

MONTCLAIR

Fall / Winter 2022

Investiture of
Jonathan GS Koppell

A DAY TO FUEL THE IMAGINATION

The University's Ninth President

THE BIG PICTURE



THE MORE THE MERRIER

Already the second-largest university in New Jersey, Montclair welcomed another record-breaking incoming class and the largest total enrollment in its history this fall. With 4,065 members, the Class of 2026 is the largest and most diverse first-year class in Montclair's 114-year history. It also pushes the University's total enrollment to 21,784 students. Our newest students hail from 39 states and 21 countries, and 42% are the first in their families to attend college. Some 41% of the incoming class identifies as Hispanic, further bolstering Montclair's status as New Jersey's largest Hispanic-Serving Institution.

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FROM THE PRESIDENT



The start of the fall semester not only marked my first anniversary as president, it also brought with it one of the most memorable days of my life – the celebration of my investiture as this great university's ninth president.

I am grateful for the confidence that all students, faculty, staff, alumni, elected leaders, community members and University trustees have placed in me. The passion for this university is as abundant as it is obvious, so the trust that has been placed in me is both humbling and motivating.

You can read about the big day on page 26, and in case you're wondering why it comes with so much hoopla, let me explain:

The symbolism of the chain and medallion – a mark of the office – bestowed upon me at the ceremony speaks to the purpose of an investiture. I am a link in a chain of leaders who served as stewards for Montclair State University. Two of those past presidents, Susan A. Cole and Irvin D. Reid, who played defining roles in the evolution of the New Jersey State Normal School at Montclair into something that would have been inconceivable 114 years ago, were active participants in the festivities and welcomed me to this very exclusive club.

The investiture ceremony, with all its pomp and academic regalia, is a long-standing tradition that I see as a celebration of Montclair State University more than any individual. Ours is a vital institution that has been ambitious and pugnacious, confident and sometimes underestimated, but always focused on its public purpose. It was also a celebration of our power to do great things when we work collectively; we all built this special institution together and together we will do more great things.

So really all of us are links in this chain, connected to the people who for generations have brought their ambitions and industry to our beautiful campus.

As we continue to forge new partnerships, focusing on improving our communities and making the world a better place, we will add links to that chain to inspire generations of Red Hawks to come.

Carpe Diem!

Jonathan Koppell

MONTCLAIR

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THE BACK

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

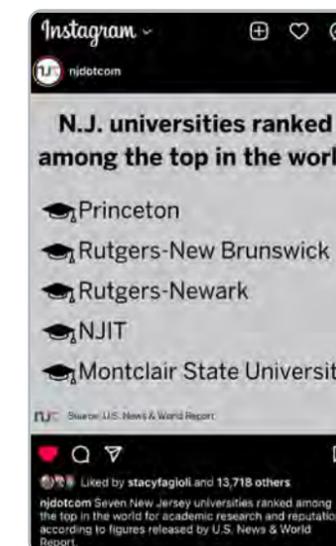
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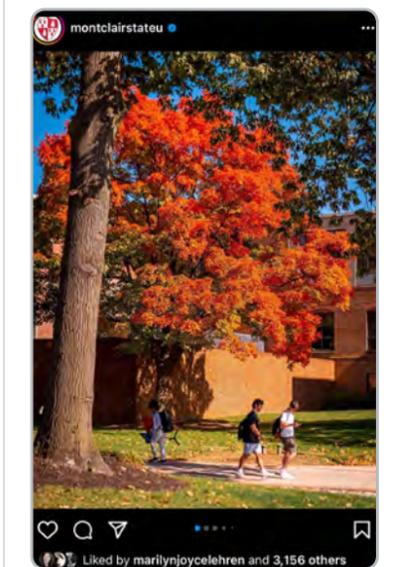
OUR FAVORITE SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS



Montclair's Instagram reel of parents giving college advice to students was viewed 700,000 times in its first two weeks alone and received more than 78,000 likes. We liked it too!



NJ.com posted that *U.S. News & World Report* listed five New Jersey schools, including Montclair, in its global rankings of the best universities IN THE WORLD.



Our favorite color is fall – but winter, spring and summer are also beautiful on campus.



Rankings: Tops in Improving Lives

The University ranks seventh in the nation among 440 national universities in graduation rate performance – the rate at which students outperform the anticipated graduation rate of those with similar backgrounds at other schools – in the *U.S. News & World Report 2022-2023 Best Colleges* guidebook.

Montclair's six-year graduation rate of 67% outpaces the 49% graduation rate predicted for it by the magazine's data analysts. The 18 percentage point difference between predicted and actual rates is the fifth best in the nation among public national universities.

Additionally, Montclair ranks No. 21 in the *U.S. News* list of "Top Performers on Social Mobility," which highlights the extent to which schools enroll and graduate low-income students and bring them closer to achieving the American Dream.

"These results are a testament to the strong work ethic and talent of our students and the dedication of our faculty and staff who support them to ensure they persist, earn a degree and go on to well-paying jobs," says President Jonathan Koppell. ■



MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY



BLOOMFIELD COLLEGE
Est. 1868

HISTORIC MERGER ANNOUNCED

Montclair State University and Bloomfield College on October 26, 2022, announced a merger of the two institutions, advancing plans to create "Bloomfield College of Montclair State University."

The College will continue to operate independently, but in close collaboration with Montclair, through the 2022-2023 academic year, and until it is officially part of the University. The goal is for the merger to be completed on or before June 30, 2023.

Bloomfield students enrolled at the time of the merger will be able to continue their education without interruption or additional costs.

Bloomfield President Marcheta P. Evans shared her enthusiasm and her confidence in Montclair's commitment to Bloomfield College and maintaining its mission, legacy and name. "Bloomfield College of Montclair State University will support and serve our current and future students by providing a

transformative educational experience with access to the University's abundant resources," Evans said.

Montclair State University President Jonathan Koppell says the University intends for the College to continue to offer a transformative education with an emphasis on first-generation students from a diversity of backgrounds, empowering them to attain academic, personal and professional excellence in a multicultural and global society.

"Students enrolled at Bloomfield College will benefit from a distinctive educational environment offering a supportive, small-college experience enhanced by the resources of a comprehensive public research university," Koppell said. "This partnership could serve as a new national model for how institutions with similar missions can innovate through integration and become partners in ensuring student success instead of competitors." ■

Doing Good by Giving Back

On a day for reflection, giving back and supporting local communities, nearly 300 Montclair State University students volunteered September 10 – gardening, planting, painting, cleaning, assisting adults with disabilities and "adopting" grandparents – to commemorate the National Day of Service and Remembrance.

The University's Center for Community Engagement sponsored the events to allow students to serve in a meaningful way, to honor first responders and those who died, rekindling a spirit of unity that arose in America in the immediate aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

Students volunteered both on and off campus – from the Montclair YMCA and the Boys & Girls Clubs in Clifton to Pillar Care for adults with cerebral palsy in Livingston and adopting grandparents at Canterbury Village in West Orange.



Katarina Rodriguez, a junior Business major who helped stain the fence at the Montclair YMCA, says volunteering on the Day of Service "allowed me to pay remembrance towards the tragedy of 9/11 in an intentional way." ■

Nursing Grads Rock *The Today Show*



This year's School of Nursing BSN graduates experienced a unique graduation moment in May – a special, live pinning ceremony on NBC's *The Today Show* as part of the show's Nurses Week coverage.

The 22 graduates, Nursing faculty and President Jonathan Koppell appeared on the national broadcast. Set against the backdrop of *The Today Show* Plaza in Rockefeller Center, the Red

Hawks received their nursing pins in a ceremony befitting an extraordinary college experience that took place amid a global pandemic and included participating in New Jersey's COVID-19 vaccine initiative.

"To be part of something like this was incredible," said Alexander Ng '22. "We have come so far as a class and been through so much together. We have become like a family. To share our story and show the world who we are and how far we have come, and do it on live TV in New York City, is a dream come true and an amazing experience I will never forget." ■

NEW ANALYTICAL MASTER'S PROGRAMS

The Feliciano School of Business now offers a new Master of Science in Digital Marketing Analytics. The 30-credit, STEM-designated program is designed for marketing professionals or those entering the field who seek a foundation in highly desirable applied business analytics skills and hands-on knowledge of current practices in digital marketing.

Students in the program work with real-world data and intelligence to develop mobile, social and web strategies that drive profitable growth by aligning campaigns with consumer needs. The program culminates with a capstone experience, including a practicum that delivers applied learning via actual digital marketing challenges by pairing student teams with organizations seeking assistance.

Program Director Junzhou Zhang, an assistant professor of Marketing, said the new MS program is a response to a need that wasn't being met in the metropolitan area. "Our program combines cutting-edge digital marketing and business analytics content and real-world experiences to meet current and future local and global demand." ■



Students who participated in the seventh annual PSEG Institute for Sustainability Studies' (PSEG ISS) Green Teams program this summer at Montclair State University learned that they can contribute to creating a greener world in both large and small ways.

Those on the Northern New Jersey Communities Foundation team discovered the project they worked on could have helped mitigate flooding by as much as 18% or 34 million gallons of water by using rain barrels and creating rain gardens. Meanwhile, some students made green changes in their personal lives, like switching from single-use plastic to reusable water bottles.

In all this summer, 50 students from 31 universities across the country and in various fields of study participated in the 10-week summer internship program.

PSEG ISS supports research and community projects, including climate change in New Jersey, and energy and water studies globally. In its seven years of operation, the PSEG ISS Green Teams Internship Program has had 320 undergraduate students from 68 different universities and almost 120 degree programs go through the program. At the end of this summer, a total of 64 teams had completed over 250 projects for 39 different hosting organizations, many of them repeat customers, says PSEG ISS Director Amy Tuininga. ■

A Diploma – and a Proposal



The moment that Public Health graduate Kathy Fevrius '22 said "Yes," in front of a cheering crowd of graduates, capped months of planning to pull off a surprise proposal during the June 2 Convocation ceremony for the College of Education and Human Services (CEHS).

"This year, we'd like to do something different, where we acknowledge a CEHS student in a special way," announced Assistant Dean Carolina E. Gonzalez,



**BRINGING
COMPUTER
SCIENCE
TO K-12
CLASSROOMS**

An interdisciplinary team of Montclair researchers is tackling one of New Jersey's pressing educational challenges – a lack of computer science resources and professional development programming for K-12 schools and teachers.

Computer Science Associate Professor Katherine Herbert and College of Education and Human Services Acting Associate Dean for Academic Affairs Sumi Hagiwara are overseeing more than \$1.2 million in grants from the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the New Jersey Department of Education to create support programs, resources, professional development programming and opportunities for northern New Jersey teachers to increase computer science offerings in elementary education.

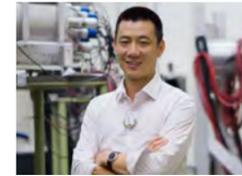
As part of the NSF's Answers and Research Experience for Teachers programs, two collaborative grants (No. 2149750 and No. 2206885) administered alongside NJIT, Rutgers and the University of West Virginia, provide resources to allow K-12 teachers to visit Montclair to work in on-campus research and teaching labs to develop modules for their classes based on their individual research experiences.

The grants follow Montclair's launch of its online graduate certificate program in K-12 Computer Science Teaching in 2020, the first of its kind in New Jersey, designed for equity-oriented teachers seeking to meet demand for high-quality computer science education. ■

inviting Fevrius to the stage for recognition of her student experience at Montclair, adding "one that embodies the identity of our college."

Behind the scenes, Gonzalez was in on a surprise that began minutes earlier when Hendy Joseph had hurried from the bleachers, secretly entering the field, and was waiting backstage with a large bouquet of flowers. On cue – Gonzalez invited to the podium "a special someone" to present Fevrius with the honor.

Fevrius was surprised – and delighted – by the ring and marriage proposal. And luckily for Joseph, who was waiting on bended knee, she said, "Yes." ■



**PROFESSOR'S
NEUTRON
RESEARCH GRANT**

Physics and Astronomy Assistant Professor Kent Leung was recently awarded a grant totaling \$436,000 over five years from the U.S. Department of Energy's Oak Ridge National Laboratory to support research into the neutron's extremely small electric dipole moment, which has never been measured. Determining its value could shed light on fundamental problems in physics, including how matter formed during the Big Bang or the existence of new particles that might explain dark matter.

