

Notes from the Valley...

...an update from the RVCC Foundation and RVCC Alumni Association

Fall 2024



AHEAD OF SCHEDULE

The 22,000 square foot expansion of the Workforce Training Center is moving briskly along, thanks to favorable fall weather and a hard-working construction crew. The new space will accommodate expansion of several existing programs and will give rise to RVCC's new Aseptic Processing program, which commences in Fall, 2025.

LIFE ON CAMPUS



A community committed to learning, growth, and transformation. A culture that values diversity, equity, and inclusion. An institution whose impact is recognized locally, regionally, and nationally. A place called **Raritan Valley Community College**.

RVCC EMPLOYEES HONORED AT 19TH ANNUAL SERVICE AWARDS PROGRAM

Some 52 employees were recognized for their full-time years of service and dedication to the College at the 19th Annual Service Awards Program, held on October 17. The awards program, the “Dandy Lion Service Award,” recognizes those with five-year increments of service. The event was held at Raritan Valley Country Club and was generously sponsored by **Affinity Federal Credit Union**.



Members of RVCC's Facilities, Housekeeping and Grounds staff were among those celebrated on October 17



Affinity's Andrea Alfaro and Shindora Knox

CHAMPS.

Another great autumn for the **RVCC Men's Soccer** and the **Women's Volleyball** teams—both won their respective NJCAA East District B Championships. This was the first time that two RVCC teams qualified for the National Championship Tournament in the same season. Men's Soccer got to travel to Batavia, NY and Women's Volleyball went to Cedar Rapids, IA. While the women got knocked out with two tournament losses, they closed the season with a 23-11 record to go with their District B Championship trophy. The men split their two playoff games, winning the consolation game against Finger Lakes Community College, and finished with a 11-4-3 record to go with their District Championship hardware. Congrats to the Lions' teams and coaches **Phil Herro** (Volleyball) and **Mark Malchow** (Soccer).



ADJUNCT EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING AWARD HONOREES



Adjunct faculty members **Gina Taylor, Nicole Paiz,** and **Peter Barra** have been acknowledged as the 2024 recipients of the *Adjunct Excellence in Teaching Award*.

The adjunct faculty were nominated for the annual award by RVCC students, alumni, faculty, and staff. The three recipients each received \$1,000, a gift made possible by a generous donation to the RVCC Foundation from **Dr. Susan Primmer** and **Dr. Robert Harris**.

The recipients were praised by their nominators, with one saying of Barra, who has been teaching Introduction to Chemistry at RVCC for the last 18 years: “He wants his students—young and old—to see the value and the meaning in what they are doing so that it impacts their lives now and forever. He does not want learning to happen in isolation; rather, he wants learning to infuse every fiber of their being.”

Another person wrote about Paiz, who brings 17 years of medical experience and a passion for healthcare to RVCC, where she has taught for two years.: “Nicole’s advocacy for further education at RVCC underscores her commitment to her students’ long-term success. Her unwavering support and

guidance have undoubtedly inspired many to continue their studies and pursue rewarding careers in healthcare.”

And a nominator said of Taylor, who is an Occupational Therapist and has taught in the Occupational Therapy Assistant program the past six years: “One of Gina’s most outstanding qualities is her commitment to fostering community partnerships that enrich the learning experiences of our students. Through tireless efforts, Gina has forged meaningful connections with local healthcare facilities, rehabilitation centers, and community organizations.”

MORE EXCELLENCE!



Dr. Madhavi Shah (4th from left in above photo), Associate Professor of Biology, has been awarded the inaugural Fulltime Faculty Excellence in Teaching Award.

The new annual award acknowledges and recognizes the outstanding performance of a fulltime faculty member who demonstrates excellence in instruction, provides outstanding mentorship and advisement to students, and inspires student success. One nominator shared, “Madhavi goes so far above and beyond the baseline requirements of her job because she is truly passionate about supporting students and seeing them succeed.” Dr. Shah, who was born and raised in the Gujarat state of India, has been teaching at RVCC for eight years. After immigrating to the U.S., she pursued her bachelor’s degree and Ph.D. in the field of microbiology and geology at Rutgers University.

Big congratulations to Dr. Shah for receiving the *2023-2024 Fulltime Faculty Excellence in Teaching Award!* Stay tuned for details on how you can nominate faculty for the 2024-2025 award later this year!

THE BIG PICTURE: A CELEBRATION OF RVCC.



It was a perfect night to celebrate Raritan Valley Community College at the Ballpark (TD Bank Ballpark—home of the New York Yankee affiliate **Somerset Patriots**, a valued “neighbor” of RVCC).

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

In total, 4,453 fans came out to the Ballpark, including a special group who purchased the 269 “RVCC tickets” and helped establish “The Big Picture Scholarship”—the first crowd-funded scholarship ever at Raritan Valley Community College.

