

COMMUNITY

THE MAGAZINE OF METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Volume 9, Issue 3



**New Automotive Training
Center opens at South
Omaha Campus**

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METROPOLITAN
Community College

VOLUME 9, ISSUE 3

Community is a publication of Metropolitan Community College. Contact the Office of Marketing, Brand and Communication at marketing@mccneb.edu.

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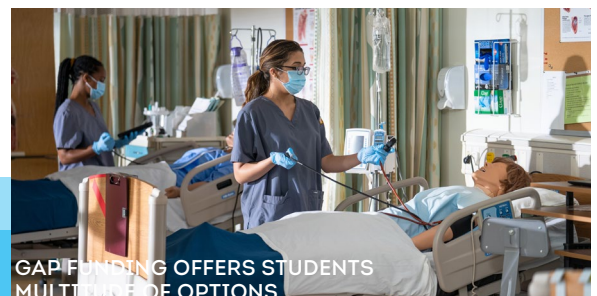
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A LETTER FROM THE MCC FOUNDATION

Dear friends and supporters,

As the year comes to a close, I want to take a moment to thank you for all of your support. While we reflect on this past year and the challenges we have shared, we also take time to celebrate some terrific milestones and achievements.

In this issue of Community magazine, we share stories that celebrate student and faculty success. Students are our purpose, and every student has their own unique story. You'll read a story from one of our international students, who took the chance to come to the United States for a better life and education.

We hope you enjoy reading about the College's continuous commitment to students. In the fall quarter, MCC opened the new Automotive Training Center on the South Omaha Campus. This public/private partnership paves the way for students interested in automotive careers. However, it isn't just the facilities that make the College great. It's the quality of its faculty and staff, as you will learn in one of the stories about Deb Gaspard, MCC business faculty member and newest chair of the Board of Directors for the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs. People like Deb are breaking down barriers and opening pathways for students through their hard work and courage.

To all of our partners and supporters, student success is the heart of what we do, thanks to your support. We celebrate these milestones with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amy".

Amy Recker
Executive director, MCC Foundation



Metropolitan
Community College
FOUNDATION

FACES OF MCC



OUR COLLEGE COMMUNITY AT A GLANCE



The weekly Faces of MCC photo series published on the College's Facebook page reflects the strength and rich diversity of Metropolitan Community College's alumni, students, faculty and staff. Here's a sampling:

COREY ALLMENDINGER

MCC HUMAN SERVICES ALUM WITH HONORS

“Overcoming my addiction problems is one of my biggest accomplishments. It has had a huge positive ripple effect on the rest of my life. Since I started my journey of recovery, I have been an active father in the lives of my eight daughters. I have been a better son, friend, husband and really just a better human. I was able to graduate with honors from MCC in 2017, which helped me secure a new career with the Department of Corrections as a counselor which I love. Most importantly it has brought me closer to God! The kindness and encouragement from my professors at MCC was instrumental in my success as well. I am proud and honored to be an MCC alum!”

RICK SANDVIG

MCC FOUNDATION DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

“I had the good fortune to grow up on a farm in north central Iowa. Dad still farmed with horses, as well as tractors. That old corn picker would miss a lot of corn, so after dad picked the corn, he would go into the field with a team of horses pulling a wagon so we could walk along picking up corn from the ground and toss them in. There were five of us boys learning good work ethic plus all that tossing of ears of corn developed arms into good shape for throwing a baseball. When the work was all done, we had ponies and a horse to ride.”

J. FINCHAM

MCC CRIMINAL JUSTICE LAW ENFORCEMENT STUDENT, PTK VICE PRESIDENT, FREMONT/ELKHORN VALLEY SAC REPRESENTATIVE

“I have had many great inspirations in my life, however there is one who I vividly remember, have always admired and who made me believe that I could be anything I wanted to be. My mother was my greatest inspiration, but a woman came into my life when I was nine years old in the early 1980s, that created the dreams that I am now realizing. My family was plagued with a violent child that no one was able to control, until he was put on probation. Watching how strong and in control this woman was, unafraid and how she saved my family from so much violence is why she became a role model for me. Never could I imagine my future years ahead and crossing paths again. I am now about to achieve my associate degree in Criminal Justice – and I was taught by that very role model, one of my greatest inspirations – MCC Criminal Justice instructor, Diane Kay Sjuts.”