The focus of this grant will be on the construction of measurement cells – toaster-sized devices that will hold ultracold neutrons cooled down to a fraction of a degree above absolute zero – to be installed in a building-size experiment at Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Tennessee.

"We are thrilled that Professor Leung brings a new and exciting research field to our department – that of low-energy nuclear physics," says Marc Favata, chairperson of the Physics and Astronomy department. "In addition to contributing to world-class research, this award will provide great hands-on experiences for our students – introducing them to state-of-the-art hardware and technology." ■



After a summer field program studying the geological wonders of the American West, Kerry Murphy '22, who graduated in August with a degree in Earth and Environmental Science, says she's now prepared to dig deeper to better understand the world beneath our feet.

Murphy was among nine students in a summer expedition led by Associate Professor Matthew Goring in the College of Science and Mathematics' Field Geology course to study ancient rocks and glaciers for geologic mapping.

"Not only did I get to see some of the most beautiful parts of the country, but I also got to learn about [the Rockies] from a rare and special perspective – a geologic one," says Murphy.

"It's one thing seeing these geologic structures in a textbook or PowerPoint, but seeing them in person gave me a much better understanding of so many concepts."

The geologic wonders were just part of the experience as the students also discovered the impact of natural disasters exacerbated by human-induced climate change as they explored different areas of the iconic landscapes of Yellowstone National Park, the Grand Tetons, Montana and Wyoming. Montclair's Field Geology course provides intensive field training with the students' mapping of the Northern Rockies shared with the Bureau of Land Management for geological purposes. ■

Hard News in the Big Easy

For several years, Journalism and Television and Digital Media students have spent their spring breaks or summer vacations gaining the ultimate hands-on experience in news gathering while working under challenging conditions. Aside from the logistical difficulties of parachuting into a faraway city to report on important issues, students from the School of Communication and Media often have to overcome other hurdles while getting their stories.

This year, while reporting on climate change and racial injustice in New Orleans, the Montclair student journalists faced the toughest challenges yet – from dealing with COVID-19 to broken equipment and a towed rental van. And, despite that, they had to figure out how to get the job done. Just like professionals do.

"I've done a lot of trips with students; this was one of the hardest ones," says Instructor Steve McCarthy, the news producer for the School of Communication and Media who is also a network TV news veteran and Emmy® Award-winning producer.

The end result was a half-hour Montclair News Lab special titled "New Orleans | The Raging Storms" on hawkplus.tv that received recognition from partner NBCU Academy, a journalism training program for professional and future journalists.

Student journalist Michelle Coneo Fernandez says that not only did the trip provide all the students good stories, it gave them new perspectives. "This no longer seemed just a school project; we saw New Orleans' reality," Fernandez wrote in an NBCU essay. "We were professionals in the field, and for the most part, we came back different individuals." ■



Professor Featured on PBS Series

Multimedia Journalism professor and former newspaper photographer Thomas E. Franklin was featured on an episode



of the new PBS series *The Bigger Picture* for his iconic photograph *Raising the Flag at Ground Zero*, which depicts firefighters at the World Trade Center after the September 11, 2001, attacks.

Hosted by Harvard University professor and historian Vincent Brown, *The Bigger Picture* explores American history through recognizable photographs that portray national culture and identity.

In the episode titled "The Hero Shot," which aired on September 6, Franklin shares his experience of that catastrophic day when he captured the heroism of the

firefighters as well as his experience of his work becoming a cultural phenomenon.

"When a plane had crashed into the World Trade Center, I rushed to get there as quickly as any other photojournalist did to take pictures, and I happened to witness a significant moment that became a symbol of that day," Franklin says. "The power of the picture has little to do with me. I'm proud of it, and I'm happy that the picture has done so much good to raise money, but it's really about the feeling and emotion that people feel when looking at it." ■

LESSONS FROM A JAZZ MASTER

Acclaimed bassist and bandleader Christian McBride, a six-time Grammy Award winner, inspired student musicians at the Cali Immersive Residency, a professional residency program of rotating solo artists and ensembles at the John J. Cali School of Music.

McBride headlined events, including a master class and Cali Conversation, a series at the John J. Cali School of Music that engages the University's visiting world-class artists in

discussions largely centered around arts education, teaching and learning.

"Primarily, I want our students to see their musical heroes as human beings who had to deal with many challenges in their journey, and I want them to hear how fellow artists perceive the education ecosystem surrounding us," says Cali School Director Anthony J. Mazzocchi. "All it takes is one moment from one conversation to unlock something for our students here." ■



Acclaimed bassist and bandleader Christian McBride conducts a master class. *Photo by John LaRosa*



WIND SYMPHONY PLAYS PRAGUE

The Montclair State University Wind Symphony conducted by Thomas McCauley performed in Prague, Czech Republic, in late July at the World Association for Symphonic Bands and Ensembles (WASBE) Conference, a festival of symphonic wind music held at the Žofín Palace.

The Wind Symphony is composed of the highest-level wind players and percussionists at both the undergraduate and graduate levels from multiple music programs, including music education, music therapy, performance and composition. Their trip abroad marked the first time any large ensemble from the John J. Cali School of Music has received such a prestigious international invitation.

Students made the most of the experience. "We worked tirelessly all year to prepare for the performance and the results were significantly rewarding," says Amanda Roth, a junior Music Education major and flutist.

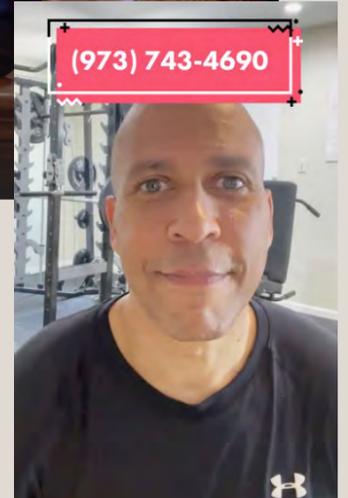
The trip also included an evening concert at the renowned MuTh concert hall in Vienna, Austria, where the Vienna Boys Choir presents many of their concerts, according to McCauley. "Truly a memorable night." ■



Sports Psychology Professor Rob Gilbert

MOTIVATION ON CALL

(973) 743-4690



A screen shot from U.S. Senator Cory Booker's TikTok video about the motivational hotline.

Sundays are not usually busy on Montclair Sports Psychology Professor Robert "Rob" Gilbert's "Success Hotline." But one Sunday in August, hundreds of calls started pouring in, thanks to a social media shoutout by U.S. Senator Cory Booker.

Every day for 30 years, Gilbert, a public speaker, author, and motivational and sports coach, has recorded a three-minute motivational message for his legions of callers from around the globe. On this particular August day, he recorded message number 11,500.

Booker shared not only how Gilbert's hotline motivated him when he was applying for a Rhodes Scholarship in 1992 but also the hotline number, 973-743-4690. Booker, then a Stanford student, did indeed become a Rhodes Scholar. Fast forward 30 years and Booker, who took a lesson from Gilbert, also started sharing motivational messages to his mentees, family and followers via social media. On August 14, Booker called the Success Hotline and "lo and behold, I hear the message," he shared with his almost 1.3 million combined TikTok and Instagram followers.

Gilbert's success has all been word of mouth – and now via social media.

After 30 years of daily messages, Gilbert, who has taught at Montclair for 43 years, knows when someone has shared the number, as he sees spikes in call volume.

What prompted this extreme exercise in consistency? Before he started teaching sports psychology at Montclair, Gilbert was a high school wrestling coach and would see his students five to seven days a week.

"I'm teaching graduate students, many of them coaches, and I only see them once a week. It really doesn't make sense because graduate school is much more important than high school

wrestling," Gilbert recalls thinking to himself. So, as a way to "be" with his grad students seven days a week, he purchased a phone system that allowed him to leave a three-minute recording and also collect messages from his students.

He intended to do it only for the semester, which would have been roughly 100 messages "just as an experiment."

Today, the Success Hotline has a loyal following, including some celebrities who have sworn him to secrecy. "I never know who's going to call. Yesterday, Cory Booker called me. Olympic champions call me. Pro athletes call me. I have all these people that I would never know if I didn't have my hotline," Gilbert says. "I've been getting thousands of calls, and I have eight lines."

Like his fans, Gilbert is relentless in his dedication. He has recorded the messages from hospitals before and after medical procedures and while outdoors in freezing temperatures in Vermont. "I've never ever missed a day," he says. "I had thousands of people calling from all over the world. I wasn't expecting that! It's been a whole lot of fun, so I've never stopped since January 22, 1992."

In three decades, there's been only one glitch: Side effects from a shingles vaccine delayed his daily recording until 5 p.m.; he usually records it at 7:30 a.m. Gilbert makes no money off of the hotline or podcast.

"I mean, I'm a teacher," he says. "And what I want to do is to spread good information." ■



Forced to flee their countries, scholars like Pavlo Lushyn (above) from Ukraine and Roya Saqib from Afghanistan are welcomed by Montclair.



Finding Refuge

Since fleeing Ukraine, renowned scholar and psychologist **Pavlo Lushyn** has found refuge at the University, where from his new academic – and safe – home, he keeps close tabs on his country, closely following the news and volunteering on the front lines of a growing mental health crisis.

“From the beginning,” Lushyn says of the Russian military invasion, “I have observed not only the state of my own internal psychological condition, but also have witnessed what has been going on inside Ukraine and the traumatic experiences being suffered.”

Lushyn served as a visiting scholar at Montclair 20 years ago, collaborating with the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children. The connection paved a path to refuge when colleagues learned that Lushyn was among the 8 million people displaced from the devastated Eastern European country. Collective efforts began within Montclair to untangle red tape and find funding for a faculty position and housing for Lushyn and his wife, Tanya. Lushyn teaches philosophy for children, central to the Department of Educational Foundation’s emphasis on morality, ethics and critical thinking to help solve real-world problems.

The humanitarian response to a global crisis is consistent with the University’s identity and mission as a public-serving institution. Through the years, Montclair has helped other displaced scholars, most recently last spring when it welcomed Political Science and Law Professor **Roya Saqib**, a women’s rights advocate and scholar who escaped the Taliban in Afghanistan in the fall of 2021.

As an employee of the collapsed government – a technical assistant to the country’s president – and an activist for women’s rights, Saqib risked retaliation if she remained.

“I was also concerned that I had no future, that everything I’ve done and earned in my life with lots of difficulties and challenges would all just go back to zero and I would be sitting at home, doing nothing and looking at what’s happening in my country without being able to stop or change it,” she recalls.

In her new position funded by the Montclair State University Foundation, Saqib has been appointed an instructional specialist in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, and is also pursuing research as an Afghan Crisis Fellow with New York University. “I’m one of the lucky ones to have these opportunities, but many are back in Afghanistan, they’re still suffering,” Saqib says. “That’s why I want to work for those who are left behind.”

“As an engaged university, we act to build the world that we want to live in, and we know that our actions speak louder than any words can,” says University President Jonathan Koppell. “At times, those actions may feel small in comparison to the scale of the tragedies unfolding around the globe, yet we are not deterred because in making this seemingly modest contribution, we underscore the role we can all play in creating a more just world.” ■

—Marilyn Joyce Lehren

BORN A RED HAWK



The baby almost born in Bohn Hall graduates from Montclair and is now engaged to a Red Hawk, too

By Marilyn Joyce Lehren



Diana Sisk-Gritz and her mother Stefanie Mulley celebrate at the Convocation ceremony for the College of Science and Mathematics. Photo by Mike Peters

In a life story that has come full circle, the baby who was almost born in Bohn Hall is now a graduate. Diana Sisk-Gritz earned a bachelor's degree in Marine Biology and Coastal Sciences as part of the combined BS/MS program.

Twenty-two years ago, her mother, Stefanie Mulley, then a Montclair freshman, went into a surprise labor in the residence hall – not knowing she was even pregnant. Floormates helped their friend continue with her classes, babysitting when she would

bring baby Diana to campus and giving her a onesie emblazoned with “Everybody loves me at Montclair State University.”

As a student, Sisk-Gritz embraced the Red Hawk spirit. She also fell in love. And that’s where the second part of this Red Hawk story begins.

Sisk-Gritz celebrated her graduation with family on June 4, during the afternoon Convocation ceremony for the College of Science and Mathematics. It was going

to be a long day because her boyfriend Tyler Frantino was also celebrating his own Convocation for the College of the Arts that evening.

