

# OCEAN VIEWS

A Magazine for Ocean County College Alumni, Our College Family and the Community • Summer/Fall 2026 • Vol. XX: No. 2

BECOME

who you are  
meant to be

CHRISTINE  
DEPRE '18





## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Alumni, Students, Friends:

In a recent article about changes in higher education, the author touted the importance of community colleges, now more than ever, and referred to their role as “mobility machines.” Of all the types of higher education institutions in our country—small private colleges, large state universities, online universities, and elite private colleges—it is the community college that most profoundly changes lives and changes communities through education attainment. With the certificate and degree programs Ocean County College and other community colleges offer, we provide pathways to different lives through education and career advancement. Isn’t it fitting that our current issue of *Ocean Views* is about Success Stories that Started Here?

In its over 60-year history, Ocean County College has always lived its mission to serve students and communities through educational opportunity. As the higher education landscape has changed in response to student needs and directions, OCC has responded by adding more certificate programs, more workforce programs, more healthcare programs, and a clearer pathway to transfer and success. I am excited for you to learn about the amazing collaborative work of faculty, staff, and administrators in developing our new Pathways Program.

Certainly, one of the favorite parts of each edition of *Ocean Views* is the profiles of our talented students and successful alumni. We have so many amazing stories to share about the endeavors and dedication of our current students and about alumni whose lives changed by coming to OCC, where they began their path to exciting new adventures. You will be as proud as I am to think we had some small part in helping these inspirational people discover their confidence, their talents, and their trajectory. We are also excited to share a new feature that highlights the accomplishments of our current faculty and staff.



Please let us know what you think, and don’t hesitate to offer suggestions for future issues. This magazine is for and about you. Share with us and we will share with all!

Enjoy the reading, and don’t be a stranger. We’d love to welcome you “home” for a visit.

All the best,

Pamela Monaco, Ph.D.  
President, Ocean County College





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Summer-Fall 2026  
Vol. XX: No. 2

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

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## Student Veterans Visit JBJ Soul Kitchen

The Veteran and Military Resource Center (VMRC) partnered with JBJ Soul Kitchen to host an unforgettable, hands-on culinary experience for student veterans and their families this spring.

From dicing fresh strawberries to perfecting a creamy risotto, participants stepped

into the kitchen and learned how to create a full three-course meal alongside professional staff. The evening was filled with laughter, learning, and connection, bringing together veterans and family members of all ages in a warm, welcoming environment where they could share a unique experience with their guests.

With nearly 20 attendees, the event was a huge success. The excitement was clear,

as students were already asking about future cooking classes even before the night ended.

Events like this highlight the power of community and experiential learning, and the VMRC is incredibly grateful to the team at JBJ Soul Kitchen for their generosity, partnership, and commitment to creating meaningful opportunities for our student veterans. – *Christina Hernandez*

photos: Christina Hernandez



## Economic Study Highlights OCC's Impact

A recent economic impact study conducted by Lightcast found that Ocean County College generated \$355.8 million in annual economic impact during Fiscal Year 2023-2024 and supported 4,849 jobs throughout Ocean County.

According to the report, OCC alumni contribute \$291 million annually to the local economy through increased earnings and workforce participation across industries such as healthcare, education, business, public service, and technology.

The study also found that one out of every 69 jobs in Ocean County is connected to the college and its students.

"Ocean County College is more than an educational institution; it is a cornerstone of our community," said Ocean County Commissioner Jennifer Bacchione, liaison to the college. "Its impact can be seen in our workforce, our economy, our arts and culture community, and in the opportunities it creates for residents of all ages."

During Fiscal Year 2023-2024, OCC served more than 12,500 credit students and 755 non-credit students while employing 901 faculty and staff

members. The study found that every dollar invested in the college generates \$7.50 in economic and social benefits.

"OCC is deeply woven into the fabric of Ocean County," said OCC President Pamela Monaco. "Beyond the classroom, the college serves as a hub for cultural enrichment, workforce development, lifelong learning, and community engagement."

County and college leaders said their ongoing partnership will continue to support the region through education, workforce development, arts and culture, and community engagement.

## Happy Anniversary, Kean Ocean!

For 20 years, Kean Ocean has been helping students turn academic ambition into achievement through a unique partnership between Ocean County College and Kean University. The first such collaboration of its kind in New Jersey, Kean Ocean has become a model for this type of partnership between community colleges and four-year institutions.

Kean Ocean provides Ocean County College students with a convenient and affordable path to complete their bachelor's and graduate degrees while staying close to home and work. Students who take advantage of the partnership gain access to the same curriculum and degree programs they would receive at Kean University's main campus, attending classes taught by Kean faculty members in the state-of-the-art Gateway Building on OCC's campus in Toms River. Students also benefit from

smaller class sizes and lower overall cost compared to a large public university.

Since it was established in 2006, Kean Ocean has grown from 10 to over 40 undergraduate degree options, several graduate and certificate programs, as well as online options through Kean Online. Currently, there are over 1,000 students enrolled at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. For more information about Kean Ocean, visit [www.kean.edu/keanocean](http://www.kean.edu/keanocean).

photos: Lisa Elrick





# YOUR PATH TO SUCCESS STARTS HERE.



**Pathways**  
OCEAN COUNTY COLLEGE

## NEW 'PATHWAYS' to Student Success

Beginning in fall 2026, Ocean County College will launch the Pathways model, a redesigned academic framework that reimagines how students explore programs, select courses and connect their education for future success. Grounded in the nationally recognized Guided Pathways model, the initiative is designed to provide students with greater clarity, structure and support from their first semester through graduation.

Pathways represents a significant step in OCC's ongoing commitment to student success. Under the new framework, all degree and certificate programs are organized into nine areas of study, making it easier for students to explore academic interests, choose a direction, and stay on track toward completing their degree.

For many students, selecting a major and navigating course requirements can feel overwhelming. The Pathways model simplifies that process by providing a clear starting point and a structured roadmap that connects academic choices with transfer opportunities and career outcomes. "Ocean County College is committed to creating an educational experience that supports students every step of the way," said OCC President Pamela Monaco. "Pathways will help students explore their options while providing the structure and guidance they need to move forward with confidence."

Through this redesigned framework, students will begin their academic journey within one of nine areas of study: Business; Behavioral Science and Public Service; Science; Computer Science; Math and Pre-Engineering; Health Sciences; Humanities and Cultures; Media, Communication and Design; and Fine and Performing Arts. These broad academic

groupings allow students to start within a field that reflects their interests while maintaining flexibility as they refine their academic goals.

Within each area of study, students will begin with a common first term, a carefully designed first-semester experience that allows them to explore related disciplines while completing courses that apply across multiple majors. This approach ensures that exploration does not delay progress toward graduation.

As students advance in their studies, they will also have access to defined concentrations within degree programs that align with transfer institutions and high-demand career pathways. These concentrations provide focused academic direction while maintaining adaptability within each area of study.

Pathways also incorporates several best practices associated with the Guided Pathways model, including curriculum maps that outline clear course sequences, proactive advising structures that support students throughout their academic journey and ongoing data-informed improvements to strengthen outcomes.

While the model reorganizes academic offerings into a more streamlined framework, college leaders emphasize that the initiative represents much more than a structural change. "This is about improving the student experience," said James Marshall, executive director of Curriculum and Academic Assessment. "By reducing confusion, minimizing unnecessary credits and strengthening connections between education and career goals, Pathways helps students stay focused on achieving their academic and professional aspirations."