SUMMER HOSPODKA

MCC GENERAL STUDIES ALUM WITH HONORS, CURRENTLY A FIRST GRADE TEACHER

“I had an amazing teacher when I was in first grade and because of that relationship I had always dreamt of becoming a teacher. Circumstances set me on a different path, and I was not able to pursue that dream. One day, I realized it's never too late to chase your dreams. However, I had a family; young children at home, responsibilities that made pursuing my dream a challenge. Starting at MCC provided the flexibility I needed to make my dreams come true. Through late nights of studying, hard work and determination, I showed my children, family and friends that you can go after what you want. Take the step that scares you, and chase your dreams because the reward is worth it.”

GAME CHANGER

DIMA student turns love of video games into career path

As a child, Bo-Dee Romero loved using his imagination.

“Ever since I was a kid I was always creative,” he says. “Before video games, all I really did was read and draw.”

Romero did eventually discover video games and was instinctively drawn to them. In fact, he enjoyed them so much he knew he wanted to make them his job.

“I think I always knew someday I would want to work in the video game industry or something that has to do with it. I was always really into computers as a kid, too,” Romero says. “I never really got into the more technical side of game development until recently. I realized I loved making the mechanics for a game even more than I did making the art for it.”

After graduating from high school, Romero learned about the Design, Interactivity and Media Arts program at Metropolitan Community College that could help him achieve his dream of working with video games.

The DIMA program at MCC combines various digital arts that require electronic media for their execution. The program has eight areas of study that include Graphic Design, 2D Animation, 3D Animation, Illustration, Media Generalist, Motion Graphics, Web Design and DIMA Entrepreneur.

Graduates of the DIMA program often go on to have careers in web design, graphic design, motion picture animation, and video game and computer game design.

Romero enrolled at MCC in 2019. He plans to graduate next year and go on to get his bachelor's degree in Computer Science.



So far, Romero says, the DIMA program and the College have been a great fit for him and have helped him flourish.

“I’ve had some amazing experiences with other art forms,” he explains. “I’ve done quite a bit with a few different mediums, both digital and physical, and I can say this program has brought out some of the most creative parts of myself that I didn’t even know I had. I love the people and all the amazing stuff I see them create. I think it’s an awesome experience.”

The DIMA program has even helped Romero find a job at the University of Nebraska Medical Center helping with software development. Instructor Ian Snyder helped

him secure the job. Romero can’t divulge too much about what he is working on due to confidentiality reasons, but he explains that what he has learned so far in the DIMA program has been beneficial.

“My job is working in digital software. It’s been a very interesting experience so far and it takes a lot of self-research and tweaking. It’s a job that I know is doing some good for the world and that’s what makes it all worth it for me,” Romero says. “If it wasn’t for the help of the great people at MCC like my instructors Ian Snyder and Ken Keys, and the people at UNMC, I wouldn’t have this awesome opportunity to create something that may someday help change the medical field in a huge way.”

To learn more about the DIMA program at the College, visit mccneb.edu/dima.

Q&A

with Jacquie Armstrong,
associate dean of
Construction Education



Q WHAT IS YOUR ROLE AT MCC AND HOW DO YOU SERVE THE MISSION OF THE COLLEGE?

I am the associate dean of Construction Education. In this role, I am able to support faculty and staff to provide hands-on learning opportunities to future trades people. Often, students entering the trades do not believe they are “college material.” We help them build confidence and learn the skills needed to have successful careers in construction trades including Architecture, Carpentry, Civil Engineering, Electrical, HVAC, Plumbing and apprenticeship programs.

Q WERE YOU FAMILIAR WITH MCC AND ITS TRADES PROGRAMS BEFORE TAKING ON YOUR ROLE?

Through the application and interview processes, I became familiar with MCC and the construction trade programs. I was looking for a change and found a college committed to the hands-on learning required for students to gain the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in the trades. This commitment shone brightly through the Construction Education Center, the leadership structure of the Career and Technical Education division and the personnel working in this area of the College.

Another key element is the support from the community in donations for the new buildings, for student tools and program equipment; participation in sponsorship programs, meet and greets, career day, signing day and advisory committees. This support is a main reason why I chose to work for MCC.