In between, the families passed the time taking photographs and walking around campus, Frantino with an eye to the perfect place to pull off a surprise of his own.

“We were taking pictures near the Red Hawk statue, and I was going to ask her there. But that seemed way too cheesy,”



A family keepsake. Photo courtesy of Diana Sisk-Gritz

Frantino says about the proposal he was going to make. When the family gathered on top of the small hill looking over Sprague Field, he saw that the setting was perfect.

“It was a beautiful background,” Frantino says. “It was set up for the ceremonies, so you could place the time that it happened.” He doesn’t quite remember all that he said on bended knee. “You can practice as much as you want, but when it’s happening, it’s amazing but very stressful . . . Diana said ‘Yes,’ and immediately after, with no hesitation, she told me I had a bug on my shoulder.”

“When we found out our Convocations were the same day, I told him it would be so cute if he proposed since, for me, so much has happened at Montclair,” Sisk-Gritz says. “I was surprised but I had a feeling because my family was being weird. My mom was doing a livestream and I was wondering why she was recording.”

For her mother, the engagement is especially sweet, given her fond memories of Diana’s earliest days on campus. In stories first published in the University’s student newspaper, *The Montclarion*, Mulley recalled the friends on her floor in Bohn Hall who helped babysit Diana. “They would dress Diana up like a doll,” Mulley told the paper.

Sisk-Gritz’s birth story always made for a great icebreaker whenever she met new people on campus. “I feel like a secret celebrity, honestly,” Sisk-Gritz told *The Montclarion*.



Tyler Frantino proposes to Diana Sisk-Gritz on Saturday, June 4, between their two Convocation ceremonies. Photo by Matthew Rolfert



An April 2000 edition of *The Montclarion*. Photo courtesy of The Montclarion archives

Mulley didn’t end up finishing her degree, but when her daughter began applying to colleges she told her: “You were born a Red Hawk, you have to go to Montclair.”

Now, Sisk-Gritz jokingly says that her mom is beginning to hint, “You’re engaged to a Red Hawk, you have to marry at Montclair.” No wedding date has been set but Sisk-Gritz returned to campus this fall to

finish her master’s program, researching the invasive clinging jellyfish found at the Jersey Shore, and then she plans to go to veterinary school. Frantino is working as a graphic designer for Middlesex County.

“Everyone’s love story is unique,” Sisk-Gritz says, “but I feel like this one is, especially for me.” ■

HAPPY TO ((HEAR)) THAT

Audiology students offer hearing screenings to pre-K and kindergartners in community schools

By Sylvia A. Martinez



A student in Newark holds a block to indicate she's heard a "beep" in her right ear during a hearing test.

Photos by Mike Peters

Skylah, a pre-K student at a school run by The Leaguers, Inc. in Roselle, New Jersey, holds a paper cookie to her left ear. She's wearing headphones attached to one of the portable audiometers the Montclair State University students and professors have brought to the school. Upon hearing a beep, the three-year-old gives the cookie to Quinley, the mouse from the children's book *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*, as instructed by Gita Balsler, a second-year Montclair audiology student.

Nearby, first-year audiology student Grace Gleba works to get 4-year-old Jowel to play a similar game as she checks his hearing. "If you hear a beep, throw the bean bag in the bucket, okay?" Gleba instructs him.

Jowel holds the bean bag to his left ear. But after the beep, nothing.

"Did you hear the beep?" He nods.

"Was it this ear or this ear?" Gleba asks, pointing to the red and blue headphones he's wearing. He points to one ear, then the other. Audiology Clinic Director Faith Mogila steps in to help, challenging the boy to beat her at tossing the bean bag into the bucket. They continue working with him, ultimately determining that he can hear, he's just quite shy. Jowel moves on to an otoscopic examination with first-year audiology student Max St. Germain.

In all, on this day, about 40 Roselle children will have their hearing screened using the audiometer and a visual ear examination with an otoscope. In addition, they will undergo an otoacoustic emissions test, which involves placing a tiny device in the ear that emits sound and records an echo, measuring cochlear function. It's commonly used with babies and small children because it doesn't require a behavioral response from them.

The four Montclair students in Roselle are among 13 audiology doctoral students dispatched to three Early Head Start and Head Start programs run by The Leaguers, the oldest incorporated African American social service agency in New Jersey. The nonprofit organization provides services to 1,700 low-income families in Essex and Union counties. The hearing screenings, part of a partnership with the New Jersey Department of Health's Early Hearing Detection and Intervention, provide a public service and give audiology students hands-

On this day, screenings are also taking place in Irvington and Newark – the same day news of Mattel's release of a new Barbie with hearing aids made the rounds among the students. The activities used during the screenings are meant to make the assessments more entertaining and less scary for children. Audiology students were challenged to come up with new age-appropriate activities that could be used to condition a child from 3-5 years of age. Gleba's idea for the mouse-and-cookie activity, sparked by a trip to her mother's



Nicole Genser asks a child whether he heard a beep in his left ear; he holds an elephant to his ear and tosses it into a basket upon hearing a beep.

on experience. Audiology students in the University's Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders also provided hearing screenings to athletes participating in the Special Olympics New Jersey Summer Games in mid-June. These are just some of the ways these students and faculty are making a difference in nearby communities.

basement where her mom still keeps all of her childhood toys, was approved for use. In fact, it was her stuffed mouse that was used at the Roselle school. At The Leaguers school in Newark, five Montclair students used toy elephants and building blocks to engage the children.

Second-year audiology student Sean Kleczkowski is conducting his first screening of young children in a preschool setting. "It's really important to screen their hearing because they may be missing learning in class and not even know it," Kleczkowski says.

While children are screened as newborns, as required by law, hearing issues can still develop. "They could have a late onset [or progressive] hearing loss," Kleczkowski says. "Incidents of hearing loss can double between birth and age 6, so it's crucial that we do these screenings."

Ivonne Jaramillo, a health and nutrition specialist with The Leaguers, says she and other specialists typically travel to schools to do hearing and vision screenings at the beginning of the school year, as required by the school, but that having an additional follow-up screening is also good. "It's important because we want early intervention," Jaramillo says. "Not being able to hear could interfere with school productivity."

Pre-K teacher Mariam Gonzales monitors the proceedings as some of her preschoolers get tested while others await their turn. She's optimistic that they will pass the screening. "I haven't had any problems with them not hearing me in the classroom," she says.

Parents, who provided consent for the screenings, will receive letters explaining their children's results. Any student who doesn't pass the screening will be referred to their pediatrician and an audiologist in their area. The parents of all the children tested will also receive literature explaining the importance of screening and signs of normal speech and language development.

At The Leaguers' Early Head Start and Head Start programs in downtown

"It's really rewarding to be able to do screenings for one's community. We're applying our knowledge for the better good."
 —Cindy Fernandez



1

1 Third year audiology student Rosie Ovadia places a tiny device in a Newark student's ear for an otoacoustic emission test, which determines cochlear function. 2 A child in Newark holds a toy elephant to his forehead in a hearing game involving moving the elephant every time he hears a tone in the headphones. Giving children interesting games enhances their ability to listen for the tones. 3 Second-year audiology student Cindy Fernandez tests a Newark child's hearing using an audiometer. 4 Professor Maryrose McInerney assists audiology student Alyssa Bonapace in conducting an otoacoustic emissions test on a young student in Newark. 5 A student in Newark waits patiently while Montclair audiology student Nicole Genser conducts an otoacoustic emissions test, which takes about three minutes.



2



3



4



5

Newark, first-year audiology student Vanessa Coppola says she enjoyed testing the children, "It was a lot of kids and a lot of experience screening children." Some, she says, will need follow-up testing.

While Balsler, second-year student Cindy Fernandez and third-year student Rosie Ovadia have tested young children before, more often than not these screenings are the first opportunity for Montclair audiology students to screen children, says Mogila.

At Montclair's audiology clinic, the students work mostly with adults who are in a soundproof booth. At the Newark school, "it was interesting," says Nicole Genser, a first-year student. "We had to think about the best way to set it all out in terms of environment and noise. The kids were great."

Professor Joan Besing, director of Clinical Graduate Programs in the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders, says going to schools sometimes affords Montclair students new experiences. "There were some students who had tubes in their

ears; our students hadn't seen that before. It provides them with hands-on experience so that they become more comfortable."

There's the added bonus of giving back while also learning. "It's really rewarding to be able to do screenings for one's community," says Fernandez. "We're applying our knowledge for the better good."

To learn more about the Doctor of Audiology program, visit montclair.edu/graduate/programs-of-study/audiology-aud. ■

TAKING CARE *of* EACH OTHER

The pandemic has made mental well-being a campus priority

By Marilyn Joyce Lehen and Sylvia A. Martinez



Avery Nixon in *The Montclarion* office shows the column she wrote on persevering and managing depression as a student.

A

very Nixon was looking forward to living on campus and sharing a room decorated into a dream space with a best friend. But the experience to start her sophomore year wasn't at all as she expected. A change in her medication triggered the depression she has been living with for years. She cried every day, and in a column she wrote for the student newspaper, she confessed, "It feels like I'm just waiting for the day I crack and lose myself for good."

It's the type of story that a few years ago may not have been easily shared, but with the pandemic heightening mental health concerns on college campuses across the country, feelings of depression, anxiety and isolation are now easier to talk about, students and campus experts say.

As a result, a culture of wellness is being built into day-to-day campus life, with Montclair State University embracing a variety of approaches: everything from group therapy, peer counseling and telehealth to meet the demands for counseling, to arts and crafts, mediation events and petting furry animals to help students de-stress. In addition, faculty and staff are receiving

resources and training to spot students in distress. This fall, the University introduced a new office to provide students with a deeper "sense of belonging" to the Red Hawk community, the aptly named Office of Student Belonging, to pull together vulnerable groups that research shows need additional support and better connections to fully immerse in the college experience.

"Mental health issues are considered by many in higher ed to be at epidemic proportions," says Vice President for Student Development and Campus Life Dawn Souferis. "Before the pandemic, we started to see a rise and the need to increase counseling and therapeutic services for students and provide more opportunities for students to be involved in campus life. Then the pandemic hit. What we've found with national research and certainly hearing from our own students, is that feeling of isolation, the feeling of anxiety and the diagnosis of anxiety, and just the difficulty of our students trying to figure out how to engage with others."

Nixon, a Film and Television major, says she has strategies to help her cope and is active in several student groups, including *The*

Montclarion. “I usually don’t talk about that kind of stuff with my friends,” she says. “It’s not because I think they can’t help or that they don’t care. It’s just that I’m used to dealing with things alone.”

Across the country, school leaders and experts say the pandemic exacerbated the already disproportionate mental health struggles of young adults between the ages of 18 and 24. Students juggling challenging coursework, relationships, economic strains and adjustment to campus life, are now also facing various forms of loss related to COVID-19.

“The conversation has been amplified,” says Jaclyn Friedman-Lombardo, director of Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS). “The pandemic emphasized this conversation about mental health as something that is just as important as other types of health issues.”

The University also offers clinical psychological services to the community and is contributing to the body of research, on both the impact of the pandemic and mental health. In October, Montclair hosted an interdisciplinary neuroscience conference on research into the potential

use of hallucinogens in treating depression and PTSD. “This is a conference about solutions,” President Jonathan Koppell told attendees. “Mental health and well-being is one of the most pressing issues of society today, and we need to be looking into every possible response available to us.”

Last February, Montclair researchers published one of the first and largest studies to document the psychological, academic and economic impact of COVID-19 on Hispanic college students, and in August convened experts from the tri-state region to craft strategies to reduce harm for this vulnerable population.

“Given how extraordinary these events are, it’s important to document how it’s affected college students,” says Psychology Professor Jazmin A. Reyes-Portillo. “Young adulthood is a high-risk period for the onset of mental health problems, even without a major stressor like the pandemic. It’s a period of immense growth and personal change. Add in COVID, and it’s a one-in-100-year event that we felt was important to highlight.”

The transition from high school to college can be challenging, “but particularly for

first-generation students, where I think there tends to be more pressure either placed on them by themselves or by family or culturally,” says Tiffany Ciprian, staff clinician and CAPS coordinator of outreach and prevention. “One of the positives of the pandemic is that it allowed for people to say that mental health matters and that it’s OK to seek help.”

