

Spring/Summer 2021

MONTCLAIR

Magazine

The Cole Years

**AN ERA OF
TRANSFORMATION**

PAGE 24

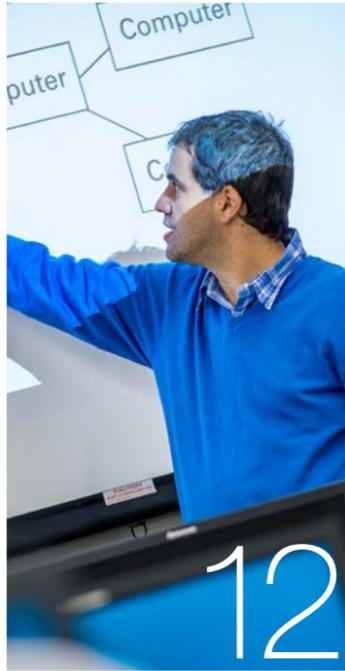


THE BIG PICTURE



Caroline Gutierrez '21 shoots confetti in celebration of her BA in Psychology. In 18 ceremonies on Sprague Field from June 7 - June 13, Montclair State awarded doctoral, master's and bachelor's degrees to a Class of 2021 remarkable for its resilience and perseverance. The multiple smaller ceremonies celebrated graduates in traditional style, with the tossing of caps, speakers and an honorary degree, this year awarded to **Mimi Feliciano**, co-founder and CEO of FEM Real Estate LLC, during the Feliciano School of Business Undergraduate Commencement ceremony. See coverage at montclair.edu/commencement-news. (Photo by Mike Peters)

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FROM THE PRESIDENT



Dear Alumni and Friends,

I am writing to you for the last time for these pages as president of Montclair State University. After 23 years as the president of this growing University, it is time to hand the keys to the next generation.

As I look back on my time here, I am gratified by how much we, as a campus community, have built together. The past year has been a difficult one,

but we have come through the year, and the University stands strong and ready to continue the realization of its important mission.

I am immensely grateful to have had an extraordinary community of colleagues, and I am grateful for the alumni and friends of the University who have so generously assisted us in giving our students the opportunity to prepare for lives of accomplishment. I have deeply valued the confidence this community has demonstrated in my leadership, and I have done my best to be deserving of that confidence.

I am certain that the University has a very bright future ahead of it, and I hope that all of you will continue to derive satisfaction from watching generations of students benefit from the education they receive here. I wish you all good days ahead and fulfillment in your lives.

Farewell,

Susan A. Cole

MONTCLAIR

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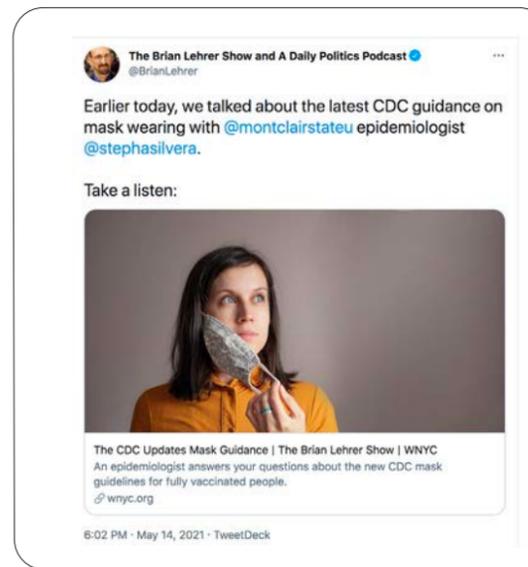
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SEEKED BACK

Enjoy the magazine? Have a story idea for us? We want to hear from you.

Email us at editor@montclair.edu. (We reserve the right to edit letters.)



Professor of Public Health Stephanie Silvera appeared on *The Brian Lehrer Show* on May 14 to discuss the CDC's latest mask guidance, and the show tweeted an ICYMI link to its nearly 75,000 followers afterward. Silvera has been a sought-after expert throughout the pandemic.



You can now find us on TikTok. If you're not following us on the popular video app, you are missing out. [tiktok.com/@montclairstateu](https://www.tiktok.com/@montclairstateu) #RedHawkPride



Congratulations to WMSC-FM. As the nation's best college radio station, even the governor is tuned in to your success. (See story, page 8.)



UNIVERSITY NAMES NEXT PRESIDENT

Jonathan G.S. Koppell

Jonathan G.S. Koppell was selected as Montclair State University's ninth president, the Board of Trustees announced on June 8, 2021. A nationally regarded scholar of policy, organization and management who transformed the public affairs college at Arizona State University into one of the largest, best and most innovative in the nation, he will start on August 2.

Board of Trustees Chair Francis M. Cuss said Koppell was the "clear choice for all the Trustees, who were impressed with his energy, his passion, and his dedication to the ideals of public higher education."

"He is an experienced and visionary leader with a very strong record of increasing service to students and communities, of supporting and advancing the work of the faculty, and engaging donors and alumni in the mission of his institution," said Cuss. "He has created mutually beneficial partnerships with many external organizations and communities, and he is known on his campus as a fierce advocate for diversity, inclusion and equity. All of these qualities, coupled with his experience as a teacher, a scholar and an administrator, make him the ideal choice for Montclair State at this moment in our history."

"I could not be more excited about joining Montclair State University," Koppell said. "At a pivotal moment in higher education, this university – with its deep commitment to serving the public interest and advancing student success – has an opportunity to define the future. I am so impressed by what the faculty and staff have accomplished with President Cole, and I am confident we can build on this foundation in bold, imaginative ways that contribute to the prosperity, health and well-being of New Jersey and the nation."

Koppell will succeed Susan A. Cole, who is retiring after 23 years of service. Under Cole's leadership, the University nearly doubled its enrollment and rose from a well-respected regional master's institution with an almost entirely commuter

student population to become a doctoral research university with a sizable residential student population and a growing national reputation (see story, page 24).

"I am confident that Jonathan Koppell understands this university and will work with the campus community to continue to secure a meaningful future for Montclair State and the students and the state it serves," Cole said.

During his decade-long tenure as dean of ASU's Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions and vice provost for public service and social impact, the College more than doubled its enrollment, becoming the nation's largest comprehensive public affairs college, serving more than 9,000 students in bachelor's, master's and doctoral programs. He also led the College to significantly improve its student retention and graduation rates through new and innovative counseling and student-support initiatives. Koppell quadrupled fundraising at the college, secured one of the largest gifts in the university's 136-year history and tripled research funding to exceed \$30 million annually.

He earned doctoral and master's degrees in political science from the University of California – Berkeley and a baccalaureate degree in government from Harvard University. At ASU he holds the endowed Lattie and Elva Coor Presidential Chair as Professor of Public Administration and Policy and is a Fellow of the National Academy of Public Administration. At Montclair State he will serve as a faculty member in political science.

Koppell, 51, and his wife, Jennifer Steen, have two high school-aged children. The appointment represents a return to his home region. The son of a New Jersey college professor and a long-time New York elected official, Koppell grew up in New York City and graduated from the Bronx High School of Science.

For more on Koppell's background visit montclair.edu/new-president. ■

Beyond the Call of Duty

Former Red Hawk Nick Volpe '19 came up with many clutch moments while on the football field for Montclair State. However, none of them compare to the one he had this past November when the rookie police officer in Howell Township, New Jersey, rescued a man moments before his car burst into flames.

It was one of three saves in recent months by Montclair State alumni. New Jersey State Trooper Corey Beczo '15 saved the life of a distraught teen who was attempting to jump from a highway overpass in Camden. And Toms River Police Officer Rebecca Sayegh '15 rescued a woman from a burning house.

The officers, who each earned a BA in Justice Studies, say it was all in a day's work. "There are times and places where things go the right way," Beczo says.

Even so, each was hailed a hero and responded to the ensuing media attention with grace and humility.

As a first responder to the burning home – where she could hear the woman inside yelling for help – Sayegh recalls thinking, "I'm going to do what I would want someone to do for me" before breaking down the door to save the homeowner and her pets.

Beczo, a classmate and friend of Sayegh, was able to save a teen when a gathering crowd caused a momentary distraction. Beczo saw an opening – "it was a now-or-never situation" – as he wrapped his arms around the boy and pulled him to safety.

Volpe was on patrol driving down a road where a car just moments before had hit a tree. He pulled the driver out a window before the car caught fire. Following the incident, Volpe drove the man home to his anxious family. "As I was leaving, I explained the story to his wife, and she thanked me for saving his life." ■



New Jersey State Trooper Corey Beczo '15

Toms River Police Officer Rebecca Sayegh '15

On and off the field, Howell Township Police Officer Nick Volpe '19.

NEW BRANDING ELEVATES US



Rebecca Monsanto, a sophomore Molecular Biology major, is filmed for the University's new brand video.

The University's institutional brand identity highlights the passion and grit of Montclair State students – and shows how a Montclair State education elevates them to new heights.

In a recent brand video, it also shows students proving naysayers wrong: "Definitely in my life, there has been someone who says, 'Oh, you can't do that. Or you're not that good,'" says junior Brandon Vargas. "That always motivates me to do it and to do it better than I did before."

Vargas, a Family Science and Human Development major, is one of nine students chosen to represent the University in a Communications and Marketing video that showcases Montclair State's values: empowering, welcoming and committed to excellence.

Agency partner, The EFK Group, tested four different concepts for the brand, and students picked "Elevate" by a wide margin. "I think it really speaks to how tenacious and hard working they are," says Joseph Brennan, vice president for University Communications and Marketing.

Rebecca Monsanto, a sophomore Molecular Biology major, says she identifies with the can-do spirit of the video's final line: "We were too busy to listen."

"My motto is always do what you're afraid of," she says. ■



Karen L. Pennington and Rocky the Red Hawk wave at her retirement parade.



From left, President Susan A. Cole, Rocky and Karen L. Pennington in front of the masked crowd at Pennington's send-off.

CAMPUS CELEBRATES A CAREER SERVING STUDENTS

The University honored Karen L. Pennington who – after more than two decades at Montclair State – retired as vice president for Student Development and Campus Life and on her last day was honored with a send-off parade across campus.

Marching behind decorated golf carts and police vehicles on March 31, students and colleagues bid a fond farewell to Pennington, who served and shaped the lives of countless Red Hawks.

The parade began and ended at the Student Center, where Pennington's vision and concern for the health, safety and well-being of all students created one of the most inclusive campuses in the country. Since joining Montclair State in 1998, she has been an

integral part of the University's growth, including the expansion of student housing and recreational facilities.

Her legacy is also being honored with contributions to Rocky's Closet, which provides professional attire to students in need so that they can be dressed appropriately for job interviews and professional networking events.

Dawn Meza Soufferis, formerly a vice president at La Salle University, joined Montclair State on April 5 as the new vice president for Student Development and Campus Life. The vice president oversees 22 departments with nearly 300 employees and some 700 student workers. ■

WMSC Named Best in College Radio

Looking for a great radio experience? Tune in to the University's station, 90.3 WMSC-FM or listen on the iHeartRadio app. WMSC was recently named the Best College Radio Station in the nation by the Intercollegiate Broadcasting System for 2021. The station also picked up two awards for Joshua Tirado, Best Program Director and Best Use of Sound Effects, and one for Kaya Maciak, named Best Business Manager.

The recognition comes during a year in which the coronavirus pandemic forced the station to improvise and find new ways to broadcast its mix of alt-rock, sports and talk.

"Before the pandemic, you would just come in during your slot, sit down, maybe have a script prepared, go with the flow and trust the soundboard," says Maciak, a junior studying Communication and Media Arts. "But now there's no soundboard. It's you and your computer recording and editing. I think we've definitely had to put in a lot more energy and strategies into how we want to operate." ■



Joshua Tirado and Kaya Maciak brought home individual national broadcasting awards. They are seen here with General Manager Anabella Poland, right, in a rare moment together in the studio.

Subway Baby Inspires Book on Finding a Home

Peter Mercurio '90 recently published his debut children's book, *Our Subway Baby*, but it's a story that he's been living and writing for more than 20 years.

In August 2000, Mercurio's partner Danny Stewart found and helped rescue an abandoned newborn infant in the Union Square subway station in New York City. The remarkable tale of their journey to adopting that baby, whom they named Kevin, is detailed in *Our Subway Baby*.

Published in 2020 by Penguin Random House, the book is a selection on the ALA Rainbow Book List for Young Readers and has gained the attention of major media, including the BBC, NBC's *Nightly News* and *Today*.

When thrust into parenthood, Mercurio was 10 years out from Montclair State, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts and Science in Speech and Theater with a concentration in Communications. Says Mercurio, "The skills I learned in those Communication Studies classes and from the teachers that I had, I still use today."

When Kevin, who is now in college, came along, Mercurio says, the couple's network of friends and colleagues stepped up to help raise him so that Mercurio and Stewart could continue to follow their dreams. "When we say, 'It takes a village,' we lived it, and we credit our village with helping us raise our son, without a doubt. We couldn't have done it without them." For more, visit petermercurio.com. ■



Peter Mercurio '90 (left) and Danny Stewart (right) with Kevin in 2001.