Q TELL US ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE WORKING IN A STILL LARGELY MALE CAREER FIELD. WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR WOMEN TO CONSIDER AND ENTER THIS FIELD?

Many women like working with their hands, have great mechanical sense, the drive to succeed and great work ethic. These are the exact attributes needed to be successful in the trades. Today, working in the trades allows all people, including women, to provide for their families while building comradery. It also builds your self-confidence, and helps to develop a positive self-esteem. You begin to believe that you can take on home improvement projects and have the confidence to advocate for yourself and your family in many different situations.

Q WHAT DO YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT YOUR JOB?

I love the dedicated, creative, student-centered faculty and staff I have the honor of working with. The CEC team includes some of the most innovative people I have ever met. Their commitment to student success inspires me to do my best each and every day to make sure they have the resources—the time, space, materials and training—needed to continue focusing on student learning.

Q WHAT ARE SOME OF THE HIGHLIGHTS ABOUT YOUR TIME HERE OR WHAT HAS HAD A BIG IMPACT ON YOU?

Of course, the biggest impact is the pandemic. It has forced all of us to learn new ways to connect with students and each other. The creativity and discipline it takes to deliver high-quality, hands-on learning experiences safely during a pandemic offers ample growth opportunities. This time has taught me that we are more flexible, agile and adaptable than we ever thought possible. It has amplified the dedication to student success, the need to use technology in the classroom and the innovative spirit of the CEC faculty and staff. I continue to be impressed with the College's service to our community, from assembling face shields to hosting vaccine centers, from the ePantry to COVID-19 testing centers. This community college seeks to serve the community at large, the current students and potential students in various ways through very innovative approaches to the very best of its ability.

Q WHAT DREW YOU TO WORK IN THE TRADES?

I was raised to believe that the only path to success was through a four-year university and a bachelor's degree. I found out that idea was not accurate. People working in the trades can use their strengths and skills to make good livings, feel a sense of satisfaction with a job well done and improve our communities. I also learned that there is a growing demand across the nation for skilled workers. This field is open to all people, including system-impacted individuals, and people who may not have the funds or desire to attend universities. It is a way to end generational poverty while improving communities, revitalizing neighborhoods and providing needed services.

Q YOU WORK IN THE CONSTRUCTION EDUCATION CENTER. WHAT IS IMPORTANT FOR STUDENTS TO KNOW ABOUT THE TRADES AND RELATED CAREER OPPORTUNITIES?

It is important to know that you can make a very good living working in the trades and that trades jobs are in demand and are expected to remain in demand. Wages continue to rise as the need for trades people rises. Also, the use of technology and the focus on safety has dramatically reduced the number of injuries and made these jobs much easier on the body than they were years ago. People going into the trades generally like to work with their hands, building and fixing things, and have good mechanical abilities. Depending upon the trade, you may work primarily outside or inside. For instance, masons generally work on exteriors of buildings and in landscaping while electricians generally work inside.



BREAKING BARRIERS

DEB GASPARD BECOMES FIRST WOMAN OF COLOR TO CHAIR ACBSP BOARD

When students attend Deb Gaspard's business class at Metropolitan Community College, they will meet the first woman of color to chair the prestigious board of the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs. Gaspard assumed the office of chair for the board this year and will serve a one-year term. It is an honor for Gaspard as well as the College.

"As the first woman of color to chair the Board of Directors of ACBSP, I realize that my role has responsibilities uniquely tied to my identity. Rather than regard those as challenges, I embrace them as opportunities to represent our membership with authenticity and from perspectives less often shared within our larger society," says Gaspard.

Gaspard is a faculty member at the College and also serves as the director of the Marketing and Entrepreneurship programs. She believes her appointment as board chair is an important one because of the council's international influence.

"ACBSP prides itself on its global reach and the diversity of its membership. In the spirit of continuous improvement, we must strive to identify ways to improve ourselves as educators who celebrate diversity and promote inclusivity in our classrooms," explains Gaspard. "That diversity and the resilience it creates is a part of what makes us great—as an organization and as a force for change."



Enactus Jack Kahl Entrepreneurial Leadership Award for the Sam M. Walton Fellows of the Year, and the ACBSP Regional and International Teaching Excellence Award. Gaspard has also been recognized for her nonprofit work in serving victims of domestic violence, military veterans and children in foster care.

