

OCEAN VIEWS

A Magazine for Ocean County College Alumni, Our College Family and the Community
Fall - Winter 2024 • Vol. XVIII: No. 2



CARING



“ I believe we are on the precipice of the golden age of two-year colleges, if we listen to our communities and embrace change. ”

- Dr. Pamela Monaco, President, Ocean County College





Fall–Winter 2024
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A magazine for Ocean County
College alumni, our College family
and the community

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3 + 1 PROGRAMS CREATE NEW TRANSFER OPPORTUNITIES for STUDENTS

Ocean County College has strengthened its academic pathways through expanded articulation agreements with Stockton University and Georgian Court University, creating new opportunities for students seeking bachelor's degrees.



The expanded agreement with Stockton University introduces a 3+1 pathway for Accounting, Marketing, Business Administration, and Hospitality, Recreation and Tourism Management majors, allowing students to complete three years of

coursework at OCC's tuition rates before transferring for their final year at Stockton. A 2+2 pathway has also been established for Social Work students.

The College also signed a new dual admissions agreement with Georgian Court University, which provides students with specialized course counseling and early connection with GCU advisors to ensure alignment with the general education and prerequisite requirements for their intended major.

These agreements, which aim to minimize credit loss and reduce the financial burden for OCC students, reflect our commitment to providing a seamless transition and setting up students for success as they go on to complete their bachelor's degrees. For more information about all of OCC's transfer pathways and partnerships, visit go.ocean.edu/transfer.



STUDENTS TESTIFY at STATE BUDGET HEARINGS

Students and staff members traveled to Trenton with President Monaco to make their voices heard in an attempt to convince the state legislature not to cut \$20 million from the community college budget for 2025. Joined by representatives from other area colleges, the students spoke about the importance of community college and urged Governor Murphy to reconsider the action. The students also attended NJ Community College Trenton Legislative Day, organized by the NJ Council of County Colleges, where they had the opportunity to meet with state assembly members to discuss the vital role of community colleges and to advocate for the restoration of crucial funding. State lawmakers ultimately restored the \$20 million cut in the final version of the budget, which was signed by Governor Murphy in July.

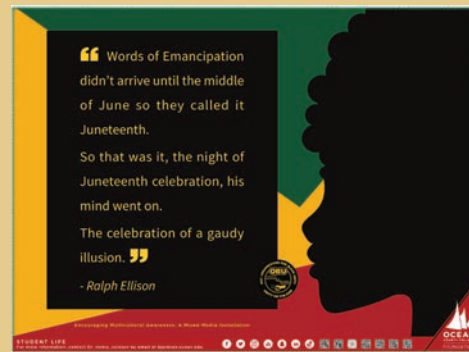
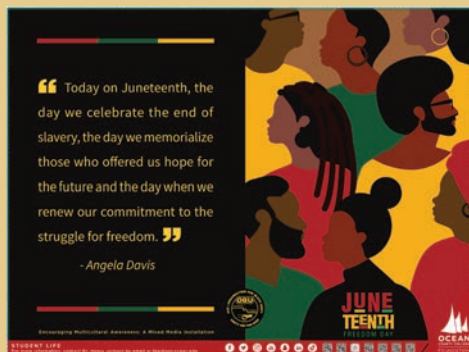


“ We committed to ensuring students had a voice and were listened to. They used their voice powerfully. ”

- Dr. Pamela Monaco, president of OCC

Ocean County College Wins Prestigious Paragon Award!

OCC received a prestigious Paragon Award for excellence in design at the National Council for Marketing and Public Relations' annual conference in Seattle this spring. The College won the Gold award in the "Poster – Single or Series" category for a series of posters created for the College's Juneteenth celebration. The series design, by Michael Leon, was based on the colors that represent the Pan-African flag, with each poster including a different quotation intended to promote multicultural awareness. The objective was to enhance the College's Juneteenth event by supporting the guest speaker's messaging and inspiring further discussion around concepts of access and belonging on the OCC campus. The Paragon Awards competition recognizes outstanding achievement in design and communication at community and technical colleges across the United States and Canada.



Lumina Foundation's Instagram Challenge

Ocean County College was one of only seven community colleges nationwide selected as a winner of Lumina Foundation's first-ever Instagram challenge. The contest invited community colleges to create a reel highlighting why their college is the best choice

for practicality, convenience and excellence. Winners each received a \$50,000 grant to support and enhance their digital outreach. Under the leadership of Social Media Coordinator Sara Nusbaum, the College's marketing team and students Cheyenne Severin and Kayla Judson worked together to develop the winning video, a

persuasive 90-second Instagram reel entitled "What's Excellent About OCC?" that showcases the exceptional value and vibrant experiences that the College offers. The award will be used to develop a new Viking Influencers program to support and encourage student involvement in OCC's social media and digital marketing efforts.

OCC Welcomes New Trustees

Ocean County College welcomed three new members to the Board of Trustees in 2024. The new members bring years of experience and wisdom to the table, along with a commitment to the growth of our institution and the success of our students.

DIANNE C. GOVE is a retired educator and retired Assemblywoman from New Jersey's 9th Legislative District. Ms. Gove was appointed by the Ocean County Board of Commissioners to fill the seat vacated by retired trustee Carl "Van" Thulin.

CHEYENNE SEVERIN is the College's new Alumni Representative, selected by the Student Life Committee. Cheyenne graduated from OCC in May 2024 with an A.S. in graphic arts, design and media. She will serve on the board through June 2025.

SUSAN NAPLES serves as the Interim Ocean County Executive Superintendent of Schools and previously worked as a special education specialist for the NJ Department of Education. Ms. Naples replaces former County Superintendent Charles Muller.





CLUBS for a CAUSE

story by Olivia Butera

Last year, Student Life Assistant Director Michelle Youngs brought the idea of “Clubs for a Cause” to life. A fundraising collaboration between OCC’s student clubs and local nonprofits, the event brought together 18 OCC clubs in hopes of inspiring a common goal within the community and to educate about hunger and food insecurity.

This year, “Clubs for a Cause” was expanded to include a second goal: to raise awareness about housing insecurity. The 2024 event, held on April 18 in the Larson Student Center, featured music, food donated by JBJ Soul Kitchen and OCC clubs, games, a scavenger hunt, and the creation of an interactive mural, as well as representatives from local support organizations and services. Thirty clubs and over 200 students attended this year’s event.