Mercurio (left) and Stewart (right) with Kevin in 2019. Photos courtesy of Peter Mercurio.

NJ COVID-19 SERVICE CORPS GETS TO WORK



Mioandrys Rodriguez, left, and Amar Helwani are two of a dozen Montclair State students who have joined the NJ COVID-19 Service Corps.

The University is leading AmeriCorps efforts to help the state recover from the pandemic, with a dozen Montclair State students accepted into the New Jersey COVID-19 Service Corps. They are working for nonprofits and local agencies, particularly in New Jersey's low-income communities, where the impacts of the pandemic – job loss, hunger, homelessness and limited access to medical and mental health care – are endemic.

The Center for Community Engagement secured a \$418,000, three-year grant from the New Jersey Commission for National and Community Service for the effort as well as a \$100,000 grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's New Jersey Health Initiatives.

Corps members are paired with agencies, including the Jewish Family and Children's Services of Northern New Jersey and Wafa House, a nonprofit agency formed to provide social service outreach to Muslims in Passaic County. AmeriCorps provides a modest living stipend and an education award to use toward repaying students' loans or for further education. ■

University Launches New Pre Med Program

Montclair State University has launched a new Pre Medical Program for the fall 2021 semester, creating new opportunities for students by preparing them to pursue careers in medical fields, take the MCAT exam, and apply to medical school.

The Pre Med Program will be an interdisciplinary offering that students in any major can pursue. Students will receive focused preparation for the MCAT exam and advising for applying to medical school, with the goal of increasing the entrance of historically underrepresented students into medical school cohorts and ultimately into the medical profession.

"The creation of our pre-medical support will fill a special need for our current students, have the potential for significant impact on the success of our graduates, and will help create diversified pools of qualified medical school applicants," says Lora Billings, dean of the University's College of Science and Mathematics, which will house the program. ■

Reading, Writing, Arithmetic and Sex Ed

How young is too young for sex education? Montclair State professors Eva Goldfarb and Lisa Lieberman say age-appropriate sex ed, concepts like consent and respect, should begin in kindergarten.

Their new study – the first of its kind in the field – shows comprehensive sex education can prevent child sex abuse and intimate partner violence, increase appreciation for sexual diversity and improve environments for LGBTQ students, among other benefits.

“This landmark study establishes once and for all that quality sex education that begins early, is developmentally appropriate and builds sequentially through middle and high school can improve young people’s physical, mental and emotional well-being,” says Goldfarb, a professor of Public Health. “While many people think of sex education only in terms of pregnancy and STD prevention, these findings speak to the broader impact of quality sex education.”

NO DIFFERENT THAN MATH

Goldfarb and Lieberman analyzed 30 years of published research on school-based programs around the world, and their results show that sex education, like any other subject, is most effective when it builds – creating an early foundation and advancing with age-appropriate content and teaching.

Children as young as preschool age not only comprehend, but can openly discuss subjects as varied as gender diversity, gender nonconformity and gender-based oppression, making it the ideal time to begin creating a foundation for lifelong sexual health.

“Waiting until eighth grade algebra to first introduce the subject of math would be absurd. The same is true for sex education,” says Goldfarb.

CREATING SAFER ENVIRONMENTS

Programming implemented earlier has helped to prevent child sex abuse. It has also led to improved self-protective skills and knowledge of appropriate/inappropriate touching, increased parent-child communication and increased disclosure of abuse.

At higher grade levels, comprehensive sex education has also resulted in decreased intimate partner violence, as well as an increase in bystander interventions.

Quality sex education can also improve the school environment. The research found that LGBTQ-supportive classes resulted in a more positive school climate, including increased feelings of safety and lower levels of homophobia and bullying for all students – specifically homophobic bullying. ■



Eva Goldfarb, professor of Public Health



Lisa Lieberman, chairperson of Public Health

FOSTERING A RECORD NUMBER OF FULBRIGHTS

A record number of Montclair State scholars and alumni have been selected as Fulbright U.S. Scholars for 2021-2022.

Gail Perry-Ryder '20 PhD was awarded for her work in Barbados, where she is studying how a nation’s educational systems respond to social transformation.

Emily Ip '20 was awarded a Fulbright Study/Research Grant to examine clinical

applications of cognitive computational models of languages at the University of Sheffield, England.

Blenda P. Alexandre '15, '19 MA and **Carmen Rosario '20** were selected for Fulbright English Teaching Assistant Awards in South Korea and the Canary Islands of Spain, respectively.

Peter E. Siegel, professor and chair of the Department of Anthropology, was selected to teach and conduct research for two semesters in Jamaica, collaborating with Zachary J. M. Beier of the University of the West Indies at Mona to update Jamaica National Heritage Trust legislation, develop protocols for systematically addressing heritage resources, and foster improved interagency cooperation. ■



MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK EARNS NATIONAL ACCREDITATION

In just three years, the University’s Master of Social Work (MSW) program has achieved accreditation from the Council on Social Work Education.

“No one expected this program to be formally accredited during a pandemic,” says Emily Douglas, chairperson of the Social Work and Child Advocacy department. “But even in these difficult times, our students are moving forward, our faculty are teaching, and our agency partners in the community are continuing to work with our students, for which we are endlessly grateful.”

The program prepares leaders in social work practice with children, youth and families. “Accreditation is important because it ensures that graduates of the MSW program are qualified professionals who provide ethical and effective social work practice often to vulnerable and marginalized members of society,” says Lynette Reitz, an associate professor of Social Work and Child Advocacy and the MSW program director.

“Students are now eligible for different levels of licensure in New Jersey, and faculty are eligible to apply for federal grant funding for their research.” ■

MA in Ed Leadership Named Best in NJ

The University’s online Master of Arts in Educational Leadership program is ranked No. 1 in New Jersey and No. 15 in the nation – up 10 spots from 2020 – in the *U.S. News & World Report 2021 Best Online Programs* rankings. The program also ranked among the top 20 in the nation in the rankings’ specialty area results for Educational Administration and Supervision, moving up three spots to No. 19.

Two other online graduate programs offered by Montclair State also placed among the nation’s best in the annual rankings.

The University’s Master of Science in Information Technology with a concentration in Applied Information Technology (Professional Science Master’s) is now ranked No. 56 in the nation, while the online Master of Business Administration (MBA) program continued its climb up the rankings to No. 79 (up nine spots from 2020).

“These rankings once again highlight Montclair State University’s ability to deliver a nationally prominent, accessible education in any delivery mode,” says Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Willard Gingerich. ■



A Chain Reaction of Kindness

Ever since Gianna Graw '21 lost her father, William, a Jersey City police officer, to cancer, she has held onto the memory of how caring and compassionate he was.

“He was willing to do anything to help anyone, even a stranger,” says Graw, who earned an MA in Higher Education and will pursue a career in disability services.

This past December, Graw, inspired by her father’s kindness, donated a kidney. Hackensack University Medical Center’s partnership with the National Kidney

Registry, an organization that facilitates living-donor kidney transplants, made it possible for her to become a “nonspecific” donor, someone whose donation can help someone she does not know.

Graw’s donation set off a chain of kidney transplants that spanned the country. “It was exciting, but I also felt a little detached until it all happened and four recipients had their transplants and surgeries,” she says.

“Sometimes when planning and doing the prep work for something, it’s hard to realize what is going on and the emotions behind it until it’s actually happening, and that’s definitely how it was for me,” Graw recalls. “It wasn’t until my surgery was done and I

was in the hospital recovering that it sunk in what just happened. It was touching and powerful, but words don’t do it justice.” ■



Gianna Graw’s kidney donation set off a donation “chain” across the country. Photo courtesy of Gianna Graw



A Talk with Professor Stefan Robila

Computer Science Professor **Stefan Robila**, director of the Computational Sensing Laboratory, recently completed a three-year stint as program director at the National Science Foundation (NSF)'s Office of Advanced Cyberinfrastructure (OAC) that collaborates with other NSF divisions to develop innovative research infrastructures that open new frontiers for discovery.

The Foundation is the premier independent federal science agency and is tasked with identifying and funding projects that advance the country's health, prosperity and welfare, and secure its defense. To do so it relies on experts like Robila to serve either as reviewers or as temporary or permanent program directors. Robila gave *Montclair* magazine a glimpse into the NSF and how his time there will serve to help Montclair State students.

Montclair: How would you compare your life as a researcher and professor to your time at the NSF?

Robila: As faculty I contribute to the creation of new degrees and develop new research directions; at NSF I participated in the design of programs that will shape future research and education. OAC's mission is to enable the research, development and provisioning of cyberinfrastructure that enable all NSF-supported science. The connection between this cyberinfrastructure and the science it serves is growing stronger, generating discoveries that no longer fit within specific domain boundaries. One such discovery led to development of AI-driven computational processes that explore time-dependent changes in molecular systems that have been used to investigate the SARS-Cov-2 infection mechanisms.

Montclair: What work at the Foundation was the most rewarding?

Robila: I am proud that I was part of the team that formulated the first ever cyberinfrastructure research program at NSF. As a researcher at Montclair State, I served as a reviewer of proposals; at NSF I managed the full proposal pipeline, from ensuring compliance and synthesizing research results to making recommendations for funding. My

research expertise and writing skills came in handy as every recommendation had to be well justified and placed in the context of value to the program and the NSF. My work covered a variety of programs such as the Major Research Instrumentation, core research, and software and data cyberinfrastructure.

Only two months after arriving at NSF, I joined the group managing the Cyberinfrastructure for Sustained Scientific Innovation (CSSI) program, an initiative with deep roots in OAC, and unique within the Foundation for its focus to support science-driven data and software cyberinfrastructure development. As program lead, I tracked and managed hundreds of proposals for projects that could someday potentially change the way we live.

Montclair: What insight did your time at the NSF OAC give you for your work at Montclair State?

Robila: As Montclair State faculty, I am inspired by our students every day, and I am amazed by their drive to succeed. NSF actively works to ensure that tomorrow's scientific community will be inclusive and diverse, something that is important to Montclair State as well. Shortly after arriving at the NSF, a group of colleagues and I developed an opportunity that encourages submissions focused on expansion of inclusivity in computing research. We continued evolving this into a full funding program focused on fostering computer science research at Minority Serving Institutions with its first deadline in April 2021.

As a faculty advisor, I often engage students in discussions about how graduate degrees help them further their professional development and broaden the career landscape. Keeping graduate students in mind while at the NSF, I became more familiar with opportunities available to support them. For example, I served as director for panels reviewing applications for the Graduate Research Fellowship Program, one of NSF's longest-running programs that provides stipends and tuition reimbursement for graduate students. ■

—Laura Griffin

BISA BUTLER '05

THE ART OF THE QUILT

Textile artist's quilts tell stories of the human condition through intricate patterns

By Mary Barr Mann

"I use these fabrics to help communicate the story I am trying to tell." -Mailissa "Bisa" Yamba Butler '05 MAT

Mailissa "Bisa" Yamba Butler's art career has soared in the past year, capped by a solo show at the prestigious Art Institute of Chicago, where 22 of her works were on exhibit through April. Butler's unique technique involves reappropriating vintage photographs and giving them new life through a traditional folkloric medium – quilting. Her work engages with themes of family, community, migration, history, creativity and promise using a variety of material including velvet, cotton, wool, silk and West African kente cloth. Here, Butler, who graduated with a Master of Arts in Teaching in 2005, answers our questions about her "whirlwind" year and the many decades of work behind it.

Montclair magazine: Tell us about your technique, using photographs and giving them new life through the medium of quilting. Beyond the technical side, what does the tradition of quilt making mean for you and for your art?

Bisa Butler: Quilt making is one of the truly American art forms. When I quilt I feel like I am carrying the torch that was lit by my ancestors. There was a tradition of making fabric appliqué artworks in the ancient kingdom of Dahomey (present day Benin) where you will find brightly colored cloths with images of animals and people stitched onto them. Enslaved African Americans made quilts for their own families using the designs and patterns reminiscent of African textiles and passed on this tradition to their children. Although my direct relatives were not quilters to my knowledge, I feel that I am carrying on this tradition from ancestors unknown.

Montclair: Your portraits include famous people but often feature the unnamed, the forgotten. The man in *I Am Not Your Negro* is as regal and deeply layered as Frederick Douglass in *The Storm, the Whirlwind, and the Earthquake*. Tell us about that.

Butler: The man pictured in *I Am Not Your Negro* was sourced from a photo by Dorothea Lange for the Farm Securities Administration. I was drawn to his thoughtful gaze and pose and it made me curious about this contemplative man. It is the mystery and the soul of an image that draws me in – I want to know more. When you encounter Frederick Douglass' images you can see his

defiance, pride and fierce convictions. We are lucky to know his story – but what about those who weren't so lucky? I am curious about the human condition in all forms and lifestyles. I believe we are all deeply layered – and beautiful in our own ways and that is what I want to portray. If I can make someone's innate beauty stand out, I feel I have done my job.

