



Mohawk Valley  
Community College

Alumni Newsletter

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"MVCC is great because it allows young students the chance to earn their degree close to home as they transition to adulthood. And my MVCC credits transferred smoothly!"  
Jesse Brookstein '01 | pages 4-5

# MVCC President's MESSAGE



Mohawk Valley Community College has a long tradition of transforming lives through learning. Whether they go on to further their education, jump right into a career, or start their own businesses, all MVCC graduates have two things in common: a strong foundation in their chosen field, and less student loan debt

than other college graduates. We are proud to be the community's college, and we are ready to reach new heights in educational excellence and help lead the Mohawk Valley into the future.

To help guide us, the MVCC Strategic Planning Council has been working tirelessly on the College's strategic plan, reaching out to nearly 900 community members and organizations for insight into emerging trends in the region. The plan's title, MVCC Catalyst 2020, captures the primary theme from that outreach: MVCC is a catalyst of progress as a key partner for nearly every important initiative in the community. The plan is aligned closely with Oneida County's Vision 2020 plan, MVCC's institutional improvement plan, and the Power of SUNY strategic plan — a scaffolding approach that links us with the region, state, and Middle States standards.

Catalyst 2020 has laid the groundwork to bolster our mission of providing accessible, high-quality educational opportunities to meet the diverse needs of our students, but also local industry and economic development. The plan outlines five strategic goals that will help us do just that.

Student success always is foremost in our minds, so increasing student completion is the first goal. We already have implemented some initiatives, such as early registration for continuing students, but now we have specific objectives that will help us inspire excellence and encourage confidence in our students, such as increasing fall-to-fall retention and graduation rates. We have scaled up our early alert interventions using Starfish software, which raises flags when a student is starting to struggle, and we have hired completion coaches who can intervene and get that student back on track. We have begun to offer wraparound services through the College Community Connection (C3) program, which connects students with

needed services, such as child care and transportation.

Strengthening the educational pipeline is our second strategic goal. We are working to develop greater outreach efforts to increase the number of K-12 career and educational opportunities, first by partnering with more high schools to encourage early placement testing, and by developing a comprehensive strategy for recruiting students from New York City. MVCC students are an important part of this pipeline, so we also must consider transfer opportunities for our graduates. The expansion of MVCC's transfer services into the University Partners and Transfer Center got the ball rolling, now we are adding more bachelor and graduate program partners to enroll even more students in these programs.

Advancing diversity and inclusiveness at MVCC is our third goal, and we plan to start with ourselves to make sure the individuals modeling the way at MVCC reflect the diversity of our student population. We will develop and implement a college-wide Diversity & Inclusiveness Plan and revise training for all who serve on job candidate screening committees. We also plan to better serve prospective adult students with new program offerings and support services with more evening classes in high-demand majors.

Our fourth goal is to expand applied learning for our students, increasing opportunities for the invaluable experience of internships and service learning. We will create a career transitions lab to ensure students have better access to these opportunities, and develop a plan to identify more sites for internships and service learning.

Our fifth goal is to continue to develop the workforce and community here in the Mohawk Valley. The region depends on us in many ways, whether it be professional development, retraining of dislocated workers, leisure learning, test prep, or swimming lessons. To help us offer the best programs, we will annually develop — or redevelop — our credit and noncredit offerings to meet community needs and will add new partnerships with educational impact.

It is a big responsibility to be so many things to so many people, but we at MVCC are up to the challenge. With Catalyst 2020 guiding us, we will be able to better anticipate the needs of the region and our students, and connect the region's employers with a knowledgeable, well-equipped workforce.

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## GIVE BACK TO THE MVCC FOUNDATION

Did you know there are creative ways to support Mohawk Valley Community College? Ways in which MVCC, you, and your loved ones all benefit at the same time?

Such giving techniques are called "planned gifts," because with thoughtful planning, you create win-win solutions for you and the College.

For example:

- **Name MVCC in your will:** Make us part of your family. A gift through your will or estate is the easiest gift you can make today.
- **Put your IRA to work for MVCC:** Avoid the potential double taxation on your retirement savings if you designate them to your heirs.
- **Support MVCC in creative ways:** Did you know there are ways to support MVCC that don't affect your current lifestyle or your family's security? You can support MVCC with gifts that don't impact the way you live by designating MVCC to receive estate assets in the future or by making immediate gifts to us of assets that are "out of sight and out of mind."

Learn more by visiting [mvcc.edu/give](http://mvcc.edu/give), or call Director of Institutional Advancement Frank DuRoss at 315.792.5555.

# MVCC INDUCTS EIGHT INTO HALL OF FAME

By Richard Haubert

On Thursday, Nov. 3, 2016, the MVCC Hall of Fame welcomed eight new members whose contributions have had a significant and lasting impact on the development, progress, and success of Mohawk Valley Community College by embracing the community, modeling the way, and inspiring confidence and excellence. The Hall of Fame, located on the second floor lobby of the Information Technology Building at MVCC's Utica Campus, features portage plates with an interactive touchscreen containing a brief biography for each member.

## The 2016 honorees are:



### Thomas A. Blanchfield

Emeritus Professor Thomas A. Blanchfield served as Criminal Justice Department Head at MVCC, where he not only taught the subject matter, but life lessons as well, with a sense of humor and discipline. He dedicated his life to justice, authoring and co-authoring several books during his career, including:

“A Killer Named Hatch: Massacre on Potato Hill.” He was vehemently opposed to Hatch’s release from prison, and was motivated to complete the book prior to his own passing on May 23, 2010, just three weeks prior to Hatch’s parole board hearing. A graduate of Command and General Staff College, he received his commission in the United States Army in 1951 as a second lieutenant. He was a platoon leader with the 32nd Infantry, 7th Division, and was the recipient of the Silver Star and Purple Heart. He also served with the 414th Civil Affairs Unit and was battalion commander for the 98th Infantry Division, based in Utica. He was discharged in 1983 with the rank of colonel.