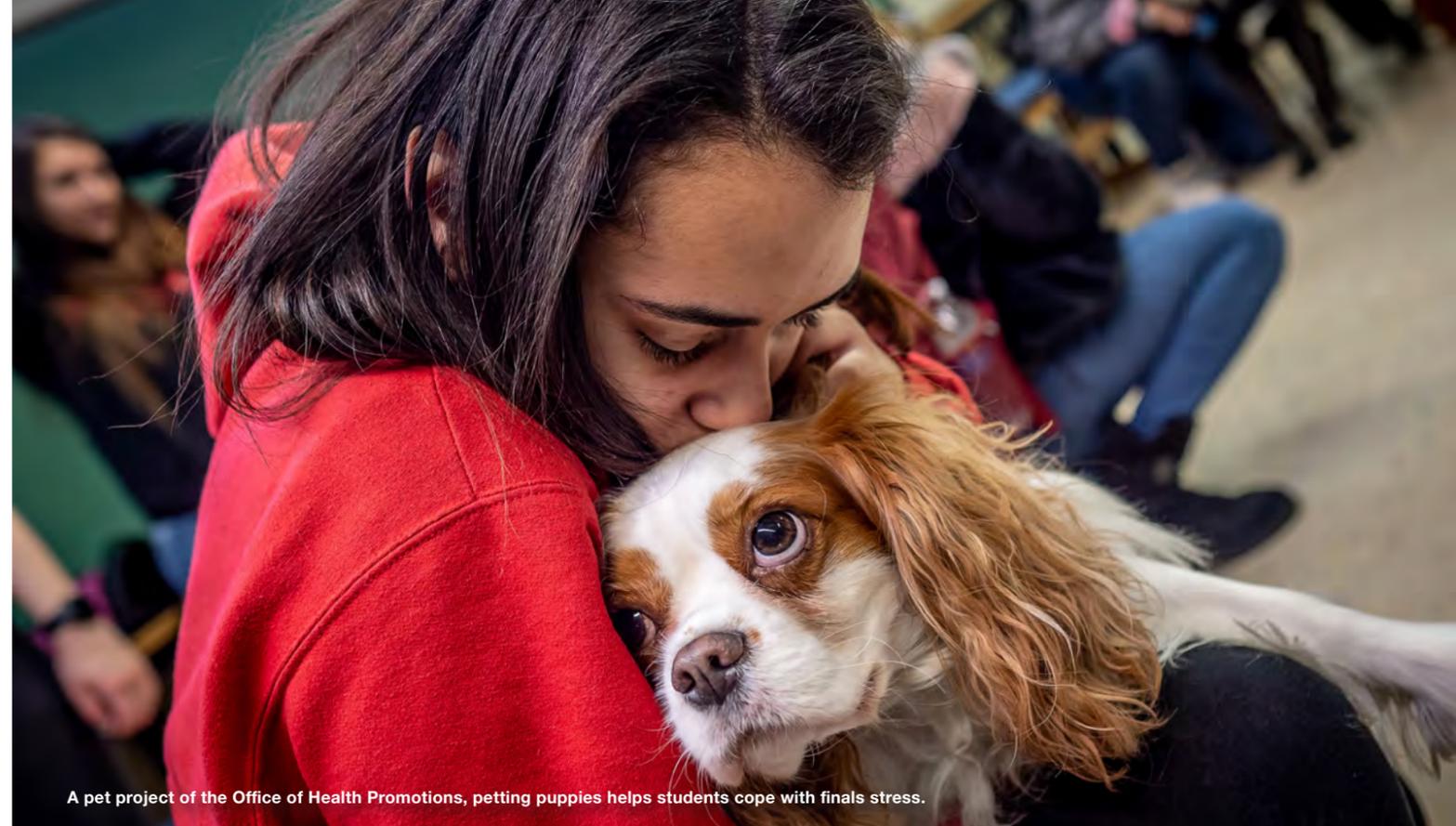
Olga Ramirez, a junior Education major and first-gen college student, turned to CAPS for support in meeting the demands of home, school and jobs (she’s a substitute teacher and works in a retail store). She didn’t feel she could talk with her parents since some of the pressure was coming from them.

“When you’re having a problem or you’re stressed out, you seriously feel alone,” Ramirez says, noting that her freshman year was filled with lots of tears. “You feel there’s no way that somebody else can understand what you’re feeling.” But when she heard other first-generation students talk about demands made of them by family members, “I was like, ‘Oh my God, I’m not crazy,’” she says. “I knew that my parents were asking for too much, and I felt guilty for feeling that way.”

CULTURE OF WELL-BEING

The University has prioritized mental well-being. Its Crisis Assessment Response and Education (CARE) team meets regularly to evaluate concerning behaviors, and CAPS has expanded the variety of services it offers, including group sessions, peer support and Let’s Talk – the informal, one-on-one consultations with counselors offered both remotely and in person at different locations around campus. “We’re trying to meet students where they are and offer a menu of options where students get to decide what works best for them,” Ciprian says.

Ciprian oversees the CAPS Ambassadors, a select group of mostly undergraduate students who share an interest in mental health through their majors, personal experience or the



A pet project of the Office of Health Promotions, petting puppies helps students cope with finals stress.



Students enjoy a game night at the Sprague Library.



Students dance during a block party celebrating Hispanic/Latinx Heritage, one of the nearly 700 events on campus this fall to promote student belonging. Photo by John LaRosa

“It was clear from the get-go of the pandemic that we were going to have to approach things differently in terms of how we help, particularly our undergrads, by increasing opportunities for students to engage and connect and feel like they belong.”

—DAWN SOUFLERIS
VP, STUDENT DEVELOPMENT AND CAMPUS LIFE



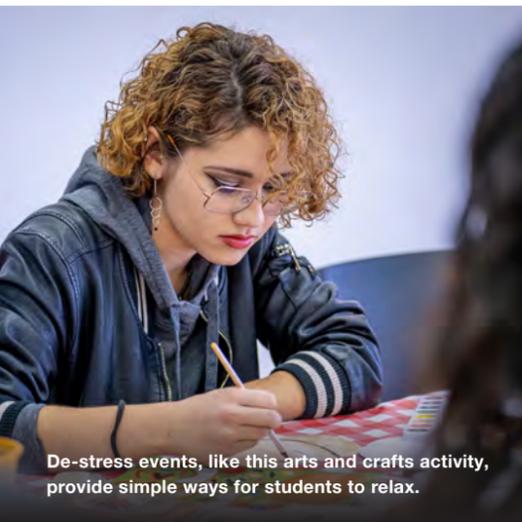
Director of Counseling and Psychological Services Jaclyn Friedman-Lombardo says the pandemic has made people understand that mental health matters.



Orientation peer leaders, working in connection with the Office of Student Belonging, welcome new students to campus during orientation to help incoming students engage in campus life.



The University has held hundreds of events so far this fall to give students a sense of belonging. About 600 students turned out to celebrate Rocky’s birthday.



De-stress events, like this arts and crafts activity, provide simple ways for students to relax.

experience of family members and friends. "It's impactful when we have ambassadors at our events, because students want to hear from other students. It helps with messaging and it really helps with destigmatizing when it's peer to peer," she says.

"Students come up to us at our events and break down what they're going through," says CAPS Ambassador Lisselo Santos Pichardo, a senior with a double major in Medical Humanities and Psychology. "I hear them out and tell them, 'It's OK, you got this.' And then I ask if they feel ready to start their journey? If they don't feel comfortable doing individual therapy, I tell them about Let's Talk and group therapy. I let them know there are other resources and that they don't have to take the big step yet."

Santos Pichardo understands because she has walked in their shoes. "I was that person once upon a time," she says, a first-gen student whose own stresses during the pandemic, academic struggles and family losses inspire her support for fellow students. "In my background, we never talked about mental health illnesses, we never talked about depression. It was a thing that if you needed any help, first, you do it on your own. You never reach out for help. And second, if you're going through mental health issues, you pray about it. I don't know about other students. I just know for first gen, it's hard."

Ramirez says she attended CAPS counseling during her freshman year. "I was stressed and sad most of the time. I was letting my insecurities stop me from interacting with others or even attending events."

Today, however, she no longer feels isolated. "I'm now involved on campus. I have friends on campus, and on my days off, I try to spend time with my sisters or friends," Ramirez says. "I keep myself occupied to avoid depression." In addition, she's taken up journaling as a coping mechanism. "I started journaling and it helped me with stress and on my days off I try to put school and work aside. I feel very happy and comfortable on campus."

That sense of belonging is key. "Mental

health isn't always about seeing a therapist or a psychiatrist; sometimes it's about becoming involved in your community. It's about making those connections, feeling you belong," Friedman-Lombardo told *CBS Evening News* for its Back to School series last year.

Montclair's culture of wellness is wide ranging. During the pandemic lockdown, staff and faculty volunteers called all 21,000 students to check on their well-being and lift their spirits. This fall, during Mental Health Awareness Week, CAPS Ambassadors ran a campaign on why mental health matters.

"Some of the challenges students face are adapting to being around more people, managing in the classroom versus virtually," says Staff Clinician Khabir Williams. Students who were isolated during the pandemic are seeking help with interacting with classmates. "How do I engage with people? How do I connect with people? I've seen a lot of that as well," says Williams.

Soufleris says, "It was clear from the get-go of the pandemic that we were going to have to approach things differently in terms of how we help, particularly our undergrads, by increasing opportunities for students to engage and connect and feel like they belong. The 'belonging' piece has become something of a buzzword in the field of higher ed, but it has some basis in diversity, equity and inclusion research. When students have a niche, they feel better about themselves, they feel more stable." To emphasize the point, the Division of Student Development and Campus Life this fall created stickers and pins that say, "You Belong Here."

Responding to the longing for social interactions, the division has run nearly 700 programs and outreach activities since September – and students are attending in record numbers. Rocky's birthday party in October, traditionally a campus favorite, this year attracted a record 600 students, plus mascot pals from other universities. "We're seeing that with other types of events all over campus, whether it's attending a club and organization meeting, making a tote bag or painting," Soufleris says.

SOUND BODY, SOUND MIND

Campus recreation also comes into play. Intramural sports, fitness classes and making s'mores around the fire pit are among the ways the University helps students engage with each other. "It ties into the greater notion of holistic student well-being," says Associate Director of Campus Recreation David Bryngil. "Being physically active, whether that's hardcore playing competitive sports or working out, even just walking, it has such a positive impact on your life. It helps clear your mind, it helps de-stress."

Extra attention is paid to health and wellness at the end of each semester. Miniature horses and puppies, a therapeutic project of the Office of Health Promotions, and events on nutrition, sleep and relaxation rooms help students cope with the stress of their final exams.

Telehealth has also grown. TAO Connect is a free online program available to all Montclair students, faculty and staff to help them manage depression, pain and anger, and improve communication and relationships.

Emily Isaacs, through her role as executive director of the Office of Faculty Excellence, addresses how faculty can help students with their trauma – as well as deal with their own. In workshops, she guides faculty members on recognizing it and connecting students with services.

"We can do some work not only as the instructor but also as the informed adult in the room," Isaacs told her peers at a recent session. "I don't have a background in public health, but I have a background in critical thinking and evidence-based reasoning. I'm not a doctor but I can help [students] discover resources and critically evaluate information."

In November, Student Development and Campus Life professionals and staff from



The pandemic advanced mental health priorities on campus, including offering space for remembrance.



Students cheer during Red Hawk Day, among the ways Montclair is encouraging students to fully immerse themselves in the college experience. Photo by John LaRosa

Enrollment Management and Academic Affairs took part in mental health first aid training to further branch out with faculty, staff and students on the signs of disorders, resources and what to say.

As an editor for *The Montclarion*, Avery Nixon decided to share her story on how she perseveres as part therapy, part confession. For her mental well-being, she dropped a difficult class and looks forward to evenings when she and her roommate indulge in a favorite television show. "I hope that anyone who is struggling can pick themselves up too," she says.

"We're going to have to be patient and supportive," Friedman-Lombardo says,

"and know that these skills are going to be cultivated. But it's not going to happen overnight, and it's not going to happen just because we send them to school."

For information on mental health resources offered at Montclair, visit the Department of Counseling and Psychological Services.

If you or a loved one is experiencing a mental health crisis or thinking about suicide, call or text 988, the new nationwide 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline for free, confidential support, 24/7. ■

Laura Griffin and Mary Barr Mann contributed to this article.