Montclair: There seem to be hidden stories in the fabric patterns you choose for the clothing in your subject matter. The fabrics feature globes, airplanes, rings, snakes, electric fans. What does it all mean?

Butler: I use many African textiles that are designed by African and Dutch designers. This cloth is called "Dutch Wax" or "African Wax Print." The images are often inspired by African folktales, sayings and allegories. For instance, the fabric printed with an electric fan indicates that the wearer is wealthy. If you have an electric fan in your shop in the marketplace it would mean that you have more money to pay for that convenience. The fan indicates economic prosperity. There is another fabric that is printed with stools all over it. This fabric is called "If you want to talk about me, you may as well pull up a stool" or in other words, "I don't care about your gossip." I use these fabrics to help communicate the story I am trying to tell about my subjects.

Montclair: The colors in your work are so vibrant, from the patterns of the clothing to the play of light and shadow across faces.

Butler: I use color as a way of expressing emotion. I use warm hues like red, orange and yellow to express passion and happiness, while I may use blues and purples to express more somber moods. I also use colors seen in African textiles – electric blue, lime green and rich scarlet reds all at the same time. I portray African Americans and I want to infuse and adorn them with the colors of the continent.

Montclair: You have had quite the year or so – with more major museums exhibiting and purchasing your work, and your portrait of 2004 Nobel Peace Prize winner Wangari Maathai featured as one of 100 covers produced as part of *Time* magazine’s 100 Women of the Year – the most influential women of the past century. How does success feel?

Butler: I feel incredibly thankful and happy that I get to experience moments of success – it has been a long road. Although I must say that I felt very

successful as a high school art teacher and was proud of what I was doing. I dreamed that one day I might be able to make a living making my artwork and I’m so glad it actually happened.

It’s easier for me to get work done now because I can work for hours on end in my studio – whereas before I would have to stop because I had to get up early in the morning!

Montclair: The Toledo Museum of Art purchased your portrait of Frederick Douglass. What does this mean for you?

Butler: I am always thrilled when an artwork I have made finds a new home. The Toledo Museum of Art is an incredible institution and to have my artwork join their historic collection is thrilling. I am so happy that people appreciate what I am doing, and I am doubly honored that my rendition of Frederick Douglass can represent such an important person.



Montclair: How did your studies at Montclair State shape you as an educator and an artist?

Butler: I made my first quilt while I was attending Montclair State. My Fibers professor, Kerr Grabowski, instructed us on the basics of quilt making and I decided to make a portrait of my grandparents for my final assignment. That was the moment when I realized I could use my love of sewing and textiles – and combine that with my drawing and painting skills in order to make art.

Montclair: Your father, A. Zachary Yamba, served as president of Essex County College for three decades, bringing enormous growth to the college. How did he influence your path?

Butler: My father always taught me and my siblings to do our best at whatever it was we put our minds to. He used to say, “If you are a street sweeper, be the best street sweeper!” To this date he still advises me and edits my essays. As a teacher, I knew that I had to try my best to make every student have a positive experience while they were in my class. As an artist I still feel that I have a responsibility to put my best effort forward with each piece.

Montclair: What advice would you give students today?

Butler: I would advise students to pursue what you love, and don’t be afraid of hard work. It is OK to struggle, it is OK to get tired – as long as you keep going. Set goals for yourself and don’t quit until you get them. Success may not come easy or quickly but that is OK – the struggle will make you stronger and better. ■

Bisa Butler, *Broom Jumpers*, 2019. Cotton, silk, wool and velvet. 98 x 58 in. (Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, South Hadley, Massachusetts)



Left: Butler at her studio in West Orange, New Jersey. Above: At the opening of her solo show, *Bisa Butler: Portraits*, Art Institute of Chicago, November 16, 2020.



1. Amir Billups
 2. Maheen Ahmad
 3. Manar Hussein
 4. Nagla Bedir
 5. Chedia Ayari
 6. Mayida Zaal
 7. Nushrat Hoque

By Marilyn Joyce Lehren

Reclaiming ME

Need for representation drives research on Muslim educators

Maheen Ahmad '13, a sixth grade English teacher in West Orange, New Jersey, never wanted to miss a day of school as a child. Her teachers, she recalls, "were the smartest, coolest people in the world. They knew everything."

But that changed as she grew older and started wearing a hijab. In school, she says, "I felt like I wasn't always accepted. One of the motivators for me is to be a teacher who

encourages students to love who they are and where they come from."

Ahmad is using her experiences as a researcher and collaborator on the first national study of Muslim-American teachers, "Teacher Diversity, Retention, and Muslim-American Teachers," conducting research rooted in dismantling racism, Islamophobia and anti-Blackness.

Led by Montclair State Associate Professor Mayida Zaal, the work of the seven-member participatory action research collective – "Reclaiming: ME (Muslim Educator)" – is supported by a \$500,000 grant from the Spencer Foundation's Large Research Grant on Education.

"The COVID-19 pandemic, the economic and political volatility, and the mass response to racism have increased the urgency of our research," Zaal says.

Zaal has focused much of her scholarship on recruiting and preparing teachers of color. As she watches the gap continue to widen among marginalized groups, and schools operating in systemically unequal and racist ways, she says children from marginalized communities continue to be left behind.

"Representation matters now more than ever. To help address these disparities, our children and communities need diverse teachers committed to anti-racist pedagogies," Zaal says.

The group will examine the intersectional experiences of Muslim-American teachers in K-12 schools. "Part of what makes our project unique is that we are participatory action researchers. This has allowed us to upend who constructs knowledge and who gets included in complex narratives about Muslim-American teachers," Zaal says.

Nushrat Hoque '16 MA, a graduate of the Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellows program at Montclair State, says the group has connected over a shared passion for social justice that has informed both their teaching practices and the study's structure.

Chedia Ayari agrees. "It's the deep desire for social justice, but we also spend a lot of time together just knowing each other and knowing our lives and who we are as individuals, as teachers, as parents. The experiences that we share in our educational background varies from negative to positive. Even the negative experiences have managed to enrich us as both researchers and individuals," says Ayari, a doctoral

student in the Teacher Education and Teacher Development program.

The group also includes Nagla Bedir, founder of Teaching While Muslim, an organization that focuses on addressing discrimination and institutional racism in schools and creating a supportive network for Muslim-American teachers. "There's no institution, no system in place that supports Muslim educators in any way, shape or form," she says.

Studies show the benefits of a diverse teaching force, including higher academic performance, graduation rates and college enrollment when teachers share race, ethnicity or gender with their students.

"The COVID-19 pandemic, the economic and political volatility, and the mass response to racism have increased the urgency of our research."

–Mayida Zaal

Preliminary findings in the "Reclaiming: ME" pilot, says Amir Billups, a high school social studies chairperson in Newark, New Jersey, "found situations where young people opened up because they found someone on the staff who shared their experiences. There's a connection that's being made there that's value added."

Manar Hussein, a doctoral student in Teacher Education and Teacher Development, recalls having only a few teachers of color growing up. "I've never had a Muslim teacher in the United States until my current program at Montclair," she says. "I thought it was my exclusive experience. In reality, even though New Jersey has a diverse population, the New Jersey Policy Perspective reports that about 66% of the teacher workforce are

white women, which does not match the demographics of the student population in our state. When I realized this was bigger than just one Muslim girl in New Jersey, that this was all over the nation, my interest in working with research rooted to help with recruitment and retention of racialized teachers was solidified."

An important piece of the conversation is how Muslim Americans are impacted by complicit racism, specifically anti-Blackness, Zaal says. "The research says that the kinds of issues that push teachers of color out of the profession are things like racial battle fatigue, and having to always be the ones to advocate for marginalized students and to educate others about what it means to be different."

As the study expands nationally, the researchers will be talking with teachers in cities with growing Muslim-American communities, ethnic enclaves and in places targeted by hate crime, including Dearborn, Michigan; Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

The study's pilot "uncovered that some Muslim-American educators have experienced microaggressions, have experienced bias, or they've had to censor themselves in terms of the content that they covered in their classroom," Billups says.

The results were influenced by the school setting. "In the City of Newark or East Orange, areas with large Muslim populations, those teachers may not feel they need to censor or feel self-conscious about who they are," Billups says. "But in a different setting, Muslim-American teachers are forced to be a lot more conscious of who they are, how they show up in certain spaces, because they may be the only person who represents a faith or a culture associated with it."

"We need to flip the conversation," Zaal says. "Anti-racist education needs to not only focus on racialized communities. It's the reverse. We need to be thinking about anti-racist education that addresses predominantly white communities, where those conversations may not otherwise be had." ■

WORKING TOGETHER

By Mary Barr Mann



Collaboration brings musical to life despite challenges of COVID-19

Students performing a vignette from *Working* at the Kasser Theater.

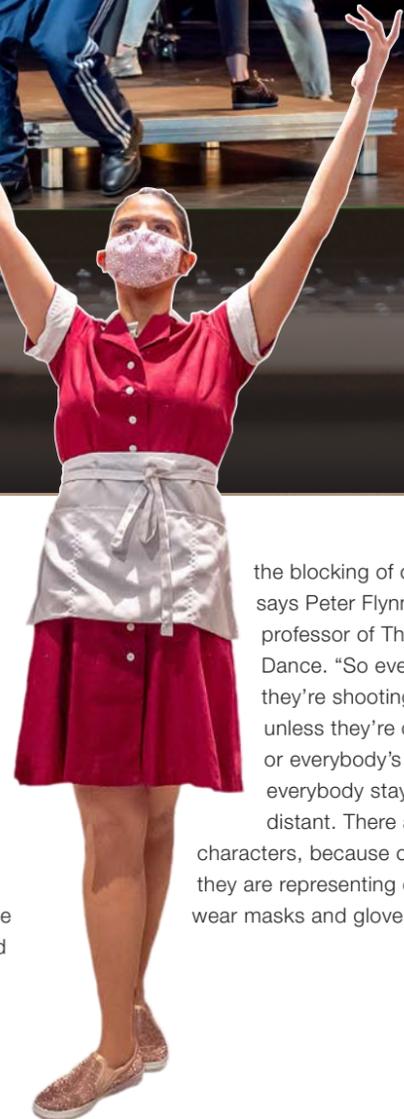
When a global pandemic disrupted live performances and classroom schedules last fall, an interdepartmental collaboration between students in Theatre and Dance, and Television Production allowed the show to go on.

Together, they produced *Working*, the 1978 Broadway musical based on Studs Terkel's book, *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do*, first published in 1974.

With its vignettes of individual workers' toils – from farming to waitressing to welding – the show is almost ideally suited for a hybrid production, one that could be rehearsed and recorded via Zoom or, for some musical numbers, in outdoor and/or socially distanced or masked groups.

"We adopted protocols for the pandemic into the design and

the blocking of our show," says Peter Flynn, associate professor of Theatre and Dance. "So everybody, unless they're shooting remotely, unless they're on Zoom or everybody's in a mask, everybody stays socially distant. There are even some characters, because of the jobs that they are representing onstage, who wear masks and gloves."



Working's tales of the trials and tribulations of everyday workers also made it the perfect theatrical vehicle for addressing the plight of essential laborers during the pandemic. Flynn worked with his associate director, Chanel Johnson '20, to update the musical, with the blessing of the legendary Stephen Schwartz, who adapted the book for Broadway 43 years ago.

"We formulated questions and put out an email to our entire Musical Theatre student body and said, 'Whether you're involved in the show or not, we'd like to interview any family members that have been directly affected by quarantine or by the pandemic.' And we got a flurry of emails back."

As a result, Flynn explains, "We interviewed a teacher, three business owners, a pilot and a physician's assistant." Then Flynn and Johnson turned each of those interviews into a monologue using a fictional name for the character.

At the same time, Flynn began coordinating with School of Communication and Media Professor Stuart MacLelland on the project, which proved rewarding for students in both programs.

"It's a huge success story," says MacLelland, who enlisted students from his Advanced Television Production and Television Production Company classes.

"Most of the time, I give my students an assignment to find acts or talent. But we weren't going to be able to put 20 people in our studio and control rooms, so I started looking around for content."

The John J. Cali School of Music and the Department of Theatre and Dance presented



Working performed and filmed at the Kasser Theater.



School of Communication and Media Professor Stuart MacLelland (left) with Carter Winner '22 in the production room at the Kasser Theater.

great opportunities. Besides filming a Kasser main stage production of *A Chorus Line* using robotic cameras and the University Singers performing *Ain't No Grave* in the Amphitheater, MacLelland and his students went to work on *Working*.

"It's been a really good partnership," says MacLelland. "Montclair State has always been great at broadcast journalism and



documentary." Working with the Cali School and Musical Theatre, however, represents "a whole new world" for Television Production students. "When they are watching the rehearsal process and see that side of show business, we're providing the broadest foundation for any kind of media arts and performance, making them more dimensional and marketable."

