

RARITAN VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE FOUNDATION
ANNUAL REPORT

We are not
one voice,
but a
chorus...



JUNE 15, 2026

ASSERTING THE RVCC VOICE

#RVCCPROUD

Our theme for this year's RVCC Foundation Annual Report is a fitting progression from last year's theme—provided by the Lumina Foundation, which declared: "It's time for community colleges to be the star of the college show." So, this year, as you'll see throughout this publication (and especially on pgs. 48-60), we are taking the stage, "asserting the RVCC voice"—and featuring some of the star power behind it.

There is good reason. RVCC has recovered from its pandemic-related enrollment loss. The College's new five-year strategic plan is being operationalized to ensure cohesion and vision guide future growth. RVCC is nationally recognized for its excellence in developing a service ethic in its students, and in its care for the environment and stewardship of its carbon footprint. The Workforce Training Center, fresh off a 22,000-square foot expansion, is blazing exciting new pathways in workforce training and expanding its ability to meet the demand of an ever-evolving workforce.

RVCC is also coming off a record fundraising year, crossing the \$2 million mark in funds raised for the first time in the College's 58-year history. In March, we had a record-breaking RVCC Giving Day—raising \$228,863 in a single 24-hour period, thanks to historic matching funds provided by three exceptional supporters of the College. That giving day total was the most ever for any community college in New Jersey, and included historic participation levels by students and alumni, indicative of a growing culture of philanthropy.

And with that Giving Day total came another distinction: surpassing \$1 million raised in the 10-year cumulative history of RVCC Giving Day. No other New Jersey community college—and only a handful in the U.S.—can make that claim.

In addition, we will soon announce the largest single gift ever received at RVCC. It will also be the largest single gift ever received by a New Jersey community college—and in the top ten largest ever for any community college in America.

The College's accomplishments belie a fundamental truth about Raritan Valley Community College: It is worth every dollar, every gift, every partnership, every collaboration, and every act of support, in any form. It is the best community college in New Jersey, and among the best in the country. Its faculty and staff are stars. Its students are rising stars. And all are worthy of being center stage.

Most of our supporters understand these assertions, but they de-

serve to be stated, amplified, and celebrated. Indeed, RVCC has earned its starring role in the college show, on the higher education stage.

But we also know that some of our readers and supporters may not have ever stepped foot on campus or met any of the people who make it exceptional. Which is why we always use this Annual Report as a showcase—for the accomplishments and the voices of our students, faculty, and staff.

My own RVCC voice was preceded by 11 years at Rutgers University. Everything I was seeking in my transition from "The State University," I found at RVCC. Community. Friendship. Leadership. The power of true connections. The virtues of small. After experiencing the immensity of Rutgers, I especially appreciated the smallness, the intimacy that RVCC offered.

In fact, my eight years at Raritan Valley Community College have been among the best of my professional life. And it seems my trajectory has always been pointed toward small: From a global corporate communications giant (AT&T) with operations around the planet, to a major R1 University with sprawling campuses across the State, to a single community college in Branchburg, New Jersey.

The truth is, I am proud of this College and the leadership behind its success. I am proud of RVCC's stature on New Jersey's higher education landscape. I am proud of our gritty determination to persevere despite every obstacle we face. I am proud of our ability to innovate, take risks, and find solutions when they're rarely obvious. I am proud of every student who chooses to attend RVCC—and especially those who enliven the campus with their passion and energy.

I am grateful to be part of a passionate, enriching community and to lead such a creative, resourceful, and talented RVCC Foundation team. As I reflect on my four and a half decades of work in the public and private sectors, across a range of organizations, initiatives, and causes, I will always cherish that the capstone of my career was spent at RVCC.

But I reserve my deepest gratitude for all of the people and organizations who've said "yes" to Raritan Valley Community College over the years. To those who've invested, given generous gifts, partnered, collaborated, or otherwise applauded the star power of RVCC. We are proud to have you with us, as you, too, are stars of the college show.

All good wishes,

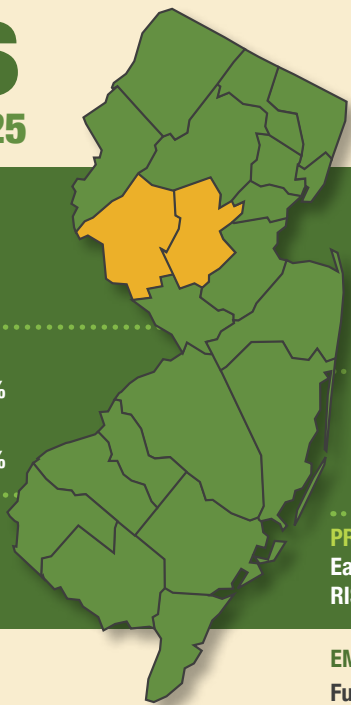
Mike

Michael J. Marion, Chief Development Officer & Executive Director
RVCC Foundation & RVCC Alumni Association, 74 Lamington Road, Branchburg, NJ 08876-3315
O: 908-648-8567; C: 973-600-2848
rvccfoundation.org / Instagram@rvccfoundation / LinkedIn:MikeMarion

RVCC Fast Facts

FAST FACTS data from Fall 2025


GRADUATES (2024-25)
1063 Degrees
79 Credit Certificates



STUDENT ENROLLMENT

Headcount..... 6,500
Credit Hours..... 60,646
Term Full-time Equivalent (FTE)..... 3,903

STUDENT STATUS

First Time Student.....21.6%
New Transfer Student.....4.8%
Continuing / re-admit / non-degree73.6%

FULL-TIME / PART-TIME STATUS

Full-Time..... 39.9%
Part-Time..... 60.1%

TOP TRANSFER DESTINATIONS

Rutgers New Brunswick
Rutgers Newark
Kean University
Montclair State University
The College of New Jersey

STUDENT RESIDENCE

99% IN STATE
56% Somerset
22% Hunterdon

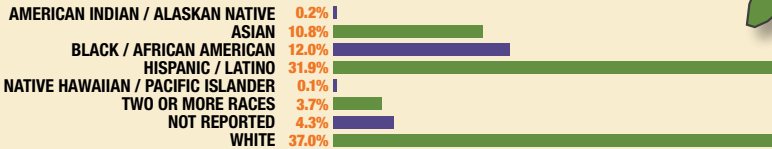
PROGRAMS

	Headcount	Credits
Early College Programs	1,032	5,389
RISE Program	391	2,479

EMPLOYEES (Fall 2025)

Full-time Faculty.....125
Adjunct Faculty.....296
FT Admin/Staff.....215
PT Hourly.....233

STUDENT ETHNICITY



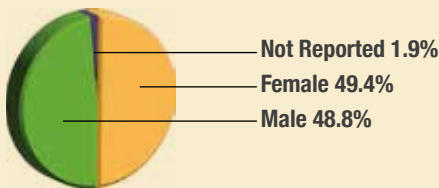
NUMBER OF SECTIONS

Sections Offered.....1,173
Average Class Size.....17

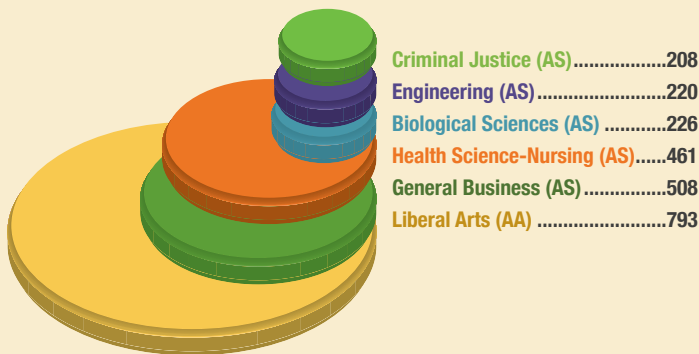
ANNUAL ENROLLMENT 2024-2025

Headcount..... 9,966
Annual Full-time Equivalent (FTE) 4,619

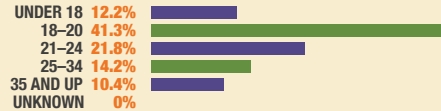
STUDENT GENDER



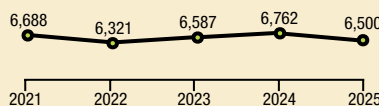
POPULAR MAJORS



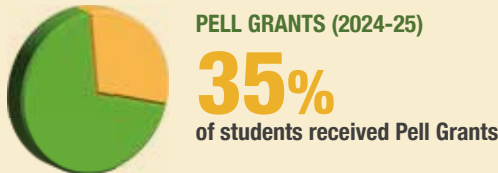
STUDENT AGE



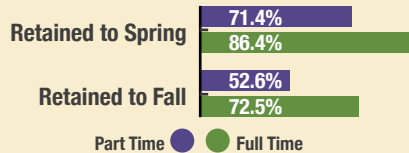
FIVE YEAR TREND (HEADCOUNT)



PELL GRANTS (2024-25)



RETENTION (Fall 2024 Cohort)



DISTANCE EDUCATION

- 41% of students took at least one online course
- Students enrolled in 14,305 online credits

RVCC Leadership



RVCC Foundation Board of Directors

Allan Boomer, Chair
Dan Van Tran, Vice Chair
Deirdre Blaus
David Bunevich
Michael Bzdak
Sierra Saint-Vil
Sean Fleming
Rebecca Geary
Parag S. Jategaonkar
Michael J. McDonough, President, RVCC
Daphne Kunukcu, RVCC Class of 2026
Joel Reyes-Guzman
Harshil Shah, RVCC Class of 2026
Michael Schwertfeger
Wanda Shoer
Tammy Stouchko
John Trojan, Treasurer
Gary C. Woodring, Assistant Treasurer

Peter S. Johnson, Emeritus
Dr. Richard D. Wellbrock, Emeritus

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Helena Swanicke, Vice Chair, Somerset
Caren Bateman
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Terence Byrd
Michael Goldberg
Roger A. Jinks
Nidhi Makhija
Howard J. Opdyke
Adam Shain
Margaret Wolan Sullivan
Juan Torres
James A. Von Schilling
Victor Komosinski, Alumni Representative
Paul J. Hirsch, Trustee Emeritus
John L. McGuire, Trustee Emeritus
Michael J. McDonough, President, RVCC

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 Marion, Executive Director, RVCC Foundation & RVCC Alumni Association
Conrad Mercurius, Executive Director of Workforce Development & Career Education
Cynthia Schaffer, Associate Vice President of Technology Services
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

RVCC Foundation Staff

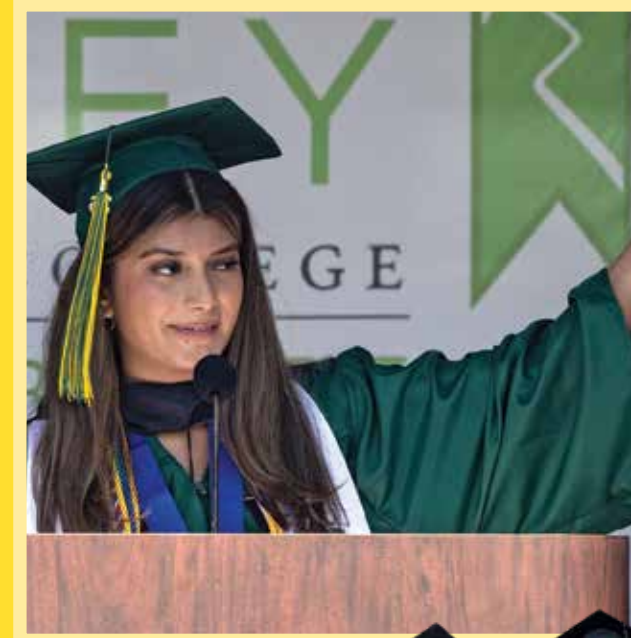
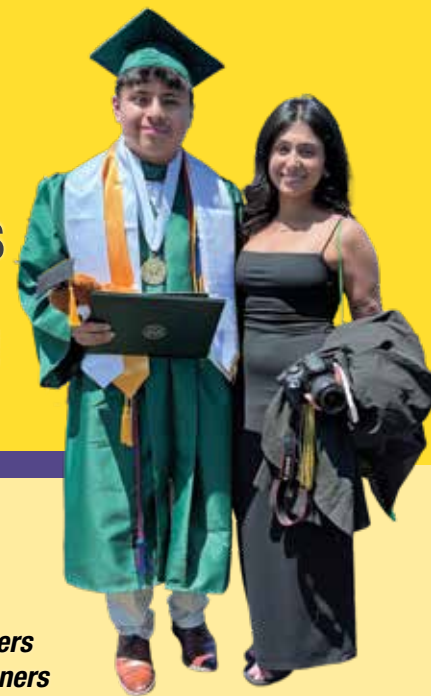
Janet Dunne, Development Associate
Chris Spangler, Development & Alumni Engagement Associate
Donna Stolzer, Director of Media Relations
Cindy Haddad, Development Specialist
Michael Marion, Chief Development Officer & Executive Director

RVCC Foundation Golf Classic Committee

Keith Cahill
Annette Lacanna
Brian O'Rourke
Steven A. Reichman
Michael Schwertfeger
John Trojan
Barry Walker
Robert P. Wise
Gary Woodring

THE RISING STARS...

**RARITAN VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE'S
57th GRADUATING CLASS—SOME 1,222 STUDENTS
STRONG—IS READY TO TAKE FLIGHT...
CONGRATULATIONS TO THE RVCC CLASS OF 2026!**



SPECIAL THANKS TO 2026 COMMENCEMENT SPEAKERS:

WELCOME: *Michael J. McDonough, President, Raritan Valley Community College*
Helena Swanicke, Vice Chair, Board of Trustees, Somerset

GREETINGS: *Jeff Kuhl, Deputy Director, Hunterdon County Board of County Commissioners*
Shanel Y. Robinson, Director, Somerset County Board of County Commissioners

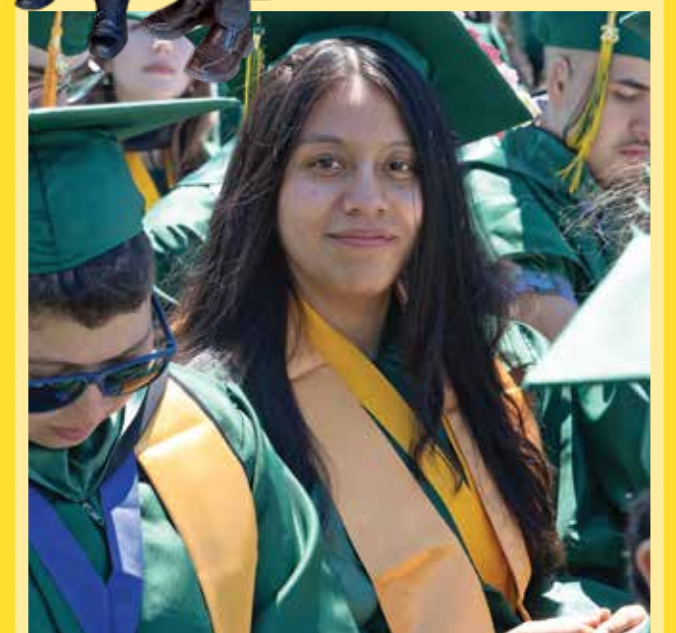
INTRODUCTION OF FACULTY SPEAKER: *Esmeralda Ochoa, Class of 2026*

FACULTY ADDRESS: *Dr. Frank Forte, Associate Professor of Mathematics*

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

STUDENT ADDRESS: *Sam Manongsong, Class of 2026*

NATIONAL ANTHEM: *RVCC Chorale*







THANK YOU

THANK YOU TO OUR GENEROUS SPONSORS AND FRIENDS OF THE 22ND ANNUAL RVCC FOUNDATION GOLF CLASSIC

EVENT SPONSORS	GOLFERS
TITLE SPONSOR DeSesa Engineering Co., Inc.	SUMMA CUM LAUDE Allied Universal Automated Logic Badger Roofing Bohler United Business Systems
LINKS SPONSOR LJS Electric	MAGNA CUM LAUDE J.G. Petrucci Co., Inc. Pave-Rite, Inc. Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital Somerset SSP Architects Suplee, Clooney & Company Trane Van Cleef Engineering Associates, LLC
GOLF BALL SPONSOR Northfield Bank	CUM LAUDE Bedrock Concrete Corp. Celldex Therapeutics Chem-Aqua, Inc. Epic Management, Inc. GCWoodring Consulting GZA GeoEnvironmental Inc. Hannon Floors Hunterdon Health Foundation Interface, Inc. Mackoul Risk Solutions Mechanical Technologies Myth MVP New Jersey Risk Managers & Consultants, LLC Norris McLaughlin, P.A. PhillyCom, Inc. USA Architects
GOLF CANNON SPONSOR LJS Electric	INDIVIDUAL PLAYERS Northfield Bank Lewis Sidorsky TD Bank Barry Walker Robert Wise
GOLF CART SPONSORS eDesign Interactive Giordano, Halleran & Ciesla, P.C.	MUCH GRATITUDE TO RVCC Golf Committee Event Volunteers
BEVERAGE CART SPONSORS Dancker FAST – Fire and Security Technologies New Jersey Risk Managers & Consultants, LLC Penncat Corporation – Critical Power Systems	
BAGPIPER SPONSOR KeRi Engineering PC	
DRIVING RANGE SPONSORS KSI Consulting Engineers, LLC Provident Bank	
ON COURSE REFRESHMENTS SPONSOR Shop-Rite of Hunterdon County	
TEE SIGN SPONSORS Blejwas Associates, Inc. HealthQuest Fitness Club MKSD Architects, LLC Whitestone Associates	

21st ANNUAL



RVCC FOUNDATION GOLF CLASSIC RAISES OVER \$153,000



The RVCC Foundation raised \$153,185 at the 21st Annual RVCC Foundation Golf Classic, held June 9, 2025 at the Neshanic Valley Golf Course.

This event was another sellout, with 147 participants, including enthusiastic golfers representing a wide range of local businesses from throughout Hunterdon and Somerset counties and beyond. Corporate sponsors were headlined by “Title Sponsor,” LJS Electric. In addition to the golf sponsors, the event met its goal by raising \$7,500 for a special “ONE FULL RIDE” new initiative, which will provide one “Full Ride” scholarship for a student to attend Raritan Valley Community College.

“As always, we’re grateful for the generosity of our corporate community, and relish the way RVCC students play so visible a role at this event,” said Mike Marion, Executive Director, RVCC Foundation and RVCC Alumni Association. “We were also very pleased to have held this year’s Classic at Neshanic Valley Golf Course, a public course and a true gem of the Somerset County Park Commission,” said Marion.

The RVCC Foundation Golf Classic is the non-profit’s largest in-person fundraising event of the year, and the 21st Annual attracted some 57 corporate sponsors, including Title Sponsor, LJS Electric, and Dinner Sponsors, Epic Management, Inc; Myth MVP; and Vanguard Energy Partners LLC

Net proceeds raised from the golf outing and auctions support student scholarships, RVCC’s education programming, and other institutional priorities.

THESE ARE A FEW OF OUR FAVORITE THINGS

A group of happy golfers.

A rocking volunteer team.

A special ONE FULL RIDE ticket promotion and a goal met—delivering a full scholarship for a worthy RVCC student for the upcoming academic year.

Happy volunteers relishing a ticket sales job well done.

An RVCC Proud poster board “autographed” by all purchasers of the ONE FULL RIDE ticket package.

Two great RVCC coaches judging a putting contest.

Cloudy, drizzle but no rain during the tournament.

Our students show up and add a little sunshine amid the overcast skies, including:

A National Anthem performed on the trumpet, courtesy of 2025 RVCC Honors College grad, Justin Britten (with Greg DeSanctis); On-course painting, courtesy of Arts & Design’s Sara Rasmussen and Jordan McNelis (Class of 2025 & 2026, respectively); A journey of triumph and gratitude shared by Leah Michelle Yacos (Nursing Class of 2025).

Students, generous supporters, and happy volunteers were the stars at the 21st Annual RVCC Foundation Golf Classic in support of Raritan Valley Community College.



21st ANNUAL



POINTS OF PRIDE

Celebrating the Reach of RVCC

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



#RVCCProud



NEWS YOU CAN USE

LOCAL CHILDREN PARTICIPATE IN “LITTLE SCIENTISTS NIGHT” AT RVCC

Local children were offered the opportunity to dive into fun, hands-on science activities during last fall’s “Little Scientists Night” in the College’s Christine Todd Whitman Science Center.



RVCC’s Department of Science and Engineering partnered with the Pioneer Family Success Center to welcome over 150 guests, about half of whom were children from toddlers to age 12, proudly wearing their lab coats. The program was led by RVCC faculty and staff, close to 100 RVCC student volunteers, and members from 12 of the College’s STEM clubs. The RVCC students helped with logistics and ran 35 engaging STEM activities, spanning astronomy, biology, chemistry, engineering, environmental science, physics, and more.

The Science Center was filled with creative activity stations, excited families, and RVCC students showing off their energy and talent as they guided the “Little Scientists” through each experiment.

STUDENT NURSES’ ASSOCIATION OFFERS SERVICE TO COLLEGE, COMMUNITY



The Student Nurses’ Association (SNA) wrapped up the fall semester by delivering Holiday Wish gifts to 10 teenagers at Agape House. The SNA also sponsored cookie and ornament decorating activities, as well as a holiday coloring activity, with younger residents of Agape House. Based in Somerset County, Agape House offers emergency housing and case management services to single adults and families with children.

SNA service projects during the fall semester also included promoting two on-campus Blood Drives and monitoring blood donors during the event; providing blood pressure checks and stroke education at the College’s Employee Benefits Fair; sponsoring a Nursing Jacket Fundraiser to benefit Hurricane Melissa Relief in Jamaica; and publicizing an ongoing Food Drive for the RVCC Resource Center and Food Pantry.

NEWS YOU CAN USE

HUNTERDON CENTRAL AND RVCC JOIN TOGETHER FOR SPECIAL PARTNERSHIP



Hunterdon Central Regional High School and RVCC have joined together to create a special dual enrollment partnership for students who enroll in the high school’s Biomedical Science Academy through its Magnet Program. Starting with the incoming Class of 2030, students taking the Biomedical Science Magnet Academy courses can earn up to 33 college credits while attending Hunterdon Central. Following their high school graduation, students can then matriculate to RVCC and complete the Associate of Science degree in Health Science in as little as one year. “Raritan Valley Community College’s expanded partnership with Hunterdon Central Regional High School is a wonderful example of the College’s ongoing commitment to expanding access to students and helping them reduce their higher education costs,” said Shay Wadher, Director of K-12 Partnerships, Raritan Valley Community College. Students follow a guided course sequence to complete the Biomedical Science Magnet Academy, with all of the courses approved by RVCC to earn college credit. Credits from RVCC transfer to state colleges and universities as well as many others across the country and even abroad. Students finishing the Associate of Science degree also have a leg up on transferring to the four-year college or university of

their choice to pursue a bachelor’s degree. “This exciting expansion of our partnership with RVCC offers students a unique bridge to their future: they can dive deep into subjects they love, such as biomedical sciences, and experience college-level rigor with the safety net of high school support. This new program also offers families significant savings on tuition,” said Dr. Matthew Hall, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Hunterdon Central Regional High School District. The biomedical science courses offered at Hunterdon Central and continuing at RVCC provide students with an in-depth understanding of health science and that industry, giving them increased career readiness upon their college graduation. “The collaboration between RVCC and Hunterdon Central strengthens the talent pipeline for students interested in pursuing education and training in healthcare and health-related fields. This initiative builds on the strong programs within both institutions and helps increase access and opportunity for Hunterdon Central students. The partnership will help students graduate with confidence and momentum toward future study. It also demonstrates a shared commitment between Hunterdon Central Regional High School and RVCC to invest in the next generation of health professionals,” said Dr. Drue Stapleton, RVCC Dean of Health Sciences.

ESTHETICS STUDENT RECEIVES SCHOLARSHIP



Fatima Akbar Rizvi of Bridgewater, a fulltime student in RVCC’s Esthetics (skincare) program, received the Fall 2025 “Hydrafacial Glow Getter Scholarship.” The \$5,000 scholarship, administered by Beauty Changes Lives, is designed to empower women who want to establish a career in esthetics. It offers financial support

for those in an Esthetics program that leads to licensure or certification, or for currently licensed professionals interested in elevating their skills. Rizvi, who has been a bridal professional makeup artist for approximately nine years, hopes to work as a medical esthetician for a dermatologist. Her future goal, she says, is to have her own medical spa business.



NEWS YOU CAN USE

RVCC FACULTY MEMBER PENS BOOK ON STRATEGIC PLANNING



A book by Fernando H. Ferrer, an Adjunct Professor in the Business and Public Service department, has been published by Archway Publishing.

Titled Strategy and Planning Fundamentals: Empowering You, the 348-page book presents a human-centered and practical approach to strategic planning, blending organizational systems with psychological insight to help leaders, professionals, and students transform complexity into purposeful action.

In conjunction with the publication's release, Professor



Ferrer has offered presentations to a wide range of institutions—including companies, professional associations, government entities, and academic organizations—focused on the transformative process of strategic planning and the concepts developed in his book.

An adjunct faculty member at RVCC since 2012, Professor Ferrer has presented executive masterclasses and has spoken at conferences on strategic planning in the United States, Greece, Italy, Argentina, and Brazil, extending his impact across academic, corporate, and professional audiences worldwide.

NATIONAL HONORS FOR RVCC FACULTY MEMBER AND MANVILLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS



RVCC Adjunct Faculty member Dr. Anita Petersen and Manville Public Schools have been honored by the National Association of Community College Teacher Education Programs (NACCTEP) for their efforts to prepare future educators.

Manville Public Schools has received the NACCTEP 2026 Partner Award, and Dr. Petersen, an Adjunct Associate Professor in the College's Humanities, Social Sciences, Social Work & Education department, is a recipient of the NACCTEP 2026 Adjunct Faculty Award.

The honors were given at the National Association of Community College Teacher Education Programs' annual

pre-conference event, "Community College Teacher Education Research, Policy, and Practice," held this past winter in New Orleans. The event is held ahead of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education's annual meeting.

Dr. Petersen, who was celebrated as an exemplary adjunct faculty member in RVCC's Education programs, is being recognized for her dedication to her students and her commitment to faculty support of future teachers. An instructor at RVCC for 20 years, Dr. Petersen has taught Early Childhood and Education courses in various certificate and degree programs. She also has served as temporary leave replacements for the program's fulltime faculty members.

"This is a well-deserved honor for Anita. She is creative and supportive of her students and is responsive and innovative with her colleagues at RVCC," said Dr. Kathryn Suk, RVCC Professor of Education and Education Program Coordinator.

Manville Public Schools was recognized as an exemplary community partner with the College's Education Programs and for the P-12 district's longstanding commitment to hosting RVCC student observers. "Students interested in becoming preschool through high school teachers have been welcomed into classrooms throughout the district for nearly 10 years," Dr. Suk continued.



NEWS YOU CAN USE

STUDENTS, ALUMNI VOLUNTEER AS TOUR GUIDES FOR EXHIBITION



RVCC students Justine Markos-Saad, Ella Partanna, Jaimy Solis, Nabeeha Khan, Amelia Reitman, Chris Fox, and Shanya Saunders, along with RVCC alumni Lev Baab and Ashley Reyes, volunteered their time and talents as trained tour guides this past winter and spring for the traveling exhibition, Anne Frank: A History for Today.

Presented by the College's Institute of Holocaust and Genocide Studies, Anne Frank: A History for Today was on display in the Morris and Dorothy Hirsch

Research Library, located on the second floor of the Evelyn S Field Library. The student training and service learning component of the initiative was supported by The Pray Family Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement at RVCC.

After completing a two-day civic leadership training led by professional educators from the Anne Frank Center—the official national partner of the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam, where the exhibition was created—the students began guiding visitors through the powerful exhibition. The training prepared participants to facilitate meaningful dialogue, provide historical context, and connect Anne Frank's story to contemporary issues of prejudice, discrimination, and civic responsibility.

The exhibition was open to the public, and tours were offered to RVCC English classes, local middle school students, and senior citizen groups.

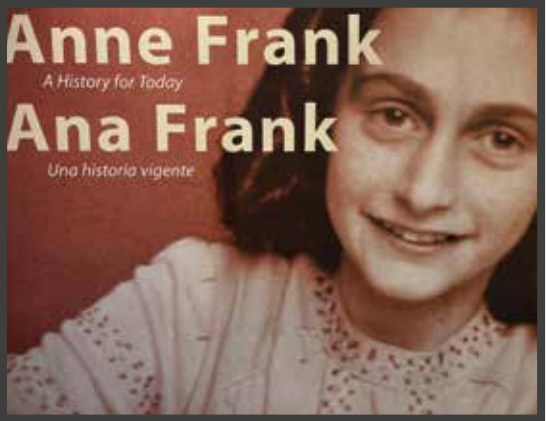
Anne Frank: A History for Today presents the history of the Holocaust as told

through the perspective of Anne Frank and her family. The display features 11 large panels, as well as artifacts. Juxtaposing photographs of the Frank family with historical images, the exhibit shows how persecuted people were affected by the political actions of individuals and groups.

"Through their service, the student volunteers earned service learning credit, developed public speaking and leadership skills, and contributed valuable community engagement hours," said Lori Moog, Director of Service Learning and Community Outreach. "Their participation reflects the Pray Family Center's commitment to fostering civic responsibility and meaningful community involvement among our students."

