35 AND UP	10.4%
UNKNOWN	0.1%

PELL GRANTS (2023-24)

31%

of students receive Pell Grants

RETENTION (Fall 2023 Cohort)

Retained to Spring	68.7%
Retained to Fall	83.6%

Part Time ● Full Time

GRADUATES (2023-24)

922 Degrees

72 Credit Certificates

RVCC Leadership



RVCC Foundation Board of Directors

Allan Boomer (Chair)

Dan Van Tran (Vice Chair)

Deirdre Blas

David Bunevich

Michael Bzdak

Rebecca Geary

Parag S. Jategaonkar

Gene McCarthy

Michael J. McDonough (President, RVCC)

Richard Ramirez (RVCC Class of 2025)

Steven A. Reichman

Joel F. Reyes-Guzman

Michael Schwertfeger

Lila Seroy (RVCC Class of 2025)

Wanda Shoer

Tammy Stouchko

John Trojan (Treasurer)

Gary Woodring (Asst. Treasurer)

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Dr. Richard D. Wellbrock, Emeritus

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Michael Goldberg

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Michael J. Marion, Executive Director

Janet Dunne, Development Associate

Donna Stolzer, Director

Cindy Haddad, Development Assistant

Greg DeSanctis, Director and Alumni Liaison

RVCC Foundation Golf Classic Committee

Keith Cahill

Annette Lacanna

Brian O'Rourke

Joseph Pavlow

Steven A. Reichman

Michael Schwertfeger

John Trojan

Barry Walker

Robert P. Wise

Gary Wooding

RVCC Executive Staff

Michael J. McDonough, President

Karen H. Bearce, Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs

Jason Fredericks, Vice President of Student Affairs

Michael J. Marion, Executive Director, RVCC Foundation & RVCC Alumni Association

Conrad Mercurius, Executive Director of Workforce Development & Career Education

John Trojan, Vice President for Finance & Facilities

Cheryl Wallace, Vice President of Human Resources and Administration

Annette LaCanna, Executive Office Manager & Board of Trustees Secretary

CELEBRATING The Journey:

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE CLASS OF 2025!



RARITAN VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE'S 56TH GRADUATING CLASS—SOME 1,200 STUDENTS STRONG—IS READY TO TAKE ON THE WORLD...

SPECIAL THANKS TO 2024 COMMENCEMENT SPEAKERS:

WELCOME: *Michael J. McDonough, President, Raritan Valley Community College*

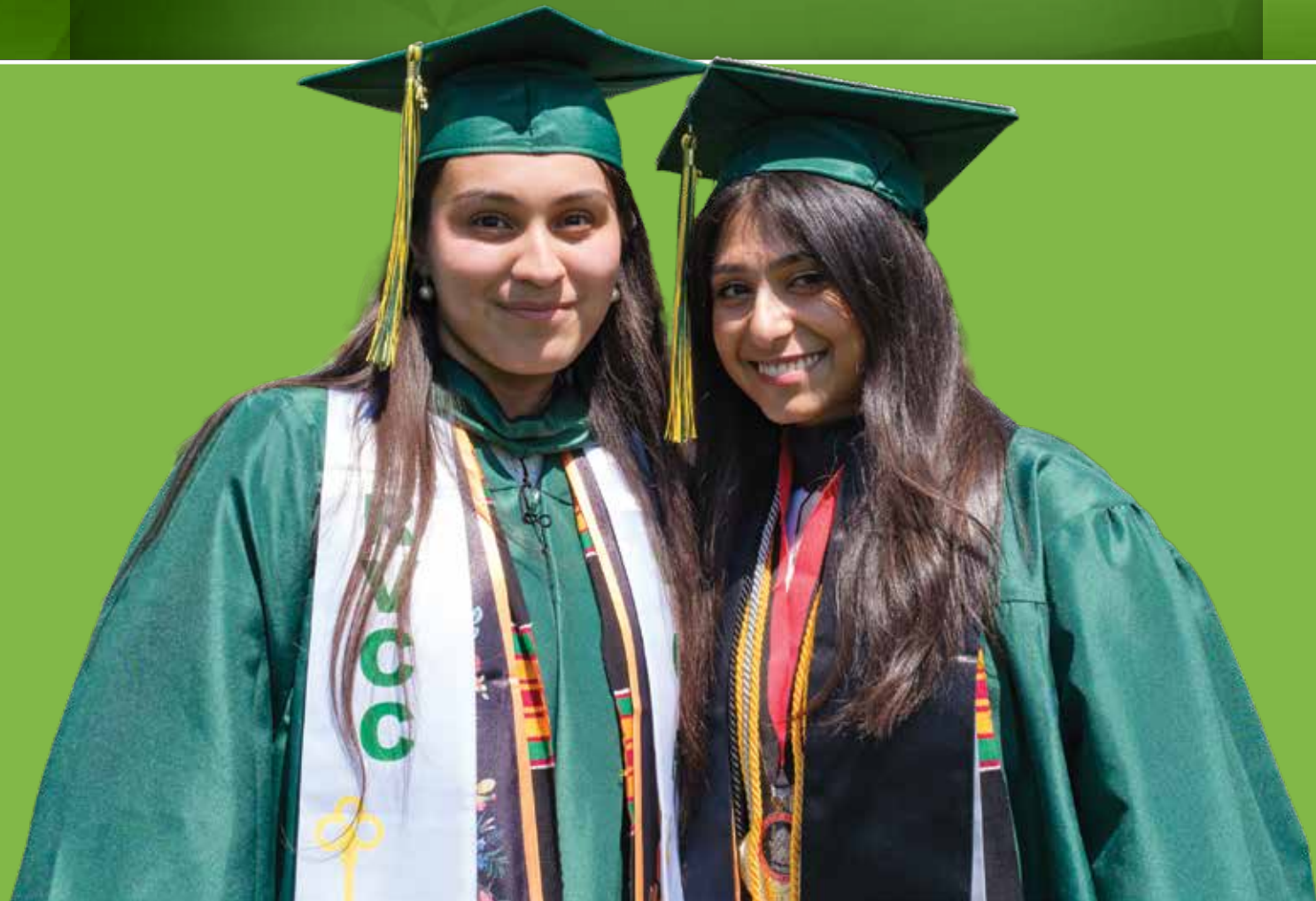
GREETINGS: *John E. Lanza, Director, Hunterdon County Board of County Commissioners and Shanel Y. Robinson, Director, Somerset County Board of County Commissioners*

INTRODUCTION OF FACULTY SPEAKER: *Safa Rizwan, Class of 2025*

FACULTY ADDRESS: *Dr. John Sichel, Professor of Music*

INTRODUCTION OF STUDENT SPEAKER: *Dr. Karen H. Bearce, Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs*

STUDENT ADDRESS: *Vaanya Salwan, Class of 2025*



CELEBRATING The Journey:



CELEBRATING The Journey:



CELEBRATING The Journey:



RARITAN
VALLEY
COMMUNITY COLLEGE
FOUNDATION



THANK YOU



To our generous sponsors and friends of
the 21st Annual RVCC Foundation Golf Classic

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Automated Logic
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United Business Systems
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Pave-Rite, Inc.
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SSP Architects
Suplee, Clooney & Company
Van Cleef Engineering Associates, LLC
- CUM LAUDE
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Bedrock Concrete Corp.
C. Lombardi Construction
Celldex Therapeutics
eDesign Interactive
Hannon Floors
Interface, Inc.
Myth MVP
New Jersey Risk Managers & Consultants, LLC
Norris McLaughlin, P.A.
PepsiCo
Steven A. Reichman
USA Architects
Wiss & Company, LLP
Gary Woodring
- INDIVIDUAL PLAYERS
TD Bank
Barry Walker
Robert Wise
- MUCH GRATITUDE TO
Sam Manongsong
RVCC Golf Committee
Event Volunteers
Jeff Gates

TWENTY STRONG



20TH ANNUAL RVCC FOUNDATION GOLF CLASSIC
RAISES NEARLY \$160,000.

The RVCC Foundation raised \$158,790 at the 20th Annual RVCC Foundation Golf Classic, held last June at the Stanton Ridge Golf & Country Club in Whitehouse Station.

The event was another sellout, with 132 participants, including enthusiastic golfers representing a wide range of local businesses from throughout Hunterdon and Somerset counties. Corporate sponsors—some 60 in all—were headlined by “Title Sponsor ” **Epic Management** and “Links Sponsor” **KeRi Engineering**. In addition to the golf sponsors and to celebrate the “20th Annual” milestone, the event also introduced a special “20 for 20” fundraising promotion in which twenty \$1,000 donors stepped up to create 20 new \$1,000 scholarships at RVCC.

In keeping with the Classic’s tradition, the day’s festivities were very much student-focused and included morning welcome remarks by **Nicholas Gallo** (Class of 2024), who provided a poignant remembrance of D-Day (June 6 was also the 80th Anniversary of D-Day), followed by a moment of silence, and the singing of the National Anthem by RVCC students **Ollie Johnson** (Class of 2024), **Katie Strong** (Class of 2025), and **Sarah Stefaniak** (Class of 2023).

On the course, student artists **Liz Mathes** (Class of 2024), **Ollie Yanicek** (Class of 2025), and **Demetrios Gianakis** (Class of 2024) painted landscapes of the 18th fairway, and each golfer received a sample pack of blank note cards featuring cover art by RVCC Arts & Design students **Cara Copeland** (Class of 2025), **Megan Weber** (Class of 2024), **Meridith Kelly** (Class of 2025), and **Russell Tam** (Class of 2025). Also featured on the course was a demonstration by RVCC Workforce Training Center’s Advanced Manufacturing group, including a 3-D printed putter, ball marks, and divot repair tool.

The Classic’s post-golf reception featured “The Payton Teague Trio” comprised of RVCC student musicians **Felipe Primero-Guzman** (Class of 2023), **Gianmarco Flores** (Class of 2025), and **Payton Teague** (Class of 2024), who provided a great jazz vibe. **Alexander Floyd** (Class of 2019) provided inspiring remarks chronicling his journey at RVCC to his current position as EOF

Program Engagement Coordinator.

The RVCC Foundation provides the resources that enable the College to enhance its programs beyond public and tuition sources and to maintain its standing as a premier academic institution and one of the most important sources of culture and continuing education in Somerset and Hunterdon counties.

The RVCC Foundation Golf Classic is the non-profit’s largest in-person fundraising event of the year, with net proceeds raised from the tourney and auctions directed to student scholarships, education programming, and other RVCC institutional priorities.

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR DISTINTUISHED GROUP OF “20 for 20” SUPPORTERS

- Approved Fire Protection Co., Inc.
- Caren Bateman & Keith Chanoch
- Keith & Jackie Cahill
- Follett Higher Education Group
- Hunterdon Neurology
- Michael McDonough
- Momentum Advisors
- Jack Opdyke
- Don Pray
- Penny Pray
- Provident Bank
- Steven A. Reichman
- Roselle Glass Co.
- Rotary Club of Branchburg
- RVCC Tech Services
- Frank & Cathy Speranza
- Suplee, Clooney & Company
- Barry Walker
- Margaret Windrem
- Gary & Lisa Woodring

TWENTY STRONG



POINTS OF PRIDE

Celebrating the Reach of RVCC

RARITAN VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE: An educational powerhouse with a proud history of impact!

90+

...number of pathways to upward social mobility through associate degrees, certificates, academic tracks and career training programs offered at RVCC.

9,716

2023-24 total full and part-time student enrollment.

22,000

...increase in square footage at the RVCC Workforce Training Center, to accommodate program growth, including the new Aseptic Processing program, new Clean Room and new Biotechnology Lab.

\$375,000

...largest single gift for student scholarships in RVCC history, providing 5 full scholarships over each of the next 10 years.

450,000

...scholarship dollars awarded to students in 2024-25 academic year.

98.25

...for the Nursing Class of 2024, graduate licensure pass rate for first-time test takers.

\$3,020,100

...total positive economic impact to the regional economy delivered through RVCC's operations, employees, and students in the 2019-20 academic year.

7,500

...number of student visits to the RVCC Resource Center/Food Pantry for both food pantry, snacks, and other services during the year 2024.

994

...number of degrees and certificates awarded to matriculating RVCC students in 2023-24

18

...average class size at RVCC.

#1

...RVCC's ranking among all NJ Community Colleges, by Intelligent.com, WalletHub.com and CollegeEvaluator.com.

100

...percentage of RVCC Automotive Technology degree students who are employed in the automotive field upon graduation.

17%

...share of RVCC's campus energy/electrical supply coming from the College's various solar arrays.

97

...Percent of 2023-24 graduates who would recommend RVCC to prospective students.

#1

...for students whose families earn \$30,000 or less per year (more than one-third of all college students), RVCC has the BEST ROI among all of New Jersey's Community Colleges, is in the top 5% of all community colleges nationally, and in the top 16% OF ALL higher ed institutions.

\$3,163,250

...total amount in scholarships awarded by the RVCC Foundation to students since 2018.

14.5%

...average annual rate of return for their investment in RVCC that students will realize considering the stream of higher future earnings that will continue to grow throughout their careers.

1,000,000

...annual dollar value of cumulative community service hours donated by RVCC students to 250 community partners, schools, and non-profit organizations.

\$1,043,008

...funds raised for RVCC in FY 2024, thanks to the generosity of our donor community.

Columbia, Penn, Yale

...as well as Johns Hopkins University, Georgetown University, Smith College, University of Michigan, Berklee College of Music, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, and the Cornell University are among the schools to which RVCC Honors College students have matriculated since the Honors College's 2011 opening.

13

... number of RVCC student athletes earning post-season honors (in addition to the "Coach of the Year" honors for two RVCC Athletics coaches).

#1

...RVCC ranking among all US community colleges for its sustainability efforts (earning GOLD rating from Association of Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education).

\$203,653

...RVCC Giving Day 2025 fundraising total—the most successful Giving Day in RVCC history!

\$252.9M

...in added income to the regional economy delivered in FY 2019-20 by the total RVCC alumni population through collective earnings and increased productivity of the businesses that employ them.

1st

...RVCC became the first carbon-neutral community college in the country in 2017 and the first community college in the country to sign an environmental stewardship agreement with the EPA.

#RVCCProud



NEWS YOU CAN USE

01 ART PROFESSOR ATTENDS FACULTY DEVELOPMENT SEMINAR IN CAMBODIA



Ji Yong Kim, Assistant Professor in RVCC's Arts & Design department, attended "Between Political and Climate Change in Southeast Asia," a two-week faculty development seminar at the Inya Institute and Center for Khmer Studies in Cambodia. The program was part of the Overseas Faculty Development Seminars sponsored by the Council of American Overseas Research Centers. The seminar focused on the interplay between politics and climate change in Southeast Asia, with a particular emphasis on Cambodia and Myanmar. It was designed for community college professors around the nation, with a total of 14 participating. Professor Kim participated in daily sessions with experts from Cambodia and

Myanmar, who discussed various topics ranging from civil society organizations to the media landscape and climate change challenges. The seminar included tours of Cambodia, with visits to such locations as Phenom Penh, Battambang, and Siem Riep, home to the famous Angkor Wat temples. Professor Kim plans to incorporate Cambodian arts and culture into his art classes at RVCC. Overseas Faculty Development Seminars are fully-funded programs conducted abroad to assist faculty and administrators from U.S. community colleges and minority-serving institutions in gaining international experience. The goal is to develop and enhance international courses, curricula, and teaching materials at their home institutions.

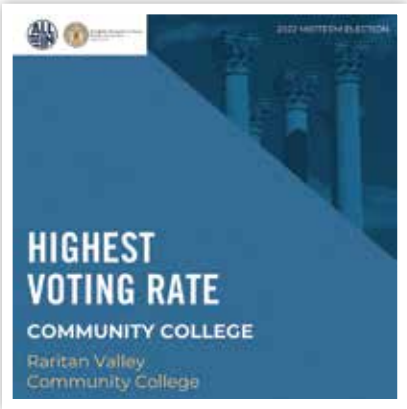
02 RVCC RECOGNIZED FOR VOTER PARTICIPATION, ENGAGEMENT



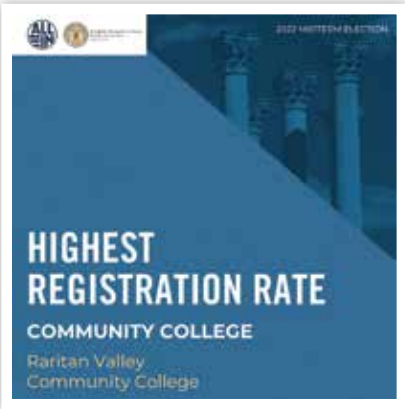
The ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge (ALL IN), which currently engages 10.8 million students from more than 1,075 institutions in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, has recognized RVCC for its nonpartisan democratic engagement efforts that fostered high levels of student voter engagement in the 2022 midterm elections. RVCC's honors include: the "2022 New Jersey Campus Voting Challenge Highest Voting Rate: Community College" and the "2022 New Jersey Campus Voting Challenge Highest Registration Rate: Community College."

The College also earned a Bronze Seal from ALL IN based on its 2022 campus voting rate from the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) report from Tufts University. RVCC is the only New Jersey college, and one of only six community colleges nationally, receiving the prestigious award. RVCC also was one of 93 campuses honored by ALL IN for its development of a campus Civic Action Plan for the 2024 election cycle. The College's successes in this area include leading the creation of the New Jersey Election Poll Worker Project, an initiative supported by generous funding through The Pray Family Center for Service Learning and

NEWS YOU CAN USE



Civic Engagement. The Secretary of Higher Education, in consultation with the Director of the Division of Elections in the Department of State, announced that an institution of



higher education may award academic credit to an enrolled student who serves as a poll worker during an election held in the state. In response, the College's nationally recognized Service Learning program will engage students in the poll worker project from many different disciplines.

RVCC also was recognized by the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge as a 2024 ALL IN Most Engaged Campus for College Student Voting. RVCC joined a group of 471 colleges and universities being recognized by ALL IN Most Engaged Campuses for College Student Voting for their outstanding efforts to increase nonpartisan student voter participation in the 2024 election. RVCC's nonpartisan student voter engagement initiatives are supported through the College's Pray Family Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement. "The Pray Family Center supports voting as a form of student empowerment. Our collective voter engagement efforts are designed to inspire and encourage peaceful and meaningful participation in elections within our communities. Our best practices include strategies for building and implementing campus voting plans, nonpartisan voter education, registration drives, and a student poll worker project. These efforts empower students to be a part of the democratic process," said **Lori Moog**, RVCC Director of Service Learning and Community Outreach.

03 RVCC RECOGNIZED AS TOP U.S. COMMUNITY COLLEGE FOR SUSTAINABILITY ACHIEVEMENTS



Raritan Valley Community College has been rated as the top community college in the United States for its sustainability efforts by the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE). STARS, the Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System, measures and encourages sustainability in all aspects of higher education. This was the 10th year in a row that RVCC was recognized nationally for its sustainability efforts by AASHE. RVCC is also rated the #1 community college in the United States—with a perfect score—for water use. RVCC received a STARS Gold rating from AASHE. With more than 1,200

participants in 52 countries, AASHE's STARS program is the most widely recognized framework in the world for publicly reporting comprehensive information related to a college or university's sustainability performance. Participants report achievements in five overall areas: 1) academics 2) engagement, 3) operations, 4) planning and administration, and 5) innovation and leadership. Sustainability is an important part of the campus fabric at RVCC, which has cut its campus energy emissions by 58% since 2005. The College is River Friendly, as well as Bee Campus USA and Monarch Watch certified. RVCC has three solar installations, a new greenhouse, publicly available electric car charging stations, a green roof and a green wall, numerous pollinator gardens, a rain garden, three rainwater harvesting systems, and three buildings built to LEED standards.



NEWS YOU CAN USE

BIOLOGY PROFESSOR RECEIVES SOCIAL LEARNING INNOVATOR AWARD IN STEM

04



Dr. Melanie Lenahan, Raritan Valley Community College Professor of Biology, has received the Social Learning Innovator Award in STEM from Hypothesis.

The award recognizes her work with social annotation to deepen student engagement and foster an immersive learning environment. Dr. Lenahan is the only New Jersey community college professor being honored by Hypothesis.

As part of the honor, Professor Lenahan was invited to participate in a webinar during which award-winners from various disciplines

shared their approaches to social learning. According to Hypotheses, the Social Learning Innovator Awards are “a celebration of the educators and institutions leading the way in transforming education through social annotation.... By honoring those who push the boundaries of traditional education, we aim to highlight the transformative impact of social learning on enhancing comprehension, fostering deeper connections with course material, and driving academic success.”

GETTING THE WORD OUT

05



With goals of “getting the word out” and advancing the positive perceptions of Raritan Valley Community College, a new promotional spot for the College

was presented at November’s **Hunterdon County Chamber of Commerce** event, at which RVCC was inducted into the Hunterdon County Business HALL OF FAME. The video message, titled “Look Around”, helps put RVCC into a fuller context, as an anchor institution for the communities it serves, and committed to helping deliver the talent needed for an evolving workforce. “Look Around” can be

viewed here: www.raritanval.edu/rvcc-look-around-fall24.

In keeping with the “getting the word out” theme, in April Mike Marion was featured in Episode 11 of “*The Scoop Podcast by SCBP*” and was interviewed by **Chris Edwards**, Somerset County Business Partnership’s President & CEO. “Building Community Impact Through the RVCC Foundation” explores “the incredible work being done to support the students and community at Raritan Valley Community College.” Access available at the SCBP’s YouTube page.

RVCC STUDENTS SAVE MONEY, BENEFIT FROM “OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES”

06



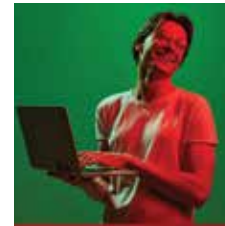
RVCC continues to help students reduce their educational costs by providing free instructional materials in a growing number of classes. Since 2018, the use

of free Open Educational Resources (OER) has saved RVCC students \$5,331,803. In the Fall 2024 Semester, students saved more than \$500,000 in textbook costs with the use of OER, which are free online resources that can be downloaded, edited, and shared. In addition to the cost savings, students benefit by using course materials that can easily be customized by their professors.

The College currently offers 70 distinct courses for which students can register to take the class with no textbook costs. When students register for classes they can see if a

course has a zero-textbook cost or a low-textbook cost of less than \$45. They can also search for “no cost” and “low-cost” courses as they are building their schedule.

Many faculty members are doing their part to assist students by embracing the use of OER in their classrooms. For example, **William Klinger**, RVCC Professor of Business, developed an open textbook for the Principles of Management course by adapting an existing OER in Pressbooks, an open textbook authoring platform available to RVCC faculty. Professor **Steve Schwarz**, coordinator of Computer Literacy classes at the College, is adapting several existing OER and creating new materials, including assignments and videos, to develop an open textbook for the unique needs of students in that course.



NEWS YOU CAN USE

RVCC AUTOMOTIVE TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM RECEIVES NATIONAL AWARD

07

RVCC’s Automotive Technology Associate of Applied Science (AAS) program has been honored with the ASE Training Managers Council’s (ATMC)

National Excellence in Training Award. RVCC is one of three programs in the country to be recognized.



The annual awards highlight outstanding or innovative training programs designed for the Automotive and Truck Industry and shine a spotlight on the importance of training to the success of the industry.

The 2024 ATMC National Excellence in Training Awards were officially announced at

the organization’s reception, held at AAPEX in Las Vegas. The submissions were judged by an ATMC panel, and awards were made to the top three programs that meet a prescribed level of excellence based upon the following criteria: Program Overview, Needs Analysis, Learning Objectives, Program Elements/ Materials, Delivery Methods, Measurement of Intended Outcome, and Program Sustainment/ Maintenance.

The ASE Training Managers Council was founded in 1984 as a non-profit organization designed to promote the advancement of training and professional development within the automotive service industry. Reorganized in 2009 as a member of the ASE family of organizations, the ATMC continues to help members stay abreast of innovations in training by facilitating interaction among its members.

10TH ANNUAL NATIONAL APPRENTICESHIP WEEK CELEBRATED

08

Raritan Valley Community College joined the U.S. Department of Labor in celebrating the 10th Annual National Apprenticeship Week. This

year’s theme was “10 Years of Engagement, Expansion, and Innovation.”

A Registered Apprenticeship provides an industry-driven, high-quality career pathway that enables employers to build and sustain a skilled workforce, while allowing individuals to gain valuable paid work experience, earn progressive wage increases, receive classroom instruction, and achieve a nationally recognized credential. These programs are industry-approved and validated by the U.S. Department of Labor or a State Apprenticeship Agency.

To mark the occasion, RVCC hosted a special Apprenticeship Day Event for high school and adult students in the College’s Advanced Manufacturing program. The event welcomed students from Manville and Bound Brook High Schools, along with an apprentice



from Triad Tool.

The event featured an engaging presentation on the Principles of Apprenticeship, followed by firsthand accounts from a Manufacturing Apprentice. The speakers shared insights into their daily tasks, emphasized the importance of practical learning, and highlighted how apprenticeships promote lifelong professional growth.

Representatives from the featured employer, Triad Tool, spoke about the advantages of incorporating apprentices into their organization, citing benefits such as improved productivity, reduced turnover, and the cultivation of a workforce equipped with critical, industry-valued skills.

