

# OCEAN VIEWS

A Magazine for Ocean County College Alumni, Our College Family and the Community  
Summer - Fall 2023 • Vol. XVII: No. 2

- ✓ A.A. in Liberal Arts from Ocean County College
- ✓ B.S. in Biology from Stockton University
- ✓ Superintendent at NJ Park Service
- ✓ NJ STARS Recipient

**MEGHAN YOVANKIN '08**



An OCC ecology class uncovers a path to true purpose.



A magazine for Ocean County  
College alumni, our College family  
and the community

**Dr. Pamela Monaco**

*President, Ocean County College*

**Jan Kirsten**

*Executive Director of College Relations*

**Editorial Team**

CO-EDITOR/LAYOUT/PHOTOGRAPHY

**Michael Leon**

*Creative Director*

WRITER AND CO-EDITOR

**Dori Londres**

*Marketing & Communications Writer/Editor*

CO-EDITOR

**Kimberly Malony**

*Alumni & Advancement Director*

ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY

**Sara Nusbaum**

*Social Media Coordinator*

**Nicolaus A. Burr**

[www.ocean.edu](http://www.ocean.edu)



Please address comments and submissions to  
[jkirsten@ocean.edu](mailto:jkirsten@ocean.edu)

**Ocean County College**

**Board of Trustees**

Jerry J. Dasti, *Chair*

Linda L. Novak, *Vice Chair*

Frank J. Dupignac, Jr., *Treasurer*

Stephan R. Leone, *Secretary*

Robert A. Fall

Charles Muller

Joanne Pehlivanian

Joseph E. Teichman

Carl V. Thulin, Jr.

Steven A. Zabarsky

Casey Conner, *Student/Alumni Trustee*

John C. Sahradnik, *Counsel*

**Ocean County**

**Board of Commissioners**

Joseph H. Vicari, *Director*

Gary Quinn, *Deputy Director*

Barbara Jo Crea

Virginia E. Haines, *Liaison to Ocean County College*

John P. Kelly

© 2023 Ocean County College.

*Ocean Views* is published biannually by the  
Office of College Relations, Ocean County College,  
College Drive, PO Box 2001,  
Toms River, NJ 08754-2001

## CONTENTS

### OCEAN NEWS

3 - 7

Passing the Baton

OCC: Best Online Community College

Welcome, Delta Alpha Pi

Students and Faculty Honored

OCC Wins National Marketing Award

Living History

56th Annual Commencement

### CAMPUS SPOTLIGHT

8 - 9

Environmental Science Certificates

Environmental Tech Conference

### ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

10 - 11

Meghan Yovankin '08

*A Natural Leader*

### OCC FOUNDATION

12 - 15

Annual Scholarship Celebration

A Day to Celebrate

Blauvelt Speaker Series

### GRUNIN CENTER

16 - 17

Battle of the Bards

Bella Gaia: Beautiful Earth

### STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

18 - 19

The Organization for Black Unity

*Creating opportunities for cultural connection*

### ATHLETICS

20-21

Net Results

*Men's volleyball team dominates the court*

### BARNEGAT BAY PARTNERSHIP

22 - 23

Meet the BBP Staff





## Passing the Baton

The College bids farewell to Dr. Jon Larson and welcomes Dr. Pamela Monaco to OCC

The changing seasons signaled a different kind of transition on campus this spring as the college community said goodbye to longtime president Jon Larson and welcomed a new leader to the executive role.

As the semester ended, people gathered to celebrate at a series of campus events that kicked off with a barbecue luncheon on the campus mall, where faculty, staff, and even some old friends dropped by to thank Dr. Larson for his years of service to the college and its students. Throughout the month of May, campus members took the opportunity to celebrate Dr. Larson’s legacy in distinct ways. At the annual Nurses’ Pinning ceremony, Dr. Larson was visibly surprised when Dean Teresa Walsh presented him with his own nursing pin, in recognition of his longtime support for the Nursing program. Dr. Larson was also featured as the honoree at the OCC Foundation’s

annual Scholarship Celebration in June (see story on page 12).

As Larson’s 23-year tenure wound down, incoming president Dr. Pamela Monaco was ramping up for the role: getting to know Ocean County, meeting stakeholders, and attending public board meetings and campus events. Dr. Monaco officially took office on July 1.

In her first email to the campus community, President Monaco wrote: “For the last several months, I have benefited from the opportunity to learn from Dr. Larson, faculty, staff, and administrators across the campus, the Foundation leadership, and the Board of Trustees. With the collective wisdom and dedication of so many engaged people, Ocean County College will continue to be the best community college in New Jersey.”



“ I AM A NURSE! ”

- Jon H. Larson

## OCC Named in Best NJ Online Community Colleges

Ocean County College was named in the 2023 Best Online Community Colleges in New Jersey by leading higher education researcher OnlineU. The report noted ease of enrollment, affordability, and the ability of students to study at their own pace in it’s positive assessment of OCC.

OnlineU compares colleges across the country in various categories, using impactful data, public information, and reviews from over 13,000 online students. To be considered in the ranking, community colleges must offer primarily associate degrees and certificate programs, have a main campus located within the state, and offer five or more fully online associate degrees.

“In the e-Learning Department, our mission is to provide our students with rewarding educational experiences that are enriched by technology, innovation, and effective design,” said Dr. Eileen Garcia, OCC’s vice president of e-Learning and Learning Enterprises. “We strive to deliver high-quality asynchronous courses which are engaging and meet the needs of students from all walks of life, with a commitment to excellence that extends from the local community to the international stage. Our goal is to empower all students with the tools and guidance they need to succeed and to help them achieve their academic and professional aspirations.”





## WELCOME, DELTA ALPHA PI!

Through a partnership between the offices of Disability Services and Student Life, Ocean County College has introduced a new academic honor society supporting academic achievement, leadership, and advocacy for post-secondary students with disabilities.

Delta Alpha Pi (DAPI) recognizes high-achieving undergraduate and graduate students with disabilities who complete a minimum of 24 credits, maintain an overall GPA of 3.10 or higher, and demonstrate an interest in disability issues. The Theta Omicron chapter at Ocean County College held its first induction during the spring semester. Fifteen students were inducted at the inaugural ceremony.