The council's mission is to promote continuous improvement and recognize teaching excellence in the accreditation of business education programs throughout the world. It accredits business, accounting and other business-related programs at the associate, baccalaureate, master and doctorate degree levels.

"Professor Gaspard is a gifted educator and dedicated leader of ACBSP. To be the first woman of color installed as our board chair is a historic achievement and she brings an important and admired voice not only to our respected organization, but as part of our fundamental commitment to students," said Jeffrey Alderman, ACBSP president/CEO. "With higher education still facing so many challenges due to the ongoing pandemic, I cannot think of a better person to lead the way during the upcoming year to promote our mission of improving management education throughout the world."

ACBSP will be well led by electing Gaspard. An educator for more than 20 years in Nebraska, she has experience in an array of business disciplines, including focusing on corporate and workforce development in addition to teaching. She was awarded the

"WE MUST STRIVE TO IDENTIFY WAYS TO IMPROVE OURSELVES AS EDUCATORS WHO CELEBRATE DIVERSITY AND PROMOTE INCLUSIVITY IN OUR CLASSROOMS."

- Deb Gaspard, MCC faculty

Revving up



New Automotive Training Center provides boost to Omaha workforce demands

Grease, grime and uncomfortable working conditions ... these are just some of the things commonly associated with working on cars, right? Not with Metropolitan Community College's brand new Automotive Training Center, a two-story academic facility meant to change the "dirty jobs" stigma associated with the automotive industry. The auto industry needs highly skilled workers and MCC is filling those positions by training students in lock-step with what employers are searching for.

"When some people think of being an automotive mechanic or automotive collision specialist, they think of a dirty garage with no working air conditioning," says Jim Champion, pathway coordinator at MCC and former manager at Charlie Graham. "That's not to say you won't get oil on your hands, but modern dealerships, garages and certainly the Automotive Training Center, are clean, open and inviting. It's unmatched in our region and this commitment to the industry is yet another example of how the College partners with employers to provide much-needed education for the next generation of technicians."

Funded through a 50:50 public-private partnership, the Automotive Training Center at the South Omaha Campus brings Automotive Technology and Automotive Collision Technology programs under one roof. Before fall quarter 2021, the two programs were separate—Automotive Technology programs in the Mahoney building at South Omaha Campus and Auto Collision Technology at the Applied Technology Center on State Street in northwest Omaha. Both programs were operating in limited space, making program expansion difficult.

"Our building is designed for the future. Our lab classrooms can easily transform into spaces designed for pre- and post-scanning and new vehicle calibrations," says Joe Baker, Auto Collision Technology instructor. "Now we have the room to expand our curriculum, student count and faculty at any time."

The Automotive Technology and Auto Collision Technology programs aren't the only ones benefiting from the new space. The Toyota T-Ten program, established within the last three years at the College, is also using the additional room for growth.

"The new space gives us the ability to keep students on task longer. In the old space we had very little room for vehicles," says Mark Wulf, Toyota T-Ten program coordinator and instructor. "When a student would complete work on one vehicle, they would often have to wait for the instructor to bring in the next vehicle. The new space allows us to set up the lab area ahead of time with all the vehicles students will be working on that day."

The Toyota T-Ten program specializes in training automotive technician students for a career working at a Toyota or Lexus dealership. In the program, students can become trained and certified Toyota automotive technicians through the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence and will receive a mix of classroom and lab education, including on-the-job training through internships at local partners. The program is regional, working with Toyota and Lexus dealerships in Nebraska, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota and the Kansas City metropolitan area, giving MCC exclusive Toyota training and recruitment opportunities within those areas. Thanks to a housing partnership with the University of Nebraska Omaha, students can live in Omaha while taking Toyota T-Ten classes at the Automotive Training Center.

The industry needs new, highly skilled workers. And MCC is helping fill those positions by training students in lock-step with what employers are searching for.

Enrollment in the MCC automotive programs continues to grow in spite of the pandemic. MCC strategically places its campuses and locations in areas that are not only convenient for students, but also in areas of high need. More than 25 percent of currently enrolled students are from ZIP codes with high concentrations of poverty, emphasizing the importance of having an academic facility along a bus route or within walking distance of local neighborhoods. The Automotive Training Center houses programs and certificate classes that give underserved students opportunities for a better career outlook.