"The dedication of our student volunteers demonstrates the power of education to inspire leadership and purposeful community engagement," said Michelle Edgar, Program Specialist for the Institute of Holocaust and Genocide Studies. "By guiding this exhibit, they are helping to ensure that Anne Frank's story continues to educate and inspire new generations."

The Institute of Holocaust & Genocide Studies at Raritan Valley Community College is a collaboration with the Jewish Federation of West-Central New Jersey. The exhibition was also supported by the New Jersey Commission on Holocaust Education.





NEWS YOU CAN USE

RVCC EARNs NATIONAL RECOGNITION FOR NONPARTISAN VOTER ENGAGEMENT



colleges and universities for developing innovative and effective strategies to increase nonpartisan civic engagement and student voter participation.

RVCC is one of 129 campuses nationwide—and only 19 community colleges—recognized for the 2026 election cycle. RVCC is one of only two New Jersey community colleges to earn the Highly Established Action Plan Seal, the program’s highest level of recognition for institutional planning and impact.

The College’s initiative was led by The Pray Family Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement, in partnership with the Office of Student Life. RVCC’s Action Plan focuses on engaging students, faculty, administrators, community nonprofit partners, and local election officials in collaborative efforts to increase student voter participation.

Through both curricular and co-curricular initiatives—inside and outside the classroom—the College promotes informed civic participation. Activities have included voter registration drives, opportunities for students to train and serve as poll workers, civic education workshops, election information sessions,

RVCC has been awarded the 2026 Highly Established Action Plan Seal by the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge. The national initiative recognizes

and social media campaigns designed to encourage students to register, learn about key issues, and vote.

The ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge—in collaboration with the American Democracy Project, Campus Vote Project, NASPA LEAD Initiative, and the Students Learn Students Vote Coalition—developed the Strengthening American Democracy Guide to help campuses create comprehensive action plans that promote democratic engagement. Institutions evaluate their plans using a rubric based on the guide; the Highly Established Action Plan Seal recognizes campuses that score at least 31.5 out of 36 possible points.

“Colleges and universities have a responsibility to prepare students to engage meaningfully in our nation’s democracy,” said Jennifer Domagal-Goldman, executive director of the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge. “We are proud to recognize Raritan Valley Community College for developing and implementing a comprehensive, data-informed campus action plan that empowers the next generation of voters.”

The ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge currently engages more than 9.8 million students at over 960 institutions across all 50 states and the District of Columbia, helping colleges and universities institutionalize nonpartisan civic learning and voter participation.

OPHTHALMIC SCIENCE STUDENT PLACES THIRD AT NATIONAL COLLEGE BOWL



Ophthalmic Science student Hunter Nicholaysen of Belvidere came in third place at the nationwide College Bowl contest at Vision Expo, held this past spring in Orlando, FL. Vision Expo is an annual event for ophthalmic professionals focusing on eyewear, education, and fashion.

Nicholaysen graduated from RVCC in May with an Associate of Applied Science Degree in Ophthalmic Science. She also works in the optical industry

as an apprentice optician and is following her mother’s path to become a licensed optician.

The United Opticians Association College Bowl, which is sponsored by EssilorLuxottica, is an annual competition among representatives of opticianry programs from across the country. It is a quiz-show type competition that features questions in anatomy and physiology of the eye, dispensing, fabrication, contact lenses, and optics.



NEWS YOU CAN USE

MUSIC STUDENTS, ALUMNA WIN HONORS AT REGIONAL CONFERENCE



RVCC Music students Sarah Stefaniak, Cynthia DiMarco, and Alex Kesselhaut received several top honors at the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS) Eastern Region Student Auditions and Conference, held this past spring at Susquehanna University in Selinsgrove, PA.

The NATS Eastern Region comprises Delaware, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Quebec.

Sarah Stefaniak, an alumna of RVCC’s Associate of Fine Arts (AFA) in Music program, and Cynthia DiMarco, a current student in the College’s AFA in Music program, tied for First Place in the Musical Theatre Auditions category. Stefaniak performed “What Remains” by Drew Gasparini; DiMarco sang “Get Out and Stay Out” from *9 to 5: The Musical*.

Stefaniak also won First Place in the Commercial Music category, performing “Excuses” by Ande Estrella. Kesselhaut, a current student in RVCC’s Music program, won Third Place in the Commercial Music category,

singing “White Rabbit” by Jefferson Airplane.

Praising his students’ efforts at the regional conference, Dr. Will Berman, RVCC Instructor of Music, said, “Moments like this are a reminder of what is possible when students are given the opportunity and support to pursue this work seriously. I look forward to continuing to build on this momentum and helping our students reach even more milestones like these in the future.”

After placing in the Eastern Regional Conference, the RVCC students qualified for the NATS National Student Auditions.

RVCC’s AFA in Music prepares students to transfer into Bachelor’s Degree programs in Music at four-year colleges and universities. The RVCC degree features two tracks: Applied Music and Music Production. The Applied Music track is designed for students interested in pursuing careers in Performance, Music Education, or Music Therapy, while the Music Production track is for students who wish to pursue careers in Audio Engineering, Music Production, and related fields.

SISTERS IN STEM CLUB PARTNERS WITH FRANKLIN MIDDLE SCHOOL



RVCC’s Sister in STEM (SIS) club offered local middle school students the opportunity to learn about science and engineering in a fun and engaging way. The eight SIS members partnered with Franklin Middle School to host 25 girls for a STEM Day this past spring, offering hands-on activities for the budding scientists. The SIS members guided and supported the students throughout the event, leading the activities and serving as encouraging role models.

In the first activity, students worked together to build simple LED circuits using batteries and wires. Engaging in the effort helped them learn basic electrical engineering concepts while creating a working project. Later, they explored Tangrams—puzzles made of seven shapes that can be

arranged into different designs. This activity encouraged them to learn about geometry as they practiced problem-solving and used critical thinking skills.

Reflecting on the STEM Day’s experience, club advisor Dr. Antonella Pompo, RVCC Professor of Engineering, said, “The SIS members did a great job creating a welcoming and supportive environment. Their leadership and mentorship made the experience both educational and inspiring. The event truly highlights RVCC’s commitment to community outreach and to encouraging young women to explore STEM fields.”



RVCC HOSTS 2026 NJ INTEGRAL BEE FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

RVCC's Math Club hosted the 2026 NJ Integral Bee, an exciting and intellectually rigorous mathematics competition for high school students. The event, held this past spring at the College's Christine Todd Whitman Science Center, was led by a dedicated cohort from Bridgewater-Raritan High School's Mu Alpha Theta Math Honors Society Chapter.

The program brought together some of New Jersey's most talented high school

mathematicians for an evening of challenging problem-solving and collaboration. Eighteen high school students competed in the three-hour competition, tackling over 100 integrals drawn from Calculus I and II classes. The event was entirely led and emceed by high school students, while a panel of four RVCC Mathematics and Computer Science professors served as judges, ensuring a fair and academically rigorous evaluation of all participants.

The event was made possible through strong campus collaboration. Members of the RVCC Rotaract Club volunteered their time to assist with event logistics, helping ensure a smooth and welcoming experience for all participants. In addition, RVCC engineering student Joseph Angline showcased an impressive collection of over 20, 3D-printed models inspired by SpaceX and NASA, adding an engaging and educational visual component to the evening.



#RVCCPROUD



NEWS YOU CAN USEEXPANDED

AMONG THE MANY

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT (L-to-R): Leah Ossi, Curriculum Assistant for The Achievement Center; Leah is both a TAC grad (Class of 2020) and a December, 2021 grad from RVCC with Associate of Applied Science in Education; Kevin Castro, TAC graduate (Class of 2023) and TAC Alumni Committee Member; Rebecca Charles-Estain, TAC graduate (Class of 2023) and TAC Alumni President; Bobby Kopac, TAC graduate (Class of 2022) and TAC Alumni Vice President.



After this summer, we'll be celebrating another milestone at Raritan Valley Community College. The opening of the new "Center for Community Education and Engagement" will provide expanded space for The Achievement Center (TAC) at Raritan Valley Community College. This innovative program provides college access for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

TAC, which is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, was inspired by a conversation between RVCC President Michael McDonough and the mother of a student with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Her observation: "it's not fair that my child doesn't have the opportunity to experience college." The president agreed. Then he pushed ahead an idea, and a collaboration between Raritan Valley Community College, the Arc of Somerset County, and The Arc of Hunterdon County was born.

And what started 10 years ago with two students and two classes, now has 55 classes and 187 students, across all of the TAC programs, including the popular "Club Friday Night Hangout." TAC at RVCC will provide college access to more

than 200 students by next fall, with some 68 TAC students taking RVCC-credit courses. In short, it is an exceptional example of what an "open access" institution enables.

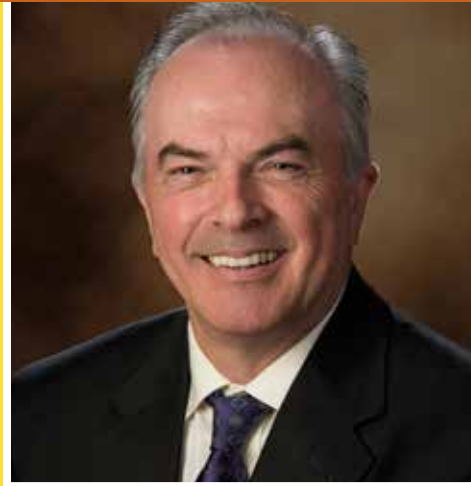
But there's more to this story. Also unique to the 10-year journey of The Achievement Center at Raritan Valley Community College: the "first ever" scholarships for TAC students, an historic multi-year commitment from The Provident Bank Foundation—through the leadership of Samantha Plotino—to expand STEM offerings, and most recently, the birth of an alumni association for TAC grads.

Flash forward to last fall's "Student Involvement Fair" at the Raritan Valley Community College Event Center, which was buzzing with energy and exuberance. More than 30 student clubs and organizations proudly displayed their work, missions, and goals.

One group of four students, positioned front and center in the lobby, welcomed visitors with their own narrative of success, pride, and big aspirations. In short: college experience realized, and achievement attained.



RVCC PRESIDENT NAMED TO NJBIZ 2025 EDUCATION POWER LIST



RVCC President Dr. Michael J. McDonough has been selected as part of NJBIZ's 2025 Education Power List. The recognition of McDonough, who took over as president at Raritan Valley Community College in 2014, is in acknowledgment of the many accomplishments he has helped achieve. Today, RVCC enrolls approximately 6,500 students, a total McDonough has helped build

steadily through aggressive marketing and outreach after the impacts of the pandemic.

This year, the school adopted a new, five-year strategic plan, "Leading Change, Inspiring Possibility." Commenting on the outline, McDonough noted colleges must not only accept change but embrace it amid an evolving learning landscape.

In February, RVCC was an integral part of the launch of NJBioFutures, a public-private workforce development partnership that will serve the state's expanding cell and gene therapy sector—to which Johnson & Johnson contributed \$1 million as founding sponsor. RVCC is also a leader in the area of operational sustainability, recognized at both the national and state levels for its stellar environmental practices. For the 2025 fiscal year, the RVCC Foundation also set a new fundraising record, surpassing the \$2 million mark for the first time in the College's history. McDonough is also active in the community college sector, serving as chair of the Executive Committee of the New Jersey Community College Consortium for Workforce and Economic Development, and chair of the Academic Issues Committee; he is a board member for Engage NJ.

NEW STRATEGIC PLAN FOR RVCC

With approval from the RVCC Board of Trustees, the College has launched a new strategic plan, "2025-2030 Strategic Plan: Leading Change, Inspiring Possibility," focusing on six themes: Student Success & Academic Excellence; Workforce & Economic Development; Access & Affordability; Community Engagement & Partnership; Infrastructure, Technology & Environmental Stewardship; and Institutional Culture.

"As many students move away from traditional academic pathways and require additional support systems and essential career skills—while conventional funding sources decline—it's vital the College not only accepts change, but also embraces it. Raritan Valley Community College's new Strategic Plan focuses on our commitment to student

success through the enhancement of academic, community, and corporate partnerships; an investment in resources to keep pace with a changing workforce; and an obligation to deliver an affordable, accessible education to help transform our inspiring students' lives," said RVCC President Michael J. McDonough.

In fall 2024, a Strategic Planning Committee was formed representing all constituencies of the RVCC community, including students and the Board of Trustees. The committee then hosted numerous focus groups and requested electronic survey feedback to discover relevant themes that represent the College's collective goals for the future. Presentations were then made to the College community and at Board of Trustees Strategy and Vision Committee meetings throughout the spring 2025 semester, in conjunction with the Strategic Planning Committee's biweekly gatherings, to develop plan details based on constituent comments and to provide updates. Additional feedback was collected during and after each presentation, resulting in the final Strategic Plan presented and approved in May 2025.



35th ANNUAL ROBESON AWARDS



Middle and high school students from Somerset and Hunterdon counties were honored for their achievements at the 35th Annual Paul Robeson Youth Achievement Awards, held April 20 at Raritan Valley Community College. The event, attended by 270 people, was sponsored by the College's Paul Robeson Institute for Ethics, Leadership and Social Justice.

Approximately 75 students were nominated for awards by their school counselors, teachers, and administrators. A special committee of RVCC faculty and staff members selected the 20 award recipients. The evening featured a keynote address by Ka'Sheer Cassett, alumnus of RVCC and Howard University (Magna Cum Laude), and current

employee of Sanofi.

The National Council of Negro Women and RVCC initiated the Paul Robeson Youth Achievement Awards program to pay tribute to the outstanding attainments of students in Somerset and Hunterdon counties. The awards are named in honor of Paul Robeson, a Princeton native who grew up in Somerville and graduated from Somerville High School and Rutgers University. The awards are given in four areas in which Robeson excelled: Scholarship, the Arts, Community Service and Athletics, as well as special "Renaissance Awards" given to students who excel in a number of disciplines.

The Evelyn Field Visionary Award also was presented at the ceremony. The award pays tribute to the founding member of the RVCC Board of Trustees, who was a dynamic and compassionate advocate for promoting diversity and equality on campus. In 1990 Evelyn Field established the Paul Robeson Youth Achievement Program to preserve Paul Robeson's legacy as a role model for excellence.

The Paul Robeson Institute for Ethics, Leadership and Social Justice was founded in 1999 to preserve Paul Robeson's legacy in the area where he came of age as an artist, athlete, orator, and scholar. The Institute envisions a global community of diverse cultures that embodies, through attitudes and behaviors, Paul Robeson's ideals, beliefs, values and vision for a world of justice and peace.





NEW ERA FOR WORKFORCE TRAINING AT RVCC



The fall began with an amazing ribbon-cutting ceremony and celebration of the 22,000 square foot expansion at the RVCC Workforce Training Center. The expanded space enables the College to offer experiential learning in such rapidly expanding areas as Biomanufacturing and Aseptic Processing, Electric Vehicle Technology, Mechatronics and Robotics, and Welding, bridging the gap between education and industry.

For their generous support, huge thanks is due to Somerset County, Hunterdon County, the State of New Jersey, New Jersey Council of County Colleges, and Johnson & Johnson. And thanks to New Jersey Business & Industry Association, Hunterdon Review, and WRNJ Radio for the coverage of this historic development on the campus of Raritan Valley Community College.

"Investing in higher education, like our outstanding Raritan Valley Community College and its state-of-the-art Workforce Training Center, is essential for developing a productive and resilient economy," said Somerset County Commissioner Director Shanel Y. Robinson. "By partnering with regional businesses on skillset needs, RVCC is



creating a talent pipeline, providing students with valuable real-world experience in biomanufacturing, mechatronics, welding, and robotics, that will lead to employment."

"Hunterdon County is proud to support RVCC's Workforce Training Center expansion. This project is a direct investment in the future of our regional workforce, ensuring that students gain hands-on experience and training in high-demand fields, while helping our local employers meet the challenges of a rapidly evolving economy," said Hunterdon County Commissioner Director John E. Lanza.

Thanks is due to all of the construction partners and the RVCC Facilities team for persevering through the difficult work such an expansion requires. Lastly, huge shoutout RVCC's Conrad Mercurius and the entire staff of the Workforce Training Center. It takes exceptional leadership and drive to achieve such a consequential milestone. And no doubt, this is just the beginning.

VIP PARTNERSHIP



Huge thanks to Somerset County executive Colleen Mahr, Commissioners Melonie Marano and Elizabeth Graner, economic development manager Jessica Paolini, and Director of the Greater Raritan Workforce Development Board, Paul Grzella—all of whom joined Raritan Valley Community College's Conrad Mercurius last August at the Workforce Training Center.

The visit was a prelude to last fall's "ribbon cutting" event for the Center's 22,000 square-foot expansion, which the County has been generously supporting.

GIVE AND GET

A special shoutout to Tom Senneca, Field Technical Specialist and Team Support Leader for the New York Region of Toyota North America. A recently donated 2024 Toyota Corolla SE represents more than an upgrade to training in the Automotive Technology program at Raritan Valley Community College, it also helps expand the Toyota-RVCC partnership as it develops RVCC students through the Toyota Technician Education College Support (TECS) program.

"One of the hardest items for automotive education programs is to obtain new vehicles in order to teach the newest technologies and how to repair the newest vehicles," says Sara Heller, Assistant Professor and Coordinator of the Automotive Technology program at Raritan Valley Community College. "That's why we're so grateful to our partners at Toyota for this donation."

For students interested in a career with Toyota or Lexus, completing TECS makes them that much more qualified for opportunities at Toyota or Lexus dealerships across the region. Adds Tom Senneca, "TECS is designed to supplement your existing curriculum and help students interested in a career with Toyota or Lexus gain a head start in their training."

In short, everyone wins.



(L-to-R): Tom Senneca, Sara Heller; Wayne Moschella, Automotive Skills Lab Coordinator at Raritan Valley Community College.



GUESTS WELCOME



Some 30 visitors from the Somerset County Business Partnership (SCBP) Government and Community Affairs Roundtable were hosted in November at the Workforce Training Center. Facilitated by SCBP's Chris Edwards, guests from 25 organizations enjoyed some quality community access, with a guided tour of the 60,000+ square-foot facility, led by RVCC's Conrad Mercurius. There was also some context setting on the challenges facing the community college sector, which is a necessary part of "advancing the mission" for any campus visitors. Folks came early and stayed late, with plenty of Q&A—always a great sign.

GIVE AND GET

At the Raritan Valley Community College Workforce Training Center, donations of all sizes are welcome. Especially ones so big that they arrive on a flatbed and need a forklift to unload.

Such was the case this week, when a Haas VF-OE CNC Vertical Machining Center was delivered to campus courtesy of Triad Tool (with special thanks to Triad's George Romanello, in photo with María Arévalo Mojica, Director, Advanced Manufacturing at Raritan Valley Community College).

A transformative addition to RVCC's Advanced Manufacturing program, this industry-grade equipment will provide students with hands-on experience using the same technology found in modern manufacturing facilities. The very facilities that have a growing demand for skilled CNC programmers and operators.

So this gift is BIG both in sheer size and in how it will strengthen the talent pipeline and support pathways into high demand, middle-skill careers. Doesn't get much bigger than that.



WINS FOR ALL



Congratulations

to RVCC students Roland Hofmann, Christian Vandergoot, Emily Cherubino, Bryce Baucom, Eva Rose Guastella, and Abida Zaidi, who were all honored at a special dinner and awards presentation in January at the Bridgewater Manor.

The evening was the culmination of months of work as part of the 3rd Annual Scholarship Competition—originally conceived by Keith Spero, Adjunct Assistant Professor, Business & Public Service department at Raritan Valley Community College, and supported through a novel collaboration between Element Logic®, the Council of Supply Chain Management Professionals, and Bergen Logistics.

The students, who were tasked with a specific supply chain logistics staffing case study (courtesy of Bergen Logistics), were being celebrated for their excellent analysis and individual presentations of their work and respective recommendations.

As Professor Spero explained, "This competition offers a unique opportunity for students to immerse themselves in the business world, apply what they have learned, and grow in ways that textbooks simply can't provide."

The participants also benefited through the mentorship of Maira Mendonça, a 2024 RVCC grad, who won this same competition in 2023—and was subsequently hired by ABCO Systems LLC (now part of Element Logic®).

"Participating in the scholarship contest gave me the confidence to improve my communication skills, gain industry knowledge, and face real-world challenges. It was a turning point that opened doors to opportunities I never imagined," Mendonca said.

Big thanks to Thomas Hoff (Element), Nicholas Klacik



(CSCMP) and Bergen Logistic site managers Shaheed Awadeh and Yokasta Luzuriaga, for their exceptional support of this year's competition—including the \$3,500 and \$1,500 scholarship awards for 1st and 2nd place winners, Christian Vandergoot and Emily Cherubino, respectively. And a huge shout out to RVCC's William Klinger and wife Sheila Brown Klinger, whose generosity ensured that the four "runner's up" (Bryce Baucom, Eva Rose Gaustella, Abida Zaidi, and Roland Hofman) each received a \$500 award in recognition of their diligent semester-long work.



Raritan Valley Community College students Christian Vandergoot, Emily Cherubino, Bryce Baucom, Eva Rose Gaustella, Abida Zaidi, and Roland Hofman were celebrated by parents, friends, corporate sponsors and RVCC faculty and staff.

NEWS YOU CAN USEEXPANDED



SUSTAINABILITY HEY, WE'RE NUMBER ONE (again!)



Raritan Valley Community College continues to set the standard for managing a complex physical operation, sustainably! We are honored to once again be ranked as the “TOP US COMMUNITY COLLEGE FOR SUSTAINABILITY ACHIEVEMENTS.” We greatly appreciate the support of the New Jersey Business & Industry Association (NJBIA) in helping spread this great news!

“The college’s commitment to sustainability is one of the central themes of its new, five-year Strategic Plan, which calls on RVCC to ‘lead with sustainability by embedding environmentally responsible practices within educational experiences and every aspect of campus operations,’” RVCC President Michael McDonough said.

Some fun facts: It’s the 11th year in a row Raritan Valley Community College has been similarly recognized. RVCC has cut its campus energy emissions by 58% since 2005. The College is River Friendly, as well as a Bee Campus USA affiliate and Monarch Watch certified. RVCC has three solar installations, a greenhouse, 12 new 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.

Number One indeed!

HONORING COMMITMENT



To be an employee of Raritan Valley Community College is to be valued. There’s actually a working committee dedicated to fostering a sense of community—and appreciation. The big event is the Annual Service Awards Program. Now in its 20th year, the lunch gathering celebrates employees who have reached “milestone” years of service at RVCC.

At last fall’s event, 40 employees were so honored; collectively, they represented more than 500 years of combined service—and experience. Included among the milestones: an individual with 50 years of employment at Raritan Valley Community College.

We thank our friends at Affinity Federal Credit Union—event sponsor—for their appreciation of the importance of RVCC employee contributions to the mission of the College. Thanks as well to our host venue, Raritan Valley Country Club, and special gratitude to RVCC’s Cheryl Wallace, Caroline Seibert, and the “Rewards and Recognition” committee members—all of whom have made this annual celebration worthy of its loyal honorees.

NEWS YOU CAN USEEXPANDED



SPREADING THE GOOD WORD



NOTE: the Davey Awards is a premier international creative awards program focused exclusively on honoring outstanding work from small agencies, independent creators and in-house teams. Inspired by the story of David vs. Goliath, the awards recognize big ideas that come to life without big budgets.



We’re pleased to be working with valued supporters of Raritan Valley Community College to promote the benefits of collaboration, partnership, shared goals, emerging talent, and a community of receptive employers found throughout Somerset County.

Special thanks to Labcorp and Elise Wagner, L & Z Tool & Engineering and Luke LaMarca, Triad Tool and Fred Carten, and several RVCC grads—as well as a nimble crew from eDesign Interactive—for helping create, “Thriving in Somerset County,” an award-winning video extolling the virtues of Somerset County, including RVCC, as seen through the lens of three local companies.

The common denominator: all participants are huge believers in the RVCC mission and in our graduates, many of whom get hired locally after graduation, and who now add value while helping drive the local and regional economy. You can view the “Davey Award” winner here: www.raritanval.edu/thriving/RV/SomersetCounty.



ANNUAL KENTE CEREMONY



This event celebrates a rich heritage and tradition at RVCC, with students at the heart of it. The Kente Cloth is a brilliantly colored fabric woven in Ghana, Africa, and dates back to the 12th century. The tradition of using the Kente Cloth honors the accomplishments of the graduating students—and the honored students, in turn, use the occasion to

acknowledge those who have helped them along on their journeys.

“This is a wonderful and an important tradition at RVCC,” said Dr. Windy Paz-Amor, Director, Department of Institutional Engagement and The Paul Robeson Institute for Ethics, Leadership & Social Justice at RVCC. “It both celebrates the achievements of graduating students and it inspires them to continue their educational and career pursuits.”



TEAM TIME

Summer is for chilling, for recharging, for setting a new agenda. It's also for celebrating unity and “team”—the ultimate community. For the executive staff of Raritan Valley Community College, that meant getting off campus, taking a short break, and enjoying a little camaraderie at Topgolf.



90 SECOND FILM FESTIVAL



CONGRATULATIONS TO (left to right) *RVCC students Luke Jacobson, Silvestre Ramirez (Science Award category), Mel Casagrande, and Chloe Trevaskiss for getting top “Overall” honors at the 3rd Annual 90 Second Film Festival held on May 1 on the RVCC campus. The event, hosted by RVCC Digital Media/Film Studies Program Professor, Evan Walter, featured shorts by 17 students in the Digital Media/Film Studies Program. Huge thanks to the event's judges: Daryn Davidson (co-founder of Bold Media Films and post-production specialist), Rolando Hernandez III (founder of First Hour Productions in Asbury Park), and David Schoner Jr. (Senior Advisor for the Film at the NJ Motion Picture and Television Commission)—and to Don and Penny Pray, for their generous support of the event.*

STATE OF THE COUNTY BREAKFAST

Somerset County, NJ was celebrated at this past winter's sold out “State of the County” breakfast at the Bridgewater Manor, hosted by Chris Edwards of the Somerset County Business Partnership. With so many exceptional things happening within the County's 305 square miles, clearly there is much to celebrate. Among each of the event's presenters—Michele Siekerka, of the New Jersey Business & Industry Association, Shanel Robinson of Somerset County, Deirdre Blaus, of the RWJUH Somerset, and RVCC's Michael McDonough—there was one through line: the adjective “thriving.”

PHOTO: *Mike McDonough, Chris Edwards, Conrad Mercurius, Mike Marion*



NEWS YOU CAN USEEXPANDED



STARS OF THE COLLEGE SHOW

PHOTO SOMERSET HILL COMMUNITY HEALTH FOUNDATION 2025-26 RVCC SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS:

Yesenia Rodriguez Garcia, Maria Valentin, Rotem Glazer, Andrew McDermott, Grace Laurent, Sasha Amaker, Tara Miner, Silvia Chinchilla;
Not in photo:
Ayanna Parson



The Annual Pinning Ceremony at Raritan Valley Community College is always a highlight of the year. Center stage and full house, all gathered to honor and celebrate seventy-one inspired, accomplished, and compassionate Nursing students—now graduates, well-trained and prepared to enter the Nursing profession.

The event also featured the awarding of the Rosalind Cuss Excellence in Nursing Award to Gavin Stager (RVCC Nursing Class of 2026) and a special tribute to Dr. Elizabeth

O'Neil, who is retiring from the Nursing faculty after 40 years as both an educator and practitioner.

Thanks to their Nursing faculty and mentors, family and friends, and all the generous supporters of the Nursing program at Raritan Valley Community College. Special thanks to the Somerset Hills Community Health Foundation whose unrivaled commitment to 10 scholarship recipients (8 of which gathered for their traditional group photo) made a huge difference in the lives of these emerging nurses.



NEWS YOU CAN USEEXPANDED



2ND ANNUAL NJCCC STUDENT LEADERSHIP SUMMIT



Facilitated by the New Jersey Council of County Colleges (NJCCC) and hosted at Brookdale Community College, the 2nd Annual NJCCC Student Leadership Summit brought together student leaders from across New Jersey's community college segment.

Said Jason Fredericks, RVCC Vice President of Student Affairs (2nd from right in photo with RVCC student attendees), "I'm grateful for opportunities like this that empower students to connect, lead, and grow."

TAKING SOME SHOTS



In support of connections, relationships, collaborations—and laughs—facilitated by the Somerset County Business Partnership. Thanks to Chris Edwards and Jackie Highland, and the entire SCBP team for a fun day at New Jersey National Golf Club, celebrating the 54th Annual SCBP Golf Classic. Representing RVCC at this April event were Mike Marion, Michael McDonough, Steve Reichman (former RVCC Foundation Board chair), and Conrad Mercurius.

RVCC Giving Day 2026



\$1,000,000 Achieved Over RVCC’s 10-Year Giving Day History
2026 Fundraising Total Highest Ever for Any New Jersey Community College
Special 10th “Birthday” Celebrated for RVCC Giving Day



BIG, SMALL, HISTORIC ALL

While RVCC GIVING DAY 2026 is officially over, we are still celebrating the historic fundraising total—\$228,863—and the 848 gifts that drove this 24-hour fundraiser for Raritan Valley Community College.

