

## MVCC Bios with Pictures PEAKS 2017-18

### Morris Pearson



Greetings, I am **Morris Pearson**, Ed. S., M.A. Currently I serve as the MVCC Chief Conduct Officer and the Founder/Director of the New Directions Program which assist "Returning Citizens" from both County and State Prisons to acclimate to the Higher Education/Academic environment. I have been a part of our intuitional team since 2004, over fourteen years of my professional and personal life has been positively impacted by the first Community College in New York State. Over the years, I worked in a part-time position in counseling, then in the Career Services Office, the Executive Assistant to the Vice President for Student Affairs, and my current role. As an Alum of MVCC is a great privilege and honor to serve students each day to foster student success both in an outside of the classroom. Our Departmental moto is "assisting in transforming lives, one person at a time..." Education has been key to

my transformation having earned my A.A.S. degree from MVCC, B.S. from SUNY IT, my M.A. and Educational Specialist degrees from Liberty University. I am finalizing the steps to earn my Doctorate of Education this Fall from Liberty University.

As a Community Change agent, born and raised in Utica, I am privileged to serve on multiple Not for Profit Board of Directors within our County, as well as Local and National Faith based Organizations as part of the Senior Leadership team. I am good spirited, faith oriented, fitness centered, lover of people and desire the best out of life. As a first generation college graduate, higher education has changed my life and afforded me the opportunity to build on the foundation my parents established for me and my siblings.

Life is full of ebbs and flows, as I advance into the next phase of my life I look forward to the PEAKS experience to help me harness my dreams in Life!

### Marie Miknavich



Hi All! My name is **Marie Miknavich**, and I am the Director of Institutional Research and Analysis at Mohawk Valley Community College. I tend to think of my job as "data pirate" – my goal is always to extract as much value as possible from all of the data we collect. Arggggh matey, here comes some data now!

I have about 10 years of experience working with education data. My other ports-of-call include working as the IR Director for Herkimer County Community College and as the Data Analyst for grades 3-8 testing data at the Mohawk Regional Information Center in Verona NY. In 2013, I side-stepped to a position as Academic Assessment Director at Utica College, which gave me an opportunity to understand and appreciate the challenges that faculty face in the era of assessment.

When not at work, I like to spend time with family and friends (both furry 4-legged and mostly non-furry 2-legged), reading books (all kinds) and working in my perennial garden. I love movies, theatre, and museums and I also enjoy knitting when the weather turns cold! Other

hobbies I've pursued in the past include learning how to ride horses and how to play guitar, both of which I did badly, but enjoyed immensely, and both taught much that can be applied to other areas of life.

I'm looking forward to meeting all of you and being part of the PEAKS program!

### **Kristen Skobla**



Hey there! My name is **Kristen Skobla** and I am the Director of Community and Workforce Development in the Center for Corporate and Community Education at Mohawk Valley Community College (MVCC), a position I have held since July 2016. Prior to this role, I served as the Coordinator of Workforce Development. Before joining MVCC, I worked as the Marketing and Communications Manager at the Stanley Center for the Arts, as well as serving as Marketing Coordinator for the Workforce Development Board. Needless to say, assisting people with overcoming barriers to training and employment opportunities holds a special place in my heart. It's rewarding work to be an integral piece in helping someone enhance their skills and create a career pathway leading to self-sufficiency. I'm currently pursuing a Master's Degree in Adult Learning, with a focus on Veteran's Programming. The importance of lifelong learning is at the core of my belief system, for myself as well as others.

I enjoy working in continuing education because I believe that we put the community in community college. We have something for everyone. Whether it's leisure learning, professional development, corporate training or college for kids and teens. We provide opportunities to learn new and exciting things at any age!

On my off time, I happily spend my time with my husband of nearly 11 years, Michael, and our two beloved boxers, Tiko and Kovy. Most often, you'll find us enjoying the outdoors with family and friends.

I look forward to collaborating with my fellow PEAKsters on this leadership adventure!

### **Mike Pede**



Greetings! I am **Mike Pede**, Director of Financial Aid at MVCC. I have been with MVCC for the past 2 ½ year, but have been within Financial Aid for over 30 years. Through my professional experience, I have worked at private, public and proprietary institutions. I have administered financial assistance to students from the two year level all the way up to the graduate/professional level. I have also held positions in Admissions, the Registrar's Office, and Student Services, but I enjoy financial aid the most because you can see the students behind the numbers. For me, Financial Aid allows us the opportunity to use our intra personal skills and our analytical skills to provide many of our student's access to a higher education. Besides the birth of my four children, one of my proudest moments was when I was asked to sit on a national committee regarding the Reauthorization of Federal Student Assistance. It was a 24 month appointment where the

committee presented a white paper addressing the concerns of student financial assistance to the U.S. House of Representatives.

Besides spending time in the office, I enjoy spending time with my family; hiking, camping, and just having an excuse to get together. I am truly excited to be a part of the PEAKS program and to meet everyone!!!

