

OCEAN VIEWS

A Magazine for Ocean County College Alumni, Our College Family and the Community
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ARTS
ON CAMPUS



A magazine for Ocean County
College alumni, our College family
and the community

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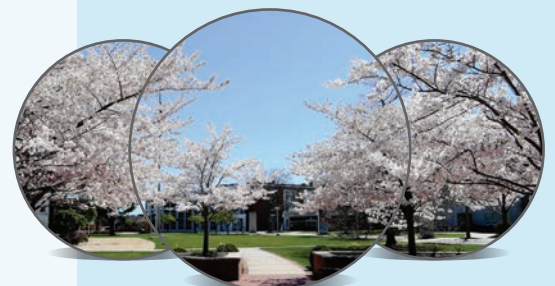
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COMMUNITY GATHERS for LIBRARY REOPENING

State and county officials, project partners, and dozens of guests joined students, faculty, and staff to celebrate the reopening of the newly renovated Library building this fall. The ceremony marked the culmination of a year-long revitalization project intended to address the needs of college students in the 21st century. Enhancements included new study areas, collaborative space, and state-of-the-art upgrades to technology, services, and resources for students.

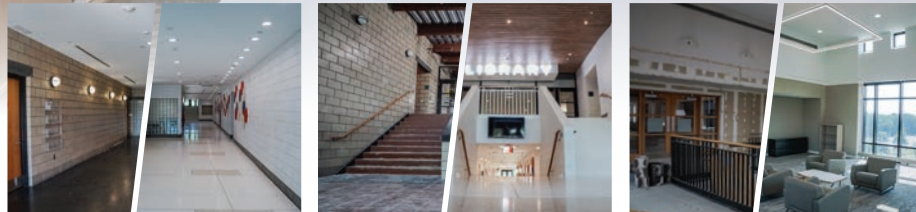
“This new, student-centered renovation takes everything to an entirely new level, with cosmetic and technological enhancements that will facilitate collaboration, inspire innovation, and provide comfort and connectivity for our students, faculty, and staff,” said OCC President Pamela Monaco. “The revitalization of the library will ensure that it is not only the center of our campus, but the heart of it – a welcoming, engaging space

for all to enjoy, with expanded facilities for our students to study and to learn.”

That space also provides a permanent home for the College’s September 11 tribute memorial, which consists of a segment of steel from the World Trade Center, donated by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. The memorial, located on the Library’s first floor, includes the names of Ocean County residents who perished on that day.

Donna Rosinski-Kauz, OCC’s dean of Library and Learning Resources, thanked everyone involved in the renovation and expressed excitement for the new opportunities it will make possible for OCC students.

“I’m looking forward to seeing what I can learn from the students as they use this space. I’m greatly looking forward to that. Thank you, everyone. Welcome to the library!”



OCC VETERAN RECEIVES CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL

OCC alumnus John N. Seebeth '73 and fellow Dustoff crew members from the Vietnam War have been awarded the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest civilian honor in the United States.

The Dustoff Crews of the Vietnam War Congressional Gold Medal Act was enacted in 2024 to pay tribute to approximately 3,000 helicopter ambulance personnel who served during the conflict. Seebeth, a medic, was part of a four-person Dustoff crew, which also included a pilot, co-pilot, and crew chief. These teams flew unarmed helicopter ambulances into combat zones to evacuate wounded personnel to field hospitals, ultimately rescuing over 900,000 injured individuals during the war.

Dustoff units experienced the highest casualty rate of any aeronautical unit in Vietnam. Seebeth himself was wounded during a mission and continues to breathe and speak through his injury today.

“It means a lot that the medal comes from the American people (through their Congressional representatives),” said Seebeth. “It means a lot that the medal is given to Vietnam Dustoff as a whole because we were a team. It was an honor for me to fly the missions with other dedicated crew members. We flew the missions so others may live.”

As a student at OCC, Seebeth served as president of student government and founded the Veterans Club. His story was featured in a 2010 issue of *Ocean Views*.



“ It means a lot that the medal is given to Vietnam Dustoff as a whole because we were a team. ”

- John N. Seebeth '73



OCC Students Selected for Princeton Summer Program

Four Ocean County College students were selected to participate in Princeton University’s highly coveted Transfer Scholars Initiative (TSI), a prestigious eight-week summer program designed for high-achieving community college students.

Laura Garzon Salinas, Jair Garcia, Elizaveta Jarkezian, and Bernard Graham represented OCC in the 2025 TSI cohort. The students spent the summer immersed in

Princeton’s rigorous academic environment, taking fully credited courses, doing research, networking with faculty and students, and receiving guidance to assist with planning their educational futures.

“Being selected for the Princeton TSI program meant so much to me,” said Laura. “I remember calling my family to share the news and hearing them cry over the phone because college was never really a possibility for us—and an Ivy League university was clearly a dream come true.”



“ The Princeton TSI was one of the most transformative and heartfelt experiences of my life. It challenged me in ways I never imagined . . . I found growth, met extraordinary people, and created memories that will live with me forever. ”

- Laura Garzon Salinas



Trustee Linda Novak Honored for Decades of Service

The Ocean County College Board of Trustees has adopted a resolution to recognize the outstanding dedication and commitment of Mrs. Linda Novak, who retired in May after more than 20 years.

Appointed to the Board in 2002 by the Ocean County Board of Chosen Freeholders,

Mrs. Novak has served as Vice Chair since 2009 and contributed her leadership to numerous committees, including Buildings and Grounds, Audit, Compensation, Finance, and Study Abroad.

At a recent meeting, Board Chair Jerry Dasti expressed the College’s gratitude for Mrs. Novak’s many years of service on behalf of the students of OCC and the advancement of education in Ocean County.

Lee Canfield has been appointed by the

County Board of Commissioners to complete Mrs. Novak’s term through December 19, 2026. In addition, Trustee Steven A. Zabarsky was named the new Vice Chair. Mr. Zabarsky will also assume leadership of the Building and Grounds Committee.

The OCC Board of Trustees meets monthly in the campus Conference Center. All meetings are open to the public. For a full schedule, visit ocean.edu.



2025 Faculty of the Year Recognized

The OCC Faculty of the Year awards are given annually to outstanding educators in recognition of excellence in teaching and commitment to student success. Winners are selected by committee from nominations submitted by students, faculty, and staff. This year, over 100 individual faculty members were nominated, with more than 200 nominations submitted by students alone!

The winners of the 2025 Ocean County College Faculty of the Year Awards are:

Christine Pericone, Assistant Professor of Science, School of STEM

Faculty of the Year

Professor Pericone began her career at Ocean County College over 30 years ago. Passionate about teaching and helping students reach their goals, she is dedicated to providing all the support, guidance, and resources her students need to achieve success. Outside of

the classroom, Professor Pericone is highly engaged with campus-wide activities, including the Honors by Contract program, the Research Networking Committee, and the School of STEM’s Course Champion program.

