

THE EMPIRE STATE COLLEGE MAGAZINE

FALL 2012

# connections





### **Jazz at Black History Month Celebration**

Black History Month was marked by a variety of events across the college. The Metropolitan Center sponsored an awards ceremony and jazz performance which featured the Marcus McLaurine Trio. Pictured here are John Chin on piano and Marcus McLaurine '09 on bass.

## fall 2012 features



5 Technology Reinventing Education



7 Alumni in Higher Ed Paying It Forward



13 Mike Russo: A Man of Many Talents and Tastes

## departments



2 Plugged In



17 Portfolio



19 Profile

20 Alumni and Student Community

28 The Last Word

On the cover: Mike Russo '10, director of government relations for the semi-conductor manufacturer, GLOBALFOUNDRIES, is pictured in front of a chip disc display.

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## Connections

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# Plugged In

## Benke and Amory Chosen

College Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Meg Benke has been appointed as acting president by the State University of New York Board of Trustees. The appointment took effect Sept. 1 following the decision by President Alan R. Davis to become president and vice chancellor of Kwantlen Polytechnic University, British Columbia.

Associate Provost Deborah Amory was named acting provost/vice president for academic affairs.

At Empire State College since 1991, Benke has been serving as provost since December 2010. Previously, she had been vice provost, as well as dean and assistant dean of the Center for Distance Learning.

She is president of the board of directors of the Sloan-C Consortium, and has been recognized by Sloan with its award for Most Outstanding Achievement in Online Learning by an Individual.

The Pennsylvania native's formal education includes a bachelor's in business administration from Youngstown State University, and both master's and doctoral degrees in student personnel from Ohio University.

Amory, who earned her doctorate in anthropology from Stanford University and her bachelor's degree in African studies from Yale University, has served the college for nearly a decade. Amory was first appointed dean of the college's Central New York Center in Syracuse, in 2003, and then promoted to vice provost overseeing half of the college's regional learning centers and the offices that focus on community college, corporate and



Meg Benke

PHOTO: JOHN HUGHES



Deborah Amory

PHOTO: STAN BLANCHARD

community partnerships as well as the Office of Veteran and Military Education.

Led by the College Council, a search committee representing various college constituencies has begun its work to identify a new president.

## New Grad Studies Degree, Certificate

The School for Graduate Studies has added a Master of Arts in Learning and Emerging Technologies, which offers students the opportunity to explore and research the learning process, specifically with emerging online technologies. During pursuit of the 36-credit graduate degree, students and faculty collaboratively explore foundational concepts and skills. Suggested strands of electives include leadership in virtual learning; assistive technologies and learning; social, ethical and legal issues; and gaming and simulations for training.

The newest 12-credit advanced graduate certificate is in global brand marketing. The certificate provides students with critical tools to identify, analyze and solve the complex problems related to the buying behavior of global customers. Courses are taught online and students may begin the certificate program in the fall, spring or summer terms.

## Student Clubs Going Strong

The college's newest club, the Student Entrepreneur Club, hosted nearly 75 aspiring entrepreneurs at the Metropolitan Center to hear presentations by John Childress, CEO and president of Childress Business Consulting, and Ira Davidson, director of the Manhattan Small Business Development Center. Childress spoke about becoming an entrepreneur and starting a new business in the current economy; Davidson discussed how to find resources within reach when opportunity knocks. Other Metro students have organized a Music Industry Club for those interested in discussing and exchanging ideas about the latest developments in the music industry. Students in the Metropolitan New York region who would like to become involved with either club, should contact the clubs' advisor, Dr. Justin Giordano, at [Justin.Giordano@esc.edu](mailto:Justin.Giordano@esc.edu).





**Excellence Honored** Five Empire State College learners were honored by SUNY Chancellor Nancy L. Zimpher with the 2012 Chancellor’s Award for Student Excellence for outstanding academic performance, community leadership and other exemplary achievements. All New York state residents, this year’s honorees are Anita Brown (Green Island), Vicki Haas (North Collins), Kevin Lawson (East Bethany), Carolyn Polikarpus (Ghent) and Ryan Smithson (Schenectady).



**Anita Brown** is a Center for Distance Learning student who earned a Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies. Brown demonstrated exemplary civic service as vice president of the board of education in Green Island as she fulfilled academic goals and family responsibilities. She delayed college to raise children until, she says, “It was my time. I looked at distance-learning programs through the State University of New York because I trust the SUNY brand.” She was thrilled to be able to interact with a professor in Florence, Italy, and classmates around the globe. She was a member of the student activity fee committee, and a panelist and co-presenter at the Student Activity Conference in 2011. Brown now works full time and also is an accomplished photographer who donates portraits to cancer survivors and service members.



**Vicki Haas** graduated from the Niagara Frontier Center with a Bachelor of Science in Business, Management and Economics. She was the recipient of the C. Penn Wettlauffer Scholarship for academic excellence and coordinated the college’s first Harvard case study course in strategic management. She established Haas Management Co. to educate citizens about the dangers of radon gas and provided technical assistance to 39 municipalities through the Erie County Department of Environment and Planning. She co-chairs the nonprofit Western New York Earth Day Family Expo created to inform and inspire citizens to protect and enhance the environment. Haas enrolled at the college to advance professionally after years of taking just one course at a time. In addition to transfer credit, she says, “I documented my accomplishments for prior learning credit.”



**Kevin Lawson** graduated from the Genesee Valley Center with a Bachelor of Arts in Human Development. “Twenty-five years ago I had to decide between employment with benefits or school. I picked work,” he says. “It was daunting to return, but I work from home, which eased the transition. Also, I had an outstanding mentor.” Lawson is a recipient of the Meritorious Service Medal from the U.S. Army for training expeditionary forces to use small-arms weapons. He retired at the rank of master sergeant. He also was a New York State Department of Environmental Conservation officer for 23 years, recognized with a Captain’s Commendation for Lifesaving Actions. In addition, he is a wood carver who has exhibited his work. Lawson has balanced family life with work, civic and academic commitments.