### Toni Carbone

Toni Carbone began her 46 years at MVCC as a stenographer at the age of 19. Throughout her career, she worked in several offices and departments, including inmate education, the vice president of instruction’s office, and several academic offices, before taking the position of assistant to the

president and secretary to the Board of Trustees in 1998, where she served for 13 years. Carbone’s long-standing dedication to the mission, students, trustees, and her colleagues at MVCC were and continue to be exceptional. Her role as secretary to the Board of Trustees became the link between the College and its members as she facilitated all communication between the Board and MVCC’s administration flawlessly and developed a level of trust like no other. She received the MVCC Excellence Award in Classified Service in 1996 and emeritus status in 2011.



### Denise M. DiGiorgio

Denise M. DiGiorgio, who began her career at MVCC in 1978 as a temporary employee, retired in 2011 after serving as vice president for student services and dean of students for 13 years. DiGiorgio is the foundation of MVCC’s division of students services, as she was integral in the creation and advancement of programs for student success and completion, including Adult Learner Services, Disability Services, and several opportunity grant programs. DiGiorgio was also among the first to bring MVCC into the information age, leading the development of the College’s first website and online registration system.

Her leadership also was critical to the growth, development, and success of MVCC Athletics. DiGiorgio was the recipient of MVCC’s Excellence in Professional Service Award in 1987, and was honored in 2011 by YWCA’s Salute to Outstanding Women. She also served as an evaluator for the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.



### Salvatore (Sam) Drogo

Professor of Life Science Salvatore Drogo taught, advised, and guided thousands of students during his 36-year tenure at MVCC. Knowledgeable and approachable, “Mr. D” — as he was affectionately called by his students — set standards high, but also did everything possible to make sure his students could

reach them. To enrich his classes, he created and published original materials, innovated with technology, and sought ways to make challenging subject matters accessible. He had a central role in the establishment of the Anatomy and Physiology cadaver lab, the first and only such facility in a New York State community college. As a respected member of the faculty, Drogo served the College in countless ways, developing curriculum, participating in college-wide communities, and serving as leader of the MVCC Professional Association. In 1978-79 Drogo was awarded the MVCC Award for Excellence in Service. In 2009, he received the Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Teaching, and in 2011 was selected to receive the MVCC Heart of Hearts Award posthumously.



### Dr. Ronald Labuz

Dr. Ronald Labuz, professor of graphic design, served as the head of the Art Department at MVCC for 17 years. With a tenure spanning 35 years, his colleagues refer to him as a mentor and icon. As a dedicated employee of the College, he served on more than 100 committees, and was the chairperson of 45 of those committees. An expert in his

craft, he authored 15 books and more than 120 articles. Labuz received several awards during his career, including the Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Professional Services in 1989, MVCC’s Excellence in Professional Service in 1989, the Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Scholarship and Creative Activities in 2002, SUNY’s

Distinguished Faculty Award in 2005, MVCC's Heart of the Hawk Award, and the highest honor SUNY bestows on faculty, the State University of New York Board of Trustees Distinguished Teaching Professorship in 2015.



## Robert G. Lacell

Robert G. Lacell joined MVCC in 1973 and served as director of public information for 33 years. Lacell's ideas and creativity shaped all of MVCC's marketing themes and campaigns. His team compiled and produced all College internal and external publications, created commercial advertising, and worked closely with area news

media to generate positive coverage for the College's many programs, services, and special events. A highlight of Lacell's career was overseeing celebrations of the College's 40th and 50th anniversaries, including special advertising initiatives, recognition of local businesses hiring MVCC alumni, and a salute to the College on NBC's "Today Show." Lacell was also instrumental in creating MVCC's Hall of Fame. One of the most significant of Lacell's contributions was an extensive narrative and photographic history of MVCC, which he finished shortly before his retirement in 2006. Lacell was recognized many times by the Mohawk Valley Advertising Club, and was honored in 1992 with the SUNY Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Professional Service, and in 2006 as MVCC's Administrator Emeritus.



## Dr. Carmelita Lomeo-Smrtic

Dr. Carmelita Lomeo-Smrtic served as the education program coordinator and director of education. In addition to serving as a teacher, she acted as a consultant and presenter in her field. Throughout her career, she received multiple requests to present at conferences

throughout New York State, which brought MVCC to the forefront of Early Childhood Education innovations and placed the College at the top of the field. She was widely cited in professional journals and served in leadership roles in numerous local, state, and national professional organizations. Although accomplished and regarded in all areas on academia, Lomeo-Smrtic's greatest passion was for her students and teaching. Due to her commitment to her profession, Lomeo-Smrtic was awarded the MVCC Excellence in Teaching Award and the SUNY Chancellor's Award the following year. Her most prized recognition, however, was receiving the Vivian C. Kinney Lifelong Friends of Children Award in 2015.



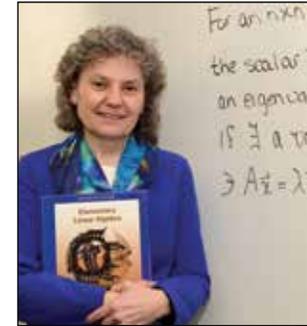
## Anthony J. Picente Jr.

Anthony J. Picente Jr. began his career in public service in the Oneida County Department of Social Services where he became acquainted first-hand with the power government has to solve problems for the people of the community. Picente has been a consistent champion of public-private development initiatives. Picente has been a longtime supporter of MVCC by

including funding in the county budget for major projects, such as the expansion of the Jorgensen Athletics/Events Center in 2011. He supports MVCC in its high-profile effort to join the national Achieving the Dream Network, and maintains a close relationship with the College by participating in various events, including the Celebration of Success. A visionary in tune to the ever-changing needs of the workforce, Picente was committed to providing a hangar at the Griffiss International Airport to MVCC to house its Aviation Training Center, preparing the local workforce for the up-and-coming Unmanned Aircraft industry. He was named an MVCC Alumnus of Merit in 2008.