The evening’s honorees were a diverse group: RVCC’s **Lori Moog, Rhonda Stewart, and Michael McDonough** and RWJUH Somerset’s **Serena Collado**—all “*Best of Bridgewater & Branchburg*” awardees, and **Osei Kwadwo Boateng** (RVCC Class of 2016), recipient of the **NJ Community Colleges’ “Distinguished Alumni of the Year.”** In addition, **Sanofi** and **RWJUH Somerset** both had on-field check presentations that honored the Nursing and Corporate Mentorship programs at Raritan Valley Community College.

The evening’s presenters included RWJ’s **Patrick Delaney**, and **Deirdre Blaus**, Sanofi’s **Raquel Mura**, NJ Council of County Colleges’ **Aaron Fichtner**, and **Hunterdon County Chamber of Commerce** Foundation’s **Rosemary Fellner**, who announced RVCC’s upcoming induction into the Business “Hall of Fame.”

Raritan Valley Community College students **Ollie Johnson, Katie Strong** and **Sarah Stefaniak** performed the National Anthem, **Amanda Moberg** captured the aerial drone group photo of the RVCC community, and RVCC’s **Conrad Mercurius** threw out the game’s “First Pitch.”

Fans who hung around for the entire game were rewarded by the home team, with the Patriots’ players staging an exciting 9th inning 7-6 walk-off win over the Reading Fightin Phils.



RVCC’s Jason Fredericks and NJCC’s Aaron Fichtner

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

PHILANTHROPY CELEBRATED



Happy to have **Josiah Kemp, Steven Schwartz, and Esmeralda Ochoa-Lopez**—Raritan Valley Community College student recipients of the Cento Amici Scholarship—present for the Annual Cento Amici Dinner at the Stone House in Warren, NJ. Present with Josiah, Steven and Esmeralda were Fiserv’s **Michelle (Bost) Milentijevic** (2nd from left), **Jennifer Manchester** (2nd from right), and RVCC’s **Mike Marion**.

To our friends at *Cento Amici*, thanks for the sustained and generous scholarship support of our students and for always inviting them to share in this annual celebration of philanthropy and impact.

SUPPORT OF STUDENTS
 FALL 2024 RESULTS
\$417,500
 IN SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED!
217 STUDENT
 RECIPIENTS!

GOOD GOES GLOBAL!

Last month, close to 200 employees from **Insmed** Incorporated spent their annual *Global Day of Good* at RVCC. The Insmed team packed meals and snack bags to benefit the **RVCC Resource Center & Food Pantry, Feeding Hands, and Empower Somerset**. Some of the other activities included painting murals for hospitals, sorting books, creating STEM kits, and helping out with the new campus trail that is in development. We’re proud to have been one of the many organizations Insmed supported for this meaningful day, during which over 1,000 employees gave back to local organizations across the globe.



Some of the Insmed team who gave their time and sweat equity to the RV Trail at Raritan Valley Community College.

LITTLE IS BIG!



Congrats to all involved in the November 14 “Little Scientists Night” event at the College, which proved once again to be very successful, entertaining and exciting for all involved. As in past years, the **Pioneer Family Success Center of Somerville** brought families with children age 5-10 to the Science Building on campus and provided the pizza, while RVCC provided all of activities—created by students of 11 of RVCC’s student STEM-themed clubs. In all, there were 96 total guests, including 55 “Little Scientists,” who proudly wore their lab coats, while some 110 RVCC students led the activities and logistics! These budding scientists had a blast with all activities and RVCC students did an amazing job not only with their creative activities but also in interacting with the “Little Scientists.”

MILESTONE YEAR!

The service learning program at RVCC (now called, “**The Pray Family Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement at RVCC**”) is celebrating a big milestone this year, culminating with a special 30th Anniversary lunch and awards presentation at the College on May 10. Featured at the event will be a video presentation that pays homage to all of the service learning work and resulting impact over the years. With over 250 community partners and “service donated” by RVCC students estimated at over \$1 million annually, there will be much to say and to celebrate on that special day. Among the first to be recorded for the video were **Don and Penny Pray**, whose generous commitment to the Center has been transformative. The Prays were recently interviewed by **Lori Moog** (far left in photo), Director of the Pray Family Center and filmed by **Kelly Oliver** (2nd from left), Specialist, Multimedia & Web Support Services.



GROWTH & GRATITUDE: RVCC HONORS COLLEGE

The Honors College has grown from 16 students in 2011 to almost 150 now. During that time, the Honors College and its students have been instrumental in helping RVCC maintain its elite status within the community college sector. Honors College students are leaders, whether on campus (e.g., PTK, SGA, etc.) or in the community (e.g., Newman Civic Fellows) and they knock down just about every door when it comes to transfer institutions (including Princeton, Yale, Cornell, Georgetown, and Johns Hopkins).

