

# 50

## Fabulous Representatives

*of Montgomery County Community College's*

## Outstanding Alumni

# 1970s

## **Clark DeLeon (1970):** Mr. Philadelphia



Clark DeLeon is Philadelphia. As he puts it “I was born in the hospital founded by Benjamin Franklin, and I studied journalism at the university founded by Russell Conwell.” But without Montgomery County Community College, nobody else would have known. “I never wrote for publication until Diane Whitehead (now Horan) asked me to be the editor of *The Montgazette*. She changed my life.” Clark still keeps in touch with Diane. From the College to Temple University to *The Philadelphia Inquirer* as a columnist writing “The Scene” for 23 years, Clark lives and breathes Philadelphia. Today, when he’s not in colonial garb regaling tourists with Philadelphia history on Independence Mall, he’s writing his new *Inquirer* column, “Clark’s Park,” or teaching as a senior adjunct at the College. “If it were me today,” he says, reflecting on his start at the College, “I’d go again.”

## **Celeste Schwartz (1970):** Campus icon



“My parents told me that there was no way I was going away for college,” Celeste says. She kept her job at the post office and went to school at the new Montgomery County Community College in Conshohocken to study data processing. “I was there every day, Monday through Friday. The College was closed over the weekends.” At graduation, Celeste was offered a job in computing services while she completed her bachelor’s degree in business at St. Joseph’s University. By 1980, she had her master’s degree in computer science from Villanova, and in 2011, her doctorate degree from Walden University. Today, Celeste holds the position of Vice President for Information Technology and College Services and is one of the longest tenured employees at the College with 44 years of service, and counting! She’s committed to the College’s success, each and every day.

## **George Marin (1971):** Strong foundation



George Marin believes that building a career is like building a house: start with a strong foundation. That is exactly what the College gave him: a solid educational foundation and an excellent starting point to build his future. George continued his education studying computer science at Point Park University in Pittsburgh, and returned to the area to run Rotelle, Inc.’s IT department for several years. He completed his graduate studies in engineering at Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. In 1982, he started Data Tech Solutions, LLC, and developed software for the supply chain industry. In 2005, George sold his company to Retalix USA, and stayed on as a consultant until it was sold to NCR in 2013. He serves on several College boards as a member of computer science and engineering advisory committees, on several school foundations, and as a College trustee. He’s committed to giving back to our local community.

**Thomas Rogers (1971):** A jump start into life



“I appreciate all that Montgomery County Community College did for me,” Thomas tells us. “The College puts you with people who are motivated.” That speaks volumes when you consider his more than 20 years in police work, from the radio room to chief of the Lower Providence Police Department, and 11 years on the bench as a Montgomery County Court of Common Pleas judge. He was appointed as chair of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court Criminal Procedural Rules Committee in 2008. Along the way, Thomas earned his bachelor’s degree from Temple University, a master’s degree in criminal justice from West Chester, and then back to Temple for a law degree. He was selected to attend the FBI National Academy in 1982. But what brings him the most pride? “Being married to my wife of 38 years,” he says, smiling. “She gave me permission to apply to law school—but only at night!”

**Sheila Wallace (1971) and James Wallace (1972):** From the kitchen to the garage to the world!



Some great tech companies start in garages. Jim and Sheila’s business, Electro Soft, Inc., started on their kitchen table and then moved to the garage! “I told him to move, so I could make some meals,” Sheila says. He did, and he moved a few more times as business grew into a premier contract manufacturing company specializing in industrial control electronics and now employs dozens in a 20,000 square-foot space in Montgomeryville, Pa. As if that wasn’t enough, Jim served our country, too, for 36 years in the U.S. Air Force. Sheila served in several roles in the company, including Marketing Director, in addition to jobs at Richardson Vicks and Wissahickon High School. Plus Sheila and Jim are involved in a variety of community activities, especially their church. Still, they don’t forget where they came from. “Our two-year Montgomery County Community College education put us into a great position when we transferred to Penn State. We were very well prepared educationally,” Jim says. Sheila agrees. “We always make sure to tell people that our Montgomery County Community College education was outstanding and put us in a position for success. It was a fine experience.”