“We are proud that Ocean County College

has made a permanent impression in New Jersey’s postsecondary history,” said Jamie Prioli, assistant director of Disability Services and advisor to the student group. “The Theta Omicron chapter is New Jersey’s first community college chapter of Delta Alpha Pi. We join the ranks of five reputable four-year institutions here in the Garden State, alongside over 200 notable institutions nationally. In addition to recognizing outstanding academic achievement, DAPI seeks to lessen and eventually eliminate the stigma and negative stereotyping that have been associated historically with disability.”

Ocean County College’s inaugural cohort joins more than 3,200 DAPI members nationwide who have pledged to continue their pursuit of academic excellence and take leadership roles in advocating for the rights of individuals with disabilities.

## OUTSTANDING STUDENTS AND FACULTY HONORED

Ocean County College presented awards totaling more than \$83,000 to graduating students at the 56th Annual Student Awards ceremony, sponsored by the office of Student Life and the Ocean County College Foundation. Awards and scholarships were generously donated to the students by individuals, organizations, community partners, and donors through the OCC Foundation.

“This program honors and celebrates our most deserving graduating students,” said Jennifer Fazio, OCC’s director of Student Life, presenting the awards during this year’s ceremony. “We would like to thank all of you for your continued support of our students.”

In addition to the student awards, OCC also recognized excellence in teaching at

the ceremony: Lynn Vazquez, Associate Professor of Mathematics (Full-Time Faculty Award); Robert Marchie, College Lecturer II, History (Professional Educator Award); and Jeffrey McWeeney, Adjunct Professor of Business (Adjunct Faculty Award).

Congratulations to all of this year’s recipients!



## OCC WINS NATIONAL MARKETING AWARD!

The National Council for Marketing and Public Relations (NCMPR) presented Ocean County College with the national Paragon Award for excellence in design at the organization’s annual conference in Orlando, Florida. OCC’s Novins Planetarium reopening signage displays, designed by Graphic Specialist Nicole Howard, received the silver award in the category of “Best Interior Signage/Displays – Single or Series.”

The prestigious Paragon Awards competition recognizes outstanding achievement in design and communication at community and technical colleges. It is the only national competition of its kind that honors excellence exclusively among marketing and public relations professionals at two-year

colleges. This year’s winners were selected from 1,726 entries from 323 colleges across the United States and Canada.

OCC’s award-winning design was a series of signs, posters and decals created to support the safe reopening of the planetarium after the COVID-19 lockdown. The displays previously won first place at the district level in the NCMPR’s Medallion Awards contest earlier this year.

“It is a remarkable honor for Ocean County College to receive this award and to be recognized at the national level,” said Jan Kirsten, executive director of College Relations. “College Relations strives to provide innovative and effective campaigns to support the wonderful things our colleagues are doing. We are excited to continue doing that work and to help Ocean County College serve our students and our community.”



# LIVING HISTORY

## A DAY OF HISTORICAL REENACTMENT

Students of History Professor John Fraterrigo got a firsthand look at life as a Civil War soldier during several outdoor “School of the Soldier” lectures held on OCC’s campus mall.

A small encampment displayed the soldiers’ tents and equipment, as students “joined” the Federal army as volunteers. Fraterrigo, dressed in a Federal army uniform, introduced students to their clothing and gear and lined them up to teach them formations, marching, and firing positions. After the training, the students demonstrated their new skills through firing drills, marches, and participation in a sudden, unexpected “battle” on the campus mall.

The students expressed amazement at the rough clothing, the small tents – which seemed just barely large enough to shelter a person from the elements – and the size and weight of the weapons the soldiers had to carry.

Fraterrigo holds these events at the end of each semester, providing a personal

learning experience that he says his students could not find in the classroom or in a book.

“This is always a fun, hands-on lecture,” he said. “I talk about pay, food, show them an example of a tent they would sleep in, the roles of various soldiers, how to line up, march, and drill, how to load and fire musket rifles.”

After the lecture, the participants are given an opportunity to earn extra credit by writing about what they have learned. Most find it incredible to see how soldiers lived and fought and the hardships and living conditions they were forced to endure.

“Until you experience something firsthand, you cannot really understand what the people who lived it went through,” explained student Marina Dittus. “Although I did not actually experience the weather, the hunger, the physical discomfort, the sorrow of loss, etc. that the Civil War soldiers endured, seeing their memorabilia in real life definitely put things into perspective.”

“ Until you experience something firsthand, you cannot really understand what the people who lived it went through. ” - Marina Dittus, OCC history student

# COMMENCEMENT

# D

# A

# Y



Ocean County College conferred 1,387 degrees – the associate in arts, associate in applied science, and associate in science – at the 56th Annual Commencement Ceremony in May. Among the graduates were high school students participating in OCC’s Early College program, students who earned OCC degrees in Performing Arts while simultaneously attending Ocean County Vocational Technical School of Performing Arts Academy, and Egyptian students who earned associate degrees in Business Administration through the partnership between OCC, Kean University and Ain Shams University.



A total of 640 students participated in the ceremony.

Student Commencement Speaker Casey Conner offered an inspirational call to action for the class of 2023. “I have seen firsthand the incredible work that can be done when a community comes together,” Conner said. “Our strength as individuals only lies in solidarity with those peers around us that share a common goal. When these individuals come together, not only does the community benefit, but it also sets the right example for other communities that surround it. Like a pebble in a river, the seemingly small impact that we have ultimately ripples and spreads.”

In his final address to the graduates, President Larson said, “My wish for you today is a lifetime of miracles as you climb toward the pinnacle of success in your lives. Along the way, you will discover the harsh reality that life is not always fair. But if you persevere, if you are resilient, if you try, you can deal with and overcome any obstacle, any setback. Whatever your immediate goal after today, graduates, remember to never give up.”