“I graduated from the Honors Program in 2020, which was in the midst of COVID. I did not take a gap year, but instead made the biggest decision of my life. I moved to North Carolina in May of 2020 after I accepted my transfer to **East Carolina University** (ECU). It has been the best decision of my life and I have enjoyed living in NC since. My junior year at ECU was completely virtual due to COVID, but I was in-person for my senior year. I graduated from ECU in May of 2022. I decided that I needed to take a gap year to get some clinical experience. With much effort and luck, I was accepted into a Physician Assistant program at **Methodist University** in Fayetteville, NC. This has been my dream and it really still feels like a dream. I just began my first rotation in Pediatrics and am supposed to graduate in December of 2025. My goal is to return to my family in Wilmington, NC and practice there. I wanted to send my gratitude to everyone involved in my education at RVCC. Every time I think about my undergraduate education, my thoughts always go back to RV and how I learned so much. I sincerely thank all of you from the bottom of my heart for making my dream a reality. I could not have done it without your support.”

-Sofia Gambino,
RVCC Honors College, Class of 2020



Sofia Gambino



RVCC Honors College students in Washington, DC.
(photo by Germán Bursset Romero, Class of 2025)

2023-24 DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD HONOREES

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



Anthony Devergillo

Anthony was a member of the inaugural RVCC Honors College class, graduating in 2013 with an AA degree in Communications before transferring to Rutgers to complete his BA degree in Communications. Anthony serves as the Head of Digital Employee Communications at *Amicus Therapeutics* and has received numerous professional accolades, including the Microsoft Most Valued Professional award and the RARE *Champions of Hope Nomination!* Anthony loves gaming, but his ability to use the controller was affected by his rare muscle-weakening disorder called Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy. Rather than giving up one of his loves, Anthony used this as an opportunity to make things better for those similarly afflicted with rare diseases. He worked with “Playability Initiative” to develop an accessible controller that would allow people with low mobility and dexterity to be able to continue socializing through gaming. That collaboration led to an invention called *Overjoyed* – a joystick overlay for Windows that would make games playable with only mouse or eye movement. *Overjoyed* was made available on the Microsoft Store through *Our Odyssey*, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to connect young adults living with a rare or chronic condition in order to improve social inclusion and accessibility. Anthony serves as Vice Board Chair of *Our Odyssey*, continuing to serve others, hosting virtual social meetups for the *Our Odyssey* community along with weekly music and gaming livestreams showcasing *Overjoyed*. Anthony's advocacy also includes serving as an Ambassador for the nonprofit Jett Foundation, participating in panel discussions for Rare Disease Day.



Charlene Green

Charlene graduated from RVCC in 2019 with a Certificate in Human Services, earning Dean's List honors. After graduating from RVCC, Charlene went on to earn a certification in Family Engagement from HarvardX and an Infant Family Associate certification endorsed from the New Jersey Association of Infant Mental Health. She did all this while balancing the responsibilities of being a mother of three. Charlene has served as the family and community advocate for *HOPES CAP Inc.* in Somerset, NJ, holding various positions, including as the policy council chair. Charlene is currently a board of trustee member for the *New Jersey Association of Infant and Mental Health*. In 2024, Charlene earned the title and position of Social Worker for the Somerset County Board of Social Services. Charlene is also a published author, releasing an autobiography inspiring others to never stop pursuing their passions. Charlene is the proud owner of a holistic health practice called *You Are Not Your Past, LLC* and continues advocating, engaging, and inspiring others to persevere through adversity and to triumph! Charlene is also a parent leader for the *County Council for Young Children*. Charlene is a domestic violence survivor and has become a certified advocate for survivors of Domestic Violence. She has devoted her life to advocating for adult and youth mental health, exemplifying that the combination of perseverance, determination and hard work can allow anyone to achieve their goals and improve their lives.

RVCC ALUMNI ASSOCIATION



Marc Pellegrino

Marc started at RVCC in 1994, earning credits while still in high school and achieved Dean's List multiple semesters while pursuing a Business Administration major at RVCC. Marc transferred to *Rutgers University*, earning his BA degree in economics and then went on to *Fairleigh Dickinson University*, earning his M.S. in Administrative Science, along with graduate certificates in both *Emergency Management Administration* and *Homeland Security Administration*. Marc has been a NJ State Trooper for the past 20 years, currently holding the rank of Lieutenant. Some highlights of Marc's distinguished career include serving as the Incident Commander for the NJ *All-Hazards Incident Management Team* deployment to both Puerto Rico in response to Hurricane Fiona, and to Georgia in the aftermath of Hurricane

Michael. Marc was also an Operations Section Chief for Super Bowl 48. Marc's professional accolades include a commendation for his work as Incident Commander during multiple COVID-19 missions and a Certificate of Appreciation from the *NJ Dept. of Military and Veterans Affairs* for his work on Albania's Disaster Preparedness assessment. Marc believes wholeheartedly in giving back to the community, having been a volunteer firefighter with Somerville Fire Department for 22 years and the *Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)* Coordinator for the Somerville. Marc also volunteered as a coach for his son's soccer teams and was also their Scout leader. Marc's greatest accomplishments are as a husband of 20 years and a father of three children (ages 17, 15, and 10). Marc's oldest is graduating high school this year and plans on attending RVCC to follow in his father's footsteps.