**Jane Flanagan (1973):** Caring for thousands



“I am eternally thankful for the Montgomery County Commissioners who started Montgomery County Community College,” Jane Flanagan says. Starting at the Conshohocken campus, she completed her degree at Blue Bell. As the first college graduate in her family, Jane went on to earn her bachelor’s degree in early childhood education at Temple University and a master’s degree in Educational Administration at Arcadia University. With her love of teaching, Jane used the College as a springboard to open two of the most successful preschools in the region. Over the years, she employed hundreds and cared for thousands. “College was an eye opener,” she remembers. “The faculty was inspiring and challenged me to think.” A lifelong learner, Jane still takes classes at the College. She’s also on the College’s Education Advisory Board, serves as an adjunct professor of Education in the Early Years and teaches Early Childhood Education at Central Montco Technical High School.

**Robert Cominsky (1974):** A passionate believer



“Montgomery County Community College was my only option,” says Bob Cominsky. “I had to get serious.” And he did. “In my first year I found direction thanks to John Lacey, my accounting professor.” Bob went from the College to Temple, then Price Waterhouse. Soon he found his professional passion: sales. At his side all the way, his wife Dale, also a graduate of the College. With Ellucian since 1990, Bob helps colleges and universities use technology to better support their strategic goals and objectives. In 2013 he received Ellucian’s “Top Sales Vice President, Across All Lines of Business” award. “I’m a big believer in community colleges,” he says. We can tell. Bob and Dale recently created the “Cominsky Family Scholarship Fund” for College students in financial need.

**Peter Grove (1974):** Innovative science teacher, outdoorsman, storyteller



Peter grew up in England and graduated high school at age 15. He became a certified landscaper, a carpenter, a painter, a merchant seaman and a part-time soldier with the United Kingdom’s Special Air Service. Peter met his wife, Nancy, in India, where for two years he sunk wells with “untouchable” villagers. Lured to America by Nancy, he earned his associate’s degree at Montgomery County Community College on a full scholarship (“For which I am eternally indebted,” he tells us.) He transferred to University of Pennsylvania for his bachelor’s degree followed by his master’s degree in elementary education. After three years of teaching, another of travel, and back to Philadelphia to direct a nonprofit, Peter began teaching science at Friends’ Central Lower School. For the past 27 years, Peter has created hands-on lessons augmented by his worldwide experiences. Among his awards, Peter was named “Teacher of the Year” by the Garden Clubs of America. He’s also served on several nonprofit boards, including Riverbend Environmental Education Center and Bridlewild Trails Association.

**Ross Mitchell (1974):** Art of the career



“I came to Montgomery County Community College as an aspiring painter,” Ross says. He earned his bachelor’s degree from Eastern University, and after studying art and aesthetics at the Barnes Foundation, he served as its Gallery Director for seven years. His next position was working for an art consulting firm in New York City and managing the collections of corporate financial giants. His career took an interesting twist with his position as Executive Director of Laurel Hill Cemetery, where he was charged with turning the historic site into a heritage tourism destination. He served as a board member of the Violette de Mazia Foundation, and in time, the board asked Ross to assume leadership of the Foundation as the director. In addition, his reach extends well into the community, and he has served as a member of several boards. As for his art...he wishes he had more time to paint!

**Eileen Behr (1976):** A stand out in our community



“Montgomery County Community College was a great start,” she remembers. Eileen entered the Police Academy in 1980. It only started accepting women four years before, and she became Montgomery County’s sixth female officer. By 2003, Eileen was Chief of Police in Whitemarsh Township, the first woman in the position. In 2011, she was appointed as Sheriff of Montgomery County. Today, she’s Director of Police Operations at Drexel University. “It’s a different kind of policing. It’s more service orientation than community work, with much more guidance and mentoring.” Eileen is on the College’s Criminal Justice Advisory Board and teaches at the Police Academy.

**Michael D’Aniello (1976):** Passion for the College



“This College is in my blood,” Michael D’Aniello says. “It gave me an opportunity I otherwise wouldn’t have had. It’s an incredible asset to our community.” Michael went from the College straight to Villanova University, where he earned his bachelor’s degree in accounting, and then to Widener University School of Law for his law degree. He now advises clients on a wide variety of legal matters from his offices in Norristown. On the College’s Board of Trustees since 2001 and Board Chair since 2011, D’Aniello is passionate about the College. “The reason I’m here is to give back; to support the College’s students.”

**Brian Lamoreaux (1976):** Just the ticket



“Montgomery County Community College was a good way to get started,” Brian tells us. And it started with the Student Entertainment Association. “We booked major concerts: Hall and Oates, the Philadelphia Folk Festival, Winter Festival and more. We were our own promoters.” Brian thought that he would follow his dad to Sperry, so he went to Spring Garden College. That’s not how it turned out, though. A casual remark while picking up tickets at the Phillies’ box office brought him to the Phillies’ organization. “I heard the ticket printer and told the guy I knew what machine it was.” That was in 1987. Brian grew with the job, and today he’s in charge of technical systems in Citizens Bank Park. There’s been some fun perks, too, like riding a float down Broad Street after the World Series. Through it all, Brian reflects, there’s been one constant theme: “Don’t be afraid to get involved, even if it’s not comfortable,” he says.