Students had the unique opportunity to participate in a question-and-answer session with the apprentices, as well as engage in an informal discussion with a representative from Triad Tool. These conversations provided valuable insights into the rewarding career opportunities available in the manufacturing industry.



NEWS YOU CAN USE

HONORS COLLEGE STUDENTS PRESENT CAPSTONE PROJECTS

09



Students from RVCC's Honors College were given the opportunity to participate in an independent, Capstone Research Course, designed to guide sophomore Honors College students from all disciplines through the stages of researching and writing a major research paper or project, or developing an artistic pursuit. The students are mentored by faculty members and present their work at symposiums held at the end of the semester.

Projects featured a diversity of subject matter, including, "The Impact of Social Media and Mobile Technology on Dating and

Relationship Dynamics in Generation Z"; "I Miss My Grandpa, Coping with Death"; "The Effect of Natural Compounds on Cancer Cell Lines"; "America's Addiction to Added Sugars"; and "Feet on the Ground: Recent Elections Through the Eyes of Poll Workers."

Congratulations to all of the 2024-25 Honors College Capstone presenters: **Justin Britten, Nina Carvajal, Melissa Cosentino, Tanaya Dhumale, Archita Gupta, Sophia Kirsinger, Victor Komosinski, Malena Krause, Jennilyn Saillema Manotoa, Siena Martin, Nathaniel Meicke, Edward Morales, Erssini Ysabel Reyes, Lucia Robertiello, Holly Rodriguez, Lila Seroy, Nicholas Hendrik Tadena, Denisse Sanchez Tlanipa, and Juan David Diaz Villarreal.**

STUDENTS GAIN REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCE IN MATERIAL HANDLING, LOGISTICS

10



RVCC students participated in a Scholarship Contest that helped bridge the gap between academic learning and real-world business challenges.

Launched through the collaboration of ABCO Systems of Carlstadt, the Council of Supply Chain Management Professionals (CSCMP), and Capacity LLC of North Brunswick, the Scholarship Contest empowered students by providing them with the chance to solve industry-specific challenges and gain valuable experience in material handling and logistics.

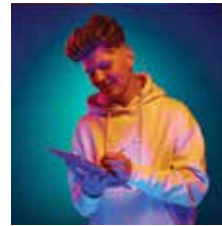
The contest, now in its second year, has become a key initiative in fostering innovation, education, and career development for RVCC students. Faculty members in the College's Business & Public Service department are a vital part of the program's success, as they mentor and assist the Scholarship Contest participants throughout the process. The five finalists—**Roland Hofmann** (Bridgewater), **Aaron Czajkowski** (Bridgewater), **Robert Lamptey** (Piscataway), **Debra Burnejko** (Clinton), and **Thais Barros** (Califon)—demonstrated exceptional creativity, critical thinking, and perseverance throughout the competition. Their efforts highlighted the skills needed to succeed in a competitive and dynamic industry. Roland Hofmann, the first-place winner, received a

\$3,500 scholarship, while second-place winner Aaron Czajkowski won a \$1,000 prize.

The real value of the Scholarship Contest went beyond the prizes, however. It was about the opportunities for personal and professional growth, as well as the skills and confidence the participants gained. But for the students, the lessons and experiences were far more rewarding than the monetary awards. "This competition has truly helped me with my professional growth, giving me the confidence to approach real-world business challenges and find effective solutions. The experience was invaluable and showed me what I can accomplish when I push myself," said finalist Thais Barros.

ABCO Systems, known for its solutions in warehouse optimization, teamed up with CSCMP, a global organization connecting supply chain professionals, to partner with Capacity LLC, a leader in fulfillment and logistics operations. Through this collaboration, students were able to tackle real business challenges, develop practical skills, and gain invaluable industry insights.

As part of the contest, students visited ABCO Systems and Capacity LLC to gain hands-on experience and an insider's view of industry practices. These visits offered an invaluable chance to interact with professionals, tour cutting-edge facilities, and develop solutions for improving daily business operations.



NEWS YOU CAN USE

RVCC TEAMS CREATE 11 GAMES DURING GLOBAL EVENT

11



RVCC's experience in Global Game Jam 2025 was a huge success, with 25 registered participants creating 11 video games. This year's Game

Jam theme focused on "bubbles." The RVCC teams featured Game Development alumni from 2010-2024, as well as current students. One participant had just started his first Game Development class at RVCC earlier that week, and he was able to create a working prototype for a video game by the weekend event. The College was one of 795 sites around the world hosting the Game Jam. In total, more than 12,000 games were made by over 35,000 people in 97 countries during the event.

In addition, RVCC Game Development student **Duncan Wade** was later honored at a Hunterdon County Board of County Commissioners meeting for his accomplishments in

the field of game development. Wade's work as part of the College's participation in the 2025 Global Game Jam was acknowledged during the meeting, and he also received a proclamation from the Board of Commissioners.

When presenting Wade with the proclamation, Commissioner Director **John Lanza** said, "On behalf of the entire Board, I would like to congratulate Duncan Wade on his dedication and talent in the art and science of video game development. The gaming industry continues to see extraordinary growth, creating a wealth of opportunities for students who have an interest in game design and development. Programs like the one at RVCC empower students to turn their creativity into meaningful and rewarding careers, and we wish Duncan continued success as he advances in his studies in game development."

STUDENTS PRESENT AT THRIVE CONFERENCE, OPPORTUNITY FAIR

12



RVCC students **Robert Lamptey** of Piscataway, **Nahary Boraai** of Flemington, and **Lucia Robertiello** of Scotch Plains participated in the 6th Annual

THRIVE Student Conference and Opportunity Fair, held this past winter at Middlesex College.

The three student leaders were given the opportunity to present their work at the conference through the sponsorship of The Pray Family Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement at RVCC.

Second-year Business major Robert Lamptey shared strategies implemented by the RVCC Resource Center and Food Pantry, which brings together both primary and secondary resources to empower underserved students. His unique ideas demonstrated how to combine education and relationship-building for students who lack available financial and personal resources, as well as support systems, to succeed in college that included creating a procedure manual. Lamptey began volunteering as a freshman at the RVCC Resource Center and Food Pantry and is now its part-time Community Outreach Coordinator. He also volunteers with the Somerville Public Works Department.

Nahary Boraai, a second-year Pre-Med major, spoke about her experience with the Flemington-Raritan First Aid and Rescue Squad, where she has volunteered since 2023. She shared why volunteering is important and how it can impact not only one's resume and portfolio, but also a person's character. Lucia Robertiello, a Digital Media/Film Studies and Visual Arts student, explored and highlighted how art can serve as a powerful ally in the ongoing fight for social justice. Robertiello is a crisis counselor and an artist, pursuing the intersections of civic engagement and creative endeavors.

All three students also received the President's Volunteer Service Award from the international nonprofit, Points of Life Foundation, for volunteering over 100 hours within a one-year period.

Hosted by EngageNJ, the conference drew over 150 students from two-year and four-year colleges from around the state. Following the keynote address, a series of breakout sessions featured workshops on a wide range of opportunities for students to connect and learn from one another. Topics included solutions to reducing food insecurity, taking action for justice, engaging in political protest,



NEWS YOU CAN USE

the value of volunteering, and building career pathways through community engagement. The Opportunity Fair provided an interactive space for students to learn from and work with professionals to develop their professional networks, skills, interests, and pathways to a meaningful career.

RVCC is a Founding member of EngageNJ, formerly called New Jersey Campus Compact. The 20 institutions forming EngageNJ include two-year and four-year colleges and universities in NJ committed to service learning and community engagement.

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STUDENT NAMED COCA-COLA ACADEMIC TEAM GOLD SCHOLAR 13

RVCC student **Amodh Naik** has been named a 2025 Coca-Cola Academic Team Gold Scholar and will receive a \$1,500 scholarship. Naik, a Computer Science major and President of the RVCC Computer Science Club, graduated from the College this spring and plans to transfer to a four-year school. The Coca-Cola Scholars Foundation sponsors the Coca-Cola Academic Team program by recognizing 50 Gold, 50 Silver, and 50 Bronze Scholars with nearly \$200,000 in scholarships annually. Each scholar also receives a commemorative medallion.

“The Coca-Cola Scholars Foundation has a long history of providing financial assistance to outstanding students at community colleges,” said Jane Hale Hopkins, President of the Coca-Cola Scholars Foundation. “We are proud to partner with Phi Theta Kappa to make it

possible for more deserving students to achieve their educational goals and support tomorrow’s global community leaders.”

Students are nominated for the academic team by their college administrators. Selection is based on academic achievement, leadership, and engagement in college and community service. Coca-Cola Academic Team members are being recognized in both local and statewide ceremonies. They also are being recognized internationally during Phi Theta Kappa’s annual convention, PTK Catalyst, in Kansas City, Missouri.

“We thank the Coca-Cola Scholars Foundation for recognizing these student leaders and for investing in their futures,” said **Dr. Lynn Tinchler-Ladner**, President and CEO of Phi Theta Kappa. “Scholarships like these are integral to the success of these students in reaching their educational and career goals.”

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STUDENT NAMED TO NATIONAL VOTING HONOR ROLL 14



The Pray Family Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement at RVCC and the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge (ALL IN) have honored **Calvin Edgar** of Somerville as part of the fourth annual ALL IN Student Voting Honor Roll. The 2025 ALL IN Student Voting Honor Roll recognizes college students at participating campuses who have gone above and beyond to advance nonpartisan student voter registration, education, and turnout efforts in their communities.

Edgar, who graduated from RVCC in December, is one of 232 college students who mobilized their peers to make their voices heard in an historic election cycle.

“Whether they hosted nonpartisan voter registration drives or early voting celebrations, the students honored today made sure their peers did not sleep in on Election Day,” said **Jen Domagal-Goldman**, executive director of the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge. “With 100,000 local elections happening across the country in 2025, ALL IN students continue to ensure that everyone on their campuses has the information they need to cast their ballot. The 232 Student Voting Honor Roll honorees lead by example, making nonpartisan voter participation a lifelong habit for themselves and their peers.”

“This incredible honor truly validates Calvin’s hard work and commitment to nonpartisan democratic engagement at Raritan Valley



NEWS YOU CAN USE

Community College,” said **Lori Moog**, RVCC’s director of Service Learning and Community Outreach. “While attending RVCC, Calvin proved to be a highly involved student who demonstrated his passion for engaging students in voting. He has a deep commitment to this work, which is evidenced by his leadership and participation with several important campus and community initiatives,” Moog continued.

An active member of the Somerville Democratic Committee, Edgar helped to lead the Raritan Valley Community College RVotes Matter initiative on campus to increase voter

registration among the student population. He also was an active participant in the ALL IN Challenge Voting Summit and Communities of Practice, learning about student voter engagement efforts regionally and nationally, as well as sharing his own ideas and practices with students.

Edgar began his educational journey as a Liberal Arts major at RVCC and, through his numerous engagement work with voting, decided to pursue a political science degree when he transferred to The College of New Jersey in the Spring 2025 Semester.

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RVCC STUDENT NAMED NEWMAN CIVIC FELLOW 15



RVCC student **Lila Seroy** of Whitehouse Station has been named a Newman Civic Fellow by Campus Compact, a national coalition of colleges and universities working to advance the public purposes of higher education. Seroy, a Business major who graduated this spring, is joining a group of 150 student civic leaders from 38 states, Washington, D.C., and Mexico who will comprise the 2025-2026 cohort of Newman Civic Fellows.

The Newman Civic Fellowship is a yearlong program that recognizes students who stand out for their leadership potential and commitment to creating positive change in communities. The Fellowship is named for the late Frank Newman, one of Campus Compact’s founders, who was a tireless advocate for civic engagement in higher education. In the spirit of Dr. Newman’s leadership, each fellow is nominated by their campus president or chancellor, who is invited to select one exemplary community-committed student from their campus each year.

The Pray Family Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement at Raritan Valley Community College is providing a generous stipend to support Seroy’s participation in the Fellowship.

“We are extremely honored that Lila Seroy has been recognized nationally and named a Newman Civic Fellow. Lila is a dedicated

student leader at Raritan Valley Community College, and she exemplifies an unwavering commitment to advocacy, community empowerment, and education for disadvantaged youth through her work at Visions and Pathways, a local nonprofit that supports at-risk and homeless youth,” said RVCC President **Dr. Michael J. McDonough**.

Through her service at Visions and Pathways, Seroy addresses the lack of awareness and resources for youth who have aged out of foster care or are facing homelessness. Her work involves expanding the organization’s outreach through digital marketing and community engagement to increase support and visibility for its vital programs. Seroy has created and implemented a strategic social media campaign to highlight success stories and engage the community in supporting the cause. She works closely with Visions and Pathways staff, who provide mentorship as nonprofit marketing professionals and access to social media analytics tools.

Seroy also is a recipient of the President’s Volunteer Service Award for the 2024-2025 academic year, having completed over 200 hours of service. She was also one of two Student Representatives on the RVCC Foundation Board of Directors.

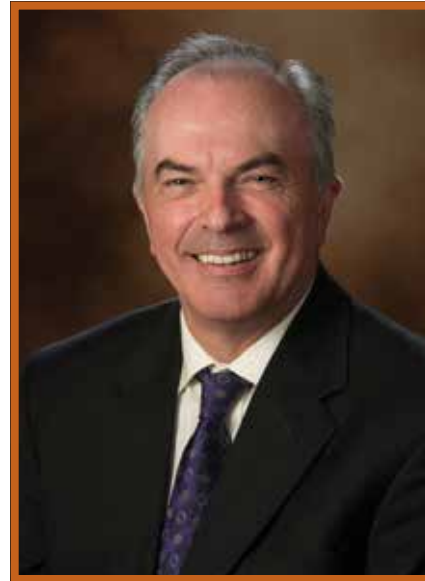


NEWS YOU CAN USE

RVCC PRESIDENT NAMED CLASS OF 2025 NEW JERSEY INNOVATE100 HONOREE

16

RVCC President **Michael J. McDonough** has been named a Class of 2025 New Jersey Innovate100 honoree. He, along with Middlesex College President **Mark McCormick** and Mercer County Community College President **Deborah E. Preston**, has been nominated by the New Jersey Council for County Colleges for their visionary leadership in establishing NJBioFutures, a public-private partnership between New Jersey's community colleges and the life sciences industry. The initiative was launched this winter at RVCC's newly expanded Workforce Training Center. The Class of 2025 New Jersey Innovate100 honorees were feted this spring at the Innovation Celebration, held at the New Brunswick Performing Arts Center.



RVCC'S CHAPTER OF HONOR SOCIETY WINS AWARDS AT INTERNATIONAL, REGIONAL CONVENTIONS



RVCC's chapter of Phi Theta Kappa (PTK), the honor society for two-year colleges, received

for three consecutive years; Distinguished Honors in Action, for its project titled "Beyond Ink: The Stories of Tattoos," focusing on how tattoos are an intricate type of storytelling, and people often use them to express stories of connection, survival, and motivation; Honors in Action Theme Award; Distinguished Chapter Officer – **Emily Rosalli**; and Distinguished Advisor Award – chapter co-advisors **Janelle Varin** and **Sara Banfield**.

Earlier in the spring, the RVCC chapter received several awards at PTK's Middle States Regional Convention, held at the Double Tree by Hilton Somerset Hotel and Conference

Center. The chapter's honors at the regional conference included: Distinguished Chapter; Distinguished Honors in Action Project; Chapter Officer – **Emily Rosalli**; Chapter Officer Team; and Distinguished Advisor Award – chapter co-advisors **Janelle Varin** and **Sara Banfield**.

multiple awards at recent conventions sponsored by the international organization. RVCC chapter members attended the PTK international convention, Catalyst, held this spring in Kansas City, MO, and received several prestigious awards, including: Distinguished Chapter – Beta Alpha Award, for chapters that have received a Distinguished Chapter Award



NEWS YOU CAN USE EXTRA

Play Ball!



It was a perfect night to celebrate Raritan Valley Community College at the Ballpark (TD Bank Ballpark—home of the Somerset Patriots, a valued "neighbor" of RVCC).

As it turns out, last summer's "The Big Picture" - themed event was so much more than a photograph: it was about partnerships and philanthropy and honoring Raritan Valley Community College staff, alumni and RVCC programs that are more than worthy of the spotlight. It was also about team building, community building, and relationship building.

We owe thanks to all 4,453 fans who came out to the Ballpark, and a special thanks to those who purchased the 269 "RVCC tickets" and helped establish "The Big Picture Scholarship"—the first crowd-funded scholarship ever at Raritan Valley Community College.

Our applause to the evening's honorees, including three from RVCC: **Lori Moog**, Director of Service Learning and Community Outreach, Pray Family Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement; **Rhonda Stewart**, Program Specialist, Paul Robeson Institute for Ethics, Leadership, and Social Justice; and **Michael**

McDonough, President. Along with RWJUH Somerset's **Serena Collado**, Director of Community Health, all were named "Best of Bridgewater & Branchburg" awardees, presented by **Vincent Farraro**, General Sales Manager of **Bridgewater KIA**. In addition, **Osei Kwadwo Boateng** (Class of 2016), was honored as recipient of the New Jersey Council of County Colleges' "Distinguished Alumni of the Year." Rounding out the ceremonies were on-field check presentations by Sanofi and RWJUH Somerset, that honored the Corporate Mentorship and Nursing programs at Raritan Valley Community College.

Huge thanks to RWJ's **Patrick Delaney**, Senior Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of RWJUH New Brunswick, and **Deirdre Blas**, Chief Administrative Officer; Sanofi's Vice President of Research, **Raquel Mura**; New Jersey Council of County Colleges' President **Aaron Fichtner**; Bridgewater Kia for the "Best of" honors (and **Kathy Fable** for facilitating the award); and Hunterdon County Chamber of Commerce Foundation's **Rosemary Fellner**, for announcing RVCC's induction into the organization's Business "Hall of Fame."

SPECIAL BONUS



"The Big Picture event was a wonderful celebration of our collective community, and an opportunity to feel genuine pride in our institution as we showcased the successes of RVCC students, alumni, staff, and key programs," said President McDonough. "It was also an important reminder of the generosity of our partners and just how important an anchor RVCC is to the counties we serve and New Jersey more broadly."

And to Raritan Valley Community College students **Ollie Johnson** (Class of 2024), **Katie Strong** (Class of 2025), and **Sarah Stefaniak** (Class of 2023): your rendition of the National Anthem was in a class of its own. **Amanda Moberg**: thanks for drone aerial capture. For RVCC's **Conrad Mercurius**, Executive Director of



Workforce Development & Career Education, no doubt that won't be your last "First Pitch."

And a special shoutout to the fans and RVCC faithful for coming out and cheering on the College and the Patriots. As for the Patriots' players, who staged an exciting 9th inning 7-6 walk-off win over the Reading Fightin Phils, three cheers for delivering the perfect finish to an already exceptional night and a just reward for your most loyal fans.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS: JULY 8, 2025

Next month the celebration of Raritan Valley Community College continues with "**The Big Parade**" at TD Bank Ballpark, as Somerset Patriots take on the New Hampshire Fisher Cats. Game Time: 6:35 PM (gates open at 5:30). A limited number of RVCC discounted tickets in Premium Field Box, Field Box and Upper Box are available on a first-come, first-served basis, and with every RV ticket purchased, you'll be supporting The Big Parade Scholarship at RVCC.



SPECIAL BONUS



New Life



A spirit, a symbol, a sapling.

On August 1, 1944, Anne Frank made her final diary entry. Just a few days later, she and seven other people, along with two helpers, were arrested by the Nazis. Six months later, Anne Frank would die in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, a few weeks before American forces would liberate it. She was 15.

But thanks to her diary, we know so much more about this remarkable young woman, and about courage, optimism, and faith. And thanks to the **The Anne Frank Center USA** and the Anne Frank Sapling Project, the campus of **Raritan Valley Community College** is now home to

a sapling from the original horse chestnut tree so important in the short life of Anne Frank.

"As long as this exists, how can I be sad?" she wrote of the beloved tree, which was visible from the attic in the Secret Annex where she hid for more than two years.

Raritan Valley Community College, one of only six new recipients of a sapling, dedicated its recent planting in honor of both Anne Frank and the late **Margit Feldman**, co-founder of RVCC's Institute of Holocaust and Genocide Studies and a survivor of the Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen concentration camps. The planting was supported by the **Jewish Federation of West-Central New Jersey**, a longstanding benefactor of the Institute.

"From my favorite spot on the floor," wrote Anne during her confinement, "I look up at the blue sky and the bare chestnut tree, on whose branches little raindrops glisten like silver, and at the seagulls and other birds as they glide on the wind."

Stars Are Rising – And Shining



STARS ARE RISING

When you have a star planetarium director, as Raritan Valley Community College does in **Amie Gallagher**, the possibilities are unlimited.

Witness the two stars in Amie's orbit, both of whom shined in support of April's "Stars are Rising" fundraising campaign event: **Neil deGrasse Tyson**, famed American Astrophysicist, who provided

a wonderful video welcome and **Charles Liu**, extragalactic observational astronomer, who offered inspiring post-dinner remarks.

Special thanks as well to our Raritan Valley Community College supporters and friends who came out for our first "public" event for this critical campaign on behalf of the Planetarium at RVCC. Our gratitude as well RVCC Foundation Board Vice Chair **Dan Van Tran**, for his generous leadership behind "Stars are Rising."

There will be more to report as progress is made toward the \$500,000 goal for much needed improvements at the Planetarium. But if you feel it's your time to shine, you can visit rarityval.edu/starsarising and make your gift of support now.



SPECIAL BONUS



NEWS YOU CAN USE **EXTRA**

A Public Good

This spring we witnessed an annual tradition—and a powerful transition—at the Paul Robeson Youth Achievement Awards ceremony on the Raritan Valley Community College campus. Established in 1990 by



Evelyn Field, a founding member of the RVCC Board of Trustees who was a dynamic and compassionate advocate for promoting diversity and equality on campus, the annual awards help to preserve Paul Robeson's legacy as a role model for excellence.

And on April 3, at the 34th Annual Paul Robeson Youth Achievement Awards, some 70 area middle and

high school students were celebrated for their accomplishments in service, academics, athletics and the arts. As part of their moment in the spotlight—"center stage"—at RVCC's Nash Theatre, these aspiring students got to experience public recognition that is all too rare for young people. For many, that public adulation will be part of their own transition: from accomplished, to honored, and ultimately, to inspired—inspired to do more and to be more.



But the real transition occurred at the end of the program, when it was announced that **Rhonda Stewart**—Program Specialist at the Paul Robeson Institute for Ethics, Leadership, and Social Justice at Raritan Valley Community College, and the spiritual leader and tour de force behind this annual event—was retiring. The 34th Annual would be her last. A lifetime of impact in education and leadership of young people was giving way to a well-earned "next chapter"—on her own terms and at her own pace.

Congratulations Rhonda: a life of service is your legacy, as are the countless talented students and achievers you've taught, guided, and helped develop.



SPECIAL BONUS



NEWS YOU CAN USE **EXTRA**

Addressing The Nursing Talent Shortage

This year, nearly half of U.S. hospitals report a nursing vacancy rate higher than 10%. In 2026, some 350,540 nursing positions across the county are expected to go unfilled. In New Jersey, which is projected to be among the top ten states with the largest nursing shortages in 2035, the work to address this shortfall continues at **Raritan Valley Community College**.

With dedicated faculty, a heritage of excellence,



Lisa Smith (RVCC Nursing Faculty, Skills Demo Lab) with Jessi L. Stewart (Nursing Simulation and Skills Lab Coordinator) with students in "Foundations of Nursing" Demo Lab

and a supportive community, Nursing at RVCC is a signature program. And student demand for available seats continues to exceed supply, largely due to limited physical space and other operational constraints.

With that said and thanks to the generosity of 11 distinguished benefactors who provide more than \$155,000 in scholarship support each year, 50 of our aspiring students are kept on path and ever-closer to attaining their goal of entering the Nursing profession. And while the resource needs for program growth remain significant, we'll keep graduating as many new nurses as possible each year and will hold the door open for any new supporters interested in adding to the impact at Raritan Valley Community College.



Some of the RVCC Nursing scholarship recipients: Gwen Loyola, Isabel Chango-Guaita, Eileen Garrity, Abigale James, Caitlin DeNaples, Elisangela Harrington, Derricka Christie, Leah Yacos

SPECIAL BONUS





Note Bene

"Take notice" indeed—from the big stage to the classroom, and everywhere in between. The Nota Bene Award Ceremony this spring on the campus of **Raritan Valley Community College** celebrated the "creative spirit and ingenuity" of 27 students, whose work spanned a range of disciplines, including poetry



RVCC student **Alicia Chapman**, performing "Songs of the Seasons" with accompaniment by RVCC Professor of Music, **John Sichel**

and essays, scientific research, musical performances, and visual arts. Huge praise to **Izabela Zieba**, RVCC Associate Professor of English, for so ably leading Nota Bene each year.

This sentiment—expressed by Raritan Valley Community College student **Noah McAvoy** about his Arts & Design Professor **Todd Lambrix**—about sums it up for all student honorees: "Thank you so much for acknowledging my hard work through the Nota Bene Award, and thank you, RVCC, and my professor for giving me the space to learn and grow, as a practicing artist."