# THE SCIENCE OF SAVING THE WORLD



“ The environmental field is broad. It has depth and breadth and touches on so many things. ”  
- Lincoln Simmons, College Lecturer II of the School of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)

## OCC ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE TECHNICAL CONFERENCE

OCC’s Environmental Science Technical Conference, held in March, was an opportunity for students to explore career paths and meet industry representatives to discuss internship and job opportunities. Representatives from a wide range of environmental companies, nonprofits and educational institutions participated in the event, including Atlantic Shores Offshore Wind, IATL International, JCP&L, Brilliant Environmental

Services, the Barnegat Bay Partnership, and many more. The conference, sponsored by the OCC STEM Environmental Management Program and hosted by the Grunin Center for the Arts, was a huge success in bringing students and industry partners together. Plans are in place to continue hosting the conference as an annual event. For information about how to participate, contact Karin Smith at [ksmith@ocean.edu](mailto:ksmith@ocean.edu).

## TWO OCEAN COUNTY COLLEGE CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS PREPARE STUDENTS FOR A CAREER IN MAKING A DIFFERENCE.

In a recent video posted on TikTok, Lincoln Simmons, College Lecturer II in OCC’s School of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), walked through a science lab and asked viewers, “Do you like science? Do you want to save the environment?”

Those fundamental questions are at the heart of two certificate programs offered by Ocean County College as part of STEM’s Environmental Science studies.

The Environmental Sustainability and Industrial Hygiene/Hazardous Materials Management (IHMM) certificates provide specific pathways for students interested in working on behalf of the environment who seek entrance to a career in the field.

“Environmental science is not just about saving trees or counting birds,” says Simmons, who serves as program chair for both programs. “The environmental field is broad. It has depth and breadth and touches on so many things.”

Students concerned about climate change and the increasing impact of greenhouse gases, for example, can take advantage of these programs to receive training that prepares them for jobs in a variety of fields. Such training is in high demand by corporate, government, and private organizations looking to reduce their environmental impact and create a more sustainable future.

“Global treaties being signed are compelling companies to figure out how to meet the standards,” Simmons says. “Students who complete these programs can start their career right away.” As a sustainability or IH technician, students are equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to perform testing, auditing, consulting, risk assessment, and to help ensure that companies establish and obey sustainable policies and practices.

Both certificates can be completed in two semesters and can be taken independently or as a complement to OCC’s environmental science degree. Students can also earn industry-recognized credentials through OCC’s Workforce and Professional Education that can significantly increase their employment and salary potential. The OCC Foundation offers scholarship opportunities for these credentials.

After completing the certificate, students can begin working in the field right away or apply the certificate credits toward OCC’s associate degree in Technical Studies for continued career growth.



Additionally, through a new articulation agreement with Kean University, students have the opportunity to apply the credits toward a bachelor's degree in Sustainability at Kean. OCC and Kean are currently working on articulating the industrial hygiene certificate into a bachelor's degree as well.

According to Simmons, 37 students took courses in the Sustainability and IHHM certificates in fall 2022; 53 students took certificate courses in the spring 2023 semester. From the first cohort of students, four earned IHHM certificates in May, and six students are anticipated to earn Sustainability certificates in the upcoming fall semester. All six received OCC Foundation scholarships. Simmons credits the growth and success of the programs to the vision and steadfast leadership of Dr. Sylvia Riviello, dean of OCC's School of STEM.

"These programs mean so much, in so many ways, for our students," said Dr. Riviello.

"One of my passions is for our students to have a great life and to love what they do. The students who work in these fields get the education that's required of them to succeed and will earn a substantial salary prior to completing a degree through our certifications."

She noted that these programs have an impact that reaches far beyond one individual.

"It's also about the Ocean County community and what we at OCC can give back to them," she explained.

"With our programs, we can address issues

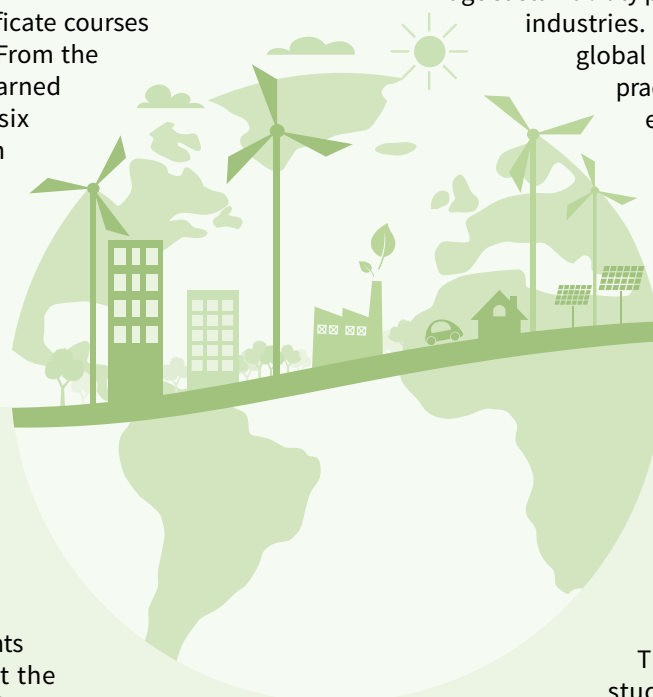
that are at the forefront of people's concerns; for example, food insecurities and our Ocean County ecosystem. Giving back to the Ocean County community will return hundredfold to our students and our campus."

### **Certificate in Environmental Sustainability**

This certificate prepares students to develop and manage sustainability programs in a wide range of industries. Students are introduced to global environmental sustainability practices and guidelines, renewable energy sources, and the evaluation systems and tools used to measure, reduce and mitigate the impact of greenhouse gas emissions. Students explore concepts, such as biodiversity, resource management and corporate social responsibility, and learn to determine the impact of products and services, analyze energy policy, and propose innovative solutions.

### **Certificate in Industrial Hygiene/Hazardous Materials Management**

The IHHM certificate provides students with the knowledge, skills, and training required to identify, assess and control industrial hygiene and hazardous materials. Courses introduce students to indoor environmental quality; occupational safety; health and wellness; workplace hazards; and hazardous materials testing and assessment. Students learn to conduct workplace evaluations, provide risk assessments and analysis, and make recommendations for remedial actions.