# SUNYHONORS

## NORAYNE ROSERO '71, TOP TEACHING RANK



MVCC Mathematics Professor Norayne W. Rosero '71 was awarded the Distinguished Teaching Professorship designation, SUNY's highest rank for teaching. She is among 29 faculty members across the SUNY system to receive the honor for 2016, and one of two community college professors statewide to be honored for the year.

Rosero has been a leader in the classroom and in the college community throughout her 35 years at MVCC. She makes essential contributions as a teacher, as a colleague, and as an expert in assessment review through mentoring younger faculty on student learning methods, and the development of effective student learning outcomes. Along with carrying a full teaching load, Rosero has served on more than 70 college committees and worked tirelessly and successfully to rally her colleagues around academic program review, accreditation review, and self-study as opportunities to learn and improve. She frequently chairs major committees and self-study efforts at the College.

The Distinguished Teaching Professorship recognizes a tenured professor who has demonstrated consistently superior mastery of teaching, outstanding service to students, and commitment to their ongoing intellectual growth, scholarship and professional growth, and adherence to rigorous academic standards and requirements.

"Professor Norayne Rosero's high personal and professional standards exemplify what one would expect of a distinguished teaching professor. Her contributions on the campus, within the community, and on the state and national level represent an individual of not only great knowledge, but also genuine passion for the important and transformative effect of education on people's lives," says Randall J. VanWagoner, Ph.D., President of MVCC.

This is the second consecutive year MVCC has had a professor receive this honor, after Professor Ronald M. Labuz achieved the distinguished teaching professorship in 2015.



## ORTIZ '16 TURNS HARDSHIP INTO HOPE, GETS INTO COLUMBIA

By Jennifer Fanelli

Rafael Ortiz '16 had his sights set on an Ivy League university at a young age.

He was naturally gifted in school, and was on his way to becoming the first in his family to graduate from high school in the United States. He always was fascinated with Washington and policy-making, but didn't know how to turn that into a career, he says. "I just knew that I wanted to make a difference."

By the time he was a junior at Proctor High School in Utica, N.Y., Ortiz was taking part in STEM-related seminars, and was involved in local government through the Utica Youth Common Council, which he helped to create with other Proctor students.

"It was a fascinating opportunity because it made me aware

of my local council and the power that people have to affect local policies in their communities," he says.

Ortiz, like his classmates, was starting to look at colleges he would be applying to in the fall. "I didn't know where I wanted to go to college, but in the back of my mind I was hoping for an Ivy League school," he says. "Culturally, I knew going to a prestigious school would be the pinnacle of success that signified I had made it."

Ortiz was pleased with his achievements. He was excelling in school, making college plans, and was working with other students in the community. But health difficulties arose in the summer before his senior year. Ortiz was diagnosed with renal failure, forcing him to withdraw from the Youth Common Council and reconsider his college plans.

"It all hit me at once, but I got over the health aspect of it emotionally relatively quickly," he says. Ortiz says he missed some school, but he tried not to talk about it. He distracted himself with learning, determined to excel, and slowly, that desire to learn evolved from a coping mechanism to a way of life.

"For me, it was easier to live in an environment where I could escape the reality of my condition," he says. "My true existentialist crisis, so to say, surrounded what would happen next. I knew I wouldn't be able to apply to away schools, and that left me with local choices."

Ortiz' hard work paid off, and he graduated in the top 10 percent of his class at Proctor High School, making him eligible for the full-tuition MVCC Presidential Scholarship.

"Of course this helped to make my decision easier," he says. "I felt this might be my only chance at continuing my education."

Ortiz had life-saving surgery in the summer after his high school graduation. While many of his classmates were packing and preparing to leave home for colleges far away, he was recovering and preparing for his freshman year at MVCC.

"Although at first it seemed like a compromise, I realized that MVCC deserves long overdue acknowledgement for helping students achieve their goals," he says. "MVCC offers many opportunities for students who try their hardest. And the small class setting helped me develop a personal connection with all of my professors."

Ortiz found the campus community welcoming and full of leadership opportunities.

As a delegate of the MVCC Judiciary Committee, Ortiz helped to establish guidelines for Student Congress by helping to rewrite the procedural manual. As president of the Latino Student Union, he organized several fundraisers and managed field trips and a budget of \$10,000. As the student delegate to the International Initiatives Committee, Ortiz contributed to the policy that helped include the Palestinian flag in MVCC's international flag display in Payne Hall. He also was a member of the Collegiate Science and Technology Entry Program (CSTEP), the MVCC Honors Program, and Phi Theta Kappa, the honor society for two-year colleges.