“This is the Montclair State University of my imagination. It is a prototype of a public-serving university that we need today. One that expands opportunity, invents solutions, empowers problem solvers, engages our communities and reinvigorates our democracy. We can make it come into being as surely as inventors, artists and scientists have brought their ideas to life for millennia.”

Kicking off his investiture, President Koppell addresses students, faculty and staff in the Amphitheater.
Photo by John LaRosa



At his investiture, Montclair’s ninth president, Jonathan GS Koppell, envisions the University’s future

A DAY TO FUEL THE IMAGINATION

By Sylvia A. Martinez

On a warm and sunny day in September, the sounds of trumpets heralded the celebration of Jonathan GS Koppell’s investiture as Montclair State University’s ninth president. Festooned with red-and-white balloon arches, the campus welcomed community partners, family and dignitaries to hear Koppell lay out his vision and plans for the University and to celebrate all that makes Montclair a special place.

Over Montclair’s 114-year history, the investiture of a president has been a rare occasion, and the University marked the event with much flourish. The day’s events included performances by Dance students and the University Singers, a procession of faculty and University leadership in academic regalia, initiated with a fanfare courtesy of John J. Cali School of Music students and accompanied by processional music performed by the University’s Wind Symphony.

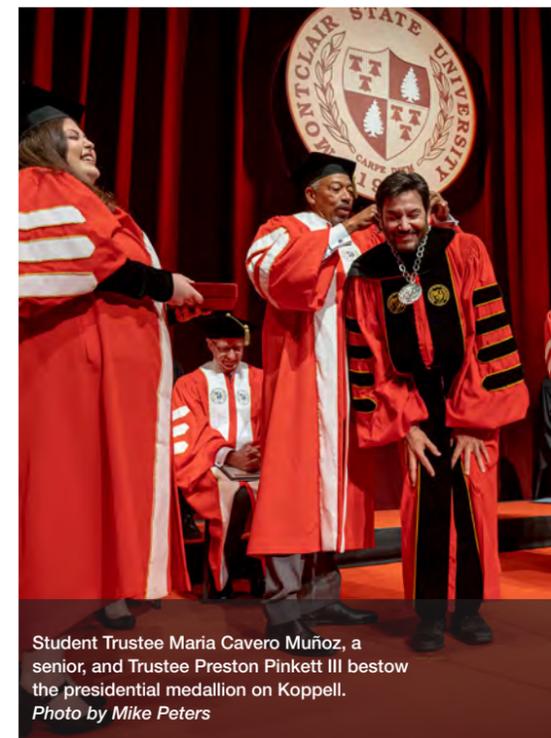
In the historic Amphitheater, which Koppell referred to as the “beating ancestral heart of Montclair State University,” the president told students they are Montclair’s most important

constituents, and invited them to make a difference in the University and the world. “We need your effort. We need your industry. We need your intellect. But mostly, what we require is your optimism – and that’s what today means to me. We will do great things together.”

Montclair’s President Emerita Susan A. Cole, who returned to honor her successor, explained the tradition signifies the contribution higher education has made to the progress of humanity throughout history. “Every member of this university community has played a part in that history and heritage,” she said. “And today, we come together as a community to acknowledge the awesome responsibility that President Koppell assumes as the leader of this university.”

Cole, who led the University for 23 years, and her predecessor Irvin D. Reid, who served Montclair from 1989 to 1997, when he left to become the first African American president of Wayne State University, addressed an enthusiastic audience to much applause.

Reid told the attendees that he was certain that like presidents before him,



Student Trustee Maria Cavero Muñoz, a senior, and Trustee Preston Pinkett III bestow the presidential medallion on Koppell.
Photo by Mike Peters

Koppell would leave his mark. “No doubt your vision for the centrality of a university at the heart of the community of which it is a part has brought you to Montclair State University at a propitious moment.” He also applauded Koppell for giving students such a prominent role in

the investiture. “It already shows you as a leader committed to the sensitivities of those you serve.”

Students indeed played important roles throughout the September 15 festivities: from the symphony and choral performances and the singing of the national anthem by Harrison Smith to brief speeches by Faith Victor '22, a former student member of the Board of Trustees, and Student Government Association President Richard Steiner-

Otoo. Board of Trustees student member Maria Cavero Muñoz carried the presidential medallion in the procession.

As the Wind Symphony played *Emperata Overture*, the academic procession, which included representatives from other universities as well as Montclair leadership, joined the president and together they made their way across campus to a red-carpeted Memorial Auditorium. There, Koppell was officially invested by Board of Trustees Secretary Mary A. Comito as Trustee Preston Pinkett III took the medallion from Cavero Muñoz and hung around Koppell's neck “a chain of office” bearing a silver medallion engraved with the University's seal, an action that symbolized the board's delegation of its authority and responsibility to the president.

New Jersey Governor Philip D. Murphy, who said he wore a red-and-white tie for the occasion, sent a video-recorded message: “Montclair has become an important resource for the State of New Jersey and beyond, providing a strong education for its students, the opportunity for social and economic mobility and promoting the ideals of public service. I am confident that President Koppell is the

right person to lead Montclair State in this moment and to continue its upward trajectory.”

Board of Trustees Chairman Francis M. Cuss, who chaired the presidential search committee, said the board was “unanimous in our opinion that he would be the kind of transformative president that we needed at this propitious time.” He called the day's events “an important celebration of renewal and a wonderful opportunity for us to reaffirm our commitment to the future of this great university.”

Cuss gave a special welcome to Koppell's wife, Jennifer Steen, and their children Elsa and William, as well as all the president's relatives and friends from across the country, who joined in person or via the livestream. A viewing party also was held at Arizona State University, where Koppell served as dean of the Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions before assuming the Montclair presidency.

Speakers included representatives from the faculty, staff, student government, alumni, elected officials and community leaders partnering with Montclair. Newark Board of Education Superintendent Roger León '96 MA said that he and President Koppell share a commitment to providing an inclusive and excellent education and emphasized the partnership between Montclair, the

American Federation of Teachers and his district in a teacher preparation program that is a national model. “Together, we are ... preparing the next generation of inspiring teachers and transformative school leaders.”

Paterson Mayor Andre Sayegh spoke about his city's educational and community partnerships with Montclair, noting that when they first met, Koppell told him, “If you're trying to write a success story in the City of Paterson, sign me up as a co-author.” Sayegh added there are many opportunities for collaboration – both in the community and in the schools – and that he was proud to call Koppell a partner and a friend who will help write that new narrative.

City University of New York Chancellor Félix V. Matos Rodríguez and Bloomfield College President Marcheta Evans, both personal friends of the president, delivered keynote addresses.

Matos Rodríguez discussed Koppell's family background and how his grandparents, first-generation graduates from New York City colleges, inspired Koppell to forge a career in public universities.

“Jonathan's family's story is the story of the promise of America and the role public higher education plays in that promise,” Matos Rodríguez said. “That is the journey that we keep seeing in



The investiture featured a festival that highlighted public service organizations and campus and community partnerships. Festival photos above and below by John LaRosa

America, thanks to places like the one where we stand right now.”

Evans spoke of her friendship with Koppell and the “model partnership” forming between Montclair and Bloomfield College, noting that Koppell “put his legacy on the line right at the start of his tenure” by throwing a financial lifeline to ensure that New Jersey's only four-year Predominantly Black Institution, as well as a Hispanic-Serving Institution and Minority Serving Institution, could remain open while the two institutions establish a strategic partnership.



“He knows the life-changing power of social mobility and how minority-serving places are the vessels that hoist students up the social mobility ladder,” Evans said.

Imagining the future

In his rousing half-hour investiture address, Koppell said his first year in office has been “incredible” and expressed gratitude for the confidence placed in him. “I am a link in a chain of leaders who served as stewards for Montclair State University.”

Koppell called the day “a celebration of a vital institution that has been ambitious and pugnacious, confident and sometimes underestimated, but always focused on its public purpose. All of us are links in the chain, a chain that connects the people who for generations have made this university great.”

But most of all, he said, “I see today as a celebration of imagination, this extraordinary human ability to form mental images of things that do not exist ... We can make real something that has never been.”



Past presidents Irvin D. Reid and Susan A. Cole (presidents number seven and eight respectively) returned to campus to celebrate the investiture of the University's ninth president.



From left: New Jersey Governor Philip D. Murphy (on screen), City University of New York Chancellor Félix V. Matos Rodríguez, Bloomfield College President Marcheta Evans and Paterson Mayor Andre Sayegh all took part in the ceremony. Photos on this page by Mike Peters



School of Nursing students demonstrate CPR at the public service festival. Photo by John LaRosa

University accessible and excellent. Through Montclair Unbound, he said, the University will offer degrees in ways that combine in-person and online modalities, creating more accessibility for more students, meeting them where they are.

“This is the Montclair State University I imagine, the prototype of the public-serving university we need today: one that expands opportunity, invents solutions, empowers problem-solvers, engages our communities and reinvigorates our democracy. We can make it come into being as surely as inventors, artists and scientists have brought their ideas to life for millennia,” he said.

“Our forebears, the architects of the New Jersey State Normal School at Montclair and every successive generation that made this remarkable institution what it is today – they imagined the University for which the moment called – and they built it. Now, it is our turn to answer the bell. Carpe diem.” ■

Laura Griffin and Marilyn Joyce Lehren contributed to this story.

The president announced a number of future initiatives both on- and off-campus that will support his vision of enhancing Montclair’s impact for students and communities.

Other initiatives to better serve students include launching Montclair Unbound, the Office of Student Belonging and the Next Generation Service Corps, and doing so while continuing to keep the

One of those initiatives, he said, will involve a significant educational role for the University in the revival of Hinchliffe Stadium, one of only two remaining historic Negro League ballparks. Montclair plans to use the site as a teaching tool to educate K-12 students, residents and visitors about the history of Paterson.

“This is just the beginning. We have a lot of things that we’re going to do together. I cannot wait, and it’s not limited to Paterson,” he said. “It’s not limited to Montclair, it’s not limited to Clifton, Little Falls or Newark. This is what we will do anywhere and everywhere. We are eager to be a partner.” Koppell said that the University also plans to launch a college of health professions “focused on community well-being,” and reimagine the focus of the College of Education.



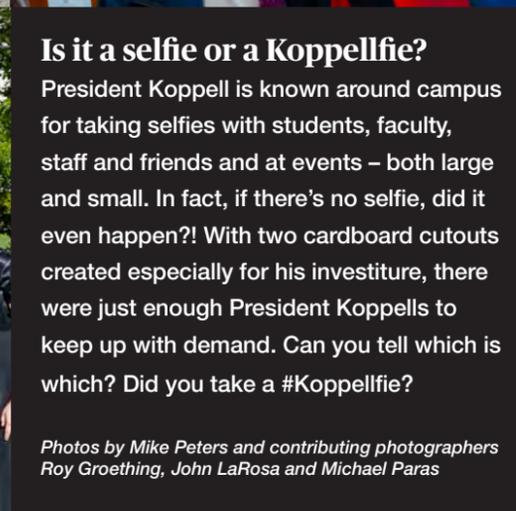
Jared Tauber, a Film major, interviews Koppell for WMSC radio as Grand Marshal Sandra Adams walks ahead of them with the University mace. Photo by Mike Peters



Is it a selfie or a Koppellfie?

President Koppell is known around campus for taking selfies with students, faculty, staff and friends and at events – both large and small. In fact, if there’s no selfie, did it even happen?! With two cardboard cutouts created especially for his investiture, there were just enough President Koppells to keep up with demand. Can you tell which is which? Did you take a #Koppellfie?

Photos by Mike Peters and contributing photographers Roy Groething, John LaRosa and Michael Paras





'KEEP POUNDING'

Pro Football Hall of Famer Sam Mills '81 Honored at Homecoming

By Red Hawks Athletics

As part of Homecoming 2022, the campus community celebrated the legacy and recent Pro Football Hall of Fame enshrinement of its greatest football player of all time – linebacker Sam Mills '81.

Mills, who was once considered too small to play linebacker in the NFL, received the league's most prestigious honor on August 6 when he was posthumously enshrined in the Pro Football Hall of Fame, Class of 2022. One of the all-time greatest athletes to graduate from Montclair State University, Mills was an NCAA Division III standout from 1977-80, setting school records with 501 career tackles, 142 tackles for a single season, and 22 tackles for a single game. Montclair retired Mills' No. 62 jersey in 1981, inducted him into its Athletic Hall of Fame in 1992 and conferred an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree on him in May 1998.