**Cynthia Diccianni (1977):** Work ethic was the norm



Everyone thought Cindy's life was set, except Cindy! Growing up in the local Greek community, Cindy was raised with a strong work ethic, and business ownership was the norm. So was the passing of a business to the next generation. But working at her father's deli wasn't her dream. Cindy became the first member of her family to attend college. "Montgomery County Community College changed my perception of my abilities." From the College, Cindy continued her education in nursing at Hahnemann and began a 17-year career at Suburban Mercy Hospital. Her gift for healing and nurturing went far beyond medicine. Watching friends and family suffer the financial consequences of a turbulent economy, Cindy began an investment club for women and fell in love with investing. By 2008, she opened her own investment advisory firm. Cindy serves on the boards of Montgomery County Community College Foundation, the Montgomery County Foundation and the Montgomery County Estate Planning Council. She also served as the local president of Women in Insurance and Financial Services for four years, before passing the reigns over this year.

**Susan Nicholas Gephart (1977):** The art of plein air



"My Montgomery County Community College experience affects me even today," Susan Nicholas Gephart says. One of her biggest influences was Professor Roger Cairns. "Roger taught me open-air painting. It's the heart of what I do." But it wasn't all canvas and brush strokes. "I was fascinated with the environment; I still am. I took a special interest in water, testing for pollution on the Perkiomen Creek." Today, Susan supports organizations such as Clearwater Conservancy and the Farmland Preservation Artists of Central Pennsylvania and creates much of her work "plein air," or on location. She is an award-winning artist who demonstrates for national art supply companies and organizes the annual Hameau Farm Artists Retreats. Her work is in the permanent collections of The Penn Stater Conference Center and The Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art.

**Oscar Vance (1977):** In service to others



Ask him, and Oscar Vance may show you his wrist band. "I went to Kenya in 2013 as a missionary." His life of service started with the Marines at age 17. His duty as a military police officer shaped the rest of his life. At 21, Oscar was taking the police exam and was recommended to the district attorney's office. In two years, he became a detective, and by age 42, he was Chief of Detectives. By retirement, Oscar had worked on 800 murder investigations, with a 95 percent solving rate and 98 percent conviction rate. Along the way, Oscar finished his associate's degree with the College, and went onto LaSalle and West Chester universities and then the FBI Academy. He's also chairman for the College's Criminal Justice Advisory Committee. On retirement, Oscar started a business and a nonprofit, and also serves on several boards.

**Sam Davis (1978):** Family and flexibility



To Sam Davis, being close to family is important. “I was, and still am, very close with my family. Plus, I was undecided about what I wanted to do.” It’s that flexibility that has brought many students to the College, then and now. It’s also the quality of the education. “I left Montgomery County Community College really well prepared.” For Sam, that led to a math teacher certification at West Chester University, a master’s degree at Arcadia University, a job teaching math, and an opportunity at GE Aerospace. Sam rose quickly, through three company changes: GE, Martin Marietta and Lockheed Martin. His leadership roles have included Director of Technical Operations for the Delaware Valley, managing more than 1,400 people, with budgets in the hundreds of millions of dollars. Today, Sam is Director of Business Transformation and Integration in the CIO organization. “The path is not always what you expect,” he says, “I thought I would be a teacher, but another path opened up. It’s essential to be open and take risks.”

**Melissa Motz (1978):** Investing in a future



Fresh out of high school, Melissa Motz didn’t find her job as “tape librarian” at Univac very exciting. She decided to take some classes. “All I did was study, sleep and work,” Melissa remembers. “Accounting class was fun and motivating.” Now, she was inspired! She went from the College to Temple University to “Big 8” accounting... but not for long. A business plan she created in a Drexel University master’s degree class led to her next move. “I started by doing taxes, but I really liked investments.” Melissa now helps clients meet their financial dreams. She gives back in important ways, too, starting with her service on the College’s Foundation Board, and by sponsoring the Motz Wealth Management Prosperity Scholarship.