**Carolyn Polikarpus** dropped out of school at 17, raised twins, earned a Regent’s diploma, worked as a computer programmer, and then graduated from the Northeast Center with a Bachelor of Arts in Community and Human Services. She received the Warren and Hortence Cochrane Scholarship and researched urban poverty and racism. Polikarpus’ epiphany came while at a workshop at Green Haven Correctional Facility, a maximum security prison, which spurred her to volunteer for Alternatives to Violence Project New York, a grass-roots program dedicated to reducing violence in homes, schools, prisons and society. She has represented AVPNY across the state and in Kenya, Guatemala and Costa Rica. “We promote healing within the prison, but we need healthier communities outside. Being a graduate will help me facilitate my work,” she says.



**Ryan Smithson** is a graduate of the Northeast Center with a Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies and was the recipient of the Nicholas Pekearo Endowed Scholarship in Creative Writing. He authored “Ghosts of War: The True Story of a 19-Year Old GI,” a cathartic account of his experiences in battle in Iraq. He is involved in several writing projects and keeps a journal to sustain the momentum. Smithson speaks widely and is an inductee of the Alumni Hall of Fame at Columbia High School in East Greenbush. “I would like to teach writing at a college,” says Smithson, “so I can help other people reach goals.” Smithson has represented the college at the New York State Capitol, been featured in college publications and spoken at college events. Additionally, he volunteers with children who have lost a loved one and tutors for Literacy Volunteers. “When you’ve been in a war,” says the husband, father, graduate student, writer and full-time worker, “you realize you don’t have all the time in the world. You fit it in.”

PHOTOS: STOCKSTUDIOSPHOTOGRAPHY.COM

# Technology Reinventing Education

By James C. Helicke

You might call Empire State College’s Creativity and Multicultural Communication a college course of the future. A website for the project lists contact information for Empire State College faculty, topics and readings, and details information about college credit for the course. But, this is where the similarities with a traditional classroom end – in fact, there is no classroom at all. And it’s not just an online course either.

Moreover, there are no “students;” instead “participants” are encouraged to contribute their own content scoured from the Web and online resources. Faculty members see themselves more as facilitators of an open, interactive and participatory digital learning process.

Hundreds of participants from six continents and 38 countries registered for the Saratoga Springs-based course. Some paid tuition and got college credit. The course drew many more “lurkers” – lingo for those who visit sites, but don’t add content of their own.

This was Empire State College’s first foray into the world of the massive open online course – commonly known as a MOOC by technophiles and online educators – made possible and enhanced by new technologies.

Participants in the MOOC used a variety of online tools – blogs, YouTube, social media like Twitter and Facebook, and Google+ Hangouts, a videoconferencing

service – to make presentations and share their discoveries. The presentations have ranged from high-tech pyrotechnics to drumming lessons, wine tastings, coffee klatches and discussions about life.

Participants were warned upfront about the flood of information they’d be facing: “You are not expected to read and watch everything. ... Instead, what you should do is pick and choose content that looks interesting to you and is appropriate for you. If it looks too complicated, don’t read it. If it looks boring, move on to the next item.”

It’s a radical disclaimer that more traditional pedagogues might find unsettling, but it’s an experiment that Empire State College, with its long tradition of unconventional approaches to higher education, has been eager to explore.

“We’re not as constrained as other schools might be. The college started as an innovator in adult education. That’s a great starting point,” says Thomas Mackey,

dean of the college’s Center for Distance Learning. “Empire State College already has the mindset. Anything is possible.”

He says that by allowing nonpaying learners to participate in the pilot MOOC, Empire State College students have the opportunity to interact with learners from around the world. And, by being flexible about the choice of reading material, students are encouraged to pursue their own interests.

“It’s about placing the student at the center,” Mackey says.

For Empire State College, the pilot MOOC wasn’t just an isolated course, but part of the college’s effort to restructure itself as an open, participatory and dynamic center of learning.

“The experience of the open learning environment provided by a MOOC is an example of SUNY Empire State College moving toward a vision as New York’s open university,” said Betty Hurley-Dasgupta, one of two facilitators for the MOOC.

The college's unusual educational model puts it at the cutting edge of this new educational movement.

Although open online courses have been around for some time, national hype about MOOCs has grown since 160,000 students joined Sebastian Thrun's course on artificial intelligence at Stanford in 2011. Thrun, the founder of Internet giant Google's secretive, pie-in-the-sky research division (which boasts projects like a self-driving car and augmented reality glasses), now is trying to "democratize higher education"

**"It's no longer just the student and the professor in a classroom. It's a community of learners."**

– Thomas P. Mackey, dean  
Center for Distance Learning

by launching his own higher educational venture, Udacity.

At Udacity, "you learn by solving challenging problems ... with world-renowned university instructors (not by watching long, boring lectures)," the company website proclaims.

Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology also have joined the online bandwagon, launching their online partnership, edX, in 2012. Additionally, the University of California, Berkeley offers free online courses in that partnership.

More than a dozen other major research universities – from Caltech to the University of Michigan to the University of Pennsylvania – have signed up to offer courses on Coursera, a rival, for-profit company that offers MOOC hosting services. Coursera says it hopes "to give everyone access to the world-class education that has so far been available only to a select few."

Although the courses remain free, students don't receive university credit. It's also clear that companies – and universities – are hoping for future

profits with revenue-sharing agreements written into their contracts. Certificates of participation from edX, which are now free, will eventually have a fee.