The University company for *Working*, which was routinely tested for COVID-19, shot scenes all over campus before needing to postpone production because of a positive COVID-19 test among the group in early November. A number called "Cleanin' Women" was shot in the News Lab in the School of Communication and Media. "The Mason" was shot in the Amphitheater.

Major production numbers that open and close the show were rescheduled for filming in the spring semester – when Flynn and MacLelland felt it was safe to

resume with the full cast and everyone in the company was cleared according to the University's COVID-19 protocols. "It's an Art," about a waitress, was shot in the Red Hawk Diner in late February.

Other scenes were recorded using Zoom or with green screens.

"It's been very weird doing a show during COVID," says Johnson, who graduated in December 2020. "Luckily, we've been able to have a lot of one-on-one time with the actors in person and over Zoom during the process. Zoom rehearsals have proven incredibly effective. We can meet as a full company or have five different breakout rooms rehearsing at the same time."

Having to always think about social distancing and other COVID-19 safety measures made everything more difficult, says Johnson, who worked with choreographer Hollie Wright and music

director Sarah Brett England. "But we were able to create a show in the middle of a global pandemic, which I think is pretty spectacular." Johnson credits MacLelland and his students: "They've been really incredible throughout all of this. Major props to them for all the hard work they put into this show!"

Beyond all the artistic considerations, the timely and fitting theme of the musical was not lost on anyone involved. Flynn notes, "For the very first time in a production of *Working*, there are monologues about people who do their jobs during a pandemic." Musical Theatre major Grace Rivera '23, who plays the waitress, says she is excited that the "subject of this show is the working class, a group of people that have been immensely affected by the pandemic. It gives them the chance to be in the spotlight and gives them credit for their contribution to the world we know today."



"We were pretty much making a movie musical and it felt exactly like that," says Grace Rivera '23, who plays a waitress in *Working*, an interdepartmental collaboration between students in Theatre and Dance, and Television Production.

Kevin Wang '21, played firefighter Tom Patrick using a green screen. Other scenes were shot outdoors last fall. Says Wang, "Some of us really needed this. We learned to appreciate every opportunity given and not take any of it for granted."



Working associate director, Chanel Johnson '20: "We were able to create a show in the middle of a global pandemic, which I think is pretty spectacular."



"It was so much fun to be a part of the team that got to do something so incredible, I'm so grateful," says Carter Winner '22, Television and Digital Media major with a concentration in TV Production and a Political Science minor.



Rivera also is filled with gratitude for this very different musical theater experience. "It was insane to walk onto a set and see all these lights and cameras. When we shot 'It's an Art,' we were able to see one of the takes in the Red Hawk Diner on campus, and it was honestly one of the coolest experiences. I seriously could not stop smiling because it felt so unreal – in the best way possible."

Television and Digital Media major Carter Winner '22 also appreciated the novel experience of working with Theatre and Dance. "I learned a lot about thinking on my feet. It was so great to cover such beautiful performances. It was so much fun to be a part of the team that got to do something so incredible, I'm so grateful."

It's an experience that they could not have had elsewhere.

"When most universities and their theater programs opted not to do shows during COVID-19," Judith Evans, the costume shop supervisor for Theatre and Dance, points out, "Montclair State is producing creatively" – and safely.

Working debuted at the Department of Theatre and Dance Virtual Festival, an online portal that allows performance and presentation opportunities for Dance, Theatre, Musical Theatre and other students, and provides every audience member a front row seat to spectacular pre-recorded shows available for streaming. Visit peakperfs.org/virtual-festival.





The Cole Years

For the past 23 years as Montclair State's president, Cole has drawn on her vision, "ridiculous optimism" and the help of dedicated faculty, administrators and staff, to write a new narrative for the University, transforming it from a respectable regional school to an ambitious national research university with the state's second largest enrollment.

The transformation is seen everywhere: in the growth of academic and research programs, the building of outstanding new facilities and the renovation of existing buildings, the nearly doubling of the student body, the hiring of hundreds of talented new faculty, the burnishing of Montclair State's reputation and much more. "It's a phenomenal narrative that she built year after year," says University Trustee and Foundation Board member, Rose Cali '80.

In reflecting on that narrative, Karen L. Pennington, who recently retired as vice president for Student Development and Campus Life after more than two decades, says Cole "has told a tale that people read

and followed to be able to fulfill that dream that she was creating for all of us. She brought us all into the play and made us all part of that cast of characters to complete the show."

"The work that we accomplished together, the things we have built and grown constitute a transformation of Montclair State that is nothing short of miraculous," Cole said in her fall 2020 address to the University.

The efforts not only elevated Montclair State University's reputation, they provided tens of thousands of students with an affordable quality education that gave many graduates opportunities they might not otherwise have had.

In an interview with *Montclair* magazine, Cole said Montclair State, a fledgling university when she arrived, was already "a good institution and had been for many years. But there's no question, we have transformed the institution. It has been major, rapid for higher education, and profound."

Notes Pennington: "Dr. Cole recognized early on that we had potential that was not being reached, whether it was because of the numbers of students we were serving, the faculty that could be here, the research that could be done."

SEEING UNTAPPED POTENTIAL

Montclair State had been advanced from college to university status just a few years before Cole became the first woman to lead the University in 1998. In her inaugural address, she said, "The important question is never ever what we want for the moment, but what we, as individuals and as a collective community, want to have accomplished at the end of our working lives; where, for example, we want this university to stand in 50 years' time; the impact we wish to have made on the progress of society."



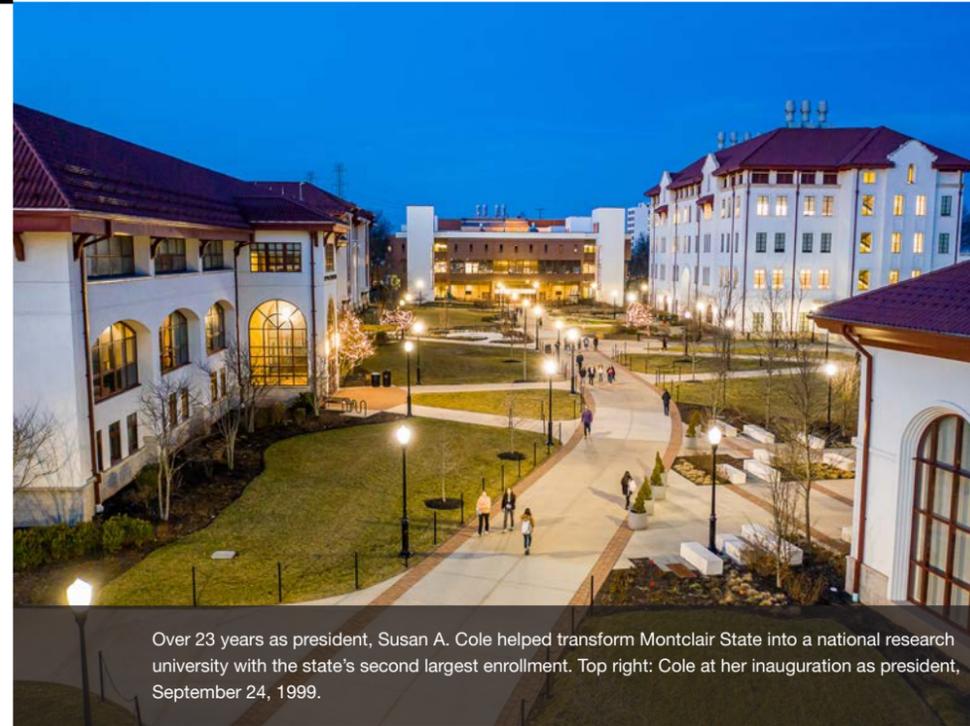
Reflecting on the transformation of the University during President Susan A. Cole's 23 years

By Marilyn Joyce Lehren and Mary Barr Mann

B

efore becoming a builder of universities, Susan A. Cole, as a child of Brooklyn, dreamed of a life on the wild frontier. World-famous sharpshooter Annie Oakley was her hero, "and I inhabited her persona for dear life," Cole says, "capturing the bad guys, bringing justice to the world, acting bravely, doing things."

The Montclair State University president has been reflecting on her life story and career, from make-believe-cowgirl to playwright to academic, as the curtain draws to a close on a remarkable tenure. It's a history marked by its boldness of vision for students and its principled response to the urgent issues of the times. Always a natural leader – as evidenced by her very first preschool report card that read: "Susan is the leader in her group. She is the driving force of everything that kids do." – she grew up determined to make her place in the world and to make the world a better place.



Over 23 years as president, Susan A. Cole helped transform Montclair State into a national research university with the state's second largest enrollment. Top right: Cole at her inauguration as president, September 24, 1999.

The pace of growth over the past 23 years, including the creation of a number of important research centers and institutes and the addition of four new schools and colleges, was meaningful for those working alongside Cole to make it happen.

"To be there as it was happening was one of the most exciting times of my life," says Bertha Diggs, who retired in 2018 as the associate director of the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) program. "Even when we were going through growing pains ... there was something about the atmosphere and the aura. The tone was set



Public-private partnerships and an understanding of the legislative process in Trenton (lower left, Cole, with Rocky and students in Trenton) contributed to an unprecedented expansion of buildings and facilities.



"I think the buildings are symbolic of everything else that happened," LaRossa says. "Even in the changes that were made to the buildings, she kept the tie to the old by making sure it was that same vintage building, the same Mission Revival architecture that was put in place from the beginning."

But the buildings are just a part of the story. Cole elevated the visibility of the University within the state, the region and the nation. She increased enrollment, enhancing diversity and quality, and increased the institution's revenue streams from external sources, including non-state resources.

"She was the first college president I think who really understood the legislative process in New Jersey, the cast of characters, I say lovingly, and who they are in New Jersey," says New Jersey Senate Majority Leader Loretta Weinberg (D-37). "She used every opportunity to move the University forward."

In talking about her connections with Montclair State during her own remarkable 30-year career, Senator Weinberg, who is also retiring at the end of 2021, recalls how Cole provided a life highlight: dinner with Ruth Bader Ginsburg after a performance by the late Supreme Court Justice's grandson in *The Merchant of Venice* at the Alexander Kasser Theater. "Susan, never

one to let an event go by without adding to some positive reaction to it, arranged for a one-on-one," Weinberg says. "She found ways to feature Montclair State University in whatever was happening."

'DO RIGHT BY THE WORLD'

Susan Ablon Cole, the daughter of immigrant parents, her mother from Russia and her father from Ukraine, grew up in New York City's Brooklyn Heights neighborhood.

"All my life, I have been driven by a sense of obligation to do right by the world, and I think that is because my parents and their friends talked about it all the time. They had endured enormous struggles, and they were engaged in making a life in a new country, making a life for their children," Cole says during an interview. "They cared about issues, and I listened and I absorbed all of that. I absorbed it with the expectations and the hope that they had for building a life in which they could be free, in which they could live and contribute. It became part of who I was."

During the 2021 spring semester, Heather Buchanan, professor in the John J. Cali School of Music, invited Cole to speak virtually with 130 students as part of the Cali School Masterful Musings series. Cole talked about her early life, about Annie Oakley, and about her own musical beginnings as a member of a choir that met every Wednesday afternoon in Brooklyn Heights. A rehearsal of the choir is captured in the film, *When We Grow Up*, with the children directed by the blacklisted composer Earl Robinson. Susan Cole, a girl with braids in the back row between Boy Scouts, sings and dances.

"When she says her line about adults not being any fun, that's when I realized the die was cast pretty early on," says Buchanan. "I'm guessing she was no more than 12 and I just thought, even back then, she was pretty darn serious. She wasn't mucking around."

"She built the buildings but more importantly she transformed the student population."

**Leslie Wilson, associate dean
College of Humanities and Social Sciences**

As for her cowgirl dreams, to this day, "Annie Oakley is so much a part of her," observes Pennington. "It's the maverick, it's the fearless, the going out there and being out on a limb and charging ahead and not worrying about the obstacles that are in your way, and when you find those obstacles, taking them down."

DIVERSITY: A MATTER OF PERSONAL MORALITY

One of Cole's goals was for Montclair State's student body to reflect the diversity of New Jersey. And it does. Representing virtually every demographic and socioeconomic group, from big cities and small towns, students arrive at a campus that seeks to make everyone feel included and welcomed.