We are celebrating our supremely generous benefactors behind this year’s \$75,000 “Match Challenge”—to Jim and Jill Gibson, Don and Penny Pray, and our

anonymous donor, our gratitude is deep, as your support inspired our historic results.

We are celebrating our students—clubs and athletic teams—for setting new high-water marks of fundraising success: a 56% increase in funds raised, a nearly 20% increase in the number of students personally giving, and record number—39—of clubs and athletic teams participating this year.

We are celebrating RVCC alumni, whose RVCC GIVING DAY participation increased by 31% over last year! And many in our alumni population also helped by amplifying the Giving Day message in their

networks and social media channels. We are celebrating the community at large, too, for its exceptional generosity: a 28% increase in gifts over last year’s total, and a whopping 90% increase in gifts of \$1,000 or more. Collectively, our ten-year Giving Day total in funds raised for Raritan Valley Community College now exceeds \$1,000,000.

And while donations in support of RVCC GIVING DAY came in all sizes—and are mostly received by way of our website and some by mail, we also appreciate those in-person opportunities to pick up or receive a check that generously add to the tally. Big, small, historic all.

We are grateful for every gift and all 688 givers in the network of support behind Raritan Valley Community College.

GIVING DAY AND STUDENT SUCCESS

RVCC GIVING DAY 2026 at Raritan Valley Community College was an epic success. All the critical fundraising goals were exceeded, including achieving the largest Giving Day fundraising total in the College’s history. To the community of support that delivered such generosity: thank you!

But it’s the students at Raritan Valley Community College who

RVCC Giving Day 2026 Our Biggest Giving Day Ever!

deserve a special callout; they brought energy, commitment, and results to this 24-hour philanthropic initiative—the largest fundraising day in the history of RVCC.

And their efforts were fruitful for RVCC GIVING DAY 2026:

- A 19% increase in the number of students making a Giving Day donation
- An 11% increase in the number of student clubs and athletic teams participating in the day’s fundraising activity
- An astounding 57% increase in total funds raised by student clubs and athletic teams, achieving a 23% share of total funds raised by the College

To all the student clubs and athletic teams—and the students leading them, congratulations on your collective creativity and success! And special thanks to these spirited, enterprising RVCC student leaders and influencers: Uzma Aloko, Esmeralda J. Ochoa-Lopez, Lucas Ventura, Austin Li, Michael Gasper, Ludwing Estrada, and Kyle Irving. Job well done!



RVCC GIVING DAY 2026 AT A GLANCE

- \$228,863** total dollars raised
- 838** total number of gifts (up 28%)
- 40** total number of \$1,000+ gifts (up 90%)
- \$39,000** largest gift
- \$53,500** largest total from a single donor
- 111** total number of students making a gift (up 19%)
- 39** number of student clubs & athletic teams participating (up 11%)
- \$51,782** total raised by student clubs & athletic teams (up 56%)
- 31%** percent increase in alumni donors



RVCC Giving Day 2026



STUDENT COMPETITIONS:

TOP 3 STUDENT CLUBS WITH THE MOST DOLLARS RAISED:

- 1. Student Occupational Therapy Assistant Association
- 2. Business Club
- 3. Sisters in STEM

TOP 3 CLUBS WITH THE MOST \$50+ DONATIONS:

- 1. Sisters in STEM
- 2. Student Occupational Therapy Assistant Association
- 3. Business Club

Club that received the 1st gift: Sisters in STEM;
Club that received the largest single donation: a four way tie—
Engineering Club, First Responder Club, Mental Health Club
& Student Nurses Association

TOP 3 ATHLETIC TEAMS WITH THE MOST DOLLARS RAISED:

- 1. Men's Basketball
- 2. Women's Basketball
- 3. Baseball



Top 3 Athletic Teams with the most \$50+ donations:

- 1. Women's Basketball
- 2. Men's Basketball
- 3. Baseball

Team that received the 1st gift: Women's Basketball;
Team that received the largest single donation: Men's Basketball

RVCC Giving Day 2026 Our Biggest Giving Day Ever!



AMBASSADOR GRATITUDE

*Giving Day is about more than raising funds.
It's also about collaboration and community.*

And both were evident as the College celebrated RVCC GIVING DAY 2026. In addition to helping spread the word, RVCC faculty, staff, and student Ambassadors donned the blue "jersey" and helped get things done—hosting club meetings, creating social media posts, and being active at the 10th "birthday party" for RVCC GIVING DAY. Big thanks for the support of all 40 RVCC GIVING DAY 2026 Ambassadors, but special mention to RVCC's Frances Boshell, Kiswah Khan, Alaysha Walker, Krisan Hall, Nancy Fritz Hibo, Caroline Seibert, Stan Valles, Cristina Lankay, Amie Gallagher, Donna Stolzer, Chris Spangler, and Cindy Haddad—all led by the RVCC Foundation's Janet Dunne.



A SHORT HISTORY OF RVCC GIVING DAY AND SO MUCH MORE

While On March 26, Raritan Valley Community College celebrated its 10th RVCC GIVING DAY. Appropriately, a few weeks before the big event, Episode Nine of the RVCC "1st and 10 Podcast" offered a history of Giving Day—and a chance to test listeners' Giving Day IQ with 10 questions. While Giving Day is behind us, you can still "play along" with RVCC President Michael McDonough, as you learn about this extraordinary 24-hours of fundraising, and some of the 2,288 donors over the first nine years who've made it so.

Listen here:
www.raritanval.edu/1STandTEN-podcastepisode9-a-short-history-of-giving-day

Giving Day Edition!



THE GENEROSITY OF JIM AND JILL GIBSON

IN A CLASS OF THEIR OWN

IN A CLASS OF THEIR OWN The Generosity of Jim and Jill Gibson



I come away from this internship now taking several things with me. For one, a great sense of belonging in the Environmental Science world that I may not have had without being able to go out and do the work I have. For two, I had the chance to explore the state I grew up in even more, to see places I'd never seen before, to meet people I wouldn't have otherwise. And finally, I have a warmth in my heart from the small community I feel I've formed with my fellow interns. Without your help, none of these programs would be possible. So, for that, and for all of your generosity in the past to make all the past years possible as well, I thank you sincerely.

~note from Sarah Merwin (RVCC Center for Environmental Studies Coastal Conservation Intern) to Jim & Jill Gibson

There are countless expressions of generosity, similarly heartfelt, but each unique to individual expression. As a group, now over a decade strong, and numbering over a hundred, they are linked by the extraordinary generosity of Jim and Jill Gibson.

And while it's easy to toss around "transformative" and "difference making" when describing the impacts of philanthropy, it's quite another when the source is those who've been impacted.

The Gibson name stands out in the philanthropic landscape at RVCC. Their generosity spans 16 years and is far ranging at the College, and includes their support of Galileo Scholarships, the Gibson Family Endowed Scholarship, RVCC Giving Day (helping fuel the annual "match challenge"), and the Center for Environmental Studies. The Gibson name has real consequence at RVCC; it carries a distinction of honor, prestige. The name is also visible in a few places on campus (e.g., the Gibson Center for Innovation in Science & Technology, The Gibson Greenhouse)—but this exposure



is not at their insistence. Instead, it's a gesture of deep appreciation by leadership at RVCC in recognition of impact realized.

The Gibsons' latest commitment, a five-year, \$500,000 gift to support the Center for Environmental Studies, adds great depth to what is already an epic legacy. The Center

for Environmental Studies will use the funding associated with this gift to sustain student engagement—30-50 paid student internships each year—in these critical areas of interest: Forest Ecology, Wildlife Research, Coastal Conservation & Rare Plant Research and Recovery, Open Space Stewardship and Native Plant Propagation, Water Quality Research, and Campus Sustainability & Outreach. Imagine the real-world experiences for students in professional environmental research, conservation and restoration, in service to local community partners and natural resources—all provided through the generosity of the Gibsons.

Among the things on the itinerary ahead: diversifying and expanding uses of the Gibson Greenhouse by partnering with other organizations (both within the College and in the community), including the RVCC Food Pantry, Somerset County Parks, and Branchburg Community Garden, among others. The Center's leadership will also continue to work with students to develop scientific presentations describing the results of their work to present

IN A CLASS OF THEIR OWN
The Generosity of Jim and Jill Gibson



“This internship was an experience that I will never forget, and I am so grateful for having the opportunity and privilege to be a part of it. The confidence, relationships, and passion that I received are invaluable, and I hope to pursue a career in environmental conservation in the future. Thank you so much for gifting RVCC’s Center for Environmental Studies this opportunity.”

~note from Kylei Mittler (RVCC Intern for the Coastal Conservation) to Jim & Jill Gibson



at local and regional conferences. Partnering with local environmental organizations to monitor water quality in rivers, streams, lakes, and reservoirs around central New Jersey will also continue at full speed. Over the past five years, this work has included collaborating with: the Raritan Headwaters and the NJ Water Supply Authority to study harmful algal blooms in Spruce Run, Budd Lake, and downstream locations; the Sourland Conservancy to compare water quality in watersheds with primary versus post-agricultural forests; and the Raritan Headwaters, to continuously monitor a range of water quality parameters in 13 stream locations over six years. In addition, participation with the New Jersey School of Conservation in Stokes State Forest, the Pine Tree Center and Pinelands Research Institute near Wharton State Forest, will continue, providing students with enriching



outdoor experiences, skills and interpretive programs, as well as team-building and cohort development—all of which contribute to their increased academic, professional, and personal growth. “The generosity of the Gibsons has been an absolutely crucial piece in facilitating the Center’s internship programs. We simply could not pay stipends to our student interns without their support,” said Emilie Stander, Co-Director of the Center for Environmental Studies. “And we know many of our students are ready to put their classroom learning to good use working on real-world, local environmental issues

IN A CLASS OF THEIR OWN
The Generosity of Jim and Jill Gibson

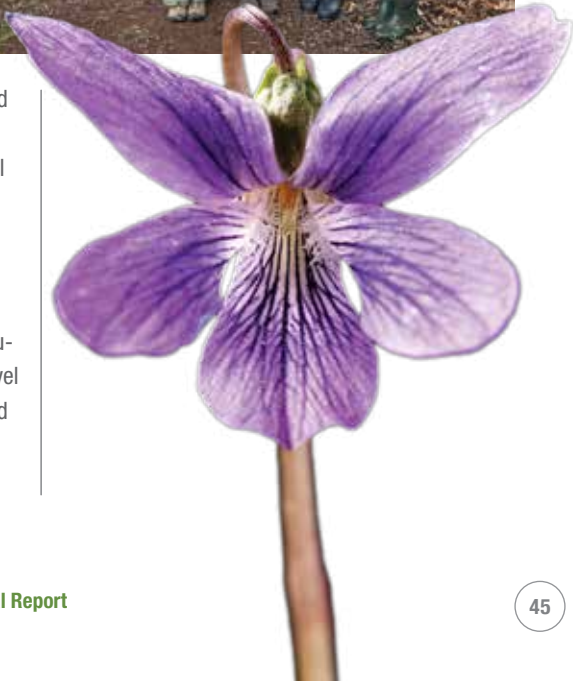


“With your support, I’m able to continue pursuing hands-on learning opportunities that prepare me for a future in environmental science, while contributing to research that makes an impact on our local communities. These internships allowed me to build connections with professionals from organizations such as Raritan Headwaters Association, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the New Jersey Forest Fire Service. I was able to use the skills I’ve learned in my biology classes here at RV and put them directly into practice in the field and in the lab. Thank you again for investing in my education, experience, and professional development!”

~note from Sari Pehnke, RVCC Intern, Center for Environmental Studies, to Jim & Jill Gibson



and that their work can make a meaningful contribution to studying and addressing these issues. Fortunately for us, the Gibsons know this too, and with their support, we can make these enriching opportunities available to our students.” Professor Stander relishes the trajectories of the Center’s former interns as they go on to earn their bachelor’s degrees and land positions at the Department of Environmental Protection and at area environmental non-profits and consulting firms. “They effectively become our colleagues in the environmental space,” noted Professor Stander. “How exceptional is that? And the Gibsons’ generosity has been integral to that transformation.” What is also incredible about the educational experiences enabled by the Gibsons’ support is how exceptionally rare they are for “freshmen” and “sophomores” at any community college, anywhere in the country. That level of exceptionalism—and the generosity behind it—is truly in a class of its own.



ASSERTING THE RVCC VOICE

To appreciate a place is to know its people. The following “voices” are but a small sampling of the vast and diverse community that is Raritan Valley Community College.



Dr. Emilie Stander
Professor, Environmental Science
Time with RVCC: 13 years

One of the great things about being a college-level professor is the freedom I have in my day-to-day work. No one micromanages the way I manage my classroom, my interactions with students, and my time. Of course, because I am a professional and am devoted to my work, I am constantly evolving in my teaching and practice with students. I attend conferences, webinars, and workshops to learn about high-impact teaching practices and do my best to incorporate these into my courses. In doing so, I have the freedom to draw on my creativity and professional expertise to design meaningful experiences for students inside and outside the classroom.

I find this to be a constant well of inspiration and renewal that keeps me engaged and motivated in my work.

RVCC has been an incredibly supportive partner in these pursuits. As a professor of environmental science who manages the environmental studies and science degree programs, one of my goals is to help environmental majors prepare for careers in the environmental field. Professionals from RVCC's Office of Career Success have visited my environmental capstone course to facilitate interactive workshops for students on resume preparation, personal branding, and networking. Our career professionals have also coached my students in developing a professional eportfolio that they can share with potential transfer schools and employers. Students use their eportfolio to reflect on the technical and career-related skills they are developing through their academic coursework, which helps them prepare for those dreaded job interview questions about their strengths and weaknesses.

It's also critical that environmental majors develop an ethic of community service to be successful in the environmental world. I have successfully partnered with RVCC's Office of Service Learning to connect with local environmental organizations so that students can engage in hands-on learning which also

benefits the local community. Activities have included stream assessments, rain garden maintenance, community clean ups, and more. With funding from exceptional donors through the RVCC Foundation, my colleague Jay Kelly and I have created the RVCC Center for Environmental Studies. Through the center, we hire paid student interns to assist us in conducting environmental monitoring, research, and stewardship on campus and in the community.

We collaborate with state and local government and environmental non-profit organizations in this work to study and address local environmental issues related to forest and stream health and conserving threatened plant and animal species. Through their internships students develop both technical and career-related skills, like communication, collaboration, and leadership, which build their confidence and propel them through the rest of their academic journey and into the professional working world.

RVCC has been an invaluable and ideal partner in this work. The college has provided the enabling environment that has allowed me to create authentic and meaningful experiences for students both in and out of the classroom. It has given me the space to conduct research and use campus as a living lab for studying and addressing real-world environmental issues. Students who have

participated in this work reflect on the impact these experiences have had on them, both professionally and personally.

After they transfer to four-year schools, they regularly reach out to Jay and me to express their gratitude for having had these opportunities far earlier in their college careers than their four-year counterparts. It's endlessly rewarding for us to see our students grow in their confidence and ability in the short time we have with them. For those who stay local, we get to watch them enter into environmental roles in county and state government, non-profits, and consulting firms, and often we get to work with them as peers and collaborators. RVCC provides the foundation; my students and I get to run with it.



Alexa Offenhauer, PhD
Associate Professor of English
Time with RVCC: 17 years

There are so many ways that RVCC has had a positive impact on my life. As a kid in Hunterdon County, I had field trips to RVCC. I'll never forget the time we went to the theater to hear a Holocaust survivor talk about her life and experiences. I was in seventh grade at the time and just learning to understand the world, and that was a formative moment.

As an adult, I had left the area and gotten a master's degree with a plan to teach high school. But life or fate intervened and I ended up becoming a part-time English professor at RVCC in 2009. I immediately loved the job, the students, and the community. Eventually, I applied for and received a full-time faculty position in the English department. Over the years, I have seen students from all backgrounds,

interests, and talents thrive at RV, where there are so many options and outlets for creativity, intellectual pursuits, career training, and more.

More recently, my own daughter enrolled at RVCC, and I learned how amazing it is from the perspective of a parent. As with so many of our students, she was non-traditional, being a teenager still completing high school. For a variety of reasons—the same sorts that bring many of our students to our doors—the traditional path wasn't working for her. So, she earned 30 credits at RVCC and with it, her high school diploma. While here, she was elected Student Government Senator, helped organize events, and even initiated a revision to the reporting process for campus incidents. Throughout, she was supported and encouraged by faculty, staff, and administrators. She will be attending Smith College this fall, and I am certain she was accepted in very large part due to her experiences and opportunities at RVCC.

But my daughter is only one type of student—academically confident and highly motivated from the beginning—who is well-served by RVCC. Some of the students in my classes are in a similar position, but many arrive with less confidence and even huge uncertainty about whether they are “college material.” I love working with these students, who soon learn that they are academically capable. I see them grow in independence, confidence, and skill while they are here.

There's simply no better institution for serving such an incredibly wide variety of students, whose varied needs, interests, and talents are met and honed by faculty, staff, and administrators who believe in the mission of a community college: open access, affordable, relevant education that holds students to the highest standards while providing them with the support they need to meet those standards. I can't think of a better place to develop, grow, and thrive than Raritan Valley Community College.



Amie Gallagher
Director, RVCC Planetarium
Time with RVCC: 29 years

I remember my first visit to a planetarium. I was about 8 years old. I don't remember the show we saw, but I remember walking down the dark hallway into a magical room. While some details may have slipped away, the awe has always remained. It started me on a long and winding path that led me to RVCC.

I am honored to be the director of our College's planetarium. I have been associated with it since 1997 when I helped launch a state-wide program connecting classroom teachers with astronomers who would come into schools and do hands-on activities with the students. While that project has concluded, I smoothly transitioned into working with students and teachers in our planetarium on campus. Today, the RVCC Planetarium hosts more than 15,000 visitors throughout the year for our planetarium shows, laser concerts, and at the telescopes in our observatory.

I like to think of the Planetarium as the “community” in “community college.” We are one of many ways RVCC reaches out and embraces the greater community around us. The Planetarium is often the first visit a child makes to our campus. Their excitement as they walk through our doors is contagious. I observe each child and wonder, which of these young people will grow up to be an astronaut, engineer, science communicator, or teacher, who will go on to inspire more people to learn about and connect with the sky and our Universe. Perhaps it will begin with their visit to the RVCC Planetarium.

RVCC supports their staff in ways some of

my professional colleagues envy. RVCC allows for creativity and innovative ideas. We are not tied to one method of interacting with our visitors. New programs are constantly being explored and encouraged in our Planetarium. We have created sensory-friendly programs and guided meditation programs. We open our observatory each week to observe and take pictures of the sky. We've created hands-on activities that coordinate with different show themes. We work with other departments on campus to provide a unique teaching and presentation space. We've even hosted marriage proposals and rock bands, though not at the same time.

I am delighted to continue to inspire awe in my visitors, young and older. I love when someone walks out of our theater and says, “wow, that was incredible!” I feel the same way.



Dr. Beau Younker
Occupational Therapy Assistant Program Director
Time with RVCC: 10 years

My professional journey is a reflection of dedication, purpose, and a deep commitment to transforming lives through occupational therapy and education. With more than 20 years of experience as an occupational therapist and over a decade in academia, I have cultivated a career rooted not only in clinical expertise, but in mentorship, leadership, and the belief that education can be a powerful vehicle for change.

Throughout my career, I have strived to demonstrate a passion for helping individuals reach their fullest potential, whether they are

patients regaining independence or students discovering their purpose in the field of occupational therapy. My transition into academia allowed me to impact individuals beyond clinics, hospitals and other medical settings to shape the next generation of occupational therapy assistants. Over the past 10 years, I have embraced my role as an educator with enthusiasm, insight, and a genuine investment in student success.

Raritan Valley Community College has provided me the unique and meaningful opportunity to witness transformational change firsthand. It is not just about teaching content; it is about guiding students through a journey of growth. I value the ability to see students evolve into better versions of themselves: more confident, more compassionate, and more capable. This transformation is not accidental; it is intentionally cultivated through mentorship, high expectations, and creating an environment where students feel empowered to lead and serve.

Central to this transformation is the belief that students are agents of change. I encourage leadership development and community engagement, particularly through participation in the Student Occupational Therapy Assistant Association. This involvement allows students to address real community needs even before they graduate, reinforcing the idea that occupational therapy extends far beyond the classroom. It is about impacting families, communities, and populations in meaningful and lasting ways.

One of the most powerful reflections of my teaching journey is the OTA pinning ceremony. This event is among the most exciting and rewarding moments of the academic year. It is an intimate celebration shared with family, friends, alumni, and faculty, marking not just the completion of a program, but the beginning of a professional calling. The ceremony gives students a voice, allowing them to reflect on their journey and express how their personal identities intertwine with their future roles as practitioners. It is a moment where purpose, passion, and profession come together.

My own commitment to growth is evident in not only developing the OTA program at Raritan Valley Community College, but in

shaping it into a premier program, recognized for excellence. Today, it is known for producing highly skilled, compassionate graduates who are actively sought after for employment. Student success remains at the heart of of this program; graduates leave not only with knowledge and skills, but with a strong professional identity and a commitment to meaningful occupation.

At its core, my work is about impact and changing lives at multiple levels. However, my purpose aligns with my family, who serve as both my ambitious energy and inspiration. My loving wife, Tiffany, and my children, Kellen, Willow, and River, are central to the “why” in my life, grounding me in the values of compassion, integrity, and service. Through them, I am constantly reminded of the importance of extending care, love, and commitment to others, not only in words but through consistent action. My role as a husband and father reinforces the belief that meaningful impact begins at home and extends outward into the community.

By modeling empathy, resilience, and dedication, I strive to set an example for my children, showing them that true success is measured by how we uplift and support others. This deep connection between family and purpose continues to fuel the passion for teaching, leadership, and service in the field of occupational therapy.



Celeste Onka
First Student Accepted at Somerset County College (now Raritan Valley Community College), September 1968

It was difficult to try to make a decision on which college to attend when I was graduating

in June 1968 from Somerville High School. Interestingly, an advertisement began appearing in the Courier News about a new college called, Somerset County College. Several courses were being offered but the one that really meant something important to my career plans was the Computer Science degree. The advertisement indicated that the length of time for this credential was only two years.

When I started at the College, there were so many things that the students could help establish—and we worked a lot with all of the professors and instructors. The women attending the College helped start a cheerleader team and even selected the design of the cheerleaders' outfits. In addition, the College started men's basketball and baseball competitions with other colleges, and the women started a volleyball team.

Amazingly, the instructors at the College were always so helpful and willing to meet and discuss any of the learning challenges; and they really helped us develop as learner—prepare for graduation. I was so lucky to be in the Computer Science program and the instructor, Professor Irving Horowitz, also hired me to be his secretary to help create many things for all of the new students who chose Somerset County College.

It was so wonderful to have been an attendee for the first two years of the College. The initial classes were actually held at Green Brook High School but a property was starting to develop in Branchburg, NJ where, Somerset County College—now known as RVCC—would be built. As we got closer to the College's first commencement ceremony, we had a party on the grounds where the college buildings were starting to emerge. As an active construction site, it was amazing to see some of the buildings that were under construction. We knew the College would be opening up on that site in just a few short years.

As the initial class approached graduation, the College was a big help in finding many of us jobs. In 1970, the College was able to assist me in landing my first career-related job, at American Hoechst—a place where I continued working on the computers for the next 42 years (including through various name changes and mergers—including Hoechst Celanese, Fast-

Serve, Triaton, and ultimately, Hewlett Packard).

Though I retired in 2012, I stayed busy. I helped out our Somerville High School class reunion, and because of my experience with computers, I was hired at “Corporate Marketing” (which was eventually purchased by ArtCraft), where I continued to use my computer knowledge.

It continues to amaze me—the things that I've been able to do, and organizations I've been able to help, from the knowledge and experience in computers that all began as the first student accepted at Somerset County College. Even at the church at which I volunteer, I helped develop a lot of their computer systems and programs.

While 1968 seems like a long time ago, I remain a big supporter of RVCC. I was even a member of RVCC Chorale group and sang at local venues and at RVCC commencement ceremonies.

I am proud of my distinction as the first student accepted at the College and even prouder of how it has grown to become an amazing and wonderful institution for all students.



Dan Van Tran

Chair, RVCC Foundation Board of Directors; Chief Technology Officer, Collectors

Time with RVCC: 3+ years

My connection to RVCC starts with my parents' story. After fleeing to America from a war-torn Vietnam, the families who sponsored them enrolled them in a BOCES ESL course at Nassau Community College on Long Island so they could learn English and find jobs. That

opportunity helped them establish roots here, and it is one reason I believe RVCC matters. It changes trajectories in a very real, very practical way. Many institutions talk about access, opportunity, and community. RVCC actually delivers it.

One of the things I value most about RVCC is that it meets people where they are. Not everyone has a straight-line path. Some students arrive right after high school. Others are balancing jobs, family responsibilities, financial pressure, or the uncertainty of trying to figure out what comes next. RVCC creates an environment that says you still belong here and that you still have the ability to build something meaningful. Coming from a family that understands what it means to build a future from scratch, I do not take that kind of access lightly.

As someone who spends much of my professional life building organizations, scaling systems, and helping teams perform at a high level, I have a deep appreciation for institutions that create leverage. RVCC is exactly that kind of institution. It does not just educate students, it expands the capacity of the entire region. It strengthens workforces, creates-mobility for families, and builds confidence, momentum, and dignity. When you support RVCC, you are making a practical investment with visible downstream effects.

Serving on the RVCC Foundation Board has only reinforced that belief for me. It has given me a closer view into how much thoughtful work goes into opening doors for students and how important philanthropy can be in helping those doors stay open. Scholarships, support programs, and targeted investments are not abstract line items. They can be the difference between a student dropping out and a student finishing, or between someone seeing college as out of reach and seeing it as something that belongs to them.

What also stands out to me is the spirit of RVCC. It is ambitious without being pretentious. It is community-oriented without thinking small. It combines practical outcomes with genuine care for people, which is rarer than it should be. In a world that often pushes people to optimize only for prestige, RVCC stays grounded in something more important: impact.

For me, that is why RVCC matters. It is a place that creates opportunity at the exact moment people need it most. It helps turn potential into progress. And it reminds us that one of the best things any institution can do is widen the circle of who gets a real chance to succeed.



Daniel Heredia

Liberal Arts Student at RVCC (Class of 2026)

Coming out of high school, I was a wreck. I had no idea of what my future could have looked like, and my pride was destroyed after being waitlisted from Rutgers. I had planned to go to Indiana University to pursue a bachelor's in economics, but the price would have been out of my family's budget, so I withdrew my offer from the “IU.” I applied to the Honors College at RVCC two days before the application was due—and attending RVCC felt like my last hope.

But after being accepted and warmly welcomed by Honors College leadership, I felt a renewed sense of hope and a degree of comfort knowing that my future was not in shambles. My identity was rewritten my first semester of RVCC, and I felt like I had to prove to the world that I wasn't a failure by enrolling in community college. As the semester progressed, my professors and the people that I met on campus gave me a sense of community, and I grew more comfortable. I want to give a special thanks to the Honors College leadership for giving me a renewed sense of purpose and reassurance after feeling like a failure right after high school. Also my English instructor, who gave me the flexibility to explore my academic interests, such as Hispanic

male voting patterns, which made me feel a sense of accomplishment and competency. These skills proved useful throughout my time at RVCC, and my academic interest and curiosity only grew.

Through my second semester, I had grown comfortable as a community college student, and I realized that it wasn't the blow that I had originally thought it was. Clubs such as the HOPE club, the Debate club, and the Business club allowed me to explore my ambitions with likeminded students, and my academic curiosity grew more and more. My economics professor was also a crucial figure in my academic exploration, and he gave me the opportunity to pursue a Capstone Project on Amtrak and American Passenger Rail. Opportunities such as the Sanofi Corporate Mentorship Program, Phi Theta Kappa, and becoming a VP of Finance for the HOPE club helped give me the tools necessary to pursue my own ambitions for the betterment of my community.

Throughout last summer, I was enrolled in Princeton's Transfer Scholar's Initiative, which gave me foundational skills on how to conduct research, write essays through a lens, and how to market myself to transfer effectively. These skills translated into the Sanofi Corporate Mentorship Program (to which I was heavily involved in my third semester). I want to give a special thanks to RVCC's mentorship program staff for helping me realize my full potential, and how to use my values to pursue future employment. The Sanofi Corporate Mentorship Program changed my life, and helped me realize how much I care about fostering communities and facilitating experiences for others. The program also helped me realize that I want to pursue a career that intertwines transportation, economic growth, and urban planning, so that I can give the less-fortunate more opportunities through the infrastructure and policies that impact our lives.

RVCC was the hand that guided me out of the depths I found myself in after high school. The support I received—through mentoring, guidance and scholarships—made a real difference for me. I encourage every student to pursue each and every opportunity they can. This may sound cliché, but I wholeheartedly

believe that every RVCC professor and staff member are here to help students succeed and achieve their full potential. If you can advocate for yourself here, I can guarantee that you, too, will experience a sense of community, opportunity, and fulfillment.