“ With our programs, we can address issues that are at the forefront of people's concerns. ”  
- Sylvia Riviello, Ph.D., dean of the School of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)

# MEGHAN YOVANKIN '08

## A NATURAL LEADER

***An unexpected path leads to true purpose and a dream career.***

When Meghan Yovankin '08 entered Ocean County College, she planned to study chemistry in preparation for a career in medicine. These days, in her role as a superintendent for the New Jersey State Park Service, her future looks a lot more – green.

Yovankin, who hails from Mystic Island in Little Egg Harbor, graduated in the top ten percent of her class at Pinelands Regional High School. That achievement opened the door to a valuable opportunity: the NJ STARS program.

“If that wasn’t available to me, I probably would never have been able to go to college,” Yovankin said.

Established in 2004, the New Jersey Student Tuition Assistance Reward Scholarship (NJ STARS) program provides New Jersey’s highest achieving students with free tuition at their

county college. The program covered five semesters at Ocean County College for Meghan, a crucial stepping stone in her journey.

It was at OCC that Meghan found her true calling. Specifically, it was during Professor Duane Grembowicz’s Ecology class, where she had the opportunity to explore Brendan T. Byrne State Forest and Double Trouble State Park for the first time. She ended up taking multiple classes with Professor Grembowicz and discovered a strong connection with the outdoors.

“Those are some of my most memorable times at OCC,” she said. “I quickly learned that I was not interested in sitting in a lab all day.”

After graduating from OCC, and with the continued support of NJ STARS, she went on to Stockton University, where she studied wildlife management, ornithology, botany and forestry. She earned her B.S. in biology from Stockton while working part time in a seasonal job for the state parks.

To gain additional experience, she took a position with the New Jersey Department of Transportation as an environmental

specialist, where she worked for nine years on site remediation, acquiring multiple certifications and gaining valuable experience in the environmental field. Her patience and perseverance paid off when an opportunity arose at the NJDEP. She assumed her new post in 2021.

As a superintendent, Yovankin manages multiple sites, including Brendan T. Byrne, Double Trouble, Whitesbog Historic Village, Rancocas State Park and Mt. Laurel State Park. Her responsibilities include a challenging blend of preservation, education, and maintenance.


“We deal with nature, but also with the public,” she explained. “It’s an odd dichotomy of being out in the woods and preserving nature, but also making it friendly for the public to come out and learn and enjoy, and helping to preserve it for future generations.”

Meghan is currently on a six-month transfer to Bass River State Forest, where she is responsible for a variety of historical and forested sites. “Our main goal is to make sure these areas are maintained, so that people can enjoy them and continue to enjoy themselves in nature.”

“ Don’t put limits on what you think you want to do. ”

- Meghan Yovankin, superintendent at New Jersey State Park Service





Although these days her job requires a lot more paperwork – overseeing planning, funding, and other administrative duties – Yovankin says it’s all for a good cause. “I’ve definitely gotten a little more tied to a desk,” she admits. “But it’s necessary to make sure that everything’s in place, to get the rest of the work done. It’s essential to ensure that these areas remain available for the public to enjoy.”

Meghan is determined to raise awareness about the many hidden gems located throughout the state, and to help more people experience the wonders of nature in the Garden State.

“People should get outdoors to explore what’s out there,” she says. “We have tons of historic and natural sites with interpretive centers. You can explore it any way you want: go out on a hike and read about it yourself, or we have podiums so you can read about certain things. We’re working on putting QR codes out so you can read a little spiel about the site and what’s in front of you, or you can go out with a leader to hear it verbally. It’s all out there to be experienced, and I really hope that people take advantage of it.”

Yovankin credits OCC for allowing her to explore and find her passion. To current students, she advises, “Don’t put limits on what you think you want to do. When you’re going into college, you don’t have to have things figured out. It’s okay to change your mind. OCC was that place for me. It was the place where I got to take the chemistry course, take the ecology course, and find out what I really liked. It’s a great opportunity to get out there and figure out what you’re interested in.”

# SCHOLARSHIP CELEBRATION

## RAISES MORE THAN \$215,000

More than 200 members of the Ocean County College community gathered under the glittering tent on the campus mall on Friday, June 23, for the Ocean County College Foundation's Scholarship Celebration. The annual event raised more than \$215,000 in support of student scholarships and special programs.

OCC donors, alumni, faculty, staff and students all braved the rainy weather to join the Foundation in enjoying a cocktail reception, a gourmet buffet-style dinner, and a silent auction at the event. Guests also included members of OCC's Board of Trustees, community partners, and OCC's incoming president, Dr. Pamela Monaco and her husband, Donald Kehne.

David Paulus, chair of the OCC Foundation Board, thanked everyone for coming out to support the Foundation and for the continued generosity of the Foundation's many committed sponsors.

"On an evening such as this, we have gathered together so many people who make a tremendous difference in our community. We want to thank all of you for supporting education in Ocean County," Paulus said. "Your support will enable us to help so many students, and we are enormously grateful."

The evening's festivities included special recognition of Jon H. Larson, Ph.D., OCC's outgoing president, this year's featured honoree. Dr. Larson was chosen in honor of his many years of dedicated service to the College, its students, and the broader Ocean County community. A special video presentation celebrating his legacy at OCC was a highlight of the evening. Dr. Larson also received a special Lifetime Achievement Award from the Ocean County Prosecutor's office for decades of work on behalf of Ocean County.

OCC Board of Trustees Vice Chair Linda Novak, who co-chaired the event along with Mr. Paulus, praised Dr. Larson's leadership at Ocean County College, citing the growth of the campus, the expansion of academic programs, and the college's success in preparing students for employment.

"Twenty-three years ago, Dr. Larson brought with him his clarity, his energy, as well as his vision to embark on this mission," Novak said. "What an honor it has been to work with such a talent."



"The job of president of Ocean County College has been, for me, such a joy – such a rewarding role, and I absolutely loved every minute of it," said Dr. Larson upon accepting his award. "I could not wait to get to work – or as I always regarded it, not as work, but as constructive play. I shall always treasure the fond memories it has provided me. Thank you for the privilege of serving, and for being selected to receive this unbelievable designation as 2023's OCC Foundation Honoree tonight."