“The new facility will have a profound effect on the lives of our students,” says Baker. “The space offers areas for students to collaborate and have conversation between classes and during break. The top floor of the new building is also designed for tours. We can invite local high school and middle school students to our building, for instance, and they can tour the second floor and look down at the lab spaces. This is a safe and effective way for the younger generation to see what the automotive industry is all about.”

The new facility is built to replicate what students see in the modern industry. The west side of the building is designed to mimic a high-production automotive collision repair facility and the College has invested in new equipment that meets manufacturer recommendations, says Baker.

“My favorite part of the new facility is the addition of lab classrooms. We can start class while sitting at the stainless steel desktops, and later, we can roll them to the side and bring parts or vehicles into the classroom for live demonstration and repair,” explains Baker. “The classrooms are equipped with air, electrical and floor drains to ensure we have everything we need to teach the technicians of the future.”

On the Automotive Technology side, the excitement is shared by long-time instructor Al Cox.

“The facility is equipped with state-of-the-art equipment coupled with a two-story design with more natural light coming through. The see-through design also allows tours to be given without interrupting classes in progress,” says Cox.

Curriculum is centered on the quickly changing automotive field. Today’s technicians toolbox of skills needs to include good soft skills, critical thinking skills, a strong focus on electrical and wiring diagram reading, topped off with maintenance requirements, such as oil changes and preventive maintenance, all held together with the basics of torque fasteners. Students also need the ability to switch gears and jump into diagnosing complex

drivability problems on a day-to-day basis. That type of teaching leads to jobs.

“Most students find employment quickly after graduating,” explains Cox. “Entry-level openings number in the hundreds locally for good paying positions with growth potential. The skillset learned while in our program is also sought by other industries as well. Jobs such as equipment repair or anything with hydraulic and electrical needs are in desperate need for the kinds of skills you leave our program with.”

The building is designed to serve the community, helping meet workforce demands while giving important opportunities to students of all walks of life.

Says Champion, “the Omaha area is benefiting from this. MCC is partnering with a wide variety of local businesses to provide pathways to high-paying jobs to a diverse community of learners.”



For more information on the Automotive Technology, Toyota T-Ten and the Automotive Collision Technology programs, visit mccneb.edu or call 531-MCC-2400.

Revving up



“The classrooms are equipped with air, electrical and floor drains to ensure we have everything we need to teach the technicians of the future.”





METROPOLITAN
Community College



Help them explore what's out there.

Visit mccneb.edu/c4k or mccneb.edu/c4t
to register or find a list of classes.





Pursuing a lifelong dream

Mausami Shrestha, a native of Nepal, has always wanted to become a nurse and be there for others in times of need. That takes a special kind of person. Someone resilient and dedicated. That part may come naturally to Shrestha, but she also needs the education and training to become certified. And that education can't be done solo without a little help.

An international student at Metropolitan Community College, Shrestha says that while life may be completely different for her in the United States, it's the guidance of those like Naomi Greelis-Matos, Coordinator of International Student Services at MCC, that assist her along the way.

"I find the people [at MCC] really nice and helpful. I really like MCC as the education is good and my advisor, Naomi, is helpful and supportive in everything that I need help with. She has made everything very easy and quite pleasant," says Shrestha.

Another person to help on her educational journey is husband Suman Shrestha, a fellow MCC student. The couple come from the same city in Nepal and the two are there for one another when things get tough.

"We have known each other since childhood," Shrestha says, smiling.

With a shortage of skilled healthcare workers, Shrestha knows that she can be valuable, making patients feel comfortable while doing the job she trained for.

"I completed my CNA program last year at MCC and right now I am taking prerequisite courses for the Nursing program," she explains. "My goal is to become a registered nurse and provide quality care and service to patients."

One of the things that drew her to the Nursing program at MCC was affordability.

"I know the reputation of the MCC Nursing program is very good, and it doesn't hurt that it's one of the most affordable in the area as well," Shrestha says. "The College has helped me grow as a person and I would like to thank all of my instructors as well as advisors for providing good education and showing me the right path."

For more information about the MCC Nursing program, visit mccneb.edu/nursing.

Affordability was a key draw for Shrestha to MCC Nursing.



A PASSION

DEVELOPED



MCC Photography graduate enjoys fulfilling teaching career, worldwide travel

As a teenager, professional photographer Al Wildey loved the arts.