Dr. Drue Stapleton

Dean, RVCC Health Sciences Time with RVCC: 1.5 years

I was drawn to the opportunity to serve as the Health Sciences Dean at RVCC because I believe education is transformative; it changes the trajectory of a student's life in tangible ways. The community college setting is where access meets impact and where success is measured not only by degrees awarded and credentials earned, but ultimately by the ability of graduates to achieve their personal and professional goals and dreams.

As a former community college student myself, this came to me in the form of mentorship that laid the foundation for my future career as an athletic trainer, faculty member, and administrator. The lessons learned and relationships I developed as a community college student have impacted me personally and professionally throughout my career, remaining both relevant and pertinent today.

Being the Dean of the Health Sciences Division at RVCC allows me to follow my passion for student and faculty development and to serve the communities that surround and support us. I have the privilege and responsibility of overseeing programs that sit at the crossroads of education, workforce development, and community well-being.

Healthcare education and training is

not abstract; grounded in theory it is deeply practical, urgently needed, and profoundly human. Every program we offer ultimately connects to a patient, a family, or a community member relying on competent, compassionate care. Leading in this space means ensuring academic rigor while remaining grounded in the realities of today's healthcare workforce.

Ultimately, my work as Dean is about stewardship: of programs, of partnerships, and of trust. I am motivated by the challenge of advocating for, and building, programs that are academically strong, clinically relevant, and responsive to the evolving needs of the markets we serve.

Students are at the core of everything we do. It is their success that drives our success, and their impact in our communities is the ultimate measure of our effectiveness.



Julia Fiore
RVCC Sustainability and Energy Coordinator
Time with RVCC: 1.5 years

Infrastructure is at the core of my work, but people are what make RVCC a wonderful place. As part of the Facilities and Grounds department, my job is to support environmental sustainability on our campus, which is primarily about the physical spaces here. I try to make our campus more sustainable through projects and outreach that support energy and water conservation, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, wildlife-friendly landscaping, and waste reduction. Collaboration with students, staff, and faculty across departments broadens the scope of sustainability projects that are possible and keeps these projects

focused on things that matter to our campus community.

I'm honored to serve as chair of the Forum Environmental Sustainability Committee and work with committee members who take time out of their regular work and studies to apply their expertise to campus sustainability. Their commitment to protecting the environment and making RV a better place to learn and work inspires me. A retiring faculty member told me she eagerly awaits passing the one-year mark when she is allowed to become a volunteer and support the sustainability committee again. Graduating student members said they want to come back and help out (to which I said, only if they have time after getting involved at their transfer schools). The students on the committee bring ideas, questions, perspective, and drive that inspires me. When I feel like a project I want to tackle is too ambitious or I feel weighed down by the barriers to achieving it, the spark that the students bring helps to motivate me.

This spring, the Sustainability Committee hosted a panel discussion on eliminating greenhouse gas emissions, featuring speakers who are leaders in state and local decarbonization work. This was a team effort, from the initial idea to planning and execution of the event. Another testament to how RVCC draws people in and keeps them connected: two participants—the moderator and a panelist—were former RVCC employees who continue to support our programs.

Focusing on sustainability was a career change for me. Previously, I worked in education management, most recently in higher education. When I was in graduate school for sustainability science a few years ago, I decided I wanted to continue working in higher education because it's an exciting and engaging place for sustainability. Higher education is the perfect proving ground for sustainability innovations, and colleges benefit from sustainable practices in many ways: cost savings, reputation, learning opportunities, resilience, and community engagement.

RVCC is a perfect example of this, and our leadership in sustainability serves as a model for the surrounding communities and other colleges. The College has been recognized as

the most sustainable community college in the country based on our Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education STARS rating. I feel lucky to be part of a college that is a pioneer in sustainability, an ever-evolving field. As a college, we have to keep growing in sustainability, to keep up with best practices and with the priorities of our community. This is part of what makes my work at RV interesting and rewarding – I also get to keep learning and growing.



Michael Goldberg
Trustee, Raritan Valley Community College Board of Trustees
Time with RVCC: 2.5 years (as a Trustee)

I moved to Somerville with my family in 1962. I was ten years old. This was before the Bridgewater Mall and I-287 were built, and community colleges did not exist.

When I graduated from Somerville High School in 1970, I was thrilled to be attending my “first choice” college, American University in Washington, DC.

Let's just say that did not work out. So, for sophomore year, I decided to transfer to a small New Jersey school, Upsala College. It was a great school but had a number of required courses which I had missed by transferring.

Now what? Fall further behind?

Just about this time, people with foresight and commitment founded Somerset County College (now known as Raritan Valley Community College). It consisted of a couple of trailers on a parcel of land in the middle of nowhere in Branchburg. But it offered the classes I needed to make up, and I enrolled in the summer of

1971 for Intermediate Spanish 1. I followed that with Accounting 1 in the summer of 1973. (In between, I attended Ocean County College while I was working a summer job down at The Shore).

All of this allowed me to catch up and graduate on time! It is not a stretch to say Somerset County College played an important role as I moved forward in life.

Except for a few years living elsewhere in NJ, I have called Somerset County home, and have resided with my family in Hillsborough since 1985.

When it came time to explore post-high school options with my older son, who was graduating in 2000, we came to the conclusion that RVCC would provide the best opportunity, so he enrolled that year. He graduated with his degree in two years, went on to get his bachelor's degree and then his master's degree. RVCC laid the foundation, my son built on it, and today, he and his wonderful family are living in Hunterdon County. My grandkids could someday be third generation attendees!

When I was appointed to the Board of Trustees at Raritan Valley Community College, it felt like the most natural thing, having had a lifelong relationship with the College.

But little did I understand how remarkable RV had become.

I was fortunate to be asked to co-chair the Strategic Plan Committee as the Trustee representative. Spending time with the other members of the committee derived from all disciplines and departments of the College gave me an opportunity to not only learn about what RV offers, but to understand that RV is a true community dedicated to the betterment of students, staff, administration and the entire Somerset and Hunterdon County population.

Attending events such as the RVCC Foundation Annual Scholarship Dinner, the award ceremony for Service Learning and Civic Engagement program, the opening of the Faculty Art exhibition, the ribbon cutting for the Workforce Training Center expansion, the annual Pinning Ceremony for RVCC's Nursing grads, and the College's annual Commencement Ceremony, I could not help but be continually amazed by the quality of our students, staff, faculty, and administrators, and the programs being offered.

RV is the greatest!

As Trustees, we are tasked with setting policies and are responsible for approving budgets and most importantly, working with our President to ensure RV is best positioned for continued success, growth with purpose—while never forgetting our obligation and responsibility to our learners, all of whom are seeking a better future through education. It's an awesome responsibility, and it's an awesome institution.



Esmeralda Ochoa
Communication Studies Student at RVCC
(Class of 2026)

When I first came to Raritan Valley Community College, I didn't fully realize how much it would shape me. At first, I saw it as a starting point but over time, RVCC became a place where I pushed myself to do more than I thought I could. It challenged me to step outside of what felt comfortable and take advantage of opportunities that I might have otherwise overlooked.

As a first-generation college student, school wasn't just about getting good grades. It was about making the most of an opportunity and figuring things out along the way. RVCC gave me that chance. Through programs like EOF and the support from faculty and staff, I was surrounded by people who genuinely wanted to see me succeed. That kind of support makes a difference, especially when everything feels new, and you are still trying to find your place.

During my time at RVCC, I got involved in ways I never expected. I became part of the Activities Board and Business Club. Being

involved allowed me to meet new people, build connections, and take on responsibilities that helped me grow. It also gave me a sense of belonging and made my experience feel more meaningful beyond the classroom. That experience pushed me to grow and helped me see what I'm capable of.

RVCC matters to me because it gave me opportunities to grow both personally and professionally. It inspired me to take initiative, get involved, and challenge myself in ways I would not have otherwise. I have also had the chance to give back to the same community that supported me. As an EOF Mentor and through volunteering at the RVCC Food Pantry, I have worked with students navigating their own journeys, which showed me the importance of supporting others. Those experiences helped me realize how important it is to create spaces where people feel welcomed and supported.

What makes RVCC unique is the people. The environment is supportive and genuine, and it is a place where you feel encouraged to keep showing up and doing your best every day. It is a place where students are not just another number and where your growth actually matters. That is what makes it a place I want to return to every day.



Peaches Bocalan
RVCC Director of Admissions
Time with RVCC: 5 years

children visiting the planetarium with wide-eyed excitement, I am continually struck by the richness of our community. To witness such a diverse population, comprised of many identities, coming together to form a vibrant, mosaic-like campus is truly a privilege.

As an immigrant and the first in my family to attend college in the United States, navigating the path to higher education was one of the most intimidating experiences of my life. I was profoundly underprepared for the process. I vividly recall standing in the school gym locker room late in my senior year, overhearing classmates discuss their early admissions to Rutgers, Montclair, and other in state and out of state universities.

In that moment, I realized, too late, that I did not understand when or how this process was even supposed to begin. Determined to move forward, I hastily explored my options and found myself close to enrolling in a private university, believing I had found my answer, until I saw what the tuition bill would be. At that point, the reality of my situation set in, and I was forced to reconsider my plans. I then turned to a community college: an accessible, affordable option that had always existed, yet one I had not been guided to consider.

In hindsight, it was a choice that should have been clearly presented from the beginning.

I am just one of many who have experienced how overwhelming the transition to college can be. At RVCC, I see students and families every day who, like I once was, are unfamiliar with the landscape of higher education.

What distinguishes RVCC is its unwavering commitment to service: its commitment to the community and its willingness to guide students and families through every step of their journey. We understand the challenges they face, and we recognize the transformative power of higher education.

The College's investment in hiring additional support staff that meet the needs of diverse student populations, and its ongoing efforts to remove barriers, is deeply inspiring. To witness departments collaborating, even with limited resources, to make the transition to college as seamless as possible is powerful. RVCC continually reinvents itself, striving each year to better serve its students and community.



Uzma Aloko
Psychology Student at RVCC
(Class of 2026)

RVCC is more than just a place to take classes. It is where I found my voice, my confidence, and my sense of purpose. When I first came to RVCC, I did not fully know what to expect. As a first-generation student, stepping into college came with both excitement and uncertainty. I was navigating a completely new environment while still trying to figure out who I was and who I wanted to become. I did not have everything planned out—I just knew I wanted to grow, even if I were not sure what that growth would look like yet.

Looking back, most of what I have today did not happen all at once. It came from small decisions, moments of uncertainty, and choosing to say yes even when I was not fully confident. I started by getting involved as a student ambassador, not fully realizing how much that one decision would shape my experience. It pushed me out of my comfort zone and forced me to talk to people, represent the College, and begin seeing myself as someone who could be trusted with responsibility.

From there, I became a campus tour guide and orientation leader. Those roles meant a lot to me because I saw myself in the students; I was welcoming. Many of them were nervous, unsure, and trying to find their place just like I once was. Being in that position made me realize that growth is not just about what you achieve, but about how you help others feel seen and supported while they are still figuring things out.

One opportunity slowly led to another. Serving as President of the Muslim Student

Association was not something I ever imagined for myself in the beginning. It developed over time through showing up consistently, taking initiative, and caring deeply about building a space where students felt like they belonged. Through that role, I learned that leadership is not about having all the answers; it is about listening, bringing people together, and creating space for others to be heard. I learned how to plan events, handle responsibility, and most importantly, how to lead with empathy.

At the same time, my involvement with Student Life, the Dean's Office, Admissions, campus marketing, social media, and RVCC Foundation work all came from being open to learning in any space I was placed in. I did not walk into any of those roles knowing exactly what to do. I learned by doing; by asking questions, observing others, making mistakes, and slowly building confidence I did not always feel at the beginning. Each role taught me something different about professionalism, communication, and teamwork, but more importantly, each one helped me understand myself better.

Even my experience in the Sanofi internship program connects back to RVCC. I was able to step into a professional environment with more confidence because of everything I had been building here. That experience helped me realize that the skills I was learning at RVCC were not just academic; they were real, transferable, and meaningful in spaces beyond campus. It showed me that I was capable of more than I used to believe, especially when I first started.

Along the way, I have been supported by several campus mentors and leaders, who each played a meaningful role in my journey. They challenged me, guided me, and encouraged me even during moments when I doubted myself. Their support reminded me that growth is not something you do alone; it is shaped by the people who believe in you before you fully believe in yourself.

RVCC gave me space to try, fail, learn, and grow again. I did not walk in as someone who had everything figured out, I grew into myself here, step by step, opportunity by opportunity, experience by experience. Some moments

built my confidence; others tested it, but all of them shaped who I am today.

RVCC matters to me because it did not just give me roles or experiences; it gave me a foundation I had to build from within myself. It met me exactly where I was and slowly helped shape me into someone who now trusts her own voice, her leadership, and her ability to step into any space and belong there.

As I prepare for the next chapter of my journey, I carry everything RVCC has given me not just experiences, but the process of becoming. The lessons, the people, the challenges, and the growth are all part of me now. RVCC did not just prepare me for the future; it helped me grow into it.



Sara Heller
Assistant Professor & Coordinator of Automotive Technology
Time with RVCC: 7

It's so hard to know what one wants to do with their life (I still don't know!) and having a location where one can explore and learn in a positive environment is unbelievably important. It's not an easy world we live in, and it is constantly changing. It is, therefore, imperative that there is a place where one can grow and learn safely.

They say the United States is a melting pot, but I think the concept is fully portrayed in the automotive program at RVCC. There's such a diverse background of people and experiences that come together in such a positive way! I've had the opportunity to meet so many amazing people, both at the College and within the community. We're partnered with several manufacturers, independent shops, etc. and

students have a vast choice of where to continue once they graduate.

Another amazing thing about the automotive program is that students are in the lab for three hours a day and four days a week. Because of amount of time students spend together in the lab, amazing friendships are formed. In addition, instructors are able to get a true sense of who the students are. This aids them in assisting students to find the employment that is right for them. There is so much opportunity and we're able to help students grow far beyond their ability to fix a vehicle!

I didn't get into the automotive field until after I earned my bachelor's degree and I wish I knew about this program back then because I would've had a completely different experience. I love that I am able to contribute to the student experience here and to see how far they are able to go! Bridging that gap between the two is incredible! And that's why RVCC matters: because each student matters and is able to be themselves and grow among their peers so that they can make the world a better place!



Phil Herro
RVCC Athletic Director
Time with RVCC: 14 years

In 2012, I was hired as the Men's Basketball Assistant Coach and fell in love with RVCC. I was introduced to a place that I had no idea existed, and I grew up just fifteen minutes away! From the beginning, it was the relationships with our student athletes that I cherished the most. Through these relationships, I was able to see firsthand passion and commitment that I hadn't witnessed at the four-year

colleges where I coached and played.

RVCC, like other community colleges, provides a unique situation where we are recruiting student athletes while at the same time helping them to transfer. This dynamic creates a lively and competitive atmosphere that is hard to replicate anywhere other than community colleges. I loved the opportunity we gave to kids, the passion with which they were committed to RVCC, and the stories they told about how and why Raritan was the perfect fit for them. Because of this, I became resolute in my desire to make our teams a reflection of the greatness that our student athletes embodied.

Surrounding yourself with student athletes that are determined to succeed, that chose us over other college options, makes you come in to work every day prepared to give your all. Because that's what those kids give, and anything less from us, would be unacceptable.

Of course, some of their stories are more than inspirational. Many of the things our kids have gone through, yet still rise to the top in the classroom and on the court is nothing short of remarkable. But, it's not only the ones that have the greatest success, or have overcome the biggest hurdles, that are the most inspiring. Every single one of our athletes is an inspiration. Choosing to come to a place like Raritan tells a lot about the character of the kid immediately. You don't choose RVCC to be comfortable. You choose RVCC to push yourself, to be challenged daily, and to prove something. Not just to those coaches or other schools that doubted you, but most importantly to yourself.

Seeing the attitude and the toughness of a student athlete that feels they have something to prove is beyond moving. When you couple that with the close personal relationships that our coaches are able to build with these athletes, more often than not, it's the kids that inspire us. Because of them we prepare better, we coach harder. We recruit with a purpose and are driven to see our players succeed at Raritan and beyond.

Coaching creates a deep connection to an individual that allows the two of you to commit to a common goal, no matter the cost. The inspiration is insurmountable, and I will forever

be grateful to RVCC for providing a place for our student athletes to motivate and impact so many people.



Todd Lambrix
*Assistant Professor of
3D Design/Sculpture*
Time with RVCC: 4 years

It was in 1988 and again in 1994 that the RVCC Arts Department changed my life. I was young, potentially a first-generation college student and a prime candidate to slip through the cracks somehow. The faculty here seemed to almost have a mission of making sure I could see my potential. Ann Tsubota, a lifelong faculty member, saw one piece of my work and bought an exhibition catalog from the Philadelphia Museum of Art and gave it to me. The works of John Cage, a composer and visual artist who made works based on chance operations...essentially a roll of the dice, a gamble. I felt a connection in his work and the support of all of my teachers that told me masterpieces can come from nothing.

Once a struggling high school student, I left RVCC with a perfect grade point average to transfer to Rutgers for a Bachelor's degree and on to a Master's degree at The Rhode Island School of Design. These accolades were not merely my own. They were the collaborative infusions of my inspiring teachers' support and an energy that a college art department pulsed with. I left this place with that energy. I had a new found desire to not only make art, but to teach and support others like me.

It is important to point out another reason this department and RVCC at large matters

so much. The work we were doing together as students and professors created a deeper understanding of the world, humanity, my place in all of that and how the work I would make could impact culture. This was more than the simplistic means-to-an-end diploma equals job equals income. I came from a more insular, uneducated, blue collar background and was changed into a citizen with a sense of community. It gave me purpose.

I spent almost 20 years teaching at Parsons School of Design in New York City when I spotted the listing for the full-time position in 3D Design and Sculpture at Raritan Valley. I saw that as a ticket home. I wanted to give back to the place that transformed my life and pass on all of the incredible support and understanding my own professors had given me. Teaching here has brought me full circle. I enter these buildings as the memories of my professors play in my mind, reminding me of where I was back then. I repay them as I strive to do for others, what they did for me.



Tracey A. Keegan
*RVCC Nursing Program
Director/Assistant Faculty*
Time with RVCC: Class of 1995;
employee since 2020

Raritan Valley Community College has positively impacted my life in so many ways. I attended this school from 1993-1995 in the Nursing Program. I so vividly remember attending classes, and making wonderful friendships that remain today. I knew I wanted to succeed; I was given such amazing guidance throughout my time here. Back then, the nursing faculty was so supportive as was the

Health Science Department. I completed my Associate of Applied Science in Nursing and never looked back.

RVCC gave me my calling. I began to work in a hospital immediately after passing my boards. I thought it would be hard to find a position but RVCC speaks for itself with its reputation. As my career took off in the emergency department, I decided I wanted to enhance my education by obtaining my Bachelor of Science in Nursing, Master of Science in Nursing with a focus in Family Nurse Practitioner and finally my Doctor of Nursing Practice. This was all time well spent that stemmed from my original education.

Fast forward twenty-six years later and I am sitting in the very department that began this journey. I patiently waited for a position to open up and I took off from there. The sheer joy I get teaching nursing students while I reminisce my time sitting in the very same lecture hall. I often tell the students stories of my time at RVCC and the pride I had wearing my uniform to clinical. Not long after I graduated from RVCC, my sister passed away. One is never prepared for this but using the tools given to me way back when, I learned to channel that into something meaningful. I wanted to support the College as I was supported and I developed a scholarship in my sister's name. The Melanie Marie Piwoski Scholarship in Nursing at RVCC supports applicants who want to follow their dreams to become a nurse and gives the opportunity to assist with lessening the burden of finances.

I am inspired every day to do more, give back more and just be a good human. Nurses are so valuable and to have this profession makes me feel complete in my journey that began so many years ago. I have more to do and more students to inspire/mentor to keep the momentum going. All of this was because of RVCC where my education began and I am very grateful for my opportunities, the faculty then and now, the overall campus spirit that makes coming here easy. I have on my office wall a picture of myself on graduation day and another picture with a faculty member who inspired me. I am very lucky to have had this professor and I hope that my students that come and go look back at me feeling inspired to keep going and promote their nursing education at RVCC.



Lisa Tucker
Professor of English
Time with RVCC: 32 years

A decade ago, RVCC adopted the motto, "Be Seen, Be Heard, Belong." I was recently reminded of how the College continues to amplify this motto.

A few months back, my father and I saw a dramatic version of Katy Hudson's book, *A Loud Winter's Nap*. The actors were the children from the RVCC Children's campus. They were ages 2-7. Their performance, organized by leadership staff of the Children's Campus, was spectacular. Every student, regardless of age or skill level or individual part, definitely felt seen and heard. The children delivered their lines with confidence. Upon reflection, I was reminded that everyone plays an important role, whether in a play, in a college classroom, or in a workplace. What matters most is that each person is recognized as an important contributing member of the whole.

As a faculty member, I am a leader who must be able to recognize, make known everyone's value, and give every student the opportunity to emerge as a class leader. My classroom is a microcosm of a safe world. I recognize that all of my students are important components of what Teachers College, Columbia University educator Yvette Jackson describes as, "high operational performers."

What was reinforced to me in the Children's Campus play production, is the value of "democratization." In order to remain effective in the classroom, I must continue to prepare students for the world by helping them find their potential. I help students discover what they do well, so that when they are seen and

heard they represent themselves appropriately, and feel a sense of belongingness. This is an awesome responsibility and I take it to heart each day on this campus.



Maria Theresa Castillo
Housekeeping Custodial Staff
Time with RVCC: 13 years

My name is María Teresa Castillo. I was born in Ecuador—a small but beautiful country—where I grew up surrounded by values that profoundly shaped my life. From a very early age, my family instilled in me fundamental principles: love for one's neighbor, reverence for God, and the conviction that we all have an important role to play in this world, no matter how insignificant that role may seem. I learned that our actions always reflect either light or darkness, and that when one acts with integrity, it is the light that prevails through sincere service to others—without distinction of social class, beliefs, or educational background.

Since childhood, I heard a great deal about this magnificent country—the United States—which sparked in me the dream of one day visiting it. Life granted me that opportunity in the year 2000, when I arrived as a tourist. For a time, I traveled back and forth between both countries, until, in 2005, I made the decision to settle here—driven by a desire to grow, to learn, and to build a future with purpose.

In 2014, I began working at Raritan Valley Community College (RVCC), and it was there that one of the most significant chapters of my life began.

For me, RVCC is important because it's not just my workplace, but a space where I build a

very significant part of my life. As a custodian, my work is often quiet, but always essential. I learn that every detail counts, that maintaining a clean and organized space is also a way of caring for people.

RVCC gives me the opportunity to serve, to contribute through my role, and to feel that my work has value. Here, I understand that we are all part of the same purpose and that every role, whatever it may be, contributes to the well-being of the entire community.

RVCC has a very special impact on my life. It teaches me the importance of consistency, responsibility, and commitment. Every day, by fulfilling my duties, I know I am helping to create a suitable environment for students, faculty, and staff.

One of my greatest inspirations is the people who are part of RVCC. Seeing the students' progress, the teachers' dedication, and my colleagues' teamwork motivates me to always give my best. Even though my work isn't always visible, I know it's important, and that fills me with pride.

What makes RVCC unique is its people. It's a place where you don't feel alone, where bonds are formed, and where everyone is valued. Every day I find respect, kindness, and support, and that makes me want to come back every day.

RVCC has become a routine I enjoy, a place where I feel part of something bigger. It's not just about finishing a workday; it's about sharing, greeting others, helping out, and being part of a community that feels like family.

SPANISH:

Mi nombre es María Teresa Castillo. Nací en Ecuador, un pequeño pero hermoso país donde crecí rodeada de valores que marcaron profundamente mi vida. Desde muy temprana edad, mi familia me inculcó principios fundamentales: el amor por el prójimo, el respeto a Dios y la convicción de que todos tenemos un rol importante en este mundo, sin importar cuán desapercibido pueda parecer. Aprendí que nuestras acciones siempre reflejan luz u oscuridad, y que cuando se actúa con integridad, es la luz la que prevalece a través del servicio sincero hacia los demás, sin distinción de clases sociales, creencias o niveles

académicos.

Desde niña escuché mucho sobre este gran país, Estados Unidos, lo que despertó en mí el sueño de algún día conocerlo.

La vida me dio esa oportunidad en el año 2000, cuando vine como turista. Durante un tiempo estuve viajando entre ambos países, hasta que en el año 2005 tomé la decisión de establecerme aquí, motivada por el deseo de crecer, aprender y construir un futuro con propósito.

En 2014 comencé a trabajar en Raritan Valley Community College (RVCC), y fue allí donde inició una de las etapas más significativas de mi vida.

Para mí, RVCC es importante porque no es solo mi lugar de trabajo, sino un espacio donde construyo una parte muy significativa de mi vida. Como conserje, mi trabajo suele

ser discreto, pero siempre esencial. Aprendo que cada detalle cuenta, que mantener un espacio limpio y organizado también es una forma de cuidar a las personas.

RVCC me da la oportunidad de servir, de contribuir a través de mi rol y de sentir que mi trabajo tiene valor. Aquí, entiendo que todos formamos parte del mismo propósito y que cada rol, sea cual sea, contribuye al bienestar de toda la comunidad.

RVCC tiene un impacto muy especial en mi vida. Me enseña la importancia de la constancia, la responsabilidad y el compromiso. Cada día, al cumplir con mis deberes, sé que estoy ayudando a crear un ambiente adecuado para estudiantes, profesores y personal administrativo.

Una de mis mayores inspiraciones son las personas que forman parte de RVCC. Ver el

progreso de los estudiantes, la dedicación de los profesores y el trabajo en equipo de mis compañeros me motiva a dar siempre lo mejor de mí. Aunque mi trabajo no siempre sea visible, sé que es importante y eso me llena de orgullo.

Lo que hace que RVCC sea único es su gente. Es un lugar donde no te sientes solo, donde se crean lazos y donde todos son valorados. Cada día encuentro respeto, amabilidad y apoyo, y eso me hace querer volver a diario.

RVCC se ha convertido en una rutina que disfruto, un lugar donde me siento parte de algo más grande. No se trata solo de terminar la jornada laboral; se trata de compartir, saludar a los demás, ayudar y ser parte de una comunidad que se siente como una familia.



Student Involvement Fair, RVCC Cafeteria, September, 2025

CENTER STAGE: MORE VOICES AND BRIGHT LIGHTS OF RVCC



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

THE LUMINA FOUNDATION



RVCC Alumni Association



Relaunched in 2022, the RVCC Alumni Association exists as an opportunity for the College's 21,000 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 the activity of our alumni over the past 12 months. The truth is, RVCC alumni are everywhere, and we're proud to bring their journeys to light.



2025-26 DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD HONOREES

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



JENNA DOUGLAS
(CLASS OF 2017)

Jenna graduated summa cum laude from RVCC's Honors College in 2017 with an Associate of Arts in Liberal Arts–Social Science. While at RVCC, Jenna was actively involved with both the Phi Theta Kappa honor society and Rotaract; received the Nota Bene Academic Achievement Award; served as a Student Ambassador; and also participated in the Asha Project in Nepal, where she helped distribute school supplies to students in remote villages. Jenna then transferred to Georgetown University, graduating magna cum laude. While there, Jenna served as a leader in Georgetown's Alternative Breaks Program, coordinating community-based service experiences focused on social justice education and student engagement. After graduating, Jenna worked

on Capitol Hill as an education public policy and advocacy intern, informing Congressional staff about educational disparities. Jenna continued serving the Washington, DC community as both a mentor and English-language instructor for ELL learners. Next, Jenna joined the Aspen Institute Education & Society Program, where she designed and delivered strategic learning experiences that equipped K-12 leaders with the necessary tools to advance equity and improve student outcomes. Jenna's career then led her to becoming a Strategy & Transformation Consultant at Deloitte Consulting, where she supported institution-wide transformations for colleges and universities. In 2023, Jenna was selected as a Fulbright Scholar, serving as an English Teaching Assistant in La Rioja, Spain.

STEPHANIE SPIES
(CLASS OF 2014)

Stephanie graduated from the RVCC Honors College in 2014 with an Associate of Science in Business Administration. She then transferred to William Patterson University, where she double-majored in accounting and financial planning. Stephanie began her career as a financial planner at Modera Wealth Management in 2017 and is now a Senior Financial Advisor and Principal at the firm. Her position involves educating her clients about retirement planning, tax planning, estate planning, risk management, and investments. In addition to



her work with Modera, Stephanie works as an adjunct professor at William Paterson University, educating the next generation of financial planners. Outside of work, Stephanie has served on various committees both inside and outside of her profession, including her role as board treasurer of The Princess Program STEM, a California-based nonprofit that seeks to encourage young girls to enter STEM-related fields. In its first year, The Princess Program STEM has reached over 2,000 young girls across the country through various STEM-related activities. Stephanie gives back to RVCC whenever she can, frequently serving as a panelist for career exploration and mentorship events focused on educating RVCC's business students.