At Empire State College, 16 students paid to take the pilot MOOC for credit, whereas hundreds more signed up for free. But Empire State College's program also differs in other ways from other schools. Carol Yeager, the co-facilitator with Hurley-Dasgupta, says the flexible, participatory and connectivist, pedagogical model underlying Empire State College's MOOC

distinguished it from many online courses. (Connectivist theory states that learning is not so much about content as it is about the process of connecting information sources.)

"Their philosophy is completely different. Theirs is content-driven; ours is learner-driven," Yeager says. "A lot of schools are afraid of losing control, rather than seeing the possibilities that (new technology) presents. But Empire State College has an advantage. It has broken the traditional academy mold and put the learner at the center. I think sometimes we have to reach further and expand that concept."

Others would seem to agree with the learner-centric principle.

Microsoft founder Bill Gates recently put his charitable foundation's support behind a revolutionary online educational venture, which he hopes might ultimately help to transform American schools. The nonprofit Khan Academy is experimenting with "flipping the classroom." Rather than listening to teachers lecture in class, students watch explanatory videos posted on YouTube at their own pace at home. Aided by technology that gives feedback

on student performance, teachers then dedicate their time to mentoring students who work on exercises in class.

"What we're trying to do is take the passivity out of the classroom," founder Salman Khan told CBS's 60 Minutes. The Khan Academy also uses technology to "start fine-tuning things the way that Amazon might fine-tune their button to help you ... find the book you want or Netflix says 'what's the right movie for you?' We now get to do (the same) with education."

Empire State College is part of a similar movement that is transforming higher education by challenging its traditional conceptual underpinnings.

"It's no longer just the student and the professor in a classroom," says Mackey. "It's a community of learners."

Educators Hurley-Dasgupta and Yeager launched a new MOOC for the fall term 2012, titled VizMath. The course aims to present complex mathematical concepts in visual terms.

The new MOOC is technically "an adjunct of a larger course, called a Mathematical Journey," according to Yeager.

The two facilitators are making sure that the course is open to outside participants from around the globe, who will leave their own imprint on the learning experience. One presenter is using origami to explain geometry; another employs crochet to illustrate hyperbolic curves.

Outside participation also encourages Empire State College students to incorporate new perspectives and use new Web-based technology to think outside the box.

But, reminds Yeager with a chuckle, "There is no box." ○

# Paying it *Forward*

by Hope Ferguson

*A number of Empire State College graduates have gone on to successful careers in higher education, where they serve as administrators, professors and mentors, fundraisers and more. We looked at six of our alumni who are “paying it forward” to the next generation of college students.*

### Education Leader

Last spring, the website for Cincinnati Christian University featured a video of its president, David Faust, good-naturedly riffing on a recent race his granddaughter competed in, complete with humorous slides. Elsewhere on the website, the president, a 1976 alumnus of Empire State College, in a more subdued mood, was sending off graduates – including a man from Myanmar and a few graduates getting diplomas in absentia due to mission trips and service in the Army reserves.



David Faust '76

Speaking to those at the beginning of their postgraduate journeys, he quoted a candidate who thanked the college for “training minds and nurturing souls.”

“I couldn’t have said it better myself,” he proclaimed.

It’s been a journey as well for the ministry leader, who moved to upstate New York in 1973 to serve in youth

outreach. Hoping to earn a college degree, “I was excited when I learned about Empire State College. It provided both the quality and flexibility I needed.”

He earned his Bachelor of Arts from the Niagara Frontier Center, his Master of Divinity from Cincinnati Christian University and his Doctor of Ministry from Fuller Theological Seminary.

His own “season of doubt” as a young man led him to “examine the reasons for faith,” he wrote via email. “I wanted to know if reasonable evidence supports believing in God, trusting in the scriptures, the historical reliability of the Bible and other aspects of the Christian faith. I still have lots of questions and plenty of room to grow, but my faith has deepened through the years.”

He has since dedicated his life to educating others in both the faith and academics. “Today, I find joy in helping others in their journey of faith. And, as the president of a Christian university, I am deeply motivated by the opportunity to engage with men and women who are considering how God’s purpose shapes the direction of their lives.”

Faust was serving in a pastorate with a church on Long Island for a decade prior to accepting a position on the faculty of CCU in 1988. He also had served as senior minister of a 4,000-member “mega church” in Indianapolis. He’s been president of CCU for the past decade.

Faust oversees a university with 1,000 students, including nontraditional students. The university has alumni in all 50 states and “at least” 71 other nations. In addition to the College of Adult Learning, there is the undergraduate Bible College and a graduate seminary.

The main campus overlooks a sprawling multiethnic urban community with a spectacular view of the Cincinnati skyline, leading it to be dubbed, says Faust, “The U with a View.”

The college also is focusing on diversifying its student body, both in terms of race and age. “We granted a Master of Arts in Religion to a man who is 82 years old,” he reports proudly.

Faust has written more than a dozen books – mainly Bible studies and inspirational books for leaders. He also writes a weekly column in a journal for Christian families.

“I am very thankful to the visionary leaders who foresaw the need for innovation in the delivery of adult education,” he says. “Not only did I benefit personally from Empire State College’s approach, but I have been delighted to see our College of Adult Learning grow and thrive at CCU. My own son, Matt, completed his bachelor’s degree in leadership and ministry in CCU’s College of Adult Learning. He now serves on the staff of an inner-city church where he works primarily with people with disabilities. No one expresses more joy and accomplishment at the commencement services than our adult learning graduates and their families.”

## Internationalist

Timothy Brown's path may have been set very early on in life. His father was a historian and director of the Center for International Affairs at Harvard, which does research, administers programs and accepts fellows from foreign countries. His family moved to Lebanon when he was growing up, where his father served as vice president of the American University of Beirut.

"Those were very formative years – the early years of primary school," Brown says.

Since 2009, he's been managing director of Capital Giving for Harvard University, with regional responsibility for the Asia-Pacific. He travels often to meet with mostly American donors working on the Asian continent.