Dov Landau

Dov came to RVCC as a homeschooled student, attending RVCC for several years before eventually accepting an appointment to the *US Military Academy at West Point*. He graduated in 2020 with a B.S. degree in Defense and Strategic Studies with a focus on Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict. Upon graduation from West Point, Dov was commissioned into the United States Army as a Second Lieutenant in the Corps of Engineers, eventually rising to the rank of Captain, a position he currently holds. Dov's distinguished career includes serving as a Platoon Leader, overseeing the training of over 400 new combat engineers and bridge crewmen as well as supporting the Joint Task Force-Bravo (JTF-B) humanitarian assistance and evacuation efforts in Haiti during the coup that had occurred. Dov currently

serves as the special projects officer in the 1st Engineer Brigade's operations shop. Dov's professional accolades include being awarded the *Joint Commendation Medal*, *National Defense Service Medal*, *Global War Terror Medal*, and *German Armed Forces Proficiency Badge*. While attending RVCC, Dov volunteered as an EMT on the Green Knoll Rescue Squad and also went on a mission trip to Liberia and upon his return, helped raise over \$70,000 to build a safe home for at-risk girls in Liberia. At RVCC, Dov was the president of the Hip-Hop Dance Club and served as the RVCC mascot at multiple events. Dov is currently stationed at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri with his wife, Skye Landau, who is also an Army captain in the Corps of Engineers. They live there with their two dogs, Bailey and Ruby.

RVCC ALUMNI ASSOCIATION



Stephanie Zayak

Stephanie graduated from RVCC's Honors College in 2018 with an AS in Pre-Med before transferring to *Cornell University*, earning both her B.S. & MS in Materials Science & Engineering. While in college, Stephanie worked in an electrochemistry reliability and testing engineering research role, assembling half cell coin cell batteries with different formulations. In 2021, Stephanie joined *General Electric Research* as a Technical Research Intern, splitting time between both the Materials Physics & Chemistry team and the Characterization team, specializing in X-rays and characterizing materials such as powders, metals, radioactive materials. While working at *Lawrence Livermore National Labs* from 2022 - 2023, Stephanie acquired a Q-level security clearance to work with classified materials, as well as an explosives

handler certification from LLNL's High Explosives Application Facility (HEAF). She worked within the department of Physical Life Science's Materials Science Division in the *Reaction Dynamics Group* as a Research Staff Scientist II. Now, at *Astrophysics Inc.*, Stephanie is working on implementing security solutions with enhanced threat detections for *Astrophysics'* customers, including the US Department of Homeland Security and Customs and Border Protection. Stephanie is also involved in artificial intelligence (AI) projects for threat detection as well as other programmatic projects that require R&D efforts. Stephanie is a first author on the paper, "Epitaxial Na_xCoO₂ thin films via molecular-beam epitaxy and topotactic transformations: A model system for sodium intercalation," published in the *Journal of Physical Chemistry C* for her work done in graduate school. While at RVCC, Stephanie achieved the *Bronze Service Award* for volunteer work at Robert Wood Johnson (RWJ) Hospital and Elijah's Soup Kitchen.



TO JOIN THE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION,
PLEASE SCAN THE CODE BELOW
AND SUBMIT THE FORM.



Look for more information on our Distinguished Alumni honorees in the social media streams of Raritan Valley Community College and the RVCC Foundation, and in the Annual Report of the RVCC Foundation (published in June 2025).

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

RVCC ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

ALUMNI PROPS

Stephen Everts of Frenchtown, a May 2024 graduate of RVCC, participated in the U.S. Department of State's **Critical Language Scholarship** (CLS) Program to study Turkish. Everts is one of approximately 500 American students at U.S. colleges and universities who were selected from over 5,000 applicants to study overseas or virtually in the summer of 2024.



Stephen Everts in Turkey.

The scholarship enabled Everts to study Turkish at the **TÖMER Institute at Ankara University**, which specializes in teaching the language to foreigners. They spent eight weeks in the country, studying five days a week and participating in program excursions and cultural activities on the weekends. This ranged from learning to cook local dishes or practicing calligraphy or the ancient arts of Ebru (water-marbling paper); to visiting the U.S. Embassy in Ankara and meeting the U.S. ambassador to Turkey; to exploring such locations as Amasra, a small coastal village on the Black Sea, and the Ihlara Valley in Central Turkey, including Byzantine cave homes and churches that were carved into the cliffs between the 7th-11th centuries C.E.

In summer 2024, Everts, who graduated from RVCC Summa Cum Laude, was honored with the 2024 **New Jersey Council of County Colleges Student of the Year Award**. Beginning in the Spring Semester, Everts will be attending

Rutgers University, where he plans to complete a bachelor's degree in Linguistics with a focus on language acquisition and cognition.

The CLS Program is part of a U.S. government effort to increase the number of Americans studying critical foreign languages.



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

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



Alumni stars were out at the 2nd Annual RVCC Alumni Association Summer Celebration at 74 Lamington Road

RVCC ALUMNI ASSOCIATION



Palak Shah addressing RVCC student at Fiserv's Berkley Heights offices.

When 35 RVCC students visited **Fiserv** in Berkley Heights for a day of discovery and career exploration, they got to hear from RVCC alumna **Palak Shah** (RVCC Class of 2020), who is currently a Strategic Data Analyst at the company. Palak chronicled her journey—from RVCC to life at Fiserv, one of the country's most admired companies.