RVCC student honoree, **Noah McAvoy**, with his Arts & Design Professor **Todd Lambrix**

Trustee Legacy Recognized

Michael Goldberg, member of the Board of Trustees at Raritan Valley Community College, was one of seven honorees at the **Somerset County Business Partnership 2024 Legacy Awards** ceremony in September. In addition to his years of board service on the **Somerset Food Bank Network**, Michael also serves as President of the **Somerset County Board of Taxation** and President of the **J.S. Henderson Scholarship Fund** Board of Trustees.



Left-to-right: **Karen Bearce**, Provost, RVCC; **Mike Marion**, Executive Director, RVCC Foundation & RVCC Alumni Association; **Douglas Singleterry**, Somerset County Commissioner; **Michael McDonough**, President, RVCC; **Michael Goldberg**, Legacy Award Honoree; **John Trojan**, Vice President, Finance & Facilities, RVCC

SPECIAL BONUS



Filling An Open House

Congratulations to all of the prospective inbound **Raritan Valley Community College** students and parents—well over 400 in total—who attended RVCC's Spring Open House.

Congratulations to all of the adult learners and non-traditional students who also attended and saw firsthand what an excellent choice Raritan Valley Community College represents.

Congratulations to RVCC's Strategic Enrollment

Management team (and all of the supporting cast) for putting together so comprehensive a program—compelling for anyone weighing what's next in their educational and life journey. Congrats, too, to all of the Raritan Valley Community College faculty and staff who were present and persuasive in the countless conversations they had with our prospective new students.

The RVCC Open House sessions present an exceptional opportunity to engage with students, parents and other family members, and to "make the case" for Raritan Valley Community College. To any prospective student who is considering RVCC as the next step in their educational journey, a single word response is a great discussion opener: "brilliant!"



SPECIAL BONUS

ONE FOR THE AGES!

RVCC Giving Day 2025 Sets New Fundraising Record!



Riding a “Be All In” theme, March 27 was an extraordinary day for **Raritan Valley Community College**, as its 24-hour Giving Day initiative raised a record \$203,653 for scholarships, student clubs and athletic teams, as well as a range of centers, institutes, and critical programs at RVCC. Energized by the return of a \$50,000 “match challenge,” and further amplified by the largest single Giving Day gift in the College’s history, this annual “give-a-thon” has become the top fundraising event of the year for the RVCC Foundation.

A huge portion of the day’s success was attributable to the return of two generous benefactors—**Jim and Jill Gibson** of Basking Ridge and the **Caruso Family Foundation**—whose \$50,000 in combined gifts fueled this year’s match challenge. “Offering the challenge was an easy decision for us,” said Jim Gibson. “We know how important the match is and we’re huge believers in RVCC and its impact.”

This year’s fundraising total represents a 32% increase in funds raised over last year’s Giving Day, and a 23% increase over the 2023 tally and the previous record of \$164,585. A total of 35 student clubs and athletic teams participated in this year’s fundraising efforts, which netted \$33,095—both were new records for the event. As part of the match, those funds raised by students will be doubled. In addition, this year’s Giving Day saw notable gains in RVCC alumni participation and in funds raised—both up by an impressive 30%.

This year’s fundraising total was significantly aided by the largest



single Giving Day gift ever—a \$50,000 contribution from **Lori Grossi** of Clinton. “My goal was to eventually endow the RVCC Scholarship for Fundamental Fairness, which I established in 2020 in memory of my husband, Jay,” said Ms. Grossi. “Giving Day presented a perfect opportunity for me to address the essential need for education in our country and honor the College, students, and leadership that I have become so passionate about supporting.”

“This year’s record-breaking results are inspiring and we can’t thank each donor enough—and especially The Caruso Family Foundation, the Gibsons, and Lori Grossi,” said **Michael J. McDonough**, President, RVCC. “Their generous support of our mission and our students provides an epic example for all.”

“The Caruso Family Foundation was honored to lend our support to RVCC’s Giving Day. The positive impact RVCC has on the lives of its students and our community is immeasurable and instrumental,” said **Anthony Caruso Sr.**

RVCC Giving Day 2025 also featured several new promotional partners from the area, including **Starbucks, Cold Stone Creamery, Il Forno Brick Oven Pizza, Shoprite, Carlucci’s**, and the **Oldwick General Store. The Stoney Brook Grille**, a long-time supporter of the College and its annual Giving Day, hosted the evening’s “Almost After, After Party” for RVCC faculty and staff—including RVCC retirees.

“This is the one day of the year when we ask the collective community to come together in a single, 24-hour period to demonstrate its support of the College,” said **Mike Marion**, Executive Director, RVCC Foundation and RVCC Alumni Association. “And when that community responds, it is an amazing thing to witness,” added Marion.

“We cannot be more appreciative of Jim and Jill Gibson, The Caruso Family Foundation, and Lori Grossi for their generosity, and for modeling the behavior and values we seek to instill in our students,” Marion said. “That may be their greatest gift.”



RVCC Giving Day 2025 donors were invited to select from a wide range of College programs, student clubs, RVCC Athletic teams, and other initiatives they wished to support, including the Student Resource Center and Food Pantry, The Pray Family Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement at RVCC, the Honors College, and Workforce Training Center, as well as a range of scholarship offerings. Donors also had the opportunity to “write in” additional giving preferences.

This year’s winners of the “**Patrick J. Fittipaldi Impact Award**”—which celebrates student success in support of RVCC Giving Day—were the Men’s Basketball team for the most funds raised (\$5,800) and the Women’s Basketball team for the most \$50+ donations (16).

My One Sure Thing

Mike Marion, Executive Director, RVCC Foundation and RVCC Alumni Association

The Resource Center & Food Pantry. Men’s Baseball Team. H.O.P.E. Club. Environmental Club. Student Nursing Association. Honors College. Women’s Volleyball Team. The Paul Robeson Institute. Sisters in STEM student club. These are a few of the many outstanding giving choices for tomorrow’s Giving Day at **Raritan Valley Community College**.

But I’m feeling the pull of a scholarship I helped establish when I was at Rutgers University. A scholarship which came with me when I made the move to the community college sector in 2018. What was once the Steven A. Cox Scholarship in Cancer Research at RU has morphed into the Steven A. Cox Scholarship in STEM at Raritan Valley Community College.

Steve Cox was beloved colleague at **AT&T** who lost his cancer battle back in 1991 at the age of 32. But his name lives on through this well-traveled scholarship. There were a good number of emerging young researchers who benefitted from it at Rutgers, including **Daniel Sharp, Christen Khella, Gaurav Mehta, Laura Poillet-Perez, Lizahira Rodriguez-Colon**, and **Vrushank Bhatt**.

At Raritan Valley Community College, the journeys of more exceptional students have been supported: **Valeria Gutierrez, Samantha Naulty, Julia Senkina, Josiane Costa Lima, Mayra Matos-Diaz, Rituben Patel, Hailey Kovacs, Pankti Patel, James Mazzocchi** and **Anna Quezada**.



Amid the wide range of giving options, this persistent little scholarship—Steven A. Cox Scholarship, and the support it delivers to ambitious, hardworking students—is my one sure thing.

Celebrating Generosity

It was an epic day for **Raritan Valley Community College**, with fundraising gains across all of our key constituents. The biggest winners? RVCC students, student clubs and athletic teams. Huge props to our generous donors behind the ‘match challenge’: **Jim and Jill Gibson** and the **Caruso Family Foundation**; and to **Lori Grossi**, for making the largest gift in RVCC’s nine years of Giving Day history. In total, more than 500 individuals and organizations chose to “be all in” and made Giving Day 2025 gifts in support of our scholarships, our student clubs, our athletic teams, our institutes, our centers, and our other priority programs. To everyone who participated in making this year’s Giving Day the most successful ever for Raritan Valley Community College, we THANK YOU!

SPREADING THE WORD

Janet Dunne of the **Raritan Valley Community College Foundation** promoting **GIVING DAY 2025** to members of RVCC’s Student Government Association. This year’s “**BE ALL IN**” theme was also a rallying cry to RVCC students, who each year play an integral role in this 24-hour extravaganza, which has quietly become the College’s biggest fundraising event of the year.



IN SERVICE

RVCC Programs Provide Hope, Opportunities, Support for Latino Students

For many young Latinos, their introduction to Raritan Valley Community College (RVCC) begins with **CRECER**, the College's outreach program for Hispanic students.

Held annually for more than 25 years, CRECER (meaning, "to grow")—and an acronym for Caring, Reaching, Educating, Connecting, Enriching, and Reaping—brings Latino students from area high schools to RVCC to help ease the transition to college. For some, the campus-wide event for approximately 200 students from underserved schools is their first experience with college life.

During the daylong event, students tour the Branchburg, NJ-based campus and meet with representatives from a variety of student services areas, academic departments, and workforce training programs. The goal of CRECER is to introduce Latino students to the vital tools they need to succeed in college. The initiative, which connects participants with Latino role models and essential College services, helps support students' academic growth and offers opportunities for career exploration. The event also celebrates Hispanic culture through music, food, and dance.

Organized by the Admissions and Recruitment department, CRECER receives assistance from the College's Orgullo Latino club, led by club president **Julio Marsiglia**, 21. Members of the club—which offers celebration, engagement, leadership, education, and mentorship—serve as bilingual tour guides and help moderate student discussions. Marsiglia, a Liberal Arts major who plans to teach high school Spanish in the future, says he wants to show CRECER participants that RVCC is affordable and within their reach. He also hopes to share the pride he feels as a Latino student at the College.

Marsiglia says that by interacting with other Hispanic students involved with campus life, CRECER participants meet people who are



JULIO MARSIGLIA, President of Orgullo Latino club

"just like them" who are thriving in college. "They see hope and faith and opportunities," says the Flemington, NJ, resident, whose parents emigrated from Colombia.

These students may then find a home at RVCC, which was designated as an Hispanic Serving Institution in 2022. Currently, 34% percent of the College's fulltime students identify as Latino. RVCC, which has a total enrollment of close to 6,800 students, serves New Jersey's Somerset and Hunterdon counties (at 18% and 10% Hispanic respectively).

Approximately 42% of degree and certificate-seeking students at the College received some form of financial aid in 2023-2024, and 31% of degree and certificate-seeking students received Federal Pell

Grant funds during that same period. In the last academic year, 822 Latino students at RVCC received more than \$3.7 million in the Federal Pell Grant. Overall, 1,080 Latino students received a total of \$6.2 million in aid.

Highlighting the importance of Hispanic students at RVCC, a Pillar of the College's current Strategic Plan includes metrics focusing on the graduation and transfer rates of Latino and Black/African American students.

The success of Latino students at the College is also exemplified by their increasing retention and graduation rates. Since fall 2020, the number of Latino students at RVCC has grown by over 22%, while overall student enrollment at RVCC has decreased by 4%. During this period, retention rates for first-time, degree-seeking Latino students have increased by more than 3%, and graduation rates for this population have increased by over 4%.

Much of this achievement is the result of programs like the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF), which provides financial, academic, and personal development resources to students who are traditionally

underserved. Its current enrollment of 216 students is 48% Latino. RVCC student **Esmeralda Ochoa**, 20, whose parents are Guatemalan immigrants, credits her participation in EOF with keeping her in college. While Ochoa excelled academically in high school, her first semester at RVCC was less successful and she even considered dropping out of college.

"Without the EOF program, I wouldn't be standing here at RVCC today," says the Flemington resident. The EOF staff members "believed in me when I didn't believe in myself. They are my mentors that I will never forget. They have provided me with nothing but support and kindness."

WITHOUT THE EOF PROGRAM, I WOULDN'T BE STANDING HERE AT RVCC TODAY

Esmeralda Ochoa



ESMERALDA OCHOA, Educational Opportunity Fund Scholar

Ochoa, who now has an A average, plans to attend law school in the future. The Communication Studies major visits area high schools with EOF staff members to speak about the program and share her story with other Latino students. She lists the many ways EOF has helped her through her educational journey, in addition to assisting her financially. This includes guiding her through decision-making; offering academic mentoring and extra assistance in the Tutoring Center; and even providing emotional support when times were especially challenging.

Being an EOF Scholar, Ochoa says, "has given me motivation to succeed in life." She believes the program helps her and other first-generation students to fully appreciate their own potential. "As a Latina, I feel there is nothing but support" at the College, she says.

RVCC also offers a variety of services for Latinos and other underserved students to support their personal, academic, and future career success. These include a Sanofi US Corporate Mentor Program that offers in-person mentoring from managers at Sanofi's office in Bridgewater, NJ, job shadowing, internships, and scholarship support, and a campus Resource Center and Food Pantry for those dealing with

food insecurity.

Some of the other resources available for Latino students and other Spanish-speakers in the community include an "En Español" section of the College's website, as well as a tool that translates the website into Spanish and other languages.

For those needing additional financial assistance, a variety of scholarships are available for Latino students and those from underserved communities, administered through the RVCC Foundation. The Latino Legacy Scholarship aids Hispanic students majoring in Business Administration, Business Management, General Business, Information



JOEL REYES-GUZMAN, with RVCC Scholarship recipient, **Jimena Torres**

Technology, Computer Science, or Data Science. The Joel F. Reyes-Guzman Scholarship, established by RVCC alum **Joel Reyes-Guzman**, offers support for graduates of Bound Brook High School, a local school with a large Latino population.

Reyes-Guzman, whose mother emigrated from Oaxaca, Mexico, is a Bound Brook High School alum who graduated from RVCC in fall 2014 with degrees in Mathematics and Engineering Science. He also received a Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Currently based in Los Angeles, he is an Airline Support Engineer with The Boeing Company.

Now a member of the RVCC Foundation Board of Directors, Reyes-Guzman says, "My ability to 'pay it forward'—yes, I know, cliché, but no less true—through the scholarship I've established at RVCC could not be more gratifying. If I can help one student each year—whether it's financial support, mentorship, or some combination of the two—I am both serving and being fulfilled by the community so near to my heart."

RVCC Alumni Association

Relaunched in 2022, the RVCC Alumni Association exists as an opportunity for the College's 19,000 active alumni to engage, connect, and keep abreast of all the developments at Raritan Valley Community College. And every year, in the RVCC Foundation Annual Report, we feature our Distinguished Alumni and highlight some of our alumni events on campus over the past 12 months. The truth is, RVCC alumni are everywhere, and we're proud to bring their journeys to light.



2024-25 DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD HONOREES

We are pleased to announce the recipients of this year's RVCC Distinguished Alumni Awards:



ANTHONY DEVERGILLO

Anthony was a member of the inaugural RVCC Honors College class, graduating in 2013 with an AA degree in Communications before transferring to *Rutgers* to complete his BA degree in Communications. Anthony serves as the Head of Digital Employee Communications at *Amicus Therapeutics* and has received numerous professional accolades, including the Microsoft Most Valued Professional award and the RARE *Champions of Hope* Nomination! Anthony loves gaming, but his ability to use the controller was affected by his rare muscle-weakening disorder called Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy. Rather than giving up one of his loves, Anthony used this as an opportunity to make things better for those similarly afflicted with rare diseases. He worked with "Playability Initiative" to develop an accessible controller that would allow

people with low mobility and dexterity to be able to continue socializing through gaming. That collaboration led to an invention called *Overjoyed* – a joystick overlay for Windows that would make games playable with only mouse or eye movement. *Overjoyed* was made available on the Microsoft Store through *Our Odyssey*, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to connect young adults living with a rare or chronic condition in order to improve social inclusion and accessibility. Anthony serves as Vice Board Chair of *Our Odyssey*, continuing to serve others, hosting virtual social meetups for the *Our Odyssey* community along with weekly music and gaming livestreams showcasing *Overjoyed*. Anthony's passionate advocacy also includes serving as an Ambassador for the nonprofit Jett Foundation, participating in panel discussions for Rare Disease Day.

CHARLENE GREEN

Charlene graduated from RVCC in 2019 with a Certificate in Human Services, earning Dean's List honors. After graduating from RVCC, Charlene went on to earn a certification in Family Engagement from HarvardX and Infant Family Associate. She did all this while balancing the responsibilities of being a mother of three. Charlene has served as the family and community advocate for *HOPES CAP Inc.* in Somerset, NJ, holding various positions, including as the policy council chair. Charlene is currently a board of trustee member for the *New Jersey*



Association of Infant and Mental Health. In 2024, Charlene earned the title and position of Social Worker for the *Somerset County Board of Social Services.* Charlene is also a published author, releasing an autobiography inspiring others to never stop pursuing their passions. Charlene is the proud owner of a holistic health practice called *You Are Not Your Past, LLC* and continues advocating, engaging, and inspiring others to persevere through adversity and to triumph! Charlene is also a parent leader for the *County Council for Young Children.* Charlene is a domestic violence survivor and has become a certified advocate for survivors of Domestic Violence. She has devoted her life to advocating for adult and youth mental health, exemplifying that the combination of perseverance, determination and hard work can allow anyone to achieve their goals and improve their lives.



MARC PELLEGRINO

Marc started at RVCC in 1994, earning credits while still in high school and achieved Dean's List multiple semesters while pursuing a Business Administration major at RVCC. Marc transferred to *Rutgers University*, earning his BA degree in economics and then on to *Fairleigh Dickinson University*, earning his M.S. in Administrative Science, along with graduate certificates in both *Emergency Management Administration* and *Homeland Security Administration.* Marc has been a NJ State Trooper for the past 20 years, currently holding the rank of Lieutenant. Some highlights of Marc's distinguished career include serving as the Incident Commander for the *NJ All-Hazards Incident Management Team* deployment to both Puerto Rico in response to Hurricane Fiona, and to Georgia in the aftermath of Hurricane Michael. Marc was also an Operations Section Chief for Super Bowl 48. Marc's professional accolades include a commendation for his work as Incident Commander during multiple COVID-19 missions and a Certificate of Appreciation from the *NJ Dept. of Military and Veterans Affairs* for his work on Albania's Disaster Preparedness assessment. Marc believes wholeheartedly in giving back to the community, having been a volunteer firefighter with the Somerville Fire Department for 22 years and the *Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)* Coordinator for Somerville. Marc also volunteered as a coach for his son's soccer teams and was also their Scout leader. Marc's greatest accomplishments are as a husband of 20 years and a father of three children (ages 17, 15, and 10). Marc's oldest is graduating high school this year and plans on attending RVCC to follow in his father's footsteps.



DOV LANDAU

Dov came to RVCC as a homeschooled student, attending RVCC for several years, before eventually accepting an appointment to the *US Military Academy* at West Point, graduating in 2020 with a B.S. degree in Defense and Strategic Studies with a focus on Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict. Upon graduation from *West Point*, Dov was commissioned into the United States Army as a Second Lieutenant in the Corps of Engineers, eventually rising to the rank of Captain, a position he currently holds. Dov's distinguished career includes serving as a Platoon Leader, overseeing the training of over 400 new combat engineers and bridge crewmen as well as supporting the Joint Task Force-Bravo (JTF-B) humanitarian assistance and evacuation efforts in Haiti during the coup that had occurred. Dov currently serves as the special projects officer in 1st Engineer Brigade's operations shop. Dov's professional accolades include being awarded the *Joint Commendation Medal*, *National Defense Service Medal*, *Global War Terror medal*, and *German Armed Forces Proficiency Badge.* While attending RVCC, Dov volunteered as an EMT on the Green Knoll Rescue Squad and also went on a mission trip to Liberia and upon his return, helped raise over \$70,000 to build a safe home for at-risk girls in Liberia. At RVCC, Dov was the president of the Hip-Hop Dance Club and served as the RVCC mascot at multiple events. Dov is currently stationed at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri with his wife, Skye Landau, who is also an Army captain in the Corps of Engineers. They live there with their two dogs, Bailey and Ruby.



STEPHANIE ZAYEK

Stephanie graduated from RVCC's Honors College in 2018 with an AS in Pre-Med before transferring to *Cornell University*, earning both her BS & MS in Materials Science & Engineering. While in college, Stephanie worked in an electrochemistry reliability and testing engineering research role, assembling half cell coin cell batteries with different formulations. In 2021, Stephanie joined *General Electric Research* as a Technical Research Intern, splitting time between both the Materials Physics & Chemistry team and the Characterization team, specializing in X-rays and characterizing materials such as powders, metals, and radioactive materials. While working at Lawrence Livermore National Labs from 2022 - 2023, Stephanie acquired a Q-level security clearance to work with classified materials, as well as an explosives handler certification from LLNL's High Explosives Application Facility (HEAF). She worked within the department of Physical Life Science's Materials Science Division in the *Reaction Dynamics Group* as a Research Staff Scientist II. Now, at *Astrophysics Inc.*, Stephanie is working on implementing security solutions with enhanced threat detections for *Astrophysics'* customers, including the US Department of Homeland Security and Customs and Border Protection. Stephanie is also involved in artificial intelligence (AI) projects for threat detection as well as other programmatic projects that require R&D efforts. Stephanie is a first author on the paper, "Epitaxial NaxCoO2 thin films via molecular-beam epitaxy and topotactic transformations: A model system for sodium intercalation" published in the *Journal of Physical Chemistry C* for her work done in graduate school. While at RVCC, Stephanie achieved the *Bronze Service Award* for volunteer work at Robert Wood Johnson (RWJ) Hospital, and Elijah's Soup Kitchen.

RVCC Alumni Association



OPPORTUNITY SUMMIT FOR RVCC ALUMNI

We love our alumni and the opportunity to network with them. Thanks to all for attending the “4th Annual Opportunity Summit for the Raritan Valley Community College Alumni Association” held on March 18. And thank you to our presenters, RVCC’s **Donyea Collins** and **Rikita Singh**, for sharing your work and ways that our alumni can engage with it, in support of the students at Raritan Valley Community College.



Osei Boateng and RVCC President Michael McDonough

STATEWIDE RECOGNITION FOR RVCC ALUMNI

Congratulations to **Osei Boateng** (RVCC Class of 2016), who was honored with the “Distinguished Alumnus Award” by the **New Jersey Council of County Colleges** in Atlantic City. Osei, who was a 2023-24 RVCC Distinguished Alumni Awardee, was recognized “For your visionary leadership and significant contributions that have brought honor to New Jersey’s Community Colleges.” His work through the OKB Hope Foundation to provide primary and preventive healthcare directly to rural, underserved, and vulnerable populations—especially those with no or limited access to health facilities—in his native Ghana has gained recognition nationally and internationally.

Stephen Everts in Turkey.



Congratulations to **Stephen Everts** (Class of 2024) of Frenchtown, a May 2024 graduate of RVCC, who graduated from RVCC Summa Cum Laude, was honored with the 2024 New Jersey Council of County Colleges “Student of the Year Award.” Stephen, who participated in the U.S. Department of State’s Critical Language Scholarship (CLS) Program to study Turkish, is one of approximately 500 American students at U.S. colleges and universities who were selected from over 5,000 applicants to study overseas or virtually in the summer of 2024.

SUMMER REUNION AT THE FARMHOUSE

It was a perfect evening to toast summer at the RVCC Foundation’s offices (aka The Farmhouse) at 74 Lamington Road. In what has become a tradition, RVCC alumni gather at the original farm house for the farm from which the College would eventually emerge. The agenda is simple: enjoy some networking, good food and drink, and toast summer’s arrival.



Victoria was the first undergraduate ever at Montclair State University to win the Concerto Vocal Competition. In this image, she is performing the aria *Donde lieta uscì* from Puccini’s *La bohème* with the Montclair Symphony Orchestra.

EXTRAORDINARY

We are so proud of RVCC music alumna **Victoria Mango** (RVCC Class of 2023). Some of the RVCC Foundation Golf Classic faithful will recall her signing of the National Anthem at the “18th Annual.” A native of East Brunswick, Victoria is a passionate vocalist and emerging artist pursuing her Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance at Montclair State University. After earning her Associate of Arts in Music from RVCC, she advanced her studies at Montclair State’s John J. Cali School of Music, where she trains under the guidance of her voice teacher Beth Roberts. She has also had the privilege of participating in masterclasses with legendary Baritone Sherrill Milnes, Mezzo-Soprano J’nai Bridges, and working privately with acclaimed conductor and coach Kamal Khan and Tenor Stéphane Sénéchal. On stage, Victoria has brought characters to life, including *Zelda*’24 in *The Ghost of Gatsby* by Evan Mack and Joshua McGuire, and *Giunone* in Francesco Cavalli’s *La Calisto*. Victoria had recently made her Carnegie Hall debut, singing the soprano solo in Dan Forrest’s *The Breath of Life*. This summer, Victoria will attend the Classic Lyric Arts program in Novafeltria, Italy, where she will train with acclaimed opera coaches and singers. As part of the program, she will also perform recitals, scenes, and solos in towns throughout the surrounding region.

“We feel blessed to have had Victoria Mango in our program at RVCC. She came to us as an aspiring musical theater singer with little formal training. She had tremendous raw talent, but her growth as an artist has been astounding, not only a tribute to her beautiful and powerful voice, her uncanny stage presence and her dedication to her art, but also a powerful demonstration of both the community college ideal and the excellence of our voice program under Dr. Will Berman. Bravissima Victoria!” -**Dr. John Sichel**, Professor of Music, RVCC Arts & Design Department

Recently made her Carnegie Hall debut singing the soprano solo in Dan Forrest’s *The Breath of Life* with the Montclair State University Singers and other combined choirs.