He received his master's degree in International Relations at American University in 1982. From there, he moved to the Kuwaiti Embassy in Washington, D.C., where he oversaw more than 1,000 Kuwaiti nationals who were earning degrees in the U.S. at a variety of institutions.

"That got me really hooked on higher education."

He went back to AU for three years, where he worked

with the university to recruit international students from "Cairo to Tokyo."

"I was really intellectually thirsty and hungry. I was becoming bored, and lacked intellectual stimulation." So he returned to school to earn his Ed.D., and completed his dissertation on the origins of professional education in international relations using the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy,

one of the first of its kind, as a model.

Brown then moved to the University of Hartford, where the president was hoping to make a small commuter college into a higher-education destination for international students. Brown became a recruiter, mainly for students from the Middle East. He also taught at the college.

When the president stepped down, Brown moved on to the University of Maryland College Park – "from a small private college to a large land-grant institution," he says.

By then, married with twins, Brown went back to the American University of Beirut.

He reported to a dean of the medical school, who wanted to revive the University of Beirut's medical practice after a devastating civil war that lasted from the 1970s to 1990s. The main hospital had been turned into a trauma unit, and many researchers had fled.

After two years, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies offered him a development position. Brown spent nearly five years there, fundraising to support the Hopkins-Nanjing Center, a joint venture with Nanjing University. Harvard came calling in 2009.

"We thought it would be nice to go home, so we ended up in the Northeast, where the weather's a lot cooler.

"I used to think of fundraising as just the annual fund, but then at Hartford, one of the vice presidents begged me to take him along [on my recruiting trips] and I learned that development is much more than the annual fund." He grappled with the issue of how a university can improve itself and attract appropriate philanthropy "across geography and cultures."

Brown doesn't do the big "ask." Instead, he updates alumni on what the university is doing, and engages in critical listening to discover what interests them.

"Nine times out of 10, they'll say, yes, I'd love to. Harvard is very donor-centered," says Brown.

Ironically, Brown didn't go to college right after high school. Instead, he worked in dance and theater. He was in his late 20s when he enrolled at Empire State College's Metropolitan Center, to the delight of his academic father who had encouraged him to go to college by paying for a writing course at the New School of Social Research. His main mentor was Mel Rosenthal, a former journalist and a photographer, who got Brown excited about photography and the politics of art. He also worked with Mentor Tom Grunfeld, who shared his interest in China and the Far East.

"Empire State College was perfect for me. It was great to have access to such a flexible program," says Brown. "I almost wish I hadn't accepted as much credit and spent more time learning."

## Policymaker

In her jobs as director of community health policy for the University of Rochester Medical Center and director of community partnerships of the United Way of Rochester, Kathy Lewis helped develop policies on such things as preventing childhood and adult obesity and reducing lead poisoning in children.

For example, while working on childhood obesity, she worked with a coalition to help the Rochester School



Timothy Brown '79

PHOTO: PROVIDED



PHOTO: RIA TAFANI

**Kathy Lewis '93**

District improve the quality of school lunches by hiring a new vendor to provide healthier meals. “School lunches can really contribute to obesity. A coalition worked closely to affect a policy change that would improve the lunches, allocating additional funds for healthier food. This resulted, Lewis says, in better meals for 34,000 children in a district in which nearly 90 percent were eligible for free or reduced-price meals.

The university also worked on adult obesity initiatives, identifying employers who were committed to improving the health of their employees; setting up a system by which companies could rate themselves and create improvement plans as well. This included a willingness to consider catering healthier selections for meetings, installing a bike rack, offering space to attend weight-loss meetings, or a place where employees could exercise or practice yoga on their lunch breaks.

“We were always focused on systemwide change on a scale that could really affect a given population,” explains Lewis.

Lewis has long been drawn to policy making. She worked for a nonprofit youth agency at a program placing older workers in jobs. She headed up the County Office for the Aging. As director of community partnerships for the United Way for 10 years, she worked on reducing lead poisoning. A community coalition helped change the law so that certifying the absence of lead paint was something that landlords had to tick off on their certificates of occupancy, along with checking for bare wires and broken windows.

The number of children with lead poisoning subsequently dropped from 1,200 children to fewer than 300, “which is still too many, but an enormous improvement,” Lewis notes.

Lewis dropped out of Oberlin College to join VISTA as a young woman, not wanting to “waste” any more time in college. However, she realized that without a college degree, she was not eligible for some of the jobs that she desired. Finding traditional college “too rigid for me,” she enrolled at Empire State College, where she was able to work while learning.

“I reached a point in my career where I needed the credentials of a master’s degree.” She enrolled in the Master of Arts in Social Policy Program while she was directing the County Office for the Aging.

“I loved the policy focus. I really felt that policy was the key to making changes,” she explains.

She has good memories of that time including carpooling with fellow students to the residencies in Saratoga Springs.

Lewis retired in January as director of community health policy for the University of Rochester Medical Center.

Her “bucket list” includes travel and volunteer work. She has a “huge curiosity” about different cultures, and is hoping to see the Himalayas in Nepal and Tibet. She’d also like to travel more in Latin America, and spend more time playing her cello.

“I’ve got a long list of things I want to do, from hiking to volunteering,” she says. The two-time breast cancer survivor adds, “To some extent, the cancer experience does sort of change your perspective. You don’t want to wait too long.”

## Program Director

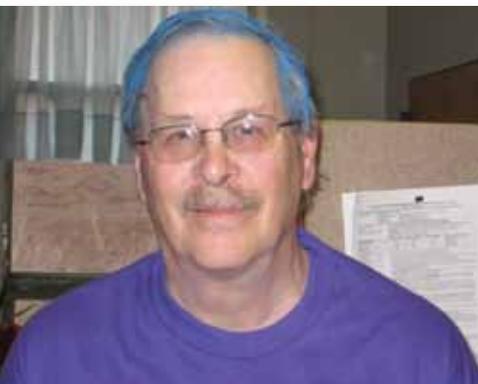
Paul Siegel is director of a program at SUNY Stony Brook that prepares students for careers in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

However, he began his career as a jeweler.