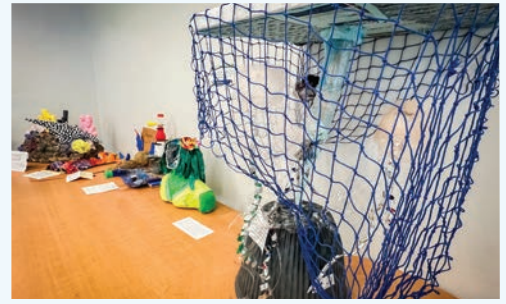
Stephen Baglivo, Adjunct Associate Professor, School of Business and Social Sciences

Adjunct Faculty of the Year

Professor Baglivo has been teaching at Ocean County College since 2014 in the subject area of Student Success. He is committed to helping students achieve emotional intelligence and growth in addition to academic success. Professor Baglivo’s students and colleagues praised his ability to believe in every student’s potential. When Professor Baglivo is not teaching, he regularly dedicates his time to Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) events and initiatives.

Congratulations to these extraordinary faculty members on this well-deserved recognition.





TRASH TO TREASURE: Art Contest Inspires Environmental Awareness

OCC students tapped their creative potential in an effort to raise awareness about environmental issues in “Trash to Treasure,” an exciting and environmentally conscious initiative that invites students to transform waste materials into thought-provoking works of art. Participants explored their artistic talents while learning about the importance of sustainability, all while competing for more than \$2,500 in cash prizes. Coordinated by Charlotte Langeveld, College Lecturer II in Social Sciences and

advisor of the college’s Social Justice Series, the contest was launched at the beginning of the spring semester with a presentation by Lynn Brotherson, founder of Stroke Your Eco. Following a lively discussion about environmental responsibility and community engagement, the students were tasked with addressing sustainability in creative ways by repurposing discarded items, such as plastic, metals, and paper, and transforming them into pieces of art that highlight the urgent need for environmental stewardship.

The project culminated in a vibrant Earth Day exhibition in OCC’s Student Center, where students had the opportunity to showcase their creativity as well as their commitment to a greener, more sustainable future. After judges awarded cash prizes to the top winners, the artwork remained on display throughout the semester, serving as powerful testimony to the environmental impact of waste and the need for sustainable practices to combat pollution and climate change.



First Prize: \$1,500 (Justin Haines) • Second Prize: \$750 (Leo Redner and Azrael Huet) • Third Prize: \$500 (Melanie Grom)



COMMENCEMENT



Grow thro



COMMENCEMENT WEEK HONORS GRADS

OCC students' highest achievements were celebrated during Commencement Week on the main campus in Toms River. On May 20, students from the OCC Nursing Class received their pins in a ceremony at the Gateway Building, followed by the annual Student Awards. The celebration culminated in the conferral of 1,495 associate degrees at



ugh what you go through!



OCC's 58th Commencement Ceremonies on May 22. After inclement weather forced the College to cancel the lawn ceremony, the festivities were moved indoors to the gym, with three smaller ceremonies arranged to accommodate the graduates and guests. A live stream was also available for family and friends to watch remotely.

Student speaker Elizabeth Macchioni reminded graduates that their journey was as important as the destination. "We entered as strangers to this world

of higher education, many of us first-generation, returning students, parents, dreamers, doers, and everything in between. And now we leave not just with degrees but with stories of perseverance, growth, and quiet bravery. Community college did not just educate us —it transformed us."

THE ARTS ON CAMPUS

Bridging Creativity and Opportunity

The arts have been influencing cultures and helping to advance human progress for centuries, yet despite their impact, they are frequently viewed as supplemental or optional in education, rather than essential. In truth, the skills developed through arts education programs are precisely what employers, institutions, and individuals need in our rapidly evolving world.

At Ocean County College, that disconnect between perception and reality is being addressed head-on through innovative programs that demonstrate the practical value of arts education and how such programs help create the critical thinkers, creative problem-solvers, and adaptable professionals that modern workplaces demand. “The arts are undervalued by society at large, but the skills that they invoke and necessitate are the very skills that society wants most,” explains Jonathan Molinaro, dean of Arts and Humanities. “There is a broad misunderstanding and gap between how the arts are viewed and what they in fact provide.”

FROM PHILOSOPHY TO PRACTICE

This isn’t just academic theory—it translates into concrete classroom experiences that reshape how students approach problem-solving. In Nat Bard’s fine arts classes, students learn to move beyond what he calls the “Lego box” mentality, where predetermined steps lead to identical outcomes. Instead, they are encouraged to embrace uncertainty and adapt when projects take unexpected turns.

“We’re a left-brain culture, and they’re coming at it from a left-brain sensibility,” Bard explains. “What I try to hammer in is this right-brain way of working, where you have to do something and see what happens, make adjustments, and when it does something that you didn’t expect, follow that instead of fighting it. What ends up happening is that the students give themselves permission to relax and find out what will happen, instead of expecting something to just work a certain way. Those are awesome life skills.”

This shift from convergent to divergent thinking—learning to adapt, experiment, and innovate rather than simply follow instructions—directly addresses what Molinaro identifies as one of our society’s greatest needs: “an ecosystem of critical and creative thinking, of self-exploration, and a foundation to developing skills that will allow us to thrive as people in the world.”

What makes OCC’s approach particularly effective is its ability to provide support and resources tailored to each student’s



unique goals, challenges, and strengths. “We accept everyone and meet them where they are,” Molinaro emphasizes. “Our faculty are dedicated to an individualistic approach, devoting their time and energy not only to students’ skill-building but to their well-being as people and learners.”

This personalized philosophy is exemplified across all artistic disciplines. In OCC’s music program, for example, students at every skill level receive the tools they need to progress as far as they are able, explains program chair Brian Gilmore. Smaller class sizes make such intensive mentorship possible. Students in the Applied Music program receive one-on-one instruction from world-class professional musicians, an advantage typically reserved for large four-year institutions. There are also multiple opportunities for the students to perform. “We try to give students as many different platforms to perform as possible,” Gilmore says. “The students may not come in prepared for that, but our program and our wonderful adjuncts transform them over the course of their two years here.” And the benefits speak for themselves. While music education majors at four-year programs typically give one recital at graduation, Gilmore says, “I’ve had students who have given a solo recital every single semester that they’re here.” This personal attention ensures that the students who complete the program are ready to move on to the next step.

REAL-WORLD PROFESSIONAL INTEGRATION

This transformation extends beyond technical skills into professional preparation. Students frequently play music at special events on campus and in the community, where audiences are often “shocked and surprised” at the caliber of the performances. Gilmore also arranges for students to compete nationally, if they are ready, as was the case for one talented student, Ian Kanev, who entered the Music Teachers National Association (MTNA) Collegiate piano competition last year. “He was the only student from a community college performing there, and he did a wonderful job,” Gilmore says. “It was a great experience for him.”

Similarly, OCC’s theater program, led by Paul Chalakani, demonstrates how arts education can blend academic learning with professional experience, preparing students for future careers as they learn. Students don’t just study theater; they perform alongside professional actors who have worked on Broadway, off Broadway, and on national tours. They collaborate with technicians from television and film and participate in real stage productions that draw thousands of audience members each year.