Most recent opera performance of Cavalli’s *La Calisto*, where she played *Giunone*, the wife of Zeus



STARS ARE RISING

Members of the RVCC Alumni Association gathered on campus at RVCC Planetarium October 24 to learn more about the “Stars are Rising” fundraising campaign and experience a special Halloween-themed program featuring the theater’s new digital projection system. The “Stars are Rising” initiative seeks to raise \$600,000 by June 30 to assist with upgrades of the lobby, exhibit space, and main entrance.




(L-R): Andres Arellano, Victoria DeStefano, Greg DeSanctis, Madeline Reese, Scarlett Simpson.



Visit us at:
raritanval.edu/community-resources/rvcc-alumni-association

IN SUPPORT Of Our Students



\$450,000 IN TOTAL SCHOLARSHIPS

264 STUDENT SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

73 TOTAL SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED

\$3,163,250 IN TOTAL SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS SINCE 2018

NEW SCHOLARSHIPS OFFERED FOR 2025-2026 ACADEMIC YEAR

BUSINESS, NURSING, AND OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ASSISTANT MAJORS

WILLIAM AND SHEILA BROWN KLINGER BULL MARKET SCHOLARSHIP AT RVCC

Available to first or second-year full-time RVCC Student majoring in Business and residing in Somerset County.

WILLIAM AND SHEILA BROWN KLINGER HEALING TOUCH SCHOLARSHIP AT RVCC

Available to first or second-year full-time RVCC Student majoring in Nursing and residing in Somerset County.

THE HELENA GARDNER SCHOLARSHIP AT RVCC

Was established to support individuals enrolled in RVCC’s Occupational Therapy Assistant program and is available for 1st or 2nd year full-time students who are taking a minimum 12 hours.

NEW ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP FUNDS

A **\$50,000** gift was received from **Catherine Gardner** to establish the **Helena Gardner Endowed Scholarship Fund** to support students enrolled in the Occupational Therapy Assistant (OTA) program—through the newly created **Helena Gardner Scholarship** at RVCC. “It is my pleasure to be able to create something like this in my mother’s name. She was a wonderful and caring individual who never had the chance to go to college, so this is a fitting tribute to her,” said Gardner, who is an adjunct instructor in the OTA program.

A **\$50,000** gift was received from **Lori Rayner-Grossi** to establish the **Lori Rayner-Grossi Endowed Scholarship Fund** at RVCC. The fund will be used to support students through the existing **Scholarship for Fundamental Fairness Remembering the Life of the Honorable John J. Grossi, Jr.** at RVCC, which Rayner-Grossi established in memory of her late, beloved husband, “Jay.” “My husband was dedicated to education and felt that it was the best gift his parents ever gave to him,” said Rayner-Grossi. “Together we set out to try and

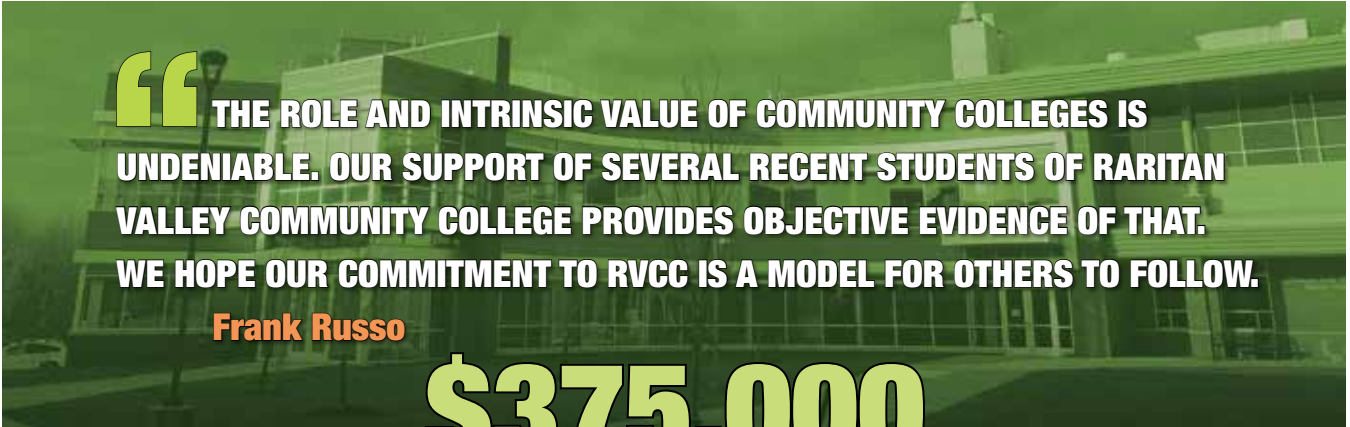
share how and when we could, with others, to make the gift of education possible. ‘Fundamental Fairness’ is actually an underlying concept of our legal system—one that Jay felt very strongly about. May we all continue to live according to its principles.”

VETERANS

JG PETRUCCI MILITARY SERVICE SCHOLARSHIP AT RVCC

This first-ever scholarship specifically for the children of military service veterans will be awarded to up to three (3) students annually and will cover tuition, books, fees, and would be available to full-time students (12 credits in each of the fall and spring semesters) or students taking 6 or more credits who are also working 20 hours or more while attending RVCC.

IN SUPPORT Of Our Students



“THE ROLE AND INTRINSIC VALUE OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES IS UNDENIABLE. OUR SUPPORT OF SEVERAL RECENT STUDENTS OF RARITAN VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROVIDES OBJECTIVE EVIDENCE OF THAT. WE HOPE OUR COMMITMENT TO RVCC IS A MODEL FOR OTHERS TO FOLLOW.”

Frank Russo

\$375,000

LARGEST SCHOLARSHIP GIFT IN RVCC HISTORY

Frank and Pat Russo both enjoyed storied careers in the telecommunications industry, at AT&T, and then, for Patricia, as CEO at Lucent Technologies. They were difference makers in the corporate world and have carried that forward into a range of philanthropic interests. One beneficiary of their generosity is Raritan Valley Community College, where the Russos established the **Frank S. and Patricia F. Russo Scholarship** in 2019. At that time, it was the most generous scholarship offered at RVCC, and it has been awarded to five students each year since its inception.

“I know what it means to struggle or lose focus or maybe not even have the motivation to excel at all. That describes the early part of my life’s journey,” says Frank. “But I eventually learned the importance of perseverance and determination. And with help along the way, including attending a community college in upstate New York, I overcame these obstacles. There are few things as gratifying as now having the ability to ‘pay that forward’ at RVCC.”

The Russos’ generosity also helped transform RVCC’s annual “Giving Day” fundraising event by offering the first ever “Match Challenge,” which they did for two consecutive

years (at \$50,000 per). That infusion was directly responsible for the unprecedented growth and success of Giving Day—making RVCC’s Giving Day the most successful fundraising event of the year, and the most successful of any of New Jersey’s 18 community colleges.

Adds Pat, herself a graduate of Georgetown University, “New Jersey was an important part of our lives and livelihoods; we raised our family there and made our career marks there. And while we don’t reside in the state any longer, we haven’t forgotten our roots and greatly value the role of education in helping people succeed in life and advance their economic interests. The role of community colleges in that quest could not be more unique and valuable. We recognize that and are more than happy to support Raritan Valley Community College.”

Last fall, the Russos decided to propel their scholarship well into the future, with a \$375,000 gift to allow for five full scholarships in each of the next 10 years. It is the largest scholarship commitment in the College’s history.

“The role and intrinsic value of community colleges is undeniable,” adds Frank. “Our support of several recent students of Raritan

Valley Community College provides objective evidence of that. We hope our commitment to RVCC is a model for others to follow.”



Lucas Winkler, one of four recipients this year of the **Frank S. and Patricia F. Russo Scholarship** at RVCC, which is among the most generous at the College. This fall he will be attending the University of Buffalo to get a bachelor’s in pharmaceutical science—a field in which he ultimately plans to pursue a PhD. What about the epic cold and the snow of Buffalo? “I’m a snowboarder so I’m looking forward to it,” said Lucas. “And I’ll be big fan of the Buffalo Bills too.” Adds Lucas, “I could not be more grateful to Mr. and Mrs. Russo—their generosity has been a difference-maker for me.”

IN SUPPORT Of Our Students

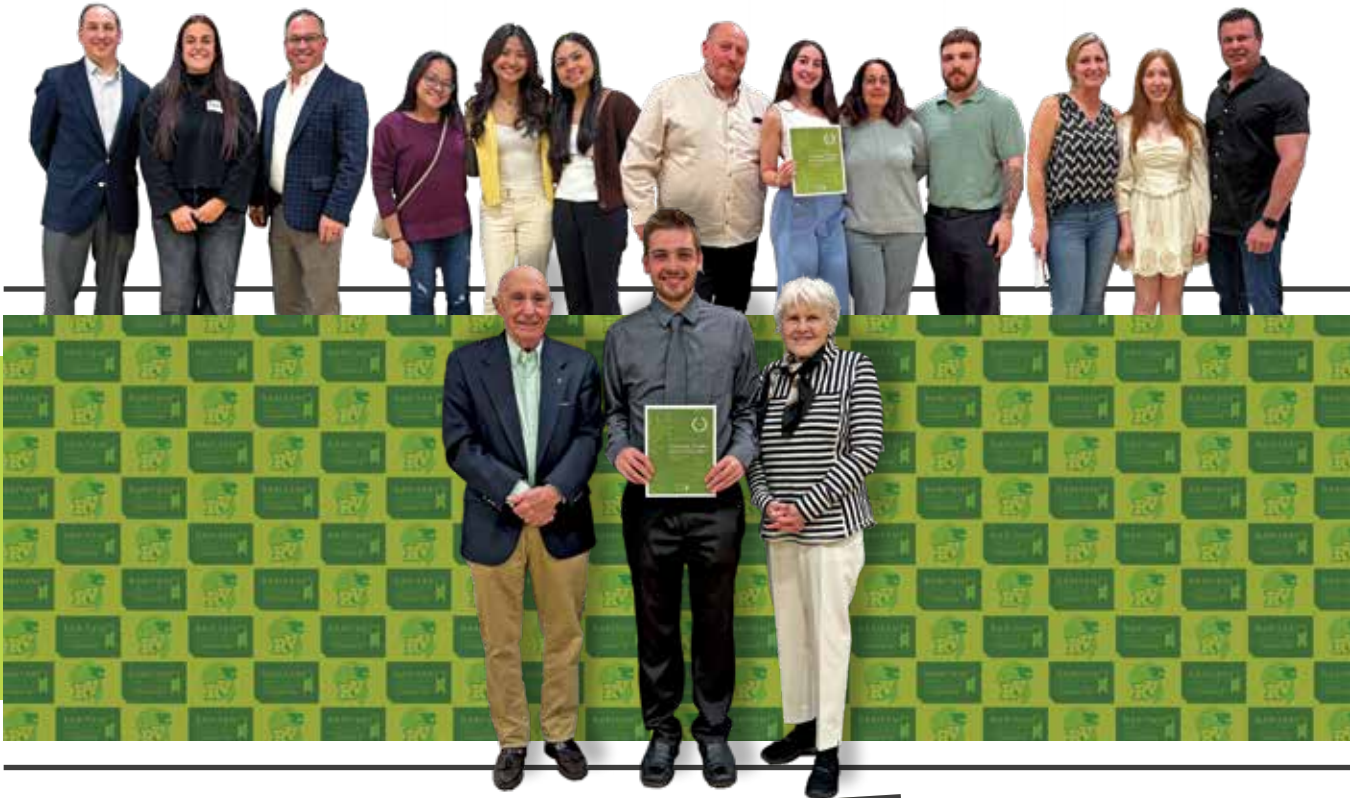


**20TH ANNUAL RVCC FOUNDATION SCHOLARSHIP RECEPTION
WELCOMES LARGEST GROUP IN 10 YEARS.**

For the twentieth time, we made a night of it. Students and families, their scholarship benefactors and distinguished guests—some 146 in all—gathered in April at the Event Center at Raritan Valley Community College to celebrate and offer thanks.

Scholarship donors are a vital part of the RVCC community and play a crucial role in the journeys of RVCC students. In addition to extending much needed financial support, their generosity also provides affirmation and encouragement—fundamental to successful student outcomes. Our gratitude is genuine and deep.

To our featured speakers—President **Michael McDonough**, Student Government President **Vic Komosinski** (Class of 2025), RVCC Foundation Board member and funder behind the Patricia Critelli and Norman Somer Scholarships, **David Bunevich**, Coordinator of the RVCC Adult Learning Experience (RVCC Class of 2014), **Michelle Amparbin**, MPA, and especially our students: **Esmeralda J. Ochoa-Lopez** (Class of 2025) and **Justin Britten** (Class of 2025)—thank you for bringing the impact of philanthropy into meaningful focus.



IN SUPPORT Of Our Students



ARTS & DESIGN AT RVCC

ARTS & DESIGN AT RVCC IS A CREATIVE, challenging, and exciting department in which to study the arts. Students majoring in either Visual Art or Graphic & Interactive Design enter their respective discipline with raw talent and an eagerness to learn. During the first year of their journey, they complete rigorous studio courses focused on learning the essential fundamentals and bolstering their skillset, and spend the second year developing a mastery of discipline-specific skills while discovering their personal, creative voice. With these newly acquired assets, RVCC Visual Art and Graphic & Interactive Design majors graduate bursting with talent, owning impressive portfolios, and ready for any opportunity that presents itself. In fact, many AFA degree recipients transfer to some of the country's top visual art and graphic design programs such as Kean University, School of Visual Arts, Mason Gross School of the Arts, and School of the Art Institute of Chicago; while others go on to find employment in talent-based industries. RVCC's prime location just an hour outside both New York City and Philadelphia benefits Arts & Design as the department attracts talented teaching artists with coveted experience and recognition in their respective fields. We hope you enjoy the selection of student work on this spread and please scan the QR code to see more of our amazing student work on the RVCC Art Gallery Instagram feed.



TRINITY PLATTEN
MAJOR: **VISUAL ART**

GRADUATING SPRING 2026
"Self Portrait"
Charcoal, conte & graphite on paper
CLASS: Drawing 1
SEMESTER/YEAR: Spring 2024
INSTRUCTOR: Kathy Schulz



DARIA BILAN
MAJOR: **VISUAL ART**

GRADUATING SPRING 2026
"Landscape via Optical Mixing"
Gouache on Bristol board
CLASS: Color Theory
SEMESTER/YEAR: Spring 2025
INSTRUCTOR: Angeles Cossio



KAYDEN SAWYER
MAJOR: **VISUAL ART**

GRADUATING SPRING 2025
"Limited Time"
Mixed media on paper
CLASS: Drawing 2
SEMESTER/YEAR: Spring 2025
INSTRUCTOR: Ji Yong Kim



JACQUELINE SHOTYK
MAJOR: **GRAPHIC & INTERACTIVE DESIGN**

GRADUATING FALL 2025
"Self Portrait: A Mirror and a Window"
Adobe Illustrator & Mixed Media
CLASS: Digital Artmaking
SEMESTER/YEAR: Fall 2024
INSTRUCTOR: Darren McManus



JACQUELINE SALVATO
MAJOR: **VISUAL ART**

GRADUATING SPRING 2025
"Quarters!"
Acrylic on canvas
CLASS: Portfolio Development: Studio Art
SEMESTER/YEAR: Spring 2025
INSTRUCTOR: Todd Lambrich



ANTONIO ALFARO
MAJOR: GRAPHIC &
INTERACTIVE DESIGN

GRADUATING SPRING 2025
"GEMBA '24 Branding Materials"
Adobe Illustrator & Photoshop
CLASS: Visual Design 2
SEMESTER/YEAR: Fall 2024
INSTRUCTOR: Darren McManus



VIRGINIA BALDI
MAJOR: GRAPHIC &
INTERACTIVE DESIGN

GRADUATING FALL 2025
"Garamond 'G' Compositions"
Adobe Illustrator using only Garamond 'G'
CLASS: Typography
SEMESTER/YEAR: Spring 2025
INSTRUCTOR: Darren McManus



DENISSE SANCHEZ TLANIPA
MAJOR: GRAPHIC &
INTERACTIVE DESIGN

GRADUATING SPRING 2025
"Reflections 1-4" (series of 12)
Adobe Illustration & Photoshop
Class: Portfolio Development: Graphic Design
Semester/Year: Spring 2025
Instructor: Darren McManus

HALL OF FAME HONORS FOR RVCC



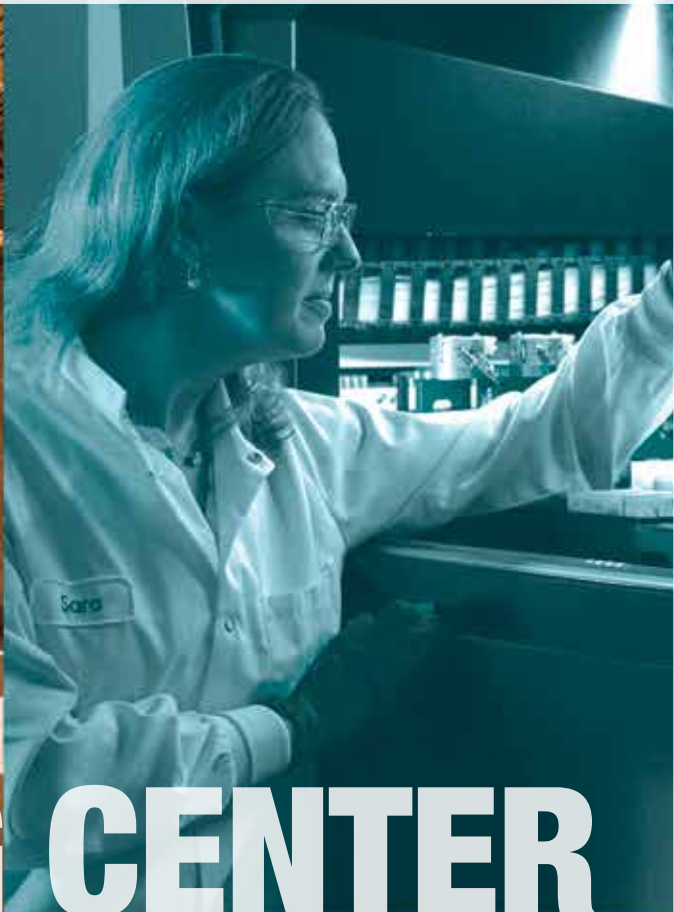
Jeff Kuhl, Hunterdon County Commissioner Director; Chamber of Commerce Board member **James Robinson**; Chamber of Commerce board member and County Commissioner **Shaun Van Doren** (RVCC Class of 1991); **Nicholas Pellitta**, Chamber Counsel; RVCC's **Karen Bearce**, **Michael McDonough**, **John Trojan**, **Mike Marion**; Hunterdon County Chamber of Commerce President and CEO, **Christopher Phelan**

The **Hunterdon County Business Hall of Fame** was established to honor current and past business leaders, businesses & organizations, who have made important contributions to the Hunterdon County business community. Last November, six inductees were recognized as part of the 2024 class: **Edward J. Kurowicki** (*Distinguished Leader Award*), **Unity Bank** (*Contemporary Award*), **Stem Brothers** (*Contemporary Award*), **Gebhardt & Kiefer, P.C.** (*Pioneer Award*), Hunterdon County Clerk Hon. **Mary H. Melfi** (*Essence of Hunterdon Award*) and **Raritan Valley Community College** (*Essence of Hunterdon Award*).

Notes **Christopher Phelan**, President and CEO of the Hunterdon County Chamber of Commerce, "we celebrate Raritan Valley Community College not only for its outstanding educational contributions but also for its unwavering commitment to community enrichment, sustainability, and student success."

"It's a true honor to recognize an institution that has become a pillar of education, innovation, and community engagement in New Jersey," adds Phelan. "Since its founding in 1966, Raritan Valley Community College has been committed to empowering students of all backgrounds to achieve their dreams and make meaningful contributions to society."

We applaud RVCC for preparing students not only for transfer to top universities but also for equipping them with hands-on skills for today's rapidly changing job market. This award recognizes their innovative initiatives and commitment to fostering leadership, critical thinking, and real-world experience."



TAKING CENTER STAGE

WORKFORCE TRAINING AT RVCC

As the community college sector ascends to its well-earned time as “the star of the college show,” workforce training provides a critical point of difference from traditional four-year post-secondary institutions. The Workforce Training Center (WTC) at Raritan Valley Community College is a dynamic and nimble engine for regional economic development. It provides high-impact, noncredit training that connects individuals to in-demand careers. Aligned with RVCC’s mission to empower individuals and strengthen communities, the WTC serves over 2,000 learners annually through a wide range of industry-aligned programs. In sum, it represents both the present and the future...

MEETING THE DEMAND

RVCC WORKFORCE TRAINING CENTER EXPANSION CONNECTS EDUCATION AND INDUSTRY



This summer, Raritan Valley Community College is set to open its expanded Workforce Training Center (WTC), highlighting the College’s commitment to keeping pace with changing talent needs and bridging the gap between education and industry.

The 22,000 square foot expansion—which increases the facility by 50%, to a total of 65,700 square feet—will enable the College to align curricula and training with workforce needs and offer experiential learning in such areas as Biomanufacturing and Aseptic Processing, Electric Vehicle Technology, Mechatronics and Robotics, and Welding.

“The expanded Workforce Training Center will transform our campus, enabling RVCC to provide students and the community with cutting-edge facilities and programs. These advancements are a terrific example of the College’s innovative public-private partnerships, as we collaborative with industry to ensure that our students are well skilled and our programs keep pace with emerging workforce demands,” said RVCC President **Dr. Michael J. McDonough**. “To further support these labor needs, the WTC addition will include state-of-the art facilities and equipment, providing

students with hands-on training to seamlessly transition into jobs, and creating a highly talented workforce pipeline.”

The State of New Jersey, Somerset County, and Hunterdon County are funding the \$9.8 million expansion. “RVCC’s Workforce Training Center expansion would not have been possible without the tremendous public support from the State of New Jersey and our home counties Somerset and Hunterdon, and we are extremely grateful for their support in making these advancements possible,” Dr. McDonough said.

One of the highlights of the WTC expansion is the cutting-edge facility housing the College’s new Aseptic Biomanufacturing program, a groundbreaking venture designed to meet the growing need for well-trained professionals in the biopharmaceutical industry.

“With the demand for highly skilled aseptic manufacturing professionals at an all-time high, RVCC’s new Aseptic Biomanufacturing initiative is set to play a crucial role in New Jersey’s biotech and life sciences sector. By equipping students with industry-recognized certifications, hands-on instruction, and direct connections to leading biopharma employers, the program is shaping the workforce of the

future,” added Dr. McDonough.

The Aseptic Biomanufacturing program will provide hands-on training in Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP), aseptic processing, and biomanufacturing techniques to prepare students for critical roles in cell and gene therapy, aseptic biopharma production, and related fields. Aseptic Biomanufacturing will be housed in a 3,180 square-foot area that will feature a biotechnology lab and cleanroom. These industry-standard facilities are equipped with advanced biopharmaceutical manufacturing equipment, ensuring that students gain practical, real-world experience. The biotechnology lab will include specialized equipment for cell culture, molecular biology, and aseptic processing techniques that are essential for biopharmaceutical production. The cleanroom will feature a fully functional GMP-compliant environment where trainees will learn how to work in classified cleanroom spaces, practice sterile techniques, and perform aseptic operations in accordance with industry regulations.

The Aseptic Biomanufacturing training will include three specialized certificate programs: a GMP Professional Certificate, an Aseptic Cleaning Certificate, and an Aseptic Biomanu-

facturing Certificate. Program graduates will be well-prepared for employment in such positions as Cell Processing Specialist, Aseptic Production Associate, and Manufacturing Technician in the rapidly expanding biopharmaceutical and advanced therapy industries.

RVCC's new Aseptic Biomanufacturing program has been developed in collaboration with some of the world's leading biopharma-

other industry partners, will bring together experts from education, government, industry, and community stakeholders to offer differentiated training programs, state-of-the-art facilities, and industry-responsive curricula to help build a pipeline for new and emerging high-demand roles in New Jersey.

As part of this effort, RVCC, along with Middlesex College and Mercer County Commu-

expansion at RVCC.

Other areas of the Workforce Training Center expansion that will accommodate growing employment areas include a 4,600 square foot space for Electric Vehicle (EV) Technology training. As the number of electric vehicles increases on the road, resulting in an ever-growing shortage of qualified electric vehicle technicians to service them, RVCC has



ceutical companies, including Johnson & Johnson, Bristol Myers Squibb, Novartis, Merck, BeiGene, and Cellares.

"These vital corporate partnerships ensure that the College's Aseptic Biomanufacturing program aligns with the latest industry needs, giving students access to cutting-edge training, networking opportunities, and potential employment pathways," said **Conrad Mercurius**, Executive Director of Workforce Development and Career Education at RVCC.

Adding to these collaborations, the WTC expansion is home to the newly launched NJBioFutures, a groundbreaking workforce development coalition aimed at creating a sustainable, skilled talent pipeline to support New Jersey's rapidly expanding cell and gene therapeutics sector.