LEILANI ROSE
(CLASS OF 2019)

Leilani Rose graduated from RVCC in 2019 with an Associate of Science in Digital Media/Film Studies. While at RVCC, she served as President of the Phi Theta Kappa honor society, leading the chapter to multiple regional and international awards and earning the College's Distinguished Club President Award. She later pursued a Bachelor of Arts in Individualized Studies at the University of New Hampshire College of Professional Studies. During her early academic years, she served as a volunteer EMT and firefighter. Her path also included volunteer work in Israel, where she taught English and supported nonprofit initiatives serving women, at-risk youth, and children with life-threatening cardiac conditions. She currently serves on the board of Guitar Tree and on the executive business committee



for the Hunterdon Jewish Business Network. She began her career in Tel Aviv as a technology correspondent before joining First Street Foundation, where she helped launch Risk Factor, the first publicly accessible flood risk data platform in the United States. She later worked in healthcare advertising, primarily within rare disease, where her work was recognized by PM360's Greatest Creators. Leilani is a writer and integrative health strategist; she is the co-owner of Envision Health and Fitness and founder of Elume, where she develops programs, workshops, and continuing medical education focused on sustainable, physiology-based approaches to health.



Alumni In The News

RAVES FOR THE FAVES

JIMENA TORRES

It was a gift of the season: a surprise visit to the Raritan Valley Community College holiday party by Jimena Torres, Class of 2023. And while it's always great connecting with alumni, Jimena is in a category of her own. Her time at RVCC was especially rewarding—certainly for her, given how she flourished, but also for so many others with whom she interacted.

The RVCC Foundation staff experienced this firsthand. And, as she was one of two student reps on the RVCC Foundation Board of Directors, our Board members witnessed Jimena's impact too.

In short, she embraced the leadership role and became a “go to” resource and a model ambassador for the institution. Whether it was representing the voice of the student, leading campus tours for donors and other VIPs, volunteering to be featured in our “Futures” campaign, or speaking about RVCC and her journey at our largest events—Jimena was always on point. She even set the standard for selling raffle tickets at our annual RVCC Foundation Golf Classic.

Actually, she crushed it.

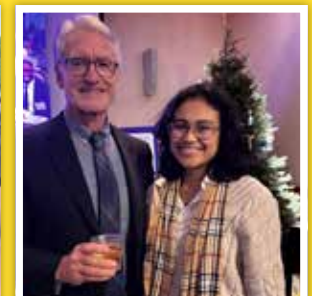
Her “fave” status isn't unique to the RVCC Foundation. Staff of the Educational Opportunity Fund, Student

Life, and Student Affairs would say the same. So, too, would her classmates and fellow clubmates on the RVCC Chapter of the Society of Women Engineers.

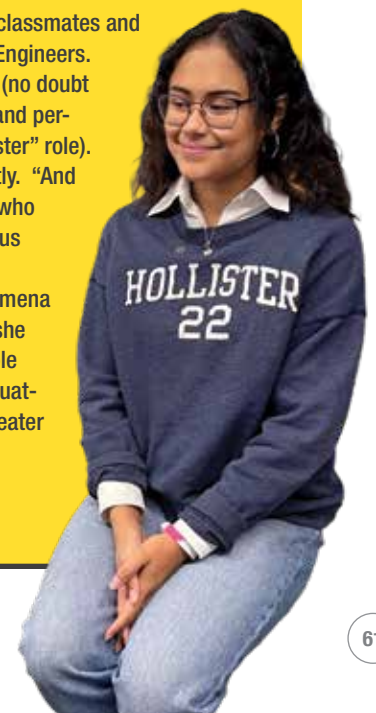
Jimena has a unique combination of problem-solving skills (no doubt from her Mechanical Engineering, Associate of Science degree) and personal warmth (no doubt from her tightknit family and her “big sister” role).

“I am forever grateful for my time at RVCC,” she said recently. “And I'm especially grateful for its community members—the people who foster truly meaningful bonds with students and whose belief in us establishes our enduring success.”

Since graduating from Raritan Valley Community College, Jimena has done what you're supposed to do in college: evolve. In fact, she has made a pivot—from STEM to Liberal Arts, and is now a double major (Theater Arts and English) at Rutgers University. After graduating Rutgers later this year, she plans to pursue a career in the theater industry. Given her star power, that's no surprise.



Clockwise from top left: Graduation day moments for the Torres family; Holiday party cheer with Mike Marion; With RVCC alumnus and RVCC Foundation Board member, Joel Reyes-Guzman; Tickets in hand with RVCC Foundation's Janet Dunne & Erin Kislan.



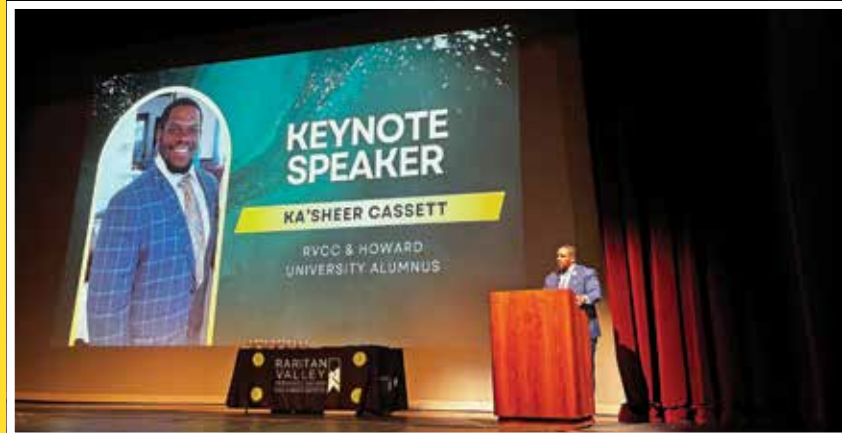


Alumni In The News

RAVES FOR THE FAVES KA'SHEER CASSETT

Ka'Sheer Cassett had a big presence when he was a student at RVCC, and his presence hasn't diminished as is evident whenever he returns to campus to mentor, speak, or just catch up with his previous mentors. An alum of both RVCC and Howard University, from which he graduated Magna Cum Laude with a B.S. in Health Science in June of 2024. Ka'Sheer was a star mentee as part of the Sanofi Corporate Mentorship Program at RVCC, and later served as a student ambassador for the program. The company thought so highly of him, they offered the ultimate compliment: employment. Ka'Sheer is now in his fifth year with Sanofi, currently holding the title of Clinical Operation Study Country Lead.

While he credits the RVCC Foundation for giving him his start in public speaking—Ka'Sheer was selected to headline the after-golf reception at the 17th Annual RVCC Foundation Golf Classic in June of 2021—it is a skill that comes naturally to him. He has returned to RVCC to speak to various audiences, including the annual “closing ceremony” of the aforementioned mentorship program, and most recently, at the 35th Annual Paul Robeson Youth Achievement Awards. His message to those 75 high achieving middle school and high school students assembled in Nash Theatre at RVCC was simple but inspiring: *“pursue what you love...with courage, patience, and persistence. You don't need to have it all figured out today. You just need to take the next step. And then the next. And then the next. Trust yourself enough to begin.”* Clearly, this former impressionable student mentee has graduated to sage, thoughtful mentor.



FOREVER GENEROUS

Congratulations to Fred and Bernadette Vath (Class of 1981, in what was then called “Somerset County College”) for fulfilling their \$50,000 pledge to establish the Frederick J. Vath Endowed Scholarship Fund at Raritan Valley Community College. The income from this fund will be directed, in perpetuity, to support Honors College students through the Bernadette Vath Honors College Scholarship at Raritan Valley Community College.

The Vath family has generational ties to RVCC: in addition to Bernadette, there's daughter, Jacquelyn (Vath) Miscichowski (a 1995 grad of RVCC), and Grace Pfizner—Bernadette's granddaughter (Class of 2024). Grace's sister, Sophia, began her RVCC journey this fall.

Huge thanks to Fred and Bernadette, and to the Vath family, for their enduring legacy and the generosity that will sustain it forever.



Alumni In The News

RVCC GRADUATE SELECTED FOR PRESTIGIOUS FULBRIGHT SCHOLARSHIP

Stephen Evarts of Frenchtown, a May 2024 graduate of Raritan Valley Community College, has been selected as a Fulbright Scholar for the 2026-2027 year.

In that prestigious role, they will act as an ESL teaching assistant and cultural ambassador at a developing state university in Turkey. Their participation in the Fulbright Program will run from September 2026-June 2027.



Evarts, who graduated from Rutgers University in May with a Bachelor's Degree in Linguistics and a minor in Philosophy, was previously honored with the 2024 New Jersey Council of County Colleges Student of the Year Award. They also participated in the U.S. Department of State's Critical Language Scholarship (CLS) Program to study Turkish in summer 2024.

The Fulbright Program was established in 1946 as a bold investment in global peace and American prosperity through educational and cultural exchange. Since then, the Fulbright Program has provided nearly 450,000 students, scholars, scientists, professionals, teachers, and artists with life-changing opportunities to study, conduct research, and teach in over 160 countries and territories around the world.

The Fulbright U.S. Student Program expands perspectives through academic and professional advancement and cross-cultural dialogue. Fulbright finds solutions to complex global issues and creates connections in a changing world. In partnership with more than 140 countries worldwide, the Fulbright U.S. Student Program offers unparalleled opportunities to advance knowledge and innovation across all academic disciplines. Awards are available to passionate and accomplished graduating college seniors, graduate students, and young professionals from all backgrounds. Program participants pursue graduate study, conduct research, or teach English abroad.

Updates From The Field



THE HUMANITARIAN OSEI KWADWO BOATENG (CLASS OF 2016)

Osei, founder and Executive Director of the OKB Hope Foundation, is leading efforts to expand access to healthcare for underserved communities across Ghana. His efforts have been recognized with some very public acknowledgment—when we last caught up with him, he had just been honored with the GRAND PRIZE by the Global Citizen Waislitz Awards in recognition of his social impact work with those experiencing extreme poverty. In 2023, he was honored as CNN Hero of the year finalist, and last year was awarded 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 visionary leadership and significant contributions that have brought honor to New Jersey's Community Colleges.” Most recently, his impact and vision have earned him selection as one of the inaugural Africa Big Bets Fellows by the The Rockefeller Foundation, a prestigious fellowship recognizing 10 exceptional changemakers across the African continent who are driving bold, locally rooted solutions to some of Africa's most pressing challenges. Said Osei, “I am thrilled to be part of the fellowship and opportunity to learn how to advance my solution to help more local communities in Ghana.”



Updates From The Field

THE PRODUCER

IVAN PORRAS (CLASS OF 2020)

Ivan, an RVCC Communication and Media Studies grad, recently announced a new role in his professional journey: Associate Producer for C-SPAN's new show, Ceasefire!

While Ivan's career is well on its way, he recalls his formative years at RVCC with clarity. "I went into RVCC with the same questions many students have when they choose a community college: Where do I go from here? Is this the right path? Can I realistically achieve my goals starting here? What I found was far more than I expected."

After earning his Associate degree from RVCC, Ivan secured

a Bachelor of Arts in Communications, from Purdue University, graduating in 2023. But he remembers how his experience at RVCC set him up to succeed. "Because of RVCC, I felt prepared to take the next step and continue my journey at Purdue," said Ivan. "It gave me the tools, experience, and mindset to pursue my goals with confidence. Looking back, RVCC wasn't just where I started—it's what helped set everything in motion."

In fact, like so many community college grads, Ivan views his RVCC experience as a "launchpad." In addition to his studies, he was a student worker in the RVCC Athletics department, but ever ambitious, he jumped in as the interim Sports Information Director after it became vacant (and held the position until graduation!). His responsibilities—setting up live streams, filming games, managing social media, and departmental photographer—set him up for the future.

"RVCC helped me realize just how much I was capable of," Ivan noted. "Through my work at RVCC Athletics, I gained hands-on experience, but more importantly, I gained confidence. I learned how to take advantage of opportunities, push myself, and think bigger about my future."

Ivan credits the support of dedicated mentors like Coach Kevin Ryan and Coach Phil Herro for playing a huge role in his growth. "They challenged me, believed in me, and helped me see a path forward when I wasn't sure what mine looked like. They were family."

As for life at C-SPAN and Ceasefire, Ivan continues to grow and develop. "This is such a great opportunity, and an exceptional organization to be part of. And to be in the Nation's Capital, with all that's going on in the world, is about as good as it can get in my profession."



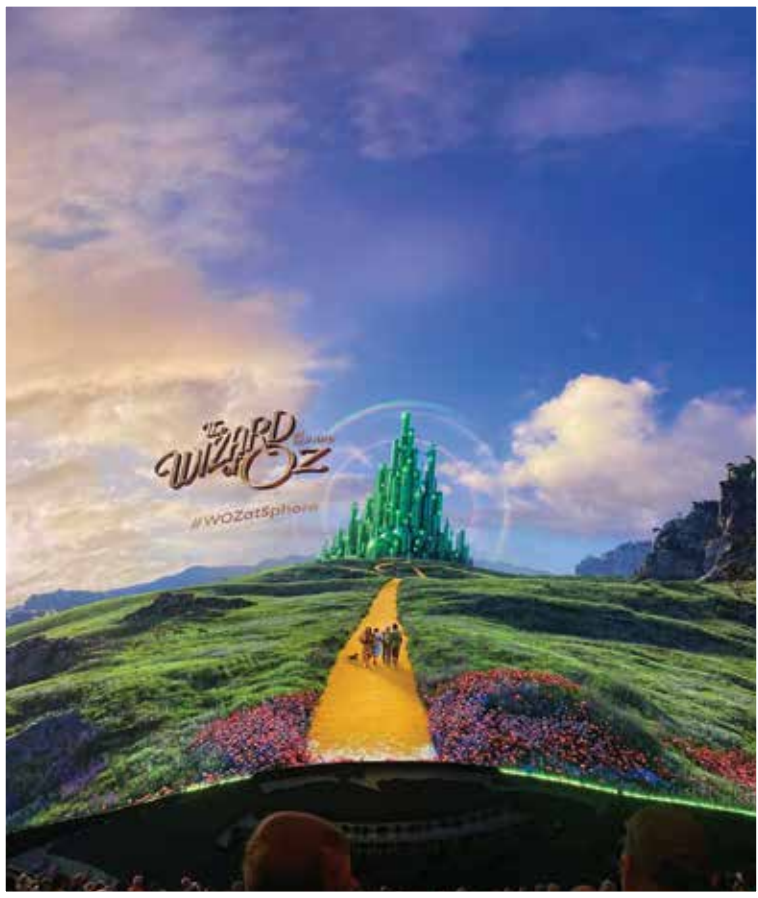
Updates From The Field

THE WIZARD

ETHAN CLARK (CLASS OF 2019)

When we last checked in with Ethan, he was savoring the impact he helped create for the "Fox NFL Kickoff" set, helping make it visually compelling. Ethan has been working as a 3D artist for FOX Sports. His projects have included helping to create the set for Season 11 of Fox NFL Kickoff. Ethan was part of the team that handled the primary modeling and texturing of the broadcast's set, using an array of computer graphics (CG)—in fact, they created everything that appears in the set (save for the actual broadcasters!). After graduating from RVCC with an AFA in Visual Arts, Clark transferred to Gnomon School of VFX, Games, and Animation in North Holly-

wood, CA, where he earned his BFA and studied 3D/CG, specializing in modeling, texturing, lighting, look development, compositing, and generalist work. Said Ethan, "Last year, I had an opportunity to work on some visuals for the Wizard of Oz show at the Las Vegas Sphere. This year, I finally got a chance to go witness it in person! It was awesome to see my work on the big screen—actually probably the biggest screen possible. Met up with my parents there and made a fun little weekend out of it! Not a bad first time in Vegas at all!"



JOIN TODAY



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

IN SUPPORT Of Our Students

\$492,741 IN TOTAL SCHOLARSHIPS; 9.4% INCREASE OVER 2024-25

252 STUDENT RECIPIENTS

96 TOTAL SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED

\$3,655,991 IN TOTAL SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS SINCE 2018

NEW SCHOLARSHIPS OFFERED FOR 2026-2027 ACADEMIC YEAR

GENERAL

MARGIE SKVARA SCHOLARSHIP/ BRIDGEWATER WOMEN'S CLUB

Available to all students with a strong preference for female students; applicants can be first- or second-year students and can be enrolled in either traditional academic credit programs or workforce training programs.

ADULT LEARNERS

J.S. HENDERSON MEMORIAL ADULT SCHOLARSHIP

Available to students that are 25 years or older and are enrolled full-or part-time and residing in Hunterdon or Somerset counties.

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

HELENA GARDNER SCHOLARSHIP

Recipients must be in the Occupational Therapy Assistant program and plan to complete an Associate's degree; students must be enrolled full-time, with special consideration given to students who are also serving as a primary caregiver.

NURSING

DEBORAH A TCHORZ-MIGNELLA NURSING SCHOLARSHIP AT RVCC

This scholarship is open to second-year nursing students, with preference for students from Somerset and Hunterdon counties. Preference is given to applicants who have EMS/volunteer department experience or training.

INCLUSIVITY

ABILITY RISING SCHOLARSHIP AT RVCC

Awarded to students with a diagnosed learning disability (e.g., dyslexia, ADHD, dyscalculia, processing disorders), who are registered with the college's Center for Accessibility and Inclusive Education, and who have demonstrated financial need.



IN SUPPORT Of Our Students



HIGHLIGHTING SCHOLARSHIPS

A TOAST TO PATRONS OF GOOD

AAUW SOMERSET HILLS SCHOLARSHIP

The American Association of University Women (AAUW) is a national non-profit that advances equity for women and girls through advocacy, education, and research.

The AAUW's Somerset Hills Branch is a gem: discerning, righteous, engaged, committed, resourceful, and generous. Their annual used book sale is legendary. The funds raised are plowed right back into the community—

from local libraries and local charities, to scholarships at a certain local community college.

In fact, for 24 years Raritan Valley Community College students have benefitted from the generosity of the AAUW Somerset Hills. Their commitment is to female students who've endured unanticipated challenges and have found their way back to education as a means to a better life.

It is an admirable commitment. It is why we never miss their annual awards celebration, at which we get to speak about the College

and the impact of the AAUW's support. Some years, RVCC student recipients are available to join the gathering and personalize the difference the scholarships have made in their lives. In either case, these patrons of good always present a check in support of the next group of persevering women who are ready to reboot their lives, and their journeys, at Raritan Valley Community College.

CELEBRATING LEGENDS

CENTO AMICI SCHOLARSHIP

The 37th Annual Cento Amici Dinner & Auction was highlighted by a conversation between two legends: honoree Bill Raftery, Hall of Fame college basketball broadcaster, and Bobby Hurley, Hall of Fame basketball coach at St. Anthony High School in Jersey City.

Another highlight was having three Raritan Valley Community College students—Esmeralda J. Ochoa-Lopez, Naysha Benavides Arroyo, and Komal Saleem, all Cento Amici scholarship recipients—present at the celebration. Esmeralda's thoughtful message of gratitude was



IN SUPPORT Of Our Students



also featured prominently in the printed dinner program. Raritan Valley Community College Women’s Basketball and Volleyball Coach, Phil Herro—a multi-year, “Coach of the Year”—also attended.

Huge thanks to the entire Cento Amici organization, but especially dinner host, Robert Zito, and event sponsor, David Nader. Their generosity and leadership are making a difference, and it was evident at the 37th Annual. Esmeralda said it best: “Receiving this scholarship means so much more than just financial support. It represents a story of hard work, family, and resilience. It reminds me that behind every student’s success story is a community that believes in the power of education.”



A LIFE. A LEGACY. A TOAST.

J.S. HENDERSON MEMORIAL ADULT SCHOLARSHIP

In 1986, following her tragic death, friends of Mrs. Jessamine Henderson came together to contribute time and resources to launch a scholarship fund in her honor. Jessamine was a lifelong resident of Somerset County, NJ and worked tirelessly for adult education in both her professional and personal lives.

• • •Late last summer, friends and trustees of the J.S. Henderson Memorial Adult Scholarship • • •

Fund came together one more time, for one last annual dinner. After 39 years and some 99 grateful scholarship beneficiaries, the mood was both festive and reflective—and certainly worthy of a toast to Jessamine, for her inspiration and all of the lives touched by the scholarship that carries her name.

And, in a beautiful commitment to keep the scholarship going in perpetuity, the management and stewardship of it was transferred to the Raritan Valley Community College Foundation, along with a new endowed fund to ensure the scholarship’s permanent vitality.

So now, Mrs. Henderson’s longstanding advocacy for providing opportunities to adults for continuing their education will live on, forever, through the “J.S. Henderson Memorial Adult Scholarship at Raritan Valley Community College.” And that, too, was worth toasting.

We are grateful for this awesome stewardship opportunity. We thank the Trustees, along with Board President Andrew Manno, for the honor of keeping Jessamine’s legacy going and for all the lives it will touch in the years ahead.

IN SUPPORT Of Our Students

A SPECIAL THANKS

KEVIN ROSERO MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

Kevin Rosero was a thoughtful, caring, and quietly passionate member of the Raritan Valley Community College community, with a bright, steady spirit, and a cheerful heart. He was a member of the RVCC Class of 2016 and the Alumni Rep on the Board of Trustees for the 2016-17 academic year. Kevin wanted to make the world a better place to live for his future children and grandchildren, a place without racism, discrimination, and oppression. Sadly, Kevin passed tragically in June 2021.

Dan Heredia, a Raritan Valley Community College student (Class of 2026) is the recipient of the 2025-26 Kevin Rosero Memorial Scholarship. He is thoughtful, grateful, and a perfect choice for the support provided by this esteemed scholarship. He recently expressed his thanks to Kevin’s parents.



To the Rosero Family,

I wanted to thank you for the honor of this scholarship, and to also acknowledge Kevin's values and how much I admire what he did and intended to do throughout his life. By no means can I even comprehend the lasting impact that Kevin left on the world, and what he meant to so many different people. But I want to begin with an admiration of his values.

Specifically, I saw that Kevin intended on becoming an immigration lawyer. I really resonate with this particular aspiration of his, as immigration can be a brutal process in the United States, depending on one’s situation and resources. I come from a first-generation household, where neither of my parents’ attended college and both immigrated to the U.S. in their mid-20s (father from Peru, mother from Colombia). I know that their process was particularly difficult, and my mom specifically had a hard-time getting citizenship. She did not speak the language when she came, and had to work extremely hard to eventually find a consistent home for herself.

I admire that Kevin wanted to make immigration easier for individuals like my mother, and I thought that was really commendable. I want to study some degree of political science when I eventually transfer from Raritan Valley Community College, and my family has instilled in me values of respect and empathy for immigrants. My dad routinely sends money to immigrants who do not have access to the resources that they need, and I also plan on continuing that family tradition when I grow older as well.

Kevin’s values are ones that I greatly admire and will try to uphold in my life, and I offer my deepest thanks for being awarded the scholarship that bears his name.

Sincerely,
Dan Heredia
2025-26 Recipient of the Kevin Rosero Memorial Scholarship



Far Left:
Kevin Rosero,
celebrating in 2016;

Left:
Dan Heredia, behind the
bench installed in memory
of Kevin, on the campus of
Raritan Valley Community
College

IN SUPPORT Of Our Students



SCORE TWO FOR THE HOME TEAM

LABCORP SCHOLARSHIP IN MEDICAL LABORATORY TECHNOLOGY

Aneldys Perez Urena of New Brunswick and Michelle Ugarte of Manville, both Class of 2026, and both recipients of the Labcorp Scholarship in Medical Laboratory Technology at Raritan Valley Community College.

Says Siddra Dar, MLT Program Director at RVCC, “Aneldys and Michelle are both excited to play critical roles in clinical diagnostics as laboratory professionals when they graduate.”

Huge thanks to Bill Haas, Elise Wagner, and the entire team at Labcorp—your leadership and generous support are making a difference at Raritan Valley Community College.



SUPPORT OF VETERANS

Rolando Romero, an RVCC Engineering Science major and veteran, holds a special Military-themed backpack, as part of the support extended by the JG Petrucci Military Veteran Family Scholarship Fund for Veterans and family members.

IN SUPPORT Of Our Students



21ST ANNUAL RVCC FOUNDATION SCHOLARSHIP RECEPTION



AND SO IT BEGINS

On April 16, the 21st Annual RVCC Foundation Scholarship Reception celebrated Raritan Valley Community College students, alumni, and the generous community of support behind the \$500,000 in scholarships provided to this year’s student recipients.

The April event featured the best of the best: Eva Rose Guastella and Uzma Aloko (both of the Class of 2026), along with Distinguished Alumna Jenna Douglas (Class of 2017), shared their personal journeys and how the support they received at Raritan Valley Community College impacted their lives.

Fred Bunsa, whose family established the Zach Bunsa Memorial Scholarship in 2020, provided inspiration and context, sharing insights and meaning about son Zach’s vibrant life of faith.

Special thanks to Daphne Kunukcu and Andrew McDermott (both RVCC Class of 2026) for their introductions, and to RVCC President Michael McDonough, for his welcoming remarks.

It is fitting that the scholarship application window for the 2026-27 Academic Year opened on the same day of this special gathering. As toasts were made for one cohort of RVCC student scholarship recipients—generously supported and inspired for what’s next in their journeys, another cohort was beginning its quest for scholarship support.

It is a full circle moment, and a reminder of the power of philanthropy and its potential to positively impact lives.

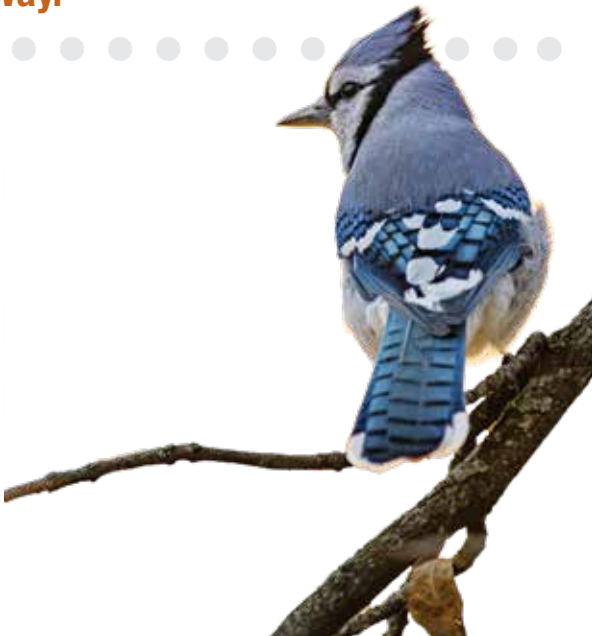


THE RV TRAIL



A LITTLE EARTH DAY LOVE

No ceremony, speeches, or fanfare. Just the public’s own trek on the RV Trail, with a little solitude to honor Mother Earth on the campus of the nation’s #1 ranked community college for environmental sustainability. For some, it’s no surprise that “a favorite place” can be a college campus. Especially one with its own hiking trail, featuring pockets of respite and joy to discover along the way.



BUILDING A “STRONGER, MORE COMPASSIONATE CAMPUS”



Tierra Hall-Edward hopes people understand that frequenting the Raritan Valley Community College Resource Center and Food Pantry represents an act of strength, not failure. “In truth,” says Hall-Edward, Director of Counseling Services, “it shows strength and connection, reflecting our ‘from RVCC, for RVCC’ spirit. The Pantry isn’t charity; it’s community. It exists to support everyone in the RVCC family, helping us care for one another, and building a stronger, more compassionate campus.”

At Raritan Valley Community College and across the country, food insecurity is a real threat to many college students. Food insecurity describes someone not being able to attain enough food, or have the proper quality of food, to meet their basic needs. It can go far beyond hunger, however, affecting their mental health, academic performance, and life outside of school. Nationally, 40% of all college students and 47% of community college students experience food insecurity. And the situation is only getting more severe. At RVCC, there were 9440 visits to the Resource Center & Food Pantry in 2025, representing a 21% increase from the previous year.

ADDRESSING BASIC NEEDS

Open to the entire College community, the RVCC Resource Center and Food Pantry, which

Hall-Edward supervises, addresses food insecurity and provides students with the basic needs to help keep them in school. The goal, she explains, is to alleviate any barriers that might prevent students from achieving their educational goals.



Tierra Hall-Edward

In her role at RVCC, Hall-Edward supports and leads mental health staff and campus-wide efforts focused on student well-being and access to care. Her hard work and dedication have not gone unnoticed: She was honored by the Somerset County Business Partnership as one of the *Class of 2025 40 Under 40*. According to information from the SCBP, the recipients are “a distinguished group of young

professionals who are driving innovation, strengthening the local economy, and making a meaningful impact across the community.” Hall-Edward brings several years of experience in higher education to her position—including close to four years at RVCC and about five years at Rockland Community College—along with a strong clinical background in counseling services. She received a BA in Psychology from City College – New York and an MS in Mental Health Counseling from Long Island University.

Her background is valuable as she supervises staff at the Resource Center, which helps students in a variety of ways, including providing appropriate attire for job interviews, along with every-day and seasonal clothing to meet students’ year-round needs. The Center also can offer financial support such as gas cards and grocery store cards, book vouchers, transportation assistance, loaning of laptops, and housing and medical resources.

Located at the back of the Resource Center, the Food Pantry is lined with shelves stocked with non-perishable grocery items, including canned vegetables and soups, pasta, dry cereals and oats, peanut butter and jelly, packaged macaroni and cheese, and more.

To assist in its efforts, the College greatly benefits from a wide range of donations to the Center and Food Pantry from community partners each year, including over \$1,000

worth of fresh produce, meat, dairy products, and pantry items from the weekly Wegmans on-campus delivery; clothing and food provided by the Somerset Food Bank; contributions from the Community Food Bank of New Jersey; and additional financial support from community donors, including student associations, faculty, and staff. For those in need, the Center also receives donations of menstrual and sanitary products and diapers for family care.