Like many Empire State College graduates, Siegel followed a circuitous route to his current destination. Right after high school, he found a job working second shift in the data processing division of Boston University, where he developed a drinking problem. While in recovery, he decided to enroll in several craft classes, including lapidary (stone cutting). The last craft “took” and he became a skilled craftsman working with fine gems and stones.

His career, which he enjoyed and was prospering in, hit a speed bump when he was diagnosed with cancer at age 29. He beat the cancer and shifted to retail jewelry, earning credentials from the Gemological Association of Great Britain, where only one in four students who start the program receive a diploma. He eventually went on the road for five years “with a bag of loose gemstones,” covering a territory of 22 states.

In 1990, Siegel took a job at Stony Brook University, where his father had been an assistant vice president in the 1970s. While doing odd jobs on the campus, he began to explore Empire State College. “I just got tired of people always asking, ‘What school did you go to? If I was going to get ahead, in terms of earning a good salary and having a pension and benefits, I was going to have to go back to school. My wife (a teacher) called it my mid-life crisis.



Paul Siegel '95

PHOTO: PROVIDED

Instead of a blonde and a Ferrari, I wanted a degree.

“I got serious about Empire State College and enrolled in the Long Island Center in 1993,” says Siegel. “I was always a big history buff. My mentor, Jim Robinson, encouraged me to cross register for geology classes at Stony Brook to strengthen my portfolio for a graduate degree in environmental and waste management.”

In 1997, while earning a master’s degree, Siegel got interested in the CSTEP and STEP programs at Stony Brook, which helped underserved students prepare for careers in science, technology and math. The program was so compelling to him that he was willing to volunteer.

“It just appealed to me. There also was a need. Since I was changing careers at 45, it had to be something that I would be comfortable with.”

The programs he runs aim to give students a step up in STEM. “By their training and giving them exposure to research, it helps make them successful as undergraduates and eventually as graduate students. I love it. It helps keep my ideals alive.” As a measure of his enthusiasm, Siegel sports blue hair because he promised to dye it blue if his 22 incoming CSTEP students ended the fall semester with a cumulative GPA above 3.0.

The most fulfilling aspect, Siegel says, is hearing back from students after they have graduated. “Getting a thank you from a student is really a kick. One young lady from an inner-city high school is applying to be an astronaut. Although she was her high school valedictorian, her SAT scores wouldn’t have gotten her a second look. But she was able to succeed because of her pluck and some help from our program.”

## Dean and Professor

For nearly 20 years, Keith Batman wore the hat of dean of continuing education for Cayuga Community College.

He was responsible for all noncredit, business and industry training, and all offerings at extension sites, high schools, online, evening, summer and January terms, as well as study-abroad programs. In fact, “pretty much everything the college offered except day credit courses,” he says.

A dropout from Indiana University, Batman eventually landed in a commune in Central New York because “it was the ’60s, and I was interested in pursuing other things.”

But he didn’t ignore his thirst for learning. One summer, he studied physics, eventually enrolling in Cayuga Community College to brush up on the math and science courses he’d neglected earlier.

“I’d always been interested in education,” he explains. “I did a lot of personal exploration, particularly of utopian philosophy. But, I decided I needed a more well-rounded, formal education. I also realized that I could get paid to go to school with TAP, Pell grants and work study; who wouldn’t want to get paid for learning?”

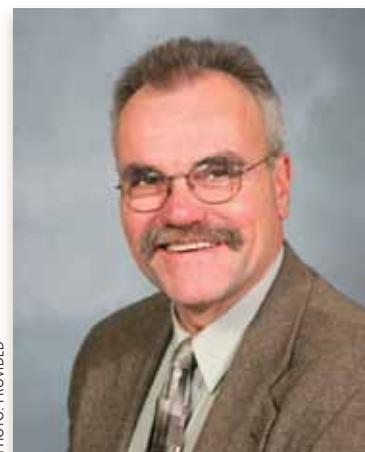
After graduating, he landed a job as the founding director of the Auburn Hospitality Association, a nonprofit that supported and advocated for visitors to Auburn Correctional Facility. “I did that a number of years and decided to get a B.A. My work schedule was demanding and completely unpredictable. But I realized that without a B.A., I would be stuck. The work was very important, but I would be paid only subsistence wages. Importantly, I couldn’t be 40 and still do that,” says Batman.

It was purely a clear-eyed, pragmatic decision to go to Syracuse University to earn his MBA.

“I didn’t want to get the kind of degree where people would sort of roll their eyes when I mentioned where I went and what I got my degree in, says Batman. “At the time, an MBA was a terminal degree and much in demand.”

He worked a number of jobs after earning his B.A. – in the local health department, in education and public relations, and an employee training program. He then was tapped to teach at Cayuga Community College.

“Fortuitously, the semester prior to completing my MBA, someone on the business faculty took a sabbatical. My work-study supervisor was now academic dean at Cayuga CC, so I quit my job to take a one-semester appointment. Pregnant with our first child, my wife also had quit her job



Keith Batman '77

PHOTO: PROVIDED

in preparation for parenthood. Our first child was born, the semester appointment ended and at this point, neither one of us had a full-time job.

“I did have adjunct work, but it didn’t pay. Since our requirements were reasonably small, we were able to get by. We did that for a year, but a real job and real money hadn’t materialized. Right at the moment we were about to go over the cliff, the position as director of the Cayuga CC Inmate Higher Education Program became available. I eventually moved to Fingerlakes Community College as director of their Geneva Extension Center, and, later, when the dean’s position opened at Cayuga, I was fortunate enough to be hired.”