"I was a pretty good student, but I really enjoyed art classes. In the art classes, I painted, drew, sculpted. A friend of mine and I painted murals," he says.

The only medium Wildey wasn't crazy about was, ironically, photography.

"I did everything except for photography," he explains. "I had a friend on the yearbook staff who took me into the dark room. I smelled all the chemicals. There was running water and I thought, 'No this is not what I want to do.'"

After graduation, Wildey left his home in Michigan and enlisted in the United States Air Force. During basic training, he missed being creative. After getting one of his first checks, he went and bought something unexpected: a camera.

"That was in 1977 and I have been photographing ever since," Wildey says.



Wildey was initially stationed in London, where he was able to take photos and develop them in a dark room there. His passion for photography grew exponentially. Later, he was stationed at Offutt Air Force Base in Bellevue, Nebraska. While living in the Omaha area, he learned about a Commercial Photography program at Metropolitan Community College.

Wildey enrolled in classes in 1980. His photography courses were at the then-brand new Elkhorn Valley Campus.

"It changed my world because I didn't go to college right out of high school. I was able to go to school with a lot of nontraditional students. It made for such a great experience," Wildey says. "I met so many great people."

While the program focused on commercial photography, Wildey says the instructors taught students how to balance commercial and artistic photography. What he learned from his MCC teachers was influential in the rest of his career.

"[Instructor] Jim Butkus comes from a fine art background, and him allowing for that sort of mix and hybrid of concept and application, it was really, really important for me."

Another instructor, Tom Langdon, helped Wildey look at photography in a deeper way.



“He said ‘Go out and photograph truth.’ We looked at each other and were like ‘What are you talking about?’ My truth at that time was from active duty military to my adult civilian life. I figured out that while I was driving, there are mirrors in front and behind me.”

Wildey bought a full-length mirror and placed it in the middle of a road. He photographed himself in the mirror with the road in the background, but also ahead of him.

“I showed Tom and he said, ‘You nailed it.’ It was just a seminal moment for me.”

After graduating in 1982, Wildey was 23, single and ready to head to a coastal city and begin working. He decided warm weather sounded better, so Wildey packed up his car and began driving to California. He made some stops along the way to visit friends and even got his first job in the photography world.

“I stopped in Cheyenne, Wyoming. One of my friends asked ‘Why don’t you hang out here for a while?’ I ended up staying for 10 months. While I was there, a photo lab opened in a shopping mall. It was the first one-hour photo in the state of Wyoming.”

In 1983, Wildey made it to Los Angeles. He was able to obtain a job at a one-hour photo lab within his first few

hours in the city. Over the next three years, he was also able to do all kinds of photography work, fine tuning his personal style of street photography mixed with landscape photography.

“I did a lot of freelance work and commercial work. I photographed the 1984 Summer Olympics. I met a lot of interesting people and I was enjoying life out there.”

A family emergency brought Wildey back to Michigan in 1985. While looking for a new job, he saw a listing for a photographer at Michigan Tech University.

“I accepted a job as a manager of the photo services department.

We provided all photo support having to do with the university from sports to PR to science. I had a great experience there. Being able to apply the commercial and administration stuff of my experience.”

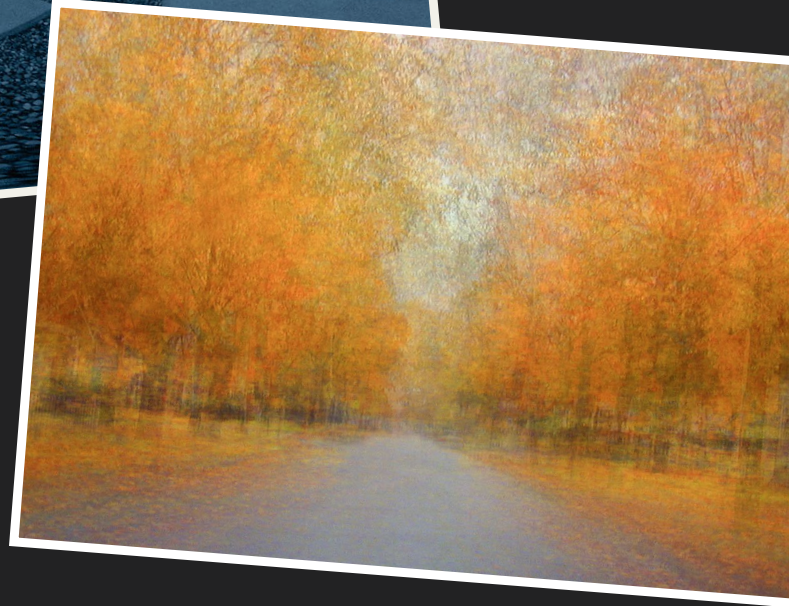
It was Wildey’s first time working in the collegiate world. He loved being able to work with students and teach them how to become better photographers.