To advertise, students created their own marketing plan, published in Viking News, and reached out to others to help spread the word. Student club members Cheyenne Severin and Marco Ferrera spoke to OCC’s STEM faculty and visited businesses in Toms River, where they distributed flyers made by History Club President Kylie Fitzpatrick. Students also met with the Business and Social Science and Humanities and Fine Arts departments. Their goal was to gather in-kind donations for the event and spread awareness about “Clubs for a Cause” around the community. In addition to in-person advertising, members took to social media to share their recorded on-campus interviews of the hopeful students attending “Clubs for a Cause.”

“Seeing our community come together to raise awareness for such important issues was super exciting, especially after the months of work everyone put in to making the event come to life,” said Severin.

When reflecting on the highlights of the event, many participants mentioned the scavenger hunt as their most memorable activity. The clues in the scavenger hunt contained various facts about housing insecurity, its myths, and the reality of the issue to break specific stigmas.

“While ‘Clubs for a Cause’ was a fun event, having everyone in attendance stop what they were doing and really listen to the truth about the severity of the issues we were there to raise awareness for was important,” Severin added. “You could tell people were absorbing the message.”

“It was amazing to see everyone so involved,” said Youngs.

In addition to the scavenger hunt, students and representatives also enjoyed this year’s mystery bags. For a \$5 donation, attendees received a bag containing merchandise from OCC’s on-campus food pantry, Helping Hands, along with Squishmallows and gift cards from local restaurants. Through these partnerships and donations, “Clubs for a Cause” raised \$1,400 for Helping Hands, which will be used to purchase additional supplies for the pantry throughout the year.

From their stories to their services, organizations such as Family Promise, Just Believe, Stop and Shop, Affordable Housing Alliance, Seeds of Service, and Destiny Food Pantry were staples in making the night so special.

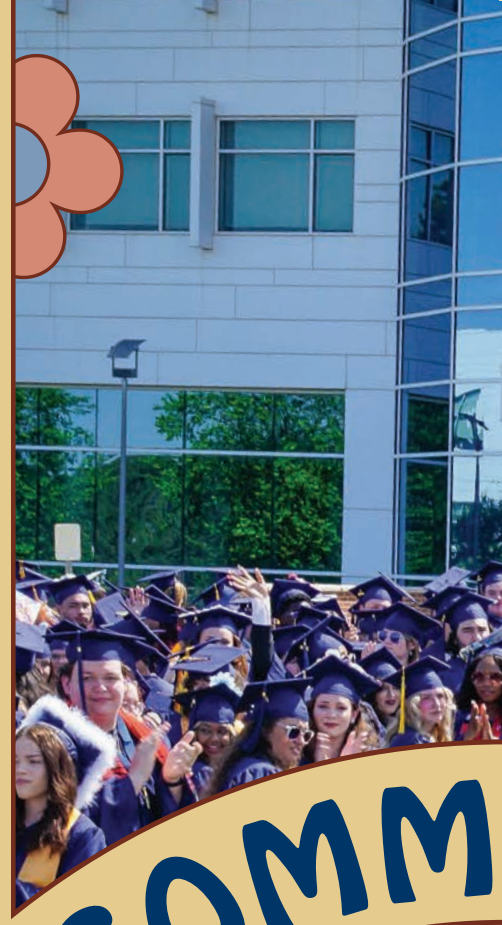
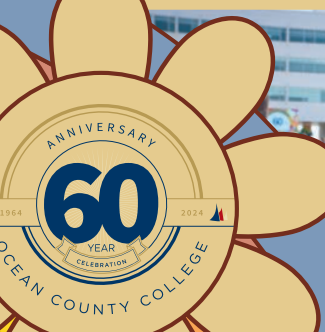
As for future “Clubs for a Cause” events, the clubs involved hope to build on this year’s success by increasing both attendance and awareness around food and housing insecurity.



With the collective efforts and enthusiasm demonstrated by the community, OCC clubs are hopeful for next year’s turnout, based on attendance nearly doubling in just one year. Looking forward, “Clubs for a Cause” will continue to be a fundamental force in raising awareness and driving positive change.

HONORING 60 YEARS

— of Commitment, Milestones and Success —



COMM



COLLEGE CELEBRATES DURING COMMENCEMENT WEEK

Excitement buzzed in the air as 1,438 students received their associate degrees during a week of activities that also marked the College's 60th anniversary.

Student speaker Sadain Siddique encouraged graduates to pursue their passions while remaining humble





COMMENCEMENT DAY

and open to new ideas. "Use your education to ask tough questions, challenge long-held assumptions, and approach problems from a fresh perspective," Siddique said. "Embrace the courage to take calculated risks, to fail forward, to lift others as you climb, and to give up your biases and fight against polarization."

Joseph Nappi, New Jersey's 2023-24 Teacher of the Year and a 2002 graduate of OCC, described success as a gift we receive when we give

to others. "Find your happiness in purpose and service to others," he advised. "While I would love to see you go out in this world and do well, I hope even more that you will go out into this world and do good. That is the path to true happiness."



AWARD-WINNING FBLA



Five students represented OCC at the Future Business Leaders of America Collegiate National Leadership Conference in Orlando, Florida, in June. Keith Blaze, Justin D'Amico, Ashley De La Rosa-Hanlon, Ryan Leichen, and Tavish McKelvey qualified for their spot at the national conference back in February, when they competed against New Jersey schools at the state conference and took home top-level prizes in Accounting, Management, and Marketing.

At the national conference, the FBLA members attended workshops, heard presentations from insightful guest speakers, and competed in two individual competitions, securing awards in five categories: Foundations of Accounting (Ryan LeChien – First Place); Business Communication (Justin D'Amico – Sixth Place); Future Business Educator (Keith Blaze – Eighth Place); Accounting Case (Ryan LeChien and Tavish McKelvey – Eighth Place); and Finance Case (Ashley De La Rosa-Hanlon and Thaddaeus Sayre, Kean Ocean – Fifth Place).