He remained there until four years ago. Batman has returned to Empire State College – where he earned his degree in 1977 from the Central New York Center – to mentor students in Business, Management and Economics. He finds, as an alumnus, he is able to encourage students in a unique way.

“While I decided to retire from the dean position at Cayuga for a number of practical reasons, I certainly didn’t want to stop contributing entirely.”

In addition to the part-time faculty position at the college, Batman still teaches a course online for Cayuga CC and is supervisor of the Town of Scipio, where he and his wife have lived for 35 years. He counts among his greatest accomplishments at Cayuga the development of the online program, the opening and development of the extension program in Fulton, which is now a branch campus, and the expansion of the high school dual-credit programs.

“These programs are so important because they enable people, who might otherwise not be able to do so, to access higher education. This is what Empire did for me, and I am pleased that I was able to develop ways that others could have the access I had through Empire State College. I am even more pleased, in my retirement, that I am able to continue that commitment as a faculty member at the college.”

## Space Academy Participant

When Janice Novello’s principal suggested that she apply for NASA’s Teacher in Space Program in 1988, she had no interest, and what’s more, was afraid of heights. She was teaching middle school social studies and it was two years after the first teacher in space, Christa McAuliffe, lost her life in the Challenger space shuttle disaster. People thought the program would be scrapped after the tragedy, but instead it just refocused.

Novello won one of 99 places among a national competition of 7,000 teachers and spent two weeks at

the NASA Glenn (Lewis) Facility as a Lockheed Martin Fellowship Scholar working on projects related to the future space station, solar panels and a special tape that could transmit electricity to the space station.

“There wasn’t a space program for middle school teachers until that competition,” Novello says. She and her original colleagues still hold annual reunions at space stations around the nation.

In 2007, Novello was selected as a Honeywell scholar, attending the International Space Academy with 100 other teachers from 38 countries. “The speaker said, ‘Push out of your comfort zone. If you’re not doing things that are out of your comfort zone; if you’re not doing things that make you uncomfortable, you’re missing the true experience.’”

Novello took that to heart. Despite her fears, she took part in a helicopter rescue in a lake, used a zipline to escape from a five-story building, and helped design a hypothetical ideal colony on Mars.

The experiences fundamentally changed the longtime teacher and mother of two. She became fearless, more willing to try new things. “This wasn’t who I was. The experiences made me braver, and now I believe that if I am afraid to do it, do it. Isn’t that what education is about? Trying things we’re afraid of?”

Novello began her career as a second-grade teacher in 1967. She left St. Joseph’s College after her junior year after becoming engaged to her now-husband. “In those days, if you got engaged prior to senior year you were asked to leave the school,” she says.

She was still able to get a teaching job without her four-year degree, but enrolled in Empire State College’s Metropolitan Center and completed her degree in 1983. With her prior learning credits, it took her less than two years to complete her undergraduate degree. She went on for a master’s degree, a specialist’s degree and a Ph.D.

Novello later ran K-8 programs for gifted children in school districts in Illinois, Iowa and Florida. After 40 years of teaching, in 2007, she took on the challenge of teaching at the University of Phoenix, where she is a faculty supervisor-Florida, and chair for the School of Advanced Studies Dissertation Research. She is on the board of directors for the Florida Association of Science Teachers.

Her fondest dream now, however, is to return to her alma mater, and the Center for Distance Learning, and pay forward what others have done for her. ○



PHOTO PROVIDED

Janice Novello '83



GLOBALFOUNDRIES

MATERIALS

# Mike Russo: A Man of Many Talents and Tastes

By Helen Susan Edelman



PHOTO: GARY SEARS

Mike Russo with President Barack Obama during his visit to SUNY's College of Nanoscale Science and Engineering in May 2012

When President Barack Obama came to upstate New York's Capital Region last May to speak about the economy, the event had the fingerprints of Michael Russo '10 all over it. As the director of government relations for GLOBALFOUNDRIES, which is based in Malta, N.Y., Russo spearheads initiatives that connect the world's second-largest contract semiconductor manufacturer with civic, government, education, labor and business leaders across the United States. In upstate New York – where GLOBALFOUNDRIES is driving innovation, creating jobs, helping to educate people to work in the burgeoning semiconductor industry and stimulating the regional economy – Obama's message about growing manufacturing and increasing the nation's exports was particularly welcome.

"We have a nontraditional approach to government relations," Russo says. "I spend a great deal of my time asking what we can do to help policymakers, developing strategies and implementing programs that leverage our company for the greater good." He sees his role as a facilitator on behalf of the company to develop productive public-private partnerships that benefit local communities, entire states and the nation.

"In the end," he is convinced, "We all win."

In 2009, Russo was new at his job, and one of his earliest efforts was to reach out to the administration in Washington, D.C., to introduce the newly formed GLOBALFOUNDRIES and ask what the company could do to partner with the government in mutually beneficial ways. Among many thoughts and suggestions expressed, there was one constant: help with education. The basic message was that the education system was failing large segments of the population, and while there were many examples of innovative programs being test-trialed in school districts here and cities there, there was no linkage.

"Unless we provide access to education for all, which could help them meet the workforce requirements to compete in the tech-based global economy, we won't succeed as a nation," Russo says. "I could see that isolated initiatives existed to address this, especially models of science, mathematics, engineering and technology education, but nobody was connecting

the dots. I knew we had to improve the situation so we could move to the next level – not just as a company or an industry, but as a nation.”

Because of all the attention GLOBALFOUNDRIES was garnering from government entities, various communities and the media, and all the institutions that wanted to work with GLOBALFOUNDRIES, Russo saw the possibilities.