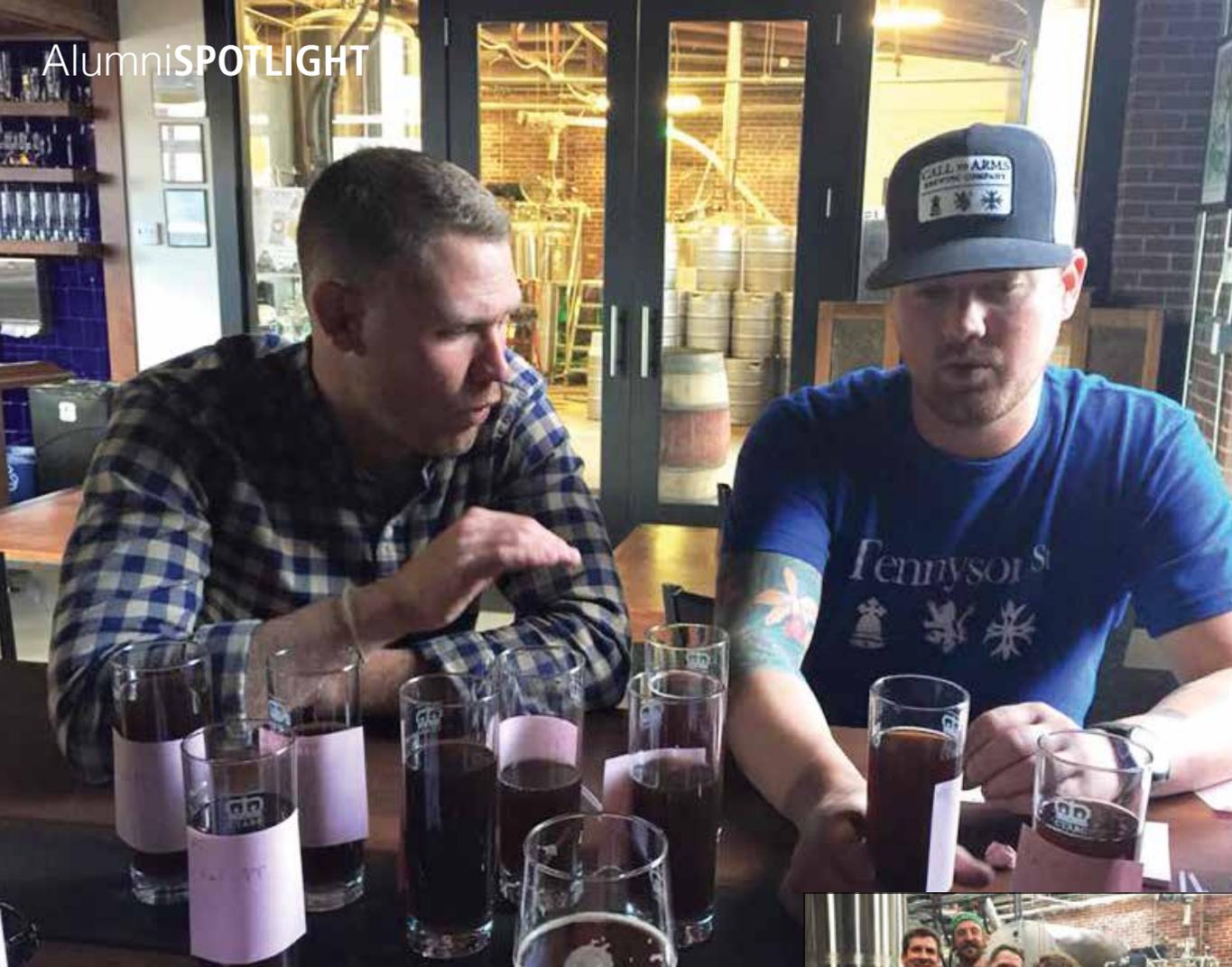
"This all helped to distinguish me from other students who were applying to four-year schools," he says. "I could point to tangible differences I made in or through each club or program."

Ortiz credits MVCC's University Partners and Transfer Center with helping him navigate the transfer process.

"They work with the other offices on campus to make sure everything you need from the school gets to where it needs to go," he says. "I had the privilege of working with Susan (Johnston), whose work with the Registrar helped me incredibly. She also helped me go through many different schools and walked me through the general application process. I applied to about 10 different schools, and she was there every step of the way."

Ortiz graduated from MVCC in May 2016 with a degree in Cybersecurity. He is now studying American Politics, International Relations, and Economics at Columbia University, an Ivy League school in New York City. Already, he is making plans for graduate school while interviewing with finance and policy firms in New York and Washington, D.C.

"My associate degree in Cybersecurity puts me in a unique position to understand the technical aspects of programs and policies in both the corporate world and public sector," Ortiz says. "For example, I'm an intern in the finance department for Columbia, and I was able to create a simple batch file to remove underscores and extra spaces on PDF files, making it easier for everyone in the department to do their jobs. I wouldn't have been able to do stuff like this if it wasn't for what I learned at MVCC."



Brookstein describes Call to Arms as “a modern craft brewery steeped in Old-World tradition.” Located on Tennyson Street in the historic Berkeley neighborhood of Denver, the brewery has large bay doors that flood the taproom with Colorado sunshine, which plays well off the rich, dark wood stain of the bar and shine of the modern equipment.

“We really wanted to bring in the aesthetic of the rustic, European-inspired bars and taverns of the Northeast while still incorporating the great aspects of Colorado living,” Brookstein says.

Call to Arms has 15 taps to showcase its wide range of brews. Core beers include an Oatmeal Porter, Intercontinental Saison, Citra IPA, Vienna Lager, and Brookstein’s personal favorite, the Clintonian Pale Ale, which is named after his hometown. They also produce barrel-aged wild and sour beers, as well as other styles of beer “that have been lost in time,” like a Dutch Kuit and a German-inspired Zoiglbier.

Brookstein got his start in the industry right here in the Mohawk Valley — as a delivery driver at McCraith Beverages, a beer distributor in New York Mills. He started the job after earning his associate degree in Graphic Design from MVCC in 2001.

“My time at McCraith introduced me to a number of craft beers I hadn’t heard of, and it’s where I fell in love with Saranac and their portfolio of unique, delicious beers,” he says. The job also showed him that it was possible to make a decent living in the beer industry, and got him thinking about switching gears.

So what does a guy with an associate degree in graphic design considering a career in the craft beer industry do? Transfer that degree to a four-year school and expand his skills.

“MVCC was an excellent bridge between high school and SUNY Oswego,” Brookstein says. “I loved my time there — I loved the small campus lifestyle. I lived in the dorms, spent hours in the library and design studios, and played club soccer. MVCC is great because it allows young students the chance to earn their degree close to home as they transition into adulthood. And my MVCC credits transferred smoothly into the Communications program at Oswego.”



## JESSE BROOKSTEIN '01 BREWS SUCCESS IN COLORADO

By Jennifer Fanelli

*Jesse Brookstein '01 knows beer.*

He grew up in Clinton, N.Y., just a short drive from Utica’s F.X. Matt Brewery, one of the oldest family-owned breweries in the country and the brewers of Utica Club, the first beer licensed for sale after Prohibition. Now he is one of three owners of Call to Arms Brewing Co. — a craft brewery he started with two partners in Colorado.