GRAPHIC DESIGNER EMMA PETKO

When Professor Nat Bard shared the opportunity to create a mural for the Ocean County Mall, second-year graphic design student Emma Petko jumped at the challenge.

The assignment was to create a “postcard style” mural, but Petko put her own twist on it by making a collage consisting of different images of the state and its scenery and focusing on typography. After learning that she had won the contest, she spent months perfecting the piece before attending the unveiling with her family. “It was incredibly thrilling to see my work printed at such a scale, and in public,” Petko said.

Petko describes her design style as malleable. “I love brutalism, modern art, and magazine covers. I am also a maximalist, as I jam-pack compositions and put everything in every corner! But I can adapt to new styles,” she said. She credits her classes at OCC, particularly Figure Drawing with Professor Bard and Professor Renate Pustiak’s Portfolio class, for making her such an adaptable artist and for inspiring her to pursue her academic career in graphic design.

Now a student at TCNJ, Petko’s passions also include sequential art – best known as comic art – illustration, character design, and scene design. She enjoys writing and is also leaning into her interest in coding, 3D visual art, and building an entire portfolio from scratch, again inspired by Professor Pustiak. Although learning coding languages is far from easy, she knows that this skill will be valuable to have under her belt. “The more I can do as an artist, the more forms of design I can cover,” she says.

Petko shares advice for graphic design students: “Remember who you are, find what your style is, and figure out ways to reach the audience you intend on reaching. Once you find your place, the rest comes together! And make sure you make a good portfolio, because it is the forefront of your work and what you intend on communicating in the massive graphic design world.”



Work & design by local artists: Emma Victoria Petko and Professor Nat Bard
Ocean County College (Digital Imagery) 2023

Ryan Leichen’s remarkable journey saw him climb from placing in the New Jersey competition to clinching first place in the national accounting event. At OCC, Leichen was involved in the Peer Assistant Learning (PAL) tutoring program, which he utilized extensively to enhance his accounting skills. His role as a PAL tutor not only solidified his own understanding but also boosted his confidence and interpersonal skills, which were stepping stones to his success.

With this newfound exposure into the business world, FBLA members are well positioned to take on new opportunities. FBLA member Kai Spinney is optimistic about the program’s future and plans to start an FBLA club at The College of New Jersey (TCNJ) to continue advocating for leadership opportunities. Meanwhile, Justin D’Amico has ambitious plans for OCC’s FBLA chapter. After the success at the national conference, the group aims to achieve gold member

status by collaborating with the School of Business and the Office of Student Life to boost membership and enhance on-campus leadership opportunities.

As OCC’s FBLA chapter looks to build on its success, the future is bright with opportunities for growth and continued excellence in business education.

“I envision increased student engagement with FBLA, with more members participating in competitions,” said Stephanie Kroeger, College Lecturer in Business. “I hope to see the College of Business forge stronger industry partnerships and continue to prepare students for success in both four-year institutions and the workforce. Our goal is to be recognized as a premier destination for accounting and business education at the community college level.”

ENTREPRENEUR ALY STEFAN

At just nineteen years old, Aly Stefan has transformed a former dog grooming storefront into Rose & Opal Boutique, her very own clothing store in Point Pleasant. The grand opening on August 17 featured local vendors who Stefan met through the Chamber of Commerce. The huge turnout was a far cry from where she began, selling clothes from her bedroom.

“I started this out of my house as a junior in high school,” Stefan recalls. “I was going live on TikTok and Instagram, I got certified in the state of New Jersey for wholesale, I got a tax ID, which my parents helped me with because I was only 16. My bedroom was our photoshoot room, my guest bedroom was where we had all our camera stuff and where I went live, and we even thought about putting some of my clothes in the attic.”

Despite initial skepticism from family, friends, realtors, and brokers, Stefan found crucial support from her OCC professor, Timothy Landers. Inspired by his encouragement and driven by her passion to help women feel confident in their clothing, Stefan envisioned Rose and Opal as a welcoming space where women of all sizes and ages can find clothes that are comfortable and stylish. “I always struggled finding stuff that I liked,” she explains. “When I discovered size-inclusive options, I was very open to getting them for myself and other girls who were going through the same problem I was. I always hated going into stores and seeing shirts that were too cropped or super tiny and knowing I wouldn’t fit in them.”

As a Point Boro native, Stefan is also passionate about promoting the importance of shopping local and reducing the environmental impact of fast fashion.

In addition to running her business, Stefan is in her second year at OCC, where she studies Business Administration. Her flexible schedule allows her to finish her associate degree while managing the store with help from her best friend and employee, Cassidy Hunt.

“This is a momentous occasion for Aly and her proud parents and a testament to the strong community spirit at OCC,” said Landers. “What’s truly heartwarming is Aly’s support from several classmates who attended the opening and then made sure I was planning to join them.”

“OCC had so much to do with my networking,” Stefan says. “I learned about the Small Business Development Center through Professor Landers and Professor Magath, who I had for Small Business.” She plans to continue her education at Kean Ocean while working toward her small business certification.

Aly Stefan’s success story demonstrates how determination and support, along with dedication and hard work, can turn even the most ambitious dreams into reality—all before turning twenty.



A CARING COMMUNITY.....

On a sunny morning in August, the Larson Student Center was full of energy as faculty and staff gathered for the 2024 Fall Colloquium. This event looked quite different from previous years. Rather than a day of professional development workshops and department meetings, the focus of this year's event had shifted to a day of service.

Throughout the morning, OCC employees fanned out across Ocean County, lending their time and talents to more than a dozen local organizations. From Harbor House to the American Legion, from stocking shelves to serving meals, OCC's team of volunteers worked alongside our civic partners, living out the College's commitment to supporting the community we serve.

A CARING CAMPUS.....

In the 60 years since its founding, Ocean County College's mission has remained the same: to empower students to learn, grow, and succeed. While the specific challenges facing students have changed over time, OCC's focus on student success has never wavered. In fact, OCC now offers more than ever before to support students while helping them achieve their goals.

That support begins even before they set foot on campus. From the first point of contact, OCC's full-service enrollment office and dedicated financial aid team work to make higher education easily accessible for all. Once enrolled, students can take advantage of OCC's extensive advising and tutoring services and a proactive network of success coaches who offer encouragement and intervention when needed. Students have access to personal counseling, support groups, health and wellness activities, financial assistance, and dedicated faculty that serve as partners to students on their educational journey.