Visit the OCC website at [ocean.edu](http://ocean.edu) for additional information about the nine areas of study and how this new approach will support student experiences and future success.



**Science**



**Computer Science**



**Math and  
Pre-Engineering**



**Business**



**Behavioral Science  
and Public Service**



**Health Sciences**



**Humanities and  
Cultures**



**Media, Communication  
and Design**



**Fine and  
Performing Arts**





## 2026 FACULTY OF THE YEAR

Ocean County College has recognized outstanding achievement in teaching and service by naming its 2026 Faculty of the Year award recipients.



Dr. Mark William Westmoreland

Adjunct Professor Dom Corcuera



### Faculty of the Year

Dr. Mark William Westmoreland,  
College Lecturer II, Philosophy

Dr. Westmoreland, who joined OCC in 2020, was recognized for his interdisciplinary approach to teaching philosophy, ethics, and religion, emphasizing real-world connections and student engagement. Students praise his accessibility, dedication, and commitment to incorporating feedback into the classroom experience. In addition to his extensive scholarly work, Dr. Westmoreland is highly engaged on campus, mentoring Honors by Contract students, co-founding student initiatives including the Free School and The Great Debate, advising multiple student organizations, and serving on numerous college committees and leadership initiatives.



### Adjunct Faculty of the Year

Dom Corcuera,  
Adjunct Professor, Science

Professor Corcuera, adjunct professor at OCC since 2015, teaches introductory and basic chemistry with an innovative, student-centered approach. Currently pursuing a second master's degree focused on chemistry education, Professor Corcuera is dedicated to helping students see the real-world value of chemistry. Students praise his ability to build their confidence, reduce anxiety around science, and inspire curiosity and discovery. In addition to teaching, Professor Corcuera actively contributes to the College through professional development initiatives, pilot programs, and participation in campus meetings and Teaching and Learning Institutes.

Ocean County College Faculty of the Year Award winners are selected annually by committee from nominations submitted by students, faculty and staff. Congratulations to these extraordinary faculty members on this well-deserved recognition!



## OCC Presents at NJCCC Opportunity Summit

Several staff members from Ocean County College were selected to present at the New Jersey Council of County Colleges' third annual New Jersey Community College Opportunity Summit, held June 9-11, 2026 at the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino in Atlantic City. The representatives shared their expertise with colleagues from community colleges across the state in a three-day convening centered on "Opportunity in Action."

Dr. Alexa Beshara-Blauth, Assistant Vice President of Strategic Initiatives; Catherine Mancuso, Assistant Vice President of Academic Affairs; and James Marshall, Executive Director of Curriculum and Academic Assessment, presented "Pathways at Ocean," which highlighted the curriculum changes made over the last academic year and showcased the collaborative process used by the institution.

Joining them were Dr. Sheenah Hartigan, Assistant Vice President of Enrollment Services, and Dr. Jim Campbell, Director of Student Success and Retention, who co-presented a session titled "Early Alert: Because 'We'll See' is Not a Strategy." Their presentation explored the outcomes produced through the Advise early alert system, focused on the work by the student success coaches. They presented

on data from Fall 2025 that showed more than one half of enrolled OCC students had an Advise alert during the term.

The annual conference brings faculty, administrators, and staff from New Jersey's 18 community colleges together with state and national leaders to share best practices, discuss emerging challenges, and collaborate on initiatives that translate into real world outcomes for students.



## South Jersey Colleges Form Regional Alliance

Ocean County College has joined with Stockton University, Atlantic Cape Community College, Brookdale Community College, and Camden County College to create the South Jersey Higher Education Alliance, a transformative partnership designed to make transferring from community college to four-year and graduate degree programs more seamless and affordable.

The Alliance is designed to help students move more efficiently from associate degree programs to bachelor's and graduate degree opportunities through stronger coordination among participating institutions. The partnership reflects a shared commitment to reducing barriers that can delay graduation, increase student costs and create confusion during the transfer process.

"Today is not simply the signing of an agreement," said Stockton University President Joe Bertolino. "It is a commitment to build a more connected, student-centered higher education ecosystem for our region. This Alliance helps students start strong, transfer with confidence, complete degrees with fewer obstacles, and build lives and careers here in New Jersey."

The presidents of all five institutions signed the agreement, including Bertolino, Barbara Gaba from Atlantic Cape Community College, David Stout of Brookdale Community College, Lovell Pugh-Bassett at Camden County College and Pamela Monaco at Ocean County College.

"This alliance signals to the broader public the importance of removing barriers as we learn collectively from one another about how to make transfer easy and supportive," President Monaco said.

The Alliance will focus on creating clearer and more seamless pathways for students by expanding transfer agreements, developing dual admission opportunities, enhancing academic advising, improving reverse transfer practices and strengthening student support services related to financial aid, scholarships, counseling, internships and career preparation.

The initiative also represents a broader investment in the workforce and long-term economic vitality of southern and central New Jersey. Participating institutions aim to increase the number of students earning bachelor's, graduate and professional degrees while improving career placement and graduate school admission in high-demand fields including healthcare, STEM, business, education, public safety and the arts.





# COMMENCEMENT DAY



*A moment*



Ocean County College celebrated the class of 2026 on Thursday, May 21, conferring 1,472 associate degrees during two commencement ceremonies held at the RWJBarnabas Health Arena in Toms River.

"This is a bittersweet day for those of us who work at the College," said OCC President Pamela Monaco, addressing the students. "Sweet because we have a last chance to honor and celebrate





you as you reach the goal you set for yourself—to complete your academic program. It is bitter because we have to bid you farewell, after much too short a time getting to know you and working alongside you. It is truly an honor to look at each one of you and get to wish you well on the next adventure before you.”

Student speaker Sabrina Watts reminded the graduates that the lessons they learned at OCC extend far beyond those that counted toward their degree.

“At OCC, we did more than complete assignments or pass classes,” said Watts. “We learned how to

adapt and turned it into resilience. We learned how to support one another and form community. We learned how to continue despite setbacks, exhaustion, and uncertainty about our future. That is our grit shining through. And most importantly, we learned how to grow the beginnings of our fortitude that will follow us for a lifetime.”







## OCC'S SOCIAL WORK CLASS

### Smashing Expectations – Including Their Own

"I'm too old." "I already tried college once." "My English isn't good enough." "I don't know what I want to do."

Social Work Professor Anaïs Mompoint has heard every one of those doubts, and her response is always the same: "So what?"

The question is direct, without a trace of indifference. It's an invitation to think differently. Those two words don't erase the financial hardship, language barriers, past failures, or self-doubt; they simply challenge the idea that those things have to determine what happens next.

This past spring, twenty-five OCC students earned their Associate in Science degrees in Social Work, the program's largest graduating cohort to date. Each arrived at OCC by a different path. Some had tried college before, while others

had spent years in the workforce. Some were the first in their families to pursue higher education. Some were raising families, balancing multiple jobs, or simply wondering whether they belonged in a college classroom.

For Lucia McGuire-Pettersen, the path began with disappointment. Financial hardship forced her to leave a four-year university after just one semester. Later, she enrolled at OCC only to have the pandemic push everything online before she had a chance to settle in. When she returned again, she made a promise to herself. "This time, I need to be here."

Molly Bryceland also came to OCC after discovering that a traditional university wasn't the right fit. Rutgers University was overwhelming—and too expensive—for someone still trying to figure out where she belonged.