The NJBioFutures initiative, established by New Jersey Pathways to Career Opportunities with support from Johnson & Johnson and

"RVCC's Workforce Training Center expansion would not have been possible without the tremendous generosity we have received from Somerset and Hunterdon County, and we are extremely grateful to the counties for their support in making these advancements possible."

Dr. Michael J. McDonough

nity College, will provide short-and long-term training and certification programs on cell and gene therapy biomanufacturing, biotechnology, and biopharmaceuticals. These programs will provide hands-on experience and prepare students for rewarding careers in an industry that is expected to continue its rapid growth. The sector was valued at \$30.27 billion in 2024, and it's projected to reach more than \$190 billion by 2033, according to Straits Research.

As a founding sponsor of the NJBioFutures coalition, Johnson & Johnson is contributing \$1 million to support the development of curricula and modernization of training and lab facilities on each college campus, including the WTC

responded to this need by adding EV training to upgrade its award-winning Automotive Technology program to create a talent pipeline for EV service technicians.

The EV lab expansion and curriculum were created with industry guidance from both the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) and the NJ Pathways to Career Opportunities statewide initiative. The curriculum also will focus on equipment and tool safety. An engine/transmission repair lab will be used for rebuilding engines and transmissions, and storage space for heavier equipment such as engines and transmissions is being included. The expansion will allow the Automotive Technology program to offer greater opportunities by enabling the College to open new sections, serve an additional 24 students, and provide the EV courses in the evening.

The WTC expansion also features a 1,700 square foot space for Mechatronics—an

interdisciplinary branch of engineering that integrates mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, electronic engineering, and software engineering—and Robotics. There, students will earn in-demand industry credentials to become entry-level production mechatronics and maintenance technicians, gaining a foundational understanding of mechanical, electrical, and computer-controlled

construction is a dynamic 800-square-foot collaborative space designed to unite large-scale equipment manufacturers, learners, employers, and industry experts in one innovative environment. As a demonstration site and a hands-on learning lab, the showroom will showcase cutting-edge technologies and advanced machinery, creating real-time problem-solving and experimentation opportunities. This facility

machinery and build direct relationships with employers seeking skilled talent. Manufacturers will benefit from real-time engagement with industry partners interested in upgrading their machine capabilities and scaling their operations. Employers will stay ahead of emerging trends, engage in collaborative problem-solving, and identify promising candidates to strengthen their workforce. The showroom



Joe Epifano of Epic Management, Inc and Tara Dohoney of USA Architects, Planners + Interior Designers, with Raritan Valley Community College's Brian O'Rourke (far left) and John Trojan (far right)

systems used in modern automation and manufacturing. Students will explore key concepts in robotics, sensors, actuators, and programmable logic controllers (PLCs) to develop hands-on, problem-solving skills for high-tech industries. The program will help create a talent pipeline for workers who are well-skilled in machine maintenance and quality control specifications.

Students will have the opportunity to earn stackable welding certificates and increase their earning potential in a 1,600 square foot Welding Lab. The facility also will offer welders, inspectors, and technicians the opportunity for professional development to earn extra credentials. These well-trained workers will be highly sought by area manufacturers and facility managers, who will be able to employ welders to keep their operations running smoothly and avoid costly delays.

The manufacturing showcase under

aims to foster cross-sector collaboration, accelerate the adoption of new manufacturing technologies, and support workforce development by immersing learners in an environment where theory meets practice and innovation drives progress.

This interactive space will feature advanced manufacturing equipment from leading manufacturers eager to showcase cutting-edge technology and connect with potential customers and collaborators. Learners will gain hands-on experience with the latest

is designed to foster a cycle of innovation, talent development, and economic growth across the manufacturing ecosystem.

Adding to the new facilities are two standard classrooms, each measuring 1,150 square feet, which will provide a conducive learning environment for the more traditional instructional portion of the workforce training programs.

Industry partners and community leaders have the opportunity to participate in the educational training of RVCC students by utilizing classroom spaces where they may interview student candidates, make industry presentations, and conduct other high-impact practices.





**RVCC TO LEAD CENTER OF
WORKFORCE INNOVATION
FOR ASEPTIC PROCESSING
AND BIOMANUFACTURING**

Raritan Valley Community College will be the Lead Institution for the Center of Workforce Innovation for Aseptic Processing & Biomanufacturing, as part of the New Jersey Pathways to Career Opportunities Initiative. This leadership role includes its position with NJBioFutures, a public-private partnership between New Jersey’s community colleges and the life sciences industry. As the Lead Institution, RVCC will serve as the ambassador for the Center of Workforce Innovation for Aseptic Processing & Biomanufacturing, providing strategic leadership and elevating its influence.

In partnership with community colleges throughout the state, RVCC is also involved with additional Centers of Workforce Innovation and projects, including:

- *The Center of Workforce Innovation for Manufacturing & Supply Chain Logistics, focusing on 3D Printing*
- *The Center of Workforce Innovation for Learning, Teaching & Research, with RVCC’s main charge centering on the Essential Learning, General Education & Career Competencies Collaborative*
- *The Center of Workforce Innovation for Renewable Energy’s Electric Vehicle Internship and Faculty Development Pilot*

The New Jersey Pathways to Career Opportunities Initiative, funded by Governor Murphy and the state legislature since FY22 and led by New Jersey’s Community Colleges and the New Jersey Business and Industry Association (NJBIA), continues to build on its unprecedented collaborative effort to align education and training with the rapidly evolving

needs of employers, ensuring the development of a highly skilled workforce.

“RVCC’s leadership role in the Center of Workforce Innovation for Aseptic Processing & Biomanufacturing highlights its commitment to ensuring that our graduates are well trained to keep up with emerging industry demands and our programs are shaping the workforce of the future,” said RVCC President **Dr. Michael J. McDonough**. “The College’s emphasis on innovative public-private partnerships, industry-valued credentials, and strategic outreach highlights its efforts to provide students with seamless transition into jobs or continued training in business and industry,” added Dr. McDonough.

“As we continue to advance this groundbreaking initiative, we are taking strategic steps to enhance our impact, with a particular focus on our Centers of Workforce Innovation and empowering the Lead Institutions to drive meaningful change. This year, we introduce new pathways in fields such as Geographic Information Systems and 3D Printing, while strengthen-

ing existing pathways to ensure they remain aligned with evolving industry needs,” said **Catherine Starghill**, Vice President, New Jersey Council of County Colleges (NJCCC) and Executive Director, New Jersey Community College Consortium for Workforce and Economic Development. “The role of Lead Institutions is more vital than ever, as they serve as ambassadors through strategic leadership for their respective Centers, ensuring effective collaboration and measurable progress.”



NJCCC's Aaron Fichtner with RVCC's Michael McDonough and Karen Bearce

**NEW JERSEY'S EIGHT CENTERS OF WORKFORCE INNOVATION
(and their associated industry sectors)**

TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

Center of Workforce Innovation for Data & Computer Science

HEALTH SERVICES

Center of Workforce Innovation for Patient Care

INFRASTRUCTURE & ENERGY

*Center of Workforce Innovation for Construction
Center of Workforce Innovation for Renewable Energy*

MANUFACTURING & SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT

Center of Workforce Innovation for Manufacturing & Supply Chain Logistics

EMERGING INDUSTRIES

*Center of Workforce Innovation for Film & Television Production
Center of Workforce Innovation for Aseptic Processing & Biomanufacturing
Center of Workforce Innovation for Learning, Teaching & Research*



LAUNCH PAD

**NJBIOFUTURES CREATES A NEW TALENT PIPELINE
FOR CELL AND GENE THERAPY INDUSTRY**



The **New Jersey Council of County Colleges (NJCCC)**, with support from **Johnson & Johnson** and other industry partners, has launched NJBioFutures, a groundbreaking workforce development coalition aimed at creating a sustainable, skilled talent pipeline to support New Jersey’s rapidly expanding cell and gene therapeutics sector.

The cell and gene therapy field has seen exponential growth over the past few years, with transformational advancements in treatments for cancer, autoimmune, neurological and genetic disorders. However, the sector is also facing a shortage of skilled workers to support this growth.

To address this need, the NJBioFutures coalition will bring together experts from education, government, industry and community stakeholders to offer differentiated training programs, state-of-the-art facilities, and industry-responsive curricula to help build a pipeline for new and emerging high-demand roles in New Jersey. As part of this effort, leading community colleges, **Raritan Valley Community College, Middle-**

sex College and **Mercer County Community College**, will provide short-and long-term training and certification programs on cell and gene therapy biomanufacturing, biotechnology and biopharmaceuticals. These programs will provide hands-on experience and prepare stu-

New Jersey’s community colleges and the life sciences industry, a pipeline of talent will be educated and trained to address the state’s workforce needs in the rapidly evolving life sciences and biomanufacturing sectors,” said Dr. **Aaron Fichtner**, President, NJCCC.



dents for rewarding careers in an industry that is expected to continue its rapid growth.

“We are proud of the ecosystem of educators and industry partners established under the NJ Pathways to Career Opportunities initiative that served as the foundation for the creation of NJBioFutures. Through NJBioFutures, the public-private partnership between

As a founding sponsor of the coalition, Johnson & Johnson is contributing \$1 million to support the development of curricula and modernization of training and lab facilities on each college campus, including an over 22,000 sq. ft. expansion of the Workforce Training Center on the RVCC campus.

“Johnson & Johnson’s role as the Founding Sponsor of NJBioFutures reinforces our commitment to economic and

workforce development in New Jersey and will provide more pathways into good-paying, high-demand jobs in an emerging life sciences sector that keeps New Jersey at the forefront of health innovation,” said **Joaquin Duato**, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Johnson & Johnson.

“I am proud to see Johnson & Johnson and



our leading community colleges partnering on this monumental workforce development coalition,” said New Jersey Governor **Phil Murphy**. “NJBioFutures will facilitate cross-sector collaboration to expand New Jersey’s unique talent pool and build out our next generation of life science leaders.”

“Bringing New Jersey back into the innovation spotlight has been a primary goal of the

Murphy Administration and thanks to the help of our many partners in state government and the private sector, our state’s innovation – and life sciences – industry is flourishing,” said New Jersey First Lady **Tammy Murphy**. “The future of groundbreaking discoveries is right here in New Jersey with public-private partnerships like NJBioFutures. I look forward to the benefits this program will bring to our students

and our entire state.”

“The NJBioFutures collaboration between Raritan Valley, Middlesex and Mercer County community colleges and industry partners represents the very best in public-private partnerships,” said RVCC President **Michael J. McDonough**. “We are deeply grateful to Johnson & Johnson for its visionary leadership and financial support.”



VISION CELEBRATED

It was a momentous February morning at **Raritan Valley Community College** with many special moments during the launch of **NJBioFutures**. We applaud the vision, leadership, and generosity of **Johnson & Johnson**, and its commitment to RVCC and its NJBioFutures education partners.

Deep gratitude as well to the distinguished

speakers present on the RVCC campus for the NJBioFutures launch event: **Kathryn Wengel** Executive Vice President, Chief Technical Operations & Risk Officer, Johnson & Johnson; **Tammy Murphy**, First Lady of New Jersey; **Josue Martinez**, RVCC Student; **Joaquin Duato**, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Johnson & Johnson; **Aaron Fichtner**, President, New Jersey Council of County Colleges; **Robert Asaro-Angelo**, NJ Department of Labor Commissioner; **Andrew Zwicker**, NJ State Senator;

and **Michael McDonough**, President, Raritan Valley Community College, and program host and emcee.

And special thanks to the tour hosts of RVCC’s nascent Biotech Lab and Cleanroom spaces: Raritan Valley Community College’s **Karen Bearce** (Provost & Vice President for Academic Affairs) and **Conrad Mercurius** (Executive Director of Workforce Development & Career Education), and Johnson & Johnson’s **William Zhou** (Head of US CAR-T Operations).



THE DIFFERENCE BEING MADE

Amid of the high-profile launch events for NJBioFutures —a dynamic and inspiring public-private workforce development coalition designed to strengthen the life sciences talent pipeline in New Jersey—stood a high school student, a coach, and an

vered through life’s challenges and has risen to the top 5% of his class, all while holding down a part-time job and anchoring the “O-line” as offensive center for the 2024-25 Bound Brook High School “Crusaders.”

“I never imagined I’d have the chance to break into the biopharma industry,” said Josue. But good things happen to good people, espe-

to help him consider all the options he has in front of him. But the new aseptic processing program at Raritan Valley Community College just seemed to catch his attention.”

“Successfully earning my first certificate in GMP Professional Training at RVCC has given me the confidence and foundational skills to pursue this growing field, said Josue. “With each certification, I am



administrator, all from the Bound Brook School District.

The student, **Josue Martinez**, is both a member of the Bound Brook High School Class of 2025 and a first-generation college student at Raritan Valley Community College. He’s also an emerging “public speaker” and his remarks were bookended by remarks from New Jersey First Lady, **Tammy Murphy**, and Johnson & Johnson Chairman and CEO, **Joaquin Duato**.

Josue was selected to speak at these VIP events because he was ready. He arrived in the United States from El Salvador with his mother and sister, determined to build a brighter future. Through hard work and dedication, he’s perse-

cially if they are determined.

“I met Josue two years ago when he started playing football,” said **David LePoidevin**, Jr. Head Football Coach and Career Liaison consultant for Bound School District. “It was his first time ever playing the sport but what the coaches and I realized quickly was his willingness to learn and work hard. He quickly became a student of the game. He studied film and spent extra time on the field after practice preparing.”

William David Ross, Director of Data, Planning, Research and Evaluation, Bound Brook School District, added, “Josue is a special young man and it has been my distinct pleasure

building the knowledge and experience needed to secure a rewarding career in biopharma. This program is paving the way for my future, and I’m grateful for the support and training that will help me succeed.”

It should be no surprise that Josue’s formal remarks included acknowledging his two mentors at Bound Brook High School. His kindness and warmth reflect his deep appreciation for life and the people around him.

“I was introduced to this incredible STEM program at Raritan Valley Community College through Mr. Ross and Coach LePoidevin,” said Josue. “And I am grateful because it has completely changed my career path.”



Q&A WITH CONRAD MERCURIUS

The power of serving others is transformative. Identifying the needs of employers and preparing long term unemployed, displaced, or under employed workers with the knowledge and skills to meet that need, has changed my life and how I see the world forever.

Conrad Mercurius



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT & CAREER EDUCATION

Born in Kingston, Jamaica, and raised in the coastal town of Portland, Jamaica, Conrad Mercurius immigrated the U.S. in 1997. He currently lives in Mount Pocono, PA, with wife, Andrea and two daughters, Chanté and Ariel, who are bright lights in the lives of their parents. Conrad holds a Bachelor's Degree in Safety and Health from Waldorf University in Iowa, and a Master's Degree in Management and Leadership from Western Governors University (WGU) in Utah. His role at RVCC is expansive and—given the increasing role community colleges play in addressing talent needs of local and regional employer—is poised for growth. Having just past his 10-year mark at RVCC, we thought it was time to check in with him...

Can you share a little about your last few positions which preceded your arrival at RVCC?

Conrad: My last few roles shaped my thinking about leadership and continuous improvement. One of the earliest impactful experiences was with UPS in Parsippany, NJ. I went through their management training program, which laid a

strong foundation in operational discipline and team dynamics.

Then, there was E.P. Heller in Madison, NJ, which was an incredible experience in a more hands-on manufacturing environment. However, the role that stands out the most is my time at Nobel Biocare Procera in Mahwah, NJ—I practically grew up there. It was an evolving journey, starting in CAD/CAM programming and moving into Team Lead, Group Manager, Value Stream Manager, Business System Leader, EHS Manager, and Production Manager. Each role built on the next, and it cemented my passion for continuous improvement and creating efficient, people-centered systems.

You've had a fascinating career—what drew you to RVCC?

Conrad: Thanks! It's been a journey. I ended up at RVCC through what I'd call a mix of necessity and inspiration. At the time, I was hiring for a significant re-shoring initiative at Nobel Biocare, where we were moving production from Sweden and Quebec to Mahwah, NJ. The

task was to hire 36 CNC operators within 6 months—not easy, especially with the limited pool of skilled workers. That search led me to discover a TAACT grant focused on upskilling returning adults and career changers. It was designed to help people transition into advanced manufacturing roles. Initially, I was looking to build a talent pipeline, but there wasn't an instructor when it came down to launching the training. Reluctantly, I stepped in to teach that first class.

That decision changed everything. The experience of watching those learners grow, overcome, and succeed was compelling—and it's what ultimately drew me to RVCC. I saw the impact education and opportunity can have when they meet people where they are. That first group inspired me, bringing me here to this time and place.

With 10 years at RVCC, can you share what has surprised you the most?

Conrad: Really, just how much growth and transformation has happened—and how quickly it continues to evolve. When I first joined the College, we had a handful of workforce programs. Now, we offer a wide range of training options, many of which are directly aligned

Q&A

with emerging industry needs like advanced manufacturing, healthcare, and aseptic bio-manufacturing.

But even more impactful has been the strengthening of public-private partnerships. We've gone from simply responding to employer needs to co-creating solutions. These collaborations have opened doors for learners, created real career pathways, and

career changers, high school students, or incumbent workers, can find a pathway leading to credential attainment and upward mobility.

That combination of strategic collaboration, speed, and learner-centered design makes us stand out across the state.

The finishing touches on a 22,000 square foot expansion to the Workforce Training Center are imminent. Can you briefly share what opportunities this new space has enabled?

Conrad: The expansion is more than just additional space—it's a strategic leap forward. Creating a cohesive, innovation-driven environment allows us to bridge gaps between



brought lasting value to local employers and the community. It's been rewarding—and honestly, pretty exciting—to be part of something constantly building toward the future.

What makes RVCC's Workforce Training Center distinctive from similar operations at our colleague community colleges across the state?

Conrad: What sets RVCC's Workforce Training Center apart is that we're not just offering training programs—we're building ecosystems that connect learners, employers, and industry partners in meaningful, results-driven ways. Our Center thrives on strong public-private partnerships that allow us to stay ahead of workforce trends and respond quickly to employer needs. We're also deeply committed to inclusive access, ensuring both traditional and nontraditional learners—whether it's adult

You've done a lot of outreaches into area high schools. Is the message resonating with that younger population?

Conrad: Yes, the message is resonating—but it takes intentional framing. High school students today are looking for purpose, flexibility, and options that feel relevant. It starts to click when we connect with them through hands-on demonstrations, industry speakers, and clear career pathways. And what shifts the conversation is when we show how workforce programs can lead to high-wage, high-demand roles, not just “plan B” options. We've also found success in partnering with high school liaisons and advocates who help amplify the message and legitimize these opportunities.

So, while it takes persistence, the response has been increasingly positive—especially when students can see real-world relevance and success stories of individuals who look like them.

traditionally “siloe” programs, like non-credit, credit, and industry-aligned training.

With the addition of a Materials Testing Lab, a Mechatronics Lab, an expanded Welding Lab, and a specialized Bio Lab, we're opening doors for cross-training, interdisciplinary learning, and seamless transitions between education and employment. We're also creating a clean-room-inspired space, built to ISO 7 standards, that moves beyond simulation to give learners a near-authentic biomanufacturing experience.

One of the most exciting additions is a Manufacturing Showcase space designed to bring together students, employers, and manufacturers. It's a collaborative hub for problem-solving, R&D, and exposure to emerging technologies—a place where innovation is both taught and practiced.

We're deeply grateful to the leadership at Somerset and Hunterdon Counties for their

Q&A

investment and at Johnson & Johnson for their gift, which has helped accelerate this vision. Our expansion and through initiatives like NJBioFutures, we are well-positioned to train the next generation of skilled professionals while fostering stronger public-private partnerships that benefit the entire region.

nerships continue to expand, and we can't meet the current demand. We're turning away programs and learners—not because of lack of interest, but because we don't have the instructional space to accommodate them all. One of our most significant limitations is our inability to offer early-day learning opportunities for adults. A new space would allow us to serve a broader, more diverse learner population and

we're co-creating solutions that align with real industry needs and doing it in a responsive, practical, and sustainable way.

What is the best part of your job?

Conrad: It's creating pathways that truly change lives. There's something significant about building programs that offer real scaffolding—giving people the chance to step



Despite the expansion to the Workforce Training Center, rumor has it you're already in need of more space. What is driving this demand and what will the potential new space be used for?

Conrad: Yes, the rumor is true—we're already feeling the space crunch, and it's driven by growing interest from emerging sectors and increased demand from our K-12 and adult learning partners. We're seeing exciting inquiries from industries like unmanned aircraft systems (drones) and custom wood and furniture manufacturing. While not traditionally tied to manufacturing, these sectors share common ground in their reliance on heavy equipment, CNC multi-axis machinery, and precision fabrication. They're looking for talent with transferable skills that we're uniquely positioned to develop.

At the same time, our high school part-

better respond to the evolving needs of regional employers and emerging industries.

You've established some very strong relationships with executives from area companies—to what do you attribute that success?

Conrad: I think a big part of it comes from having been on the other side myself—as an industry leader, I've faced the same challenges these executives are dealing with today: finding skilled talent, adapting to new technologies, and staying competitive. That shared experience builds trust. But more than that, I think what resonates is a shared vision—one where upskilling isn't a one-time event, but part of a continuous learning ecosystem that supports both the workforce and the business community. These partnerships succeed because we're not just offering training;

in, step out, and step up when they're ready. Whether it's a high school student exploring a new field, an adult learner retraining for a second career, or someone returning to the workforce after time away, the intrinsic value of that flexibility and access drives me. It's not just about credentials—it's about giving people real choices and opportunities and watching them gain the confidence and skills to move forward.

Looking 5-10 years out, where do you think the biggest opportunities are for growth in workforce training at RVCC?

Conrad: Looking 5–10 years out, the most significant opportunities for growth in workforce training at RVCC will come from deepening our integration with emerging industries—particularly in areas like biomanufacturing, advanced manufacturing, AI-assisted design, sustainable energy, and autonomous systems. We also

Q&A

see increasing demand for stackable, flexible credentialing, allowing learners to gain skills quickly and continue building toward degrees or career advancement without starting over. Pairing this with stronger private-public partnerships, we can co-create training ecosystems that keep pace with industry while remaining accessible to a diverse population of learners.

Expanding regional collaboration across K-12, higher ed, and industry will also be key to sustaining long-term impact. If we can continue to anticipate industry shifts and develop inclusive, forward-thinking pathways, RVCC will remain a leader in workforce innovation.

What keeps you up at night?

Conrad: The urgency of aligning talent development with the speed of industry change keeps me up at night. I worry about the learners we haven't reached yet—those who could thrive in high-demand fields but face barriers we haven't addressed. I also consider how we maintain equity and access while meeting employers' expectations for specialized, job-ready talent. It's a constant balancing act: building agile programs to respond to industry needs yet robust enough to create lasting opportunities for individuals and communities.

If you had the proverbial "magic wand," what would you first address?

Conrad: If I had the magic wand, I would remove systemic barriers that prevent justice-impacted individuals from re-entering the workforce with dignity and real opportunity. Too often, past mistakes follow people for a lifetime—limiting their options and undercutting their potential. I'd create a clear, supported pathway that acknowledges past mistakes but doesn't define individuals by them—training

programs that lead to meaningful employment, wraparound services that address real-life challenges, and employers willing to invest in people, not just resumes. That kind of reintegration doesn't just help individuals—it strengthens families, communities, and the workforce.



When you need to get away, where's your favorite "go to" spot?

Conrad: When I need to get away, my favorite "go-to" spot is at home—where I can recharge, reconnect, and reset. But if I'm thinking bigger, any luxury vacation spot with sun, great food, and zero emails will do just fine!

Any hobbies we should be aware of?

Conrad: Absolutely—I've always loved stories in books, films, or conversations that reveal how people got to where they are. I also enjoy traveling—connecting with new perspectives and cultures is a great way to do so. And when

time allows, I try to get out on the golf course.

Favorite guilty pleasure-food obsession?

Conrad: Jamaican cuisine is my first love—oxtail, stew peas, ackee, and salt fish are all at the top of my list. But right after that, I have a serious sweet tooth. Desserts of almost any kind are my guilty pleasure—cakes, pastries, you name it. And, of course, I can never say no to a good slice of pizza.

Favorite book you've read in the last three years?

Conrad: "Here One Moment" by Liane Moriarty

Favorite television streaming service and favorite show or series you've watched this year?

Conrad: A toss-up between "A Man in Full" and "The Four Seasons."

Last summer, you threw out the "first pitch" at last RVCC's "The Big Picture" celebration at TD Bank Ballpark. What was that experience like?

Conrad: It was an exciting experience, but honestly, I thought I could've done better. I had been practicing and felt more confident, but the nerves kicked

in once I was up there! Regardless, it was an honor to represent RVCC at such a fun event. I truly enjoyed being part of the celebration and supporting our amazing community college.

RV NIGHT @TD BANK BALLPARK

Join us for an fun evening of baseball, community, and celebration of RVCC!

Help create a new scholarship at RVCC and be a part of RVCC history at "The Big Parade" event – the LARGEST RVCC parade procession at the ballpark, ever!