Students also benefit from the Center in other ways, such as volunteering there as part of their service learning experience through The Pray Family Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement at RVCC.

As one student, who did not wish to be identified, notes, “I was first introduced to the Resource Center via service learning. That experience allowed me to learn about all the amazing work that the Resource Center does and allowed me to play a part in it. What I love most is the community that the Center creates. I always loved seeing the same faces come into the Center and seeing community ties being formed. A lot of people would come to grab snacks, groceries, or menstrual/household items from our pantry, or grab clothes from our free clothes shop, or others would just come to sit in the Resource Center because it felt like a safe and comfortable space.”

The student adds, “Providing people with access to resources and basic needs is very important, and I think that resources are a vital part of RVCC, ensuring everyone on campus has their needs met. On a personal level, the Center has inspired me to be more involved in my community at RVCC and my community back home. The Resource Center has definitely become my favorite part of RVCC.”

Asked whether students’ needs have changed since she’s been involved with the Resource Center and Food Pantry, Hall-Edward says, “The core needs like housing, financial stability, and access to food have always been there. What’s changed is the complexity and scale of those needs. We’re seeing growing instability as students navigate rising costs, limited resources, and broader economic challenges.”

She continues, “At the same time, funding cuts to community organizations and food pantries mean there’s less support available to meet increasing demand. Students today are juggling more uncertainty, often in multiple areas of their lives. So, while the needs themselves haven’t changed, the challenges around meeting them have become more sophisticated and urgent.”

“GENEROSITY & GRATITUDE”

There were little moments—and big news—as the RVCC community came together to raise funds (and donate food products) to address food insecurity on the campus of Raritan Valley Community College. Some 80 guests attended November’s “Evening of Generosity & Gratitude” event, which required a donation of \$30—in ShopRite gift cards, grab-and-go food items, or as a financial contribution. And each \$30 earned a 2X match from the Board of Directors of the RVCC Foundation—generously initiated by vice chair, Dan Van Tran—for every attendee.

In total, some \$68,000 was raised—thanks in large part to a \$50,000 anonymous gift to the RVCC Resource Center & Food Pantry, which was announced as part of the evening’s celebration. The event also served as a ceremonial kick off for the last stretch of the RVCC Foundation’s end-of-year fundraising campaign, which seeks to bring in more support for RVCC students facing food insecurity. You can help in this perpetual effort by contributing at www.raritanval.edu/hunger. We are grateful for every gift of support.



Above: Members of the RVCC leadership team at the Somerset County Business Partnership “40 Under 40” ceremony.



Photos left, top and bottom: Members of the Raritan Valley Community College community display their generosity and willingness to “give back” and help those in need during “An Evening of Generosity & Gratitude,” hosted by the RVCC Foundation.

CELEBRATING THE SEASON

Another tradition at Raritan Valley Community College: the December holiday gathering of faculty, staff, leaders from the College and Foundation boards, and student carolers. In addition to celebrating the season, small donations were also accepted to bolster the reserves of the RVCC Food Pantry and Student Emergency Fund, netting a total of \$5,000. Thanks to all who made this event so successful, including our food service and technology staffs (especially John Wiedemann, Jill Erwin, Shawn Dahlhaus, and Tremayne Reid), to our student performers, to our “anonymous” donor and RVCC President Michael McDonough (for their generous “matching” donations), and to this event’s lead planner, Annette Lacanna.



RV FAMILY: Stephany, Shawn, and Shayna Rumrill

When Stephany, Shawn, and Shayna Rumrill of Flemington graduated from Raritan Valley Community College as members of the Class of 2016, they were one entity: triplets receiving their Associate Degrees from the College.

Together, they were homeschooled before coming to RVCC. At the College, all three had perfect, 4.0 grade point averages and received Academic Awards in their respective majors—Shawn for Pre-Medical Professional, Shayna for Chemistry, and Stephany for Education (P-5). One of the triplets, Shawn, also served as the Student Commencement Speaker. After graduating, the triplets all transferred to The College of New Jersey (TCNJ).

But 10 years later, after graduating from TCNJ, each sibling has forged their own path. Shawn is a scientist at Merck; Stephany is a special education teacher; and Shayna is a process engineer for Axalta Coating Systems. Their journeys are different, but one thing remains in common: RVCC has had a profound impact on their lives. Here are their stories and their thoughts about Raritan Valley Community College:

STEPHANY RUMRILL PALACIO

Stephany Rumrill Palacio, a resident of Hamilton, has pursued her passion for education as a special education teacher in the Lawrence Township Public Schools.

After graduating from TCNJ with degrees in Education and Psychology in 2019, she continued her studies, earning a Master’s Degree in Special Education from TCNJ in 2021. Her future goals include working in higher education in an administrative role.

Reflecting on her time at RVCC, Stephany says the College gave her a “fantastic foundation to higher education.” She notes, “I absolutely adored each of my professors and appreciated the small class sizes at RV, allowing for personalized instruction and support.”

Raritan Valley also was the place that launched her career in education. “My first teaching job occurred at The Children’s Campus at RVCC, where I had the privilege of working with inquisitive preschoolers and learning from amazing teachers and teacher assistants. Along with work experience, my Education classes at RVCC allowed me to step into local classrooms for observation hours and opportunities to network with professionals in the field.”

Stephany says she is especially appreciative of her RVCC professors, whom she



describes as “kind, intelligent, and supportive.” They added to her educational experience, she says, by helping her feel motivated and interested in her classes.

Going to RVCC and TCNJ with her brother and sister was “the best,” according to Stephany. They carpooled to college together, and “it was always nice to hear about Shawn and Shayna’s days and share stories. I enjoyed hearing about their experiences and seeing

them both develop their specialties and interests in science. It was a unique honor to spend my college years with my siblings before we each went our separate ways personally and professionally. I’m very grateful for those years together, and I’m thrilled to have celebrated each other’s successes.”

In addition to having her siblings with her at college, Stephany says she made lifelong friendships at RVCC, including her most important one: her now-husband, Javier Palacio.

SHAYNA RUMRILL

Now living in Greensboro, NC, Shayna Rumrill is a process engineer for Axalta Coating Systems. Her position is based in a manufacturing plant that creates paint for building products, such as siding, floors, and cabinets. Shayna helps monitor, troubleshoot, and optimize the processing of products from the R&D formulation stage all the way through the manufacturing process and quality control.

After graduating from TCNJ in 2018 with a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry, Shayna continued her higher education and received a PhD in Chemical Engineering from Drexel University, Philadelphia, in 2024. Her future plans include continuing a career in the paints and coatings

industry, where she hopes to become a group leader or fellow, working on innovations in coating formulas and technologies.

For Shayna, RVCC was the place where she found herself—personally, academically, and professionally. Because Shayna, like her siblings, had been homeschooled since kindergarten, “being in a classroom with a teacher and other students was foreign to me. I wasn’t sure I would be able to do well in that new environment. I had extreme social anxiety.” Shayna credits her “excellent professors” and classmates with helping her achieve success. She explored various STEM subjects at the

SHAWN RUMRILL

Shawn Rumrill is a senior scientist in Preclinical Biologics Development at Merck. In that role, the Flemington resident helps take molecules, such as antibodies to treat cancer, out of the lab and into the clinic to serve the needs of patients around the world.

After graduating from TCNJ in 2018 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Chemistry, Shawn completed his PhD in Chemistry and Chemical Biology at Rutgers University. At the same time, he participated in internships at Amicus Therapeutics, a rare disease company; Matinas Biopharma, an antifungal company;

Educationally, RVCC offered him the opportunity to explore different subjects before he found his true passion. Recalling that he changed his major three times, Shawn says, “At each point, I found myself gravitating more and more toward life sciences—subjects I never had confidence in during high school. However, I was inspired by incredible professors from anatomy and physiology, to chemistry and biology.” He adds, “RVCC was a place that made me excited for each of my classes every day. Even better, a little friendly sibling competition always kept me motivated to do my best.” Outside of the classroom, Shawn became

“I learned many important types of skills at RVCC, such as teamwork, leadership, and independent research. These are some of the core pieces of my current career.”

Shayna Rumrill

College and developed a strong interest in engineering and chemistry and began to see a possible career path.

At the same time, “I became more confident in myself, which was greatly helped by meeting people like Professors Antonella Pompo and Peter Stupak, who always believed in me. I learned many important types of skills at RVCC, such as teamwork, leadership, and independent research. These are some of the core pieces of my current career.”

Shayna says she enjoyed the smaller classes at RVCC, which enabled her to interact better with her professors, who were “easily approachable and personable.” Both in and out of the classroom, “It felt like there was always someone there to support you, whether that was in relation to classwork or finding your overall path with the career center and advisor staff. It truly felt like a second home to me.” But she still felt challenged academically and well prepared for the future.

Attending both RVCC and TCNJ with Stephany and Shawn was a definite benefit as well for Shayna. “There is something special about always having a friendly face around.”

She continues, “It’s nice to know that from the first day of college, you know someone on the campus, someone that you can talk to about your day. It takes away some of the isolation and awkwardness that you might feel otherwise.”



and Merck, a pharmaceutical company.

Shawn says he would like to continue growing professionally in the pharmaceutical industry, with one day leading teams to address some of the world’s most challenging scientific questions that make profound impacts on healthcare.

Shawn’s RVCC educational experience impacted him in several ways, he says. It was his first time “adulting,” and attending the College with his siblings, and interacting with so many people from different backgrounds and ages, helped him transition into the next stage of life with greater ease. “I am confident that being surrounded by so many unique and amazing students from all different backgrounds and circumstances truly enriched my experience and perspective, setting the stage for my personal and professional growth,” he says.

involved on campus in leadership roles with RVCC’s Student Government Association. Before that experience, he says, “I never thought of myself as a leader. My original intention in going to college was to keep my head down, keep a decent GPA, and graduate with a degree. However, the incredible opportunities for scholarships, student activities, honor societies, etc., were irresistible, and the energy from campus faculty, staff, and students involved was contagious.” Shawn says his RVCC leadership

roles fostered his interest in networking and building relationships that continued into graduate school at Rutgers University, when he headed one of the largest University Graduate Student Governments. It also gave him the confidence to lead conferences, workshops, committees, and other activities that have helped him throughout his professional career.

Shawn also enjoyed going to college with his siblings. “There was always someone nearby to share successes and wins over lunch or on the commute home. At a time of discovering yourself and navigating a new world in college, there is a lot of comfort in knowing your lifelong best friends and family are doing it with you. Most people don’t get to have that experience, and I consider myself incredibly lucky!”

STUDENT EXCELLENCE



“...when I look to the future state of justice and opportunity here in New Jersey, I am confident that Manuela and Aiden will be the future we want to see for our citizenry,”

Dr. Saul Petersen

MANUELA BULGARO: A CIVIC LEADER ON AND OFF CAMPUS

The honors were plenty for Raritan Valley Community College student Manuela Bulgaro during the 2025-2026 academic year, with much to celebrate and acknowledge. Bulgaro, an Honors College student and Social Sciences major who graduated from the College in May, has been recognized by several groups for her outstanding civic leadership efforts.

OUTSTANDING WOMAN

Manuela Bulgaro was honored this past spring by the Somerset County Commission on the Status of Women in its 2026 Outstanding Women of Somerset County Awards program. The annual event, which featured keynote speaker Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman, was held at Roycebrook Country Club in Hillsborough.

Bulgaro, who was nominated by several people at RVCC and in the community for the award, was honored in the Government/Public/Social Service category. She was presented the award by Somerset County Commission on the Status of Women member, Rheanah Johnson.

At RVCC, Bulgaro has integrated academic learning with civic leadership. She has served as President of the Criminal Justice, Student Government Association Senator, Vice President

of Finance and Logistics for the Debate Team, a Phi Theta Kappa scholar, and Student Voter Engagement Ambassador. In these roles, she organized civic education initiatives, voter registration drives, and community-based projects, earning recognition through the President's Volunteer Service Award.

KESSELMAN FELLOW

Bulgaro's yearlong accolades began last summer, when she was named the Engage NJ Kesselman Fellow for the Advancement of Democracy for the 2025-2026 academic year. The position was announced by The Pray Family Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement at RVCC.

In that role, Bulgaro co-developed the project, The Republic We Keep, A Podcast on American Systems, Voices, & Values. The Republic We Keep is a student-led civic podcast created by Bulgaro and Aiden Annis, a Rutgers University sophomore who is majoring in Electrical Engineering and minoring in Political Science. The Fellowship included a \$1,000 honorarium to support the project during the academic year.

“Former Engage NJ board chair and president of Stockton University, Dr. Harvey Kesselman, continues even now in retirement to be an advocate for the advancement of human rights. RVCC's Kesselman Fellows seek to walk a similar path with their project called, The Republic We Keep. And so, when I look to

the future state of justice and opportunity here in New Jersey, I am confident that Manuela and Aiden will be the future we want to see for our citizenry,” said Dr. Saul Petersen, Executive Director, Engage NJ.

In addition to the honorarium, the Fellowship provides professional pathway coaching and the chance to participate in a series of skills development opportunities focusing on such areas as consensus-building, public speaking, and professional communication, designed to meet students' self-identified needs. Bulgaro and Annis also will have the opportunity to work with other student Fellows nationwide.

Through honest and thoughtful conversations, The Republic We Keep podcast created by Bulgaro and Annis focuses on how American systems—such as healthcare, education, justice, and immigration—impact people's lives and explores what it takes to build a more informed and engaged generation of citizens. To learn more about the podcast, visit www.therepublicwekeep.com/.

STEM SUMMER WORKSHOP

Bulgaro also served as Creative Director last summer with the Annis Young Innovators Initiative, Mission: Safe Landing, held at the Hillsborough Municipal Building.

Bulgaro volunteered along with RVCC student Michela Ruffa, who served in the role of Student Nurse & Youth Engagement Support, as

STUDENT EXCELLENCE



well as several students from Rutgers University School of Engineering.

During the peer-to-peer mentorship program, led by the college students, more than 30 sixth graders learned about physics, gravity, and other topics, and helped design a rocket that would keep a raw egg intact when dropped from a certain height.

As the Creative Director for the STEM workshop, Bulgaro first proposed the project to the Hillsborough Recreation Department, secured sponsors, and coordinated key components to bring it to fruition.

“WHY LOCAL ELECTIONS MATTER”

In her role as RVCC Student Voting Engagement Ambassador, Bulgaro also organized a campus event this past fall that offered students the opportunity to hear from elected officials, campus leaders, and civic engagement experts about the importance of registering to vote and participating in the electoral process.

More than 50 students attended the event, “Why Local Elections Matter,” which focused on the significance of student participation in shaping the future of their communities and the nation. The program's highlight was a panel discussion featuring Assemblyman Roy Freiman, Assemblywoman Michelle Drulis, and Committeewoman Samatha Hand.

The event was part of a larger, ongoing effort by the College to promote civic engagement through a collaboration with Student Life, Student Government/RVCC Clubs, and The Pray Family Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement.

Participants included students from several criminal justice classes taught by

Robert Cacciatore, Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice, and members of the RVCC Criminal Justice Student Club.

Throughout the program, students learned how policies set at the local, state, and national levels directly impact issues relevant to them, such as college tuition, housing, and job opportunities. The “Why Local Elections Matter” event included ballot initiatives, a debate on local issues, and the opportunity to meet community leaders.

AFTER RVCC

The future continues to look bright for Bulgaro, who is also the College's nominee for the nationally recognized Newman Civic Fellow. The prestigious honor, established by Campus Compact, is a yearlong program that recognizes students who stand out for their leadership potential and commitment to creating positive change in communities.

Bulgaro's plans also include transferring to a four-year school to study philosophy on a pre-law track, with the goal of attending law school and pursuing a career focused on public service, constitutional law, and strengthening democratic institutions.

STUDENT NAMED SEMIFINALIST FOR COMPETITIVE NATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP

RVCC student Jei Budiharto of Piscataway was named a semifinalist for the highly competitive Cooke Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship, it was announced by the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation.

The RVCC Honors College member joined a group of 485 semifinalists across the country for the scholarship, which supports the nation's top community college students with financial need seeking to complete a bachelor's degree at four-year colleges or universities.

Selected from a pool of more than 1,300 applicants, this year's semifinalists represented 224 community colleges across 37 states. Each was chosen through an evaluation process that assesses academic ability, achievement, perseverance, and leadership.

Budiharto, an Engineering major focusing on Biomedical Engineering, graduated from



Jei Budiharto

RVCC in May. They plan to transfer to a four-year school to pursue a degree in Neuroscience or Biomedical Engineering. Budiharto was active on campus as Vice President of Information and Media for the Student Government Association (SGA), a member of the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, and Internal Coordinator for the Filipino Peace Club. In addition, they worked as a part-time tutor at the College's Tutoring Center.

The Cooke Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship enables recipients to complete their bachelor's degrees debt-free at any accredited four-year college or university in the United States and provides last-dollar funding of up to \$55,000 per year for two to three years. The award is designed to remove financial barriers so that high-achieving community college students can transfer to and thrive at the nation's top institutions.

“Through the Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship, the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation works to ensure that exceptional community college students have the opportunities to reach their full academic potential,” said Executive Director Giuseppe “Seppy” Basili. “This year's semifinalists reflect the remarkable talent and ambition found in community colleges nationwide.”

The Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship provides comprehensive support that extends far beyond financial assistance, recognizing that admission and enrollment are only the beginning. Selected Cooke Transfer Scholars receive personalized educational advising from the Foundation's Deans of Scholar Support,

STUDENT EXCELLENCE



who guide them through the transition to a four-year institution and help prepare them for future careers. Scholars also gain access to transformative opportunities including internships, study abroad experiences, and graduate school funding, as well as inclusion in a thriving community of more than 3,800 fellow Cooke Scholars and Alumni who provide mentorship and networking connections throughout their academic and professional lives.

Budiharto’s leadership skills were on display this past winter, when they collaborated with Middlesex College student Nina Salam-atova on an event that fostered community engagement between the two colleges.

Titled “Interactive Dialogue,” the program at Middlesex College brought together students, faculty, and staff from both colleges to

Budiharto was the event’s co-organizer and co-facilitator and worked directly with Salamatova from Middlesex. The two began brainstorming the event concept at last summer’s Princeton University Transfer Scholars Initiative, a prestigious summer program for community college students that they both attended. He then brought the idea to the Student Life department and the Student Government Association at RVCC.

The cross-campus collaboration, which was hosted by Middlesex College’s Political Science Club, of which Salamatova is the president and founder, featured breakout group discussions focusing on a series of questions. Group members then shared their discussion results with those in attendance, hoping to create a collaboration of ideas and action plans.

STUDENT NAMED TO 2026 ALL IN STUDENT VOTING HONOR ROLL

RVCC student Colin Howell of Readington has been named to the 2026 ALL IN Student Voting Honor Roll, earning national recognition for his leadership in promoting nonpartisan civic engagement. The announcement was made by The Pray Family Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement in partnership with the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge.

The ALL IN Student Voting Honor Roll recognizes outstanding college students nationwide who demonstrate a strong commitment to increasing democratic participation on their campuses.

Howell, a Liberal Arts major who graduated from RVCC in May, is one of just 168 students across the country selected for this honor. He is being recognized for his work

expanding voter registration, education, and turnout during the 2025 New Jersey gubernatorial election. A key component of his efforts includes his involvement in RVCC’s Service Learning Program, where he served as a poll worker with the Hunterdon County Election Board, Senator Andrew Zwicker’s Office, the Hillsborough Democratic Organization, and Mikie Sherrill’s campaign for Governor of New Jersey.

Howell also has contributed to institutional efforts to expand civic engagement on campus. He worked alongside college administrators and community partners on RVCC’s Civic Action Plan, helping align strategic priorities with innovative approaches to voter education. His contributions have supported the development of new programming and enhanced campus-wide engagement initiatives.

RVCC’s commitment to service learning and civic engagement plays a vital role in student development, equipping learners with



Colin Howell

real-world experience that complements classroom instruction. Through hands-on opportunities like community partnerships, public service, and voter engagement initiatives, students build critical thinking, communication, and leadership skills. These experiences not only deepen students’ understanding of course material, but also foster a sense of civic responsibility, empowering them to become informed, active participants in their communities and in the democratic process.

Tamara Jones

brainstorm ideas and collaborate on ways to enhance the community college experience. More than 50 people attended the event, including 25 RVCC students and staff members Tamara Jones, Krisan Hall, Kristin Gatti, and Fran Boshell.

STUDENT EXCELLENCE

HONORS COLLEGE STUDENTS PRESENT CAPSTONE PROJECTS AT SYMPOSIUMS

Students from RVCC’s Honors College were given the opportunity to participate in an independent, Capstone Research Course. The Capstone Research Course—often known as a “research adventure”—is 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 the end of the semester.

Projects featured a diversity of subject matter, including, “Beyond the Constitution: A Comparative Analysis of Democracy in the United States and Brazil”; The Enigmatic Nature of Light: The Debate of the Twenty First Centuries”; “Nova Tarot Deck: From Concept to Reality and Design to Sale”; “Fast Fashion, Marketing, and the Environment: A Comparative Analysis of the 1970s and the 2020s”; “Exploring the Evolution of and Modern-Day Fascination with True Crime”; “Mind Muscle Connection”; “A Microeconomic Overview on Amtrak: What Went Wrong?”; “Comprehensive Analysis of E-Commerce Price Trends Using Python”; “From



Spring Honors Capstone students with Honors College Director, Greg DeSanctis and Professor Frank Forte

East to West: Examining Variations of Mental Illness Through a Biopsychosocial Approach”; “Collateral Consequences: The Effects of Sex-Offender Registries on the Families of People Convicted of Sexual Offenses”; “The Death Penalty in America and its Legal, Ethical, and Social Consequences”; “No, I’m sure he’s the guy!’: The Causes of Cognitive Biases on Wrongful Convictions”; “FORGE: A Self-Study of Discipline, Focus, and Skill Transfer Through MMA Training”; “Hadestown: the Early Years”;

“Current and Emerging Treatments in Cardiac Arrest: A Review of Clinical Outcomes”; and “Impact of Gut-Microbiome on Mental Health.” Congratulations to all of the Capstone presenters: Manuela Bulgaro, Sarah Bragger, Emma Phan, Debra Burnejko, Jasmin Ha, Rooney Rasare, Daniel Heredia, Eleonora “Jei” Budiharto, Hamza Catovic, Nyesha Hodges, Margaret Horch, Theo Johnson, Sharanya Ram, Komal Saleem, Chelsa Salesman, and Mohamed John Wusha-Conteh.



RVCC Honors College students, from left: Daniel Heredia, Debra Burnejko, Emma Phan, Manuela Bulgaro, and Sarah Bragger, gather before they present their Capstone research projects.

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 and please access more of the amazing work of our students on the **RVCC Art Gallery Instagram feed** (@rvcc_art_gallery).

ARTS & DESIGN AT RVCC



ERICA YOO

MAJOR:

**GRAPHIC &
INTERACTIVE DESIGN**

GRADUATING SPRING 2026

"OCD Archives: Hands"

ADOBE ILLUSTRATOR & PHOTOSHOP

CLASS: DIGITAL ARTMAKING

SEMESTER/YEAR: FALL 2024

INSTRUCTOR: DARREN McMANUS



KATHRYN O'HARA

MAJOR:
VISUAL ART
GRADUATING SPRING 2027
“Self Portrait”
OIL ON CANVAS
CLASS: ACRYLIC & OIL PAINTING 1
SEMESTER/YEAR: SPRING 2026
INSTRUCTOR: HEEJUNG KIM

DARIA BILAN

MAJOR:
GRAPHIC &
INTERACTIVE DESIGN
GRADUATING SPRING 2027
“Near to the Wild Heart
Book Jacket”
ADOBE INDESIGN & PHOTOSHOP
W/ TRANSPARENT OVERLAY
CLASS: VISUAL DESIGN 2
SEMESTER/YEAR: SPRING 2026
INSTRUCTOR: DARREN MCMANUS





NICOLAS SARTORI

MAJOR:
VISUAL ART
GRADUATING SPRING 2027
“Portrait Of A Woman”
OIL ON CANVAS
CLASS: ACRYLIC & OIL PAINTING 1
SEMESTER/YEAR: SPRING 2026
INSTRUCTOR: HEEJUNG KIM

GABRIELLA MURPHY

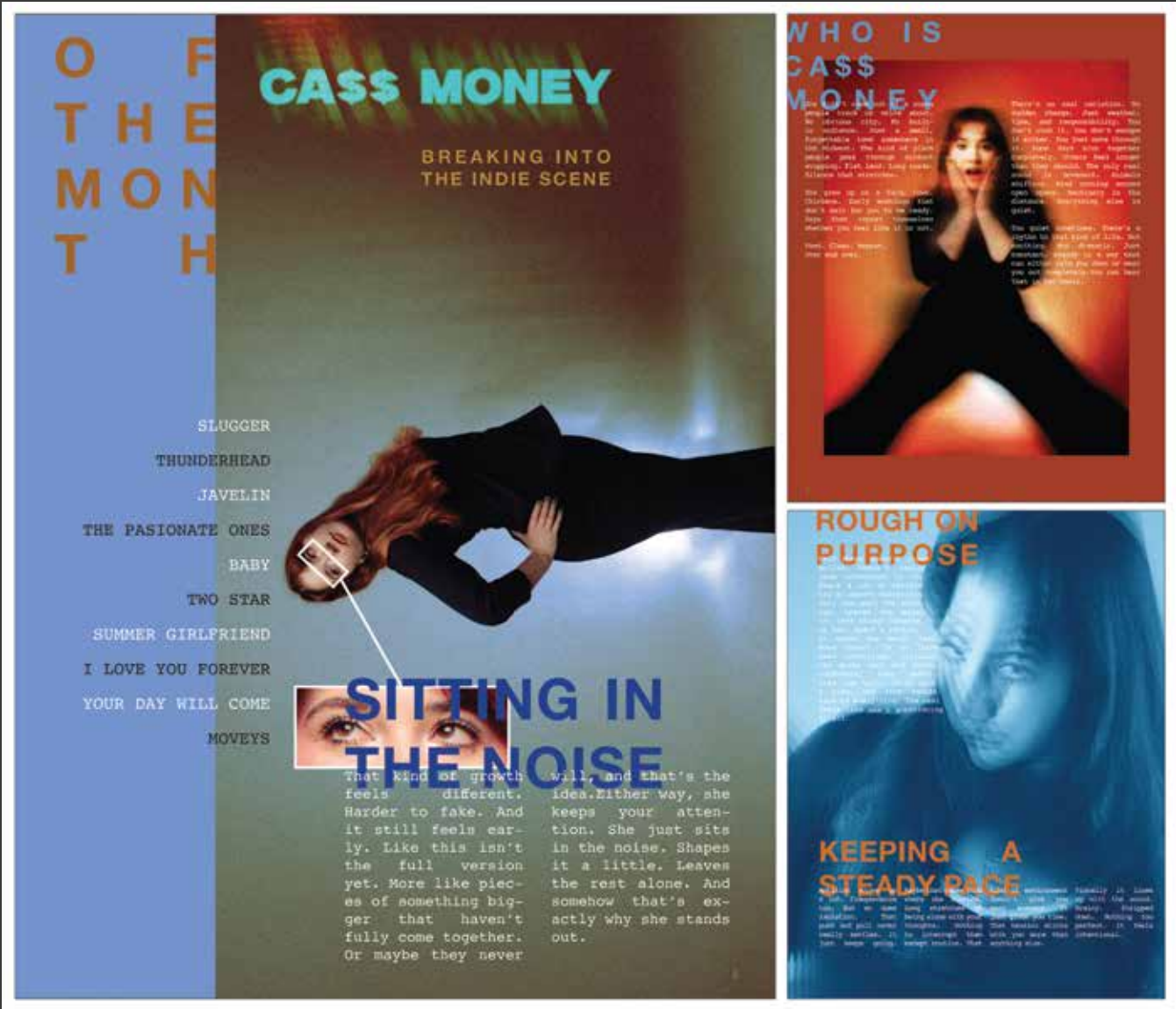
MAJOR:
GRAPHIC &
INTERACTIVE DESIGN
GRADUATING SPRING 2027
“Allura Supplements:
Posters & Product Labels”
ADOBE INDESIGN & PHOTOSHOP
W/ TRANSPARENT OVERLAY
CLASS: Portfolio Development:
Graphic Design
SEMESTER/YEAR: SPRING 2026
INSTRUCTOR: DARREN MCMANUS





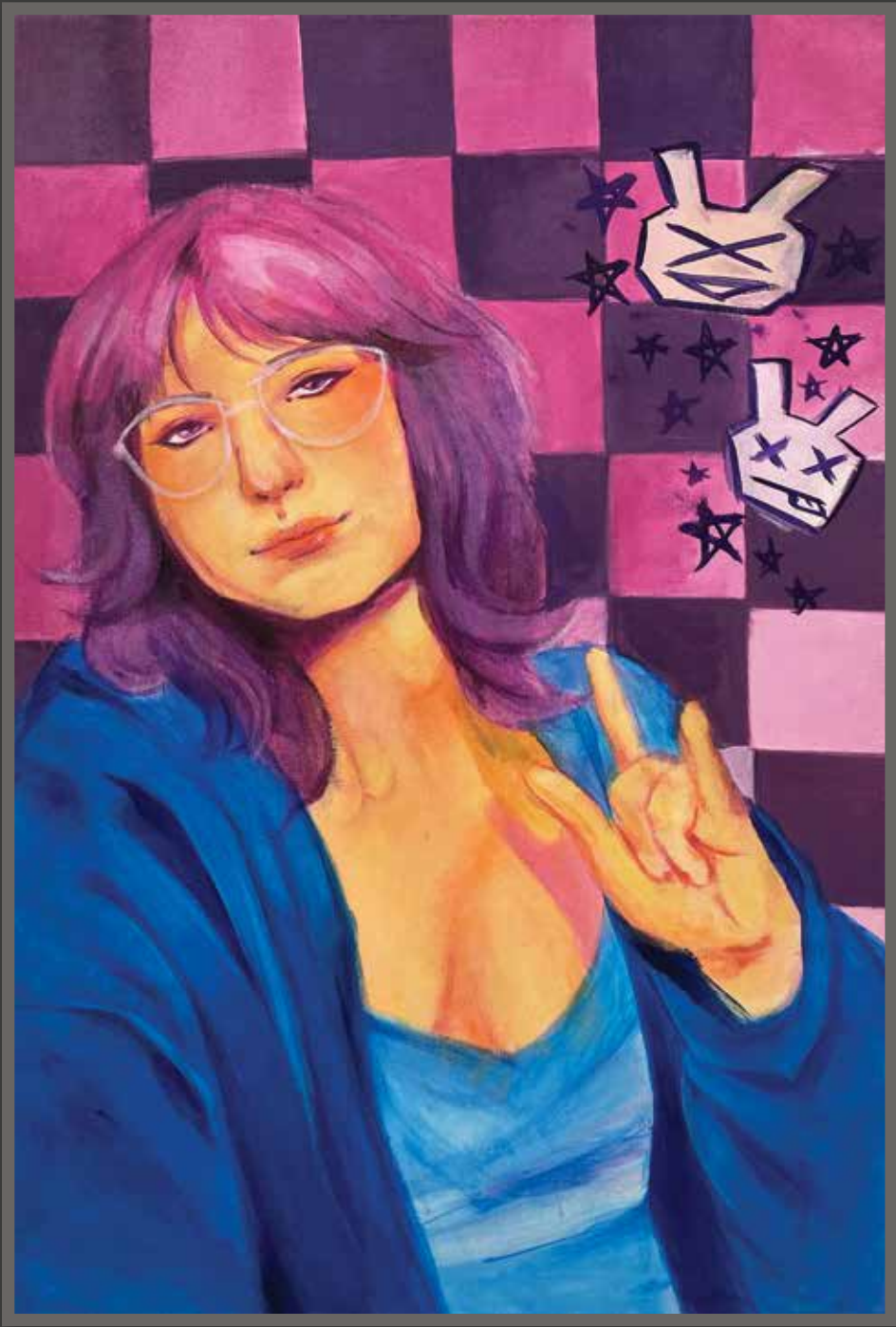
EMMA PHAN

MAJOR: VISUAL ART
GRADUATING SPRING 2026
“Father Winter”
OIL ON CANVAS
CLASS: ACRYLIC & OIL PAINTING 2
SEMESTER/YEAR: SPRING 2026
INSTRUCTOR: JONATHAN RICCI



REESE LEVITT

MAJOR: GRAPHIC & INTERACTIVE DESIGN
GRADUATING SPRING 2026
“CASS \$\$: Magazine Article”
ADOBE INDESIGN & PHOTOSHOP
CLASS: TYPOGRAPHY
SEMESTER/YEAR: SPRING 2026
INSTRUCTOR: DARREN MCMANUS



JULIET FIGORITO

MAJOR:
VISUAL ART

GRADUATING SPRING 2027
“Self Portrait”

OIL ON CANVAS
CLASS: ACRYLIC & OIL PAINTING 1
SEMESTER/YEAR: SPRING 2026
INSTRUCTOR: HEEJUNG KIM

RECORD YEAR
SOARING TO NEW HEIGHTS
IN SUPPORT OF
RARITAN VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE



It was an incredible, record-setting year for the RVCC Foundation, surpassing the \$2 million mark for the first time in the College’s history. The funds raised in 2024-2025—\$2,014,187—is \$971,431 higher than the previous year’s total.