NJCCC DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD



Osei Boateng and RVCC President Michael McDonough

Congratulations to **Osei Boateng** (RVCC Class of 2016), who was honored with the "Distinguished Alumnus Award" by the **NJ Council of County Colleges** in Atlantic City. Osei, who was a 2023-24 RVCC Distinguished Alumni Awardee, was recognized "For your visionary leadership and significant contributions that have brought honor to New Jersey's Community Colleges."

RVCC ALUMNA POWER

Thanks to the efforts of a member of the RVCC alumni community, the College's Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) program has been selected as one of 20 organizations across the United States and Canada to receive a 2024 *Barista Champion Neighborhood Grant* from **The Starbucks Foundation**. The \$2,500 grant will help support the EOF program, which provides financial, academic, and personal development resources to students who are traditionally underserved. The EOF program was nominated for the grant by **Ashley G.**, a former RVCC EOF scholar and current Starbucks partner (employee) who works at the Bridgewater Commons location. Ashley, who attended RVCC from 2019-2021, was crowned the Starbucks North American Barista Region 7 Champion, a recognition that qualified her to nominate an organization for the Barista Champion Neighborhood Grant. She selected the RVCC EOF program in recognition of the impact it had on her personal and academic journey. Since completing her studies at RVCC, Ashley has been pursuing her bachelor's degree in psychology through Arizona State University Online, which she is completing debt-free through *Starbucks College Achievement Plan*.



Members of the RVCC EOF program join Ashley G for an on-campus photo

BEARING WITNESS



RVCC's Dr. Windy Paz-Amor and Michelle Edgar

The Institute of Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Raritan Valley Community College played host to the September 16 opening of the “Bearing Witness” exhibit, which features mixed-media quilts and other works of fabric art, all exploring humanity’s shared history of deliberate attempts to eradicate specific populations due to differences—in culture, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender expression, and race. Though this exhibit frames a dark and shameful narrative, the work is stunning and powerful.

Several of the artists—who hail from United States, the United Kingdom, Israel, Germany, Italy, and Canada—were present and provided inspiring personal context for their art. Organized in partnership with the Studio Art Quilt Associates, Inc, the Bearing Witness exhibit is open to the public through mid-December.

Huge props to Michelle Edgar, Program Specialist, at the Institute of Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Raritan Valley Community College and to Dr. Windy Paz-Amor, Ed.D., who leads the College’s DEI work. This exhibit was sponsored by the Jewish Federation of West-Central New Jersey. Special thanks to Robin Wishnie, the Federation’s Executive Director.



Artists lead the discussion of their work.

ADDRESSING THE NURSING TALENT SHORTAGE

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

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

With that said and thanks to the generosity of 11 distinguished benefactors who provide more than \$155,000 in scholarship support each year, 50 of our aspiring students are kept on path and ever-closer to attaining their goal of entering the Nursing profession.

And while the resource needs for program growth remain significant, the College will keep graduating as many new nurses as possible each year and will hold the door open for any new supporters interested in adding to the support of RVCC Nursing students.



Somerset Hills Community Health Foundation Nursing Scholarship recipients: Eileen Garrity, Abigale James, Caitlin DeNaples, Elisangela Harrington, Derricka Christie, Leah Yacos;



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

DAY OF DISCOVERY

Imagine being early in your educational journey and having the opportunity for a day of discovery at one of the world’s most admired companies, with “innovation” as one of its most admired attributes. A company with a stunning campus, a culture that values its employees, and one that is recognized by its clients for an unwavering commitment to delivering excellence.

If you were one of the 35 Raritan Valley Community College students who earlier this fall visited Fiserv, a financial data services powerhouse, you were probably doing a lot of imagining. And you undoubtedly left inspired for your future.

Huge thanks to the Fiserv team, including **Michelle (Bost) Milentijevic, Linda Wellbrock, Brendon Howell, Shawn Nicolen, Nicholas Samodio, Nicholas Coluccio, and Dhruv Soni**, for bringing to life a world of possibilities for RVCC students. And to RVCC’s **Alicia Hermo-Weaver**, for your exemplary advocacy on behalf of RVCC students.



RVCC STRONG: RVCC students meet in the lobby of Fiserv to begin the immersion into the rapidly growing field of financial data services.

AWARD WINNER

RVCC's Automotive Technology Associate of Applied Science (AAS) program has been honored with the **ASE Training Managers Council's (ATMC) National Excellence in Training Award**. RVCC is one of three programs in the country to be recognized.

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

The 2024 ATMC *National Excellence in Training Awards* were officially announced at the organization's November 6 reception, held at AAPEX in Las Vegas. The submissions were judged by an ATMC panel, and awards were made to the top three programs that meet a prescribed level of excellence based upon the following criteria: Program Overview, Needs Analysis, Learning Objectives, Program Elements/Materials, Delivery Methods, Measurement of Intended Outcome, and Program Sustainment/Maintenance.