“It ups their game tremendously,” Chalakani says. This professional integration helps the students learn to collaborate effectively with diverse groups, communicate across different expertise levels, and maintain high standards under pressure – all essential workplace competencies.

BUILDING CONFIDENCE THROUGH EXPERIENCE

None of OCC’s programs exist in isolation. Theater students work with visual arts students on set design while music majors perform scores for theatrical productions. Music and art students collaborate with history professors to create multimedia presentations. Mathematics professor Julia Kim, whose background includes

violin performance, partners with music faculty on “Music and Math” presentations that demonstrate how artistic thinking enhances understanding across disciplines.

And these connections aren’t coincidental— they reflect the interdisciplinary nature of today’s workforce, where innovation happens at the intersection of different fields. Students learn to embrace the discipline and collaborative skills required for cooperative work and to balance their creative vision with practical constraints while working with real clients.

Each of these experiences helps students achieve what Molinaro identifies as essential for future success: confidence and self-understanding. Whether they are performing for public audiences, participating in competitions, or working side-by-side along with industry professionals, the students are developing resilience, communication skills, and the ability to receive and incorporate feedback—all essential for success in any field. Bard describes watching his students transform from frustrated beginners to confident artists who understand their power to shape their world. This transformation confirms that artistic training isn’t separate from professional preparation—it *is* professional preparation for the challenging work that lies ahead.

As Molinaro puts it, “The arts are radical, subversive, personal, reflective, and clairvoyant. They allow us to explore the deepest part of what it means to be human and to understand both ourselves and the universe around us.” More practically, they develop the “adaptive nature” that he sees as crucial for workforce preparation. “The arts are both reflective and prophetic. They are soothsayer and watcher. They are multifaceted and ever-changing. They connect us to the past and future but are deeply ingrained in the present and the now.”

OCC’s approach illustrates that the perceived gap between arts education and workforce preparation is largely an artificial one. “In the end, our students leave with more confidence, a better understanding of themselves, and skills that allow them to thrive in the field, the world, or at their next institution,” Molinaro explains. In a rapidly changing world that increasingly values creativity, adaptability, and human connection, these qualities are essential competitive advantages for the future.



“The arts are radical, subversive, personal, reflective, and clairvoyant. They allow us to explore the deepest part of what it means to be human and to understand both ourselves and the universe around us.”

- Jonathan Molinaro, dean of Arts and Humanities, Ocean County College



TALENT ON DISPLAY

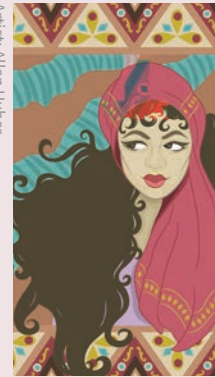
Showcasing Student Creativity



Artist: Sam Schechter



Artist: Allen Huber



Artist: Micaela Dangelico



Artist: Dawn Simon



Artist: Marjorie Mendoza



Artist: Giezi Teutle



Artist: Yarely Ramirez

Artist: Diedra McGrath

When Renate Pustiak, College Lecturer II in Graphic Design, first proposed a student art gallery at Ocean County College, her goal was to fill a noticeable absence of student artwork in the campus landscape. That objective would eventually transform how the College celebrates and showcases the artistic talents of its students. What began as a simple observation has evolved into a comprehensive Arts on Campus initiative that inspires creativity, builds community, enhances the learning environment, and provides students with a sense of accomplishment and ownership, encouraging them to engage more deeply with their work and with the campus as a whole.

Arts on Campus emerged from Ms. Pustiak's passionate belief that OCC student work deserves recognition and visibility. After she shared her idea, more than a decade ago, the administration encouraged her to develop a proposal. What followed were months of research, including visits to galleries at Rutgers University and Stockton University and outreach to museums in New York and even Europe. "I don't know what spirit controlled me!" Ms. Pustiak laughs, remembering the extensive process. "It was like creating a small business. I understood that an art show makes students feel proud and special. Environment is an important player in productivity and creative inspiration. Therefore, well-organized and invigorating displays of student art have a direct impact on students' output."

They can also reflect the intellectual and creative missions of the institution. Arts on Campus supports OCC's mission, Renate explains, by providing a rich environment where students can learn from and interact with art while promoting a sense of achievement among students, increasing community knowledge of OCC's art programs, and attracting new populations of learners.

Turning that initial vision into reality required both passion and resources. With limited resources at first, the program prioritized

creating impactful student exhibits in high-traffic areas, like the student center and library. The opening of the Instructional Building in 2018 marked a turning point, providing a permanent space to celebrate artistic achievements in collaboration with then-dean Heidi Sheridan (now the executive director of the Grunin Center for the Arts) and the Arts on Campus committee.

"Heidi was really supportive and helpful," Renate says. "She is arts-oriented; she absolutely understood the concept. Because of her, this became the first real student art installation."

Today, the Arts on Campus project thrives thanks to generous support from OCC alumnus Tom Zorojew, and the committee continues its mission under the guidance of Jonathan Molinaro, dean of Arts and Humanities, whose appreciation for student creativity and advocacy for the arts strengthens its work and momentum. The positive response has been remarkable. Students and community members frequently comment on the pieces, share them on social media, and inquire about the college's programs and courses. This enthusiasm led to the creation of permanent exhibits throughout the campus, showcasing the impressive work from OCC's graphic design, fine arts, and photography students.

GIVING REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCES

Under OCC President Pamela Monaco's leadership, the Arts on Campus initiative has expanded to emphasize projects that provide students with authentic professional experiences, connecting them directly with campus initiatives while enabling them to build their portfolios. OCC's First Generation logo design contest is one project that exemplifies this approach. Students in Renate's Portfolio and InDesign and Typography courses worked throughout an entire semester to create logos for the College's first-generation community. First-gen representatives visited the classroom to explain their mission and needs, creating a genuine client-designer relationship. The students created hundreds of logos, developing variations in different sizes and colors and producing professional mockups.



Artist: Kristin Nikola



Artist: Emily Lynch



Artist: Lorrieth Woodell



Artist: Mackenzie Quinn



Artist: Jason Zall

The campus community voted on the final design, with student Kohler Wagner’s creation selected as the official logo.

“These are real-life client and designer experiences you are living through,” Professor Pustiak told her students. “This experience will help you get a job.” Renate credits Dr. Monaco for making the project possible, adding that both she and her students were “truly grateful for the opportunity and inspiration.”

The Student Artwork Notecard “To Make You Happy” project represents another innovative way the College showcases student talent while serving practical needs. Dr. Monaco’s decision to feature student artwork on the college’s holiday cards has created an ongoing opportunity for students to see their work shared throughout the community.

“I’m old enough to believe hand-written communication via cards and letters matters,” Dr. Monaco explains. “After my first holiday at OCC sending out our very nice cards, I believed there was a way to use my holiday greetings to express joy and promote the talents of our students. From that idea, and a quick conversation with our faculty member Renate, the project was born. I, and I hope all the recipients, delight in the amazing talent of our students. My communications are more meaningful to me when I see the visual reminder of the good work of the College.”