The College's efforts to provide holistic support reflect the changing landscape of higher education and the evolving needs of today's students. College students across the country are struggling with difficulties that impact their academic performance and mental health. A 2022 survey from Trellis Research found that nearly three-quarters of

“Through our collective efforts today, we acknowledge that we belong to other communities and should serve other service organizations that support the people of our county,” said OCC President Pamela Monaco in an address to the campus that afternoon. “Thank you for your hard work and commitment to helping others succeed.”

This emphasis on service and community is a key facet of President Monaco's vision for OCC. It's a vision centered on providing students with everything they need and creating a caring environment where all are appreciated, supported, and encouraged to thrive.

undergraduate students reported experiencing financial difficulties in the past year, and campuses nationwide are reporting food insecurity prevalence around four times the national average. Today's college students are also facing record-high rates of depression and anxiety.

At OCC, the numbers tell a similar story. The College has seen a dramatic increase in student usage of support services, such as the on-campus food pantry and Counseling Center, and nearly \$100,000 has been spent on students in the first year of emergency financial assistance offered through the FIPSE grant.

“Increasingly, our students are more vulnerable in terms of their financial status and their emotional health, said President Monaco. “We must acknowledge that the students we serve are different from the past. They want different programs, they have different needs, and we must adapt ourselves.”

To that end, OCC has bolstered its academic and mental health resources and established a strong infrastructure of support to meet the needs of the learners of today. With comprehensive support systems in place, Ocean County College is ensuring that every student has the resources they need to thrive. Here are just a few of the programs that help make that happen.



“ Through our collective efforts today, we acknowledge that we belong to other communities and should serve other service organizations that support the people of our county. ”

- Dr. Pamela Monaco, President, Ocean County College

COUNSELING CENTER.....

The OCC Counseling Center offers free, confidential counseling as well as education, referrals, and wellness events, collaborating closely with the College and community to support students' emotional well-being.

BASIC NEEDS...

Funded by the three-year federal FIPSE grant, the FIPSE Grant Student Financial Resource Center provides direct support for basic needs, such as food, housing, transportation and child care, and connection with campus and community resources for long-term support.

VETERANS.....

The Veteran and Military Resource Center (VMRC) provides support, mentoring, and advocacy services to help veteran and military-affiliated students achieve their goals. A dedicated office staff works exclusively with and for these students, supporting the unique needs of military service members and veterans throughout their educational journey.

SHARED SUPPORT.....

With support from faculty and the Office of Student Life, OCC students are empowered to get involved and care for each other. Club activities, largely student-led, are often designed to address the needs of the student body and members of the community. For example, a recent clothing swap hosted by the Pride Club and Environmental Club provided an eco-friendly way for students to access free, gently-used clothing. The Community Ambassadors offer ESL classes for adults and provide outreach to help students and families navigate the enrollment process. The Soroptimist Club promotes leadership and mentorship among women and girls. In 2024, 30 clubs joined forces to address food insecurity in Ocean County (see story on page 5).

HELPING HANDS.....

story by Olivia Butera

Since its start in 2018, Helping Hands Food Pantry has been a cornerstone of support for students at Ocean County College. Founded in partnership with Student Life and Phi Theta Kappa, the pantry began as a small closet in the Student Center. Today, it has grown into a vital resource, thanks to the dedication of co-founder Rachel Hess, who now serves as the Helping Hands Coordinator. Hess' passion for helping others started at a young age, sparked during her time as a student at OCC, and now drives the ongoing success of the pantry.

The pantry has seen tremendous growth in the past few years, aided by a recent Hunger-Free Campus Grant that ensures shelves remain stocked. This grant, along with generous donations from local organizations like JBJ Soul Kitchen, Plentiful Plates, and Stop and Shop, has enabled Helping Hands to expand its offerings. The Hunger-Free Campus Grant also allowed the College to hire a staff member to coordinate and run the pantry operations, along with creating a meal voucher program to help with student lunches.

As for the pantry itself, students can now find a variety of items, including microwavable meals, canned goods, gluten-free

options, and snacks. The pantry also provides a cozy lounge area and microwave for students to enjoy quick, on-the-go meals between classes.

Helping Hands has seen a significant increase in student usage. In spring 2023, the pantry assisted around 900 students, a number that surged to 3,000 by spring 2024. This increase reflects the growing need for food assistance on campus, with many students seeking convenient meal options during their busy schedules.

Hess finds immense fulfillment in her role. "Meeting all the different faces and hearing all the different stories is super rewarding and knowing I can help too."

Hess and the Helping Hands team work tirelessly to reduce the stigma associated with food pantries, hosting pop-up events throughout the semester, organizing a Thanksgiving food drive, and even offering online ordering through PantrySoft to make the pantry more accessible around the student's schedule.

OCC students can make an account, shop, and place an order in their online store, then come to the pantry to pick it up. This is a helpful tool for anyone who is busy day-to-day and does not have the time to come and shop in person.



“ Thank you for your hard work and commitment to helping others succeed. ”

- Dr. Pamela Monaco, President, Ocean County College



DR. TARA CHALAKANI

CEO of Preferred Behavioral Health

Dr. Tara Chalakani was participating in an icebreaker at a meeting of Chief, a national organization for women executives, when she noticed an unexpected pattern. As these highly accomplished leaders discussed their pivotal life moments, she realized that many of them shared a common experience: their families had moved during their teenage years.

For Chalakani, Chief Executive Officer of Preferred Behavioral Health Group, this sudden revelation brought a new understanding of the person she has become, and how facing those challenges as a youth helped her navigate her own personal path to success.

Born and raised in Newark, Dr. Chalakani was a city girl transplanted to the Jersey Shore in the middle of her sophomore year of high school. The transition from an all-girls private Catholic school to a public high school in Lacey Township was difficult at the time, but she now understands that it laid the foundation for the resilient leader she would become.

“That pivotal event really started to develop who I am as a person, because I had to figure it out—I had to assimilate, I had to make friends, to develop a personality to succeed,” she reflects. “It really developed skills in me that have stayed with me all my life.”