Gather pre-game on the field wearing your RVCC "spirit" attire, and be part of a festive "walk-around" the park! Bring your smiles and your Raritan Valley Community College pride as we make history together! And with every RV ticket purchased (use QR Code below), you'll be supporting The Big Parade Scholarship at RVCC!



PACK THE PARK! TUESDAY, JULY 8TH, 2025

GATES OPEN AT 5:30 | THE BIG PARADE AT 5:45 | GAME AT 6:35



SOMERSET PATRIOTS (NYY) VS. NEW HAMPSHIRE FISHER CATS (TOR)

MUST HAVE A TICKET TO GET ON FIELD
PURCHASE TICKETS!



GUIDING LIGHTS



Raritan Valley Community College has benefited appreciably from “corporate giving.” But it’s a short list of firms whose support has been both sustained and transformational. Sanofi is one such company. And you only need to consider the **Sanofi US Corporate Mentorship Program at RVCC** to

also given generously for 25 years to the STEM-based RVCC Galileo Scholarships, the Science Education Institute, and most recently, a “cornerstone” sponsorship of the RVCC Planetarium.

Says **Diana Blankman Roberts**, who is U.S. Head of Sanofi’s Corporate Social

Responsibility and President of Sanofi Cares North America, “our support of Raritan Valley Community College is a point of pride for our employees. They are both impressed with the caliber of RVCC’s students and committed to helping them on their journeys. This really is corporate social responsibility at its finest.”

Blankman Roberts speaks from experience: she has held similar responsibilities at both Norvo Nordisk and Wyeth.

“The best part of this job is seeing the difference we are making in communities

GROWTH IN MENTORSHIP OFFERINGS AT RVCC CREATE LASTING RELATIONSHIPS AND DEEP CONNECTIONS

across the country, and beyond,” she says. “And being located an easy drive to RVCC has allowed me to really witness the impact we are having locally. It is inspiring, and it is gratifying.”

That impact is most evident in the Mentorship program—and it goes well beyond

the value mentors provide to RVCC student mentees. “Year in, year out, our Sanofi mentors are enriched by the mentorship experience and the transformation affects both mentee and mentor,” notes Blankman Roberts. “To be selected as a mentor has become a badge of honor. Our employees look forward to the difference they can make in lives of RVCC students—and to how that process brings inspiration and perspective to their own lives.”

launched as a pilot for the 2024-25 Academic Year, the **Insmmed Mentorship & Scholarship Program at RVCC** seeks to empower and propel the next generation of leaders by fostering professional development and knowledge transfer for first-generation RVCC students and ultimately, aims to improve their rate of college completion. An initial five students were paired with five Insmmed employees for the eight-month program, which seeks to both position students for success at RVCC and for transfer to four-year colleges or universities. Participating students also benefit from guidance and career planning as they build their social capital and career self-efficacy.

The program was also meaningful to Insmmed, providing employees with a professional development opportunity to gain skills that can be transferred into their daily roles. The program provided them with the opportunity to foster confidence, empathy, and



enhanced leadership capabilities.

In addition to its mentorship commitment, last fall the company brought its company-wide day of service, Global Day of Good, to the RVCC campus, with nearly 200 Insmmed

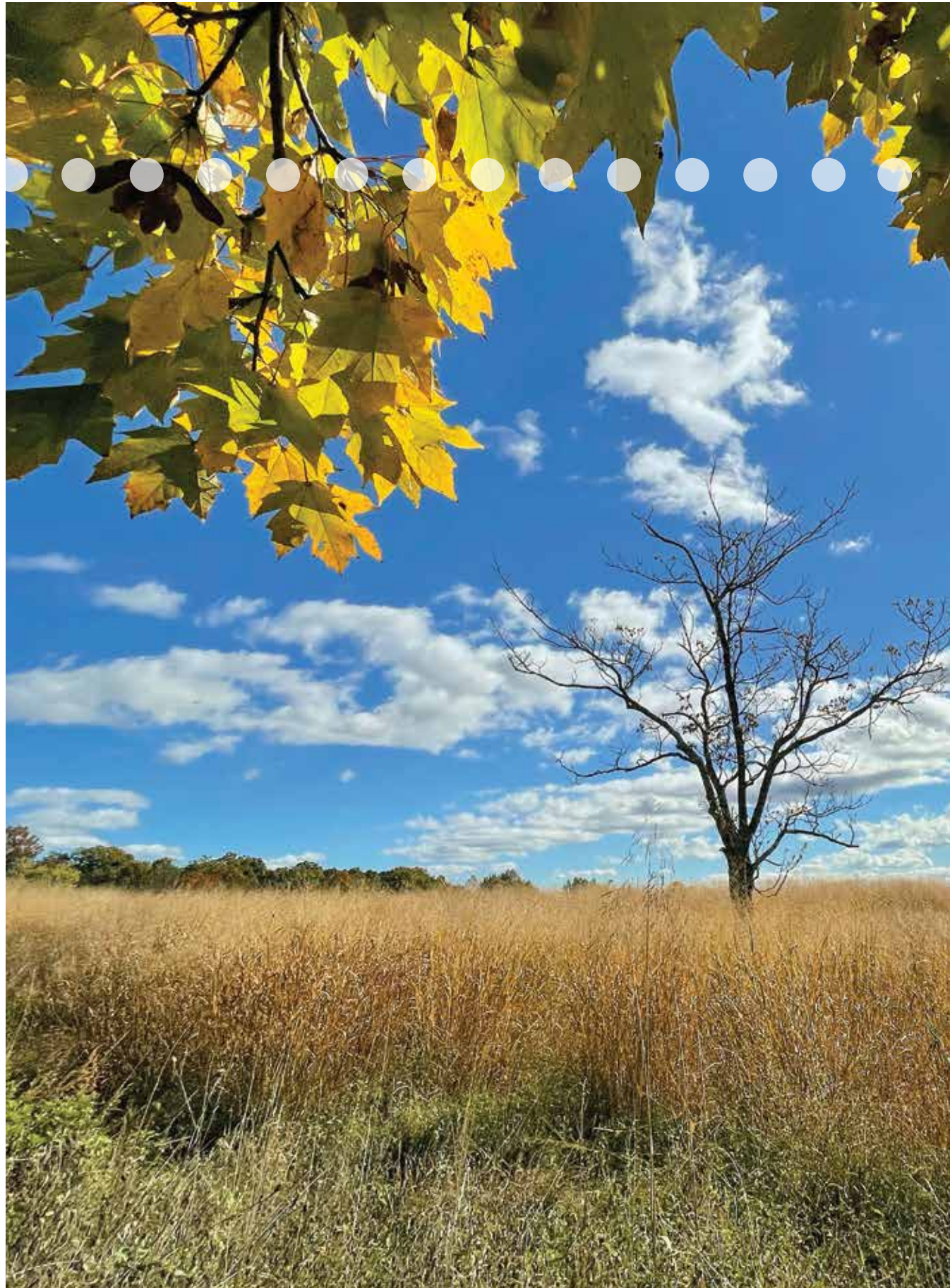
employees participating in numerous activities on the campus of **Raritan Valley Community College**. The Insmmed team packed meals and snack bags to benefit the **RVCC Resource Center & Food Pantry, Feeding Hands, and Empower Somerset**. Some of the other activ-



ities included painting murals for hospitals, creating STEM kits donated to Students 2 Science, and helping out with the new RVCC campus trail that is in development. It was a proud day for RVCC to have been one of the many organizations Insmmed supported for this meaningful work, during which over 1,000 employees gave back to local organizations in New Jersey and across the globe.

“We’re proud to support RVCC’s mission in our local community—and we value their impact both locally and beyond,” said **Claire Mulhearn**, Vice President, Corporate Communications and Responsibility at Insmmed. “We are committed to support the journeys of RVCC students through our newly established mentor and scholarship program.”

Raritan Valley Community College Foundation 2025 Annual Report



THE RV TRAIL



NEW ADDITION TO THE RVCC CAMPUS



Earth Day was in full bloom this spring when RVCC celebrated the occasion with a ribbon-cutting ceremony to mark the College's new public trail on campus. Approximately 40 people, including students, faculty, and staff, RVCC Board of Trustees and Foundation Board members, and representatives from the Somerset County Business Partnership attended the event, which featured remarks by faculty, staff and a student.

Mike Marion, Executive Director of the RVCC Foundation and Alumni Association, welcomed attendees by noting that the theme for the RV Trail is "Recharge. Restore. Renew" and that it exists "for the community, by the community." The RV Trail is another example

of how the College acts as an anchor for the community it serves, and offers a new way for friends, neighbors and other constituencies to engage with RVCC, Marion said.

Other speakers during the ceremony included **Isabella Scricco**, Environmental Science Major and President of the Environmental Club, RVCC Class of 2026; **Julia Fiore**, RVCC Sustainability and Energy Coordinator; and RVCC Professor Dr. **Emilie Stander**, Co-Director of the College's Center for Environmental Studies, who noted that the RV Trail will be used as a living lab for her Environmental Science students.

After the remarks and ribbon-cutting ceremony, several participants took an inaugural

.4-mile hike on the trail, which will be approximately 2.5 miles in length when it's completed. The trail is part of the RVCC Facilities Master Plan and the credit for the "trailblazing" goes to RVCC facilities staff members **Santos Callejas** and **Jose Giraldo**, with strong support from **Brian O'Rourke**, Executive Director of Facilities.

THE RV TRAIL



THE TRAILBLAZERS



It was a small ceremony on the campus of Raritan Valley Community College on April 22. But on the 55th anniversary of Earth Day, it was also an important milestone—the birth of a hiking trail, with a simple credo: “Restore, recharge, renew. For the community, by the community.” While dignitaries and public officials were present, it was the lesser known that we celebrated: **Jose Giraldo and Santos Callejas**, a tireless, two-man trailblazing force extraordinaire, and part of the grounds crew at Raritan Valley Community College. When the RV Trail officially opens to the general public later this summer, it will be Jose and Santos that we’ll be toasting. It is their baby.

THE RV TRAIL



TAKE A HIKE



Later this summer, RV Trail will provide students, faculty, staff, neighbors, and the extended community, with a unique trek through the beauty and diversity of RVCC’s 250 acres—and a fresh take on “college life.” Whether you’re in it for the cardio or just need a change of scenery, there’s nothing like a good hike. On the RV Trail. On the campus of Raritan Valley Community College.

When fully opened (and as enhancements are added), the trail will feature:

- 11 Informational Pods with themes of Ecology, Sustainability, History
- 6 handcrafted bridges
- 4 College road crossings with well-marked crosswalks
- hardwoods, softwoods, stream bed environments—even a mini “waterfall”
- benches in places of respite
- primary public access in Parking Lot 5. 4-mile hike on the trail, which will be approximately 2.5 miles in length when it’s completed.

RV FAMILY: Johanna and Jennilyn Sailema

“Growing up, our father instilled in us a love for learning and the belief that education could change everything. Even when we didn’t have much, he made sure we had books and took us to the library.”

Johanna Sailema

TWO SISTERS AND RVCC GRADS (CLASS OF 2020 AND 2025) REFLECT ON THEIR FAMILY, THEIR BOND AND THEIR RVCC EXPERIENCE.

They are a family of five with strong roots in Ecuador—with parents who came to the U.S. to build a better future, and through every challenge, they taught the importance of love, perseverance, and the value of where they came from. Their home is in North Plainfield and the three siblings—**Jennilyn, Johanna**, and younger brother, **Nathan**—have always shared a close bond and support one another in everything they do. They love spending time outdoors, whether it’s kayaking, going on long walks, riding bikes, or gardening together, and on weekends, you’ll often find them grilling or working on a 1,000-piece puzzle. Nathan, who is the puzzle expert, is a rising junior at North Plainfield High School and a nascent member of the RVCC “family”—he took Pre-Calculus 1 last summer at the College. Gardening also holds a special meaning for the siblings—it reminds them of their grandparents, and though they don’t live with them, they still follow their advice on how to care for their plants. “It’s one of the ways we stay connected to them and our heritage,” says Johanna. “No matter what we’re doing—



soaking up time together outdoors, or simply sharing a homemade meal, family has always been our greatest source of strength, laughter, and love,” adds Johanna.

Says Johanna: “The bond between Jennilyn and me is one of the strongest parts of my life. As her older sister, I’ve always taken it to heart to guide, support, and encourage her to go even further than I have. I try to lead by example, but I also learn from her every day. Most people who see us together think we’re twins—and we always laugh about how often our friends confuse us. Our relationship is deeply rooted in how we were raised. Growing up, our father instilled in us a love for learning and the belief that education could change everything. Even when we didn’t have much, he made sure we had books and took us to the library. He always reminded us that knowledge was something no one could take away. The sacrifices of my parents continue to guide us, reminding us to hold onto our values while chasing our dreams. That has also shaped not just our academic paths, but how we support one another as sisters. We’ve shared

everything from quiet study sessions to deep talks about the future. No matter what point in life we’re in, we’ve never stopped showing up for each other. That bond has informed not only how we see the world, but how we move through it—with purpose and love. And while our sisterhood is a powerful connection, all three of us are close. Together, we make an even stronger team: we challenge one another,

achieve my academic goals. It’s also where I learned the value of perseverance, community, and showing up for others.

Jennilyn: When I started at RVCC, I knew I wanted to pursue a career in the sciences—but I wasn’t yet sure which direction to take. Over time, RVCC became a place of exploration and helped build the foundation I needed to take the

science and how powerful it can be when it connects to something bigger. I’m grateful for the support, confidence, and clarity that RVCC gave me along the way.

Families—Raritan Valley families—are integral to the College’s enduring heritage and to the community in which RVCC exists. Each year, as part of our RVCC Foundation



JENNILYN SAILEMA graduated last month as part of the RVCC Class of 2025 and was a double-major Chemistry (Associate of Science) and Pre-Medicine & Pre-Pharmacy (Associate of Science). She was also part of the RVCC Honors College and President of the Student Ambassador Club. She now has her sights set on transferring to Rutgers University School of Environmental and Biological Sciences, to pursue a degree in Biological Sciences, with plans to become a physician assistant. She is passionate about blending patient care with medical research and hopes to improve access to care for underserved communities.

JOHANNA SAILEMA, a member of the RVCC Class of 2020, graduated with an Associate of Science degree in Pre-Medicine & Pre-Pharmacy. “JoJo” is currently employed as a Production Scientist at Werfen, a global leader in specialized diagnostics. In her role, she formulates reagents used in diagnostic kits for blood and transfusion testing. These reagents are critical to Werfen’s diagnostic solutions, which are used in clinical laboratories worldwide to ensure accurate blood typing and compatibility assessments—ultimately enhancing patient care in transfusion medicine. Passionate about science’s role in improving lives, JoJo plans to begin her Master’s program at Rutgers next year, continuing her journey in healthcare and diagnostics.

cheer each other on, and always aim to lift the next one higher.”

ON THEIR RARITAN VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE EXPERIENCE:
Johanna: As a first-generation college student and proud DACA recipient, I discovered my strength as both a student and a leader at RVCC. I was deeply involved on campus—serving as a Student Government senator, playing on the women’s soccer team, and participating in the Sanofi Mentorship Program—all while balancing the challenges of being the oldest sibling and a role model. The support and opportunities I found at RVCC helped me push through every obstacle and

next step in my academic journey. Being part of the Honors College challenged me intellectually and connected me with a supportive, motivated community. One of the most impactful experiences was being selected for the year-long Insmend Mentorship and Scholarship Program, where I received one-on-one mentorship from a biopharmaceutical professional. That experience helped me shape my goals, grow professionally, and better understand how my passion for science could create a real impact in healthcare. Another meaningful part of my time at RVCC was completing a capstone research project on the anti-cancer effects of natural compounds, under the mentorship of Dr. Melanie Lenahan. It reminded me why I love

Annual Report, we’re proud to introduce you to some of our RV Families—families who have multiple members educated, trained, or otherwise involved at Raritan Valley Community College. We celebrate RV Families and thank them for their rich legacy of encouraging, empowering, and supporting the journeys of our students...

The Giving Tree

It was another festive *Annual Winter's Eve Celebration* on the campus of Raritan Valley Community College. The end of the fall semester and imminent holiday break provided all of the good cheer needed, but there was also a generous community to celebrate. In all the Giving Tree generated \$1,460, which was matched by President **Michael McDonough**, the RVCC Foundation, and an anonymous RVCC staff member. In total, some **\$5,840** was raised in support of the RVCC Food Pantry, the student Emergency Fund, and for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities enrolled at *The Achievement Center at Raritan Valley Community College*.

In short, it was best of philanthropy—and huge thanks to the RVCC faculty, staff, and Board of Trustees for celebrating the season with generosity and kindness.



WE ARE THE CHAMPIONS!

RVCC Lions' Teams Continue to Flourish



2024-25 was banner year for the Raritan Valley Athletics program. Led by national tournament appearances for the Men's Soccer, Men's Basketball and the Women's Volleyball team, the Lions are gaining a reputation beyond our Garden State Athletic Conference and Region XIX footprint. Raritan Valley has had 8 teams qualify for the NJCAA National Tournament since 2021 and nationally people are starting to take notice.

Joe Pavlow, Director of Athletics



The 2024-25 academic year in the RVCC Athletic Department saw unprecedented success with three teams qualifying for the national tournament in the same year—including the Men's Basketball team, for the first time in school history. RVCC Athletics also had 13 students and one coach earn individual recognition for their outstanding performance.





STATS-AT-A-GLANCE

WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL

- 23-11 Overall record
- NJCAA East District B Champion
- Competed in the NJCAA National Tournament in Cedar Rapids, IA
- Five Post-season award honorees:

Madison Cobb (1st Team All GSAC, 1st Team All Region, 2nd Team All American),

Skylee Ohler (1st Team All GSAC, 2nd Team All Region)

Courtney Bordanaro (2nd Team All GSAC)

Dennicy Mota (2nd Team All GSAC)

Danna Gaitan (3rd Team All Region)

MEN'S BASKETBALL

- 20-15 Overall Record
- Region XIX Champions (Third year in a row)
- NJCAA East District B Champion
- Competed in NJCAA National Tournament in Danville, IL
- Three Post-season award honorees:

Najee Graham (1st Team All GSAC, GSAC player of the Year, 1st Team All Region, Region XIX Player of the Year, 2nd Team All-American)

Sutan Fitzpatrick (2nd Team All GSAC, 2nd Team All Region)

Kevin Ryan (Region XIX Coach of the Year)

MEN'S SOCCER

- 11-4-3 Overall Record
- NJCAA East District B Champion
- Competed in NJCAA National Tournament in Batavia, NY
- Three Post-season award honorees:

Wood Jerry Jeune (1st Team All GSAC, 1st Team All Region)

German Burset Romero (1st Team All GSAC, 1st Team All Region)

Jeff Cubero (3rd Team All GSAC, 3rd Team All Region)

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

- 18-11 Overall Record
- Eliminated in first round of Region XIX Playoffs
- Three Post-season award honorees:

Julia Fontanillo (1st Team All GSAC, 2nd Team All Region)

Sophia Larsen (2nd All GSAC)

Ona Riopedre (2nd Team All GSAC, 2nd Team All Region)

SOFTBALL

- 8-22 Overall Record
- **Jayla McNeil** (2nd Team All Region)

BASEBALL

- 10-20 Overall Record
- **Bryce Pantozzi** (2nd Team All Region)

GOLF

- **Matt Rody** (2nd Team All-GSAC)
- **Matt Roman** (Honorable Mention All-GSAC)



HIGHLIGHTS FROM BANNER SEASONS FOR RVCC ATHLETICS

The **RVCC MEN'S SOCCER** team returned to the NJCAA Division III National Championship for the first time since 2022. The team played as the #8 seed in the competition, held at Genesee Community College in Batavia, NY. The Lions beat Finger Lakes Community College with a score of 8-2 in the National Championship's consolation round.

The **RVCC WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL** team earned its second consecutive trip to the NJCAA Division III National Tournament with a 3-1 victory over Montgomery County Community College. At nationals, held in Cedar Rapids, IA, the team lost its two games to Century College and Rochester Technical and Community College by final scores of 0-3. The RVCC team finished 23-11 for the season and was awarded the number 2 overall seed in the Region XIX tournament.

The **RVCC MEN'S BASKETBALL** team won its third consecutive Region XIX Championship, this time in dramatic, "nail-biting" fashion with a 76-75 win over Lackawanna College. The team's success did not end there. The following weekend the Lions went to Niagara Falls and defeated Monroe Community College to win its first District Championship and earn the team's first trip to the National Tournament in Danville, IL.

RVCC WOMEN'S BASKETBALL team earned a first-round home playoff game against Mercer County. Unfortunately, the breaks didn't go the Lions' way and the team's season came to an end with that first-round playoff loss. Three Lions' players earned Post-season honors.



FULLTIME AND ADJUNCT FACULTY HONORED FOR EXCELLENCE

ADJUNCT EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING AWARD

We're pleased to announce the 2025 Honorees:

Sherry Gerwer
Science & Engineering

Anita Petersen
Social Sciences

Keith Spero
Business & Public Service

Congratulations!

2024-25 Fulltime Faculty Excellence in Teaching Award Honoree

We're pleased to announce this year's Honoree:

Melanie Morris
Business and Public Service

Congratulations!

“I am so very honored to be chosen for this award. I absolutely love working with our amazing students and staff here at RVCC! It is a privilege to support our future teachers.”

Dr. Anita Petersen

MELANIE R.B. MORRIS, RVCC Professor of Business Law, has been awarded the second annual Fulltime Faculty Excellence in Teaching Award for 2024-2025. Sharing the reasons that Professor Morris received the award, Dr. **Karen H. Bearce**, Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs, said: “The committee felt that your nomination showcased the hard work that underpins the characteristics of this award, including excellence in instruction, outstanding mentorship and advisement to students, and inspiring student success. Your dedication has clearly made a positive impact on many students’ and colleagues’ lives here at RVCC.”

One nominator wrote: “Professor Morris has dedicated her career trying to make her 100% text-based discipline feel like the laboratory experience she enjoyed as a science undergraduate. Her passion for active learning and engagement is evident in every aspect of her teaching. She exemplifies excellence in instruction, innovation in pedagogy, and an unwavering commitment to student achievement.”

Professor Morris has been a member of the RVCC faculty for 20 years and is an attorney licensed in both New Jersey and Pennsylvania. A pioneer in the use of Open Educational Resources (OER) at RVCC, Professor Morris is deeply committed to access and affordability in education. She is an author of the interactive Business Law textbook currently used in her courses. Designed with student engagement in mind, the text includes study aids, an interactive glossary, self-grading practice questions and matching exercises, and even incorporates student-produced videos to reinforce key

concepts. Her OER initiative has eliminated textbook costs for students for nearly a decade, generating over \$400,000 in savings to date.

In addition to Professor Morris, three RVCC adjunct faculty members were named recipients of the 2024-2025 Adjunct Excellence in Teaching Award, with each receiving \$1,000—made possible by a generous donation to the RVCC Foundation from Dr. **Susan Primmer** and Dr. **Robert Harris**, longtime supporters of the College.

SHERRY GERWER (Science & Engineering) was praised by a nominator, who wrote that “Professor Gerwer presents Anatomy and Physiology in a way that is both engaging and easy to relate to. I’ve learned far more than I expected to, and I’ve genuinely enjoyed the process along the way.”

Another nominator stated: “Professor Gerwer does everything she can to make sure her students excel. Although she is strict and sticks to the rules, she’s very helpful and tries to make sure everyone understands her classes. She tries to help with anything she can. She really cares about her students’ academic excellence!!”

ANITA PETERSEN (Humanities, Social Science, Social Work and Education) was lauded by a nominator, who wrote that “Dr. Anita Petersen is a consummate professional. She is a supportive colleague and an exceptional instructor.” When a last-minute emergency led to the adjunct faculty member teaching additional Education courses, the nominator shared that “Dr. Petersen and the students had such a productive semester; when we met to

discuss the term in January, I was so grateful for the detailed and specific notes that she shared with me about what was accomplished in each course and what happened in individual situations for certain students. This attention to detail and professionalism are two qualities that Anita infuses in every course that she teaches.”

KEITH SPERO (Business & Public Service) was praised by a nominator, who stated that “He goes above and beyond to ensure every student feels supported and empowered. From personalized feedback to mentorship beyond the classroom, Professor Spero shows a level of dedication that profoundly impacts student outcomes. His work directly supports the College’s mission of academic excellence, workforce readiness, and civic engagement.”

A student wrote about him: “I had the pleasure of having Professor Spero for two supply chain courses. His attention to detail and presentation of the course material provided me with a thorough understanding of Inventory and Purchasing Management. I’ve already applied many lessons in my role at a global logistics provider.”

“Professor Spero has played a pivotal role in organizing supply chain conferences in partnership with the Business Department, helping to build strategic industry relationships and expand professional networks for both students and faculty,” added a nominator. “These efforts not only elevate the program’s visibility but also contribute to students’ career readiness by connecting them directly with employers and business professionals in the field.”