IMPACT BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

The true measure of the Arts on Campus initiative lies in its impact on students themselves. “Students are excited for this opportunity, they are really happy to submit their work,” Professor Pustiak notes. “The increased visibility afforded by exhibiting design and artwork empowers students, boosting their self-esteem and opening doors to a wider range of career opportunities.” In one instance, an employer who saw a student’s work on display was so impressed that they offered the student a job.

The project has grown to feature exhibits on multiple floors of the Instructional Building, at the Manahawkin campus, and in offices across the college, each installation representing a significant investment in student creative success. Even as the program continues to evolve, the vision remains constant: to create meaningful opportunities for students to share their talents. “Dedicated to nurturing and celebrating student achievement, our objective is to showcase the remarkable abilities of our talented students while highlighting the opportunities offered by our programs,” Renate says. Through the Arts on Campus initiative, Ocean County College demonstrates its commitment to supporting students in the arts while enriching the cultural life of the entire community.

ARTS ON CAMPUS COMMITTEE

The growth and success of the Arts on Campus project are mainly due to the dedication of its committee, made up of instructors and administrators from across the college. The committee plays a vital role in ensuring that creativity has a visible and valued place at OCC. Many of the members interact with students daily and understand firsthand how meaningful it is for them to see their talents recognized. Their efforts have not only elevated the visibility of student artwork, they have transformed the cultural environment of the college.

- Jonathan Molinaro, Dean, School of Arts and Humanities
- Laura White, Academic Affairs Coordinator
- Nat Bard, Instructor, Fine Arts
- John DiLonardo, Adjunct Assistant Professor, Photography
- Ariana Sanchez, Adjunct Assistant Professor, Photography
- Kimberly Malony, Director, Advancement and Community Impact, OCC Foundation
- Melanie Parker, Director, Facilities Support Services
- Michael Leon, Assistant Director, Graphic Design, College Relations
- Renate Pustiak (Chair), College Lecturer II, Graphic Design

CHALLENGE AND INSPIRE

OCC's Educators at Work



Behind each of OCC's art programs are dedicated faculty who bring passion and experience to their classrooms. Through innovative approaches that combine personalized instruction with professional experiences, these instructors are demonstrating that transformative education is not just about what students learn, but also discovering who they can become.

For Music Professor Brian Gilmore, this begins with a simple but crucial premise. "We take the students where they are when they meet us, and give them everything they need to elevate them to where they need to be," says Gilmore. OCC distinguishes itself through its commitment to individualized education, a benefit rarely found at larger institutions. Music students work closely with accomplished faculty, many holding doctoral degrees in their instrument and with extensive professional performing experience. "We have a professional for every individual instrument," Gilmore notes, emphasizing how this approach allows students to "excel, thrive, and flourish."

That guidance helps strengthen both technical skills and confidence, according to fine arts instructor Nathaniel Bard. Some students, especially those who haven't touched art supplies since middle school, feel discouraged that their skills don't measure up right away.

Through one-on-one support and projects designed to be "messy and sort of imprecise," students learn to focus on the process rather than trying to control outcomes. In one assignment, students overlap multiple images and experiment with inking, creating drawings that "don't represent, and don't have to." The goal isn't photographic accuracy – "take a photo if you want that," Bard says – but developing the confidence to trust their own creative instincts.

Bard's approach often includes practical skills that carry deeper lessons. Students in his painting class built their own canvases rather than buying them. "They painted very differently because it's something that they made versus something they bought,"

he notes, reinforcing how taking ownership boosts students' confidence in their abilities and creative choices.

OCC's theatre program also illustrates how personalized instruction creates opportunities rivaling those at major universities. Paul Chalakani has developed a unique, community-integrated program that gives students direct access to working actors and professional-level performance experience. This provides individual attention and mentorship that would be impossible in the anonymous lecture halls of larger institutions, while creating a cultural hub that serves the broader Ocean County community.

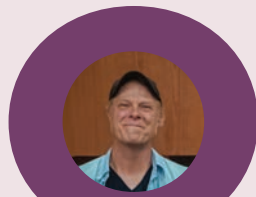
One of Chalakani's most innovative methods involves productions where students create original scripts by weaving together works

from single authors, like Shakespeare or Edgar Allan Poe. These shows allow students to tackle challenging roles such as Hamlet and King Lear that might otherwise be beyond their experience level. The large community audiences that attend these shows provide real-world validation for students that classroom exercises can't replicate.

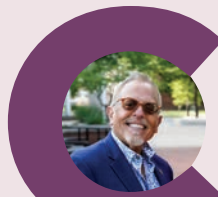
Despite their different disciplines, these instructors share a commitment to challenging students' preconceptions about

learning, creativity, and their own capabilities. Students are encouraged to move beyond their comfort zones while receiving the necessary support to succeed at a higher level. An arts education at OCC can rival or exceed what students receive at four-year institutions – not by lowering standards, but by raising them while providing individual attention to meet those expectations.

As Gilmore puts it, "the depth of caring, support, and individualized attention they'll get to reach their goals" is what sets Ocean County College's arts programs apart from the rest for prospective students. That support develops not only the student's artistic skills, but also the confidence, discipline, and professionalism that will enable them to succeed anywhere.



Nathaniel Bard
Instructor
of Humanities and Fine Arts



Paul Chalakani
College Lecturer II
of Communication and Theatre



Brian Gilmore
College Lecturer II
of Humanities and Fine Arts



OCC offers intimate, dynamic, and engaging courses and programs in the arts that are truly built for all students. They are spaces for students to explore themselves, make mistakes, learn their process, and come full-circle in their skill-building.

- Jonathan Molinaro, dean of Arts and Humanities, Ocean County College



MELANIE PARKER:

Compassion in Action

At OCC, Melanie Parker is known for her calm competence. As Director of Facilities Support Services, she makes decisions that impact the student and employee experience daily. She is also someone to call when an animal is in need.

“I’ve always loved animals,” she says. “In college, I took a summer job as a vet assistant at Toms River Animal Hospital. It was a job where every day felt full of purpose.”

That experience led to two decades managing veterinary practices and hospitals, where Melanie gained expertise in animal care, emergency operations and leadership. She also became deeply involved in rescue and trap-neuter-return (TNR) initiatives.

The work was rewarding, but took its toll. “Compassion fatigue is real,” she says. “You care deeply about every animal that walks through the door, but they can’t all be saved. I loved everything about it, but it was heartbreaking at times. I cried many tears over the years.”

In 2021, Melanie switched gears, and in her new role at Ocean County College she found meaningful work and the flexibility to help animals on the side. Since then, she has served as a volunteer with the ASPCA and Humane Society/Humane World for Animals, responding when disasters, law enforcement actions, or other events require fast action to help displaced or endangered animals.

Her deployments have included the rescue of over 4,000 beagles bred for lab testing, building a temporary shelter for 200 Great Danes seized from a breeder, responding to hurricane-impacted animal shelters in North Carolina, establishing an emergency shelter for 175 cats rescued from a hoarding situation, and even assisting local authorities in a large-scale parrot hoarding case.