To learn more about the Ocean County College Foundation and how you can support its mission to provide access to higher education to all Ocean County students, visit the foundation's webpage at [go.ocean.edu/foundation](http://go.ocean.edu/foundation).



# A DAY TO CELEBRATE

Scholarship Reception honors students and donors

After a four-year hiatus, the OCC Foundation's Scholarship Recognition Reception returned in 2023, bringing together scholarship recipients and their benefactors in a welcome opportunity to celebrate the students' academic success and the generosity of their donors. The event was held May 3 in the atrium of the Instructional Building.

Hosted by the OCC Foundation Board of Trustees, the event offered an opportunity for Fall 2022 and Spring 2023 scholarship recipients to thank their donors for their

support, while enabling donors to see the direct impact of their gifts and to learn how these awards will play a key role in the students' future success. The reception is a long-held annual tradition at Ocean County College, but was halted in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sincere appreciation is extended to all of the individuals, companies, and foundations whose support enables the Ocean County College Foundation to continue to provide these awards each year to hundreds of OCC students.



# SAVE THE DATE!

## BLAUVELT SPEAKER SERIES



PRESENTED BY  
**OCEAN**  
COUNTY COLLEGE  
FOUNDATION



### ROBERT PONDISCIO

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 28

11:00 a.m. – IN PERSON

Robert Pondiscio is a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), where he focuses on K-12 education, curriculum, teaching, school choice, and charter schooling.

### LIDIA BASTIANICH

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 4

6:00 p.m. – IN PERSON

Lidia Matticchio Bastianich is an Emmy Award-winning public television host, best-selling cookbook author, successful restaurateur, and owner of a flourishing food and entertainment business.



### STACY SCHIFF

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 15

11:00 a.m. – IN PERSON

Pulitzer Prize-winning and No. 1 best-selling author Stacy Schiff uses brilliant storytelling to bring to life some of history's most enigmatic individuals. Part of the Visiting Writers Reading Series.

Photo Credit: Elena Seibert



## CONCERT EVENT

# BLUES TRAVELER

FALL TOUR 2023

OCT 27



Art Credit: Derek Hatfield

# BATTLE OF THE BARDS

A N D B E L L A G A I A

The Grunin Center for the Arts and the Robert J. Novins Planetarium partnered to present *Bella Gaia*, a remarkably ambitious, fully immersive experience that explores the beauty of planet Earth and the fragile relationship between human civilization and our ecosystem.

The concert combined supercomputer data visualizations from NASA, satellite images of Earth from space, cultural photographs, and live music and dance from around the world to expand public understanding of the global challenges we face and inspire audiences to act as stewards for our shared resources. The award-winning show, composed and directed

by Kenji Williams, was inspired by astronauts who spoke of the life-changing power of seeing the Earth from space.

The extraordinary event was part of Grunin's Schools 'N Stage program, a series of programming for kindergarten through college students offering exposure to the arts, sciences, and fun. Schools 'N Stage events are funded in part by the Ocean County Board of Commissioners and a grant from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, administered by the Ocean County Cultural and Heritage Commission, the OCC Foundation, Arts for Everyone Fund, and the Quebec Delegation General – New York.

The Main Stage at the Grunin Center for the Arts was ringing with rhythm as poets from Ocean, Monmouth, Middlesex and Cumberland County high schools gathered to compete in the 2023 New Jersey Poetry Out Loud Region 2 and 3 semifinals.

Poetry Out Loud is an arts education project that encourages high school students to study classic and contemporary poetry, offering free educational materials as well as the opportunity to participate in the national recitation contest. The program helps students develop their public speaking skills, build self-confidence, and explore literary history and its relevance to contemporary life.

Students representing 15 schools participated in the regional competition, which was coordinated by Erik Stratton, Education and Community Engagement Coordinator at the Grunin Center, a regional partner for New Jersey Poetry Out Loud. More than 21,000 New Jersey students from 66 high schools and home school organizations across the state competed this year as part of the program.

"Every single year, hundreds of thousands of students nationwide learn about the impact and power of poetry through Poetry Out Loud," Stratton said. "Here at the Jay and Linda Grunin Center for the Arts, we are grateful to be a part of a growing network of regional partners from across the state, including Rutgers, Camden Center of the Arts, Appel Farm Arts and Music Center, Mayo Performing Arts Center, South Orange Performing Arts Center and Ramapo College of New Jersey."

Each competitor recited three memorized poems while a panel of judges scored them on physical presence, voice and articulation, dramatic appropriateness, evidence of understanding, accuracy, and overall performance. The two top-scoring contestants were named the regional champions.

The 2023 winners were Lydia Smith, from Henry Hudson Regional High School in Highlands, and Jake Fredericks, from Red Bank Regional High School in Little Silver. Both advanced to the state finals competition at the Count Basie Center for the Arts in March, which Smith also won. As the New Jersey champion, Smith received an all-expenses-paid trip to Washington D.C. to represent the state at the Poetry Out Loud National Finals, where finalists vied for the national title and up to \$50,000 in awards and scholarships. Sreepadaarchana Munjuluri, a junior at Columbus North High School in Indiana, took top honors at the national finals in May.

New Jersey Poetry Out Loud is a project of the New Jersey State Council on the Arts and the Count Basie Center for the Arts. National Poetry Out Loud was founded by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Poetry Foundation, and is carried out annually in partnership with state and jurisdictional arts agencies of the United States. Since 2005, the Poetry Out Loud program has grown to reach more than 4 million students and 65,000 teachers from schools in every state, the District of Columbia, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, Puerto Rico and American Samoa. For more information about Poetry Out Loud, visit [poetryoutloud.org](http://poetryoutloud.org).

REGION 3

CHAMPION

Lydia Smith

W I N S

the 2023

Poetry

Out Loud

NJ state finals.





ARTS | ENTERTAINMENT | EXPLORATION  
EXPERIENCE OCEAN COUNTY COLLEGE!