ACADEMIC AWARDS & HONORS COLLEGE GRADUATES



ACADEMIC AWARD RECIPIENTS
The following graduates of the Class of 2024-25 are being recognized for their outstanding academic achievement:

- Alyssa Anderson
Interface Design and Web Development
- Alexander (Lexi) Anzalone
Occupational Therapy Assistant
- Keilly Arias
Computer Networking and Cybersecurity
- Keilly Arias
English as a Second Language – Certificate
- Rachel Beedasee
Interior Architecture and Design
- Karolina Burke
Nursing
- Cristina Carrano
Medical Assistant – Certificate
- Nina Angela Carvajal
Social Sciences
- Tracy Cavallaro
Paralegal Studies – Certificate
- Karlie Connery
Music
- Melissa Cosentino
Business Administration, General Business
- Steven Coss
Game Development
- Tanaya Dhumale
English
- Aimee Domnizky
Ophthalmic Science – Certificate
- Raddiel Echevarria
English as a Second Language – Program
- Calvin Edgar
Liberal Arts

- Ummefarwah Fazal
Business Management, Supply Chain
- Nicholas Gasparino
Exercise Science, Sports Medicine and Rehabilitation
- Miles Giambalvo
Environmental Science
- Samantha Goldstein
Early Childhood Education
- Archita Gupta
Communication Studies
- Austin Hoos
Game Art
- Geri Kain
Biological Sciences
- Josiah Kemp
Theatre
- Mackenzie Kernan
Automotive Technology
- Bogyeong Kim
Health Science
- Winnie Kuria
Ophthalmic Science
- Cheng-Chun (Jason) Lee
Mathematics
- Olivia Mahoney
Fitness Specialist – Certificate
- Russel Malik
Computer Networking and Cybersecurity – Certificate
- Jennifer Monteiro
Education: P-12
- Amodh Naik
Computer Science
- Amanda Perez-Vargas
Exercise Science
- Angela Plummer Jones
Paralegal Studies
- Anna Quezada
Pre-Medicine and Pre-Pharmacy
- Kyle Quinlan
Accounting
- Alejandro Ramirez Bedoya
Criminal Justice

- Jeffrey Robinson
Supply Chain Management – Certificate
- Stephanie Stokes
Graphic and Interactive Design
- Morgan Strahle
Visual Arts
- Fhaungfha Suvannakajorn
Computer Programming
- Maira Aparecida Valentim Mendonca
Business Management, Supply Chain
- Vaishvik Vidavalapati
General Science/Pre-Health Professional
- Dante Walker
Digital Media/Film Studies

HONORS COLLEGE GRADUATES
The following graduates of the class of 2024-25 are being recognized for their outstanding academic achievement:

- Alexis Bara
- Nicholas Bentz
- Justin Britten
- German Burset Romero
- Nina Angela Carvajal
- Justin Cascante-Alfaro
- Grace Castellani
- Raechel Cole
- Miranda Cordero
- Deangelo Coris
- Melissa Cosentino
- Andrew Demcher
- Tanaya Dhumale
- Juan Diaz
- Kaitlyn Eckhart
- Ada Freider

- Narolyn Garcia Toribio
- Jonathan Gomez
- Archita Gupta
- Gwyneth Horvath
- Kimberly Johnson
- Faith Kellett
- Victor Komosinski
- Malena Krause
- Katherine Leddy
- Cheng-Chun Lee
- Siena Martin
- William Mccallum
- Nathaniel Meicke
- Luke Menabdishvili
- Kylei Mittler
- Edward Morales
- Akiko Namisato
- Abegail Nunez Bano
- Eric Pydeski
- Emily Rambo
- Robert Reuter
- Erssini Ysabel Reyes
- Erica Rice
- Diamond Richardson
- Safa Rizwan
- Holly Rodriguez
- Emily Rosalli
- Danielle Rotolo
- Jennilyn Sailema Manotoa
- Denisse Sanchez Tlanipa
- Lila Seroy
- Allyson Serritella
- Peter Sorgi
- Kaily Sou
- Sarah Stefaniak
- Morgan Strahle
- Nicholas Tadena
- Anna Willigan

RUTGERS' YOUNGEST 2025 GRAD HAS ROOTS AT RVCC

“It is fair to say that without RVCC, my academic journey would have been stalled in its tracks.”
Alex Geppert

THERE’S NOTHING ARTIFICIAL ABOUT THIS INTELLIGENCE.

Imagine being 18-years-old and having a clear vision of your future. Armed with your high school diploma, the world awaits. Now imagine being 18 with that same diploma and two associate degrees—in mathematics and computer science—from Raritan Valley Community College. Now add to that a bachelor’s degree from Rutgers University. But that’s not all: also imagine that you’re also heading to the University of Wisconsin this fall, fully funded, on a PhD track, to study multi-agent systems and generative AI. Yep, all of this, at just 18-years-old.

If you’re **Alex Geppert**, you don’t have to imagine it. He’s too busy actually living it. Last month he graduated—with a double major in computer science and data science—as the youngest member of the Rutgers University Class of 2025.

“I was taking classes at RVCC during afternoons and weekends,” said Alex, a resident of Warren, NJ. “By the time I finished high school, I had enough credits to start at Rutgers as a junior.” Yep, at 16, he graduated from high



Photo credit: Nick Romanenko

school having already completed the equivalent of two years of college.

That high school was Watchung Hills Regional High School.

“From the moment I met Alex, I knew he was special,” said **Lauren Krueger**, School Counselor at Watchung Hills Regional High School. “During his freshman year, I was asked to meet with him because he had ‘acciden-

tally’ registered for the AP Calculus BC exam. After just a few minutes of conversation, it became clear that this was no mistake—he had been self-studying for the exam. My mind was blown. In my 17 years of counseling, I have worked with many talented and driven students, but I have never encountered someone who has demonstrated this level of brilliance and self-motivation.”

Alex enjoyed his time at RVCC, which included a combination of online and in-person classes. “Meeting professors and interacting with fellow students was thrilling and inspiring—especially considering I was only 15 at the time. Fortunately, my height helped me blend in easily,” said Alex, who is now 6-foot-3.

By the end of his sophomore year, Alex had successfully completed multi-variable calculus (Calculus III), Mathematical Thinking, Discrete Mathematics, and Linear Algebra. “Looking back, it feels surreal given that I was only supposed to take pre-Calculus during my sophomore year,” he said. “And it’s fair to say that without RVCC, my academic journey would

have been stalled in its tracks.”

To be sure, Alex is appreciative of the role Raritan Valley Community College played in his life. “My time at RVCC was pivotal in shaping my academic career,” said Alex. “Every course I took at RVCC—in particular Calculus III and Linear Algebra with the inspiring Professor,

degree while still in high school,” said Professor Forte. “He was truly a unique student. He took Calculus III—a sophomore level college course—as a sophomore in high school. Then he took Linear Algebra, earning top grades in both classes. In addition to content knowledge, it takes a lot of motivation and discipline to take

news or at conferences, and at least one on the RVCC faculty. I’m sure that Alex will be among those whose names I see making a positive and visible difference in the world and I can proudly say, ‘I had Alex in class.’”

Adds Lauren Krueger, “To say that I’m proud of him is an understatement. High



Frank Forte—provided me with a strong foundation that has been instrumental in my studies in Artificial Intelligence. I am grateful for the support and opportunities that RVCC offered.”

As it turns out, the flexibility of online courses offered at RVCC allows students like Alex to fit courses into their high school class schedules, where it might be a challenge coordinating times and transportation if they had to take courses exclusively on campus.

“When Alex introduced himself, he said that he was an early credits student, but I didn’t notice that he was working on a whole

an online course, and he really excelled in both classes.”

“There have been a few students in my teaching career whose names I’ve seen in the

school was too small for someone of Alex’s ambition, and I am thrilled to see him spread his wings and realize his true potential in college. I am beyond excited for him and can’t wait to see what the future holds at the University of Wisconsin and beyond.”

As for Alex, and his thirst for knowledge, “I want to build AI that helps people reason through complex problems,” he said. “We talk a lot about what

AI can do, but not enough about how we stay connected to it. That connection—understanding what the system is doing and why—is the part I care about most.”

Alex (center) took up crew while at Rutgers, and last month, his team placed 5th in the nation in the “Varsity 8” (1V8) category of the American Collegiate Rowing Association’s National Championship!

LAUNCH PAD FOR RISING STARS

Vaanya Salwan, last month’s student commencement speaker at the Raritan Valley Community College graduation ceremony, completed her associate degree in General Science/Pre-Health Professional at RVCC and also received her diploma from The Academy for Health and Medical Sciences at Somerset County Vocational and Technical High School (see “The Last Word” on p.125). As Alex and Vaanya demonstrate, RVCC presents an ideal option for students with high ambition, aptitude for rigorous study, and a desire to advance their future. And to help make this option accessible to more high school students, the RVCC Foundation provides support to the College’s Concurrent Enrollment Program as it seeks to expand access and eliminate financial barriers that prevent some students from participating.



RVCC ATHLETICS



You can be part of a winning tradition and help our student athletes in the process. If interested in advertising and sponsorship opportunities or to make an outright gift of scholarship or other support of our students, please contact either:

Joe Pavlow
Director of Athletics
Raritan Valley Community College
Joseph.Pavlow@raritanval.edu

Mike Marion
Executive Director
RVCC Foundation
michael.marion@raritanval.edu



Visit RVCC Athletics at www.rvccathletics.com

RVCC FOUNDATION Topline Summary of Giving

FISCAL YEAR 2024 (July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024)

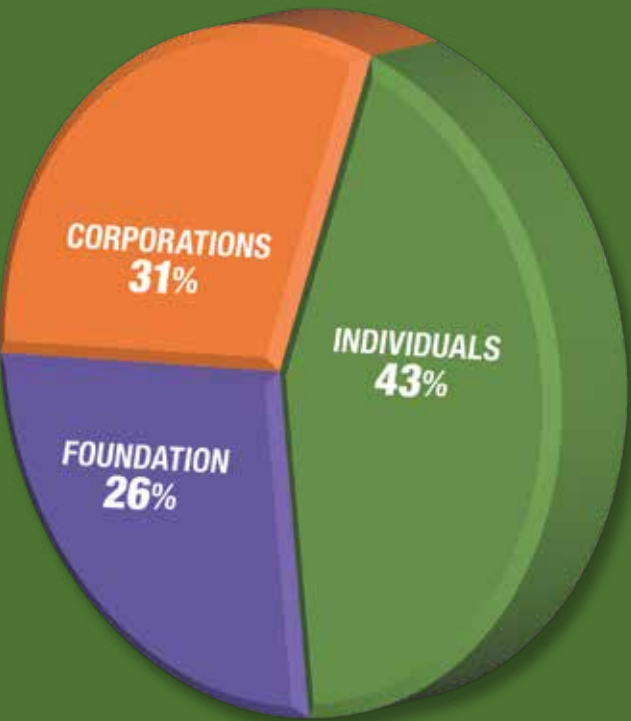


TOTAL FUNDS RAISED: \$1,043,008
TOTAL GIFTS: 1,987
TOTAL DONORS: 826

TOP 10 MOST GENEROUS SUPPORTERS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2024

(INSTITUTIONS AND INDIVIDUALS \$10,000 AND GREATER)

- Donald & Penny Pray: **\$154,000**
- Somerset Hills Community Health Foundation
(via Community Foundation of New Jersey): **\$75,000**
- Sanofi US Services Inc.: **\$75,000**
- Laboratory Corp. of America: **\$45,000**
- James & Jill Gibson: **\$37,500**
- ERS Charitable Fund, Inc.: **\$35,000**
- The Frank S. and Patricia F. Russo Family Fund
(via Ayco Charitable Foundation): **\$34,500**
- Caruso Family Foundation, Inc.: **\$25,000**
- The Joan Capps Foundation: **\$25,000**
- Insmed Incorporated
(via Charities Aid Foundation of America): **\$20,000**
- Janssen Pharmaceuticals: **\$20,000**



Source of Gifts by Segment

30 YEARS Of Impact



THE PRAY FAMILY CENTER FOR SERVICE LEARNING AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AT RARITAN VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE CELEBRATED 30 YEARS OF THE COLLEGE'S SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY AT A MAY 16 AWARD LUNCHEON.

Approximately 140 people—including students and their families, community members representing different nonprofit organizations, College staff and faculty, and Board of Trustees members—attended the event, which honored exemplary RVCC students for their participation in service learning and civic engagement activities.

Over the years, the Service Learning Program at RVCC has invested in activities that meet the most pressing needs in communities locally and nationally. One of the highlights of the event was the screening of the Pray Family Center 30th Anniversary Video, which celebrates that work. To view the video, visit:

raritanval.edu/servicelearning30th

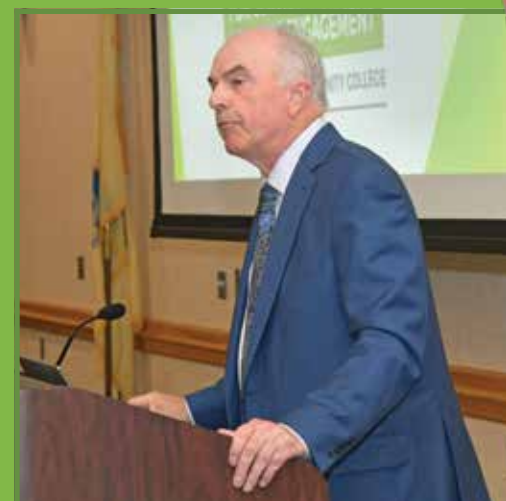
RVCC's nationally recognized program enables students to use community service as part of their academic coursework and receive credit for the experience. Through involvement in service learning and civic engagement activities, students are not only helping themselves, but they are

also helping others. Annually, RVCC students provide service to more than 250 community organizations in Somerset and Hunterdon counties, donating the economic equivalent of over \$1,000,000 in service to numerous organizations and their clients. In a five-year period, students have contributed the economic equivalent of well over \$5,000,000 to

the community, helping the College gain national recognition.

"We have such great community partners, who are more than willing to open their doors to the support offered by RVCC students," said **Lori Moog**, Director of Service Learning and Community Outreach, who has led the program for the past 29 years. "Our students play a critical role in driving the success of this program, and in return, they're enriched by the experience and network they gain."

From non-profits to schools to government agencies, students serve many diverse organizations that include public schools, literacy centers, nursing homes, municipal offices, food pantries, environmental centers and farms, as well as homeless, domestic violence and animal shelters. In addition to learning about important community issues, RVCC students provide assistance without financial cost, helping the organization improve services to their clients and the broader community.



30 YEARS Of Impact

2024-25 RARITAN VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT HONOREES

STUDENTS WERE CELEBRATED FOR THEIR SERVICE LEARNING PROJECTS IN A VARIETY OF ACADEMIC COURSES AND PROGRAMS, INCLUDING:

FOUNDATIONS OF EDUCATION (Spring 2025):
Julia Beatty, Class of 2026

FOUNDATIONS OF EDUCATION (Fall 2024)
Nabeeha Khan, Class of 2026

MEDICAL ASSISTING PROGRAM (Fall 2024)
Shruti Patel, Class of 2025

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ASSISTANT PROGRAM (Spring 2025)
Anna Clara Da Fonseca Lima, Class of 2027
Julianna Shea, Class or 2027

SOCIAL MEDIA PROGRAM (Fall 2024)
Shaina Villalobos (graduation date TBD)

GENERAL BIOLOGY II HONORS (Spring 2025)
Jasmin Ha, Class of 2026 (Spring)
Jaimy Solis, Class of 2026 (Spring)

GENERAL BIOLOGY I HONORS (Fall 2024)
Andrew Bambridge, Class of 2025
Owen Pierro, Class of 2026

TRENDS IN NURSING (Spring 2025)
Evelyn De Leon, **David Reichert**, **Daniel Vigilante**, **Donna Zimmerman** (all Class of 2025)

IN ADDITION, THE RECIPIENTS OF SEVERAL NATIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL AWARDS WERE HIGHLIGHTED DURING THE PROGRAM. CONGRATULATIONS TO THE STUDENTS HONORED WITH THE FOLLOWING AWARDS:

CAMPUS COMPACT NEWMAN CIVIC FELLOWSHIP
Lila Seroy, Class of 2025

THE PRAY FAMILY CENTER SERVICE LEARNING LEADERSHIP AWARD
Robert Lamptey, Class of 2025 (December)

THE PRAY FAMILY CENTER NONPROFIT CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AWARD
Sari Pehnke, Class of 2026

THE PRAY FAMILY CENTER STUDENT AMBASSADOR AWARDS:
VOTER ENGAGEMENT PROJECT
Calvin Edgar, Class of 2024 (December)

SERVICE LEARNING/INSTITUTIONAL ENGAGEMENT
ARTISTIC RESEARCH PROJECT
Lucia Robertiello, Class of 2025

SERVICE LEARNING/INSTITUTIONAL ENGAGEMENT VIDEO PROJECT ON
STUDENT BELONGING AT RVCC
Kennedi Smith, Class of 2026

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

In 2023, the College’s Service Learning Program received a generous gift from Don and Penny Pray of Westfield and Jupiter, FL that benefits RVCC students in their efforts to give back to the local community.

The couple’s five-year commitment of \$150,000, directed through the RVCC Foundation, is being used to create greater recognition and exposure for the achievements and impact of students participating in programs offered through service learning. In the Prays’ honor, and in recognition for their exceptional generosity, the College’s program was renamed: “The Pray Family Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement.”

Don and Penny Pray with Kelly Oliver and Lori Moog.



PRAY FAMILY CENTER NONPROFIT CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AWARD WINNER NAMED



Sari Pehnke, a second-year environmental science major at Raritan Valley Community College, has been selected for the 2025 Pray Family Center Nonprofit Civic Engagement Award. The annual award honors a student who has demonstrated active and exemplary involvement serving a nonprofit, going above and beyond with their work and playing a major role in a project for their community partner organization.

Pehnke has proven to be a highly involved student leader who is dedicated, intentional, and determined to serve the campus and community. She passionately invests in volunteering through the lens of environmental and community-based work. In alignment with her academic pursuits in environmental and sustainability studies, Pehnke is an active student volunteer for numerous nonprofit organizations that include the Sourland Conservancy, New Jersey Conservation Foundation, Ridgeview Conservancy, Raritan Headwaters, Stony Brook Watershed, Rutgers Hutcheson Memorial Forest, Friends of Sparta Mountain, and Friends of Princeton Open Space. She is also an intern for Forest Ecology & Water Quality at RVCC. At these organizations, she serves as an environmental land steward and educator working on many different projects.

Pehnke, who also serves as the Vice President of the RVCC Environmental Club and helped launch the Student Network for Amphibian Pathogen Surveillance (SNAPS) project at RVCC, is driven by a fervent desire to make a meaningful impact on the broader community.

As someone who believes in the power of leadership and service, she consistently seeks opportunities to lead, inspire, and uplift those around her. She remains steadfast in her mission to serve with integrity, engage others, and contribute meaningfully to society.

Through her service over the 2024-2025 academic year, Pehnke also earned the President’s Volunteer Service Award – Gold Level, from the global nonprofit organization, Points of Light Foundation for completing over 300 hours of service to the community.



30 YEARS
Of Impact



STUDENT RECEIVES PRAY FAMILY CENTER SERVICE LEARNING
AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT



RVCC student **Robert Lamptey** of Piscataway has been selected for the 2024-2025 Pray Family Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement Leadership Award. Lamptey, a second-year Business Administration major, is pursuing the General Business option. The annual award honors an RVCC student for their outstanding leadership and personal development attained through their service learning project and reflection activity. The award focuses on projects showing a high level of

initiative in all areas of development, including identifying the community need, preparing the service, and putting the plan into action.

Lamptey's passion for social change is highlighted by his leadership and engagement in service learning through his Supply Chain Management and Volunteer Tax Assistance courses. His service has included assisting with economic research and project management at the Somerville Public Works Engineering Department; coordinating efforts at the RVCC Resource Center and Food Pantry; and helping low-income populations with tax returns. Additionally, his co-curricular activities at RVCC include serving as president of both the National Society of Leadership and Success and the International Cultural Association, as well as being an active member of the International Students' Club.

Outside of school activities, he serves on the Piscataway Township Board of Education Fiscal Planning and Operations Committee and the Culture Climate and Community Relations Committee, and as co-vice president of the Piscataway Board of Education High School Parent Teacher Student Organization. In addition to his

RVCC honors, Lamptey has earned the President's Volunteer Service Award – Gold Level, from the global nonprofit organization, Points of Light Foundation for completing over 300 hours of service to the community.



TUMULTUOUS
AND VIRTUOUS
1968. The Year it Was.

Martin Luther King is shot and killed by James Earl Ray in Memphis. Senator Robert F. Kennedy is assassinated while on a campaign stop in Los Angeles. The USS Pueblo is captured by North Korea. Its crew, headed by Captain Lloyd Bucher are held as POWs for almost one year. Apollo 8 is the first manned-spaceship (Frank Borman, Jim Lovell, and William Anders) to reach and orbit the moon. Worldwide riots and protests over the Vietnam War and racism continue to escalate. In Chicago, the Democratic National Convention is hit with widespread protests and clashes with police. The Chicago

Seven become famous. At the Mexico City Olympics, while receiving their medals, two African-American athletes, John Carlos and Tommy Smith, raise black-gloved fists in support of the fight for Human Rights (or Black Power, depending upon the source) during the playing of The U.S. National Anthem. In Vietnam, the My Lai Massacre takes place. The name Lt. William Calley, Jr., emerges during the fallout and becomes forever infamous. The RNC nominates Richard Nixon for President; meanwhile, LBJ declines to run again. Nixon then defeats the Democratic candidate, VP Hubert Humphrey

in the General Election. The "Heidi Game" happens: NBC cuts away from the final 1:05 of the NY Jets - Oakland Raiders football game with Oakland down 32-29 to broadcast the pre-scheduled movie "Heidi," the Shirley Temple classic (Oakland proceeds to score twice in that final minute and win the game, outraging hordes of football fans who flood the NBC switchboard in livid protest).

And Somerset County College, forerunner to **Raritan Valley Community College**, is born.



A VERY SPECIAL Pinning Ceremony



THE NURSE'S PLEDGE

Upon my honor, I solemnly pledge in the presence of this assembly to practice my profession faithfully.

I will do all in my power to maintain and elevate the standard of my profession, practicing with conscience, dignity and compassion.

I will abstain from whatever is deleterious, and will not knowingly administer any harmful drug.

I will hold in confidence all personal matters committed to my keeping and all family affairs coming to my

knowledge in the practice of my calling.

With loyalty will I endeavor to aid my fellow healers in their work, and devote myself to the welfare of those committed to my care.

I declare my willingness to unite in a program of action, sharing information and solutions to resolve problems and improve conditions - locally, nationally and globally—in order to achieve health for all humanity.

Congratulations to all of the RVCC Nursing students in the 2025 graduating class. As is tradition, last month featured “The Pinning Ceremony” held in the Edwin Nash Theatre on the RVCC Campus. This event is always a favorite among the many end-of-the academic year festivities. Members of the graduating class literally take center stage, receive praise from department and College leadership, and then the name of each grad is announced as they are pinned. At the end of the ceremony, the entire class recites “The Nurse’s Pledge.” This year’s ceremony took on special meaning as **Brian Steve Silva**, a member of the Class of 2025 who lost his battle to cancer, was

honored, and his family was presented with his pin.

The event was also notable for the recognition bestowed on **Leah Yacos** (RVCC Nursing Class of 2025), recipient of the **2025**



Rosalind Cuss Excellence in Nursing Award.

This honor is exceptional because it celebrates more than academic achievement, but also heart, leadership, and the spirit of compassionate care. Judging from the ovation from her fellow classmates, the faculty made an outstanding choice in Leah. Joining in celebration of Leah was Professor **Sarah Cuss**, a Nursing Program grad, now a member of the Nursing faculty at RVCC, and daughter of **Rosalind** and **Francis Cuss**, generous benefactors who established the award in 2023 with a \$50,000 endowed fund pledge.

Just a few minutes after accepting the award, Leah was “pinned” with the same pin that her grandmother, **Thora Cynthia**

THE 2025 PINNING CEREMONY IS DEDICATED TO **Brian Steve Silva** 1998 – 2024

A devoted student nurse whose kindness, strength, and passion for caring for others touched all who knew him. Though cancer took him from us before he could graduate, his strength and kindness live on in our hearts and his spirit remains an enduring part of our RVCC nursing family. We honor his memory today and carry his light forward in our practice.

“Brian’s unwavering perseverance was undeniable. He always had a smile despite all the challenges he faced. Bri-

an did not allow his diagnosis to stop his dream of becoming a nurse. During clinicals, he was moved by the heartfelt reward of helping others. We will always remember him as a kind, gentle, and compassionate soul.

Brian lived a meaningful life and we are endlessly proud of his positive impact on others. We are honored and humbled by the legacy our angel left behind.”

- The Silva Family -



Swensen, was given as a graduate of the Mountainside School of Nursing in Glen Ridge, NJ—79-years-ago to the day (May 16, 1946). As a nurse, Thora worked at the Student Health Center at Montclair State University and then as a surgical nurse at Osteopathic Hospital in Philadelphia. She passed away on September

4th, 2024 at 99 years old. “Even in her last year of life, when she was pretty sick, she still would give me advice on nursing school,” said Leah. “I attribute her long life to her nursing background, and I know she was with me in spirit on my pinning day.”