While these volunteer deployments are not for the faint of heart, they’re also inspiring. “It’s sad to know these animals came from terrible situations, but you also know that from here on out, life will be so much better for them,” she says. “And while these rescue scenarios show you just how terrible some people can be, your faith in humanity is restored when you see the commitment and dedication of so many volunteers.”

Melanie’s rescue work continues in the community, where she performs TNR on stray cats in her neighborhood and assists animals in need on OCC’s campus. She stresses she’s never alone in her efforts, relying on animal-loving coworkers for backup. Last winter, when temperatures dipped dangerously low, Melanie emailed OCC President Pamela Monaco requesting permission to build a better shelter for “Boots” and “Bella,” the beloved stray cats residing on campus. Not only did she get the green light, President Monaco’s husband, Don, even helped construct it.

Recently, Melanie began working with OCC’s veterinary assistant training program. In this part-time role, she supports instructors, mentors students, and assists with hands-on training.

“I really want to inspire the next generation of veterinary assistants, to help develop well-rounded, emotionally intelligent professionals,” she says. It’s a goal that allows Melanie to share her expertise while empowering others to carry her mission forward.

For those interested in getting involved with TNR in their own neighborhood, Melanie recommends Alley Cat Allies as a great resource for tips on getting started. “All it takes is a willingness to help and a humane cat trap. We’re fortunate to have a low-cost option, the East Coast Spay and Neuter Clinic, right here in town,” she says, adding that since “you cannot predict when you’ll trap a cat, they’re willing to spay and neuter stray cats transported in traps Monday through Wednesday without an appointment (drop off 8-10 a.m.). By spaying and neutering, you’re not only helping to control the stray cat population, but you’re improving the quality of life for each one of those cats.”



FIRST IN CLASS: PHILIP G. ZITELLI '68

When Philip Zitelli walked into the temporary offices of the brand-new community college in downtown Toms River in the mid-1960s, he had no idea how the visit would come to change the course of his life.

“I asked for a catalog and an application,” he recalls. “After receiving the items, I was asked to wait a minute, and then was told ‘the Dean of Students would like to talk to you.’ And that’s where it all started.”

That first meeting was the beginning of a lifelong relationship between Phil and Ocean County College. In addition to being one of the college’s very first students, he also became a foundational part of its culture, serving as president of the student government and advocating for the institution’s early growth. In 1968, he graduated with an associate in arts degree as a member of OCC’s inaugural class.

More than five decades later, Phil remains deeply connected to the College. His path from student to leader to lifelong supporter is a testament to the power of accessible education and a personal commitment to giving back.

“To watch the college grow, and to be part of that along the way, has been exciting. It’s just a very special thing.”

FINDING HIS FOOTING

Phil’s path after high school wasn’t clear at first. “My grades were not good,” he says. “I was a C student at best.” His high school guidance counselor hesitated to recommend college and instead advised him to go into a trade.

His mother had read about a new community college being built in Toms River, and she encouraged him to check it out. It was a turning point.

“Today, when I look back, I realize that was really an inflection point in my life,” he says. “That exposure really helped me grow and develop. It prepared me to succeed.”

That success opened doors to future educational and professional opportunities. Phil earned degrees from Fairleigh Dickinson University and St. John’s University and eventually became a pharmacist, sales leader, and executive consultant. He founded Zitelli & Associates, LLC, and spent more than two decades guiding corporate leaders across the globe in leadership development and organizational success.



Even after an impressive career, Phil credits OCC with giving him his foundation. “It all started at OCC,” he says. “The college gave me a quality education at a reasonable cost and at the perfect time in my life.”

He’s also enthusiastic about the college’s evolution. “When we first arrived on campus, it was very sparse, with dirt roads and dirt parking lots, concrete walkways and a few buildings, several still under construction. Now look at it! When you walk the campus, it does not feel like a community college, it feels like a four-year university,” he says. “The faculty, the curriculum, the way it has adapted to community needs—to watch the college grow, and to be part of that along the way, has been exciting. It’s just a very special thing.”

That growth, he believes, has been driven by strong and consistent leadership. “We’ve been fortunate to have the Board of Trustees to make sure the College’s vision is alive and continues to move forward,” he says. “I’ve known each of the college presidents over the years. Each brought their own expertise.” Now, under President Pamela Monaco, he says, “I could not ask for anyone better to lead the college. Dr. Monaco brings the intellectual and emotional capabilities that are needed for the position. She has the right temperament; she is very bright and connects with the college community and is very engaged with the local community. She is going to do exceptionally well. I’m confident the college is in a good place.”

A LEGACY OF LEADERSHIP

Phil’s impact is perhaps most powerfully felt through the endowed scholarship he established: the Philip G. Zitelli Scholarship in Leadership, which awards \$5,000 annually to a graduating OCC student who has demonstrated strong leadership and maintained a GPA of 3.5 or higher.

“I’d always wanted to set up a scholarship at the college,” he says. “When I was a student at OCC, even though the cost was extremely reasonable back then, it was still tough. I look back now and realize that if the college didn’t provide that type of support, I would not have been able to attend OCC. That’s always been in the back of my mind.”

He vividly recalls the emotional reactions of students and families when they receive the award. Those moments inspire his continued support. “One year, after the event, the recipient was crying, and we talked for a while. She said, ‘This means so much to me. You don’t know how much it’s going to help.’ That solidified my desire to keep going.”

Phil continues to be involved and remains active in campus activities. This past June, he was the Distinguished Alumni Honoree at the OCC Foundation’s annual Scholarship Celebration for a lifetime of support for Ocean County College and contributions to the OCC Foundation.

From an average student who almost didn’t go to college to a successful consultant and generous donor, Philip Zitelli’s story reflects the heart of OCC’s mission and demonstrates the profound ripple effect that one student’s story can have on the lives of many. “I’m proud to be a part of what I consider to be not just the first community college in New Jersey, but the foremost community college in New Jersey and perhaps, even in the country,” he says. “I’m very proud and honored to be part of the OCC legacy.”

A MAN ON A MISSION: MARK HAUG

When disaster strikes, most people watch the news and wonder how to help. Ocean Gate resident Mark Haug jumps in his truck.

Haug, a physical education and wilderness survival teacher at Central Regional High School, knows firsthand what it’s like to lose everything. When Superstorm Sandy destroyed his home in 2012, he and his family were forced to rely on help from friends as they worked to get back on their feet. Rebuilding took more than two years.

But what Haug remembers most isn’t just the loss—it’s the kindness of others who tried to help. A cup of coffee, a helping hand: those moments inspired him to give back. In 2021, Haug launched Hold On, I’m Coming, a one-man nonprofit providing immediate relief to people impacted by large-scale disasters. When the need arises, he hooks up his trailer—already packed with food, water, first aid, and hygiene supplies—and drives directly to the community in crisis. “In an hour and a half, I can be on the road,” he says. “I know that in the first few hours, there’s usually nobody there to help. That’s my niche.” His goal is to get there as fast as possible and fill the gap before organizations like the Red Cross can mobilize.