Concerts · Theater · Jazz · Dance · Planetarium · Family Shows



UPCOMING EVENTS - visit: [www.grunincenter.org](http://www.grunincenter.org)



**Grosse  
Isle**  
Oct. 19  
7 p.m.



**Mariachi  
Herencia de  
México**  
Nov. 9  
7 p.m.



**A Jazz Tribute  
to 100 Years  
of Disney**  
Nov. 18  
7 p.m.



**The World  
Famous  
Glenn Miller  
Orchestra**  
Dec. 10  
3 p.m.



**America's  
Sweethearts**  
Dec. 15  
7 p.m.



**Cherish the  
Ladies - Celtic  
Christmas**  
Dec. 17  
7 p.m.



# THE ORGANIZATION fo

## ***Students create new opportunities for cultural connections.***

On a crisp day last November, a group gathered in the Larson Student Center for a frank conversation about mental health. The discussion, titled “Shades of Brown,” was coordinated by OCC’s Organization for Black Unity (OBU) to raise awareness about student mental health and to help people learn how to spot the signs when someone is in distress.

The event was a resounding success, with students and staff sharing experiences and learning from each other. They talked about mental health issues and trends, explored ways to change the culture around mental health and to eliminate stigma, and discussed the support services available on campus. Speakers included Dr. Kate Pandolpho, director of OCC’s Counseling Center; Dr. Mary-Ellen Rada, lecturer in science; and Bridget Everett, executive assistant to the associate vice president of Academic Affairs and co-advisor to the OBU.

“These women gave insightful speeches and made students aware that there are many types of mental illnesses,” said OBU president Shonoyalee Griffin. “Students joined in and asked questions. I couldn’t have been happier that this event was an absolute success.”

The OBU has been a steady and active

presence at OCC for over 50 years, encouraging intellectual discourse and multicultural connection on campus. Originally known as the Organization of Black Students, the club’s name was later changed to more accurately reflect its main objective: to unite all cultures. The OBU strives to improve the quality of life for all students, regardless of race.

“We always want to bring other perspectives into it,” said OBU co-advisor Dr. Henry Jackson. “The goal is not to be working in a silo, but to work together to bring about unification.”

“The OBU was founded to promote academic success, social involvement and community outreach among all students,” said Griffin. “The work done in representation of the OBU is done in an effort to promote unity among all students.”

Members have the opportunity to have fun and make friends while creating opportunities for people to connect and learn from each other. The club meets weekly during the semester to talk about current issues and to plan the projects and activities they want to work on during the year.

One of those activities is OCC’s annual Black History Month celebration, a series of events throughout February that traditionally begins with the raising of the



“ The OBU was founded to promote academic success, social involvement and community outreach among all students. ”  
 - Shonoyalee Griffin, president of OBU

# or BLACK UNITY

Pan-African flag. The schedule typically includes presentations, guest speakers, and the annual Read-In, where students, faculty, and staff perform recitations based on the current year's Black History theme. Past recitations have included Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I've Been to the Mountaintop," Paul Roberson's "The Artist Must Take Sides," and poems by Glenis Redmond, Jamaica Kincaid, and Claudia Rankine. Other special events have included live concerts, poetry slams, film screenings, and art displays.

The club often joins with campus partners to create opportunities for dialogue around current events and social justice issues. Recent discussions have centered on the shooting of Trayvon Martin, the controversy surrounding Colin Kaepernick, the Black Lives Matter movement and the January 6 insurrection. These discussions often focus on sharing different perspectives and brainstorming solutions.

In 2022, the OBU partnered with the OCC Foundation to host OCC's first Juneteenth celebration, a standing-room-only event that featured a presentation by OBU past president Rans Newton. The Juneteenth event has since become an annual tradition.

It was Newton who first introduced Griffin to the OBU. "I was on board immediately," Griffin said. "This club is my home away from home. A safe space where we gather to share facts about African American history and share stories, experiences and opinions."

"This is one of my best groups in a long time," said Jackson, who has served as the club's co-advisor with Everett since 2011. "They just took the club and ran with it." The current group of students is eager to collaborate and regularly seeks out opportunities to work with other clubs and community partners.

That determination, Jackson says, reflects the times in which they live. "The Black Lives Matter movement has this generation looking at things differently. Their generation is really inclusive. This group really wants this to be successful, and they have learned how to get people to be a part of it. They are interested in making a difference."

"One thing I love about the Organization for Black Unity is that everyone is welcomed, no matter the color of your skin," Griffin said. "We are, out of many, one people."



“ We always want to bring other perspectives into it. ”

- Dr. Henry Jackson, co-advisor of OBU



## NET RESULTS

### OCC's first men's volleyball team dominates the court

Talent. Energy. Cooperation. These are just some of the words to explain the remarkable success of the Ocean County College men's volleyball team in its historic first season.

Led by Head Coach Madisyn Raguz and Assistant Coach Alexis Whitney, the team had an extraordinary inaugural year, finishing the regular season undefeated in Garden State Athletic Conference play and capturing both the GSAC and NJCAA Region XIX championships, solidifying Ocean County College's position as a strong contender in the new sport.

The program was made possible through a grant from the National Junior College Athletic Association Foundation in collaboration with First Point Volleyball Foundation. Recognizing the potential of the emerging sport, the NJCAA Foundation awarded \$10,000 to member colleges to support the establishment of men's volleyball as a full NJCAA championship sport.

Interest was already growing at Ocean. With 12 high schools in Ocean County currently offering boys' volleyball teams, OCC's program would provide a valuable opportunity for those athletes to continue to play and compete.

"We had the support of the College to create more opportunities for students, and then

we were able to receive the grant," said Ilene Cohen, OCC's executive director of Athletics. "Our athletic staff got the word out a year in advance that we were going to start a men's volleyball team, and the students were excited."

The players came in ready to do the work—and to win. All of the team members had played in high school, according to Head Coach Raguz, and they brought a level of skill that allowed them to adapt to the rigorous demands of the collegiate-level game quickly.