**Scott Rau (1978):** A swipe at the future



At age 19, Scott wasn’t sure that any college was right for him. “Student government was my first leadership experience,” he remembers. “I was 17, but because of Montgomery County Community College, I advanced in speaking and working in big groups.” After George Washington University, Scott started with Provident National Bank. By 1986, he was with the “MAC” debit card network. In the 1980s, that meant helping the public use bank cards like cash. Now, as Senior Vice President for JP Morgan Chase, the lessons from Student Government Association apply today. “Only one person can be the visible leader, but everyone can meaningfully contribute,” he says. Scott’s glad to bring his experience to the College’s Foundation Board.

# 1980s

## **Lillian Caperila (1980):** A clean future



“Montgomery County Community College’s dental hygiene graduates are first rate,” Lillian Caperila tells us. She should know. Lillian presents to hundreds of dental hygienists each year, all around the world. After graduating from the College, Lillian continued her education at Thomas Jefferson University. Then she earned her master’s degree and taught full time at Harcum College. Lillian is now manager and international presenter of professional continuing education for Premier Dental Products Company in Plymouth Meeting, Pa. As a past president of the Pennsylvania Dental Hygienists Association, she is an important advocate for her profession. “My education at the College was a solid start to a great career path that opened doors,” she says.

## **Lena Tella Gelenberg (1980):** Reach for the stars!



“I changed my major often,” remembers Lena Tella Gelenberg. “First I wanted to be an interpreter, then a business major, and I graduated with an engineering degree from West Chester.” This first generation Italian-American was determined to succeed. She loves to work, and knew value when she saw it. “Montgomery County Community College offered opportunities for me to explore and was close to home, and the low cost helped.” Lena made a career change after 10 years as an engineer. “When buying our first home, the builder noticed my negotiation expertise and people skills and offered me a job.” Lena never looked back. She’s been a successful Real Estate Consultant/Realtor for 24 years.

She focuses on relationships rather than transactions and becomes her clients’ lifelong trusted advisor, resource, and friend. Lena is a ministry leader at her church, and serves on advisory boards at New York and St. Joseph’s universities. “Reach for the stars, dream big, don’t be afraid of change... Change allows you to succeed!”

## **William Carroll (1981):** It’s all about the kids



When you talk to Bill Carroll, you might not realize that he’s an Emmy Award winning radio and TV producer. That’s because you’re impressed with his commitment to the kids of Montgomery County. For most of his career, Bill led two lives: as the go-to guy for foster children for Montgomery County, and the producer of sports classics, like the Randall Cunningham show. Where did he get his start? “My English teacher, Dr. William Lynch, told me that I had all the attributes of a good writer,” Bill remembers. “At Montgomery County Community College, it was all about the students.” It still is.



**Cathy Heckler (1981): Mothers know best**



Even though her mother thought she might not like computer work, Cathy Heckler earned her data processing degree from the College. She then earned her bachelor's degree from Ursinus College, and after working, discovered her passion for marketing. However, it was her ability to “crunch numbers” that got her noticed by her friend and mentor, Deb Takes, then president of Harleysville National Bank. Today, as a Vice President for TD Bank and a “Founding Mother” of the Woman-Owned Business Network, Cathy recommends the College to everyone: “I put myself through school working for the bank,” she remembers. “The College is economical. All my credits transferred. It was fabulous!”

**Joseph Tumolo (1981): Jazzed up**



“Montgomery County Community College means the world to me,” Joe Tumolo says. After graduating from the College and earning a degree at St. Joseph’s University, Joe worked in his family’s printing business for 20 years. When the business was sold, he looked for something to do to make a difference. “I help fundraisers build stronger relationships with their donors,” Joe says. He also helps charities set up planned giving programs. As a volunteer, Joe helps the College’s Foundation with its planned giving efforts as Chair of the Planned Giving Advisors Council. Along the way, he went back to the College. “My wife encouraged me to go to a jazz drumming class.” Now Joe has his own band and plays in two others. Joe and his wife, Lorraine, have included the College in their estate plans and sponsor a scholarship in the Culinary Arts program. “You could say that I’m jazzed up about Montgomery County Community College.”

**Michele Kraynak (1982): Caring for money, caring for people**



As the controller at North Penn Hospital, and later at Waverly Heights retirement community, Michele Kraynak was used to handling big money. Now, the funds are smaller, but no less important. Today, she owns “Michele’s Money Services,” where she specializes in helping people with their day-to-day financial lives. The College was there for Michele when she started her career, and now, as a member of the Woman-Owned Business Network, it’s there as she builds her business. “I see folks get extended beyond their means with a lot of debt,” Michele tells us. “Montgomery County Community College should be a natural first step into a college education.”