Josselyn Alvaro's challenges went far beyond choosing a college. After immigrating from Ecuador, she was learning English and adapting to an entirely new culture while living far from the family she hoped to support.

Kamari Jones had stepped away from college before finding his way to OCC. As a first-generation student, he had grown up believing that higher education wasn't for him. Even after enrolling, he questioned whether he belonged.

Ray O'Donnell came directly from high school, but wasn't ready to leave home or commit to a career path before discovering where their interests truly lay. Meanwhile, Kendra Zuniga worried that at 27, she would be the oldest person in the room.

Different lives. Different obstacles. Different reasons to wonder if college was right for them. Professor Mompoint's answer remained the same: **So what?**





# FINDING THEIR FOOTING

Pettersen remembers spending her first weeks on campus almost entirely alone. “I didn’t speak to anyone. I was isolated.”

That began to change as professors and peers encouraged her to get involved. When Mompoint first invited her to join the Social Work club, Pettersen couldn’t picture herself saying yes; she had never joined a club before. But before her time at OCC was up, she would be serving as the club’s vice president.

Bryceland’s turning point came from an unexpected phone call. Taking classes online, she assumed she was just another name on a screen, but Mompoint noticed the quality of her writing and the potential behind it and reached out personally, encouraging Bryceland to come to campus because she believed she had something to contribute. That invitation changed everything.

“Once I came in person, I got really involved,” Bryceland said. “Staying involved was motivational.”

Soon she was helping organize clothing drives for survivors of domestic violence, planning community outreach events, and mentoring other students entering the program.

Alvaro, who once wondered whether she could succeed while studying in her second language, graduated with membership in three honor societies, earned a place on the President’s List and received a leadership scholarship. More important than any recognition, she said, was what those accomplishments meant. “I proved to myself that I belong in higher education.”

Jones found his confidence through community. As a member—and eventually the president—of the Social Work club, he found peers who encouraged him and a mentor who convinced him his opinion mattered. “Professor Mompoint let me know that I had a voice,” he said. That confidence changed the way he saw himself. Today, he plans to earn not only a bachelor’s degree, but eventually a doctorate in social work. “I want that ‘doctor’ in front of my name.”

Zuniga initially worried that returning to school later than many of her classmates would make her feel out of place. Instead, she found connection—in her professors, her classmates, and in the club, where collaboration became one of her favorite parts of college. “It made me a better student to be more involved,” she said.

For O’Donnell, involvement meant service. Whether working in the Tutoring Center, participating in campus organizations or completing a practicum, each opportunity reinforced that they had chosen the right path. “It made me feel like I found my place and was making a real impact on my community.”

# THEIR OWN WORDS

For each of these students, somewhere along the way, “So what?” stopped being Professor Mompoint’s phrase. It became their own.

Bryceland no longer asks herself what could go wrong. “What if it works out?” she asks instead.

Alvaro hopes to become the kind of advocate she once needed as a newcomer to this country. Jones wants to be the social worker he wishes he’d had growing up. Zuniga discovered that the advocacy she had always been searching for had a name: social work.



O’Donnell found purpose by investing in the success of others.

Their aspirations reflect the spirit of this cohort, whose members plan to pursue careers serving children, families, immigrants, veterans, and underserved communities.

And Pettersen, who once wasn’t sure college was even possible, now looks toward the future with a very different outlook.

“Everything is an option now.”





“ My education was empowering.  
It was something I had that nobody could take away...”  
– Christine Depre, class of 2018



# Christine Depre, Ph.D.

At 35 years old, Christine Depre came to Ocean County College hoping to earn an associate degree. She discovered something far greater: the confidence to redefine her future. Today, she is a criminal justice professor, advocate and author whose newly published memoir tells the story of the journey that began with one courageous step onto the OCC campus.

Depre's early life was marked by family instability, addiction and trauma. She left school after eighth grade and, by age 16, was raising two young children. She eventually earned her GED, but with no family model for higher education and little support, her initial attempt at college was unsuccessful. At 18, she survived a home invasion and violent assault that left her feeling, in her words, "worthless, defined by her circumstances."

After years of healing and rebuilding her life, Depre married and was raising a growing family when she enrolled in a 40-hour training program to work on behalf of victims of sexual violence. The experience gave her a renewed sense of purpose. With military education benefits covering her tuition, she enrolled at Ocean County College with one goal: to earn an associate degree so she could become a victim advocate in the prosecutor's office, inspired by a person who had once helped her.

Walking into her first class was one of the hardest things she'd ever done. "I remember walking up the stairs and being scared to death," she recalls.

"I didn't know what to expect." The coursework felt like a foreign language, and she worried about feeling out of place among younger classmates. Struggling to catch up, she landed on academic probation early on, but help from her professors and support from OCC's Veterans Office kept her moving forward.

Making the honor roll for the first time changed everything. "It solidified that I could do this. I was really proud of myself," she says. That pride became fuel. Despite challenging coursework, long work shifts, and the demands of raising her family, she was determined to keep going.

"For so long, I was put down—as a victim of environment, of assault, of poverty," she says. "My education was empowering. It was something I had that nobody could take away. It made me want it even more. I wasn't going to be a victim of my past."

When Depre graduated in 2018, her children were there to celebrate with her. It was a full-circle moment she'll never forget.

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**"I broke so many  
generational curses.**

**OCC gave me that start."**

*– Christine Depre, class of 2018*

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After graduation, Depre's family relocated to Florida, where she continued her education at Florida State College at Jacksonville. "I liked going to class. It felt productive. It was building my self-esteem," she says. She went on to earn a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in Human Services before completing a doctorate in Criminal Justice in 2025. Her dissertation examined how first responders influence the experiences of sexual violence survivors—research she continues to use to advocate for more trauma-informed training and legislation for law enforcement.

Today, Dr. Depre serves as a program director and criminal justice professor at Keiser University. As a public speaker and advocate, she draws on both her professional expertise and personal experiences to champion trauma-informed training and policy reform to better serve survivors of violence. Most recently, she published her memoir, sharing the story of how she transformed unimaginable hardship into a life of purpose, advocacy, and hope.

Her advice for anyone who wonders if it's too late to pursue a dream is simple and hard-earned: "Drown out the noise. Don't ever let society decide the future for you. You hold the power."

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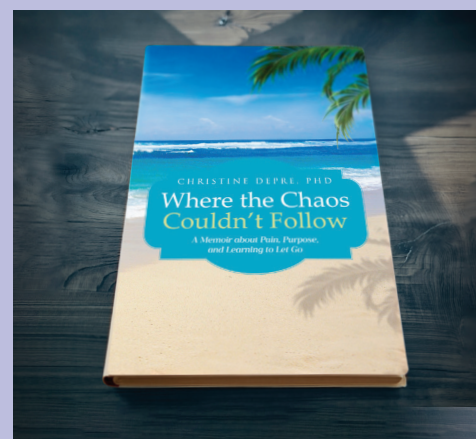
Christine Depre's inspirational memoir, "Where the Chaos Couldn't Follow: A Memoir about Pain, Purpose, and Learning to Let Go," is available now on Amazon.

## HEY, VIKINGS!

### We Want to Hear From You!

Help us keep our alumni community strong by updating your contact information and sharing your latest accomplishments for our Alumni on the Move section. Your update may be featured in an upcoming issue!