Among the highlights of the year was a record-setting “Giving Day 2025,” during which \$203,655 was raised over 24-hours for scholarships, student clubs, athletic teams, and a range of centers, institutes, and critical programs at RVCC. Results were largely energized by the return of a \$50,000 “match challenge”—generously provided by Jim and Jill Gibson of Basking Ridge and The Caruso Family Foundation—which also inspired the largest single Giving Day gift ever: a \$50,000 contribution from Lori Grossi of Clinton.

The year’s fundraising tally also was aided by the incredible generosity of Frank and Pat Russo, whose longstanding scholarship at RVCC is among the among the most generous. The Russos’ \$375,000 gift—the largest

scholarship commitment in the College’s history—provides five full scholarships for RVCC students in each of the next 10 years.

Also adding large, six-figure gifts were Johnson & Johnson in support of the nascent NJBioFutures, and J.S. Henderson Foundation, whose board chose the RVCC Foundation to assume full management and stewardship of the J.S. Henderson Memorial Adult Scholarship—to be exclusively available to students at Raritan Valley Community College in perpetuity. Also notable in the year’s fundraising success:



\$153,000 in proceeds from the 21st Annual RVCC Foundation Golf Classic, which was held at Neshanic Valley Golf Club.

“Our record fundraising success this year is a direct testament to the generosity of our expanding donor community, and their willingness to step up,” said Mike Marion, Executive Director, RVCC Foundation and RVCC Alumni Association. “We had 306 new donors add to the exceptional support of our longstanding benefactors. It is

so encouraging that more and more people are recognizing the value and impact of RVCC, and are choosing to be part of it.”

The RVCC Foundation’s fundraising results were showcased by President Michael J. McDonough during his remarks at RVCC’s “All College Day” event, which each fall welcomes faculty and staff back for the new academic year. “This is an exceptional achievement,” he noted, “and couldn’t be more critical given all of the challenges facing higher education today.”

EXCELLENCE RECOGNIZED

in Faculty, Staff, and Administrators

FACULTY, STAFF MEMBER, ADMINISTRATOR HONORED FOR EXCELLENCE.

Martha Salas, Dr. Rikita Singh, and Professor Derek Weber are being honored by Raritan Valley Community College for excellence in their professional roles at the College and service to the campus community for the 2025-2026 academic year.

MARTHA SALAS, a Molecular Biology Lab Assistant III in the Science & Engineering department, is the winner of RVCC’s inaugural **Fulltime Support Staff Presidential Award**. The award acknowledges and recognizes the outstanding performance of a full-time Support Staff member who demonstrates excellence in mastery of the position, commitment to growth, collaboration, and campus engagement.

Recommending her for the honor, a nominator praised Martha Salas’ efforts to prepare the laboratories for classes, stating, “Martha goes beyond preparation—she proactively troubleshoots lab activities in advance, anticipating potential challenges and ensuring student success. Her attention to detail and deep technical knowledge make her an invaluable asset to the department.”

The nominator continued: “Martha’s impact extends far beyond the laboratory. She has a proven history of working effectively with colleagues across departments and plays an active role in supporting institutional initiatives. She has served on numerous search committees for both faculty and staff positions, contributing thoughtful insight and professionalism. She has also supported Workforce Development efforts by assisting with the use of Science Department equipment, coordinating with vendors, and managing materials—including storing perishable items to ensure program continuity.”

Another nominator wrote: “Martha’s scholarly achievements are both impactful and far-reaching. Her knowledge in microbiology and molecular science has significantly supported faculty and advanced RVCC students’



understanding in these areas, as evidenced by a strong record of student success. Faculty consistently praise her content knowledge and strong work ethic. Martha is reliable, responsible, and dependable.”

Martha Salas has worked at RVCC for close to 23 years, becoming an experienced laboratory specialist in molecular biology, biotechnology, and microbiology in higher education. She holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in Biology with a focus in Genetics from Universidad del Valle in Cali, Colombia, and a Master’s Degree in Biotechnology from

Kean University. Throughout her career, Ms. Salas has been dedicated to maintaining high-standard laboratory environments. Her work focuses on supporting microbiology, genetics, and cell molecular labs. She is passionate about science and creating inclusive lab environments that foster curiosity, innovation, and equity in STEM. From overseeing reagents and equipment to supporting faculty, Ms. Salas strives to foster and support a STEM environment where all students can succeed. She always has been interested in connecting with educators and biotechnology professionals dedicated to hands-on research experience that can strengthen students’ competitiveness for both the workforce and at four-year institutions.

FULLTIME FACULTY EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING AWARD

Professor Derek Weber, Professor of Microbiology, has been awarded the Fulltime Faculty Excellence in Teaching Award for 2025–2026, recognizing his exceptional commitment to student learning, instructional innovation, and academic excellence.

Dr. Weber received 13 separate nominations for the award. Students describe the faculty member and his classes as engaging, enthusiastic, passionate, accessible, extremely interesting, and fun. While his expectations in

EXCELLENCE RECOGNIZED

in Faculty, Staff, and Administrators

class are high, Dr. Weber remains approachable and inviting, according to his students. One person said they grew from a shy student to an avid participant because the student wanted to keep up with Dr. Weber’s energy.

One nominator wrote: “Energy comes from the genuine enthusiasm this faculty member brings to biology. Support is consistent and proactive. . . . His calm and confident presence contributes to a classroom culture grounded in respect and intellectual engagement. . . . What changed most was my approach to learning science after studying with this faculty member. Previously, memorization shaped much of my preparation. His teaching redirected attention toward understanding processes and conceptual relationships. Recognizing connections among ideas became more



important than recalling isolated facts.”

Dr. Weber’s colleagues praise him for his commitment to staying ahead of the curve, including integrating AI into assessments and activities. He is also a faculty champion for digital accessibility.

Dr. Weber joined Raritan Valley Community College in 2008, following three years as an Assistant Professor at Broward College. He earned a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry from Moravian University and completed his PhD in Biomolecular Chemistry at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

Widely respected for his dynamic, student-centered approach to teaching biology, Dr. Weber designs courses that emphasize active learning, scientific literacy, and realworld application. His teaching approach enables students to master complex scientific concepts while developing confidence, curiosity, and strong critical-thinking skills. Through innovative pedagogy, intentional use of instructional technology, and inclusive classroom practices, he fosters learning environments in which students feel both challenged and supported.

In addition to his teaching excellence, Dr. Weber is an active scholar and contributor to the broader academic community. He has served as an invited presenter at professional and academic conferences on topics such as microbiology education, career readi-

ness, student engagement, and emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence. His scholarly work also includes authorship on three academic publications, most notably as a coauthor of *Microbiology: An Introduction* (Pearson Education, 14th edition), an internationally adopted textbook used by colleges and universities throughout North America and multiple regions worldwide. In 2022, his creation of an engaging, interactive digital laboratory manual for allied health

microbiology students was recognized with the Top Hat Top Author Award.

Dr. Weber is deeply committed to mentorship and service, and works closely with students pursuing careers in healthcare, research, and other science-based professions. He is dedicated to accessibility, continuous improvement, and student success.

FULLTIME ADMINISTRATOR PRESIDENTIAL AWARD

Dr. Rikita Singh, Executive Director of the Office of Student Support, is the recipient

of RVCC’s inaugural Fulltime Administrator Presidential Award. The award acknowledges and recognizes the outstanding performance of a full-time Administrator who demonstrates excellence in mastery of the position, innovation, collaboration, and campus engagement.

In recommending her for the honor, a nominator wrote: “Rikita has built a strong reputation for working collaboratively with colleagues, departments, and partners across the College. Her approach brings people together to ensure students receive coordinated and compassionate support. Colleagues across campus value Rikita not only for her expertise, but also for her openness, willingness to listen, and ability to bring thoughtful solutions to complex challenges.” In addition, Rikita “goes out of her way to advocate for and protect her team, fostering an environment where staff feel supported and valued.”

The nominator added: “Rikita maintains a visible and positive presence within the College community and continually works to make campus life safer, more inclusive, and more supportive for all. At a time when many students are navigating complex challenges in the broader world, her leadership helps create a stronger sense of care, belonging, and stability across campus.”

The praise continued: “Beyond managing several critical areas that support student success, Rikita continues to lead the campus-wide initiative to advance digital accessibility. This work reflects both forward-thinking leadership and a genuine commitment to improving systems and processes so that information and services are accessible to everyone in our community.”

Dr. Singh has spent more than a decade advancing inclusive and accessible educational experiences for students with disabilities. With a professional background in counseling, she began her career in the mental health field, supporting individuals with serious mental health conditions as they worked to reintegrate into their communities, secure employment, and access educational opportunities.

EXCELLENCE RECOGNIZED
in Faculty, Staff, and Administrators

Since joining Raritan Valley Community College in 2017, Dr. Singh has worked closely with a growing number of students seeking support through the Center for Accessibility and Inclusive Education (CAIE). Her work has included developing and securing grant funding to launch a new program serving students with intellectual and developmental disabilities, as well as presenting on a range of topics aimed at fostering a more inclusive, equitable campus community.

Dr. Singh received a Bachelor's Degree in Exercise Science from Rutgers University and a Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (now part of Rutgers University). She earned a Doctorate in Educational Leadership from Capella University in 2020, further strengthening her commitment to student support, inclusive practices, and institutional change. Her approach is grounded in collaboration, advocacy, and a deep belief in the transformative power of education.



ADJUNCT EXCELLENCE IN
TEACHING AWARD

Three Worthy Honorees and the Words of
their Nominators

With special thanks to **Dr. Susan Primmer** and **Dr. Robert Harris**, our generous benefactors behind this unique award—we appreciate your six years of support of our adjuncts and your longstanding commitment to Raritan Valley Community College.

HONOREE: ROGER SHUTACK

Department: Social Sciences

Roger Shutack is one in a million! He is retiring this May after 60 years of teaching at the high school level and the college level. His time at RVCC has been marked with the Music in History series to engage audiences of all ages into the power that music has in shaping our cultural experiences. Further, as a consistent instructor in the Returning & Incarcerated Student Education (RISE) program, Roger was invited as a commencement speaker for the incarcerated program. He gives this cohort of students hope and empowers them to reach higher than they ever could have imagined. His time in the classroom may be coming to an end, but Roger will continue teaching, leading, and inspiring wherever he may go for as long as he may traverse our great land! He is a gem, and deserves this recognition and more!

HONOREE: JAMIE PARMESE

Department: English

She brings energy, kindness, and curiosity into the classroom in a way that inspires her students to also seek opportunities through the material that she teaches. She encourages meaningful academic exploration by offering extra credit opportunities that motivate students to deepen their understanding beyond the

classroom. Most importantly, Jamie's students adore her. As an adjunct, Jamie doesn't have to spend extra time with her students, but she does. In fact, she attended last year's RVCC graduation ceremony just to support her past students who were graduating, meeting them all there with small gifts of congratulations. If I have a student who has come out of English I having taken Jamie's course, that student will likely tell me, "oh, I had Professor Parmese - she's the best!" And often that student is more than prepared and motivated to continue on in English II. Jamie has spent endless hours attending CTLS events and workshops, so that she can continue growing as a teacher, learning new pedagogical approaches that she then takes back to her classroom.

HONOREE: NINA PRESUTO

Department: English
Student

I personally experienced how committed she is to helping students grow and succeed. At the beginning of the semester, I struggled with essay writing because it had been years since I last wrote one, and I no longer remembered how to properly structure an essay. Instead of letting me fall behind, she took the time to guide me step by step. She re-explained the structure of an essay in a clear and simple way, breaking it down so that it was easy to understand. Her patience and willingness to help made a huge difference in my confidence and ability to complete assignments successfully. What truly sets her apart is her genuine care for her students. She consistently made herself available for extra help and provided constructive feedback that helped me improve over time. Because of her encouragement and guidance, I not only improved my writing skills but also regained confidence in my academic abilities. She goes above and beyond what is expected of a professor. Her dedication, patience, and ability to support students at different levels make her truly deserving of this recognition.

RVCC FOUNDATION
Topline Summary of Giving

FISCAL YEAR 2025 (July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025)



TOTAL FUNDS RAISED: \$2,014,186

TOTAL GIFTS: 1,799

TOTAL DONORS: 758

TOP 10 MOST GENEROUS SUPPORTERS
FOR FISCAL YEAR 2025

(INSTITUTIONS AND INDIVIDUALS)

Johnson & Johnson: \$500,000

The Frank S. and Patricia F. Russo Family Fund
(via Ayco Charitable Foundation): \$375,000

Jessamine S. Henderson Memorial
Adult Education: \$129,114

Sanofi US Services Inc.: \$125,400

Somerset Hills Community Health Foundation
(via Community Foundation of New Jersey): \$75,000

Cathy Gardner: \$50,974

Lori Rayner-Grossi: \$50,600

Caruso Family Foundation Inc.: \$45,000

Frederick & Bernadette Vath: \$44,500

James & Jill Gibson: \$37,500



Source of Gifts by Segment

THE BIG PARADE

Raritan Valley Community College and the Somerset Patriots teamed up for a special night at TD Bank Ballpark



The July evening was more than a big parade—it was another “center stage” moment to showcase an exceptional college. It was a celebration of partners and relationships, family and friends, RVCC faculty, staff, students, and alumni. And thanks to this special pairing of RVCC and the Somerset Patriots, it also was an opportunity for the general public—some 3,431 patrons in all—to get to know a little bit more about the programs and impact of the best community in New Jersey.

While Mother Nature provided a hot, muggy night for baseball—and for the faithful who weathered a two-hour rain delay,

there was also a rainbow. Thanks to those who purchased the special RVCC ticket, their collective generosity gave rise to a new scholarship at RVCC. The pre-game festivities featured The Big Parade, a ceremonial first pitch by a Region XIX RVCC Coach of the Year, Kevin Ryan, a dance performance and a National Anthem, both showcasing RVCC students and alumni.

Huge thanks to the on-field pre-game cast members: Deirdre Blaus, Kathleen Roberts, Christina Reilly, of RWJ University Hospital – Somerset; Bill Haas, Elise Wagner, Ryan Livingston, and Alissa Farrier of Labcorp; Lindsay Bevan and Polly Owens of

Insmed Incorporated; and Andrew Manno of J.S. Henderson Foundation; as well as these stellar on-field RVCC ambassadors: Dan Van Tran, Allan Boomer, Gary Woodring, Justin Britten, James Von Schilling, Arianna McLean, Cedric Thomas, RVCC “announcer” John Trojan, and RVCC President Mike McDonough.

And if you missed last summer’s The Big Parade, mark your calendar for JULY 7, when the RVCC and the Patriots team up to once again celebrate Raritan Valley Community College.

*This summer’s theme: **THE BIG 250!***





JOIN US FOR A SPECIAL CELEBRATION OF RARITAN VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

TUESDAY, JULY 7TH, 2026

GATES OPEN: 5:30

THE BIG 250 PRESENTATION: 5:45

GAME: 6:35

SOMERSET PATRIOTS (NYY) VS.
READING FIGHTIN' PHILS (PHI)



GET YOUR SPECIAL
RVCC TICKET AND SEE
THE BIG 250 PRESENTATION

THEN HEAD TO
TD BANK BALLPARK
BRIDGEWATER, NJ
ON JULY 7, 2026!!

WWW.RARITANVAL.EDU/PATRIOTS





NO ORDINARY HERRO

After an extensive national search, it was the in-house talent that emerged on top. Huge congrats to Coach Phil Herro, the new Director of Athletics at Raritan Valley Community College.

For 10 years, Phil has served as the RVCC's Head Women's Volleyball and Head Women's Basketball Coach, and has earned five "Coach of the Year" honors.

"Phil is more than a coach—he actually teaches on the court, and it's impressive," says Kevin Ryan, RVCC Men's Basketball Head Coach—who has also earned multiple "Coach of the Year" honors.

Phil's leadership will be critical in his new role, as RVCC Athletics continues to ascend.

But he's more than ready for the challenge. Throughout his time at Raritan Valley Community College, Phil has consistently championed the success of student athletes. His players love him, as do coaching colleagues and donors alike. Clearly, Phil is no ordinary Herro.



THE YEAR AND THE TEAMS.

"Seven teams. 94 athletes. Nearly \$75,000 in scholarship support. One Community. The Raritan Valley Athletics program continues to shine brightly on our campus and beyond. Our student athletes are leading the way by meeting rigorous academic standards and demonstrating their commitment to excellence on the court, in the field, around the diamond, and down the fairway. The 2025-2026 academic year was a strong one for Athletics at RVCC. Men's Soccer led the way with a 13-4-3 overall record and capturing a second straight Region XIX Championship and making it to Nationals! Three players were recognized with All-Region honors. Men's Basketball and Women's Volleyball posted strong seasons, each reaching the regional championship game. And our Baseball team rebounded nicely this year, finishing with a winning record during the regular season. All of our coaches and assistants have done a commendable job supporting our athletes this year and instilling in them the values of hard work and excellence. RVCC Athletics is a vital component of our vibrant community, and I look forward to what the future brings."

-Phil Herro, Director of Athletics, Raritan Valley Community College



Athletics



RVCC ATHLETICS: HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 2025-26 SEASONS

MEN'S SOCCER

- 13-4-3 Overall record
- Won second straight Region XIX Championship (third in the past four seasons), beating Ocean County 5-3
- Captured the East A District Championship (went into Nationals with a 13-2-3 record)
- Three Post-season award honorees: Angel Rodriguez (1st Team All-Region), Brody Belmonte (2nd Team All-Region), and Carlos Marquina (3rd Team All-Region)

WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL

- 13-16 Overall record
- Lost in the Region XIX Championship game, (9th straight appearance)
- Two Post-season award honorees: Emma Kovacs (2nd Team All-Region), Nyah Hermann (3rd Team All-Region)

MEN'S BASKETBALL

- 19-11 Overall record
- Lost in the Region XIX Championship game to Mercer County College
- Two Post-season award honorees: Isaac Gonzalez (1st Team All-Region), Jordan Summers (2nd Team All-Region)

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

- 12-17 Overall record
- Biggest win of the season was in November against #17 Palm Beach State
- The Lions also welcomed to the RVCC Gym the #1 overall—and reigning NJCAA Division II National Champion—Johnson County Community College from Overland Park, Kansas
- One Post-season award honoree: Maria Eguizabal Ruales (2nd Team All-Region)

SOFTBALL

- 1-23 Overall record

BASEBALL

- 18-18 Overall record
- Earned the #4 seed in the Region XIX playoffs

GOLF

- Matt Roman (2nd Team All Garden State Athletic Conference)



Athletics



THE MOST IMPORTANT Capital

Mentees and mentors at Insmmed Closing Ceremony



IT'S PEOPLE POWER THAT DRIVES MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS AT RVCC. Invaluable Partners Provide Generous and Insightful Support.

What began with Sanofi some nine years ago, has blossomed into three unique mentorship programs—offered during the 2025-26 year by three distinct companies Sanofi, Insmmed, and J&J—that represent the very best of corporate social responsibility and engagement with RVCC students. And while there are many exceptional things about Raritan Valley Community College, few rival the powerful impact created by matching student and professional, mentee and mentor, college and corporation, all rowing together on a shared mission of enriching the journeys of RVCC students.

Over the last nine years, 136 students have participated in mentorship programming at the College. And since there's a mentor for every

mentee, that's 272 relationships—and all of the inherent collaboration and guidance that implies.

"The Corporate Mentor Program at RVCC has been truly transformational for our students, creating meaningful access to corporate professionals, career opportunities, and networks that many would not otherwise have exposure to," said Alicia Hermo-Weaver, visionary behind the mentorship programs in her capacity as Manager of the Office of Career Success & Experiential Learning at RVCC. "Its lasting impact lies in advancing career equity and creating life-changing connections that empower students to succeed both personally and professionally."

Credit the leadership of Sanofi for placing a

mentorship bet at RVCC back in 2017. This fall, the Sanofi Corporate Mentorship program at the College will enter its 10th year. That's not only a significant milestone, it also represents a major investment of both scholarship support (which all mentees receive)—and more importantly, human capital.

"Having participated in the Sanofi Mentor Program at RVCC over the past three years, I can say without hesitation that this partnership is truly special," said Stefan Roehr, CEO, Gold Bond Co (a unit of Sanofi). "Watching students grow from eager learners into confident, career-ready professionals has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my career. Year after year, this program reinforces why industry-academic collaboration matters—not

THE MOST IMPORTANT Capital



Above: Sanofi mentors and mentees at Closing Ceremony;
Bottom: Mentors, mentees at Johnson & Johnson Closing Ceremony

just for the students we mentor, but for us as leaders too. It's a privilege to give back to the community while helping shape the next generation of talent and leaders."

Said Daphne Kunukcu (RVCC Class of 2026) of her Insmmed mentorship experience: "I'm so grateful to have been part of this program. The guidance and connections I gained truly made an impact, and I appreciate everything Alicia (Hermo-Weaver) and our Insmmed mentors have done to support us."

The culminating event each year for RVCC's mentorship programs is the 'closing ceremony'—at which, mentors and mentees share what they learned and how much each has benefited from their unique, year-long relationship. Sanofi held its ceremony on the RVCC campus, while Insmmed and J&J hosted at their respective locations. And no surprise, all appreciated the shared benefits to mentor and mentee alike.

"Partnering on the J&J Pilot Mentor Program with Raritan Valley Community College was a truly rewarding experience," said Diana Rosado, Technology LDP Analyst, Technology Services at Johnson & Johnson. "We're deeply grateful to the RVCC Career Success team for

their dedication and leadership and continually impressed by the enthusiasm and talent of the mentees. The experience was equally inspiring for our J&J mentors, and we look forward to continuing this meaningful partnership."

Among the unique characteristics of community colleges is the constant need for financial capital to effectively sustain operations and grow the institution's impact. For students, the financial support of a scholarship can be a lifeline to help address the economic challenges associated with attending college. But as RVCC's mentorship programs reveal, it's the human capital that is the difference maker.

"The Sanofi mentorship program helped me strategize how to work on my presentation skills during our meetings," said Ingrid Medina

(RVCC Class of 2021). "We prepped for informational interviews by role-playing with our mentors, which helped me practice answering interview questions. The job shadow day was also an important opportunity where we got to apply all the skills we learned and network with departments of our interest."

Said Xiomara Castro Ramirez (Class of 2026): "One of the most impactful parts of this program was the opportunity to visit Sanofi and connect with professionals. It made me realize that one day, we will step into those same spaces. And when we do, we have a responsibility to remember those who guided us and to become that same support system for others."

"I also want to recognize all of the mentors involved," added Xiomara. "As an immigrant student, there are moments of uncertainty, moments where you ask yourself, 'What should I do?' or 'Who do I follow?' Even when our families are accomplished in our home countries, navigating a new system can feel very scary. This program gave us something incredibly valuable: guidance we didn't always have access to, and the clarity to move forward with confidence."

This model of leadership, generosity, and intention owes a debt of gratitude to Sanofi and its team of talented mentors, and to Sharon Katz and Diana Blankman Roberts, for launching mentorship at RVCC so many years ago.

"The RVCC / Sanofi Mentorship program is one of the most meaningful programs that we



get to be a part of. That's due to the time and energy of the RVCC team, the Sanofi mentors who donate their time throughout the entire academic year, and to the amazing students who step up to be part of this program," said Diana Blankman Roberts, Head, Corporate Social Responsibility, Sanofi US.

Human capital indeed.

CELEBRATING Academic Excellence In RVCC Students



Congratulations to 45 Outstanding Students Honored with Academic Awards for the 2025-26 Academic Year:

- Matthew Witham:** Computer and Data Science, AS
Nicole Brunskill: Computer Networking & Cybersecurity, AAS
Maria Langman: Information Systems & Technology, AAS
Nicholas Hendrik Tadena: Mathematics, AS
Giacomo Lo Grasso: Automotive Technology, AAS
Justin Lotenberg: Automotive Technology, Certificate
Jasmin Ha: Biological Sciences, AS
Daniel Kuffo: Chemistry, AS
Sarah Bragger: Engineering, AS
Isabella Scricco: Environmental Science, AS
Trinity Medina: Environmental Studies, AA
Joseph Spagnolo: General Science/Pre-Health Professional, AS
Edward Cunningham: Mechanical Engineering Technology, AS
Jenner Dzeuba: Pre-Medicine and Pre-Pharmacy, AS
Benjamin Vasquez: Game Art, AS
Daniel Corritore: Game Development, AAS
Erica Yoo: Graphic Design, AFA
Miguel Martinez Serrato: Interface Design & Web Development, AS
Daniel Santos: Music, AFA
Gretchen Albrecht: Theatre Arts, AA
Emma Phan: Visual Arts, AFA
Michelle Romero-Hernandez: Education: P-12, AA
Chelsa Salesman: Human Services/Pre-Social Work, AS

- Quentin Economy:** Liberal Arts, AA
Jennifer Guevara-Duarte: Social Sciences, AA
Jimena Rodriguez: Communication Studies, AS
Joseph Mosca: Digital Media/Film Studies, AS
Emily Lagos: English as a Second Language – Program Completion
Silvia Sira: English as a Second Language – Certificate of Completion
Laurellen Cosico: Accounting, AAS
Angus Morgan: Commercial Energy Management Technology, AAS
Vincent Todd: Criminal Justice, AS
Maxwell Fox: Environmental Control Technology, AAS
Ella Fenimore: General Business, AAS
Debra Burnejko: General Business, AS
Jennifer Wenger: Paralegal Studies – Certificate
Gene Segeda: Exercise Science, AS
Aedan Byrne: Exercise Science - Option in Sports Management, AS
Rachael Fiorini: Health Science, AS
Shruti Patel: Medical Assistant, Certificate
Melissa Rusnak: Nursing (PN/AD), AAS
Brian Chau: Nursing/RN, AAS
Morgan Davis: Occupational Therapy Assistant, AAS
Qiao Jing Zhuo: Ophthalmic Science, AAS
Alexis Abbott: English, AA

ECONOMIC IMPACT



NEW STUDY DEMONSTRATES RVCC’S ROI FOR STUDENTS AND TAXPAYERS

RVCC and its students added \$410 million in income to Somerset and Hunterdon counties’ economies in FY 23-24 and supported 4,204 regional jobs, according to a new economic impact study announced this spring by the College.