While at Oswego, Brookstein did a marketing internship at Brewery Ommegang in Cooperstown, which he says was “a life-changing experience.” The internship introduced him to the business and marketing side of the craft brewery industry.

After earning his bachelor’s degree from SUNY Oswego in 2006, Brookstein decided to head west to Colorado and give it a go in one of the nation’s most dynamic craft beer communities.

**“I did everything I could to soak in the craft beer scene,” he says. “I applied to every craft beer gig I could find.”**

His first job was a delivery driver at Twisted Pine Brewing Company in Boulder, which gave him the opportunity to become acquainted with the beers and liquor stores of his new state. Seven months later, he landed his “dream job” at Avery Brewing Company, also in Boulder.

“It was my time at Avery that really immersed me in the craft beer industry,” Brookstein says. “I started off cleaning kegs and scrubbing floors, which sounds rather mundane, but it’s a lot of fun once you gain an understanding of why these tasks are so important. My co-workers and bosses were actually teaching me the finer details of what it takes to produce world-class beer in a fast-paced environment — skills I was able to pass on to employees once I was promoted to packaging manager.”

Brookstein’s business partners, Chris Bell and Jon Cross, also worked at Avery, and the trio decided to take a shot at opening their own brewery. The industry had changed substantially in the six-and-a-half years Brookstein was at Avery; the business had grown from 12 employees to 175.

“My business partners and I saw this massive explosion in smaller craft breweries and realized our combined experience might give us the skill sets needed to open one of our own,” Brookstein says.

Bell, controller and sales director, used his degree in economics to guide the group down the right path in terms of investors and budgeting. Call to Arms head brewer Jon Cross has a degree in biology. As marketing and events coordinator, Brookstein works to bring exposure to the brewery through events, including the Rumpus, a bi-monthly party at the brewery; community-focused events; and Denver’s Great American Beer Festival.



“So all in all, we’re all using our degrees to some extent,” he says, “We’re just doing so by means of a factory making carbonated malt soda.”

**In its first year, Call to Arms Brewing Company received accolades in Denver and beyond.** It was named the 2015 Best New Brewery in Colorado by the Denver Post, named to the Class of 2015 Best New Breweries by the Beer Advocate, listed among the 10 Must-Try Craft Breweries by 5280 Magazine, and one of 25 Breweries On the Rise in 2016 by Draft Magazine.

Not bad for Year One. So what’s next?

Call to Arms understands that it can be hard to get a foothold in the world of can, bottle, and keg distribution.

“So instead of selling our beer in cases of cans or bottles, we’re focusing on keeping our beer on tap at local draft accounts with the goal of opening multiple Call to Arms locations throughout the state,” Brookstein says. “Colorado is friendly to breweries in that we can self-distribute our beers to all of our accounts rather than pay a distributor to carry the load for us.”

The partners just finished an expansion of their current taproom, and already have started discussing the logistics of a second location.

Brookstein says he tries to make it back to the Mohawk Valley every chance he gets, usually every other year. This past July, he and his girlfriend were in Utica to participate in the 2016 Boilermaker.

“I usually drive directly from the Syracuse airport to Café Del Buono, and from there I pick up some Saranacs or Utica Clubs and drive to meet friends,” he says. “F.X. Matt really brings so much life to Utica, as do the new beer-focused establishments like the Green Onion and Nail Creek. It’s great to see.”

Does that mean Call to Arms could someday open a location in Utica?

**“As a proud Central New Yorker, I would absolutely love to open a brewery back home — particularly in Utica,” Brookstein says. “But for now I am tied to Denver.”**

# ROSIC '03 LEADS LEARNING COMMONS FOCUS ON STUDENT SUCCESS

By Paige Phillips

Ibrahim Rosic '03, director of the Mandia Family Learning Commons at MVCC, understands the importance of a supportive, welcoming environment to help students succeed.

In 1999, he left his native country of Bosnia, where he was an electrical engineer with a master's degree from the University of Zagreb in Croatia, and arrived in Utica, N.Y., facing a language barrier that kept him from finding a job.

"I didn't know the language," he says. "A friend of mine talked to me about going to MVCC to learn English. I kept saying I am too old to go to college, but one night he brought me here and we walked the hallways, and I realized that there were many adult students."

Rosic enrolled in MVCC's English as a Second Language program. During this time, he sought help with his studies in the Learning Center, and one of the peer tutors there helped him on the path to completing his associate degree.

"Her encouragement and help made me realize that I could overcome anything and be successful," he says. "It was then that I realized I wanted to give back to other students as she did for me."

Rosic's strong math background made him a great help to other students, so he was hired as a peer tutor, and then started working full-time while he completed his bachelor's and master's degrees in electrical engineering at SUNYIT.

"My background is in engineering, but helping people is what I want to do," he says. "Students really appreciate tutors and the help they give them. Sometimes just being there is all they need."

In January 2013, Rosic was named director of the MVCC Learning Center. Almost immediately, the center



transformed into a bustling, welcoming, fun environment that students sought out to help them succeed.

In 2015, MVCC was awarded one of 41 Title III grants from The U.S. Department of Education's Strengthening Institutions Program. With this grant, MVCC was able to transform the Learning Center into the Learning Commons — a renovated space dedicated exclusively to promoting student success. The Learning Commons, located on the first floor of the Information Technology Building in Room 129, officially opened for the Fall 2016 semester. (On the Rome Campus, the Learning Commons can be found in Room 102B of the Plumley Complex.)

"Location and accessibility are very important," Rosic says. "We wanted this to be an inviting and comfortable space — a safe space for students to say 'I don't know.' Often, they may be afraid to say they don't understand something while they are in the classroom. Here, they know we won't judge them."

Equipped with math, writing, and computer labs, as well as peer and professional tutors, the Learning Commons is a one-stop shop for any questions or problems students encounter while trying to achieve academic prosperity. Students can schedule appointments with tutors on the Learning Commons section of the MVCC website for a variety of academic areas, including Mathematics, Science, English, Computer Operation and Programming, Social Sciences, and Humanities, as well as ESL.