Haug has responded to floods in Vermont, hurricanes in Georgia and Florida, tornadoes in Pennsylvania, and wildfires in Ocean County. Parked in a lot at Walmart or a roadside clearing, he offers hot dogs, coffee, a place to charge mobile phones, and perhaps most importantly, a listening ear from someone who knows how it feels. “That empathy makes a huge difference,” he says. “People need to know they’re going to be OK. My perspective gives them hope.”

What started as a debt-funded act of service has grown into a community-powered movement,

thanks to donations from both friends and strangers. Haug’s trailer is always fully stocked and his freezer holds thousands of hot dogs, and he feels truly blessed by the response. He is also grateful to his school administration for letting him take off to travel to disaster sites, and for the support of his coworkers and students, who often help him with fundraisers and bring donations when they know he’s going on the road.

And while he often deploys solo, he never stays that way for long. Locals, first responders, and volunteers regularly join in to lend a hand. “People are looking for a way to help, and I give them that avenue.” And each time he travels, he learns something new. “Every time I go, people make suggestions. I listen, and I learn.”

To date, Hold On I’m Coming has assisted more than 8,500 people in need. Want to help? Visit www.holdonimcoming.com or search for “Hold On I’m Coming” on Facebook to learn more.

OCC ROOTS RUN DEEP

Years before he began helping thousands through disaster relief, Mark Haug was a student at Ocean County College, where he participated on the swim and track teams while completing his general education courses. The flexibility OCC offered was key. “I loved OCC,” he says. “I loved the professors, I loved that I could keep my job while I was going to school. I always tell my students to go there.” He even credits his psychology classes with helping him develop the listening skills he now uses in the field. “I wouldn’t have changed it for the world.”

DISASTER RELIEF
www.holdonimcoming.com



2025 | SCHOLARSHIP CELEBRATION



The Ocean County College Foundation raised more than **\$220,000** for students while celebrating its 60th anniversary during the annual Scholarship Celebration, held on June 27 on the college’s main campus in Toms River.

“This year’s 60th Anniversary Scholarship Celebration was a powerful reflection of the generosity and spirit that define our community,” said Foundation Executive Director Kenneth J. Malagiere. “We were honored to celebrate alongside our remarkable honorees, dedicated students, and the many supporters who make the mission of the OCC Foundation possible. Their commitment continues to inspire and uplift everything we do.”

Each year, the Foundation acknowledges outstanding individuals and organizations that have made a lasting impact on our students and our community. In 2025, the Foundation recognized the Gia Maione Prima Foundation, OCC Controller Mary Lancaster, and Philip G. Zitelli '68. Congratulations to all of these extraordinary honorees!

Student, Alumnus, Donor:
PHIL ZITELLI'S
CIRCLE OF GIVING

For Philip Zitelli, giving back to Ocean County College isn't just an act of generosity. It's personal.

As a member of OCC's first graduating class in 1968, Phil credits the College with

launching his professional success. “It all started at OCC,” he says. “The college gave me the foundation.”

But he's never forgotten that without financial help, he couldn't have gone to college at all. It still troubles him how something so critical could stand in the way of a student's potential success. That awareness would inspire him to create the Philip G. Zitelli Scholarship in Leadership, given each year to a graduating student at OCC (*see story on p. 14*).

“I get tremendous personal satisfaction from seeing a student receive the award,” he says. “I have met people that truly want to learn, people who are motivated to work and be successful and have that special ingredient. If you can help along the way, it makes a very big difference. It can change someone's life.”

Phil is a generous supporter of several Foundation initiatives that are close to his heart, including Helping Hands Food Pantry, Dollars for Scholars, Global Travel, and the Athletics Hall of Fame. He is especially drawn to programs that promote leadership and provide students with well-rounded experiences both in and beyond the classroom.

“I will continue to support wherever I can,” he says. “If I hear about a need and it's something I think I'll be able to support, I'll do it. I've always believed that if we can make somebody's life better, it can make a real and lasting difference.”



ART COLLECTION

Expanding OCC's cultural landscape

When Professor Marilyn Kralik received an email from a colleague at Hudson County Community College proposing a coalition of community college art galleries, she saw an intriguing opportunity. Inspired by Hudson's innovative approach to integrating art throughout its campus, Dr. Kralik teamed up with Ocean County College Foundation Executive Director Ken Malagiere to launch a similar initiative at OCC. Together with a committee of Foundation volunteers from the art community, they envisioned a collection that would beautify the campus and enrich the daily experience of students, faculty, staff, and the broader community through meaningful encounters with original art.

The Foundation Art Collection was officially launched in October 2023 with the installation of 20 Seward Johnson life-size bronze sculptures across OCC's Toms River campus, followed by an additional piece placed at OCC Manahawkin. With its debut, OCC became the fourth community college in New Jersey to establish a permanent art collection.

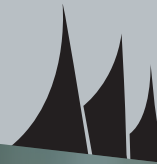
Since its launch, the collection has steadily grown, with works donated by artists and Ocean County residents. "People donate art for various reasons, including death, divorce, downsizing, tax relief—and artists may donate art because they want their works to be seen, rather than kept in storage as investments," says Dr. Kralik. Pieces now include a series of duck decoys by master carver Perry "Sammy" Applegate, original work by American abstract artist Creighton Michael, a complete volume of photographs entitled "SONG" by Francesco Scavullo, and paintings by Stephen Crohn and Vincent Baldassano. All pieces are reviewed by the Foundation Art Collection committee and acquired at no cost to the College—transport and installation are covered entirely by the OCC Foundation.

"The Foundation Art Collection is a wonderful way to bring more of the arts to our campus, not just for our students, but for the entire community to experience and enjoy," said Malagiere. "We are working to make Ocean County College a true cultural hub, where creativity and connection thrive in a vibrant, welcoming atmosphere."

The Foundation welcomes inquiries about possible art donations. For more information, visit occfoundation.org.

SAVE THE DATE!

BLAUVELT SPEAKER SERIES



PRESENTED BY
OCEAN
COUNTY COLLEGE
FOUNDATION

ADMIRAL JAMES STAVRIDIS

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 8

6:00 p.m.

Thirty-seven years in the Navy, rising to the rank of four-star Admiral. Among his many commands were four years as the 16th Supreme Allied Commander at NATO. He has published 15 books on leadership, character, risk, the oceans, maritime affairs, and Latin America.



BASIL CAMU

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 28

11:00 a.m.

A co-founder of Leaf & Limb, a tree care company, and Project Pando, a non-profit that aims to connect people to trees. Author of the book *From Wasteland to Wonder*. His work has been featured in the *New York Times*, *The Seattle Times*, *Forbes*, *Gardenista*, and *The Joe Gardener Show*.



CONCERT EVENT

TO BENEFIT THE STUDENTS
OF OCEAN COUNTY COLLEGE

**CHRIS
BOTTI**

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 3

7:00 p.m.



COMMUNITY – ENGAGE!

by Dori Londres and Olivia Butera



On a warm, weekday afternoon, a group of middle school students sat, captivated, in the Grunin Center for the Arts as *Mariachi Herencia de México* performed a showcase of the rich cultural heritage of mariachi music. By the end of the show, the young audience was clapping to the beats, cheering, and singing along in both English and Spanish.