**George Marks (1982):** *The affordable choice*



For George, the choice was simple. “The College was the only school I could afford,” he remembers. George finished at the College and soon earned his architectural license. He earned a bachelor’s degree in civil engineering at Spring Garden College. Today, Kramer+Marks Architects has 42 employees with more than \$200 million in projects. And while that’s impressive, George is most proud of his educational roots. “Montgomery County Community College gave me a ticket to open doors. The College gives a chance to people who would otherwise be stalled.”

**George Heming (1984):** *A dream becomes reality*



George Heming did what some people only dream about. It’s the stuff of legends. The son of hard-working, blue-collar parents, George, as a junior in high school, landed a job in the mailroom of a small financial management company with only 200 employees and \$3 billion in assets. Today, George is a principal in the same firm, with 14,000 employees and \$3 trillion in assets. Oh, that company? Vanguard. “I went to Montgomery County Community College while I was working at Vanguard,” George remembers. From the College, George attended Ursinus College’s evening division and worked during the day. While he appreciated the value of his education, he sees an even stronger argument for community colleges today. “With higher education as an expectation in today’s world, community colleges are where someone can figure out what they want to do in an efficient way.”

**James Vlahos (1985):** *Communitarian*



“I went from high school to the Air Force at age 17,” Jim remembers. By 1978 he was married to Bonnie, now for 35 years. “She’s the one who pushed me to go back to school.” For Jim, that meant 10 years of college at night, and work in the day. After the U.S. Air Force, he worked at a body shop, and then as an insurance appraiser. When the office closed, he sold insurance, and then through his own business, Vlahos Dunn Insurance. “All my business is in the Pottstown area,” he says with pride. In addition to his wide variety of community activities and formerly serving as a member of the College’s Board of Trustees, Jim supports veterans going to the College. “The funds take care of expenses that regular scholarships might not cover,” he says.

## **Michael Vereb (1986):** Dedicated to public service



All through high school, Pa. Representative Mike Vereb wanted to be a police officer. The College was his first choice, and the right choice. “Montgomery County Community College helped me get an affordable education,” he remembers. And despite the cold, early morning runs, he came to love it. “The faculty was great. My Montgomery County Community College education got me my first job as a police officer.” Today, as the youngest member to be elected to the Pennsylvania House leadership, Mike advocates for community colleges based on his personal experience. “They’re economical, convenient and second to none academically.”

## **Kevin Geiss (1987):** Leadership



“Montgomery County Community College is where I learned the basics of leadership,” Kevin recalls. While at the College, Kevin had a job and joined the U.S. Marine Reserves. In 1987 he transferred to Cedarville College in Ohio, and after graduation, he worked at Wright Patterson Air Force Base. In 2001, he completed a Ph.D., and in 2005 he was called to the White House Office of Science and Technology. By 2010, he was Deputy Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Air Force. Today, he’s Director, Human Effectiveness Directorate, 711th Human Performance Wing, Air Force Research Laboratory, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio, where he heads initiatives to protect and enhance the performance of military members in service to our nation. In 2013, Kevin was honored with the top civilian service recognition, the “Service to America Award.”

## **Michael Webb (1987):** The foundation for professional success



“Montgomery County Community College is very student focused,” Michael Webb says. He should know about student-oriented education. With his Ph.D. from Walden University, Mike is an instructor in the health-care management program at Thomas Jefferson University and faculty in public safety leadership at Capella University. He also taught for the College’s criminal justice program for 20 years. All of that is in addition to his supervising 100 Abington Township police officers and support staff in his role as one of two deputy chiefs. “The College laid the foundation for my professional success and academic achievement.”

**Timothy Briggs (1989):** Doing the people's work



Pa. State Representative Timothy P. Briggs, Upper Merion Township, completed his freshman year of college at Montgomery County Community College in 1988-89 before transferring to West Chester University. He went on to earn a bachelor's degree in Political Science from West Chester University and a Juris Doctor from Temple University's Beasley School of Law. After working as a political advisor for more than a decade, Briggs ran for office in 2008 and is about to begin his fourth term as Representative for Pennsylvania's 149th District. He is an associate with the law firm Hamburg, Rubin, Mullin, Maxwell & Lupin.