Visit the "Update Your Profile" link at [ocean.edu/alumni](https://ocean.edu/alumni), or send your updated address, phone number, email, and career news to [occalumni@ocean.edu](mailto:occalumni@ocean.edu). We look forward to celebrating your successes!





# A FULL-CIRCLE MISSION

Inside the Community Threads store in Brick, racks of donated clothing line the walls, while tables are stacked with hygiene products, cleaning supplies, and household necessities. Tiffany deSousa, founder of the CLCL Foundation, walks through the space, pointing out sections she and her volunteers assembled by hand — shelves of children's shoes, tables of toiletries' donated just that week. But this isn't your typical secondhand shop. Everything here is free.

For customers, it is much more than a donation center.

"I say to them, if you ever feel alone, this is your community telling you you're not," deSousa said. "There's dignity here. You come in, you get a shopping cart, and you get what you need."

In just over four months, Community Threads reached 1,000 shoppers; by the end of its fifth month, that number had grown to 1,151, despite relying almost entirely on word-of-mouth advertising. The store makes a point of serving everyone. Families, veterans, foster youth, unhoused individuals, and elderly residents on fixed incomes have all come through its doors seeking items many people take for granted: winter coats, laundry detergent, garbage bags, toothpaste, diapers, and clean bedding. Every item at Community Threads has been donated by members of the community, and all of it is completely free to those in need.

For deSousa, meeting that need is not charity. It is prevention.

The project grew out of what she describes as a "gadfly" moment: the closure of Ocean's Harbor House youth shelter in 2023, which left Ocean, Monmouth, and Atlantic counties without an emergency shelter for minors, and the closest resources located in Camden or Trenton.

"If you are under the age of 18, there is no place to go," deSousa said. "It was imperative that, with no resources to treat, we had to prevent."

That effort became the primary mission of CLCL Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting youth in need and strengthening families before crises escalate into abuse, neglect, or homelessness.

The mission is deeply personal. As a teenager in 2001, deSousa herself was a runaway youth who sought refuge at Harbor House after years of trauma and instability. A trusted teacher at Toms River High School South, Andrea Viggiano,

helped her get support and eventually became her guardian, offering advice that would later inspire the nonprofit's name: "Choose love. Celebrate life."

With that support, deSousa graduated from high school with honors and years later enrolled at Ocean County College, where she earned an associate degree in psychology in 2013. She began working part-time as a residential counselor at Harbor House while continuing her education at Stockton University, later moving into a full-time role at the agency while still completing her degree. She earned her B.A. in psychology with a minor in childhood studies from Stockton in 2019, and returned to Harbor House part-time once more before going on to earn a master's degree in child advocacy and policy from Montclair State University in 2024.

Her experiences shaped an approach that is thoughtful, evidence-based, and long-term. At its center is the belief that strengthening families and meeting basic needs can help prevent crises before they begin—and the community plays an essential role.

"If you suspect maltreatment, you always call and make a report. But if what you're seeing is no shoes or dirty clothes or things missing that the community could rally around and provide, then in my opinion, that's our obligation as a community. It saves CPS resources, it saves your tax dollars, and we're not investigating people unfairly or unnecessarily," she said.

That distinction matters because systems and institutions do not treat all families equally. Families living in poverty are more likely to be reported, investigated, and separated—not because they cause more harm, but because poverty itself is often mistaken for neglect.

"That scares them away from accepting other forms of help because they're afraid they're going to be labeled," deSousa said. "And it isolates them from community—it makes community something that's punishing, something that's judging. It's important that we remind people that that's not what community is."

In response, CLCL Foundation developed a three-phase program called Community Cares. The first phase was the Community Care Connection "warm line," a volunteer-run service that connects residents with nearby resources for food, shelter, utilities, healthcare, and other necessities while helping them understand eligibility requirements.

The second phase became Community Threads. deSousa credits volunteers, the store's volunteer Board of Directors — including co-founders Lisa Scala and Kelsey Wetmore, LPC, who remain on the board — local organizations including the Women's Club of Brick, and Mayor Lisa Crate for helping the store open quickly despite limited staffing and funding. And the community's response has been overwhelming.

"We had to get a storage unit," she said. "The bathroom is filled. The changing rooms are filled. People were coming with 20 boxes at a time."

The final planned phase is a door-to-door delivery service that would allow community members to anonymously request essential supplies for struggling families without triggering the fear or stigma often associated with formal intervention.

"It's about strengthening families. You're not blaming them. You're not judging them. You're giving them the resources and tools they need to be successful."

To that end, CLCL also hosts free monthly "Family Fun Nights," and peer-support groups are currently in development, along with an initiative to connect young adults aging out of foster care with stable housing. deSousa is also working with Dr. Jeff Waid of the University of Minnesota School of Social Work on research examining the effectiveness of the prevention-based model.

But her biggest goal remains restoring an emergency youth shelter to the region. Without one, she says, "lives are at stake every single night."

Despite the scale of the challenges, deSousa remains deeply optimistic about the power of community.

"People are quick to rise up to a problem faced by their neighbors, to advocate for them, to help them. We do it in so many ways," she said. "There's a reason we form communities. They are the answer to so many social illnesses. Humans don't ever exist in isolation; mentally, physically, we cannot survive alone. It's our combination that creates our success."

**"It's about strengthening families."**

— Tiffany deSousa  
founder of the CLCL Foundation



# HOW YOU CAN HELP

Your support makes a difference.  
Here's how you can get involved:

- Donate
- Volunteer
- Visit 270 Chambers Bridge Road, Unit 11, Brick

To learn more, visit [cclcfoundation.org](http://cclcfoundation.org),  
email [info@cclcfoundation.org](mailto:info@cclcfoundation.org)  
or call 848-227-1205.





# RICKY RICCARDI '01



photo credit: Rankin

When Ricky Riccardi accepted his first Grammy Award, there was one challenge he wasn't prepared for.

"The countdown starts, the music comes on, and suddenly they're telling you to wrap it up," he recalled with a laugh. "They played me off!"

For Riccardi, a Toms River native and a 2001 Ocean County College graduate, the moment felt surreal. After spending three years helping produce an extensive Louis Armstrong collection and writing the accompanying liner notes, he had earned music's highest honor in a category that had fascinated him for years.

"I never thought it would happen to me," he said. "The strange thing is, the category that always excited me was Best Album Notes."

Since that first win, Riccardi has earned a second Grammy and become one of the world's foremost authorities on Louis Armstrong. As Director of Research Collections at the Louis Armstrong House Museum in Queens, he has authored three acclaimed biographies, taught courses at Queens College and Jazz at Lincoln Center, lectured internationally, and produced award-winning archival recordings that have introduced Armstrong's legacy to new generations. His most recent book, *Stomp Off, Let's Go: The Early Years of Louis Armstrong*, earned praise from filmmaker Ken Burns and musician Jon Batiste and led to an appearance on NPR's *Fresh Air* with Terry Gross.

But ask him where it all began, and he doesn't hesitate. "OCC is where all this started for me."

Raised in Toms River and a graduate of Toms River High School East, Riccardi originally imagined a career as a sportswriter. During his two years at Ocean County College, he immersed himself in campus media projects: hosting an all-jazz radio show on WOCC, working on *Seascape* literary magazine, and serving as editor-in-chief of the *Viking News* student newspaper, where he created his own jazz column. His first piece, about Louis Armstrong's later years, earned him a collegiate journalism award.

"All right," he remembers thinking. "I'm on my way."