A perfect arc in the narrative of the family

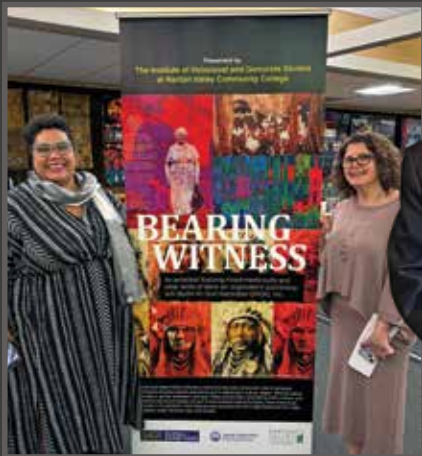
so integral to the nursing profession. As for Leah, she’s planning to work in a hospital setting, specializing in women’s health. In the meantime, she’s hoping to continue her work at the RVCC Tutoring Center, where she spent the last year as the Nursing tutor.



DAYS IN THE LIVES



In the era of the smart phone, there is certainly no shortage photographic images and no shortage of things to capture at so vibrant a place as Raritan Valley Community College. With only a couple of pages to celebrate RVCC students, faculty, staff, and supporters, there is simply no way to capture the multitude of our “days in the lives” or to convey our shared impact and life-changing role. So we’re ceding to a cliché here—and if a picture is truly “worth a thousand words,” then...





LEADERSHIP IMMERSION

It was a full day for the Trustees of Raritan Valley Community College. On May 20, they gathered on campus for the "Spring 2025 Trustee Retreat," which included a review session of the near-final draft of the College's Strategic Plan 2025-30, as well as a tour of some of the dynamic assets on the RVCC campus. Foremost, of course, was the RVCC Workforce Training Center, which is in the final stage of a 22,000 square-foot expansion. Included were stops at "Protégé,

the Salon and Spa at RVCC" (home to the College's burgeoning Cosmetology program), the new expanded space for the Automotive Technology program, the new (but not quite finished) Biotechnology Lab and Clean Room spaces, and the HVAC-Environmental Control Technology classroom. But science is often best served up with art, so the last stop was a visit to the RVCC Art Gallery, which was being set up to host a portion of Somerset County's "Teen Arts Festival," the annual

"Arts-in-Education" program of the Somerset County Cultural & Heritage Commission. The very next day nearly 1,000 junior high and high school students from Somerset County would arrive on the campus of Raritan Valley Community College to showcase their talents in music, dance, film, theater, creative writing and visual arts—providing a potent reminder of the College's role in the communities it serves.



CENTER OF IMPACT

The Center for Environmental Studies continues its state-wide impact, engaging with a variety of partners, and providing invaluable experience to RVCC student and alumni interns. Led by Co-Directors, Dr. Jay Kelly and Dr. Emilie Stander, and supported by generous funding from Jim and Jill Gibson (via the Gibson Center for Innovation at RVCC), the Becker family, as well as several agencies and local municipalities, the work of Center is unique to Raritan Valley Community College—no other community colleges in New Jersey, and few nationally, are providing this kind of environmental leadership or research experience for students. What follows is a summary of just three of the many areas of focus and impact of the Center of Environmental Studies at Raritan Valley Community College.

COASTAL CONSERVATION

RVCC's Dr. **Jay Kelly** and project partners led a workshop last summer for NJ Department of Environmental Protection employees on the benefits of rare plant protection strips for species conservation and dune development. In addition, protective fencing was installed in all four coastal state parks (Island Beach State Park, Corson's Inlet State Park, Brigantine Natural Area, Cape May Point State Park) and several other coastal municipalities (Bradley Beach Borough, Ventnor and Cape May Cities, and Brick Twp) to protect the habitat for rare beach nesting birds and plants, and to facilitate the development of dunes—by keeping vehicles off sensitive upper beach areas. These areas totaled approximately 15% of the NJ shoreline and resulted in another year of very high numbers of rare beach plants (especially seabeach amaranth).

Monitoring of Beach Management Plan (BMP) compliance was also conducted in numerous locations in partnership with US Fish and Wildlife Service, NJ Department of Environmental Protection, and Conserve Wildlife Foundation of NJ. Ten RVCC student and

“We’re so appreciative to have the engagement of our student and alumni interns—their work drives so much of our impact,” said RVCC’s Dr. Jay Kelly. “We’re also grateful to be able to provide them with truly unique field and lab work, as well as research and public outreach experiences—which is exceptional for a community college.”

alumni interns assisted with installation or the monitoring and maintenance of beach fencing, and the monitoring of BMP compliance, including **Lauren Teach, River Mariman, Matthew Gnap, Olivia Stettler, Alec Newman, Jess Tirado, Amber Fine, Robert Pagliaro, Ramon Zamora, and Zach Nekola.**

FOREST ECOLOGY RESEARCH

The Center participated in several major forest ecology research projects this year with a variety of local, state and federal partners. Multi-year projects at Farny Natural Area, NJ, and Green Mountain National Forest, VT, were successfully completed. Research from previous years on the effects of agricultural land use history on forest conditions in northern NJ was also published as a peer-reviewed article in “Forest Ecology and Management.” Some highlights from what was addressed in the past 24 months:

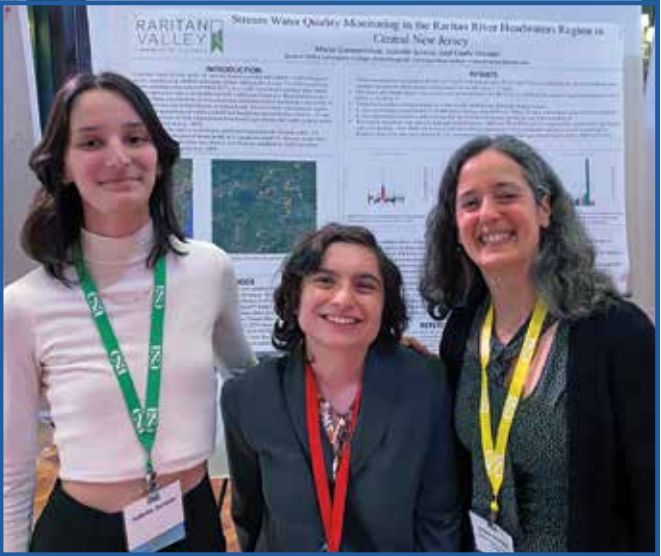
- Survival and growth of tree plantings for forest restoration in the Sourland Mountains (Sourland Conservancy – Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space, NJ Conservation Foundation)
- Ecological assessment of forest health at Farny Natural Area (NJDEP Office of Natural Lands Management)
- Effects of prescribed burning on invasive insect pest species affecting trees in the NJ pine barrens (US Forest Service)
- Effects of prescribed burning on forest

PHOTO LEFT PAGE:

Workshop led by Dr. Jay Kelly and project partners for NJDEP employees on the benefits of rare plant protection strips for species conservation and dune development.



Forest ecology intern **Ramon Zamora** at Lewis Morris County Park.



Maria Scarpantonio (center) and **Isabella Scricco** (left) with **Dr. Stander** after presenting their water quality RVCC poster at the **ESA Mid-Atlantic regional meeting conference.**

understories in northern hardwood forests (NJDEP, US Forest Service, VT Center for Ecosystems)

- Monitoring forest microclimates at Duke Farms (Duke Farms)

Seven student and alumni interns participated in this work: **Allyson Schmieder, Yvonne Selander, Sari Pehnke, Zach Nekola, Rudy Plesmid, Jess Tirado, and Ramon Zamora;** as well as part-time research technicians hired with support from the US Forest Service (**Allyson Schmieder, Ramon Zamora, and Rudy Plesmid**).

WATER QUALITY RESEARCH

The Center conducted multiple research projects related to water quality monitoring during 2024-25. These included an ongoing partnership with Raritan Headwaters (RHA) to monitor water quality in thirteen streams in the headwaters region of the Raritan River Basin, and ongoing monitoring of streams draining agricultural and forested landscapes in the Sourland region. Notable examples include:

- Water quality interns coordinated with RHA staff and citizen science volunteers to sample 13 local streams on a biweekly basis. Following each sampling event, interns conducted bacterial analysis for E. coli and total coliforms as well as filtered and stored the samples for later nutrient analysis in the RVCC Water Quality Laboratory. Several times per year **Dr. Stander** and the interns analyzed the stored samples for nitrate and ammonium concentrations utilizing flow injection analysis, following EPA methods, in the Water Quality Lab at RVCC.
- Water quality interns sample six streams in the Sourland region on a biweekly basis. Three of these streams drain small watersheds primarily containing post-agricultural forest while the other three streams primarily drain intact forest. The interns filtered the samples and analyzed them for nitrate and ammonium concentrations. Dr. Stander designed a case study on stream and forest restoration using the water quality data, as well as data from Dr. Kelly's tree regeneration research in the Sourlands. Students in Dr. Stander's fall ecology course visited two Sourlands stream locations, reviewed the water quality and tree data, and

developed evidence-based plans for restoring streams and surrounding forested areas at the most degraded location

- Intern **Emory Barrett** analyzed data on harmful algal blooms in the Spruce Run collected by previous water quality interns and prepared a scientific poster based on the results and presented the poster at the RVCC STEM Poster Session and the Ecological Society of America's Mid-Atlantic Chapter meeting last spring.

Five water quality interns were involved in aforementioned work: **Maria Scarpantonio, Isabella Scricco, Emory Barrett, Aaron Henderson, and Adam Mzili.**

ABOUT THE RVCC Foundation



MISSION

Expand the network of influence behind raritan valley community college, deepen the bonds with our current supporters and alumni, and inspire new partners to invest in our students, our faculty, our staff, and our signature strategic priorities.

Our team leads the cultivation of existing philanthropic relationships, and identifies, activates, and grows new relationships, all to increase overall engagement with, and support of, Raritan Valley Community College. *RVCC students are at the heart of everything we do.* The RVCC Foundation also oversees the RVCC Alumni Association and all related engagement with the more than 20,000 active alumni of the College. We invite residents of Somerset and Hunterdon Counties—and beyond—to learn more and to join our efforts on behalf of the best community college of New Jersey: Raritan Valley Community College. Find out more at rvccfoundation.org.

RVCC FOUNDATION STAFF

MIKE MARION:
Executive Director & Chief Development Officer
(michael.marion@raritanval.edu)
O: 908-648-8567; C: 973-600-2848

Mike joined RVCC in April of 2018, after 11 years at Rutgers University Foundation, where he served as Associate Vice President. Prior to coming to higher education, Mike had a distinguished career in the advertising, marketing, sponsorship management, and event marketing industries, including 17 years at AT&T, where his passion for philanthropy began. He has an MBA from the University of South Carolina and a BS from Eastern Michigan University.

JANET DUNNE:
Development Associate
(janet.dunne@raritanval.edu)
O: 908-648-8355

Janet has been with the RVCC Foundation since 2014. Her main responsibilities include special events, managing the financial and

fiscal reporting processes, and maintaining the day-to-day operations of the Foundation. Prior to joining RVCC, Janet worked at a consulting firm in Washington D.C. She has a BS from West Chester University.

DONNA STOLZER:
Director of Media Relations
(donna.stolzer@raritanval.edu)
O: 908-526-1200, ext. 8383

Donna joined RVCC in 2002 after serving as a Communications and Pursuit Strategist for Ernst & Young. She previously worked as a writer and arts editor for the NJ Jewish News. Her main responsibilities at RVCC include positively promoting the College to the media through the writing of press releases and handling media requests. Donna has a BA from Brandeis University and an MA from Hunter College of the City University of New York.

CINDY HADDAD:
Development Assistant
(cindy.haddad@raritanval.edu)
O: 908-648-8412

Cindy is the part-time Development Assistant

and has been with the Foundation since May 2021. She assists with fundraising events, data entry, scholarships, and any other day-to-day needs. Previously, Cindy worked as an Executive Assistant for BOC Gases for 10 years. She was also a Board Member of the St. Ann School Home School Association.

Alumni Liaison
GREG DESANCTIS:
Alumni Engagement
(greg.desanctis@raritanval.edu)
O: 908-526-1200, ext. 8966

Greg joined RVCC in 2001, working in Financial Aid before transitioning to Academic Advising and eventually becoming the Director of Advising & Counseling Services. Greg helped develop the RVCC Honors College and now serves as the Director of Honors Programs. In conjunction with the Foundation Team, a portion of Greg's time is focused on helping grow the RVCC Alumni Association. Greg has a BS Degree from Penn State University and a MA degree from University of Phoenix.

ABOUT THE RVCC Foundation



IN OTHER RVCC FOUNDATION NEWS...

TRANSITIONS

LEADERSHIP TRANSITION AND AFFIRMATION.

Congratulations to the following board members, all of whom joined the RVCC Foundation Board of Directors during the 2024-25 Academic Year: **Tammy Stouchko**, Senior Partner at SSP Architects; **Deirdre Blaus**, Chief Administrative Officer at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital – Somerset; **Rebecca Geary**, HR Leadership Development Program at Johnson & Johnson (and RVCC Class of 2021); **Michael Bzdak**, retired Johnson & Johnson executive and adjunct professor at Rutgers University; and **Wanda Shoer**, Chief Learning Officer at Sanofi.

As we welcome Tammy, Deirdre, Rebecca, Michael and Wanda, we applaud outgoing Board members **Jeanne Perantoni** (also of SSP Architects), **Patrick Delaney** (Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital), and **Sebastian Galvez** (Johnson & Johnson) for their insightful and generous service. And we offer especially deep gratitude to

Jeanne Perantoni, one of our longest-tenured board members of the RVCC Foundation, whose contributions were diverse and always valued. Among the most notable: her inspiring vision that helped launch the original RVCC Giving Day concept, which over the years has evolved to become the College's largest fundraising event and a model approach for other community colleges. We wish Jeanne well as she embraces a full and busy life of retirement and grandparenthood.

In addition, our two RVCC student board members—**Ricardo Ramirez** and **Lila Seroy**—for the 2024-25 Academic Year have

graduated and are moving along in their journeys (including Stanford University for Lila); we extend our gratitude and wish them both continued success. And as Ricardo and Lila depart, we welcome **Daphne Kunukcu** and **Harshil Shah**, both Class of 2026, as our newest student Board representatives. Daphne, who is majoring in Mechanical Engineering, Mathematics & Physics, and Harshil, who is majoring in Computer Science and is part of the Honors College, will “officially” join the RVCC Foundation Board of Directors at next month's board meeting. Congratulations to Daphne and Harshil!



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ABOVE:
Jeanne Perantoni and Sebastian Galvez

PHOTO LEFT:
Tammy Stouchko, Deirdre Blaus, Rebecca Geary

PHOTO RIGHT:
“The Road Less Traveled” – early work on our new paved pathway connecting the RVCC Foundation with the Workforce Training Center



THE LAST WORD

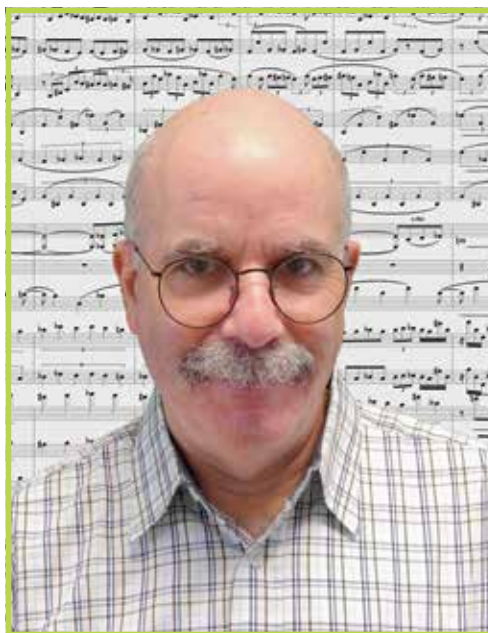
Each year **THE LAST WORD** features the remarks of the student commencement speaker at the RVCC Graduation Ceremony. And this year, we're beginning a new tradition by featuring the remarks of the faculty commencement speaker.

Dr. John Sichel, Faculty Commencement Speaker
Professor of Music, Arts & Design Department, Raritan Valley Community College

John Sichel has been part of the RVCC fulltime faculty since 2008. He teaches Music Theory, Musicianship, Music History, and Composition, among other courses, and served as Arts & Design Department co-chair from 2017-2023. John earned his Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the Yale School of Music in 1990. His principal teachers included Martin Bresnick, Nicholas Maw and Jacob Drucman. John's works have been performed on 4 continents and have been and are included on several recordings. A lifelong New Jerseyan, John enjoys birding, astronomy, and writing fiction, a small amount of which has been published under a pseudonym.

Good morning, Raritan Valley Community College graduating class of 2025! Congratulations! You have succeeded, with the help of family and friends, faculty and staff—and give yourselves some credit, too—in a heroic undertaking, and all during what are euphemistically referred to as “interesting times”—pandemics, wars, brutality, weather disasters, wildfires, inflation, seemingly endless political cacophony and, worst of all, two factor authentication. And, during these times, perhaps more than ever, it is important to ask ourselves, whatever we may have studied here: why do we do what we do? Why biology, why business, why music, why paralegal studies, why supply chain management? Why whatever?

Well, to answer this, what you need most of all is some Polonius-like drivel, from a befuddled old prof who can't remember



where he put his keys, that begins with the words, “many years ago...” So...many years ago, one of my then-colleagues, an art professor (I think it was Leonardo, or was it Michelangelo) told me a story about a student who was underperforming in class and hadn't turned in any work for weeks. My exasperated colleague asked him, “why are you an art major, anyway?” The student's response: “I want to be an artist because I want to do the least amount of work and make the most money.” Had I been there, I would like to have whispered in the student's ear, “excuse me, sir, forgive me if I'm belaboring the obvious, but you are aware, are you not, that ‘art’ means painting, drawing, sculpture, graphic design and so on, and not, as you may have thought, hedge-fund management or trading in non-fungible tokens.” As it is, I can only hope he figured out, eventually, that the Arts

actually involve a lot of work and rarely involve offshore bank accounts.

So, why do we in A&D do art? It's not that we don't want to make money. Money is very nice, especially when we have kids in grad school. Still, we do art because we like to make things, and because we hope, in our humble way, to give others pleasure, and make the world better by illuminating the problems, challenges, joys and heartaches we face as humans.

And that should be why we do whatever

product quality...these businesses can fall on hard times. They are usually run by a CEO who was hired to pursue just these policies, perhaps by a board which has misplaced its sense of value. A CEO of a company in the news lately touted in an interview that he came from and I quote, the Darth Vader school of management. He went on to pursue many of the policies you've just heard and replaced his company's internal motto with the Dickensian “More with Less.” Shades of Hard Times.

Were I there, I would like to have taken

power and the predatory amassing of wealth, and whose novels seem prescient of today's world. A criticism frequently leveled at Dickens, who is certainly not a stylistically perfect writer, is that his characters are two-dimensional and cartoonish, but the world today seems to be full of people suspiciously similar to, and no less cartoonish than, Mr. Bounderby, Mr. Tulkinghorn, Mr. Podsnap, Mr. Chadband, and Mr. Pecksniff. And, of course, Jacob Marley, whose ghost, after being complimented on his former business acumen, laments in horror,



we do. We need the money, but in the long run we'll make more of it if we love the doing, the making, the serving of humanity, and of our planet, and if we aim by doing what we do to make the world better. That's not only the starry-eyed, do-good view, in the long run, it's also the good business model.

Businesses which prioritize their bottom lines and their shareholders over their customers and their sense of purpose, businesses whose management seeks to marginalize those who design and manufacture their product or provide necessary production services, business which do not support research and development because its benefits are too far down the line to justify current expenditure, businesses which sell off the expensive parts of the manufacturing process or cut corners on

him aside and whispered something in HIS ear: “Excuse me, sir. You are aware, are you not, that, in Star Wars, the Empire loses, right?” Or, to put it another way, “the more you tighten your grip, Tarkin, the more star systems will slip through your fingers.”

The good news is that some of these companies can turn and have turned themselves around by remembering who they are and what is truly important to them. Others have become shells, holding companies, and others have disappeared, gone the way of the Old Republic. A lot of Star Wars references here, but you may have noticed I also name-dropped Charles Dickens a little while ago. It's worth tossing in a reference to the world portrayed by Charles Dickens, who wrote 180 years ago about real priorities at odds with the pursuit of

“Business?! Mankind was my business!”

So, what does this mean for us all, and for you the class of 2025? We want to make money, but, paradoxically, the only sustainable way to make that happen, is to prioritize what we do and those for whom we do it, over our shareholders, our bottom line, or our control of those in production. Do, and love what you do. Make, create. Help others. Make the world better.

And, at the moment, take a day to celebrate! Celebrate yourselves and those who helped you achieve this tremendous milestone.

Class of 2025...Do well, and do good and, as Dickens said, the force will be with you...always!

”

THE LAST WORD



Vaanya Salwan, Student Commencement Speaker

A resident of Bridgewater, Vaanya Salwan is a General Science/Pre-Health Professional major and is graduating from RVCC Summa Cum Laude. She is also graduating from high school this spring in the Academy for Health and Medical Sciences. She is a member of the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society and has been actively involved in campus life through the Pre-Med Club, where she has connected with fellow students pursuing careers in healthcare. Outside of the classroom, Vaanya has engaged in service and advocacy work—from volunteering at local hospitals and hosting public health events, to mentoring young students. She also has been consistently named to the Dean's List at RVCC. After graduation, she plans to attend Rutgers University Honors College on a pre-medical track with the goal of becoming a physician.

There's a strange magic to community college. You walk in thinking it's just a quick stop—something in between high school and “real life,” whatever that means. Maybe you planned to knock out a few gen eds and move on. You weren't expecting it to change you. I definitely didn't. I started at RVCC while still in high school—dually enrolled and just hoping to get a head start. I thought I'd quietly earn a few credits and be on my way. But instead, I found a second home. And now, somehow, I'm receiving my associate's degree before my high school diploma. That's the kind of magic RVCC holds—the kind that reveals itself in small, unexpected moments. You come in with a plan, maybe even a timeline. But then things shift. You stay late after class to talk with someone who ends up becoming your best friend. You show up to a

club meeting out of curiosity and leave with a sense of purpose. You spend hours in the Bateman Center—not just to finish lab reports, but because you've found a space where you belong. Today isn't just about crossing the campus one last time. It's about recognizing the path we've carved—together—and how it shaped us. When I first got here, I didn't expect much beyond classes and credits. But this place has a quiet way of surprising you. It's in professors who take the time to know you. In classmates who start as lab partners and end up cheering you through every exam. In the way a group chat turns into a lifeline, and a coffee run becomes a ritual. It's in the little things: cracking a concept you never thought you'd understand (looking at you, physics). Laughing way too hard during

a club meeting. Getting through a rough week and realizing—you were never doing it alone. That's the kind of growth that matters—not just academic, but personal. We didn't just earn credits. We built confidence. We found direction. We figured out who we are, even if we're still figuring out where we're going. Some of my favorite memories? Wegmans Wednesdays. If you know, you know. We'd swing by the food pantry, grab snacks, and then cram for bio like our lives depended on it. Spoiler alert: they kind of did. We were half-asleep, stress-eating trail mix, and yelling about osmosis—but it was



OURS. It was messy and it was real and KIND OF beautiful. To everyone graduating today—whether you were balancing classes with jobs, raising families, learning English, or just trying to keep your head above water—you made it. We all did. Through late submissions, parking lot breakdowns (emotional and mechanical), group projects that tested our patience, and the occasional Canvas crash that nearly broke us—we made it.

You've stayed up late, showed up early, asked for help, and offered it. You're more prepared than you think. And when the world feels too big again, just remember what RVCC taught us: community isn't something you wait to find—it's something you create. We built ours through shared playlists, scribbled notes, open Google Docs, and late-night check-ins. It's real. It matters. And it stays with you. That's the magic of this place. And that

helped us stay standing. To the families, friends, and loved ones who sent pep talks, carpooled us to campus, and believed in us when we didn't believe in ourselves—thank you. This day belongs to you, too. And to my classmates—thank you for being in it with me. For the group chats, the snack stashes, the collective sighs before exams. We couldn't have done it alone, and thankfully, we didn't have to.



Some of you are transferring to four-year schools. Some of you are heading straight into the workforce. And some of you are still figuring it out one step at a time. That's okay. The point is: you're moving forward. And you're doing it with more strength than you probably give yourself credit for. You didn't just survive college—you did it in a way that speaks to your resilience. You showed up. You kept going. And you grew into someone you should be proud of. If your next step feels uncertain—if you're nervous, unsure, maybe even a little scared—good. That means you're stretching. And you've done that before. You've pushed through doubt.

magic doesn't end here. It goes with us. So let's carry it forward. Let's come back—not just as alumni, but as mentors, guest speakers, quiet supporters in the back of the auditorium, cheering on the next wave of students who have no idea how much they're about to grow. Let's be the reason someone else feels seen here. Before I go, I want to say thank you. To the professors who didn't just teach us, but invested in us—thank you. To the advisors who helped us navigate degree audits like they were treasure maps. To the staff—from Financial Aid to the library—you kept this place running and

Most of all, thank you, RVCC. You were never just a stepping stone. You were the launchpad. As Eleanor Roosevelt said, “The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.” And lucky for us—we believed. Congratulations, Class of 2025. We made it. And the best part? The magic is just getting started.