"We didn't really have to go over the basics," Raguz explained. "We could be a little bit more technical with them and just say, 'Hey, you need to go do this,' and they'd do it."

Coach Whitney agreed. "I think you have to have coachable players, and we have a team of coachable players. They know what to do, but when you're standing on the sideline and coaching, you can see things from a different angle."

One interesting challenge the team faced was transitioning from former opponents to current teammates. "They all played against each other in high school, and they were rivals," Raguz said. "They had to come in and reset that mindset. I think they pulled it off."

Clearly, they did. From the beginning, the

Vikings demonstrated exceptional cooperation on the court, and that teamwork led them to finish the season ranked fifth in the nation. Three student-athletes – Tyler Iozzi, Tosh Mrazek, and Jake Sullivan – earned All-GSAC/All-Region XIX Team honors at season's end, and Raguz was named Region XIX Coach of the Year, a remarkable accomplishment in her first season as a head coach. Yet both players and coaches quickly agreed that no egos were on display. The team's emphasis remained firmly on collaboration and support.

"Volleyball's very much a team sport," said Whitney. "You cannot do it with one person. So although we may have an all-star hitter, if we can't pass, we can't set, we can't use the all-star. It really is a team effort."

After their incredible Region XIX championship victory, the team wrapped up their post-season at the 2023 NJCAA Men's Volleyball Invitational tournament in Glen Ellyn, IL, where they picked up valuable competition experience to prepare for next year.

"Our men's volleyball came out in their first season as strong as we can ask for, finishing sixth at the National Tournament, and with the guidance of the Region XIX coaching team of Coach Maddy and Coach Alexis, it all fell into place," said Cohen. "We are all looking forward to another exciting season in spring 2024."



## MADISYN RAGUZ

**HOMETOWN:**  
Jonestown, P.A.

**COLLEGE:**  
Kutztown University

**TEACHES:**  
Barnegat H.S.

**HEAD COACH:**  
Men's Volleyball

**ASSISTANT COACH:**  
Women's Volleyball

## ALEXIS WHITNEY

**HOMETOWN:**  
New City, N.Y.

**COLLEGE:**  
Kean University

**TEACHES:**  
Matawan Regional H.S.

**HEAD COACH:**  
Women's Volleyball

**ASSISTANT COACH:**  
Men's Volleyball

## A WINNING COMBINATION

The coaching combo of Madisyn Raguz and Alexis Whitney proved a winning formula for men's volleyball in 2023, but their collaboration extends even beyond the men's team. Together, they also lead OCC's women's volleyball, with Coach Whitney as head coach and Coach Raguz as assistant coach. The double teamwork keeps the two of them in near constant communication.

"People would think that we've known each other for years with how we act together, but we only met each other in August, when the women's season started," Coach Raguz says. "We're together literally every day."

"I think we didn't talk one day this whole year," agreed Whitney.

Both coaches are looking forward to their continued work together and to lead both teams to even greater success next year.

# EDUCATION AND OUTREACH



photo: Barnegat Bay - Little Egg Harbor Estuary ©Michael Leon

## Jersey-Friendly Yards Conference 2023: CHANGING CLIMATE, CHANGING YARDS

Registration is now open for the 5th Jersey-Friendly Yards conference, to be held September 30, 2023, from 8:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. in the Ocean County College Gateway Building (#101) lecture hall. Attendees can enjoy the exhibits and learn about Jersey-Friendly landscaping practices that help us prepare for climate change challenges, such as heat, drought, intense rain and flooding.

Guest speaker Dr. Christopher Obropta, Extension Specialist in Water Resources for Rutgers Cooperative Extension, will discuss the many benefits of a rain garden, including where to place one on your property and how to build one. Christopher Miller, Plant Center Manager/Conservation Agronomist from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, will talk about creating

a sustainable landscape for a future climate, providing insight into plant selection for various site conditions and discussing how the Jersey-Friendly Yards database can assist with planning. Following the presentations, visit the native plant sale and take home some climate-ready, wildlife-friendly native plants!

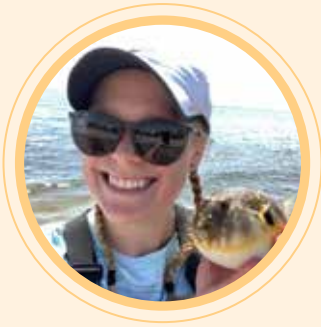
To learn more about the conference and to register, visit [www.jerseyyards.org/events/2023-conference](http://www.jerseyyards.org/events/2023-conference).



“ The Barnegat Bay Partnership will continue to use the best science available to protect and restore this unique ecosystem that we all treasure ... join us in these endeavors and help build on the successes of the past five years. ” - Dr. Stan Hales, director of Barnegat Bay Partnership

# W E L C O M E A B O A R D

The Barnegat Bay Partnership was pleased to welcome several new members to the staff this spring. Get to know the new team!



## **Samantha Adamczyk - Wetlands and Watershed Specialist**

Samantha always knew she wanted to work near the beach, and she found the perfect opportunity at the BBP, where she gets to work on both coastal wetlands and the inland part of the watershed. After graduating with a degree in marine biology in 2016, Samantha volunteered at the BBP, where she realized there was a lot more to protecting the health of our coast than just sandy beaches and ocean waves. She started as a part-time technician in 2020, and moved to full-time in 2023. Samantha loves the variety of work she gets to do, from field work to data analysis to planning new projects. “I keep discovering new fields within coastal science,” she says. “I’m learning so much about water quality, wetland resilience, fish populations, community science, and stream health. It’s never boring!”



## **John (JJ) Egan - Field Specialist**

JJ came to the BBP as a part-time technician in the spring of 2022, moving to full time in March. Depending on the season, he usually spends 3-4 days a week in the field, and then a day or two in the office or fixing equipment. JJ holds a B.S. in Marine Science from Stockton University and earned his master’s in Environmental Studies from College of Charleston. “I always wanted to be in this field,” he says. “I grew up around the water and have done blue-collar work most of my life, so the equipment maintenance and being on the bay were things I was already comfortable doing.” His favorite part of the job is the variety: “I get bored pretty easily, so I like that every day is different. I’ve also always loved fish, so I’m excited whenever I get to do fish work.”