**Patricia Nunan (1989):** Fulfilling a promise



"I was a 'stay-at-home' mom to a wonderful boy and girl," Pat remembers. Then she received a flyer about classes at the College. "I promised my grandmother that I'd get a college education." It was the start of an unexpected career. Graphic art and AutoCAD software classes at the College led to work with the County, and later remodeling grocery stores. She joined the College's Alumni Board, where she met George Marks, who hired her. Commuting from Boyertown took its toll, and Pat left for a company closer to home, where she picked up construction management experience. Finally, Pat went on her own, turning to fellow alumni board member Wayne Gregory at the College for business advice to start her business designing accessible life and work spaces. "I became a 'Founding Mother' of the Woman-Owned Business Network. There's now a business start-up certificate class. We sponsor the Leading Women Symposium and Golf Experience. Pat is quick to give the College credit. "I got more than I came for."

## 1990s

**Charles Yarnall (1990):** "I knew I made the right choice"



At six years old, Charles Yarnall could see his future. "I grew up in Blue Bell, looking at the field that became the College." The family moved, but Charles came back, "From my first class, I knew I made the right choice." That choice was the biology sciences. After acquiring the needed courses, Charles was one of only six students accepted annually among the 300 applicants for Hahnemann Hospital's cardiovascular perfusion program. This specialty provides full life support temporarily replacing circulatory and respiratory functions during procedures like open-heart surgery. Today, he's a published author, teacher and a co-creator of a device that transports Macro Molecules to organs such as the heart. This device was awarded a patent by the United States just last year. He practices regularly at Abington Hospital.

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**William Ziegler (1991):** Will the next Bill Ziegler please stand up?



Dr. William Ziegler, yes, Dr. Ziegler, is the first to admit that he didn't see himself as college material. He laughs when he tells you that he didn't even register himself for his first semester. His father did! "My parents wanted a better life for me than they had," Bill remembers. "I didn't know what I wanted to do. Montgomery County Community College planted the seed that led me to teaching." Today Bill is principal of Pottsgrove High School and was president of the Pennsylvania Association of Elementary/Secondary School Principals. These days, when he thinks of the College, it's as a stepping stone for his students. "We participate in the College's 'Gateway to College' program to help students struggling in school. We send a lot of kids to Montgomery County Community College." Maybe one of them will be the next doctor, lawyer, dentist, engineer, architect, nurse, etc.

**Jeannine McKnight (1993):** Expanding her world



After a stint as an Arabic cryptologic linguist in the U.S. Air Force, Jeannine McKnight came to the College to build experience and explore possible careers. "The classes were excellent," she remembers. "The faculty, especially Pat Nestler and Charles Reilly, put no limits on what I could do." From strobe lights to the earliest "selfies" (with film!), to creative writing and poetry, Jeannine expanded her world far beyond what she expected. She went on to own a successful book packaging company and worked as a fire performer and Middle Eastern dance instructor. Now as senior editor and literary magazine adviser at Widener University, she is grateful to Montgomery County Community College for the most energizing years of her life.

**Tracy Reinhart (1993):** I truly found my love for dentistry



From an orthodontic assistant right out of North Penn High School to her associate's degree in dental hygiene from the College to her Doctorate in Dentistry from Temple University School of Dentistry, few have been as deeply involved in dentistry throughout their profession as Tracy Reinhart. "The experiences I had at Montgomery County Community College still stay with me today," she says. "I had teachers who had their finger on the pulse of what was happening in my field to guide me. It was there that I truly found my love for dentistry." Besides her busy practice, Tracy sits on the College's Dental Hygiene Advisory Committee and its Leading Women in Philanthropy initiative. She also established the Tracy Rossi-Reinhart Endowment fund that honors dental hygiene students with annual scholarships.

**Rodolfo Tellez (1993):** Translating life



“I was 15 years old when we arrived,” Rudy Tellez says. As immigrants from LaPaz, Bolivia, family money was tight. Starting at the College made sense. After graduating, he continued his education at West Chester University, where he earned his bachelor’s degree in Communications. He then earned his master’s degree in Student Affairs in Higher Education from Kutztown University. He became a professional interpreter, now certified for medical, court and conference work. “I worked for Attorney General Eric Holder, Al Sharpton, Nobel Prize winners, Congress and ambassadors,” Rudy says. He also teaches at LaSalle University. While Montgomery County Community College was instrumental to his success, Rudy reminds himself daily of his parents’ role in his accomplishments. “They’re my biggest heroes. It’s because of their courage and love that I became the man I am.” Rudy serves on the College’s Alumni Board.