“I was always a good student in high school, even without really trying, but I lacked direction,” Chalakani recalls. “I had things I was interested in, but I didn’t know what to do with it.” Her strong suits were writing and foreign languages, so she enrolled in Georgian Court College (now University) and began studying to become an interpreter or foreign language teacher.

One day, while working as a medical assistant at an urgent care, she witnessed a desperate mother rush in holding a blue baby, screaming for help. As she watched the doctor’s attempts to save the child, something shifted within her. “I never wanted to feel that helpless again.” She knew then that she wanted to be a nurse, to help people.

Fortune favored her decision. In 1990, amid a nursing shortage, Community Medical Center was offering a nursing scholarship and Chalakani seized the opportunity. She enrolled in the nursing program at OCC, where the education she received was rigorous and challenging. “I have earned multiple degrees and certifications since then, but nursing school was probably the hardest of all my degrees,” she reveals. “It really tested me and stretched me, and it was wonderful. I was fully prepared to be in the workforce.”



Dr. Tara with her husband, Paul, lecturer and theatre director at OCC



Among her most influential instructors at OCC was Professor Sandra Kearns, whom Chalakani initially feared but came to deeply admire. “She was no joke, she was tough – but I learned so much from her,” she remembers. “We don’t grow if we’re comfortable. If we don’t take people out of their comfort zone, they’re not going to go anywhere.” It’s a philosophy she now applies to her own leadership style.

After graduating, Chalakani began her career in the neonatal ICU before moving into pharmaceuticals. Although she was always interested in psychology and had excelled in her psych classes in nursing school, it remained on the back burner until more than a decade later, when she decided to pursue her bachelor’s degree.

“I was getting divorced, I was a mom with two little kids at home, working full time, and I said, ‘I want a bachelor’s degree.’ I went back for psychology because I was always interested in it, and in those classes I knew what I wanted to be when I grow up. I wanted to be a therapist.”

Chalakani excelled as a licensed therapist, earning accolades and recognition as an expert clinician, educator, public speaker and CEO, but even today, she still maintains her nursing license – a credential she proudly includes in her signature. “I’m so proud to be a nurse,” she says. “It’s served me so well.”

Her success story carries a message of exploring opportunities, even if it means embracing the unknown. “You just never know,” she says. “I never thought when I went back for my psychology degree that I would become a therapist. I didn’t see that coming. When I work with clients and mentor younger people, especially women, I tell them we just have to be open to it, even if it feels like a mistake. If we don’t take risks, we never get anywhere.”

“ Our human default survival skill is to think: what if?
To think the worst-case scenario.
But what if it’s amazing? What if it’s great? ”

As an expert in behavioral health, Chalakani offers valuable insight into the challenges faced by today’s college students, particularly in the wake of the pandemic. “We need to be more humble and not assume we know what they need,” she emphasizes. “The pandemic was a global traumatic event. When we experience trauma, our brain changes – it changes how we see the world, the filters we use. Students are not who they were five years ago. We need to look at who they are now and adapt.”

Her advice for current students is just as passionate: “Never minimize or put down a community college education. It is just as valuable as any other. It’s a stepping stone.” She encourages students to get involved – in campus life, in student clubs, in the community. “Being part of a community is one of the secret ingredients for the recipe of happiness of life,” she says. “Making the most of it will set a precedent for the rest of your life.”

Welloff Podcast, hosted by Dr. Tara and Gina Simm, airs every other Wednesday. Listen wherever you get your podcasts or visit welloffpodcast.com to learn more!



WELLOFF PODCAST
Health. Wealth. Livin’ Top Shelf.

FAIRWAY TO THE FUTURE



“ The Foundation holds space for a lot of opportunity, making a difference in the community. ”
- Jessica Egger, community outreach manager of New Jersey Natural Gas



“ It’s a great opportunity to say ‘thank you’ to our donors. ”
- Ilene Cohen, executive director of OCC Athletics

The Foundation’s commitment to education story by Olivia Butera

On October 15, the Ocean County College Foundation hosted its 23rd Annual Golf Classic at Pine Barrens Golf Club in Jackson, bringing together supporters for a day on the green to benefit local students. The event kicked off at 9:30 a.m. with registration and brunch, followed by the tournament and putting competition and concluding with a buffet dinner celebrating the participants and their contributions to the Foundation.

This signature event plays a vital role in making higher education more accessible through scholarships and supporting various student resources on campus.

Foundation Board Chair Michael Manzo explained that the Foundation’s impact goes far beyond traditional scholarships. “It’s so much more,” he said, highlighting the Foundation’s support for OCC’s food pantry; Helping Hands, ESL programs; work-study opportunities; and the Success Team.

Longtime Foundation member and past chairman, Dave Paulus, also an OCC alum ('81), believes the Golf Classic is about giving back to a place that helped shape his future. “When you see students smile, walking across that graduation stage, it

makes it all worth it,” he said. An active member of the Foundation since 1986, Paulus believes that educating people locally helps build a stronger community, as many graduates choose to stay in the area and contribute.

Board Secretary Anne Kraljic shared her hopes for the Foundation’s future: “We aim to continue our success and generosity for those in need in Ocean County and bring more culture to Toms River.” Her vision reflects the Foundation’s ongoing efforts to enrich the community while expanding educational access.

Jessica Egger, who joined the Foundation in 2021 representing NJ Natural Gas, also shared her connection to the cause. “I grew up in Toms River, so Ocean County is a forever home,” she said. “The Foundation holds space for a lot of opportunity, making a difference in the community.”

Among the day’s enthusiastic participants was Ilene Cohen, OCC’s executive director of Athletics, who has attended the Golf Classic since its start, 23 years ago. “It’s a great opportunity to say ‘thank you’ to our donors,” Cohen said. “The Foundation has always been special, and everyone here today understands that it’s an opportunity to give back.”