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



2024 Automotive Technology Degree recipients gather in August for their end-of-year ceremonies with RVCC's Wayne Moschella (far left in photo), Automotive Lab Skills Coordinator. Not long after earning their credentials, this group was gainfully employed in the automotive and truck repair industry within Somerville, Hunterdon and Middlesex Counties.

HALL OF FAME HONORS FOR RVCC



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

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

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

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

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

LEADERSHIP TRANSITION AND AFFIRMATION

Congratulations to **Tammy Stouchko**, Senior Partner at SSP Architects, **Deirdre Blaus**, Chief Administrative Officer at RWJUH Somerset, and **Rebecca Geary**, HR Leadership Development Program at Johnson & Johnson (and Class of 2021, Raritan Valley Community College), who were recently affirmed as the newest members of the Board of Directors of the Raritan Valley Community College Foundation. We look forward to the engagement and support of these exceptional leaders.



Tammy Stouchko, Deirdre Blaus, Rebecca Geary

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

And especially deep gratitude to Jeanne Perantoni, one of our longest-tenured board members of the RVCC Foundation, whose contributions were diverse and always valued. Among the most notable: her inspiring vision that helped launch RVCC Giving Day, which has since become the College's largest fundraising event and a model approach for other community colleges.



Jeanne Perantoni and Sebastian Galvez

LEGACY RECOGNIZED

Michael Goldberg, member of the Board of Trustees at Raritan Valley Community College, was one of seven honorees at the **Somerset County Business Partnership 2024 Legacy Awards** ceremony in September. In addition to his years of board service on the **Somerset Food Bank Network**, Michael also serves as President of the **Somerset County Board of Taxation** and President of the **J.S. Henderson Scholarship Fund** Board of Trustees. *Left-to-right: Karen Bearce, Provost, RVCC; Mike Marion, Executive Director, RVCC Foundation; Douglas Singletary, Somerset County Commissioner; Michael McDonough, President, RVCC; Michael Goldberg, Legacy Award Honoree; John Trojan, Vice President, RVCC.*



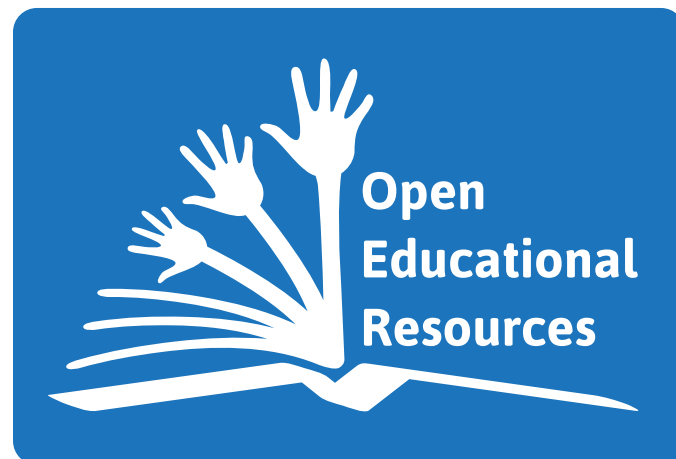
TAKING SHAPE

As noted in the cover caption, the Workforce Training Center is expanding! The 22,000 square-foot of new space will not only support the new Aseptic Processing program, it will also provide additional space for existing programs, including Automotive Technology and Advanced Manufacturing. Special thanks to the commissioners of **Somerset** and **Hunterdon Counties** for their support of this expansion, and to lead construction collaborators, **USA Architects, Planners + Interior Designers** and **Epic Management, Inc.**, for working so diligently with the RVCC Facilities leadership.



Joe Epifano, Project Manager, Epic Management, Inc and Tara Dohoney, Director of Construction with USA Architects, Planners + Interior Designers, with Raritan Valley Community College's Brian O'Rourke, Executive Director of Facilities (far left) and John Trojan, Vice President, Finance and Facilities (far right)

\$5,000,000 PLUS



RVCC's **Open Educational Resources (OER)** program has achieved epic savings to date: since the inception of the faculty grant program, RVCC students have saved \$5,331,803 in textbook costs, a number which is increasing each year along with the number of enrollments in no-cost courses. Highlights of the past semester include adoption of an open textbook by two additional *Intro to Psychology* adjunct faculty members, roll-out of the *Business Law I - Interactive* open textbook, which includes multi-media and embedded reading checks to enhance students' engagement with the course material and retention. In addition, professor Steve Schwarz is nearing completion of an open textbook for Computer Literacy, a high enrollment course that will pilot as no-cost in the Spring semester with full roll out to all sections in Fall 2025. Standing ovation for all participating faculty and to **Megan Dempsey**, Instructional Services Librarian, for leading the OER charge at RVCC.

It should be no surprise that Megan has also recently earned the distinction of *Vice-President/President-Elect* of the **New Jersey Academic Librarians**. Congratulations Megan Dempsey!

THIS IS WHAT #1 LOOKS LIKE



The results are in: the **Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE)** rates Raritan Valley Community College as the **TOP COMMUNITY COLLEGE IN THE COUNTRY** for sustainability achievements.