“There was a window of opportunity to get people together in a way that would not normally be possible.”

At the suggestion of the administration in Washington, D.C., GLOBALFOUNDRIES decided to create a large, regional “laboratory” to test the most innovative practices in education today. The goal, says Russo, was “... to connect the dots between those practices and scale them, identifying and eliminating roadblocks in the current system, pre-K through higher education.”

He understood that GLOBALFOUNDRIES was in a unique position; it could lead the initiative to develop a pilot that could be used as a model to help change the educational system nationally.

So, with Russo doing the footwork, GLOBALFOUNDRIES reached out to the Capital Region’s Center for Economic Growth to facilitate the initiative, which encompasses 13 counties, 111 school districts and 345 schools. Russo also works closely with SUNY Chancellor Nancy Zimpher and SUNY Deputy Chancellor for Community Colleges and the Workforce Pipeline Johanna Duncan-Portier, considering how to create educational opportunities that benefit the whole state.

“It has been a pleasure to work with SUNY’s forward-thinking leadership. The chancellor fully understands the role of the SUNY system in the future economic success of New York state and is always



PHOTO: GARY SEARS

Mike Russo indulges his passion for cooking every chance he gets.

looking for ways to provide better access to education and leverage the entire SUNY system to create a workforce pipeline that will be required to drive the state’s future economy,” Russo says, adding, “It is also a pleasure to work with a company that takes corporate responsibility seriously.”

### Beyond Business

Taking responsibility seriously is a theme in Russo’s life – or lives, because he actually lives three of them simultaneously, all of

which demand honed organizational skills, gravity, levity and compassion. In addition to a 24/7 job that he says, “squeezes every neuron of every brain cell,” Russo also is devoted to his wife and three sons (ranging in age from 6 months to 34) and somehow still hosts “Cooking for Kids,” a fun, high-energy, informative cooking show that is a fundraiser to benefit charities that serve children.

The link between working hard for rewards and giving a lot back was



established early for Russo, a Ravena, N.Y., native who discovered a passion for food and cooking as a child, both in his own home and at Lou's Restaurant, on the main street of his hometown. Instead of planting himself at the counter for a Coke, he gravitated to the kitchen. Eventually, he worked for Lou's in every aspect of its business, from being a short-order cook to driving the coffee truck to work sites, from bartending to serving at banquets, from washing dishes to waiting tables.

Always industrious, the young Russo also collected bottles to return for their deposits, and solicited grocery lists from neighbors, did their shopping and often helped prepare meals afterwards – for a fee.

He also was a boxer in the basement of a fabled school gym in Albany where, he says, “There was no Spandex, just sweat.”

He graduated from high school ready for college, but wanted to save some money first, so, he kept working in

the food business.

“But I got derailed,” Russo says. “I got married and had two kids in two years, then found myself becoming a single parent. I needed money. I fixed roofs, painted and repaired houses, worked at the Port of Albany, and, when I realized I also needed health-care insurance and benefits, I took a job in the Owens Corning factory.” (Owens Corning is the world's largest manufacturer of fiberglass and related products.)

Aggressive, smart, farsighted and sensible, Russo didn't stay on the factory floor forever. He became the shop steward for the Glass, Molders, Pottery, Plastics & Allied Workers International Union – the oldest industrial union in the country. Inevitably, Russo rose through the ranks first to be president at the local level, and finally as an executive officer at the national level, an expert in organizational development, arbitration and negotiation.

“I've had lots of experience in organizational development,” he says. “I have spent a lot of time watching the U.S. lose jobs to overseas companies. There was a problem: companies didn't want to share information with workers, and so workers didn't understand the challenges their employers faced. Collectively, workers and companies needed to learn to better communicate and work together if they wanted to be globally competitive. In organized industrial environments, unions need to learn to be strategic assets to companies in order to stem the tide.”

Political activity was part of his job, so, for the union, Russo was involved in supporting candidates in federal elections who were sympathetic to the needs of the middle class. In that capacity, he became a close advisor to now-New York Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand.

“And that's the preamble to the story of how I got involved with GLOBALFOUNDRIES,” he says. “Kirsten Gillibrand was instrumental in facilitating discussions with local, state and federal officials about developing the huge infrastructure necessary to support GLOBALFOUNDRIES and the region, and as the director of operations for her congressional district, I led many of those discussions on her behalf. GLOBALFOUNDRIES reached out to me to see if I would lead its government relations activities in the U.S. right at the time when we had just completed our

transition to the senate office from the congressional office. While I loved working for, and with, Kirsten and her great team, we finally had settled in and the challenge of developing a new organization was coming to an end. When I was presented with that same challenge, on an even larger scale, to help create a new brand and culture and help lead an organization that could do so much good, it was evident that GLOBALFOUNDRIES was the right fit at the right time.”

**“The power of food is amazing.”**

– Michael Russo

Throughout, the professionally produced “Cooking for Kids” road show remained an intact centerpiece of Russo's life, but instead of leveraging political or corporate power, it's a forum where he calls on “the power of food.”

He says, “The power of food is amazing. You can use it to bring people together, to promote good health, to have fun, to entertain, for pleasure and adventure – and to support good causes.”

He also underlines the role of food in adult-child relationships, asserting that cooking is a great way to spend quality time with the children in your life and create memories for them that will last a lifetime.

“It is a way to learn measurements and simple math and just plain time to bond, Russo says. “Don't look at it as a chore that has to be done, but rather a chance to be as creative as possible in your preparation and presentation.

“I really believe that home is where the heart is, and the heart of every home is the kitchen. The kitchen should be a safe place, where you, children and anyone in your life are not only free to make mistakes but also are able to talk freely about anything.

I like to call my kitchen my 'safe zone,' where I and anyone cooking with me are free to burn food, break dishes and talk about anything on their mind, without fear of reprisal."