A research project gave him the opportunity to dive deeply into Armstrong's life and career, and the paper he wrote would become the foundation

for the books, lectures, and career that followed. After graduating from OCC, he continued his research at Rutgers University, where he earned a bachelor's degree in journalism and a master's degree in jazz history and research

"It prepared me for everything that would come," Riccardi said of his OCC experience. "The newspaper, being with that staff, made me who I was. I always fall back on what I learned there."

He credits the College's faculty as much as its opportunities.

"I got the most out of my education. The teachers were wonderful, and I'm still friends with a lot of them. They were the best teachers I ever had in college."

That support helped launch a career Riccardi once could hardly imagine. But after visiting the Louis Armstrong House archives for the first time, he knew he had found where he belonged. "I thought, 'If there's anywhere I need to end up, it needs to be here.'" When an opportunity to work there opened up in 2009, he accepted the position and began a demanding daily commute from Toms River to Queens. For more than a decade, he made the trip while balancing family life with his wife, Margaret, and their three daughters.

"It was a tradeoff," he said. "This is what I was put on earth to do."

Since the pandemic, technology has made that work more accessible than ever, allowing him to manage the museum's archive remotely while continuing to write, teach, and produce new projects centered on Armstrong's extraordinary legacy. Despite his remarkable accomplishments, Riccardi remains focused less on accolades than on the work itself.

"I have my dream job," he said. "As long as I'm in the Armstrong field, I'll be happy."

Riccardi returns to Ocean County College in June as part of the Blauvelt Speaker Series. For students and community members alike, his story is a reminder that extraordinary careers can begin with a single opportunity, a supportive mentor, or a research project that sparks a lifelong passion.

For Ricky Riccardi, all of those opportunities began at OCC.



# BLAUVELT SPEAKER SERIES

Since 2017, the Ocean County College Foundation's Blauvelt Speaker Series has welcomed distinguished guests whose achievements, experiences, and ideas encourage audiences to see the world from new perspectives.

Funded in part through the generosity of the late Bradford Thomas and Eleanor G. Blauvelt and the Wintrode Family Foundation, the series reflects the Foundation's commitment to enriching the intellectual life of the College and providing opportunities for thoughtful exploration outside the classroom.

"The Blauvelt Speaker Series reflects the very best of what colleges can offer beyond the classroom," said Casey Yetman, chair of the Ocean County College Foundation Board of Trustees. "Through the generosity of the Blauvelt Fund, the Wintrode Family Foundation, and our dedicated sponsors, we are able to bring nationally recognized voices to Ocean County and create opportunities for meaningful dialogue, inspiration, and lifelong learning for students and community members alike."

Under the leadership of OCC Foundation Executive Director Kenneth Malagiere, the Blauvelt Speaker Series has become a highlight of the College's cultural calendar, inviting audiences to engage with prominent leaders and storytellers in an intimate, accessible setting.

"Since its launch with presidential historian Jon Meacham, the Blauvelt Speaker Series has grown into one of

the Foundation's signature programs, connecting our students and community with some of the most influential thinkers, authors, artists, journalists, and leaders of our time," said Malagiere.

"The series embodies our commitment to expanding educational opportunities, encouraging intellectual curiosity, and making Ocean County College a destination for thoughtful conversation and cultural engagement."

Today, the Blauvelt Speaker Series continues to feature acclaimed speakers from a wide range of disciplines. Each presentation is designed to explore view-

points, spark discussion, and connect audiences with ideas that resonate far beyond the evening's program.

For Ocean County College students, the series offers a unique opportunity to hear directly from accomplished figures whose work has shaped public discourse, enriched the arts, or influenced contemporary culture. For the broader community, it provides access to conversations and experiences typically found at major universities and metropolitan cultural institutions.

The Blauvelt Speaker Series is made possible through the support of generous donors who share a vision of education as a lifelong pursuit. By bringing extraordinary talent to the campus, the Ocean County College Foundation continues to strengthen the College's role as a community center for intellectual and cultural engagement.

"The Blauvelt Speaker Series reflects the very best of what colleges can offer beyond the classroom."

- Casey Yetman, chair, Foundation Board of Trustees

## THE 2026-2027 BLAUVELT SPEAKER SERIES



Laurie Hernandez

September 22

Olympic gold and silver medalist, bestselling author, broadcaster, and advocate



Travis Mills

November 9

Retired U.S. Army Staff Sergeant, quadruple amputee and motivational speaker



Nolan Gasser

March 24

Architect of Pandora's Music Genome Project



Katty Kay

April 6

International journalist and author



Ricky Riccardi

June 8

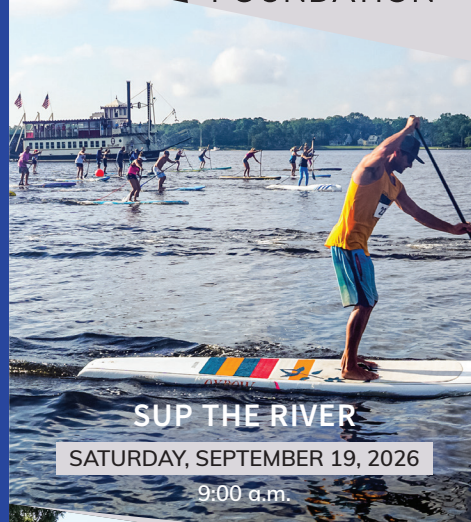
Two-time Grammy award-winning OCC alumnus and Louis Armstrong scholar

## FOUNDATION EVENTS SAVE THE DATE!

visit: [occfoundation.org](http://occfoundation.org)



PRESENTED BY  
**OCEAN**  
COUNTY COLLEGE  
FOUNDATION



### SUP THE RIVER

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2026

9:00 a.m.



### VIKING 5K and FUN RUN

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2026

9:00 a.m.



### 25<sup>th</sup> Annual GOLF Classic

### ANNUAL GOLF OUTING

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2026

11:00 a.m.



# A SEASON OF MUSIC, STORIES, and CELEBRATION



This fall, the Jay and Linda Grunin Center for the Arts invites audiences to discover a season filled with unforgettable performances. From August through December, the community venue will bring acclaimed musicians, theatrical productions, family favorites, and holiday traditions to the Ocean County College campus.

“I am delighted to invite everyone to our new season at the Jay and Linda Grunin Center for the Arts, where we celebrate artistic excellence and meaningful community connection,” said Heidi Sheridan, Executive and Artistic Director. “I look forward to sharing the joy, connection, and inspiration of the season with our community this fall.”

Music lovers will find something to enjoy in nearly every genre. The season opens with The Doo Wop Project, celebrating beloved classics alongside fresh takes on modern hits, and continues with performances by Grammy-winning guitarist John Pizzarelli, acclaimed jazz vocalist Veronica Swift, two-time Latin Grammy nominees Mariachi Herencia de México, and legendary singer-songwriter Judy Collins, who brings her Farewell Tour to the Grunin Center. Holiday favorites include the Westminster Concert Bell Choir, Tartan Terrors Celtic Christmas Spectacular, and Jukebox Saturday Night: Swingin’ Holiday Spectacular.

The Grunin Center also welcomes artists whose performances extend beyond entertainment. Samuel A. Simon’s *Dementia Man, An Existential Journey* offers a deeply personal account of living with Alzheimer’s disease, while historian and musician Bobby Horton brings the music of the American Revolution to life through

storytelling and song. Fans of nostalgia will enjoy *80s kids*, a lively multimedia concert celebrating the soundtrack of a generation, while illusionist David Caserta delivers an interactive evening of comedy and magic just in time for Halloween. Family favorites return with productions of *A Christmas Carol* and *The Nutcracker*, making the Grunin Center a destination for audiences of all ages.