As one of the first community colleges in New York State to be a member of the Achieving the Dream coalition, MVCC recently hired three Completion Coaches to help students stay on track of their studies, using Starfish Software to flag potential barriers to completion.

In addition to academic assistance, the Commons is there for students dealing with personal struggles, including finding child care, getting a bus pass, and financial situations.

"We offer wraparound services to remove any barriers that could potentially stop them from graduating," Rosic says.

Rosic says the space also serves as a gathering place. "They use it for socializing, as well, which is great. It's so good for students to get connected to each other and the campus — they come here, have lunch together, work together, study together, help each other through issues, then they are motivated to come back, and to stay in college."

While the new space is beautiful and state-of-the-art, Rosic says that it's the people who make the Learning Commons such a great place to be.

"I have a really nice team," he says. "We are like a little family here, and everyone is phenomenal. Everyone cares so much about the students and each other, and that is important for students to see."



**The MVCC Engineering Science Class of 1966 as identified in the 1965 Ivy Yearbook: First row: J. Brockway, V. Maine, R. Shannon, R. Bush, B. Roberts, K. Allen, F. Hartigan. Second row: W. Newhaus, D. Wilcox, J. Lynch, G. Grossman, C. McWilliams, F. O'Brian, V. Scarafino, D. Timm, G. Race. "The only men without a suit and tie are Vince and I," Don Wilcox says.**

## FOR MVCC CLASS OF '66, ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE LED TO GREAT OPPORTUNITY

When Don Wilcox graduated from MVCC in 1966, he and a few of his classmates packed up and headed west — to Dearborn, Mich., where they would spend the summer working at Ford Motor Co. before transferring into engineering programs at the University of Michigan at Dearborn (UMD).

At that time, UMD was a junior- and senior-level university with a focus on co-op education, and it needed transfer students, so representatives of the university and Ford both came calling at MVCC as part of a recruiting tour across New York State.

Wilcox remembers the excitement of being offered such an opportunity. Of the 32 students in his graduating class, only five took them up on it: Wilcox, Vince Scarafino, Beverly Roberts, Bob Bush, and Janet Brockway.

"Ford would give us jobs for the summer if we came," he says. "We were good friends in engineering science, and we took them up on the offer. It was a phenomenal opportunity for us."

MVCC prepared them well for their endeavor. The five were at the top of their class, and found that their professors — especially Neil Gall (Physics) and Ivan Dospoly (Math) — had prepared them well for the academics at Michigan and their co-op work at Ford. The only thing they might not have been prepared for was the city of Dearborn itself.

"I had never seen that many people in my whole life," Wilcox says. "But being in Detroit's metropolitan area was exciting. We were there when the Detroit Tigers won the World Series, and we all got to go to Michigan football games."

All five MVCC grads graduated from Dearborn in 1969. "Each one of us stayed in our area of study before branching out," Wilcox says. "We all did very well."

Wilcox was the only one to leave the industry. While in Dearborn, he got involved with a prayer movement. He moved to Albany for graduate school and earned his master's degree in math, but decided to get involved with in-house ministry, and spent much of it in Cortland as the campus pastor.

When Wilcox returned to Dearborn for a visit, his classmates still were working at Ford.

"MVCC was very good to Ford Motor Co.," he says.

Wilcox says for a time, he lost contact with Brockway and Roberts, but kept in touch with Scarafino, who had Bush's

contact information. They reunited at the MVCC Class of 1966 50th reunion last year, and they were able to catch up.

During his 30 years at Ford, Scarafino helped to advance the state of the computer sciences arena, which was in its early stages. His early work in the Engineering Computer Science Department brought new methods of computer user interface and state-of-the-art relational database technology to help engineers manage their work. In later years he helped to enable the prediction of vehicle crash characteristics and the latest turbocharged engine designs through the use of supercomputers. "Vince probably helped to create the super computer at Ford," Wilcox says. "He grew up on Bleecker Street, but he could have gone anywhere."

During her time at Ford Motor Co., Roberts was among several guest speakers at the Michigan Technological University's Women in Engineering Programs, encouraging high school girls to consider math and science careers. She enjoyed a varied career in the auto, nuclear, oil shale, and petro chemical industries in engineering and management positions. She was engineering and construction project manager at BP Amoco when she retired to pursue her passion for horses, art, and sailing.

After five years at Ford in the Engine Division as a senior design engineer, Bush moved to Idaho and worked for Bettis Atomic Power Laboratory for 30 years. He managed a group of engineers who provided technical support and direction at an experimental test reactor. He also started a Youth Soccer Organization in Idaho Falls in 1976. In retirement, he has spent many hours on the soccer field as a coach and referee.

Brockway spent 34 years at Ford. She spent three of those years in Germany managing a casting group working on a new engine and automatic transmissions. When she returned to Dearborn, she became manager of Powertrain Prototype Build overseeing most of the prototype engines and transmissions the company tested for development in the U.S. and Europe. In retirement, she has concentrated on her golf game and watercolor painting.

"It has now been 50 years since we graduated from MVCC," Wilcox says. "I am happy to say that in the last two years I have been able to see my four classmates face-to-face — three of them after 40 years. I am proud of the quality of their careers, and I am deeply thankful for what MVCC gave to us — a solid foundation for our careers and for our lives."

## MESSENGER BIRDS DELIVER DREAM COME TRUE FOR ROBERTS '04

By Jennifer Fanelli

For Michelle Roberts '04, realizing one's full potential is the first step in achieving a dream.

"Never let someone tell you what you can and can't do. Live to your full potential — it's what we're made for," says the branding strategist and entrepreneur. "If I had listened to people telling me I couldn't do it, I wouldn't be here today."

"Here" is certainly an exciting place to be. Roberts, an award-winning designer and marketing expert, has built her own successful branding and design agency, Novus — Be Known, Inc., based in Rochester, N.Y., and this past summer, one of her handcrafted creations — the Raku Messenger Bird — was picked up by Hallmark Cards, Inc., to be sold in select stores around the country.