That moment of unbridled joy, coupled with cultural connection, is exactly the kind of experience Jaclyn Wood, OCC's Assistant Director of Education and Community Engagement, hopes to create every time the doors open at the Grunin Center.

"Our mission is to bring the world to them here," Jaclyn says. "Students can't always travel, but we create opportunities for them to experience other cultures and perspectives right in their own backyard."

Many residents of Ocean County are familiar with the selection of musical, dance, and art activities presented by the Grunin Center for the Arts each season. Perhaps less well known is the abundance of educational programming the Grunin Center offers, programs designed to support classroom curriculum while encouraging student engagement in the arts.

One of those opportunities is through *School 'n Stage*, a program which offers performances specifically designed for K-12 student audiences. By combining performances at the Grunin Center with related curriculum for use in the classroom, OCC is helping students across Ocean County develop the invaluable skills that arts education provides. *School 'n Stage* was launched in 2017 with support from the Ocean County Cultural & Heritage Commission and the OCC Foundation. To date, the program has provided performances and workshops for over 4,500 students in Ocean County.

Another way the Grunin Center connects with young audiences is through the CAMP (Community Arts and Music Program) series, which welcomes youth from local camps and community organizations,

such as the YMCA, to the OCC campus to experience live performances intended just for them. These performances, sponsored by the Wintrode Foundation, are offered free of charge to campers, ensuring there are no barriers to participation.

By introducing young students to the arts at OCC, these kinds of programs help create a sense of belonging that can ease their path to becoming future college students.

"Kids grow comfortable with OCC because they come here for shows," Wood notes. "As they grow older, they're familiar with us, and they know that this is a place where they can belong, express themselves, and be inspired."

Wood, who joined Ocean County College in 2017, sees herself as a kind of matchmaker—pairing performers and programs with the right audiences, and ensuring those experiences are meaningful. Seeing an audience truly engaged in a performance is her greatest reward.

"Basically, what I do here is find a good show and then find ways to make it accessible," she says. "When you match the right performer with the right audience and they're really into it, for me, that is the most special thing."

PROGRAMS WITH PURPOSE

The Grunin Center provides hands-on experiences where students can meet and learn directly from visiting artists through educational workshops, Q&A sessions, and technique classes. Recently, students participated in a vocal technique workshop with Broadway's Rita Harvey, took dance classes with Ephrat Asherie Dance, and enjoyed a memorable visit from Nobuntu, an all-female a cappella group from Zimbabwe. Through a partnership with the New Jersey Council for the Humanities, Nobuntu visited classrooms and offered workshops during their fall 2024 residency, encouraging social activism through stories and song. Programs like these allow students to engage in cultural exchanges that reach far beyond the stage.



“ This is a place where they can belong, express themselves, and be inspired. ”

- Jaclyn Wood, assistant director of Education and Community Engagement,
The Jay and Linda Grunin Center for the Arts

ARTS | ENTERTAINMENT | EXPLORATION EXPERIENCE OCEAN COUNTY COLLEGE!

Concerts · Theater · Jazz · Dance · Planetarium · grunincenter.org



“The educational programs at the Grunin Center highlight our mission to celebrate culture and to inspire joy and creativity,” said Heidi M. Sheridan, the Grunin Center’s executive and artistic director. “We believe in the exceptional educational and health benefits derived from the performing arts.”

With audiences growing each year, Jaclyn is looking forward to expanding the Grunin Center’s youth and family programs with a continued focus on inclusive programming. She is especially proud of several recent performances adapted for neurodivergent audiences and day programs for adults with disabilities, made possible through partnerships with The Open Door of New Jersey and the LADACIN Network.

“I want everyone to feel comfortable here,” Wood says. “Every year we have new folks coming. Some of our guests are seeing live music or theater for the first time. It’s really inspiring.”

The impact of OCC’s educational programming extends far beyond the Grunin Center’s Main Stage. The Grunin Center serves as host for the regional tournament of Poetry Out Loud, where teens from Monmouth, Middlesex, and Ocean Counties vie for a spot in the state competition. Each March, the College hosts the annual New Jersey Teen Arts Festival, a juried competition that draws students from more than a dozen high schools to showcase their talents in theater, music, dance, visual arts, film, and creative writing. During the two-day event, the students have opportunities to participate in workshops and master classes and to further explore their

interest in the various arts. Each year, several festival participants are invited to join in the Ocean County Cultural and Heritage Commission’s annual SALUTE to Ocean County, where student artists are recognized alongside professionals in the community and can even receive scholarships to continue their education.

A PLACE TO BE INSPIRED

Still, Wood wishes more educators knew what the Grunin Center has to offer.

“It can be really hard to get kids out of the classroom,” she acknowledges, “but I wish more teachers and educators realized what we are able to offer.” She believes these performances provide something truly special for students—an opportunity for experiences that spark the imagination and open the mind to new possibilities.

Whether it’s a science-themed performance for third graders, a dance workshop for high school seniors, or a sensory-friendly magic show for adults, the Grunin Center’s commitment is clear: to inspire curiosity, celebrate diversity, and make the arts a part of every student’s journey.

Wood puts it simply: “The most rewarding part of my job is inspiring people,” she says. “When they come here and have a really neat experience that takes them out of their everyday life, hopefully it makes them realize what’s out there, and what’s possible in the world.”



Ocean County College Athletics continues to demonstrate that teamwork extends beyond the playing field. Student-athletes, coaches, and department staff regularly dedicate their time and talent to outreach events that highlight their commitment to making a difference in the community.

For example, OCC student-athletes and their coaches hosted a free all-skills clinic for local youth, offering hands-on instruction in basketball. This event not only gave participants the chance to learn new skills and build self-confidence, it also provided opportunities for meaningful connections between OCC student athletes and the broader community. The clinic also served as a collection site for donations benefiting Family Promise of Southern Ocean County, a nonprofit that supports families experiencing homelessness.

This past spring, OCC Softball hosted a First Pitch Day ahead of its doubleheader against rival Brookdale, welcoming families, OCC staff, and alumni for a day of fun. Highlights included a ceremonial first pitch by OCC President Pamela Monaco and an appearance by Vidar, the OCC Vikings' mascot. In another standout moment, the Athletics department partnered with OCC's on-campus Veterans and Military Resources Center (VMRC) to host a special basketball game honoring our veterans. That day, student veterans Hunter Mantz and Shinayo Bartholomew-Stewart acted as honorary team captains and Adam Sherman participated in the tip-off. During the game, donations were collected in support of the VMRC, which provides vital resources for veteran and military-affiliated students throughout the year.

The Athletics department also partnered with the OCC Foundation to support the OCC Viking 5K and Fun Run, a community activity that raises funds to support student scholarships and awards. Athletics staff and students volunteered to run the event, and student athletes lined the path to encourage the runners and keep them following the course.

"Our student-athletes and staff are always eager to give back," said Ilene Cohen, executive director of OCC Athletics. "These events are about more than sports, they're about building connections, showing gratitude, and being an active part of the community we serve."