Returning series continue to showcase exceptional talent throughout the season. The Afternoon Recital Series features internationally recognized pianists Ching-Yi Lin, Lyndon Ji, and Margarita Rovenskaya. Jazz on a Sunday Afternoon celebrates both contemporary artistry and jazz history with pianist Nat Adderley Jr. and a centennial tribute to Louis Armstrong’s legendary Hot Five recordings.

The season also celebrates the talents of Ocean County College’s own performing arts community. OCC Repertory Theatre Company presents Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* in October before returning in December with *Broadway for the Holidays*. The OCC Concert Band ushers in the season with *Magic of the Season*.

Whether you’re discovering a new artist, reconnecting with beloved holiday traditions, or sharing live performance with family and friends, the Grunin Center’s fall season offers countless opportunities to experience the power of the arts.

Tickets are available through the Grunin Center Box Office or online at [grunincenter.org](http://grunincenter.org).



“I am delighted to invite everyone to our new season at the Jay and Linda Grunin Center for the Arts, where we celebrate artistic excellence and meaningful community connection.”

- Heidi Sheridan, executive and artistic director



## SAVE THE DATE!



### 80s kids

SATURDAY,  
SEPTEMBER 19, 2026

7:00 p.m.



### VERONICA SWIFT

THURSDAY,  
OCTOBER 15, 2026

7:30 p.m.



### MARIACHI HERENCIA DE MÉXICO

TUESDAY,  
OCTOBER 27, 2026

7:00 p.m.



### JUDY COLLINS – SWEET JUDY BLUE EYES: FAREWELL

WEDNESDAY,  
DECEMBER 9, 2026

7:00 p.m.

## A NEW WAY to EXPERIENCE the GRUNIN CENTER

The Grunin Center has a new online home! The new [grunincenter.org](https://grunincenter.org) makes it easier than ever to explore performances, purchase tickets, and stay connected throughout the season.

Visitors can browse events by genre or series, learn about our community programs, and find everything they need to plan a visit, all in a new, mobile-friendly design. The website is also the best place to purchase tickets, ensuring that our patrons receive official pricing and avoid costly third-party reseller websites.

From the latest season announcements to membership information and special events, [grunincenter.org](https://grunincenter.org) is your one-stop shop for everything happening at the Jay and Linda Grunin Center for the Arts!

## BUY TICKETS with CONFIDENCE

The Grunin Center Box Office is your official source for all tickets at the Grunin Center for the Arts. Third-party reseller websites often appear in online search results and may offer legitimate tickets, but they frequently charge prices well above face value.

The safest way to purchase your tickets is to type [grunincenter.org](https://grunincenter.org) directly into your browser or use the links provided in official Grunin Center emails. Once you're on the site, look for the Grunin Center logo at the top of the page and the appropriate performance series logo on event pages.

Be cautious of websites that describe themselves as a "reseller" or "third-party seller," or that offer to "buy tickets on your behalf." These are signs that you're not purchasing directly from the Grunin Center. If you notice prices that are significantly higher than those listed in our season brochure or on our official website, you're likely viewing a reseller's listing.

Our goal is to keep ticket prices affordable for our community. If you have any questions before completing your purchase, contact the Grunin Center Box Office at 732-255-0500 (Tuesday–Friday, noon–5 p.m.) or email [grunincenter@ocean.edu](mailto:grunincenter@ocean.edu).





## BATOOL ABDELMALAK '26 *OCC Woman Athlete of the Year*

Ocean County College cross-country standout Batool Abdelmalak, class of 2026, was named OCC's Woman Athlete of the Year, an honor she received at a National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) reception celebrating National Girls and Women in Sports Day. The event, held at Middlesex College in Edison, marked both the 40th anniversary of National Girls and Women in Sports Day and the first-ever NJCAA Region 19 reception of its kind.

Abdelmalak, a Manchester Township resident, was selected to speak on behalf of all the award recipients at the ceremony, a role she called a life-changing honor.

During both of her seasons with OCC's women's cross-country team, Abdelmalak earned MVP honors and was named to the NJCAA All-Region 19 Team. She also maintained a 4.0 GPA throughout her time at OCC, earning membership in the Phi Theta Kappa honor society, and was the recipient of multiple student awards for academic and athletic excellence. Abdelmalak also worked as a student employee in OCC's enrollment office, volunteered at community events, and was active in multiple student clubs on campus — a balance of commitments that reflects the same discipline she brings to her sport.

Abdelmalak's accomplishments were celebrated in March at an OCC Board of Trustees meeting, where she shared reflections on her experience at the Region 19 reception. Notably, she pointed out that of the 24 regions across the country, Region 19 was the only one to host an event specifically to honor and support its women athletes.

In her remarks, Abdelmalak described what it meant to see 26 schools come together in one place in support of student-athletes and their families.

"It was really so inspiring to learn of the different backgrounds, interests, and goals amongst all of us, because it showed me that striving for success doesn't have a particular mold you have to shape yourself into. Instead, I got to see that everyone's story is unique and the paths we take help us to grow, not just individually, but as a whole."

Abdelmalak also reflected on remarks from guest speaker Tamika Dixon, who spoke about the ripple effect that women athletes create in their communities.

"My eyes were opened to the power of women in sports, and our guest speaker, Tamika Dixon, gave a beautiful speech about how women in sports influence one another. Sports sharpen us, shape us, and make us more dedicated. But what really stuck with me was the effects that we, as college women, have on sports," she said. "I think all of us who attended got to witness that the small steps we take today can have a lasting effect for generations onward."

Abdelmalak closed her remarks by thanking those who made the day possible, including her coach and the OCC athletic department, as well as the organizers behind the reception.

"I'm so thankful for receiving such an eye-opening opportunity where I learned that my participation goes so far beyond me and that the efforts I put in don't just benefit me, but my community as well. I'm also so grateful for my coach and the support of the athletic department here at OCC who helped me progress so much," she said. "It was truly a life-changing experience, and I was so happy I attended. Thank you."







photo: Lisa Elrick

## MEN'S VOLLEYBALL

### *Finishes Second in the Nation*

The Ocean County College men's volleyball team capped off an extraordinary season, finishing second in the country at the 2026 NJCAA Men's Volleyball National Championship in Glen Ellyn, Illinois. Led by first-year head coach Jose Rafael, the Vikings captured the Garden State Athletic Conference, Region 19 Championship, and NJCAA East District A Championship in rapid succession, defeating some of the toughest teams in their level before heading to nationals. OCC closed out the season with an outstanding 16-3 record.

The Vikings' success was fueled by outstanding individual performances throughout the year. Student athletes James Baxes, Daniel Brunke, and Abran Arrojo were all named to the 2026 All-Garden State Athletic Conference and All-Region 19 Teams at the close of the regular season, recognition that reflected the talent driving OCC's championship run. Congratulations to the entire men's volleyball program on a remarkable year!





## EDUCATION AND OUTREACH



## GET TO KNOW THE BARNEGAT BAY PARTNERSHIP

To those who live, work, or play along the Jersey Shore, the Barnegat Bay is more than just a scenic backdrop. It supports wildlife, recreation, tourism, and the region's quality of life. Protecting this vital ecosystem is the mission of the Barnegat Bay Partnership (BBP), a collaborative organization that brings together scientists, government agencies, educators, businesses, and community members to safeguard one of New Jersey's most valuable natural resources.