Roberts' Messenger Birds are gifts created from clay. Each bird is unique, with its own special markings, and each has a hole through the middle to hold a handwritten note for the recipient.

"It's all about human connection," she says. "I believe that every day, the best gift we can strive for is an authentic human connection, and these birds are at the core of that."

Roberts came up with the concept at her apartment almost six years ago, while she played with clay at her kitchen table.

"I made a bird, but I wasn't happy with the way it came out," she says. "So it morphed into different shapes and structures. I played with different glazes, and I thought, this is cool, but what is the function ... what are they going to do for people? Then I thought, 'What's better than receiving a personal, handwritten note inside a handmade object?'"

And the Messenger Birds were born. They were featured in many print and online publications, and eventually caught



the attention of Hallmark. That is what really gave them wings.

One of Roberts' biggest fans is her 92-year-old grandmother, who had worked with Hallmark products for much of her life.

"When I got the call, it was a dream come true," Roberts says. "They told me I was going to have to pull it all together, make the birds, find the packaging ... it was a great opportunity with a lot of preparation. It was stressful, but very rewarding."

"She always wanted to have her own idea in Hallmark," Roberts says. "I was so ecstatic when I was able to tell her I did it. Then she said, 'I have some other ideas I would like you to take to Hallmark for me.'"

Roberts says she initially wanted to be an engineer, but she lacked a strong math background. Her mother suggested she try Graphic Design at MVCC. The College was close to home, affordable, and had a reputable program in graphic design.

"After my first class, I fell in love," she says. "MVCC really taught me so much. I was able to really use what I learned. The program was intense, and the teachers had high expectations. It definitely prepared me for transferring to Oswego, but also my career — setting those high standards of what design is, and the work ethic behind it is very important. I loved the challenge. It was an amazing program."

After graduating with a BFA in graphic design from SUNY Oswego in 2006, Roberts moved to Rochester to work for a giftware company, where she created high-end giftware and unique packaging design. She spent some time in Utica working for Mele & Co. as an art director, product designer, and illustrator. After a few years, she returned to Rochester to work for an advertising agency before an experience working with a branding company gave her insight into a new dream.

"I fell in love with branding," she says. "I found that this was what I was meant to do."

So Roberts left the agency and began anew. She hired a business coach to help with the business side of things, how to package herself, and how to make money. In January 2013, she launched Novus — Be Known Inc., a company that helps create meaningful and strategic brand design and marketing for entrepreneurs and large privately owned companies.

"Our goal is to communicate messages that change perceptions, connect with our clients' true value and vision, and impact the world in a positive light," Roberts says. "Fostering relationships is at the heart of everything we do."

As president and brand strategist at Novus, Roberts wears many hats, including account manager, art director, and sales. Her handpicked team of creative professionals helps to support her clients' needs. And it's working: During the third year, Roberts says, Novus saw six figures in sales for 2015. And her work has been widely recognized: Among her achievements are Best in Show and First Place Design Award for the MVCC Alumni Show in 2015, American Graphic Design Award in September, and the Rochester Women's Network Up & Coming Businesswomen's Award, also in September, which she says is her proudest achievement so far.

"It was the best," she says. "My family came, my partners, my clients ... I felt so supported."

Roberts isn't showing any signs of slowing down. She has found a great mentor who is helping her find new nesting spots for the Messenger Birds.

**"We really want to get the birds out there and share more stories," she says. "It all comes back to realizing your own potential — that you can do anything."**



# MVCC CLASS NOTES

## Alumni updates from the April 2016 Turning Stone event:

### 1940s

**Peter Nicolucci '49:** Served in the Air Force for three years, then spent 35 years as a salesman. He retired in 1990.

### 1950s

**Thomas Ager '52:** Entered the service after graduation and spent 18 months in Okinawa, Japan. He married in 1955, and has four children, nine grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren. He worked in Syracuse, N.Y., for 30 years and has traveled 13 states in the Northeast, and then it's been golf, golf golf!

### 1970s

**John Hayden '70:** Graduated from Utica College in 1973 with a degree in Business Administration. Worked at Griffiss Air Force Base for 22 years, retiring in 1988. He has traveled to Europe several times and to Spain to visit his wife's family. He also has visited Ireland, England, Holland, Italy, and Portugal.

**Peter Franz '78:** Earned a bachelor's degree in Accounting from RIT, and has been a certified public accountant since 1983, and an investment advisor since 2008.

**Rick Rohrer '78:** Has worked for Ceco Concrete Construction for 38 years. Married Dorsey Kuchler Rohrer and has four children.

**Eileen Spellman '79:** Went on to SUNYIT and graduated in 1984. Worked at General Electric and retired.

### 1980s

**Carol Pumilio '82:** Worked as a respiratory therapist for about seven years, then went back to school to be a teacher. She has been teaching for 18 years.

**Connie Sheppard Giordano '83:** Married the love of her life and has two children and two step-children. She is now working at Frankfort-Schuyler Central School.

**Randy Johnson '86:** Graduated from MVCC's Criminal Justice program, then went on to complete the Respiratory Care program. He continues to work in Respiratory Care at the Mohawk Valley Health System.

### 1990s

**Grace Adragna Cappelli '90:** Earned her bachelor's degree at the University of Maryland, graduating summa cum laude with a 4.0 average. She spent some time traveling overseas with her military husband. Upon returning to the area, she went into the Human Resources field, where she has worked for 13 years.

**Dr. James Davis '91:** Earned a bachelor's degree in Psychology from SUNY Albany in 1993, then his master's degree and certificate of advanced studies in Counseling from SUNY Albany in 1996. He received

his Ed.D. in Education Leadership from Sage Graduate School in 2014. He is currently a staff therapist at the Samaritan Counseling Center in Utica, N.Y.

**Stephen Sheldon '99:** Worked at SBU/Partners Trust Bank from 2004-07, then DFAS in Rome from 2008-present. Earned a bachelor's degree in Economics from Florida Atlantic University.