Third-generation board member Ethan Rosen described the Foundation as “a group of people who make change for the

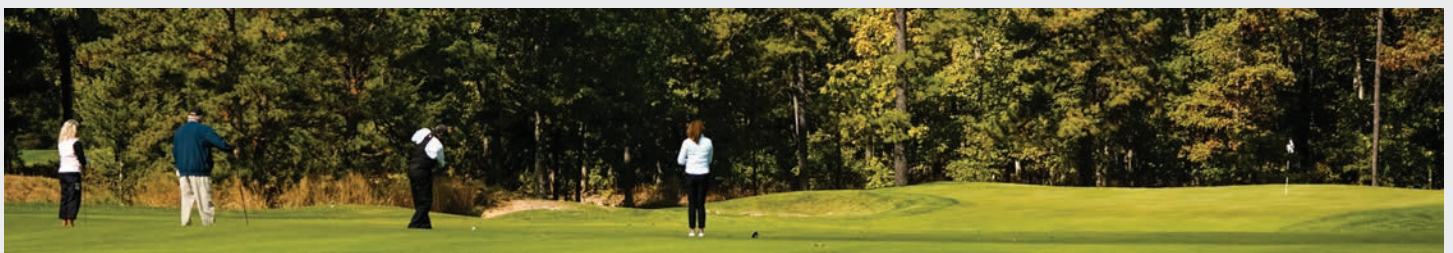
community,” continuing a family legacy that began with his father and grandfather’s involvement.

For OCC alumnus Michael Salerno, Class of 2003, participating in the Golf Classic was personal. “I received a scholarship from the Foundation, so this was a great way to give back,” he shared. His efforts illustrate the Foundation’s lasting impact on students’ lives.

Even newcomers felt the sense of community, including first-time participant Michael Jordan, who enjoyed the camaraderie on the course. “I can’t wait to come back next year,” he said.

OCC alumnus Rocco Novellino, who graduated 50 years ago, expressed his gratitude to the Foundation’s executive director, Kenneth Malagiere, and organizers for coordinating the event, crediting them with making it a memorable day. Novellino had a special moment to close out the day—a hole in one.

OCC Foundation is incredibly proud and grateful for the generosity of our donors, who often give not only their resources but also their invaluable time and expertise to support our college’s mission. Their commitment exemplifies the true spirit of giving and drives our Foundation’s success, helping to create meaningful opportunities for our students and our community.



JOIN US!

Become a Foundation partner and support our efforts to provide scholarship and programmatic support for OCC and the broader community. Every contribution strengthens our mission. Together, we are making a lasting difference in the lives of our students and in our community. Donate online at go.ocean.edu/donate

FUNDS DISTRIBUTED

\$1 MILLION

With your help, our Foundation distributed over \$1,000,000 in scholarship and programmatic support during FY2024.

LEGACY

\$4.5 MILLION

Raised for the Foundation Legacy Campaign.

GRUNIN THEATRE

44,000

Our support for the Grunin Center for the Arts helped bring nearly 44,000 community members to campus last year.

INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL

FIVE DESTINATIONS

Our Foundation provides scholarship support for immersive international study experiences each year.

FOUNDATION BOARD

100%

Our Foundation is proud to report a 100% Board-giving rate.

SAVE THE DATE!

GOLF • BLAUVELT • GALA

PRESENTED BY
OCEAN
COUNTY COLLEGE
FOUNDATION



MINIATURE GOLF TOURNAMENT

FRIDAY, JANUARY 10

6:00 p.m.

Hosted by

Community Medical Center
Foundation and
Ocean County College Foundation

DAVID HOGG

THURSDAY, MARCH 27

11:00 a.m.

Thrust into the world of activism by the largest school shooting in American history, Parkland survivor David Hogg has become one of the most compelling voices of his generation. His call to “get over politics and get something done” challenges Americans to stand up, speak out and work to elect morally just leaders, regardless of party affiliation.

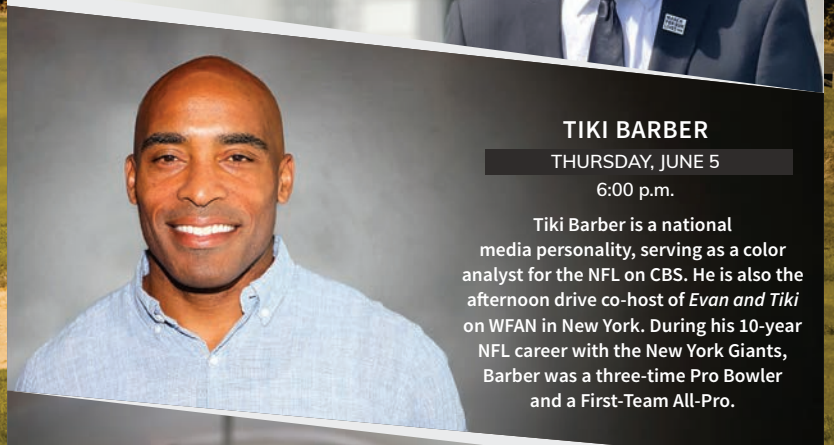


TIKI BARBER

THURSDAY, JUNE 5

6:00 p.m.

Tiki Barber is a national media personality, serving as a color analyst for the NFL on CBS. He is also the afternoon drive co-host of *Evan and Tiki* on WFAN in New York. During his 10-year NFL career with the New York Giants, Barber was a three-time Pro Bowler and a First-Team All-Pro.



ANNUAL SCHOLARSHIP CELEBRATION

FRIDAY, JUNE 27

6:00 p.m.



Cheyenne Severin '24

OCC's New Alumni Trustee

story by Olivia Butera

Cheyenne Severin '24 enrolled at OCC just to pursue her degree in graphic design. With little knowledge of what the college experience had to offer, she had few expectations.

"I wasn't aiming to do any clubs," said Severin. "I didn't know what to expect coming to college because I am first generation, I didn't know what college really was supposed to be. I wanted to do school and get out. So that was my mindset going in and then it snowballed into something very different."

Little did she know that "something different" would eventually lead her to a seat on the college's Board of Trustees, post-graduation.

get involved

Despite her initial apprehension, Severin flourished at OCC. During her time as a student, she was a NJ STARS recipient, president of Improv and Theatre Club, vice president of Pride Club, secretary of Wellness Club, and vice president of the Student Government Association. At her graduation in May, she received the Ocean County Cultural and Heritage Art Award, the "40 for 40" Graduating Award, and was named to *Who's Who Among Students of Ocean County College*. To cap off a very impressive two years, on July 25, 2024, Severin was sworn in as the new alumni representative to the Ocean County College Board of Trustees.