## **Bailey Sanders - Stewardship Specialist**

Bailey holds a B.S. in Biological Sciences from Rowan University and an M.S. in Environmental Science from Minnesota State University Mankato. She came to the BBP as the AmeriCorps New Jersey Watershed Ambassador, where she taught people about the watershed. “It turned out that I had a knack for it,” she said. “That led me here, from scientist to science educator, and I couldn’t be happier.” In her new role, Bailey focuses on education and outreach, but like her coworkers, she insists there is no such thing as a typical workday. “Sometimes I’m in the office, creating signage for a nature trail. Other days, I’m out in the field, gathering aquatic bugs to show to students. Another day, we are planting a garden.” Her favorite part of the job, she says, is working with other people who love what they do.



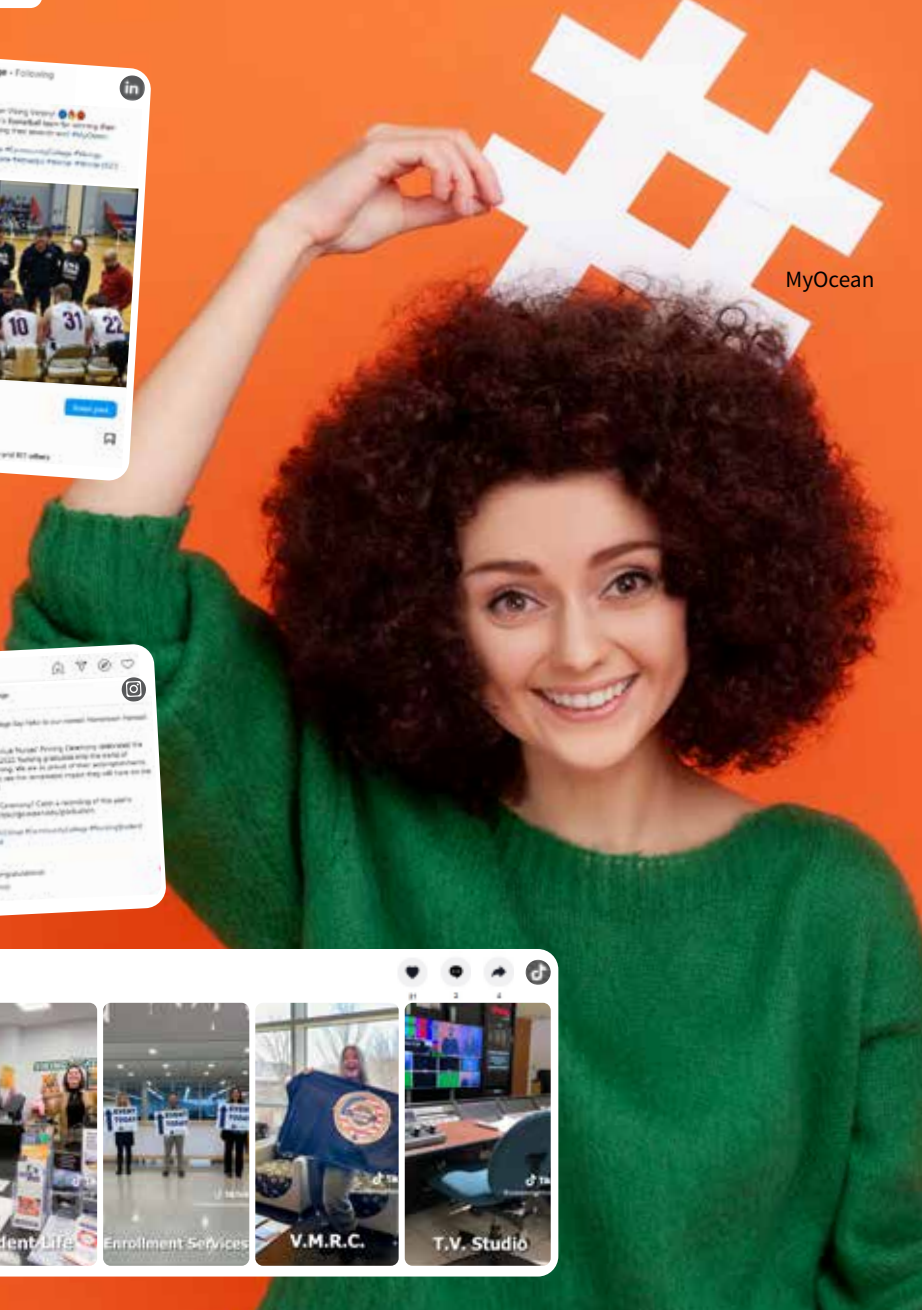
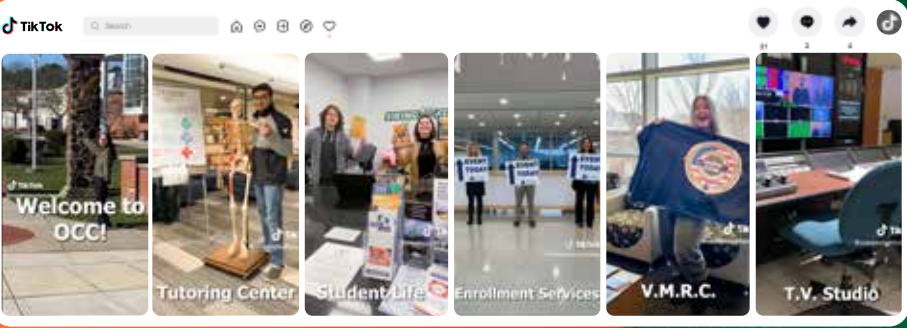
photo: Barnegat Bay - Little Egg Harbor Estuary ©Michael Leon



College Drive, PO Box 2001  
Toms River, NJ 08754-2001  
ELECTRONIC SERVICE REQUESTED

NON PROFIT ORG  
US POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
TOMS RIVER NJ 08754  
PERMIT NO 27

# OCC COMMUNITY TRENDING | 🔍



MyOcean