### 2000s

**Chris DeWolfe '08:** Graduated from Morrisville State and is now working at MVCC in Rome.

**Caitlin Stanton '09:** Works as a residence counselor for The Arc. Also got engaged.

**Mason McNichol '12:** Earned a bachelor's degree in Biology from Utica College, and is now working on a master's degree in Adolescent Education at Utica College.

**Brenda Capron '13:** Graduated from SUNYIT in 2015 with a bachelor's degree in Communication and Information Design. Has been working at Seifert Graphics in Oriskany as a technical design engineer since July 2015.

**Robert Santello '14:** Enrolled at Utica College and works for a software company in Syracuse.

**Valentine Spells '14:** Works full-time at Metlife as an insurance agent in property and casualty.

**Kelly Woodcock '14:** Passed the NYS NCLEX in July 2014 and is currently working as a registered nurse at Women's Health Associates affiliated with Oneida Healthcare.

**Christina Ferrucci '15:** Working as an X-ray technician at Rome Memorial Hospital. "Thank you MVCC for preparing me for my career. Your awesome Anatomy and Physiology program really was a great jumpstart into the healthcare field and the new radiologic technology program."

## SEND US YOUR NEWS!

MVCC alumni, we want to hear from you!

Submit your Class Notes for future issues to Marie Kohl, coordinator of Alumni Relations, at [mkohl@mvcc.edu](mailto:mkohl@mvcc.edu) with "Class Notes" in the subject line. Please include your name, graduation year, and your major, as well as some information about what you've been up to lately.

Also remember to keep your contact information up-to-date so that we can stay connected.

And we're social! Make sure to "like" Mohawk Valley Community College at [facebook.com/WeAreMVCC](https://www.facebook.com/WeAreMVCC), and follow us on Twitter and Instagram at [@MVCC\\_UticaRome](https://www.instagram.com/@MVCC_UticaRome). Stay in touch with the Alumni Association by joining the MVCC Alumni Association group on Facebook!

## ALUMNI ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



The past year has been great, serving as president of the MVCC Alumni Association — a wonderful group of alumni volunteers who truly value their MVCC experience and help to promote the College in the community. And 2017 is looking like it, too, will be an exciting time for all of us at MVCC.

One important role of the Alumni Association is making connections. Members of the association attend MVCC's Open House to talk with prospective and current students about their MVCC experience and their consequent careers. We often take part in career panels where current MVCC students can learn about what other MVCC graduates have done with their degrees. We love to be able to connect current students with alumni for career guidance and possible internships or employment. MVCC's Office of Career Services has started using career services management software called Purple Briefcase, which will make it easier to create a strong network linking MVCC students with alumni, internships, and employers. You can learn more about this and other great support offered by MVCC's Career Services Office at [www.mvcc.edu/careers](http://www.mvcc.edu/careers).

I'd like to encourage all MVCC alumni to visit the newly renovated Rome Campus of the College. The John D. Plumley Complex has undergone extensive construction, which has expanded the space by 48,000 square feet. Make sure to see the new library, featuring group study rooms and a conference room, a computer lab, and even a fireplace. The computer lab is shared with the Learning Commons, which provides tutoring services and support for students. And don't miss the changes to the Hospitality program area, which has given the Culinary Arts program gorgeous new kitchens and a dining room for MVCC students to show off their culinary skills, which also can be used for conference space. A bookstore and cafe also have been added.

Also, I would like to once more recognize the MVCC Alumnus of Merit for 2016, Roberto G. "Rob" Angelicola '82, vice president of Office Interiors in Rome, N.Y. Angelicola was born in Rome and graduated from Rome Free Academy. After graduating from MVCC with an associate degree in retail business management, he transferred to SUNYIT, where he earned a bachelor's degree in business and public management. In 1995, he co-founded roi, which specializes in office furniture, space planning, design, installation, and business best practices. Angelicola is actively engaged with MVCC as a supporter and volunteer, most recently co-chairing the College's Rome major gifts campaign to fully furnish the newly renovated Rome Campus. He is a longtime member of the MVCC Foundation Board of Directors, and we appreciate all that he does for MVCC, its alumni, and students.

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## ROME CAMPUS RENOVATIONS NEAR COMPLETION

For the past year, MVCC's Rome Campus has been on a steady track for the completion of its \$29.5 million construction project. The objective of these various renovations is to provide modern education to help shape Central New York's next generation of engineers, technicians, and scientists in an effort to keep future business local.

"Rome is the geographic center of Oneida County so the campus provides critical access to the region and the campus proximity to Griffiss Business and Technology Park amplifies MVCC's role as a catalyst for workforce development in the area," said MVCC President Randall J. VanWagoner.

The addition of a north and south wing on the existing John D. Plumley Science and Technology Complex is expected to boost enrollment. The north wing of the Plumley Complex will house the newly merged learning center and library called the Learning Commons. The south wing will be dedicated to Rome's hospitality programs such as Culinary Arts and Hotel Technology. Classrooms in the center building of the Complex will contain the best surgical technology and biology labs the area has to offer.

Other improvements to the Rome Campus include upgrading parking and business entrances, full bathroom renovations, replacing ceilings and lighting fixtures in existing classrooms, masonry cleaning, and installing modern equipment.

Students will benefit immensely from these updates. All 1,500 plus who attend the Rome Campus annually will now be under one roof. A new area will be provided for students to congregate and the addition of a new café and bookstore will persuade them to stay on campus between classes.

The MVCC Alumni Association will be hosting a campus tour for alumni, followed by refreshments. For more information, contact Marie Kohl at [mkohl@mvcc.edu](mailto:mkohl@mvcc.edu).

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Visit us online at [mvcc.edu/alumni](http://mvcc.edu/alumni) or join the group "MVCC Alumni Association" on Facebook.

Questions about Mohawk Valley Community College, its services, and its programs should be directed to the MVCC Office of Alumni Relations at 315.792.5340.

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