“I thought ‘I really enjoy teaching people at this level,’” Wildey says.

Wildey decided that he wanted to realize his dream of teaching college students.



For me, one of the foundational ideas about photography is that while it is so good at recording surface, descriptive info, it is always symbolic. It’s at its strongest when we use it to tell stories.



With the support of his wife, he enrolled in a Bachelor's in Fine Arts program at the Rochester Institute of Technology in New York. After graduating, he found a photographer job at the University of Idaho. The college was able to accommodate and allow him to work and enroll in a Master's program, graduating in 1996.

After working his way up to being a full-time tenured instructor at the University of Idaho, Wildey returned to Michigan in 2003 to be closer to family. Wildey took a tenured position at Central Michigan University, where he retired from in August.

While teaching, Wildey says he applied what MCC instructors taught him while he was a student, including what Langdon taught him when he took that photograph of his truth.

"I showed that photo to classes for years and years. It wasn't about camera operation or chemicals. It was about expressing an idea that could only be done symbolically. For me, one of the really foundational ideas about photography is that while it is so good at recording surface and descriptive info, it is always symbolic. It's at its strongest when we use it to tell stories."

On top of teaching, over the years, Wildey was able to travel, photograph the world and show his work in galleries on several continents and cities, including Paris, Prague, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York City and his hometown of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

"I exhibited in the Grand Rapids Art Museum. They put it in the permanent collection. As a kid from a working-class family, a lot of family didn't understand what I was doing.

Art, to them, was pictures of pheasants or deer in the living room. To have family come see my work as part of the permanent collection was really cool," Wildey says.

Now that he is retired, Wildey is still busy. He is working on a photography app for smart phones and is writing a book on how to become a better photographer.

"I'm writing the book I wish I had when I was teaching introductory photography. It's based upon the teaching I've done," he says. "The foundation of my book is that you are going to be a good photographer by unlearning the bad habits you already have. The way to get better is to stop doing what you've been doing. Let's take a step back and look at what makes a really good photograph."

Wildey was grateful to spend more than three decades working in the collegiate world. Although he is retired now and has moved to Florida, he is still teaching an online course and stays in touch with students from over the years.

"I know that the relationships that I established at MCC laid the groundwork for everything that came after. I managed to spend about 35 years in higher education and have loved every minute of it," he says. "I have been honored to be a part of so many students' lives."

To learn more about Al Wildey and see more of his photography, visit alwildey.com.



Gap funding offers students multitude of options

When people think about financial aid, they associate them with two- or four-year degree programs. But did you know that financial aid also exists for short-term training programs?

MCC participates in the statewide Community College Gap Assistance Program, offering need-based tuition assistance for approved short-term credit and noncredit training programs in high-demand fields. MCC has more than 25 credit and noncredit certificates that qualify for the Gap Assistance Program. These include training in the areas of Business Management and Insurance, Healthcare, Information Technology and the trades.

“There’s a wide variety of classes available,” says Todd Hansen, executive director of Student Services. “There are classes in coding, digital marketing, pharmacy technology, project management and web development, just to name a few. These are excellent opportunities for students to earn a great wage in an exciting career.”

Other offerings include CDL truck driving licensing, medical services representative training, carpet and flooring installation and more.

The Gap Assistance Program may be right for unemployed or underemployed individuals or for those looking to upskill to achieve career advancement. The program is designed to bridge the funding “gap” for participants who meet program and income guidelines.

Alex Lovrien, MCC Workforce Training coordinator, says that while most people come to associate financial aid with credit courses, there is a lack of awareness around aid for short-term, noncredit programs.