The study was commissioned by RVCC as part of a larger statewide study conducted through Lightcast by the New Jersey Council of County Colleges. “The Economic Value of Raritan Valley Community” quantifies the value RVCC brings to the community by promoting economic development, enhancing students’ careers, and improving the quality of life for residents in Somerset and Hunterdon counties.

“The economic impact study confirms what we already knew about Raritan Valley Community College: An investment in RVCC benefits all stakeholders—students, taxpayers, local businesses, and society as a whole,” said RVCC President Michael J. McDonough.

“From preparing students to enter the regional workforce as highly educated, well-skilled employees, to supporting local business by increasing consumer spending, to improving students’ lives by helping to raise their lifetime earnings, to assisting society overall by generating a variety of savings through students’ improved lifestyles, RVCC truly enriches the quality of life for everyone in Somerset and Hunterdon County,” McDonough said.

Data and assumptions used in “The Economic Value of Raritan Valley Community” study are based on several sources, including the FY 2023-24 academic and financial reports from RVCC, industry and employment data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and U.S. Census Bureau, outputs of Lightcast’s Multi-Regional Social Accounting Matrix model, and a variety

of studies and surveys relating education to social behavior. The study applies a conservative methodology and follows standard practice using only the most recognized indicators of economic impact and investment effectiveness.

RVCC’s economic study was part of the larger, statewide NJCCC study, “The Economic Value of New Jersey’s Community Colleges,” which underscored the value of New Jersey’s community colleges to society. The state’s 18 community colleges add \$12.8 billion to New Jersey’s economy, which is approximately 1.6% of the total gross state product. This number reflects an increase in economic activity that supports 135,492 jobs, which is one out of every 46 positions in the state’s employment market.

In addition, for every dollar invested in a New Jersey community college, taxpayers gain \$8 in added revenue from students’ increased lifetime earnings and increased business output, raising economic prosperity in the state. Finally, graduates of a New Jersey community college gain \$4.30 in higher lifetime earnings for every \$1 they invest in their higher education. This equals an average annual return of 14.9%.

KEY FINDINGS

- In FY 2023-24, RVCC and its students added \$410 million in income to Somerset and Hunterdon County economies, supporting 4,204 regional jobs—or 1 out of every 88 jobs in the two counties.
- The net impact of the College’s operations spending added \$44.2 million in income to the regional economy in FY 2023-2024.
- Taxpayers provided RVCC \$35.6 million in funding in FY 2023-2024. In return, they benefited from students’ higher

lifetime earnings and increased business output and purchases of goods and services, amounting to \$93 million.

- For every dollar of public money invested in educating RVCC students, taxpayers will receive \$3.20 in return over the course of the students’ working lives. This represents an annual rate of return of 8.8%, which compares positively to other long-term investments in the public sector.
- The net impact of RVCC alumni currently employed in the regional workforce amounted to \$360.8 million in added income in FY 2023-24, which is equivalent to supporting 3,361 jobs.

BENEFITS TO STUDENTS

- The average student’s income increased by \$3.90 for every \$1 they invested in their education.
- Students enjoy a 14.9% average annual rate of return on their RVCC educational investment.
- The average student who receives an associate degree from RVCC will see an increase in earnings of \$11,400 each year, compared to someone with only a high school diploma or equivalent working in New Jersey.
- As RVCC students are educated, they are statistically more likely to develop healthier lifestyles that lead to reduced government-support services. This leads to \$20.7 million in savings to state and local taxpayers.

To access The Economic Value of New Jersey’s Community Colleges digitally, visit: www.njcommunitycolleges.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/Economic-Impact-Study-Main-Report.pdf

APPLAUDING Service



THE PRAY FAMILY CENTER FOR SERVICE LEARNING AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT is proud to recognize outstanding students who have demonstrated exceptional commitment to service learning through academic engagement and meaningful community partnerships. These awards celebrate the integration of classroom knowledge with real-world impact. We commend all award recipients and nominators for their dedication to service learning and their positive impact on the community. Their work exemplifies the mission and values of the Pray Family Center.

ADMINISTRATIVE MEDICAL ASSISTANT PRINCIPLES

Fall 2025

Student: **Melanie Edelson**
Community Partner: *Dove Hospice*
Nominated by: *Janette Rodriguez, Assistant Professor of Health Science and Medical Assistant Program Coordinator*

EDUCATION FIELD EXPERIENCE

FALL 2025

Student: **Olivia Aliseo**
Community Partner: *Alexander Batcho Intermediate School*

SPRING 2026

Student: **Kaylah Kritzar**
Community Partner: *Spruce Run Elementary*
Nominated by: *Dr. Kathryn Suk, Professor of Education*

FOUNDATIONS OF EDUCATION

FALL 2025

Student: **Isabella Schuster**
Community Partner: *Good Shepherd Christian Day Care*

SPRING 2026

Student: **Logan Rodriguez**
Community Partner: *Raritan Valley Community College Children's Campus*
Nominated by: *Kimberly Maitland, Associate Professor of Education*

GENERAL BIOLOGY I AND II HONORS

SPRING 2026

From Source to Sample: Investigating Raritan River Water Quality
Students: **Adrian Cardenas, Gianmarco Perez-Gomez**
Community Partner: *Published on QUBES on Platform for Teaching Data Interpretation*
Nominated by: *Dr. Melanie Lenahan, Professor of Biology*

INTRODUCTION TO OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

SPRING 2026

Student: **Peter Dornbierer**
Community Partner: *Rock Steady Boxing*
Student: **Sophia Rodas Cordon**
Community Partner: *Franklin Township Parks and Recreation*
Nominated by: *Dr. Beau Younker, Assistant Professor and Occupational Therapy Assistant Coordinator*

TRENDS IN NURSING

SPRING 2026

DAYTIME CLASSES:
Stay Strong, Stay Steady: Fall Prevention for Seniors
Students: **Sarah Sciarretta, Katherine Yarnell, Silvia Chinchilla, Eric Chamberlain**
Community Partner: *Somerset County Senior Wellness Center at Montgomery*

APPLAUDING Service



THE HOPE GUIDE

Students: **Jessica Deo, Ayanna Parson, Anna Wallendal, Nadia Ruiz**
Community Partner: *Evolve Pink*

EVENING CLASS:

Healthy Hygiene Education for Children
Students: **Shaelyn Stanek, Rotem Glazer, Alyssa Rosa, and Kadeejah Bowdre**
Community Partner: *Martin Luther King Youth Center*
Nominated by: *Dr. Mary Balut, Professor of Nursing; Sarah Cuss, Assistant Professor of Nursing*

VOLUNTEER INCOME TAX ASSISTANCE

SPRING 2026

Student: **Debra Burnejko**
Community Partner: *United Way of Northern New Jersey*
Nominated by: *Anne Marie Anderson, Professor of Accounting; Alisa Pisani Shapiro, Associate Professor of Accounting*

STUDENT SERVICE & LEADERSHIP AWARDS

SERVICE LEARNING LEADERSHIP AWARD

Colin Howell
Community Partners: *Senator Zwicker's Office; Hillsborough Democratic Organization*

CAMPUS COMPACT NEWMAN CIVIC FELLOWSHIP

Manuela Bulgaro
Community Partners: *Hillsborough Democratic Organization; Feeding Hands*

NON-PROFIT AWARD

Manuel Cadra
Community Partner: *Raritan Valley Habitat for Humanity ReStore*

SERVICE LEARNING/INSTITUTIONAL ENGAGEMENT AWARDS

Erika Aguilar FALL 2025
Project: *From First Gen to First Steps: College Stories & Resources – Connects Identity to Practical Guidance*
Zeina Afyouni SPRING 2026
Project: *Creative Connections: Art Therapy for Expression and Community*



PHOTOS
OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP:
Sarah Cuss, Ayanna Parson, Jessica Deo, Nadia Ruiz, Anna Wallendal, Drue Stapleton

THIS PAGE, TOP TO BOTTOM:
Drue Stapleton, Melanie Edelson, Janette Rodriguez
Senator Andrew Zwicker, Colin Howell

James Von Schilling, Jason Fredericks, Michael Goldberg
Mike Marion, Penny Pray, Lori Moog, Don Pray, Mike McDonough
Manuela Bugularo, Joseph Maloney, Karen Bearce

ABOUT THE RVCC Foundation



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 22,000 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 www.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 Specialist
(cindy.haddad@raritanval.edu)
O: 908-648-8412

Cindy is now a full-time RVCC employee and has been with the Foundation since May 2021. She assists with fundraising events, data entry, scholarship implementation and management, and any other day-to-day needs.

CHRISTOPHER SPANGLER:
Development & Alumni
Engagement Associate
(christopher.spangler@raritanval.edu)
O: 908-648-8310

Chris started with the RVCC Foundation in January 2026 and works on institutional fundraising (focusing on companies and foundations) as well as alumni development and engagement. Prior to this role, Chris has experience working in government, nonprofit, and education as a teacher. He has a Bachelor's degree in History from Rutgers University.

ABOUT THE RVCC Foundation

Visit us: RVCC Foundation,
74 Lamington Road,
Branchburg, NJ 08876-3315

Mail us: RVCC Foundation,
118 Lamington Road,
Branchburg, NJ 08876-3315

RVCC Foundation's federal tax number:
23-7138731

In Other Foundation News

TRANSITIONS LEADERSHIP TRANSITION AND AFFIRMATION.

Congratulations to Sierra Saint-Vil, who joined the RVCC Foundation Board of Directors during the 2025-26 Academic Year. Sierra is a Marketing & Communications Specialist with Somerset County's RideWise Inc. Congratulations as well to the newest member of the RVCC Foundation Board of Directors, Sean Murray, who will officially join the Board on July 23. Sean brings a wealth of experience to the Board, and is currently Market President Northern NJ & Lehigh Valley Region, for Fulton Bank. As we welcome Sean, we bid farewell with deep gratitude to two RVCC Foundation board stalwarts, Steve Reichman and Gene McCarthy, whose 30 years of combined service puts them in rarified territory. As these legends know well, our doors are always open

at "the Farmhouse" for their return to campus.

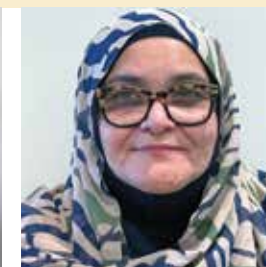
And congratulations to Dan Van Tran, who assumes Board chair responsibilities, as longtime chair Allan Boomer returns to his regular board seat, while maintaining his chairmanship of the Finance and Investment Committee. Huge thanks to Allan for his leadership, and thank you Dan for assuming the Chair responsibilities. We look forward to another exceptional year ahead.

In addition, we're pleased to welcome Chris Spangler to the RVCC Foundation team. Chris joined in January and is putting his many talents to work in support of both fundraising from institutional funders, and growing our engagement with graduates through the RVCC Alumni Association. We look forward to Chris's many contributions as he continues to grow in his new role at RVCC.

And finally, our two RVCC student board

members for 2025-26 Academic Year, Daphne Kunukcu and Harshil Shah, have graduated and are moving along in their journeys. Daphne will be taking a gap year and plans to pursue her private pilot license and PADI Open Water Diver Certification, and Harshil is heading to Georgia Tech. We extend our gratitude and wish them both continued success.

And as Daphne and Harshil depart, we welcome our student board representatives for the 2026-27 academic year: Hoda Khamis, a Liberal Arts-Social Science major who is passionate about working in education and child development, and Vedha Priya Shivaraman, a Business Administration major with entrepreneurial aspirations. Both Hoda and Priya are scheduled to graduate in spring of 2027 and both will "officially" join the RVCC Foundation Board of Directors at the July 2026 board meeting.



INCOMING (above): Priya Shivaraman and Hoda Khamis, our new Student Reps on the Board, join the action at the July 23 Board meeting;

TRAILS (top of page on right): The RVCC Foundation offices are now directly linked to the Workforce Training Center, thanks to a new asphalt walkway completed last fall;

THE CLASS FROM 2026 (top left): Emma Couchie, Autumn Ananson, and Audrey Maxwell, interns from the RVCC Center for Environmental Studies, applying some stain on the plant boxes at the RVCC Foundation offices;

WORKING SESSION (top right): Board members working through the agenda at the April meeting (at The Farmhouse);

YOUR FOUNDATION STAFF (L-to-R): Donna, Chris, Janet, Cindy and Mike enjoying some solar power outside The Farmhouse.



Visit us at: [@rvccfoundation](https://www.instagram.com/rvccfoundation)

THE LAST WORD

Each year, THE LAST WORD features the remarks of the faculty and student commencement speakers for the RVCC Graduation Ceremony. And this year, we're beginning a new tradition by featuring the thoughts of RVCC President, Michael McDonough.

Dr. Frank Forte, Faculty Commencement Speaker



Dr. Frank Forte of Raritan, Associate Professor of Mathematics, has been teaching mathematics for 28 years, the past 11 of them at RVCC. He received his Bachelor of Arts from Drew University and a Master of Science degree in Mathematics from Montclair State University. He recently completed his PhD in Mathematics Education from Montclair, and his dissertation examined the struggles that preservice elementary school teachers face while solving nonroutine math problems. It also focused on ways to help these future teachers improve their math problem-solving skills and become better educators. At RVCC, in addition to teaching mathematics courses, Dr. Forte serves as the Faculty Liaison to the Honors College and has worked with the College's Concurrent Enrollment program for the past few years.

ASSERTING THE RVCC VOICE

Good Morning Raritan Valley Community College Class of 2026, and congratulations. Congratulations on reaching the beginning.

In my career as both student and teacher, I have graduated several times. And still, I must admit that sometimes words confuse me. This ceremony is called a commencement. To commence means to begin something – but we are at the end of your time here at RVCC. Why not just call it a graduation?

Last year about this time, I also graduated. I finished my doctorate and graduated from Montclair State University. And in the months leading up to that day, I might have traveled some of the same roads that you did. It started when I looked at all the checkmarks in my Degree Works (yes, they have that in graduate school too). Then I saw the comments on my dissertation drafts and realized – this might actually be happening. I might be graduating soon. Now what do I do?

The answer, no matter where you are, is

the same. You should fill out a form and pay a fee. And when I did that, I ended up on an email list of graduation candidates. One day, we all got a message from an exasperated person in the registrar's office with multiple exclamation marks that said "graduation and commencement are not the same thing. Graduation happens on a transcript, Commencement happens at a ceremony."

Great. But I still needed to know – why is it called commencement? What I came to realize is that your degree is not the end of your journey, it is the beginning. Today's celebration is about commencing the next part of that journey. Doors will now be open to you that were not open before. But more importantly, you do not leave RVCC exactly the same person that you were on the day you walked in. If nothing changed, then we all did something wrong.

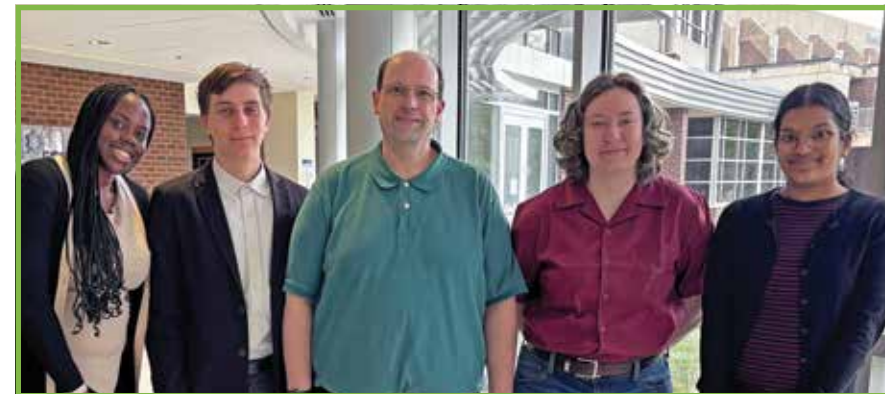
You learned content. You took courses that helped you to write an essay, evaluate double integrals or figure out how supply chains work

in the world of business. You learned how to write a lesson plan or how to stabilize a patient in distress.

But I hope you found something else here too. Maybe you found an interest that you never knew you had or a major that you never knew existed. Maybe something surprised you. You thought you wanted to be a second grade teacher, then one day you walked into the chaos of middle school to do an observation and realized you were at home there.

Maybe you came in here as the quiet high school graduate, and found a voice that you never knew you had. Or you graduated from high school and then 20 years later you decided to come back to college. And you wondered "can I do this?" Sitting here today confirms that you can, because you did it.

That doesn't mean your journey was easy. If it was, everyone would be a college graduate. You gave up those nights and weekends in order to study, to practice, to edit and to complete



assignments. You hit the "help me solve this" button more times than the Jets lost football games last season. But this morning, you realize that all that hard work is worth it.

Some of the math courses that I teach here are for preservice teachers, students who are studying to become teachers. So it's not surprising that one of the things I do outside of RVCC is mentoring student teachers going for certifications to teach middle and high school mathematics.

Last week, I was at a reception with my three student teachers from this semester who, I might add, have all accepted math teaching positions for next year before they graduated. If you're considering career paths, maybe it's worth giving fractions and variables a second chance.

We were talking about teaching. Teaching is one of those professions that everyone should try for at least a few days in their lifetime. It will give you a new perspective on so many things. At one time, my math courses for preservice teachers here involved writing a short lesson plan and then teaching the lesson. About 6 weeks into one of my classes, one student, who was not planning to be a teacher, had enough of all the teacher talk and asked the class "is anyone in here planning to become a teacher?" Then he looked surprised when all of the other students in the class raised their hands. This caused him to look at me and ask "how did I get into this class?" which honestly was a question that I had also been asking for about 6 weeks.

A couple weeks later, when I explained the teaching project, he said "so I just have to go up there and do what you do? That should be easy." As he went through the planning process, he had a lot of questions. Could he just go up there and wing it? (No) Did he really have to write his lesson plan down? (Yes) Did he really have to pick the example problems in advance? (Yes) Do

lesson plans really have a due date? (Yes)

His presentation went fine, and at the end, he told me he had a new respect for this teachers. He said to me "You really do this for every class? Do you know how much time this took me?" Yes. But as teachers, we spend the time, days nights and weekends, for that moment when you, the student, get it, when you are able to see yourselves being successful in courses or places where you had not been successful before. We also like when you ask those questions that we had never thought about which turns into a learning opportunity for us as well.

And we are proud of your accomplishments long after you graduate. Last month I saw that a former student of mine who was sitting in these seats just a few years ago, was named Teacher of the Year at her elementary school. There are also those moments when they introduce new faculty members here at RV and I realize they were once a student of mine. (Of course, I started teaching when I was really, really young).

So as someone who may have been teaching a little longer than I realized, what advice can I give to you as you commence your next journey?

Don't be afraid to start something just because it might not go perfectly. If the standard for teaching was perfection, I would not be here today. If every lesson had to be perfect, I would have never written my first lesson plan. Same is true about this speech.

Inspire others to take the journey that you did. Let them know that they can do it too. Show them by your actions that the hard things are worth doing, and are worth doing well.

Be open to new opportunities. For fun next week, ask people my age if they are doing the same thing now that they planned to do when they were in college or if they are in the same



job field as their first job. I'm guessing you'll get far more "no" answers than "yes."

Take a break each day from the world of your phones and go outside and talk to people face to face. Have civil conversations with people with whom you disagree, or with whom you have little in common rather than shouting matches online. Understand that you can form lasting friendships with people and still have very different views on politics, religion and whether it's Taylor Ham or Pork Roll. Look for the things that unite you rather than places where you disagree.

For the last few minutes, I've been talking about looking ahead to the next thing. I'm going to end with an exception to that advice. This morning, as your name is announced and you walk across the stage, pause for just a second to bask in the glow of your achievement. When the ceremony is done, go over to the reception area and talk with each other. Shake hands, take pictures. Take one with your whole family, one with your siblings, one with people you've taken classes with, and some with your professors too. Pause long enough to hear the accolades from family, classmates, professors and others around you.

When I passed my comprehensive exams and was admitted to candidacy, everyone on my committee sent me a nice long email with congratulations. All except Dr. Greenstein who was the head of the doctoral program at the time. He was a man of few words, and his emails were concise. He responded with three words. "Breathe it in." And that is my hope for you this morning as well. Take this moment and breathe it in. Today, you commence the next step of your incredible journey.

Congratulations to you, the RVCC Class of 2026.

THE LAST WORD

“Today’s celebration is about commencing the next part of that journey. Doors will now be open to you that were not open before”

Sam Manongsong, Student Commencement Speaker



Sam Manongsong of Raritan, an Honors College student and Business Administration major, is graduating from the College with cum laude honors. He is also a member of the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society and was selected to participate in the prestigious Sanofi Corporate Mentorship Program. Sam has been actively involved on campus and in the community. He served as vice president of marketing for the RVCC Business Club and also worked on the College newspaper, RVoices, and as a sports photographer. He has been a dedicated member of his church for the past 10 years. As a first-generation college student, Sam is driven to keep growing both academically and personally. He plans to continue his education at Rutgers University to pursue a career in supply chain management within the pharmaceutical field.

ASSERTING THE RVCC VOICE

What if...

I got up here, and the first thing I said to you was, “no”? And that was the only word you heard?

Well, the first thing that happened in my college experience was being told NO! No to Rutgers No to the Honors College No to testing out of Math! And the “no’s” just kept coming!

Good morning, faculty, family, friends, and most importantly.... the class of 2026! Those of us who survived the bees and the potholes, we have finally made it!

I want to say thank you. To God and my church. To my loving, hardworking family. And to the RV professors, administrators, and staff here. Thank you for everything you’ve done for us, even the things we don’t see.

College for me did start with “NO!” But I had to be honest with myself, I knew

I could do better. I knew I wasn’t giving everything I had. But what kept me going was bigger than just me. I thought about my family, the sacrifices they made and the opportunities they didn’t have.

Looking back, those “no’s” changed everything for me. Because you realize pretty quickly that growth doesn’t happen when everything goes your way. It happens when it doesn’t.

I arrived at RVCC as a first-generation student without knowledge of how to be a college student, where to start, and how to work with EduNav. At the time, I felt like I was behind, while everyone else had it all figured out. I was upset, but more than that, I felt guilty and embarrassed. But that forced me to take a step back and ask myself, what do I need to do to turn that No into a Yes?

So, I stepped it up. I started taking my classes more seriously, I started visiting those oddly timed student hours, and I started asking

more questions. I simply got involved. And, things started to change. Not just my grades but my mindset. Oprah Winfrey once said: “Surround yourself with only people who are going to lift you higher.” Well, I found those people just as motivated as I was.

Somewhere along the way, I stopped thinking about “getting through” college. I stopped doing things just to check a box. I started doing things that helped me grow. It helped me determine my values, my independence, and my confidence.

And I wasn’t the only one. I met students who balance school with work. I met students who were parents trying to build a better future. I met students who came back to school after a long break. And I met students who had to care for their families while balancing a full-time schedule.

You showed up every day, even when life outside of school wasn’t easy.

Everyone’s story is different. No matter

where you started, how long it took, or what it looked like. I encourage you not to stop moving forward, even when progress feels uncertain or slow.

Chinese philosopher Confucius said, “It does not matter how slowly you go as long as you do not stop.”

RV gave us the foundation, the confidence, and the direction to keep moving forward beyond where we started. RV was never just about what it gave us; it’s about who we became here and who we’re still becoming.

Our time here has helped us grow, learn, and prepare for what comes next. As RVs motto reminds us, there is opportunity in every moment.

So, what does the next moment look like to you? Is it stepping onto a bigger campus and continuing your education? Is it exploring and

finding what you want to do next, or might it simply be taking a break? The future is limitless, but what matters most is how we take our next step. For me, that answer became clearer when I looked back at where I started.

RV became a place I grew, a place where I found community, and more than anything, this is the place where I started to believe in myself.

But, back to that word “no”. After that first semester, those no’s turned into yes’s.

I was accepted into the Honors College, I completed all those math courses, I’m heading to Rutgers this fall, and I became the sports photographer for RV.

What started in high school as a hobby turned into something bigger. Contributing to RVoices, seeing my work featured on the college website, and even being displayed in the athletic building.

Through all of that, I realized something I’ve always believed in...capturing special moments. And TODAY, this... right here... is one of those spectacular moments. So before I give up this podium, I want to capture THIS moment.

Class of 2026, on the count of three, will you please smile for my photo? 1.2.3, smile! I’ll be posting this on my LinkedIn page. Help me reach 500. Don’t forget this moment!

In all seriousness, thank you for helping me capture this moment. Thank you for believing in yourself. And thank you for not stopping when someone told you “no.”

Congratulations to each and every one of you and your families.

Thank you.



THE LAST WORD

Michael McDonough,
President of RVCC



ASSERTING THE RVCC VOICE

I have had the rare and distinct privilege of being a part of this remarkable community for twelve years. I have witnessed the transformative power of this institution, to the thousands of ways that this college impacts these counties, this region, and this nation. RVCC is an ever-evolving anchor of our communities, a place of innovation, of collaboration, a place of inspirational change.

Today, however, I write as a dad, as the proud parent of two RVCC graduates. And as much as I cherish my role as president, it is as their dad that has given me the most joy, the singular experience that makes my life complete.

Oliver and Nolan came to RVCC uncertain about their majors, uncertain about their future pathways, their potential careers. Both discovered a college of opportunity and a community of faculty and staff dedicated to their success. Both discovered a college of possibility and a community of people who offered only encouragement and support.

Oliver found his passion in business studies, in the world of finance and business analytics. He would complete his two years at RVCC and transfer to Bentley University in Massachusetts, long recognized as a leading business college. But it is RVCC he considers his true alma mater. At RVCC, he encountered an engaged, dynamic faculty, innovative teachers who nurtured his curiosity and encouraged his interests. He was supported by staff members who mentored him and offered life-changing, career-changing internships. After graduating from Bentley, Oliver has been a member of the Esoteric Asset-Backed Securities Team at S&P Global in New York City. If you ask him, he will excitedly tell you that he owes it all to RVCC.

This spring, Nolan will graduate summa cum laude from RVCC. Here, Nolan had the opportunity to discover his love of contemporary politics, his thoughtful fascination with public policy. His course work fueled his interest in this field and an internship with a state senator made his commitment more real.

RVCC provided Nolan a rigorous intellectual foundation, a comprehensive introduction to his future discipline, and a set of skills and habits that will shape his future success. In the fall, he'll attend the Edward J. Bloustein School of Public Policy at Rutgers University. He will remind you, however, that he is first – and always – a graduate of RVCC, the place where he found that he not only belonged but thrived.

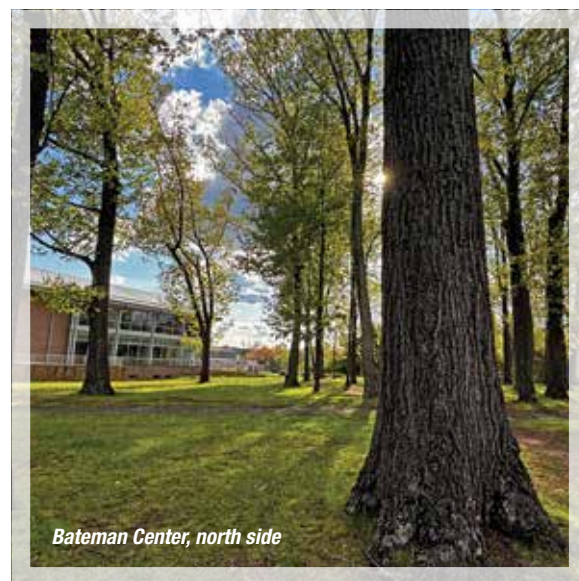
Not only has this gem of a college shaped my life but it has launched my two boys into adulthood, made them confident, engaged, ethical citizens. It is a part of them, a part of their character. I'll never be able to thank this college – this community – enough, never be able to express my gratitude for the magic that is RVCC. Now, multiply this small story of Oliver and Nolan by six or seven thousand each fall and you'll begin to grasp the enormous power of this college.

Dr. McDonough is the 8th president of Raritan Valley Community College.



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