**Megan Kratz (1994):** Teaching, acting and life!



“The teachers at Montgomery County Community College are some of the best I’ve ever had,” Megan Kratz tells us. “Their dedication, wealth of knowledge, and approachability are why I’m a proud alumna.” As a 1997 Cum Laude graduate at West Chester University in Elementary Education, Megan knows about quality teaching. She practices it regularly at the College, teaching Acting Fundamentals for the last 15 years in the continuing education program, in addition to substitute teaching for the Wissahickon School District. Megan’s also an actress for TV, movies and local theater. She’s held leading roles at the Walnut Street Theater’s productions of “The Sign in Sidney Burstein’s Window,” and “Golden Boy.” “In my free time, you can find me hanging with my husband of 14 years and our four beautiful children. I am a proud stay-at-home mom, who loves to cook with my family, run with my friends, and write and perform skits,” she says.

**Alan Porter (1999):** Safe!



Alan came to the College focused on a career: baseball. Coach Lou Lombardo’s reputation is a magnet to up-and-coming players. But nobody, even Alan, considered the path he ended up taking. “That’s when I heard of ‘umpire school.’” The odds were against him: of his class of 150, only 25 started in the minors. Each season, though, Alan moved up. “There are fewer and fewer slots. To get a full-time Major League job someone has to leave one of the 74 positions.” That’s exactly what happened. “The Minors aren’t anything like the Big Leagues,” he reflects. The off season gives Alan a chance to bond with his and Alison’s (also a graduate of the College) two kids. He’s also on campus. “I help Lou out with an umpire clinic,” Alan says. What does he tell them? “No matter what your goal is, don’t shy away.”

# 2000s

## **Michele Fonte (2000):** Focusing on the whole child



Michele Fonte ties her teaching philosophy and professional success to her time at Montgomery County Community College. She registered for her first class at age 41, graduating from the College in 2000 with an associate's degree in Elementary Education. Michele credits the College with helping her to develop a "positive approach to teaching and learning that focuses on the whole child." Michele continued her education at Kutztown University and earned a bachelor's degree in Education with certifications in Elementary and Special Education. She went on to earn a master's degree in Educational Development and Strategies at Wilkes University and a Letter of Endorsement in Teacher Leadership and Instructional Coaching. In 2009, Michele received the Pennsylvania Council of Exceptional Children's Teacher of the Year Award and was nominated for The Great American Teacher of the Year Award. In 2010, she served as the College's commencement speaker. Taking a very unique and individualized approach to teaching children with learning challenges, her philosophy is that all children can learn and achieve in their own ways.

## **John Caperilla (2001):** Designing a career



While the thoughts of working at a grocery store for the rest of his life and the value of the education were good motivators to enroll at the College, it was a scholarship that launched John Caperilla's career. "I received the College Foundation's Allan C. Myers Memorial Scholarship," John remembers. John interned and spent the first years of his career with them—all through his time at Temple University, too—where he received his degree in civil engineering technology. Today, John designs and manages highway projects for PennDOT, municipalities and even railroads. He's also very involved with both of his alumni associations, at the College and Temple. John's taken some interesting lessons from his highway projects into his life in general. "Don't raise a bridge in a residential neighborhood," he says, remembering a specific project. "When you impact people at their homes, they don't like it," he says with a smile.

## **Patti Thomas (2001):** The definition of non-traditional



"Montgomery County Community College was the saving grace of my life," Patti exclaims. "I fell in love with the campus and the school. The professors there were always 'real.'" After graduation, Patti jumped to a Masters in Divinity program at Lancaster Theological Seminary. She's now senior pastor at St. Paul's United Church of Christ in Sellersville, and on track for her Doctor of Divinity. Patti currently chairs the Alumni Board and volunteers to assist at many College events and activities.

**Christian Sheehan (2005):** Direction and tradition



Christian knew that law was a viable career path. His father and grandfather were role models. But he came to the College because he wasn't sure. "It gave me direction," he says. The College was where he found his interest in political science, and where best to follow that dream? Washington. "I interned at [U.S. Representative] Curt Weldon's office when I went to American University." It's also how he met his wife, Elizabeth Trinkle. A Weldon volunteer, Elizabeth knew the College well. She grew up on Cathcart Road. After graduating magna cum laude from American University, Christian went on to Boston College School of Law, where he also graduated magna cum laude. From there, he clerked for the Honorable D. Michael Fisher with the 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals. Today, Christian is an associate at Schnader, Harrison, Segal & Lewis, LLP. Wherever his career goes, Christian knows the College is where it all started. "I had excellent professors who were professionals in their fields."