“The name of the Gap program is apt. While Pell grants or other scholarships are available for low-income students who want to pursue college degrees, few financial supports exist for students who need to improve their career outlook quickly, such as working adults with families. This program

fills the gap by enabling those hardworking students to invest in their futures and gain the skills needed for high-wage, high-skill occupations, which would not be possible without training beyond high school,” says Lovrien.

Certificates earned are industry recognized and, depending on the program, can take just weeks to complete. Classes will be offered throughout the winter quarter and some credits earned while in a Gap Assistance Program course may also apply toward an associate degree or transfer to another institution.

The program has made a difference for Pierce Robinson, a local business professional who was looking to upskill quickly in the field of project management without years of schooling ahead of him. Like some others, Robinson wasn't aware of the kind of opportunities that existed at MCC for short-term education.



“This program fills the gap by enabling those hardworking students to invest in their futures and gain the skills needed for high-wage, high-skill occupations, which would not be possible without training beyond high school.”

-Alex Lovrien



“Prior to going through the Gap program, I had no idea how I would be able to afford the training I needed to go along with my experience to advance my career. After being accepted into the program, I was able to get the training I needed. This led to me receiving a job offer immediately after completing,” he says.

Robinson says that while this accomplishment may not come with the glitz and glamour of a master’s degree, it was exactly what he needed.

“To some, this may not seem impressive, but along with Gap training came the opportunity for a C-level position that I will officially be taking over this year. While the training program has been a blessing, the economic impact it has had on my life is unmatched. I am truly grateful, and I know without the Gap program none of this would be possible,” Robinson states.

For more information on qualifications and a full lineup of courses and schedules, visit mccneb.edu/gap.

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-Pierce Robinson





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Around The College

College celebrates Pride Month

MCC celebrated Pride Month with a series of online educational events. Each event centered on different issues facing the LGBTQIA+ community and brought them to light through stories, experiences and presentations featuring unique perspectives.

Cleve Jones, author and activist, presented online. Jones has been giving a voice to the voiceless for more than 50 years and was recognized as a Champion of Change by former President Barack Obama in addition to being portrayed in an Oscar-winning film.

Other education events throughout the month included “LGBTQ 101: Allies & Inclusivity,” “Chamber Music Theatre Performance: Equally Divine—The Real Story of the Mona Lisa,” a panel discussion and a film discussion on “Facing Fear.”



Signing Day highlights importance of community

Metropolitan Community College hosted a Signing Day ceremony at the outdoor amphitheater on the Fort Omaha Campus. Highlighting the trades, the celebration included students and their business sponsors, who committed to helping students pay for college as the students ‘signed’ with the company to start their careers.

The sponsored students have started their studies in various programs at the College, including automotive technology, electrical technology, welding technology and more. MCC president Randy Schmailzl and industry partners spoke at the ceremony. Partners include: Baxter, Fiserv, Jensen Tire and Auto, Lozier, MH Equipment, NMC Cat, Sid Dillon, Smithfield Foods and Tyson Foods.





Summer camp instills entrepreneurial spirit

The students from the Metropolitan Community College Kidz Biz Entrepreneurship Camp Expo class sold the items they created during the camp at MCC North Express over the summer. The camp was designed to help teach youth ages 12-15 how to turn a passion into a real-life business and let them discover how to create a brand and market it. Part of the camp is selling what they created to the public, giving the students a well-rounded experience.

Items sold during the sale included arts and crafts and even hamburger sliders. The camp was part of the College for Teens noncredit course lineup for the summer quarter. For more information about MCC College for Teens, visit mccneb.edu/ce.



MCC honored at 2021 Nebraska CTE Conference

The Metropolitan Community College Early Childhood Education program was honored at the 2021 Nebraska Career Education Conference. The program received the Outstanding Postsecondary Career and Technical Education Program Award for exemplary student success.

Offering an associate in Applied Science, the Early Childhood Education program prepares students for education or human services careers, while giving them college credit that they can transfer to a four-year institution if they choose to do so.

During the three-day conference, event participants selected from more than 75 breakout sessions where they had the opportunity to collaborate, engage, learn and reconnect with colleagues to advance their programs. National leaders presented topics focused on ensuring all students have equitable access to high-quality career and technical education programs, social and emotional learning resources and teaching strategies to engage learners virtually and in person.



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