During Homecoming on Saturday, October 29, Montclair celebrated Mills' posthumous honor with a lunch reception for the Mills family, friends and teammates and the unveiling of a plaque on Sprague Field before the Red Hawks football game against Christopher Newport University.

Mills' wife, Melanie, attended the ceremony and the festivities celebrating his legacy, including the premiere screening of the Montclair faculty- and student-produced film *Teammates*, which can be seen on hawkplus.tv.

After retiring from playing in 1997, Mills became an assistant coach with the Carolina Panthers. He was diagnosed with cancer in 2003 and told he had only a few months to live. Despite that, he underwent chemotherapy and radiation and continued coaching. In the Panthers' postseason run-up to Super Bowl XXXVIII, he was an

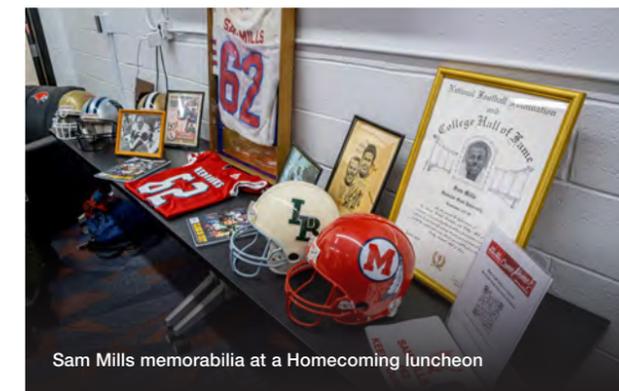


Left to right: Melanie Mills speaking at the ceremony; Sam Mills' motto "Keep Pounding" continues to inspire players; Sam Mills when he was coaching

inspirational force. His plea to "Keep pounding" in an emotional speech before the Panthers' victory over the Dallas Cowboys later became the name of a fund to sponsor cancer research programs and an official team slogan.

The first 400 fans who arrived for the Red Hawks' Homecoming game received a commemorative rally towel inscribed with Mills' inspirational motto, which also now adorns the back of the Montclair football players' helmets.

"We took our place in the Hall of Fame and they encouraged us to call Canton our home, but today coming back to Montclair on this Homecoming, this is our home, New Jersey is our home.



Montclair State University is our home," Melanie Mills told the crowd at the game. "We, the Mills family, are honored to share his biggest accolade with all of you and know that you are a part of his journey. Keep pounding!"

Montclair's Head Football Coach Rick Giancola, aka Coach G, an assistant coach while Mills was at Montclair, told *Montclarion* Sports Editor Matt Orth that he recognized from the beginning that Mills was more than a stand-out player.

Montclair coaches initially were concerned that Mills would follow his high school coach to William Paterson University, he said. "When Head Coach [Fred] Hill spoke to him about that, Sam said 'I give you my hand.' They shook hands. And Sam was committed to Montclair State. That's the kind of young man he was; a young man of character, he was upfront and honest."

Coach G went on to say, "He was always doing what he was asked to do. But more than that, he was always willing to help people. And he played with the gusto and the challenge of a young man who loved football, and that's the way he played."

With his name and motto featured inside the Panzer Athletic Center, his legacy continues to inspire students on campus to achieve their dreams.

For more photos from Homecoming, see page 36. ■

Sports Briefs

Red Hawk Open Scores for Athletics

The 10th annual Red Hawk Open welcomed a sold-out field of golfers and raised more than \$110,000 for Montclair student athletes. Held in September at the Crestmont Country Club in West Orange, the outing included a BBQ lunch and dinner reception, along with raffles and prizes.

“I am happy to see the event grow to where it is today – the first time we have filled to capacity – which is a testament to the excitement that is going on at Montclair,” says Robert Lieberman, who serves on the University’s Foundation Board.

Proceeds from the Red Hawk Open support the Athletics department’s more than 500 student athletes and 18 varsity athletic programs. Proceeds will also continue to enhance the student-run and produced Red Hawk Sports Network, as well as provide upgrades to the Panzer Athletic Center locker room and the Panzer Fitness Center, where having quality equipment is essential to all teams. ■



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ALUMNI NEWS

HOMECOMING 2022



Photos by Mike Peters, John LaRosa and Shelley Kusnetz



Red Hawks returned to the nest for fun, games, barbecue, student performances, football and a ceremony honoring football legend Sam Mills '81 (see story page 32).

For more photos and video, go to:



Living Her Legacy



Alumna's gift will help future generations

Wamwari Waichungo '90 is living more than her best life; she is living her legacy. With a deep belief in the power of education, she is creating opportunities for the next generation of food science leaders through her ongoing support of the Wamwari Waichungo Food Science Scholarship and a recent seven-figure gift commitment to Montclair State University.

"I want others to have the opportunities I had," Wamwari says. "It is an honor to be able to pay it forward."

As vice president of Global Safety Assessment and Regulatory Affairs at SC Johnson, Wamwari leads a team of more than 140 regulatory compliance, registration and safety experts. The company's numerous brands, which range from pest control and cleaning products to air care, home storage and personal care, are something of a departure for the food scientist, whose prior experience includes product guidance, marketing, innovation, strategic planning and regulatory roles at The Coca-Cola Company, Campbell Soup Company and ConAgra.

"I bring an innovative and strategic approach to the safety, regulatory and registration aspects of SC Johnson brands and products," she explains.

Serendipity played a role in Wamwari's road to Montclair and the career she loves. Her father, who was studying at Harvard while his daughters finished high school in Kenya, learned of Montclair from a classmate who was the son of then President David W.D. Dickson.

Then, a long line in a hot gym during registration changed the trajectory of her education and set her on her path. "I stepped

away for a minute, to speak to a gentleman sitting at a table with no line. It happened to be Dr. John Specchio from the Nutrition and Food Studies department. We talked about my interest in food and my love of cooking. By the time we finished, I was sold and decided to change my major from Mathematics to Home Economics with a concentration in Food and Nutrition."

Specchio also remembers the conversation well – both he and Food Science as a major were new at Montclair. "As I explained the curriculum to Wamwari I could see her interest growing and her face lighting up. We talked about how food impacted everyone's life and the potential of a career in food science. She became one of my very first students."

"If it weren't for that conversation, I would have gone in an entirely different direction," says Wamwari, who went on to earn a master's degree and PhD in Food Science at the University of Missouri-Columbia. "He showed me the path to the incredible career I have today. His advice was priceless."

Wamwari makes it a priority to serve as a catalyst for the next generation of STEM leaders, particularly young women and young professionals of color, including supporting scholarships at Alliance Girls High School in Kenya, the first high school for African girls, which her mother attended as a young girl. Wamwari has also established the Waichungo Study Abroad Scholarship at the University of Missouri-Columbia, College of Food, Agriculture, and Natural Resources. Wamwari offers students advice on how to cultivate and grow their careers.

Montclair, and the students here who share her love for nutrition and food science, hold a special place in Wamwari's life. Staying involved, she has participated in Women Entrepreneurship Week, hosted a reception for alumni in Atlanta, serves on the College of Education and Human Services Advisory Board, and has been part of the President's Club since 2015.

In 2015, she established the Wamwari Waichungo Food Science Scholarship at Montclair for students pursuing degrees in Nutrition and Food Science. This year, Wamwari took her support further with a significant commitment that will continue to transform students in the Nutrition and Food Science program by including additional endowment support for scholarships and student initiatives. The gift, honoring Wamwari's legacy and family, will be recognized in the naming of the University Hall courtyard as the Waichungo Family Courtyard.

The Wamwari Waichungo Food Science Scholarship helped Megha Barot '21 pursue her goal of a career in food product development. "The financial support was important, of course," she says. "But receiving the scholarship also motivated me. It was especially encouraging to know that the scholarship I received was funded by a successful alumna in my field."

When Barot met Wamwari, the accomplished alumna offered guidance and inspiration. "She encouraged me to have confidence and to embrace my accomplishments," Barot says.

"It makes me happy to help students like Megha," Wamwari says. "I am creating a legacy for my family, and for my sister, who also is a Montclair graduate," Wamwari continues. "And by making my legacy commitment to the University now, I get to enjoy the experience of giving."

In addition, Specchio and Wamwari have kept in touch over the years, with Specchio taking pride in his former



Left: Wamwari speaking as the distinguished alumna at the 2021 College of Education and Human Services Convocation ceremony. **Below:** Wamwari visits with her mentor Nutrition and Food Studies Professor John Specchio on campus.



student's accomplishments, pointing out the impact of alumni participation and support. "When alumni like Wamwari show an interest in students, their understanding of their own potential expands," he says.

In June 2021, as Wamwari was honored as a distinguished alumna of the College of Education and Human Services and addressed the undergraduates at Convocation ceremonies, she couldn't help thinking of her own graduation. "I see myself in the students," she says. "It motivates me to listen to their stories and to let them know that I have been in their shoes. It is my turn to help them with the path forward." ■

—Michele Hickey

ONE DAY FOR MONTCLAIR



Montclair alumni and the campus community are invited to celebrate the University's annual giving day, One Day for Montclair, on April 27, 2023. "One Day for Montclair is an opportunity for everyone – alumni, students, parents, faculty, staff and friends to come together on one day to do something special," says Director of Annual Giving Kara Baldwin Brennan '92. "When we all come together, we are saying we believe in the tremendous gift of higher education and the amazing opportunities here at Montclair." One Day for Montclair coincides with World's Fair Day on campus and includes fun activities, fundraising challenges and giving initiatives, like last year's "give a latte." It is a day to celebrate the contributions that allow Montclair to provide increased opportunities to help students follow their dreams. Check your inbox for more information.

Graduated in the last 10 years? Join the Recent Alumni Network!

Recently graduated? We invite you to join the newly created Recent Alumni Network (RAN). RAN works to meet the needs and interests of alumni from the past 10 graduating years. Working with the Office of Alumni Engagement, the RAN committee will develop, plan, promote and deliver quality programs for our most recent alumni. Interested in serving on the committee? Contact Linda Kavan, associate director for Alumni Engagement, at kavanl@montclair.edu or **973-655-4141**.



Recent graduates get together for a night of fun and networking at The Barrow House in Clifton.

Hot Fun in the Summertime

Alumni and friends gathered at McLoone's Boathouse in West Orange in June for the opportunity to meet President Jonathan Koppell, network with Red Hawk alumni and enjoy a beautiful summer evening.



A Night to Remember



For more photos: Alumni and friends gathered in October for the first-ever Black Alumni Advisory Council (BAAC) Gala to reconnect with classmates, rediscover their alma mater and pay it forward to students. They honored former Associate Dean of Students and University Ombudsman James Harris '68, '70 MA, recognized BAAC Rising Star Medinah Muhammad '16 and celebrated the legacy of Sam Mills '81. Proceeds support the Emergency, EOF and James Harris book funds. The BAAC was created to strengthen relationships with the Black community and promote social justice, equity and inclusion among alumni and students. To join BAAC and help build and strengthen the network and support student success email baac@montclair.edu or call the Office of Alumni Engagement at **973-655-4141**. *Photo: President Jonathan Koppell and Rocky with the BAAC founders (l to r): Doreen Tucker '83, Diane Gipson '80, Brenda Coleman-Caldwell '78, Donna Teel '80, Joanne Bowman '82, Antoinette Clay '80, Greg Collins '79, Randal Yorker '89.*



50th Reunion Committee

It's almost time for the Class of 1973's 50th reunion. Want to serve on the Reunion Committee? Contact Linda Kavan, Office of Annual Giving and Alumni Engagement, at kavanl@montclair.edu or **973-655-4141**.

1973

Roger León '96 MA

NURTURING EDUCATORS

Roger León, the superintendent of Newark Public Schools, came to campus this summer to greet high school students in the Red Hawks Rising Teacher Academy, a nationally recognized program helping to build a locally grown, diverse teacher workforce in the city's schools. Overwhelmed the moment he walked into the room, he explained that his tears were because of the significance of this partnership with Montclair and what it will accomplish.

Addressing the students, León recognized the first two who graduated from Newark high schools and are now college freshmen at Montclair. "They are living examples of what's going to happen right in front of you," he said, adding that, as part of the program, each graduated

with a teacher contract to come back to work in 2026.

"The road just gets better, and the reason why it gets better is because you're on it."