"The soul of this university, the very sacred purpose of this university is to create itself as a place where all of our students have the

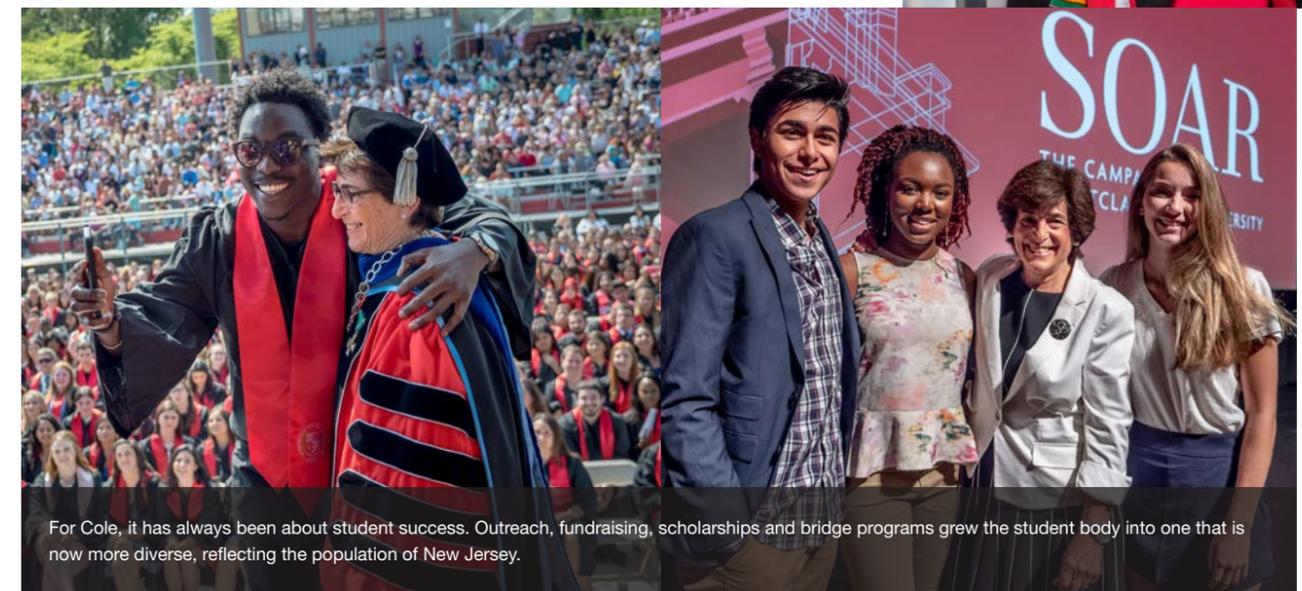
opportunity to fulfill their potential," Cole told students in a video address in June 2020.

Over several decades, Montclair State has worked to broaden the diversity of its student population so that it reflects the rich diversity of New Jersey. Cole built on these efforts and expanded them in several notable ways, including creating the President's Commission on Affirmative Action, Equal Opportunity and Diversity as a vehicle for engaging faculty and staff more closely in the work of diversity and inclusion.

"Dr. Cole expanded the student body in ways that had not been considered," says Associate Dean Leslie Wilson of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. "Our student body became more economically diverse. It became more racially diverse. It became more socially diverse. It became more culturally diverse. She built the buildings but more importantly she transformed the student population. People who would never have

considered applying to Montclair State before do apply now because Montclair State makes them feel comfortable and welcome, and that's important."

The U.S. Education Trust describes Montclair State as a "Top Gap Closer" for increasing graduation rates for minority students, and the University, as a Hispanic-Serving Institution, enrolls more Latinx undergraduates than any other New Jersey higher education institution. It is recognized



For Cole, it has always been about student success. Outreach, fundraising, scholarships and bridge programs grew the student body into one that is now more diverse, reflecting the population of New Jersey.

“A byword that she would always bring into every meeting that we had was retention, not just enrollment, but retention and graduation.”

Karen Pennington, retired vice president for Student Development and Campus Life



Cole congratulates a graduate, one of about 100,000 students who graduated from Montclair State during her tenure.

as one of the Top 100 Colleges for Hispanics each year for the past 18 years by *Hispanic Outlook on Education* magazine.

In her EOF work with students from some of the state’s most impoverished communities, Diggs says that under Cole there was emphasis on achievement and retention, encouraging tutoring and support services, engaging students in clubs and activities, inspiring leadership, and keeping students on track to graduate.

“From a holistic level, the goal was to have the student totally immersed in the culture of the University, because that was the way they were going to be successful,” Diggs says.

Greg Collins, chair of the University Foundation Board, says his alma mater has changed for the better since he graduated in 1979. “Montclair has elevated itself on Dr. Cole’s personal morality. She saw what was best for the students and how it fit into

our world, our society as a whole. And she went forward from there. She didn’t ask permission from anybody. She just did it.”

“She’s done a tremendous job making sure that we have a diverse community,” he says. “When I was a student, Montclair State was not a diverse place. And now it is.”

TOP PRIORITY: STUDENT SUCCESS

When pressed on what makes her most proud, Cole points to University Commencements and the student success they represent. “I see every year as the students walk across the stage there are more of them, from more programs, from more colleges. There are thousands and thousands and tens of thousands of souls that we have served.”

The other proud accomplishment is her longevity in the job. Among college presidents, 23 years is a long time at one institution, as many make their way to the next job after five or six years. But Cole says she wanted to make a real difference at Montclair State – for the sake of the students.

The recognition that students needed to be “front and center of everything that we did” began as soon as Cole arrived, recalls Pennington.

“For many years, a byword that she would always bring into every meeting we had was retention, not just enrollment, but more importantly, retention and graduation,” Pennington says. “That allowed those of us in support positions to place the emphasis where it needed to be, which was on what it takes to help a student succeed and the things we need to ensure that they get to make that happen.”

Cindy Meneghin, director of Student Communications and chair of the President’s Commission on Affirmative Action, Equal Opportunity and Diversity, adds, “Everything Dr. Cole has done and everything she’s doing and everything she

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COLLEGE HALL REDEDICATED AS COLE HALL

On June 22, the Montclair State community gathered to celebrate retiring President Susan A. Cole at the rededication of College Hall in her name.

Now known as Susan A. Cole Hall, the University’s iconic 113-year-old Mission Revival building, which housed the entire school when it opened in 1908, recently reopened after being completely renovated and expanded.

With its signature red tiles, tin ceilings and wood finishes restored, Cole Hall now also includes a soaring glass atrium which houses Red Hawk Central, a one-stop shop where students can get help with financial aid, course registration and more.

“Rededicating the hall in Dr. Cole’s name is the most fitting honor the Board of Trustees could bestow,” says Francis M. Cuss, chair of the Board of Trustees. “Her approach to renovating this building, which honors its past, while preparing it to serve the needs of the students of today and tomorrow, exemplifies what she has done for the entire institution for the past 23 years.”

“As a result of her outstanding leadership, Montclair State has been remarkably transformed, and today we are poised to advance to the next chapter of our history, and to make an even bigger impact on our state and our nation,” Cuss says.

wants us to do is about the students. It's about keeping the talent in New Jersey. It's about making sure everybody who wants a seat in the classroom, gets a seat, helping them grow as people, as good citizens, as not just well-educated, but well-informed and involved. She wants the students to grow as people here."

Under Cole's leadership, research-scholars continually break records for securing external grant funding, with \$22.4 million awarded for the fiscal year

2020 alone. Thanks to their work, in 2017, the State of New Jersey designated Montclair State a New Jersey Public Research University, and in 2019, the University advanced in its Carnegie Classification to R2, Doctoral University.

'TURNING STRAW INTO GOLD'

Remaining affordable and accessible remain core values for the University. To support its commitment, Montclair State has consistently maintained tuition rates

among the lowest of the four-year public colleges and universities in the state, and dramatically increased scholarship funding. Keeping tuition rates low has been challenging in a state that historically does not provide much funding for higher education. In a 100-year history of the institution, *Montclair State University: A Century of Triumph Over Circumstance* written by Professor Emeritus Joseph Thomas Moore, Cole said that in order to provide the buildings and the faculty needed, "we have taken matters into our own hands; we have been aggressive and entrepreneurial and clever about turning straw into gold."

Cole has taken on educating New Jersey lawmakers. Trustee Rose Cali recalls accompanying Cole to Trenton for innumerable meetings with state university and political leaders. Cali says she sometimes questioned whether they had accomplished anything at a meeting, but Cole was stalwart.

"She has clarity in vision," Cali says. "She saw the broader content and context in working with the state. With her fellow presidents throughout the state, she was the leader."

Senator Weinberg explains that Cole "made her impact on the college funding formula, not necessarily on the dollars that came forth from that formula, but to make the formula more equitable. Susan gave me a much more passionate view. It's not just lines on a paper because she made it come alive."

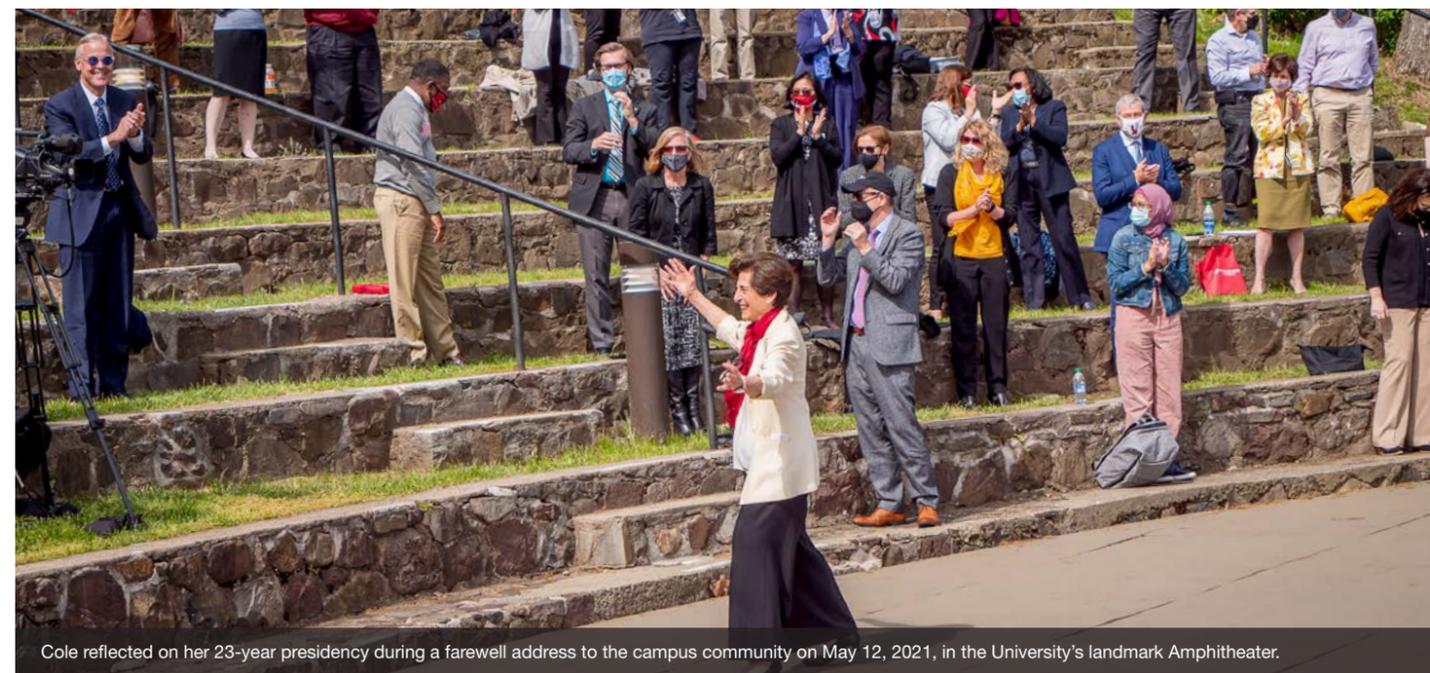
Case in point, the public-private partnerships to build residence halls and outfit other facilities. "The best examples of that were the dorms and the way President Cole navigated her way through the political system to make sure that she was able to construct those and change the campus from one that was mostly commuters, to one where there's actually a student environment on campus now," LaRossa adds.

"Everything Dr. Cole has done and everything she's doing and everything she wants us to do is about the students."

Cindy Meneghin, director of Student Communications



Cole leads an on-campus parade of students, faculty and staff in spring 2021.



Cole reflected on her 23-year presidency during a farewell address to the campus community on May 12, 2021, in the University's landmark Amphitheater.

FINAL BOW

In her fall address on September 9, 2020, her last to open an academic year, Cole said: "I will not tell you, as so many people do when they retire, that it is time to retire because I have accomplished what I came to do. It would not be true. The University is not finished, and I have not accomplished all that I came to do. The University will never be finished; it is organic and ever changing and meant for the ages, not just the decades. ... I am not finished, I could never be finished, so, at some point, I just have to stop."

In a recent interview, Cole said it's time for someone with fresh eyes to look at the future. The University has hired Jonathan G.S. Koppell to succeed Cole as the University's ninth president (see story, page 6).

The foundation that Cole laid will serve the University as it continues to grow. And, to ensure that her legacy serves students well into the future, donors recently contributed approximately \$3.5 million in her honor to benefit students and programs across the University, including a scholarship in her name. The President Susan A. Cole Scholarship will ensure that New Jersey

"The University will never be finished. ... I am not finished, I could never be finished, so, at some point, I just have to stop."

Susan A. Cole

students who strive to achieve educational success have the opportunity for an education at Montclair State despite any economic and social challenges they may face.

After nearly a quarter century dedicated to building and running the University, Cole says she plans to live in a completely different way in retirement – to take the time to walk, to see and to write.