"Now, being a trustee, I feel like I have to be more active than ever," said Severin.

When asked about her priorities for her new position, Severin emphasized how eager she is to check in on clubs, attend board meetings, and go over general business with members to ensure that all goals are accomplished. Committed to being a dedicated advocate for the students, she aims to be as present as she possibly can with clubs and athletics to make sure that the students are being represented the way they should, considering what they need and want from the College and its resources and addressing any concerns along the way.

setting the stage

Severin was passionate about theatre in high school and this interest carried over to her college career once she found Improv Club at OCC. When the club was in danger of being cancelled due to lack of members, Severin felt strongly about keeping the program alive, so out of necessity, she set out to rebuild the club from the ground up, learning to take charge of things as she went. Her experience with Improv Club was the catalyst for her future leadership roles.



an
emerging

Fear

der



a student voice

Severin also found joy participating in OCC's social media outreach and working with Student Life, where she became a huge advocate for OCC students, both on campus and online. Alongside her creative passions, she also immersed herself in volunteer work. Her involvement fulfilled her in ways that made her feel more connected with the community and within herself.

"I have become more confident because of my leadership experience," said Severin. Through her exposure in clubs, she became more comfortable in sharing important messages and saying yes to any task that came her way. Her newfound confidence encouraged her to accept new roles and opportunities – one of them being invited to speak at OCC President Pamela Monaco's presidential inauguration in October 2023.

For her inauguration ceremony, Dr. Monaco felt it was important to emphasize the many voices of the Ocean County College community. From faculty to Facilities to the students, Dr. Monaco was intent on having a wide range of representation. When it came time for her to choose a student representative, she immediately knew she wanted a strong, young woman for the role.

Dr. Monaco had first met Severin at the OCC Foundation's Scholarship Gala. Out of the group of students that engaged in conversation with her, Cheyenne stuck out to her the most. "Cheyenne was always very matter of fact, well spoken, as well as very personable," said Dr. Monaco. After a few conversations, the two realized they shared a common ground: finding their voice in a typically male-dominated space. Dr. Monaco believed Severin was a prime example of who should represent the student body at the celebration. "I knew Cheyenne wouldn't be afraid to speak the added truth to power and that she would represent students very well."

Severin had never pictured herself being in a position to speak in front of hundreds of people, but just like the rest of her experiences at OCC, she embraced the opportunity when it arose. And when it came down to it, she admits, it was one of the best speeches she's ever written.

"People want to be involved. You just have to show them that they can be the change they want to see, and that's what OCC does," Severin said during her inauguration remarks. "I made OCC the best thing that's ever happened to me."

As OCC's new Alumni Trustee, she's only just getting started!



EXPERIENCE the | EXCITEMENT



SEÁN
DAGHER

Saturday
March 1
3:00 p.m.



APRIL
VARNER

Sunday
March 9
3:00 p.m.



photo renderings: DRG Architects

EXCITING CHANGES ARE ON THE WAY!

All shows from January 2025 through May 2025 will take place in alternative venues on campus while the Grunin Center Main Stage and lobby undergo cosmetic renovations. The venues include the Gia Maione Prima Foundation Studio Theatre (Building 12, at the base of the ramp); the Gateway Lecture Hall (Building 101, room 104); and our own Black Box Theatre.

Simultaneously, we are delighted to announce the expansion of the Jay and Linda Grunin Center for the Arts! The new addition will feature an enlarged lobby and a new art gallery. Stay tuned for more details about this exciting transformation.

2025 SPRING SEASON TICKETS on sale now at grunincenter.org

Explore our new schedule, jam-packed with thrilling shows and special events featuring music, theater, dance, family programming, and visits from world-class professional artists.



**A BAND CALLED
HONALEE**

**Saturday
March 15
7:00 p.m.**



**NAT
ADDERLEY, JR.**

**Sunday
April 27
3:00 p.m.**

NOVINS PLANETARIUM RECEIVES NASA GRANT

The Robert J. Novins Planetarium has been awarded a prestigious NASA Team II Community Anchor Grant to provide STEM programming to underserved middle school students and enhance the planetarium's reputation as a science hub in the community. The grant will support projects intended to engage students and their families in a variety of STEM learning opportunities, such as exhibits, mentorship, and hands-on activities. The planetarium will

use this funding to implement families on Campus Using Science (FOCUS), a one-year project for middle school students (grades 5-8) and their siblings across grades K-12 to increase their exposure to and interest in STEM subjects and to encourage traditionally underrepresented students to pursue STEM education and careers.

"The NASA Anchor grant is an excellent opportunity for the planetarium to connect with and learn from NASA and other informal education institutions around the country," said Cara Muscio, associate director of the Novins Planetarium.

"We are excited to create new pathways to engaging, interactive earth and space science education for all families in our community and help connect them with all Ocean County College has to offer."

The Novins Planetarium hosted its first event from the FOCUS grant in September. Games and activities included a themed dome show and an immersive escape room-type activity in observance of International "Observe the Moon" Night. Cara and her staff promise a fun-filled schedule of additional family events in the spring. Stay tuned to learn more!



VIKINGS SOCCER SHINES in POSTSEASON

Ocean County College proudly hosted the NJCAA Region 19 D-III Soccer Championships in November as both the men's and women's teams competed for their respective District B championships.

The women's team upset #2 Rowan College of South Jersey-Cumberland, 2-1, to win their third consecutive Region 19 title. OCC's Rory Hagen was named Region 19 Most Valuable Player, and Coach Breeana Cassidy

earned Region 19 Coach of the Year. The Vikings went on to compete in the 2024 NJCAA D-III National Championship tournament, hosted by Genesee College in Batavia, NY, yielding to Dallas-Brookhaven in the quarterfinal round.

OCC's men's soccer team finished the regular season with a 7-5-1 record, earning a spot in the Region 19 semifinals, where they pulled off a thrilling 2-1 win against Sussex

County Community College before falling to Raritan Valley in the district finals.

Both teams turned in a terrific campaign all season long. Katherin Munoz, Rory Hagen, Brooke Ossimina and Leilani Borges have been named to the Women's Soccer 2024 NJCAA All-Region 19 Teams, while Men's Soccer's Alex Baginski, Jack Eubanks and Jayson Nardone have been named to the NJCAA All-Region 19 Teams.