For the 10th year in a row, RVCC has been recognized nationally for its sustainability efforts, including as the **#1 community college in the United States**—with a perfect score—for water use. RVCC received a STARS Gold rating from AASHE.

Sustainability is an important part of the campus fabric at RVCC, which has cut its campus energy emissions by 58% since 2005. The College is "*River Friendly*," as well as "*Bee Campus USA*" and "*Monarch Watch*" certified. RVCC has three solar installations, a new greenhouse, publicly available electric car charging stations, a green roof and a green wall, numerous pollinator gardens, a rain garden, three rainwater harvesting systems, and three buildings built to LEED standards.

In 2009 RVCC was the first community college in the nation to sign an environmental stewardship agreement with the **US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)**, and the College's current Strategic Plan formalizes its commitment to sustainability.

"We are extremely honored that Raritan Valley Community College is being recognized by AASHE as the top community college in the nation for its sustainability efforts. RVCC's STARS Gold rating is a reflection of the College's longstanding commitment to sustainability and reducing its carbon footprint," said RVCC President **Michael McDonough**.

If environmental sustainability is important to you, please spread the word on this outstanding recognition for Raritan Valley Community College. And if you'd like to support this work or the Raritan Valley Community College students who help drive much of it, please reach out.

STARS ARE RISING



The "Stars are Rising" fundraising campaign for the **RVCC Planetarium** is in full swing. The goal is to make \$1 million available for the Planetarium to upgrade the technology, equipment, exhibit space, show content, lobby space, and entrance. The good news: we're just about halfway there. Let there be any doubt about the importance of this effort, let's remember that some 20,000 guests visit the RVCC Planetarium each year, many of whom are in our local K-12 schools. As is clearly evident in **Ms. Gina Pelosi's 2nd Grade** students from **Oak Tree Elementary School** in Woodbridge, the Stars are indeed rising! Want to help the effort? Visit: rarityval.edu/starsarising.

TAKING SHAPE



The **ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge** (ALL IN) this fall has recognized RVCC for its nonpartisan democratic engagement efforts that fostered high levels of student voter engagement in the 2022 midterm elections. RVCC's honors include: the "2022 New Jersey Campus Voting Challenge Highest Voting Rate: Community College" and the "2022 New Jersey Campus Voting Challenge Highest Registration Rate: Community College."

The College also earned a Bronze Seal from ALL IN based on its 2022 campus voting rate from the **National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement** (NSLVE) report from Tufts University. RVCC is the only New Jersey college, and one of only six community colleges nationally, receiving the prestigious award.

RVCC is one of 93 campuses that earned this recognition for the current election cycle by ALL IN. The College was honored for its development of a campus Civic Action Plan for the 2024 election cycle.

RVCC's successes in this area include leading the creation of the *New Jersey Election Poll Worker Project*, an initiative supported by generous funding through **The Pray Family Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement at RVCC** that led to students from across many different disciplines becoming engaged as poll workers for last month's election.

HONOR RECEIVED

Dr. **Melanie Lenahan**, Raritan Valley Community College Professor of Biology, has received the *Social Learning Innovator Award in STEM* from **Hypothesis**. The award recognizes her work with social annotation to deepen student engagement and foster an immersive learning environment. Dr. Lenahan is the only NJ community college professor being honored by Hypothesis.

As part of the honor, Professor Lenahan was invited to participate in an October 17 webinar during which award-winners from various disciplines shared their approaches to social learning.

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



Professor Lenahan (3rd from left) with RVCC STEM students

Diana Blankman Roberts

U.S. Head of Sanofi's Corporate Social Responsibility and President of Sanofi Cares North America

Most of us are familiar with "corporate social responsibility" even if it remains ambiguous to some. In short, it is where philanthropic investments are made within the corporate structure. It exists mostly at companies of size and scale; the larger the company, the more likely it will have employee leaders evaluating a wide swath of community-based or national philanthropic choices in which to invest.

Thankfully, Raritan Valley Community College has benefited appreciably from corporate giving. But it's a short list of firms whose support has been both sustained and transformational. Sanofi is one such company. And you only need to consider Sanofi's US Corporate Mentorship Program at RVCC to appreciate its transformational impacts. Now in its eighth year, some 85 RVCC students have benefited from the program, which combines in-person mentoring from managers at Sanofi's Bridgewater office, job shadowing, internships, and scholarship support. RVCC student mentees are afforded a rare opportunity to network with managers active in their profession and ready with both polished listening skills and well-seasoned counsel.

Says **Diana Blankman Roberts**, who is U.S. Head of Sanofi's Corporate Social Responsibility and President of Sanofi Cares North America, "our support of Raritan Valley Community College is a point of pride for our employees. They are both impressed with the caliber of RVCC's students and committed to helping them on their journeys. This really is corporate social responsibility at its finest."

Blankman Roberts speaks from experience: she has held similar responsibilities at both Norvo Nordisk and Wyeth. Sanofi's support of RVCC goes beyond its mentorship program; the company has also given generously for 25 years to the STEM-based RVCC Galileo Scholarships, the Science Education Institute, and the RVCC Planetarium.