Nurturing local talent is León's passion, and the district's partnership with Montclair and the American Federation of Teachers is being lauded as a national model for helping solve the chronic shortage of teachers for urban schools, especially teachers of color, and creating career opportunities for young people in Newark and a pipeline of teachers returning to teach in Newark.

It's a path that León himself followed. The son of Cuban immigrants, León grew up in Newark and attended the city's public schools, including

his neighborhood elementary, Hawkins Street School, where he returned to teach fifth grade. At Science High School he was part of a championship debate team and later coached the team for eight years. He has spent more than 30 years working in the schools he is now in charge of reshaping.

León earned his Master of Arts in Administration and Supervision in 1996 from Montclair State University, an experience he says sharpened his focus for the purpose of public education and has led to significant partnerships with Montclair, creating teacher pipelines and coaching and mentoring for new educators.

"There is work that needs to be done to move us in an aggressive direction, and we're making exerted efforts to

do that," he says. Many of the new teachers earning degrees in the partnerships with Montclair are like León, homegrown educators.

"You want to be able to tell a student, 'I've walked these halls, I've sat in that classroom,'" says León, the first Latino to serve as the chief education officer of the largest school district in New Jersey. "Sometimes, especially in youth culture today, many students have a belief system that you can't understand what they are going through. But you may have lived in the same projects or on the particular block that's closest to the school, you may have played in the same playground. In Newark, our students, before they see anything of their teacher, they see their heart first." ■

—Marilyn Joyce Lehren

'60s

Joseph Fiordaliso '67, president of the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities, was ranked No.18 on *InsiderNJ* 2022 100 Policymakers Power list.

Mike Fratello '69 was the recipient of the 2022 Chuck Daly Lifetime Achievement Award after a 16-year NBA coaching career that included 647 career regular season wins, NBA Coach of The Year honors and a successful sports broadcasting career.



'70s

Nicholas Mazza '71 is the dean and professor emeritus of the College of Social Work at Florida State University and a Florida licensed psychologist. He is the president of the National Association for Poetry Therapy. His work was also noted in *Children's National Geographic* and *Business Insider*.



Barbara Diamant '72, '79 MA received the Daniel E. Cohen Award from ProJeCt of Easton, Penn., the highest honor awarded by ProJeCt for showing commitment to the community and the agency.

Stuart Zagnit '74 appeared in *Little Shop of Horrors* off-Broadway performance as Mr. Mushnik in April.

Angelo Genova '75, the chairman and managing partner for Genova Burns LLC, was named to *NJBIZ's* Law Power 50 list.

Gregory Dell'Omo '77, president of Rider University, was recently named co-recipient of the Eugene Marsh Community Impact Award from the United Way of Greater Mercer County for exemplifying Eugene Marsh's commitment to mental health, veterans, diversity, anti-racism and giving back to the community.

Nancy E. Smith '77, Esq. is an employment and civil rights litigation lawyer. She was mentioned in *NJBIZ's* Law Power 50 and ranked No. 37 in *ROI-NJ* Top 40 Women in Business in July.

Helene Becker '79 received the Distinguished Alumni Award for the Feliciano School of Business during Convocation in June. She is an airline analyst and recently



joined the GlobalX advisory board in a leadership role. She serves as the managing director of Cowen.

Regina Egea '79 is the president of the Garden State Initiative, an independent research organization that promotes innovation and growth in New Jersey. She was included in the *ROI-NJ* 2022 Women in Business Top Influencers list in March.

'80s

Stephen Adubato '80 is the host of NJTV's *State of Affairs*. He was ranked No. 94 in *InsiderNJ* 2022 100 Policymakers list in July.

Susan Schotka '80, '84 MA retired after 42 years of teaching in the Bloomfield (N.J.) School District. During her tenure, she taught physical education, health and driver's education.

Sandi Monack '81, the co-vice president of membership for the Ponte Vecchio chapter of the Pap Corps, published her second book, an autobiography, *Put on a Happy Face*, in May.

James Occi '82, '85 MA is a microbiologist for the New Jersey Department of Health. He assisted in the discovery of the invasive Asian longhorned tick and found a new species of *Rickettsia* and *Borrelia* in bat ticks in May.

Marcia Almeida '83 is the co-founder of Latinos of Montclair, a grassroots organization promoting greater unity, visibility, cultural diversity and civic engagement in the Latino community.

Edward O'Dell '86 was named president and chief medical officer at St. Mary Medical Center in Langhorne, Penn., in July.

Brigitte Rittenhouse Crosson '87 retired from corporate America with her husband and opened her own brewpub in Morrisville, Penn., in October.

Leslie J. Ferguson '88 serves as the deputy to the commander for resource management for the Marine Corps Systems Command.

Brian Condit '89 was promoted to director of creative services at Thermo Fisher Scientific in June.

Tamour Kousha '05

ACCOUNTING FOR GOOD

If there's one thing Tamour Kousha '05 has learned since he was first introduced to the field of accounting in high school, it is that a career as an accountant can be dynamic and diverse.

"I had a wonderful business teacher in high school," he recalls. "She opened my eyes to the possibilities offered by a career in accounting. She also assured me that there would always be a need for people with accounting skills."

Kousha took that advice to heart and to Montclair's Feliciano School of Business, where he successfully balanced the demands of an accounting major, internships and multiple part-time jobs. He even managed to make time to participate

in the student-led Accounting Society. As a result, Kousha was more than ready for his first career role as an associate with Sax LLP, a Top 100 accounting, tax and advisory firm.

Although he quickly rose to the role of senior accountant at the firm, Kousha had other ideas about the future. "I found myself gravitating toward the nonprofit sector," Kousha says. "I enjoyed learning about organizations' missions and seeing the impact they have in their communities."

Five years into his career as a professional accountant, Kousha joined the New Jersey Community Development Corporation as controller, later becoming the organization's chief financial officer.

In 2018, he joined Liberty Science Center as chief financial officer. "I want to give and get value from my career," he says. "Being an accounting professional at a place like Liberty Science Center gives my life a greater sense of purpose. I am helping to serve the greater community. Plus, Liberty Science Center is a really cool place to work."

As chief financial officer, there is a lot riding on Kousha's shoulders. "It is my responsibility to drive strategies that maximize the Center's impact, while also ensuring compliance and ongoing fiscal soundness," he says.

Montclair is responsible for more than the foundation of Kousha's career, however. During his sophomore year he met the woman

who would become his spouse, Gina Kousha '05, when they both enrolled in the same journalism course. They have been married for 13 years.

Kousha looks forward to connecting with Montclair students, particularly those majoring in accounting. "I didn't even know that the nonprofit sector existed, or that I could specialize in nonprofit accounting," he says. "And yet it has become a very rewarding path for me."

His advice for students: "Get comfortable with being uncomfortable. Continuing to learn and do new things will help you grow and progress in your career." ■

—Michele Hickey

CLASSNOTES

'90s

Scott Cirigliano '90 is a United States Bowling Congress bronze-level certified coach. In August, he accepted his first collegiate-level coaching position as head women's bowling coach for Felician University.

Robert N. Davison '90 is the chief executive officer at the Mental Health Association of Essex and Morris Counties. He was also a recipient of the Wayne Murdoch CEO of the Year Award from United Way of Greater Knoxville, Tenn. In July, he was voted on to Mental Health America's national board.

Thomas A. Conroy '93, '99 MA is principal of Our Lady of the Lake Catholic School in Verona, N.J.

William "Bill" Mesce '93 MA had his collection of three one-act plays, *A Jersey Cantata*, staged at Burgdorff Cultural Center in Maplewood in August.

Steve Antonucci '94 is the head football coach for Middletown (N.J.) South High School. His coaching career was highlighted in 92.7 WOBM 2022 All-Shore Gridiron Classic – Meet the Coaches in July.



Guenther Waldow Jr. '94 joined DeCotiis, FitzPatrick, Cole & Giblin, LLP, as a partner in the firm's Real Estate/Redevelopment and Public Entity law groups in March.

Edward McDowell '96 and Gina Calderone '98, '06 MS, '08 Cert. were married at the Park Chateau in East Brunswick in August.



Melanie Murphy '97, '00 MS was appointed chief analytics officer at Fluent, Inc., in April. She also is an executive co-chair on Fluent's Women Leaders Employee Resource Group and Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Team.

Eleanor "Eli" Albert '98 joined Frier Levitt as the firm's first director of administration. She is responsible for human resources, staff management and oversight of administrative departments.

CONNECT WITH US SOCIALLY



'00s

Thomas A. Gorman '02 was appointed superintendent of schools by the Montville (N.J.) Township Board of Education in March.

Micheal Gambatese '04 was appointed vice president/business relationship officer at Kearny Bank in May.

Kent Bania '05 MS was appointed as the superintendent of Nutley (N.J.) Schools in July. He has worked in the Nutley school system for 23 years.



Mailissa Yamba Butler '05 MAT had her artwork exhibited in June at the Renwick Gallery, a branch of the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C. She also is a Bloomfield College honorary degree recipient who was awarded a Gordon Parks Foundation Fellowship.

Tamour Kousha '05 is the chief financial officer for Liberty Science Center and a former *NJBIZ* CFO of The Year winner. He was also included in *NJBIZ* Next Generation of Leaders The 2022 Slideshow in July. (See profile, page 43)

Mirko Joldzic '06 was appointed head of investment products at Insigneo in March.

Kimberly Velez Moreno '06 EdD was appointed assistant principal at Wayne Valley (N.J.) High School in May.

Nathaniel Frissell '07, PhD is an assistant professor of physics and electrical engineering at the University of Scranton. He was recently awarded a National Science Foundation grant supporting a collaborative research project.



Al-Nesha Jones '07, '13 MBA is a certified public accountant and the founder of ASE Group. She received the NJCPA Ovation Award for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion in June. (See profile, page 45)



Diana A. Morgan '07 is the vice president of global regulatory at Nutrabolt. She is also the founder of What's Up with Supps which hosts networking events and podcasts for the supplements industry.

Paige Dworak '08 MBA is the owner, president and CEO at Carewell Health. She was ranked No. 40 in *ROI-NJ* 2022 Top 40 Women in Business.

Flora M. Encarnacao '08 MA, assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction at Kearny Public School District, won the 2022 Winslow Coyne Excellence in Education Award in June.

Cristina Pinzon '08 is president and CEO of a multilingual government affairs firm and a board member of the N.J. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. She was included in *ROI-NJ* 2022 Women in Business Top Influencers in March.

Andrew Stafford '08, PhD is an assistant professor of French in the modern language department in Lycoming College, where he earned the 2022 Junior Faculty Teaching Award in April.

Lee B. Ehudin '09 joined Provident Bank as first vice president/commercial lending team leader for its North Jersey region in April. He has more than 15 years of experience in commercial lending.

Michael W. Holzschuh '09 was promoted to assistant treasurer at Lakeland Bank in April.

Al-Nesha Jones '07, '13 MBA, CPA COMMUNITY BUILDER

Al-Nesha Jones '07, '13 MBA, CPA is using her expertise to build up the community, one small business at a time. She is also bringing her positive energy to Montclair as a mentor and a new member of the Black Alumni Advisory Council.

The 200-plus clients of West Orange, New Jersey's, ASE Group receive much more than year-end tax preparation. Jones and her all-female team of financial professionals educate and provide year-round expertise to help business owners build their enterprises, and their community.

"My firm's clients work hard and have great ideas," explains Jones. "What they often don't have, is good financial know-how. By educating and guiding our clients throughout the year, we empower them to grow their businesses."

When Jones founded the ASE Group in 2016, she brought considerable corporate experience as an associate manager of financial reporting at Prudential Financial and as an assurance senior at EY, where she began her career as an intern from Montclair. The pivot may have been prompted by the need for flexibility to raise her family, but it also reflected a personal sense of mission as well as what she observed as a real need in her community.

"I had a successful career working for very large companies, but I didn't feel like I was having an impact," she explains. "At the same time, I had friends and neighbors who were struggling to make their small businesses thrive. They knew they had to pay taxes but didn't know how to plan for them. They needed more comprehensive

guidance. I saw an opportunity to make a real contribution." In addition to tax, accounting and financial counseling services, Jones educates the community through free bookkeeping and tax classes and her Tea & Tax Talk blog. She also teaches a Quickbooks Online Certification course at Essex County College.