**Nicola Manning-Davenport (2007):** A lifelong learner



Her life's journey started in Antigua and continued to West Philadelphia and homelessness. Then, she went to Temple University, but encountered unemployment. She then started classes at Montgomery County Community College and earned her degree. Then she continued at Bucknell University where she earned her bachelor's degree to a steady job, a stable life, and a master's degree at Bloomsburg University. Nicola, a mother of two, has seen a lot in the more than 15 years since coming to the United States. When did life turn around? "I enrolled at Montgomery County Community College's 'New Choices/New Options' career development program," she remembers. "I took a computer class, then more." It wasn't long before Nicola found that the College was exactly what she needed. "I was nurtured at Montgomery County Community College." Today, Nicola takes online classes while she works for the Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit. She's also thinking about a doctorate. "People should always be lifelong learners," Nicola says.

**Michael Pflueger (2007):** Where I got the vision



Sometimes the best advice is to tell someone what they should not do. "Frank Short told me not to be an illustrator," Michael says. "It was good, and I learned a lot from his class." On the other hand, "Walter Hunter, in math, was the right teacher at the right time." From the College, Michael went to Gwynedd Mercy for a degree in math and education, then graduate school at Villanova. It was there, that he discovered the Fulbright program. Michael just completed a year teaching in Durban, South Africa. "Montgomery County Community College was where I got the vision of what I wanted to do. It's where I found my focus," Michael recalls.



**Debbie Zlomek (2007):** Tackling the crisis through education



When her position as human resources manager was eliminated with the sale of Pottstown Memorial Medical Center, Debbie Zlomek knew she had an opportunity that few people get: to make a mid-career change. “I knew the College was a great place because I had hired so many good people with Montgomery County Community College degrees,” she says. “When I went, I always felt someone was rooting for me. I was never discouraged.” Today, as a nurse, Debbie tackles one of the most important health crises of our time: Type II diabetes. In her work as a certified diabetes educator, she cares for hundreds of patients at four locations, helps them monitor their condition and trains them on self-care. She also helps spot good talent, just like years ago. “Montgomery County Community College nursing students do community rotation with me.”

**Sherrylynn Marshall (2008):** Creating yourself



“George Bernard Shaw said ‘Life isn’t about finding yourself, it’s about creating yourself,’” world traveler and U.S. Navy veteran Sherrylynn Marshall reminds us. In her 16 years with PNC Bank, now as Vice President, Market Administration Manager, Sherrylynn’s “creat-ed” herself with every new opportunity. “I had challenging classes at Montgomery County Community College. I overcame fears.” This Phi Theta Kappa inductee and active Alumni Association member mentored classmates, just like she mentors employees at the bank. “Montgomery County Community College helped me find strengths I didn’t know I had.”

**Jan Kargulewicz (2009):** Before and after



“My life is either ‘before or after Montgomery County Community College,’” Jan says. “I was the first in my family to go to college. The College taught me the value of being a good member of the community.” When the Kargulewicz family emigrated from Poland, they knew it meant hard work, but also rewards, especially for their son, Jan. From the College, Jan aimed high: Columbia University. He graduated Phi Beta Kappa and is now working at Vanguard. “Montgomery County Community College made me what I am today,” he declares. Jan currently serves on the College’s Alumni Board.

# 2010s

## **Antonio Marrero (2011):** A second chance at greatness



When Antonio Marrero first came to the College, he was excited, but by the end of his first semester, he realized his focus had drifted from academics. “I needed motivation,” he recalls, so he joined the U.S. Marines. After his tour, Antonio was back, but had a different outlook and was selected for the Honors Program. He jumped into school like never before, becoming Student Government Association President and volunteering as an active proponent for rights for all students. Antonio graduated from the College, then Dickinson College. Today, he’s president of his class at Penn State Milton S. Hershey Medical School. Antonio sees his community college experience as an asset, and his classmates and faculty agree. “If more community college graduates were in medicine, we’d have healthier communities,” Antonio says.

## **Myrtle Williams:** I found myself, and my passion



“I kind of went the other way,” Myrtle says with a smile. She already had an associate’s degree from the Community College of Philadelphia, and her bachelor’s degree in Fine Arts in printmaking at Arcadia University, but she wanted more. “A friend recommended that I learn about sculpture,” she recalls. Myrtle came to Montgomery County Community College. “A whole new world of 3-D art opened up to me.” That was more than 30 years ago. Except for a year’s stint at the University of the Arts, she’s never left. Along the way, she’s taught as an adjunct instructor and served as a studio assistant. Her African and world history inspired art has been in exhibitions all over the east coast, and she has exhibited more than once at the College. “Montgomery County Community College is a real teaching institution. It’s where I found myself, and my passion.”

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