The Barnegat Bay Partnership is one of 28 National Estuary Programs in the United States, established under the Clean Water Act. Funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and administered by Ocean County College, the BBP and its many partners work across the watershed to restore, maintain, protect, and enhance the health of the Barnegat Bay estuary.

The BBP's work is focused on four priority areas: water quality, water supply, living resources, and land use. These efforts are interconnected, because what happens on land directly affects the health of the water and the fish, wildlife, and people who depend on it. The BBP collaborates with researchers and partner agencies to better understand the estuary through science and research, in order to inform restoration and management decisions.

Among its current initiatives are two new Watershed Protection and Restoration Plans, one focused on the Toms River subwatershed and another covering the Cedar Creek, Forked River, and Oyster Creek watershed complex. These plans identify water quality challenges within each watershed and recommend practical strategies for improving conditions. They are currently under review by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and other stakeholders.

The BBP also maintains a network of continuous water quality monitoring stations throughout Barnegat Bay. Since 2017, these stations have collected valuable information that supports statewide Clean Water Act assessments while providing scientists, educators, and residents with access to reliable environmental data. An online Environmental Monitoring Portal allows users to explore monitoring sites across the watershed, see what information is being collected, and access publicly available data.

Protecting wildlife is another essential part of the BBP's mission. By monitoring key aquatic species and tracking changes in their populations, researchers gain valuable insight into the overall health of the estuary. This information helps guide habitat restoration projects and provides local resource



managers with the scientific foundation needed to prioritize conservation efforts.

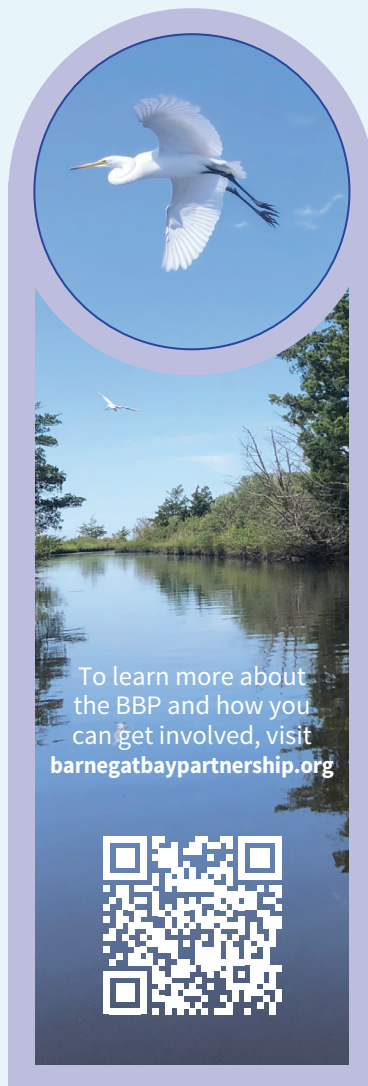
While scientific research drives much of the organization's work, public involvement is very important. Education and outreach are central to the BBP's mission, empowering residents and visitors to become active stewards of the bay through educational programs, volunteer opportunities, and community partnerships.

One of these opportunities is the Barnegat Bay Volunteer Master Naturalist Program, an environmental education and stewardship program that trains participants in the ecology, history, and conservation of the Barnegat Bay watershed. Since its launch in 2010, graduates have contributed thousands of volunteer hours by presenting educational programs, assisting with scientific research, maintaining nature trails, and supporting stewardship projects alongside partners including the Pinelands Commission, Island Beach State Park, and the New Jersey Forest Resource Education Center. Participants complete classroom instruction, hands-on field experiences, and volunteer service to earn and maintain certification. Continuing education opportunities are also available for program alumni. In 2025, the program welcomed 18 new participants.

Another popular volunteer effort is Paddle for the Edge, an annual shoreline survey that combines kayaking with citizen science. Volunteers use a smartphone app to document shoreline conditions at locations throughout the Barnegat Bay and Great Egg Harbor wetland systems. During the past decade, participants have paddled more than 230 miles of shoreline and collected data from more than 11,000 monitoring locations. This information helps scientists track shoreline changes and identify future restoration opportunities.

The BBP also encourages residents to make a difference at home through the Jersey-Friendly Yards program. Planning guides, a yard certification program, and other resources provide practical guidance for homeowners, schools, and municipalities interested in sustainable landscaping practices that help reduce pollution, conserve water, and create healthier habitats for wildlife.

Protecting Barnegat Bay requires the combined efforts of scientists, educators, government agencies, volunteers, and residents. Through research, education, and community engagement, the Barnegat Bay Partnership demonstrates how collaboration can help preserve one of New Jersey's most treasured natural resources for generations to come.





# Q&A with ELLIE DOWEK '26



The Jack Kent Cooke Foundation's Cooke Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship is one of the most competitive and prestigious awards available to community college students. We invited Ellie Dowek, president of OCC Student Government and 2026 scholarship semifinalist, to reflect on what this recognition means to her.

**Q: Tell us about the moment you found out you were selected as a semifinalist. What did it mean to you?**

One day in early March, I received an email from the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation. Since I had applied for the scholarship in January, I had almost forgotten about it, but seeing that name in my inbox immediately brought me back. I braced for impact and ripped the Band-Aid off, opening the email expecting disappointment. But to my surprise, the Foundation shared the exciting news that I had been selected as a semifinalist.

I was immediately elated and filled with immense gratitude. It felt like I had lived a lifetime since the new year, and to be recognized as an outstanding applicant by such a prestigious foundation reminded me of how proud I should be of how far I have come. I came to OCC with a GED and never even expected to earn a single A in any class. Fast forward to where I am now, and I have achieved far beyond what I ever thought possible. So, when I saw the Jack Kent Cooke email, a buzz of excitement passed through my body, immediately followed by gratitude for everyone who assisted and guided me through the journey.

**Q: What do you plan to study after graduating from OCC? How did this nomination impact your academic choices?**

I will be studying Political Science and History at Swarthmore College as a Thomas B. McCabe Scholar. Becoming a Jack Kent Cooke semifinalist boosted my applications and network, giving me greater access and stronger odds in highly competitive and deserving applicant pools. I truly believe that recognition helped me stand out, including in my selection for such an exclusive merit scholarship from Swarthmore.

**Q: How have your experiences at OCC prepared you to apply for this scholarship?**

Without Ocean County College, I would never have found myself on a Jack Kent Cooke Foundation press release as a semifinalist. Through the support and network I gained at OCC, I found the confidence and courage to apply for such a prestigious scholarship. The Student Success team and transfer advisors were with me every step of the way, ensuring I could become the best applicant version of myself possible. Additionally, through OCC, I was able to meet distinguished faculty and staff members with whom I built incredible bonds, and their letters of recommendation no doubt strengthened my application. A special thank you to Professor of History Stephen Downey and [OCC President] Dr. Monaco for their wonderful letters and steadfast encouragement.

**Q: What advice would you give to other students looking for an opportunity like this?**

To future Ocean Jack Kent Cooke applicants, I say: do not wait to begin. Take that first step in your application as soon as possible. Opportunities like this come only a few times in a lifetime. Start early, reach out to your network, think carefully about your essays, think about your letters of recommendation, and most importantly, think about your journey. It is challenging to figure out how to condense all of your amazing accomplishments and difficult challenges into only a few essays of a couple hundred words or less, so it is important to utilize the guidance of those around you to help you draft, revise, and finalize your essays. Do not be scared to do it. Take every opportunity that comes your way, and good luck!