JOHN H. STAUFF HONORED by REGION 19

Ocean County College is proud to congratulate John H. Stauff for his induction into the inaugural class of the Region 19 Hall of Fame! Stauff's remarkable career has been characterized by a lifelong dedication to athletics and education. After joining Ocean County College in 1966 as a health and physical education professor, Stauff became a pivotal figure in the College's athletic program, serving as the

inaugural head basketball and golf coach, the College's athletic director, and dean of health, physical education, and athletics before retiring in 2001. Stauff was also active in numerous athletic organizations, serving as assistant and region director for women's athletics at Region 19 for over two decades and holding leadership roles in the NJCAA, NATYCCA, and NACDA. Stauff built an enduring legacy in collegiate sports, and his

contributions have been widely recognized. In 2003, he was inducted into the inaugural class of the OCC Athletics Hall of Fame, and he received NATYCCA's prestigious L. William Miller Award for excellence in athletics administration in 2006. Stauff's induction into the new Region 19 Hall of Fame is the latest well-earned acknowledgement of his enduring commitment to student athletes and college sports.

OCC VIKING 5K and FUN RUN RETURNS

The OCC Foundation and OCC Athletics hosted the 2024 Viking 5K and Fun Run, bringing together runners and walkers of all ages to support scholarships for Ocean County students.





ATHLETIC HALL of FAME

Ocean County College has announced the addition of seven new inductees to the College’s Athletic Hall of Fame, honoring distinguished alumni-athletes, former coaches, and others whose accomplishments have had a significant impact on Ocean County College’s athletic program.

This will be the first new induction since 2016, when the awards, typically held every two years, were placed on hold to accommodate the conversion of the College’s swimming pool to a new auxiliary gym. The awards were postponed once again as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“The OCC Athletic Department staff and Hall of Fame committee members are thrilled to bring back the recognition of former Viking stand-outs into the Hall of Fame,” said Ilene Cohen, OCC’s executive director of Athletics. “This year’s Hall of Fame inductees’ remarkable achievements and dedication to Ocean County athletics inspire us all to aim higher and strive for excellence.”

THE 2024 INDUCTEES ARE:

- Gerald Carroll, Cross Country – 1976-1977
- David Kalash, Baseball – 2009-2011 (Rawlings Gold Glove)
- Oriana Smith, Softball/Basketball – 2006-2008 (All American)
- Mary Kate Sullivan, Soccer – 2013-2015 (All American)
- Ed Baynes, Cross Country Coach (National Champions – 2009, 2013)
- Arleen Rooks, Athletic Department Manager
- Steve Stout, Swimming Coach (Non-Scholarship M/W Champions 2009)

The 2024 Athletic Hall of Fame induction ceremony was held on December 15. For more information, visit go.ocean.edu/HOF or contact Ocean County College’s Athletics office at 732-255-0346.

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH



“ We’re delighted to have this opportunity to partner with Cara Muscio and the Novins Planetarium staff, and our many partners including Kean University, to develop innovative education programs to help students... ” - *Dr. Stan Hales, director of Barnegat Bay Partnership*



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

BBP and NOVINS PLANETARIUM TEAM UP for CLIMATE EDUCATION

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has received a **\$72 million** grant from NOAA to fund critical climate resilience projects across multiple coastal counties in the state through the DEP's "Building a Climate Ready NJ" initiative.

"Building a Climate Ready NJ" leverages the expertise of 15 New Jersey-based partners, including Barnegat Bay Partnership, to enhance community and ecological resilience in many of New Jersey's most densely developed municipalities. The projects are intended to make climate resilience planning more accessible and provide education, outreach and technical assistance to help these communities implement those plans.

As part of the broader New Jersey Education, Climate Awareness, Training, and Engagement (EduCATE) initiative under the NOAA grant, the Barnegat Bay Partnership and Novins Planetarium, both housed at Ocean County College, are receiving \$387,795 to develop guided educational programs on climate change and community resiliency, using the planetarium's full-dome and multimedia capabilities. This programming will reach diverse audiences, including K-12 students, college students, and the public, and will focus on environmental topics such as climate change, sea level rise, and coastal resilience that are relevant to the local Barnegat Bay watershed and other New Jersey coastal areas.

The programming builds on the existing reach of the Novins Planetarium, which presented educational programs to more than **38,000 attendees**, including 12,000 K-12 students last year. Novins Planetarium also collaborates and shares best practices with a consortium of New Jersey planetariums, including Rowan University and Raritan Valley Community College, and reaches out through other public venues (i.e., Jersey City Public Library, Jersey Shore Girl Scout Council) to achieve programming outcomes. The project will also use a portable planetarium dome to bring climate

education programming to overburdened communities via churches, social welfare organizations and public libraries. The programming will focus on environmental topics such as climate change, sea level rise, climate resiliency and related issues which are being addressed locally by the BBP, its partners throughout the Barnegat Bay and other coastal watersheds, and by partners in this collaboration.

"Given that I began my career as an environmental scientist, researcher, and educator, I am especially excited to help bring the excellent climate resilience work of NJDEP, Barnegat Bay Partnership and other grant partners to audiences across New Jersey through the unique venue of the Planetarium theater," said Cara Muscio, associate director of Novins Planetarium. "The Novins team is excited to create engaging programming, aligned with NJ's groundbreaking Climate Change educational standards, to educate all ages and abilities about our climate future."

Overall, this federal funding will enable New Jersey to take significant steps towards building climate resilience and protecting coastal communities, ecosystems, and economies.

"The plans and projects identified in 'Building a Climate Ready NJ' further advance New Jersey's comprehensive strategy for addressing the worsening impacts of climate change," said New Jersey's Chief Resilience Officer Nick Angarone. "In addition to identifying key projects, this initiative will pair climate resilience experts with local community leaders while educating the next generation of environmental stewards in order to move resilience plans into action."

"We're delighted to have this opportunity to partner with Cara Muscio and the Novins Planetarium staff, and our many partners, including Kean University, to develop innovative education programs to help students and others better understand the challenges of living on our changing coast," said Stan Hales, director of Barnegat Bay Partnership.



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