"I've been working ever since I was a little girl helping my parents in their picture frame shop in Brooklyn. I've never not had a job, and my life has been consumed with family and working, and when I work, I work full out, it's never halfway."

That family includes her two children, Simon and Alexa. Simon Cole is a professor of Criminology, Law and Society, and director of the Newkirk Center for Science and Society at the

University of California, Irvine. Alexa Cole is acting deputy assistant secretary for International Fisheries and director of the Office of International Affairs for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries. Cole also has two granddaughters, Sonia, a senior working on a joint degree in History from the College of William & Mary and St. Andrews University in Scotland; and Leah, a senior soccer player at Irvine High School. Cole's husband of 37 years, the visual artist David Cole, died in 2000.

As Cole shared recently with the Cali School choral music students, "When I retire this summer, that's when I'll try and get some balance back. I've been working for a very long time, and now it's time to be Susan and find myself again, outside of the context of work." ■

Essential

Throughout the coronavirus pandemic, Montclair State students and faculty have been working toward the greater good, administering vaccinations and health education, and providing commentary and leadership.

A sampling of the outreach includes clicking into video chats with isolated senior citizens, translating for Latino families at a COVID-19 information event in Montclair, and visiting with the homebound to inoculate them against the virus.

Among the students reflecting on the efforts, Karen Cook, a registered nurse pursuing her BSN in the School of Nursing, says the outreach “was cathartic in a way I didn’t expect.”

Cook vaccinated seniors in their homes through a University partnership with the West Orange Health Department. “Each dose put in an arm, represented a face I wouldn’t see on my next shift at work. I was finally on the proactive side of this battle and that felt wonderful.” ■

Cassie Armout, a sophomore BSN major, monitored senior citizens after they received a dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at the John Reena Senior Apartments in West Orange. Nursing students assisted with vaccination appointments, registration, line control and patient monitoring in the partnership with the West Orange Health Department.

Care

In scenes of community outreach, students and faculty assist in pandemic recovery

1. Aisha Shabbir, a sophomore BSN student, directs a resident to her inoculation. “I was just taking names and they thanked me over and over,” says Shabbir. “We started talking and I told them about my life and they told me about theirs.”

2. Loyal Helwani '16 found herself in the center of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. A health educator, her work has evolved from contact tracing to testing people to coordinating the vaccination rollout for the Clifton Health Department. She is seen here at a drive-through vaccination clinic in Clifton, New Jersey, marking a windshield to note the vaccination time. “To see everything play out the way it did, I’m almost speechless to describe how far we’ve come and how much of our resources and time this has taken,” she says.

3. Karen Cook and Valentina Valencia, registered nurses in the School of Nursing’s BSN program, made house calls to give the Johnson & Johnson vaccine to the homebound. The visits were part of the School of Nursing’s ongoing partnership with the West Orange Health Department. “The second we step inside the residents’ homes we are taking everything in,” Valencia says. “We have to understand this is their most private space and it speaks for who they are.”

4. Theresa Migliaccio '21 and Mark Rodrigues '21, registered nurses who graduated this spring with the BSN degree, prepared necessary documentation for vaccine administration. “It’s exceptionally rewarding,” Rodrigues says, “knowing we are putting people on track for getting back some sort of normalcy.” Adds Migliaccio, “They cry and they’re so thankful.”

5. Christina Chagaris '21 and Gregory Carmona, Nutrition and Food Science majors, and their video pal John Zbozen Jr. at Canterbury Village Assisted Living in West Orange, New Jersey. Throughout the semester, they connected beyond conversations about healthy eating to share life lessons and stories. “This experience taught me about the importance of having a community and support system,” Chagaris says.

6. “It was as if we were lifelong friends,” says junior Gregory Carmona of meeting, finally in person, his “video pal,” John Zbozen Jr., a retired U.S. Army mapmaker, with whom he spent Friday mornings throughout the spring on Zoom to talk about food and life.



RED HAWK ZONE



Chisom Onyewuenyi No. 22

WOMEN'S SOCCER WINS NJAC CHAMPIONSHIP

Sophomore midfielder **Chisom Onyewuenyi** picked the best possible time to record her first goal of the season.

"ChiChi," as she is known to her teammates, blasted a shot from 30 yards out in the 71st minute lifting second-seeded Montclair State to the NJAC Championship with a 1-0 victory over No. 1 seed Rutgers-Camden on April 14.

Onyewuenyi's goal capped off an unbeaten season for the Red Hawks (5-0-2), who claimed their fourth overall conference title and first since the 2014 campaign. It was also the first time Montclair State won the championship in regulation. The previous three – 2004, 2012 and 2014 – were all decided by penalty kicks.

IN RARE SPRING PLAY, FOOTBALL NABS NJAC NORTH TITLE

In a rare, condensed spring season, following a fall that saw only practice because of the pandemic, the Red Hawks football team captured the NJAC North Division title 28-0 over William Paterson University on April 2. Three players who were key to that victory, were named NJAC players of the week for the game that was also the season finale.

Senior safety **Zack Zaccone** was named the Defensive Player of the Week while sophomore running back **Abellany Mendez** was tabbed Offensive Player of the Week and senior kicker **Ian Johnson** was selected Special Teams Player of the Week.

Mendez rushed for 111 yards and scored three touchdowns total while averaging 5.8 yards per carry and pulling in two receptions for 15 yards. Zaccone had 11 tackles, 10 unassisted, and also had an interception and a forced fumble, both of which led to Red Hawks scores. Johnson, who also played soccer for Montclair State and was on the University's diving team, connected on two extra points in his first and only football game for Montclair State.



Zack Zaccone No. 24



Abellany Mendez No. 1



Ian Johnson



Allyn Lilien

WOMEN'S LACROSSE DEFEAT TCNJ FOR FIRST TIME EVER

Senior goalkeeper **Allyn Lilien** matched the school record with 25 saves as the Montclair State women's lacrosse team knocked off No. 10 The College of New Jersey 10-9, the first win over the Lions in program history.

The Red Hawks snapped a 22-game skid against the Lions. Lilien's 25 saves matched the 1981 save performance by Nilsa Ramirez against Rutgers.



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'Magical Evening' Honors Cole, Raises Scholarship Money

In a festive celebration of philanthropy and achievements, more than 250 Montclair State University alumni, friends, benefactors and community members gathered on campus to raise money for student scholarships as well as to recognize the distinguished service of Montclair State President **Susan A. Cole** and honor four influential alumni on May 22, 2021.

The Montclair State University Foundation announced that more than \$4 million was raised in scholarship and program funds for future generations of students, including nearly \$750,000 as part of the Annual Scholarship Fundraiser. Some \$3.5 million of that was pledged in Cole's honor. Guests were also treated to a student performance in the University's landmark Amphitheater.

New Jersey Governor **Phil Murphy** and First Lady **Tammy Snyder Murphy** kicked off the evening by paying tribute to President Cole as she prepares to retire. "Susan has made an indelible mark on this institution, within our higher education community, and on our state," said Murphy. "Your love of this institution has radiated throughout your efforts to better its future.... Because of you, the future of Montclair State has never been brighter."

The evening's program also celebrated the remarkable achievements of four alumni who have carried their Montclair State education forward to achieve great success in their professions and in their communities.

Community philanthropist and dedicated alumna **Rose L. Cali '80** received the Mary Mochary and Michael Kasser Award for Philanthropic Leadership, presented to her by **Mary Mochary**, who along with her brother **Michael Kasser**, are the children of Alexander Kasser, for whom the University's theater is named. Cali's extensive service to the University includes leadership roles on multiple boards, and she and her late husband, John, created opportunities for generations of music students through an endowed gift for scholarships through the John J. Cali School of Music (see profile, page 42).

Cali presented the Rose and John J. Cali Award for Business Leadership and Community Engagement to **Michael J. Fucci '80**, former chairman of the Deloitte US Board of Directors, in recognition of his work to develop leaders in the workplace and inspire students as future leaders.

Co-honorees **Denise Rover '84** and **Al Prieto '84** received the Margaret and Herman Sokol Award for



Alumni Achievement and Civic Leadership, bestowed on alumni who have made a significant contribution to industry, culture and/or society. Alumnus and University Foundation Board of Trustees Chair **Greg Collins '79** (see profile, page 41) presented the award to Rover, sales account manager at NBCUniversal, and to Prieto, vice president of NewsOne at ABC News. In addition to their decorated careers, both recipients have been integral members of the University's College of the Arts, serving on its Advisory Board and Prieto also serving on the Advisory Board of its School of Communication and Media.

Since 1999, the Annual Scholarship Fundraiser has raised millions of dollars to support student scholarships that provide financial assistance to hundreds of students of limited financial means, enabling them to pursue and complete their studies at Montclair State.

For students like **Ashon Lanada**, a junior majoring in Business Administration, scholarship support is life changing. "What drives me is the fact that nobody in my family has done this before – I'm the first to have these opportunities. As a first generation college student, it's vital for me to start the story." ■

1) Theatre and Dance students perform selections from *Working, A Musical* in the Amphitheater.

2) President Cole with the alumni honorees: (from left) Michael J. Fucci '80, Rose L. Cali '80, Denise Rover '84 and Al Prieto '84.

3) Alumni Awards

4) Governor Phil Murphy presents a proclamation honoring Cole's service.

5) Cole addresses the audience at the awards ceremony.

6) Theatre and Dance students perform in the Amphitheater.

Make a Difference

Visit montclair.edu/make-a-gift to make a difference for students at Montclair State.

Fundraiser Supports Rocky's Closet

Vice President for Student Development and Campus Life Karen L. Pennington's retirement inspired a fundraising campaign this spring for one of her initiatives, Rocky's Closet.

Driven by her deep passion for the development of students since arriving in 1998, Pennington launched both Rocky's Closet and the Red Hawk Pantry during her tenure. Alumni and friends have generously supported both projects. The campaign for Rocky's Closet in honor of Pennington raised more than \$15,000 to help students acquire professional attire to help instill confidence for their first interview and to launch their careers.

"Dr. Pennington understood that being able to meet the basic needs of students was an integral step in creating an environment for students to succeed at the University," says Dean of Students Margaree Coleman-Carter.

To support Rocky's Closet, visit crowdfund.montclair.edu/rockyscloset or contact the Office of Annual Giving at 973-655-4141 or giving@montclair.edu.



New Affinity Groups in MONTCLAIRconnect



Looking to build your professional network and connect with fellow alumni? Join the Montclair State alumni online community – MONTCLAIRconnect. Connect with alumni from all class years or join a group from your specific college, region or affinity. You're sure to find a group designed especially for you. The latest groups to launch include the Hispanic/Latinx Alumni Network and Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) Alumni Network.

"For the EOF Program, alumni engagement and outreach has always been an important aspect of our mission," notes Carmen Reyes-Cuevas, assistant director for the Educational Opportunity Fund Program.

The groups offer diverse programming, including social and professional networking events, professional development workshops, and conversations between students and alumni. "The Hispanic/Latinx Alumni Network creates a space where we can support each other, network with each other, learn from each other, and listen to each other's stories," says Katia Paz Goldfarb, assistant vice president for Hispanic Serving Initiatives.

Want to create an alumni affinity group for your team, student organization or academic area? Or a regional chapter or industry-based group? Let us know! Contact us at montclairconnect@montclair.edu.

#MontclairStateGIVES



MONEY RAISED

\$125,258

Giving Day helps fund emergency scholarships and our Red Hawk Pantry.



NUMBER OF DONORS **304**

Thank you for your support.



Students and faculty explored the Galápagos in March 2020 prior to the pandemic. Professor Scott Kight recently led Florida alumni on a virtual tour of that trip.

Virtual Trip to the Galápagos Islands

Hosted by the Montclair State West Coast Florida chapter, alumni and friends enjoyed a presentation from Biology Professor Scott Kight, who is also the associate dean for the College of Science and Mathematics. Kight led attendees on a virtual tour through the Galápagos and shared stories about the scientific history of the islands, illustrated by stunning photographs. Kight and students and faculty from Montclair State traveled to the Galápagos in spring 2020 as part of a biology course, and Kight discussed their learning experiences during this unique opportunity.

Alumni **Jane Bogossian Saks '70, '75 MA** and **Gene Saks '70** appreciated the armchair tour. "We want to thank you so much for giving us the opportunity to see the Galápagos and its animals! It was wonderful," said Jane.

Although the focus was science, the event had broad appeal. "I was never a science person, but Dr. Kight's presentation has us thinking about taking this trip!! And thinking about taking our grandchildren!" says **Joe Fiordaliso '67**, who attended virtually with his wife, **Marilyn '68**.

To view this recording visit MONTCLAIRconnect at connect.montclair.edu. Interested in starting a regional chapter or hosting a virtual event? Contact Karen Hackett, Associate Director of Alumni Engagement, at 973-655-4207 or hackettk@montclair.edu.