### Cooke Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship Semifinalists



Five students from OCC were named semifinalists for the Cooke Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship this year:

**Laura Garzon Salinas, Sabrina Watts,  
Ellie Dowek, Anne Nyangaga and Anthony Paris.**

Visit our social media channels for more interviews with our semifinalists.



# RETIREMENTS

**SUSAN BOHS,**  
Program Manager/Instructor,  
Adult Education, Title II  
*Retired October 1, 2025*

**LORI CRIMMINS,**  
Executive Assistant to the  
Asst. V.P. of Enrollment Services,  
*Retired June 1, 2026*

**JOSEPH DEMALIK,**  
Adjunct Associate Professor,  
Social Sciences,  
*Retired June 1, 2026*

**SHIRLEY GRONE,**  
Assistant Professor of Mathematics,  
*Retired June 1, 2026*

**LEE KOBUS,**  
College Lecturer II, Humanities & Fine Arts,  
*Retired June 1, 2026*

**LORRAINE STEVENSON,**  
Administrative Assistant,  
*Retired June 1, 2026*

**MARYANN BIRDSALL,**  
Professor of Mathematics,  
*Retired July 1, 2026*

**WALTER LUKAS,**  
Craftworker I/General Mechanic,  
*Retired July 1, 2026*

**JACQUELINE D'AMORE,**  
Director,  
Talent & Organizational Development,  
*Retired July 1, 2026*

**LAIDLEY RAMDEEN,**  
Adjunct Associate Professor,  
Mathematics,  
*Retired July 1, 2026*

**DUANE GREMBOWICZ,**  
Associate Professor  
of Science,  
*Retired September 1, 2026*

# DEGREES and CERTIFICATIONS

Twenty-seven faculty members recently earned the Association of College and University Educators (ACUE) Effective Teaching Practices certification through OCC. The certification is the only nationally recognized teaching credential in higher education and is endorsed by the American Council on Education (ACE).

**DR. CHRISTOPHER BRITTAIN,**  
academic administrator for the Early College program, earned a Doctorate of Education from Fairleigh Dickinson University.

**DR. JAMES CAMPBELL,**  
director of Student Success and Retention, earned a Doctorate of Education degree from South College in Knoxville, Tennessee.

**CALLEIGH KEARNS,**  
Enrollment Services Advisor, Outreach, earned a Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership with a concentration in higher education from Rider University.

**KAYLA STAHL,**  
Director of Student Conduct, earned a Master of Arts in Higher Education Administration from Fairleigh Dickinson University.

# ACHIEVEMENTS and RECOGNITION

**MAUREEN CONLON,** Associate Director of Web Services and Adjunct Professor in the School of Business and Social Sciences, has been named the 2025–2026 Adjunct Excellence Award recipient for the Leon Hess School of Business at Monmouth University. This honor celebrates faculty members who demonstrate sustained excellence in teaching and a dedication to delivering a transformative, engaging educational experience. Ms. Conlon is recognized for her outstanding capacity to translate her real-world industry expertise and disciplinary knowledge into the classroom.

**LINCOLN SIMMONS,** College Lecturer II in Biology, gave a presentation at the Northeast Campus Sustainability Consortium (NECSC) Annual Summit at Rutgers University in New Brunswick. Mr. Simmons presented on the topic of “Stronger Together Through Community-Based Action.”

**PLANETARIUM DIRECTOR CARA MUSCIO** presented at the Middle Atlantic Planetarium Society conference. Her session focused on remote sensing activities and included a paper on the evaluation of informal education programs.

**DR. MADISON PESCHOCK,** College Lecturer II in English and Literature, presented “Teaching Thru the Archives and the Value of Using Primary Sources in the Undergraduate Classroom” at the Northeast Modern Language Association (NeMLA) conference in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Dr. Peschock has also authored an encyclopedia entry: “In Cold Blood, by Truman Capote,” for Children’s Literature Review (2026).

**DEBORAH J TARANTO,** Assistant Adjunct Professor of English, has written and published a memoir entitled *Nine Ways to Crazy: Surviving My Mom’s Dementia*, about her journey traversing the red-tape road of caregiving.

**DR. MARK WILLIAM WESTMORELAND,** College Lecturer II in Philosophy, presented “Socrates and Baldwin: Dispelling Delusion with Ethical Dialogue” at Villanova University’s 30th Anniversary Celebration of the doctoral program in Philosophy. Additionally, Dr. Westmoreland’s article “James Baldwin and Socrates: Teaching Spiritual Exercises” was accepted for the book “James Baldwin’s Question,” which is forthcoming from Temple University Press.



# MARY-CLAIRE CAPP '22



When Mary-Claire Capp decided to follow a lifelong dream to further her education, it was her mother's advice that pointed her toward Ocean County College. A simple call to the admissions office quickly got the ball rolling, and Mary-Claire went on to earn her Associate in Science degree from OCC and a bachelor's degree from Kean Ocean. Now a proud member of the OCC alumni family, she believes that the benefits of graduating from OCC will assist her throughout her life. Here, in her own words, Mary-Claire tells us her story.

"I was 50 years old when I attended my first class, and I had not had college experience since 1990. Due to family circumstances, I could not complete my degree, which had been a lifelong dream of mine. I began working in the admissions department at Katharine Gibbs School. I acquired marketing skills in this role that served me well for the next two decades. I later worked for Oracle Corporation in the Education Division and eventually became the Director of Admissions for Berkeley College. Throughout my career, I encouraged others to pursue their aspirations through higher education.

"One day, my mom asked me what I would do if I could do anything. I told her I would love to be a student again and further my education. The next day, I reached OCC, and the admissions department was incredibly supportive and efficient, helping me enroll in my first class! I was excited but nervous, venturing into something new.

"My experience with OCC was terrific. I was able to dive into classes that stimulated my interests. Additionally, I built on the experience I had gained at work, making my learning journey all the more dynamic and fulfilling. OCC was a custom fit and a springboard for future endeavors. OCC's relationship with Kean University made transitioning to a four-year institution effortless.

"I am excited to share that I have been accepted and am currently enrolled in graduate school at Rutgers University. Rutgers awarded

## ADVICE FOR FUTURE STUDENTS:

**Ocean County College is  
just a phone call away.  
They were there for me;  
they will be there for you, too!**

*– Mary-Claire Capp*

me a scholarship based on my academic achievements, which include a 3.99 GPA from Ocean's partnership with Kean University and the writing skills I developed during my studies at Ocean County College. This sense of exuberance reminds me of when I first enrolled at Ocean.

"To help alleviate any financial concerns, I have accepted a position as a substitute teacher as I embark on this exciting journey. I am also a caregiver for my mom, who courageously battles Parkinson's Disease. Additionally, I am taking summer courses at Harvard through their Professional and Lifelong Learning program. The sky is the limit!"



# REFLECTIONS



**The best way  
to predict the future  
is to invent it.**

*– Alan Kay, computer pioneer*

Every success story has a beginning. For many students, that starting point is a classroom, a conversation, an opportunity that inspires them to turn their ambition into achievement. Their stories remind us that success isn't defined by where you begin, but by having the courage to keep going. After all, the future isn't something that happens to us. It's something we create.

When we empower students to achieve success, there's no limit to where they can go.





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