"The best part of this job is seeing the difference we are making in communities across the country, and beyond," she says. "And being located an easy drive to RVCC has allowed me to really witness the impact we are having locally. It is inspiring, and it is gratifying."

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



Sanofi mentors and mentees gather for last April's Closing Ceremony for Sanofi Corporate Mentor Program on the RVCC campus.

THE LAST WORD VOICE OF THE DONOR

Frank and Patricia Russo

Frank S. and Patricia F. Russo Scholarship

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

“I know what it means to encounter obstacles early in life that get in the way of doing your best,” says Frank. “But eventually, with some perseverance, determination and help along the way, I was able to overcome these obstacles. And luckily for me, there was a community college close by that was accessible and affordable. This combination of circumstances turned out to ultimately change my life. There are few things as gratifying as now having the ability to “pay that forward” to deserving students at RVCC.”

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

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

“The role and intrinsic value of community colleges is undeniable,” adds Frank. “Our support of several recent students at Raritan Valley Community College provides objective evidence of that. We hope our commitment to RVCC is a model for others to follow”



Dylan McBride, Daniela Ovelar (both Class of 2023 and both recipients of the Frank S. and Patricia F. Russo Scholarship at RVCC)

THE LAST WORD VOICE OF THE DONOR

Jim & Jill Gibson

Supporting RVCC since 2000

Preface: Jim and Jill Gibson are longstanding scholarship benefactors and are also major supporters of RVCC’s Center for Environmental Studies (CES) and the CES interns. The Gibson’s acknowledgement below was in response to the work of CES interns, as described in the “Update from RVCC: The Gibson Interns.”

October 29, 2024

Dear Interns,

The latest “Update from RVCC: The Gibson Interns” could not have been more impressive.

Each and every intern accomplished so much so far and you are just beginning to improve the environment, which we all appreciate.

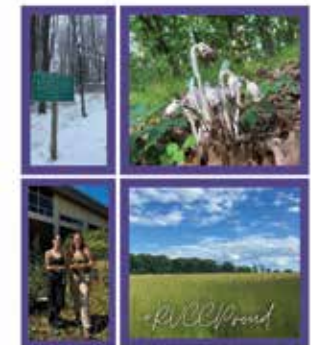
Jim and I are thrilled you are involved in work you love doing. We are fortunate to have gifted, enterprising individuals dedicated to the environment.

We all benefit from your work as interns! Keep up the great work!

Applause, Applause,
Jill & Jim Gibson



**Update from RVCC:
The Gibson Interns**
ACADEMIC YEAR 2023-24



Sari Pehnke

Dear Jim and Jill Gibson!

During my internship, I monitored 6 deer enclosures, all throughout Hunterdon and Somerset county. I would check on the enclosures as often as I could, to see if any deer had gotten in or if the fence had broken. If the fence was broken, I repaired it, and removed or chopped down anything too big to move that may have fallen on top. This was difficult at times, but was an exercise in perseverance. If there were deer inside, I had the fun job of trying to get them out, and I learned that they're usually pretty smart, and will leave the same way they came in, but other times it was a thrilling chase!

I learned how to always be prepared, for you don't know what you'll end up needing in the field. I practiced creative problem solving, and saw lots of amazing flora and fauna. I have to admit, some days were really not so great--working in freezing temperatures or the sweltering heat but overall this job got me outside even when I didn't want to be, which actually ended up making me happier. I greatly appreciate your generous support in this internship, and all that it has taught and given me.

Thank you again,
Sari Pehnke (Forest Ecology Intern)



STUDENT LIFE



Huge props to “people power”—specifically **Kiswah Khan, Alaysha Walker, Marie Wicklund** and their team leader, **Fran Boshell**—for enriching the *Ray Bateman Center for Student Life & Leadership* at Raritan Valley Community College with creativity and energy. Thank you for bringing the *spirit* to the annual “Spirit Day” celebration, for being “all in” on transforming the student experience at RVCC, and for all that you do to elevate our students and our student leaders. **RVCC PROUD!**





Jose Giraldo, Ermis Rodriguez Henriquez, Samuel Callejas, Brian O'Rourke



TRAILBLAZING. Thanks to a dedicated team, seed funding from the College's Innovation Fund, and a mission to "cut the ribbon" on **March 20, 2025**, work has commenced on the "RV Trail," which leverages a point of differentiation for RVCC: a beautiful, 250-acre campus with woodlands, streams, and meadows. The RV Trail will extend around the perimeter of campus (estimated at just under 2.5 miles), and will feature 12-15 educational pods presenting unique and important messaging about the local ecology, RVCC's sustainability and environmental accolades, as well the rich history of the land—and the original farm—on which the College sits.

Notes from the Valley is published by RVCC Foundation to share what inspires us every day: your generosity, your engagement, your commitment. Whether you're a donor, a friend, a student, an alumnus, or a member of the RVCC faculty and staff, you are essential to this exceptional community, which we are honored to support.

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