University Receives Gift of Hand Sanitizer from My Sales

Montclair State University's efforts to ensure the health and well-being of students, faculty and staff received a boost with a gift of 165,000 units of 3.38-ounce bottles of hand sanitizer from My Sales LLC, a wholesale distribution company based in Edison, New Jersey in February.

My Sales owner Kevin Zhang and Sales Manager Manny Mukhtarov donated 26 pallets of travel-sized hand sanitizers – at least a year's supply – to the University. "Montclair State is part of our community, and we are here to help," Mukhtarov says.



Lavone Broxton '21, associate director of Postal and Warehouse Services, with cases of hand sanitizer from My Sales.

Beginning Your Career: An Alumni Panel



In March, the Class of 2021, along with fellow students and alumni, had the opportunity to hear from three alumni about what employers are looking for in job candidates. Hosted by the Office of Alumni Engagement, the panel featured talent management professionals **Keesha Chavis '97, '03 MA**, associate vice president and chief human resources officer at Widener University; **Chris Fitzpatrick '04**, campus relations manager at Crestron Electronics; and **Bisrat 'Bis' Mekbeb '01**, vice president, lead HR business partner at Global Atlantic Financial Group.

View this recording by signing up at connect.montclair.edu. To learn more about this and other virtual events, visit montclair.edu/alumni or contact the Office of Alumni Engagement at 973-655-4141 or alumni@montclair.edu.

'60's

'70's

CLASSNOTES

Vincent N. Parrillo '65 MA co-wrote *Vincent N. Parrillo: A Collection of His Work* with editor Martie Ohl, published by Liferich Publishing. The work highlights his career as a sociology professor, Fulbright scholar and expert on immigration and intergroup relations. His work has ranged from international speaking engagements and scholarly publications, to producing PBS documentaries and contributing to community theater in northern New Jersey.

Terry Scott Boykie '69 published a novel, *The Forthcoming Jilt*, through Adelaide Books in New York City. It is a culture-collision, genuine poetic-prose memoir of Tim Bratkowski, America's oldest and foremost baby boomer.



Connecting with Alumni Engagement has its perks

PerksConnect is a service providing benefits to alumni, including deals and discounts on travel, insurance, event tickets and more. It is free for all Montclair State graduates. To get started with PerksConnect, just sign in to your exclusive alumni account at [MONTCLAIRconnect](https://montclairconnect.com). For more information, visit montclair.edu/alumni.

Robert Taylor Brewer '70 published his first poem, "Tracking Colonel Gadaffi," through Southeast Missouri State University Press for its *Proud To Be: Writings of American Warriors* series in November. His non-fiction piece, "If You Would Like To Make A Call," was also accepted for publication in *War, Literature and the Arts*, the literary magazine of the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo.

Margaret Hyatt Bayalis '71 used her painting skills to respond to the pandemic's toll by gifting portraits of COVID-19 victims to their loved ones at no cost, though her work has led to donations to local food banks from appreciative families and friends. Her project garnered attention in her home state of Florida, where she also launched the group "Faces Not Numbers," to recruit artists from across the country who share her intentions.

Judith Medwin '74 joined the real estate firm, Brown Harris Stevens. She has been a real estate broker in New York City for many years.

Peter Lieberman '76 released his first single, "I Like To Sing."



Anthony Cafiero '77 has published a dystopian, geo-political thriller entitled, *The Fall of Carbon*. It tells the story of the unholy union in a time when church and state are no longer separate, but instead unite as one.

Anthony M. Carlino '77 was elected vice chair of the Montclair State University Foundation Board of Trustees in October. He has served on the Board for 10 years and was Board secretary prior to this position.

Joe Cosentino '77 published the first two books in the Player Piano Mysteries series, *The Player* and *The Player's Encore*, surrounding a paranormal romantic mystery. He also published *Drama Christmas*, the 11th book in the Nicky and Noah series, in December.

Richard "Rick" M. Geffken '77 MA published *Stories of Slavery in New Jersey*, through The History Press. The book highlights the fact that New Jersey was the last northern state to abolish slavery.

William R. Testa '79 retired as executive director of The Arc/Morris Chapter after 29 years in the position. He was honored in November by the Morris County Board of Freeholders for his nearly four decades as an advocate for people with developmental disabilities.

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Greg Collins '79

A STRONG FOUNDATION

Anyone who thinks that a career in accounting can't be exciting or meaningful has not met Greg Collins '79.

For more than 30 years, Collins worked in the sports and entertainment industry, holding executive positions at Columbia Pictures and AT&T and serving as the chief financial officer for Stevie Wonder's business organization. He also spent time as a director at the New York-based accounting firm Koenigsberg & Parker, LLP and as a partner at Mitchell & Titus, LLP, the country's largest minority-owned accounting firm. Collins capped this phase of his career managing his own boutique firm, G. Collins & Company, LLC.

All that success never clouded Collins' view of the importance of ensuring that all children receive high-quality education. More than 20 years ago he helped

establish the Marion P. Thomas Charter School in Newark, now part of the BRICK (Building Resilient Intelligent Creative Kids) Education Network, which helps the city's neediest children succeed.

His support for Montclair State is also clear: "I never forget where I came from, and I believe that if people help you, you owe a debt back," says Collins, now chair of the University Foundation board.

Collins learned of the University while attending Newark's Malcom X. Shabazz High School, where his guidance counselor urged him to look at the school.

"I had a vision of becoming a corporate executive, so I majored in business," he says. "When I got involved in the cooperative education program, I saw that the best jobs were in accounting, so I moved into accounting."

He credits the Co-op Education Program and the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) with providing crucial support during his college years. "EOF really helped me make it through until I was self-sufficient," he says.

Collins began giving back by serving on the University's Co-op Education Advisory Board, then the Alumni Advisory Board and then with the Foundation, where he served for 17 years, before becoming chair in 2021.

"This is the first time that the Foundation has had an African American chair," he says. "This is long overdue, which makes me especially excited to be stepping into this position."

Collins is focused on growing the Foundation's endowment and providing more resources to the University:

"I also hope to strengthen what the EOF program can provide in terms of scholarships, support for books and other academic resources, room and board, and general sustenance."

Proud of the growth and changes at the University, Collins says it is a "different place from when I went to school here – and not just because there are so many new buildings, majors and programs."

"The diversity is such that the University is becoming a wonderful example of community, of all kinds of people working together," he says. "It makes me proud to see so many different people getting along and taking education seriously, and to know professors who are so devoted to helping students transition into becoming professionals." ■

—Michele Hickey

FOREVER GRATEFUL, FOREVER PROUD

Rose Cali '80

Serving on the Board of Trustees since 1991, Rose Cali '80 has helped shape the University both physically, artistically and communally. She has led the charge on such projects as the naming of the Yogi Berra Stadium; creating, developing and building the Yogi Berra Museum and Learning Center, where she served as president and CEO until 2005; introducing President Susan A. Cole to the Kasser family who embraced the idea to name the Alexander Kasser Theater; and surprising her husband, John J. Cali, by working behind the scenes to name the newly established School of Music after him in 2009, dedicating their generous financial contribution to music scholarships and professorships.

As a longtime advocate for grassroots community partnerships and programs directed to help the underserved, Cali has served on more boards and driven more fundraising campaigns than space allows

— championing worthy causes including the University Foundation, the Montclair Art Museum, Big Brothers Big Sisters, The Salvation Army, Mentor Newark, Write on Sports, the Italian American Forum and the Mental Health Association.

Her legacy includes, in part, the University's growth as a research institution, particularly when it comes to bringing its programs together with organizations such as the New Jersey Coalition for Inclusive Education and The Trust for Public Land for grant opportunities. Cali says such partnerships and the resulting research and education initiatives are "the future of this university."

On top of all that, 23 years ago, Cali helped select Susan A. Cole as president — ushering in a period of remarkable growth and transformation. (See story, page 24.) Since then, Cali has been a

dynamic partner to Cole, riding sidecar on trips to Trenton and blazing a path to the local philanthropic community.

Coming from a hardscrabble diverse working class neighborhood in New Haven, Connecticut, Cali says that she and her four siblings were not "shy observers" of a "curated" life. Their single Latina mom, Alicia, was raised in an orphanage and worked as a housekeeper to support them.

After graduating from Wilbur Cross High School in 1959, Cali left home "because we had to work to survive" and only returned to school for a college degree in the late 1970s after falling in love with John and moving to Montclair with her sons Mike and Josh. After their son Chris was born, she enrolled at Montclair State because "I was hungry to learn." Cali ultimately obtained a degree in Cultural

Anthropology, graduating magna cum laude. "It was an unforgettable day."

Though Cole is retiring, Cali says she is excited about the future of the board and the University.

"Living through this pandemic has reset our mindfulness particularly about educators, who have become exceptionally valued, as parents recognized their dedication to their craft and are reconsidering their worth," says Cali.

"Susan reenvisioned Montclair State and continuously raised the bar over 23 years for our students. I am shouting out my fellow board members who are exceptionally dedicated to Montclair State, working together to raise that ceiling. I'm a very proud alumna forever grateful and proud. I love Montclair State University." ■

—Mary Barr Mann

'80s



'90s



'00s



Elizabeth DiSavino '80 wrote a biography, *Katherine Jackson French: Kentucky's*

Forgotten Ballad Collector, and won the Kentucky History Award from the Kentucky Historical Society. The novel was also the subject of a five-minute, coast-to-coast feature in January on *All Things Considered* on National Public Radio.

Matthew B. Johnson '80 MA published a book, *Wrongful Conviction in Sexual Assault: Stranger Rape, Acquaintance Rape, and Intra-familial Child Sexual Assault*, through Oxford University in October. For the past 20 years, he has served on the faculty of John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY, and is widely published in psychology and law. He has also been influential as an expert witness and advocate for policy reform in legal matters such as interrogation reform, the death penalty and parental rights in family court.

Thomas "Tom" Davies '81 became principal systems engineer at ENSCO Corporation, located at Vandenberg Air Force Base, Calif., in January. This new role helps establish the launch Range-of-the-Future at both the Vandenberg and Cape Kennedy national launch sites.



Richard P. Gallagher Jr. '81 celebrated 13 years at State Street Bank and Trust Company in Boston.

Gerard "Gerry" McIntyre '84 was the choreographer for *Godspell*, the first equity sanctioned musical in 2020 and one of the few during the pandemic. **Nicholas Edwards '14** was also cast in the show, as well as **Najah Hetsberger '21**. The show was featured in *The New York Times* and on CBS and NBC.



Barbara Bell '86 was inducted into the juried organization, National Association of Women Artists. Her work was exhibited at the HIT Festival in Haugesund, Norway, and at the George Segal Gallery at Montclair State in the "Fifty Years of Inspiration and Impact: The Photographic Legacy of Klaus Schnitzer and His Students" exhibit. Her primary focus is printmaking and work on paper.



MaryRuth M. Mercurio '88 (pictured) and **Donna Jamison '92** both started working at The Lubowicki Insurance

Agency this past year in Middlesex County, N.J. Mercurio, an insurance agent for 32 years joined the agency as a commercial agent/CSR. Jamison has a 25-year background in sales, sales training and marketing and joined as the agency's business development coordinator. They are proud to be alumni embarking upon new jobs together.

Pete Mercurio '90 published a children's picture book, *Our Subway Baby*, with Penguin Random House in September. The book tells the true story of how his husband, Danny, found a baby in the corner of a New York City subway station and became a family. See story, page 9.



Daniel "Dan" Gerard '93 became president-elect of the International Association for EMS Chiefs in December.

The IAEMSC mission is to support, promote and advance the leadership of EMS response entities and to advocate for the EMS profession worldwide.

Robyn Merkel-Walsh '93, '95 MA published the texts, *A Sensory Motor Approach to Feeding and Functional Assessment and Remediation of Tethered Oral Tissue*. She has been published in the journal, *Clinical Pediatrics*, as well as in *The International Journal of Orofacial Myology and Myofunctional Therapy*.

William "Bill" Mesce Jr. '93 MA published *Median Gray* with Willow River Press in August. The book received the Individual Artist Grant Award from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts. Serving House Books published his essay collection, *A Screenwriter's Notebook: Reflections, Analyses, and Chalk Talks on the Craft and Business of Writing for the Movies*. He also co-wrote a stage play, *Black Lives/Blue Lives*, with television writer Stephen Harper, supported by a grant from the New Jersey Council for the Humanities.

Thomas Sebok '97 was elected secretary of the Boys & Girls Club of Paterson and Passaic, N.J., in November. He is an executive vice president of PNC Bank.

Robert "Rob" DeCarlo '00 celebrated two milestones in 2020. In September, he and his wife of 13 years, Meghan, welcomed their first daughter, Shelby Francis. In November, he was inducted into the New Jersey Scholastic Coaches Association Hall of Fame, largely for his work from 2002-2013 as head track and field coach at Don Bosco Prep High School. DeCarlo teaches humanities at Mount Saint Dominic Academy in Caldwell, N.J.