Ilene added, "Much of the successful coordination of these events can be credited to Assistant Athletic Director Tricia Carroll, whose dedication to OCC students and connections with community partners helped make these events possible."

With every event and outreach effort, OCC Athletics reaffirms its commitment to promoting teamwork, leadership, and service, both on and off the field.

OCC Athletics Scores Big with

COMMUNITY SERVICE



“ These events are about more than sports; they’re about building connections, showing gratitude, and being an active part of the community we serve. ”

- Ilene Cohen, executive director of OCC Athletics





VOICE OF THE VIKINGS

Kevin Byrne Tells
the Stories of OCC Sports

story by Olivia Butera

Whether announcing from the sidelines or spotlighting student wins on social media, Kevin Byrne has been a dedicated and energetic presence at the heart of OCC Athletics since 2015. Starting out part-time with a shared role in Student Life and Athletics, Byrne quickly found his stride, and by 2016, his passion and commitment had carved out a full-time position within OCC's Athletic Department as the Coordinator of Sports Information and Athletics, a role he truly enjoys and takes great pride in.

His responsibilities range from writing stories and managing OCC Athletics' social media accounts to announcing games and filming content for later use. "I enjoy my job. I love the interaction with students," Byrne says. "We have the same group that goes through two years on our teams, more or less, so I love meeting them as freshmen and getting to see them in their sophomore year. I love commencement, even though it's bittersweet. It's nice to see them achieve that."

A lifelong sports fan, Byrne credits his father for introducing him to the world of athletics. "I played many sports growing up, with the support of my dad," he recalls. His earliest memories are tied to those moments. "Playing catch with my dad when I was younger and winning my championship in Little League—even in fourth grade, it was all a pivotal moment."

No two days are ever the same in his role. "A typical day depends on the season and whether or not we have an event," he explains. On game days, Byrne's schedule is especially jam-packed. "Game day means creating content to promote the game, posting graphics beforehand, setting up the event, and depending on the needs, I may announce. Then after the game, I post recaps and start prepping for the next day."

He especially enjoys managing the OCC Athletics website, because it allows him to dive deeper into stories. "I like the long-format writing," he says, reflecting on the satisfaction that comes from capturing the spirit of a game or the arc of a season. Byrne is tireless when it comes to spotlighting student-athletes and their accomplishments, and that student-centered focus



shapes everything he does. "The slightest achievement, I publicize on our social media. I'm always making sure the college at large is aware of it." Whether it's a personal milestone or a team victory, he ensures that OCC's broader community sees and celebrates it. "I definitely want to present the best possible picture of what they're doing."

What might surprise people most about his role? "The hours in Athletics," he says. "Depending on when events are happening, I could be getting post-game content on late evenings after an away game." While juggling the busy schedule, Byrne embraces the pace. "It's a heavy workload, but in order to be timely and do it justice, you need to be ready to work when the work is required."

Among all of his proud moments at OCC, a few clearly stand out—like the Women's Soccer team's three consecutive regional championships – but for Byrne, the pinnacle is always graduation day. "Watching them graduate, that might be my favorite thing. It's very meaningful to me—like whatever small part we played, we did it, and now they made it and are moving on."

Byrne's long-term goals are aligned with the college's mission to grow and to support student success. "Our goal is always to bring in more student-athletes and increase enrollment for the college," he explains. "We are forever trying to expand our reach and build our teams." His appreciation for OCC extends far beyond that, however. "I greatly enjoy working here. I love working with different departments on campus and people outside my silo... that's stimulating to me. It forces me to raise my level a bit and not be stagnant, and I love that. The more I get to branch out, the better."

From the bleachers to the press box, from freshman orientation to graduation day, Kevin Byrne is a champion for OCC's student-athletes and a storyteller committed to making their moments shine.

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH



MEET CAROLINE MCFARLAND

As Barnegat Bay Partnership's (BBP) new Stewardship Specialist, Caroline McFarland is thrilled to be making a difference in her community. With a background that bridges arts and science, she brings a unique perspective to her work.

"You know how you start out doing one thing, and as you learn and grow, you realize that your true passions lie in another direction? It's so funny how life brings you on a different path."

Passionate about communications and media, Caroline planned to work in entertainment, though her interest in the environment was also strong. After graduating from Drexel University, she began looking for ways to combine both interests, and enrolled in the master's program in Environment, Culture, and Society at the University of Edinburgh. "It was a great intersection of humanities with science," she said. "That was how I segued into the environmental field."

Her first experience working with BBP came during her first term as an AmeriCorps NJ Watershed Ambassador. "I always loved volunteering, and that looked like an amazing way to make a difference and get those environmental skills I needed," she said. "I was so excited to be selected.

AmeriCorps changed my life—it was one of the best experiences I've ever had." When a full-time position at BBP opened up, she jumped on it. "I am so glad to be back at BBP, and to have that full circle moment."

Today, she leads the Jersey-Friendly Yards program, helping residents make eco-conscious choices in their own backyards. With free resources, planning guides, and a yard certification program, the initiative gives people the tools to support environmental health at home. "It's about how people can help promote sustainable environmental health and make an impact," she said. "I've always been passionate about native plants, so I'm grateful to have this opportunity." She's also planning the 2025 Jersey-Friendly Yards Conference, which will bring local experts together to tackle emerging environmental concerns, including the threat of invasive species.

Whether she's doing field research, hosting events, or empowering homeowners to plant more sustainably, Caroline is grateful for each opportunity to put her passions to work. "I was excited about bringing all that experience and knowledge home, and now I get to make a difference right here. I'm so grateful."



photo: Barnegat Bay Partnership Internship Video

CREATIVE CONNECTIONS

Marketing Students Team Up with BBP

As associate director of outreach for the Barnegat Bay Partnership, Nina Sassano is always exploring new ways to engage college students in creative, cross-disciplinary work. So when she met Business Lecturer Laura Paolillo, advisor of OCC's Marketing Club, at a campus event last year, their conversation quickly sparked an idea: what if marketing students could help support the mission of the BBP while gaining valuable, real-world experience in the process?

"At first glance, our connection may have seemed unlikely: a business lecturer and an outreach director from an environmental organization," said Sassano. "But it quickly became clear that this was exactly the kind of collaboration we both had been looking for."

That idea has since grown into a dynamic and rewarding partnership, an opportunity to connect OCC and Kean Ocean students interested in media and design with a local organization in need of creative support. Students were tasked with learning about the Barnegat Bay Partnership's

mission and creating a promotional video using content that Sassano shared from the BBP's photo library, which included everything from community outreach to field research. Students also created marketing collateral, applied SEO techniques, and developed their Photoshop skills to enhance and edit the images.

The hands-on project allowed the students to add to their current portfolios while learning new skills that will help prepare them for the workforce, providing them with résumé-worthy experience as well as an opportunity to contribute to environmental education.

For the BBP, the collaboration with students led to new, meaningful content and fresh perspectives to help promote its mission. Sassano is already brainstorming new ways to involve the Marketing Club next semester.

"We are so grateful for the work of the students and look forward to strengthening our partnership and creating more opportunities in the future."



Visit: go.ocean.edu/BBPintern



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