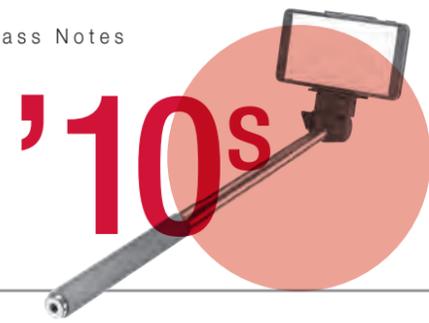
When Jones jumped off the corporate ladder to start her own company, it was not the first time she had changed course. She had thought she would attend college out of state but was offered a scholarship to attend a New Jersey college, so she began touring campuses. "I loved Montclair and liked the idea of staying close to home."

Jones' involvement in Montclair has continued – and grown – since

graduation. She understands the power of mentorship and regularly volunteers as a mentor. "I received such wonderful mentorship from my professors and counselors," she says. "I kept in touch with some of my professors over the years and when I was starting my own firm, they continued to inspire and support me."

As a member of the Black Alumni Advisory Council, Jones has another opportunity to give back. "I remember what it was like, coming to Montclair as a first-generation college student," she says. "There were so many people at Montclair who helped me create a path to success. I want to do the same for others." ■

–Michele Hickey



Falynn Bleiberg Balassone '10 MA was appointed K-12 director of counseling for the Westfield (N.J.) Board of Education in July.

Alex W. Csedrik '10 MA is a professor at Delaware Technical Community College. He published a science fiction short story collection *Mars is for Millennials* in June.

Angelica Diggs '10, '13 MA is a museum professional. She was appointed executive director of the Montclair History Center in August.

Tammi Hughes Foeller '10, an elementary school teacher in North Carolina, was featured as the Teacher of the Week on WTN NBC in June.

Harold Abraham '11, '15 MA, PhD is a school administrator and adjunct professor of educational leadership at Montclair State University. He was appointed to the New Jersey State Council for Special Education in September.

Emine Kasapoglu '11 began a new role as manager of procurement content creation with Johnson & Johnson in March.

Sean R. Verbist '11 is a former Montclair and Randolph police officer. In June he was sworn in as a Morris County prosecutor detective.

Suzanne Hawley '12 and Rocco Terranova '13 celebrated their



marriage on April 12. They met through the Fine Arts program and returned to the Alexander Kasser Theater for pictures.

Eric Zullo '12, '14 MA, '20 Cert., '21 Cert. is a physical education and health teacher at Rumson-Fair Haven (N.J.) Regional High School. He was named the school's Educator of the Year in March.



Sally Agramonte '13 and Tremain Williams '15 welcomed their baby boy, Adonis Williams, on April 18, 2022.

Paulina Banasiak '13, a former top aide to Governor Phil Murphy, is a public affairs specialist who recently took on a vice president role for the Trenton lobbying firm Kaufman Zita Group.

Erica F. Kaslander '13 MA serves as executive director of Passaic County Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA). In August she was included in *NJBIZ's* Forty Under 40.

Stephanie Lokker '14 is the CEO of Lockerbie & Co., a management consulting firm and the board director and vice president of supplier diversity and certification at the New Jersey Pride Chamber of Commerce. She was also included in *ROI-NJ* 2022 Women in Business Top Influencers in June.



Kelly McDonald '15, '19 MA and Kevin Santos '17 were married and celebrated along with family and friends in Mallorca in July. They are dedicated coaches with Kearny Thistle United and before heading to Europe for their nuptials, they had a small ceremony in Kearny, N.J., with their teams in attendance.

Olivia Polci '15, a Broadway performer, was cast as Frankie's first wife in the play *Jersey Boys*.

Medinah Muhammad '16 is a senior legislative aide for the New Jersey Governor's office; she covers housing, economic development, criminal justice and the Legislative Black Caucus. She ranked No. 65 in *InsiderNJ* 2022 Top Influencers.

Celinda Ortega '16 is the vice president for Stellar Productions and was formerly Miss Bergen County. She previously won Miss New Jersey USA and spent the past year as an ambassador for the Lupus Foundation of America.

Lindsay Young '16 MA was appointed principal of Vernon (N.J.) Township High School in July. She previously worked for the high school in 2011, originally serving as a mathematics teacher.



Kevin Abreu '17 is an award-winning digital media professional. He recently earned two Promax Awards for his contributions to American television.

Justin Avedissian '17, a former Wayne Hills High School standout, was appointed football coach at Wallington (N.J.) High School in June.

Jessica Fiore '17, '20 MA was appointed registrar for Herkimer County (N.Y.) Community College in August.

Stacy A. Garrity '17 is a real estate professional. She was promoted to senior paralegal and assumed a role as corporate secretary for Levin Management Corp in August.



Sam Mompont '18 and Tolani Waller '18 were engaged on campus in August.



Andrew C. Matteo '20 PhD was named superintendent of schools in Ramsey, N.J., in August after serving as the district's director of curriculum, instruction and assessment.

Alyssa Petry '20 is an environmental scientist at Dresdner Robin. She previously served in the Montclair Center Business Improvement District.

Mimi Feliciano '21 Hon. is the founder and CEO of FEM Real Estate, a real estate investment company, based in Montville, N.J. She serves as an advisory board member for the Feliciano School of Business and the Feliciano Center for Entrepreneurship & Innovation, and founded the University's Global Center on Human Trafficking. She was included in *ROI-NJ* 2022 Women in Business Top 40 list in March.

Michael Palma '21 was sworn into the Montville (N.J.) Township Police Department in February.

IN MEMORIAM

Emily Lin '43

Martha E. Smith '43

Elena F. Arminio '48

Lorraine Marcy '50

Ruth J. Combs '52

Alfred Di Nola '53, '55 MA

Louis C. McWhorter '57

Frank J. Vogt '57 MA

John L. D'Andrea '60

Donna M. Jerue '61

Kathryn Rubineti Kern '62

William "Bill" Davies '63

Richard Hilser '63

Inez Kerr McClendon '63, '77 MA, '95 MA

Joseph C. Steigauf Jr. '65

Sharon Baty Berger '67

Doris M. Fordyce '68

James F. Stock '68 MA

Kenneth E. Warren '68

Doris Johnson Heise '69, '79 MA

John "Jack" Clark '70

Margaret Del Guercio '70, '72 MA

Nan B. Barcan '72 MA

Mary A. Katlack '72 MA

Diego Castellanos '73 MA

Jean DeGaetano '77 MA

Gregory D. Fahey '77 MA

Carol A. McLaughlin '77, '86 MA

Catherine S. Pirrell '77, '85 MA

Agnes Bojsza '78

Genevieve T. Hillard Cavadini '78

Mary W. McDougall '78 MA

Dale E. Burnett-Howie '79

*Diane E. Freedman '81, '84 MA

Jettie J. Hudgins Harris '81 MA

Alice A. Carpentieri '82 MA

Elizabeth B. Jefferson '83 MA

Dorothy Sommer '84

Patricia Kamermayer '88 MBA

Laura C. Hardy '92

*Michael Scala '92

Joan M. Nisler '94 MA

Joy C. Brokes '95 MS, '10 EdD

Ronald Jaremca '99 MA

Louis Ken-Kwofie '99

Wakina Humphrey '00

*Staff/former staff

LASTING LESSONS



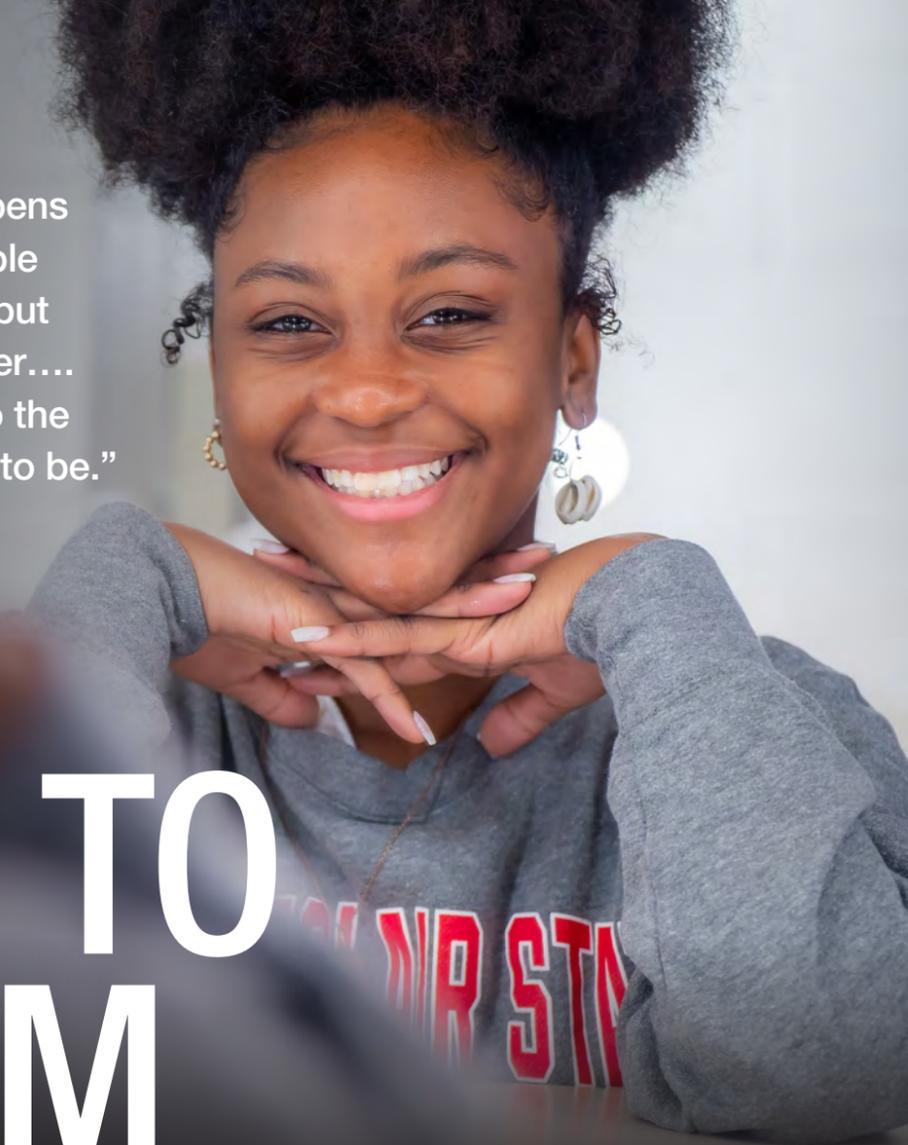
DEBRA ZELLNER | PROFESSOR EMERITA, PSYCHOLOGY

Professor Emerita Debra Zellner, who retired in 2019 after 18 years at Montclair, was renowned as a teacher and a caring and supportive mentor to her students. “If it wasn’t for Dr. Zellner I don’t know if I would be where I am today as a doctoral student,” says Veronica Schneider ’17. “Working with her was one of the most impactful things I’ve done for myself and my future.” Zellner was well known for involving students in her work, giving them hands-on experience and boosting their confidence. “Dr. Zellner believed in me, even when I doubted myself,” recalls Nancy Greene ’14. “She has always fostered an inclusive environment, even during her tenure as president of the Eastern Psychological Association, ensuring all lab members participated in conference events.” Melissa Dolese ’03, ’06 MA, a professor at the University of Alaska, says “Dr. Zellner was my professor and research mentor. Her class on sensation and perception gave me foundational knowledge for my research, my teaching, and shaped my love for our sensory systems.” For Elizabeth Cogan ’11, who switched her major to Psychology after taking an introductory class from Zellner, “Deb instilled knowledge and confidence in me that changed my life. As a first-generation college student, her mentorship meant the world to me.” ■

—Robert Gano

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

“Montclair State University opens doors for me; not only am I able to hone my craft as an actor, but as a dancer and student leader.... Montclair has molded me into the person I have always wanted to be.”



DARE TO DREAM

Ciara Chanel Allen always knew she wanted to go to college. The question was how she would pay for it. As a top student in academics with talent in the arts, Ciara was eligible for financial support, and thanks to generous scholarships made possible by donors, she made her dreams a reality.

Your support helps students like Ciara take their future to the next level.

Go to montclair.edu/make-a-gift or use the envelope in this magazine to make a difference.

CIARA CHANEL ALLEN '22

BFA in Acting, MSU Players, Complexions Band Dance Team, Resident Advisor, Student Recreation Center dance teacher, featured on *The College Tour*.



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See page 39 for more details.