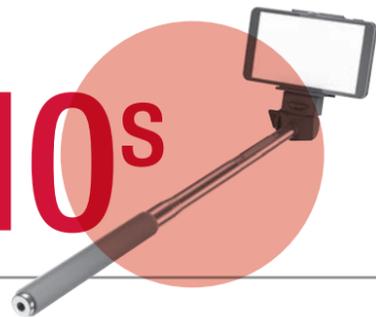


Stacy Albanese Fagioli '08, '17 MA and **Andrew Fagioli '11** welcomed their son, Carson Andrew Fagioli, on November 1, 2020. They look forward to seeing Carson become a Red Hawk in the future!

Jennifer T. Ranu '02 MEd published a historical fiction book, *Colorful Journey*, highlighting the rich history of Paterson, N.J., in the 1950s. Ranu serves as a volunteer storyteller at the Paterson Great Falls National Historical Park and as a volunteer at the Paterson Museum.



'10s



Alexander Rios '03, MD became the resident physician at True Bliss Medical in Verona, N.J. He is also an emergency physician at ApolloMD.

Nicholas V. Vancheri '04, '08 MEd, '21 PhD was appointed acting superintendent of schools for the Northern Region Educational Services Commission in New Jersey. He credits retired Montclair State faculty member Ana Maria Villegas for his success, and wants to continue the work of offering solutions for the specific educational challenges of partner school districts.

Malachy Orozco '05 and his theater company won the 2018 Oxford Samuel Beckett Theatre Trust Award.



Tremayne L. Reid '06 was elected councilman for Dunellen (N.J.) Borough in December, with his three-year term beginning in January. He is the first African American elected to office in that district and is excited to serve the community.



Sharrod Williams '12 developed and wrote a web series, *Neighbors*, which is loosely based on real-life events and friends, and celebrates the BIPOC and LGBTQ experience. The trailer for the series was featured on BroadwayWorld.com. As a young, Black artist, Williams feels it is time to use his voice and tell more stories like these. Williams is a member of the board of directors for the nonprofit organization Broadway For Racial Justice.

Nicole DeMaio '14 became a member of The Broadway Sinfonietta, an all women-identifying, majority women-of-color orchestral collective. The group's mission is to support the existence, excellence and equity of female BIPOC musicians, orchestrators and contractors on Broadway. The group's performance of "You're Gonna Hear from Me" premiered on YouTube with vocalist Solea Pfeiffer. It was featured on NBC, as well as Playbill.com, Broadway.com and BroadwayWorld.com. The group recorded vocals for *Ratatouille: The TikTok Musical*, which streamed on New Year's Day as a Broadway benefit for The Actor's Fund.

Ashley Matarama '14 created an illustration selected as the cover for *Humans in the Wild: Reactions to a Gun Loving Country*, an anthology published by Swallow Publishing and Mythic Picnic.

Jacob "Jake Vincent" Deibert '15 was a featured dancer in the Paul Taylor Dance Company's virtual benefit show, *Modern Is Now: Stories of our Future*, in November. It was hosted by Michael Novak, artistic director, and Alicia Graf Mack, dean and director of the dance division at The Juilliard School.

Theresa Stier '15 co-wrote two pieces in the book, *Channel Kindness*, that was released in September and features a collection of inspirational stories from fellow reporters who work with Lady Gaga's Born This Way Foundation.



Michelle Bayha '16 graduated from Monmouth University with a Master of Social Work degree in August 2020.



Kayla Ceballos '16, '18 MBA was promoted to vice president of sales at Solar Gleam Energy in January. The New Jersey-based firm provides clean, affordable energy to homeowners, businesses and communities across the United States and internationally.

Francesca Moran '16 opened her own business, Nerdabe, an online platform for designers. She was inspired to create a platform that teaches the real process behind an artist's work rather than just the "how" and "why" of design covered in conventional online learning services.

Jade A. Webber '16 published a book, *Profit From Your Untapped Passion*, in which she takes aspiring business owners along on her entrepreneurial journey and teaches them how to successfully design, brand and market their online business. She also has her own graphic design company, JW Branding.Co, which helps entrepreneurs and small businesses worldwide bring their brands to life with graphic design.



Stephen Blazejewski '17 achieved his Certified Financial Planner designation in October and is excited to continue delivering holistic financial plans to help his clients achieve financial freedom.



Megan Eitel '17 AuD works as a research audiologist with funding from the Henry Jackson Foundation at Walter

Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Md. Her research focuses on traumatic brain injury in the military population. She enjoys interacting directly with service members and veterans and working to positively impact the care they receive.

Jennifer Leon '18 was featured in *Horse & Style Magazine* as a contributor. She is a senior account executive at Sirota Public Relations and has secured coverage for clients in several well-known print publications.



Steve Way and his friend Ramy Youssef in a scene from the Hulu hit show *Ramy*.

Steve Way '13

ACTOR AND ADVOCATE

Photo by Barbara Nitke/Hulu

When Steve Way befriended the Muslim kid in fifth grade who was being bullied in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, it was the start of a lifelong friendship that would later lead to Way's television acting career and sow the seeds of his passion for social justice.

The moment he and Ramy Youssef became friends would also one day become a scene in the Hulu hit show *Ramy* about a Muslim American 20-something living in New Jersey and dealing with conflicts between his faith and American culture. In the show, Way plays the title character's best friend — a role he also plays in real life.

"We really bonded over shared feelings of pain of being an outcast, but we didn't really realize that until we were filming that scene," Way says. "Ramy has always been my biggest supporter and helped me out every step of the way."

Way, who graduated from Montclair State in 2013, is no stranger to being in the public eye. Growing up with muscular dystrophy, he spoke at fundraisers beginning at age 9, and spoke at the College of Humanities and Social Sciences convocation the year he graduated — about resilience and rising to life's challenges.

In recent years, he has also become an advocate for people with disabilities, using his platform to call for change. He currently leads the Rutherford Civil Rights Commission and is working to change laws that discriminate against marginalized groups, including those with disabilities.

"I have this growing platform, and I feel I would be remiss if I didn't use it to raise awareness of everything that we go through," he says.

Prior to the pandemic, when he was not on set or advocating, Way worked as a substitute history teacher by day and as a stand-up comedian at night. Now that he's fully vaccinated and the world is opening up a bit, he's starting to get some gigs again, and *Ramy* has been renewed for another season. It was also Ramy Youssef who helped launch Way's comedy career in 2010, when his improv group did a show to raise money for muscular dystrophy.

"Ramy's always seen that talent in me and wanted to bring out the best of me," Way says.

Working on the set of *Ramy*, Way says, has been one of the best experiences of his life. "It's a family. We're all really rooting for each other. It's a great environment."

Way has added his colleagues to the list of those who help get him through each day, saying his "incredible support



Steve Way at home.

system" includes his parents, teachers, friends, doctors, girlfriend and, of course, Ramy. "I wouldn't be here without them."

"I take it one day at a time, understanding that tomorrow won't be like today," he says. "It could be better, it could be worse. There's no need to worry about what hasn't happened when I have the power to figure out what I can do right now." ■

—Laura Griffin

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'10s '20s



Gabrielle Magsino Loureiro '18 recently became a real estate broker manager at Halo Realty's newest branch office in Bridgewater, N.J.

She has received the NJ Realtors Circle of Excellence Sales Award, Bronze Level, for the last three years. She serves as both director and chair for the Young Professionals Network Committee at the Metro Centre Board of Realtors.

Ijeoma Opara '19 PhD received a 2020 National Institutes of Health Early Independence Award. She is an assistant professor at the Stony Brook School of Social Welfare, the founding director of The SASH Lab at Stony Brook University and visiting faculty at Yale School of Public Health through the Research Education Institute for Diverse Scholars program.

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Shannon Donaghy '20 was appointed publicity coordinator in November for Smith Publicity in Cherry Hill, N.J.

Mackenzie Robertson '20 premiered her film, *Life Without Parole: The Sammy Gladden Story*, at the Montclair Film Festival in October.

Nicole Romero-Rendon '20 wrote, directed, edited and completed her latest short film, *A Real Job*, in August 2020. In 2018, her film *Dacamented* won first place for Independent Short Film as well as Best Social or Environmental Documentary at the Passaic County Film Festival and was based on her experiences as an undocumented immigrant.

Kit SaizdeLaMora '20 became an assistant professor of early childhood education at Francis Marion University.

Jamie Schoenbach '20 MA was featured in HobokenGirl.com's "Feel-Good Stories From Our Readers Proving 2020 Wasn't All Bad," highlighting her accomplishment of receiving her master's degree amid the pandemic. She is in her sixth year of teaching fourth grade in New Brunswick, N.J.

Rasheed J. Siyam '20 was sworn in as a law enforcement officer for the North Bergen (N.J.) Police Department in February.

IN MEMORIAM SPRING 2021

Gioia "Joy" Marguerite Toy '39
Ruth D. Alper Goldenberg '46, '48 MA
Margaret Louise Barnard Appleby '47
Aithra A. Vlahopoulos Martin '47
Marjorie "Marge" Morgenstern Glassman '48
Fred Pregger '48, '50 MA
Suzanne Schaffer '48
Dr. Rose Marie Battaglia '51, '66 MA
Ann O'Connell Gebhard '51
Maria Woodruff '51, '56 MA
Helen Foley Gargiulo '54
Leonard "Len" Klein '54 MA
Kathleen F. Breen '55
James "Jim" R. Murray Jr. '56
Gloriette Curtis Owens '58
Charles Yeamans '58
Henry D. "Hank" Barilli '59
Merle Biderman '60
Ronald C. Taylor '60
James A. Crawford '61
Iris Margareta Barley Binder '62, '65 MA
Barbara J. Nuss Gilroy '63
Col. George Piegari '63
Joanne Egan '64
Charles S. Mainenti '64, '66 MA
Glenn A. Ridler '64
John A. Young '64 MA
Frances L. Borsh '65
John E. "Jack" Suffren '65 MA
Ruth A. Bond '66 MA
Carole Lane '66
Warner John Strube '66 MA
Linda Lieb Tieger '66
Adolph H. Haug '68 MA
LaVerne J. Sack '68
Geraldine C. Wagoner '68 MA
Susan N. Sloan '69

Teresa Landini Taylor '69
Catherine "Cathy" A. Duchensky Abboubi '70
Sheila Crotty '70
Doris H. Harnacker Funk '73 MA
Robert W. "Bob" Betz '76 MA
George R. Henderson '76
Levy Nkebani Mayuku '76
Bohdan A. "Bob" Mykulak '76 MA
Dr. Mark Alicke '77
Ann "Nancy" Cunningham Appert '77 MA
Judy Weston '77 MA
Karen C. Lindholm '78
Ruth Buchoff '79
Ann T. Dorko '79
Marilyn E. Mitchell '80
Janet Cooke '82 MA
Patricia J. Vanterpool '84
Gloria Caboy '85
Thomas P. Hunt '85 MA
Judith V. Enhoffer Mitchel '87
Helen Savas '87
Joseph "Joe" Drago '90
Jill M. Homcy '90
Susan R. Garguillo '92
Shirley Erdos '95
John Cvelic '97
Daniel R. Lockart '00
Arthur "Art" J. Maher '00 MA
Chad Davis '02
Yisneyris Monegro De Flores '20

*Jennifer Crum Hunt
*William "Bill" C. Liess '58
**Donald Mintz

*Former Faculty
**Faculty Emeriti



LASTING LESSONS

HARBANS SINGH | PROFESSOR EMERITUS, EARTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

In 2019, Harbans Singh, then the University's longest-serving professor, carried the ceremonial mace as Grand Marshal at Commencement. The mace, an ornamental symbol of authority that originated centuries ago as an instrument of war, took on a markedly benevolent quality with Singh's kind and gently smiling face behind it. For decades before his retirement last fall, Singh's students knew that smile as a reflection of his empathy. "Dr. Harbans Singh has been a friend, a mentor and an inspiration to me since I began my career here," says Amy Ferdinand '14 PhD, Environmental Management, the director of Environmental Health and Safety for University Facilities. "His focus was not just on teaching, but ensuring that students understood the material," says Siobhan McCarthy, reference librarian for Research and Reference Services at Sprague Library, and current student in the graduate Sustainability Science program. Rae Cade '20 MS, Sustainability Science, is now working toward a PhD at Montclair State. She recalls that Singh "started every class with just a little bit of information about himself, talking to students to make sure that we're all okay, mentally and physically." Mike Wilson '09 MS, Environmental Management, says he was unsure of himself when he came to Montclair State as an older student. Singh "gave me the confidence to continue my education. He recognized the valuable experience that I had gained through my employment in public gardening and was always trying to get me to apply practical experience to my studies – but he exerted his influence in subtle ways." Wilson now works as an adjunct professor of Environmental Studies for Ramapo College and as an agricultural extension agent for Cornell University Cooperative Extension Service. "Dr. Singh is one of the kindest and gentlest teachers I have ever had," says Wilson. "He made me feel comfortable from the very beginning." ■ *—Mary Barr Mann*

Read more at montclair.edu/magazine. Let us know who made a difference during your time at Montclair State at editor@montclair.edu.



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