### **Mark Saxe**



Hello my name is **Mark Saxe** and I am the Supervisor of Building Services, at Mohawk Valley Community College. I started working here at MVCC in 2011 as a Building Maintenance Helper and quickly became a second shift Crew Leader. I accepted my current position in 2015 and supervise a team of 23 Building Maintenance Helpers and 5 Building Maintenance Workers (Crew Leaders) over two shifts. Not only are we responsible for keeping the buildings shining we are also in charge of the set up and break down of campus events, snow removal , office moves and a variety of special projects and programs such as The ARC's school to work program .

In my younger years I was the lead singer in a local rock band and while I still enjoy playing and writing music, I now perform around the backyard fire instead of on stage. I have been married to my beautiful wife Robin for 17 years and we have an amazing 13 year son Dakota. As a family we love fishing, camping, and spending quality time together. I am looking forward to the PEAKS experience and am grateful for this opportunity.

### **Belinda Alvarado**



Hello, my name is **Belinda Alvarado**. I am an Assistant Professor of English as a Second Language and the ESL Program Coordinator. I came to MVCC in 2011 from the University of Findlay in Findlay, Ohio. Teaching English as Second Language has allowed me to work with immigrant, refugee, and international students from all over world who bring incredible cultures, values, and stories to the classroom.

Outside of work, I enjoy spending time with my family and traveling. Despite my love of travel, I am a true homebody and I make my way back to Ohio as frequently as possible. While in Utica, I enjoy taking in the scenery and impatiently wait for fall and winter to return. I look forward to meeting everyone participating in the PEAKS program!

## Steve Frisbee



Hi! My name is **Steve Frisbee**, and I am the Director of College Libraries at Mohawk Valley Community College. I started in this role in 2000, and I love my job! I oversee library operations at both the Utica and Rome campus libraries. I work with a fantastic groups of dedicated and talented librarians and support staff. When I became an administrator, I knew that would mean not as much interaction with students as I had at previous positions – so I got involved as an advisor for the Lambda Beta Chapter of the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society. I have been doing that for almost 15 years and it is such a great way to get to know a diverse groups of students from around the campus. My library position along with my PTK advisor role has solidified my belief and commitment to community college education. We really do make a difference – and I am so happy to be here!

When I am not at work or at an honor society activity, I most enjoy spending time with my family and friends. I have two children – Laurel who is 17 and Josh who is 14 – and they are my world! I grew up in the Capital District – but have lived/worked in New York City, Saranac Lake, and Seattle prior to coming to the Mohawk Valley. I love road trips – traveling sometimes with no destination in mind – but my happy place is by the ocean. I enjoy visiting NYC (seeing Broadway shows), playing board games and cards, and telling corny “dad jokes” (as my kids would say).

I’ve heard great things about the PEAKS program – and I look forward to spending the year with all of you in this experience!

## Salina Billins



Hello, my name is **Salina Billins**, and I am a Pathway to Graduation Completion Coach on the Utica campus of Mohawk Valley Community College. In this role, I build engaging relationships with students and empower them to become self-aware by understanding their own values, interests, purpose, and passions. Prior to my current position I was a Gear up Academic Specialist at MVCC. In this role, I was a team player that supported a cohort of disadvantaged students with becoming better prepared for entrance into college. Before coming to MVCC, I worked at Mohawk Valley Community Action Agency where I have had many roles which include OCFS Head Start Site Supervisor, Education Manager, and ARRA Job Training Manager. I have a passion for learning and with empowering others to embrace their own strengths.

Outside of work, I love to spend time with my family and close friends. I enjoy traveling, shopping, and relaxing on beaches.

Throughout my career, I have had the opportunity to work with some amazing leaders. I appreciate the opportunity to experience different leadership styles. I look forward to

participating in the PEAKS program, specifically, the opportunity to engage, share, learn, and develop new ideas and become more acclimated with institutional leadership best practices.

## **David Katz**



Hi all, I'm **David Katz**, Professor of Political Science and currently the Executive Director of Organizational Development at Mohawk Valley Community College. I was in college classrooms for 32 years teaching just about every conceivable higher education cohort there is, from adult learners to traditional college students, athletes in intercollegiate competition, and inmates within New York State correctional facilities. I have coached basketball on the varsity high school, NJCAA Div. III, and NCAA Div. III levels, and I've also taught Social/Ballroom dancing professionally. I spent college summers as a life guard and Red Cross Swimming Instructor. Teaching, coaching and mentoring is my lifework.

Outside of work I am an endurance athlete who enjoys running, biking, cross country skiing, hiking, mountaineering, and fly fishing for trout in pristine back country mountain streams. I love spending time with my wife Marilyn, my four dogs, and my three grown children when they come for a visit! I am truly excited about PEAKS, and I am really looking forward to getting to know everyone.