### Let's Do This!

Despite monumental vocational, avocational and interpersonal achievements, Russo yearned for a college degree.

"Yes, I had gotten off the traditional track," he says, "and a degree wasn't to advance my career, but for personal enrichment. I wanted to return to college. I wanted to enhance myself as a critical thinker. Besides, I am very competitive – around me, there were people who were formally educated, and I told myself, 'It's never too late to earn a college degree; let's do this!'"

So, drawn by the flexibility of the degree programs and the option for prior-learning

assessment for academic credits, Russo enrolled at SUNY Empire State College.

"It's a lot easier to take a structured class, get assignments and complete them than it is to articulate your career history as college-level learning through a prior learning assessment," he says. "While I have good writing skills, articulating your knowledge in an organized fashion, which corresponds to a college course or

### "Life's a pie ... "

– Michael Russo

curriculum, was very challenging. As an adult, you don't know what you know. Writing the PLA promotes self-worth and puts things in perspective. It's a lot of work, and there are a lot of rewards."

It took Russo nearly 20 years to fulfill the degree requirements and graduate from the Northeast Center.

"I work seven days a week, long hours, and have always found myself in demanding, leadership positions," he says. "I was kidnapped once in Peru; I have built two houses for myself, including one on Saratoga Lake, on the property my grandfather bought in the '40s (where Rita Hayworth used to summer and had frequent guests including Bing Crosby, James Cagney, Lucille Ball and Elizabeth Arden); I was owed the rights to the life story of Jimmy Scott, the American jazz vocalist, and worked on the production of a movie about his life; I boxed at places like Sing Sing; I owned my own food-catering business and small home-repair business; worked part time as a longshoreman; and, of course, my main passion ... hosting my national cooking show. It has been a crazy life ... so, it took me a long time to complete my bachelor's degree."

Russo is aware that the bells and whistles of his double-time daily existence are extraordinary, but there's not an activity, not a minute of it, not a commitment it demands that he would relinquish.

"I guess I could sleep more," he admits. "But I am not burned out, because I have balance in my life. I'm up in the middle of the night with a scratch pad, but, when you think about it, life's a pie; you have a slice of professional life, social life, family life, aspiration, intellectual life, giving back, and time to recharge your batteries. Burn-out happens when you don't feel fulfilled in life, not because you work too hard."

He says a day doesn't go by that he isn't grateful for the opportunities and tools he's been given, and the part he has played on some great teams throughout his work life, and, most importantly, with his home team: his wife, Fiorella, new son, Gianluca, and his two older sons, Michael and Adam.

"The balance allows you to be productive in all aspects, and to appreciate every day, whether you're cooking, talking to a congressman or searching inward to understand your gifts and how you can share them." ○

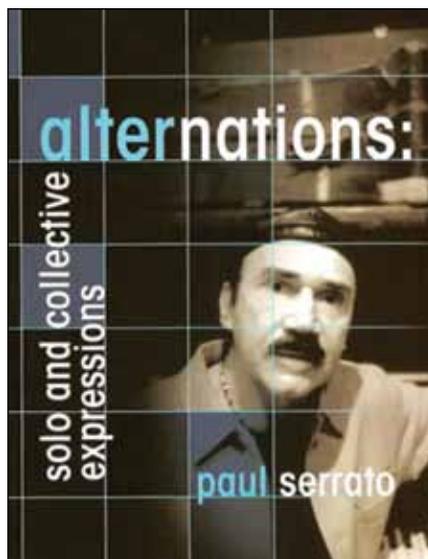


PHOTO: GARY SEARS

Mike Russo pictured with some of the children he's teaching about cooking on the set of his "Cooking for Kids" road show.

# Portfolio

## MUSIC



### Musician's Style Called Intimate and Revealing

**Paul Serrato '95  
Metropolitan Center**

Sensuous, playful, sophisticated and raw sounds blend in the jazz presented on "alternations," the latest CD spotlighting pianist and composer Paul Serrato, who earned a B.S. in The Arts. Tracks range from his rollicking "Waltzing on the Hudson" and the somber "Meltdown" to his homage to flamenco, "Spanish Flame." He brings fresh improvisational buoyancy to the genre, at the same time sparking an adventurous dialogue between musician and listener.

Distinctive, fascinating and haunting, Serrato's work has been called both "intimate" and "revealing" by critics. The Omaha, Neb., native, who honed his craft in New York City, has contributed music to off-Broadway plays and provided music for the acclaimed documentary by award-winning writer/producer/director Craig B. Highberger, "Jack Mitchell: My Life is Black and White." Serrato has assembled a world-class band with which he performs and records regularly in the U.S. and abroad.

## ART



### Beach Glass and Found Objects Given New Life

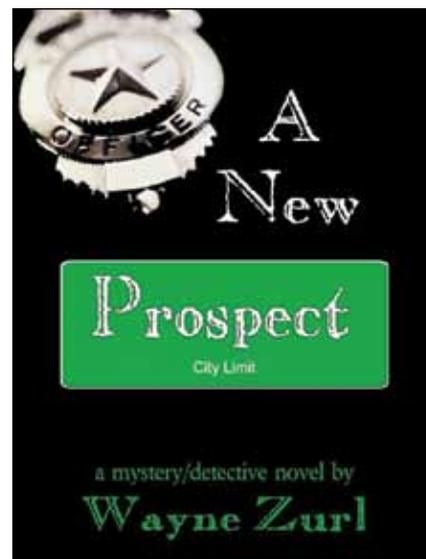
**Timothy Cosgriff '93  
Genesee Valley Center**

Beach glass and found-object artwork are centerpieces of constructions by Timothy Cosgriff, assistant to the dean at the Genesee Valley Center and a graduate of the center with a B.S. in Business, Management and Economics.

His work often is inspired by literature or cultural symbols, and has included candlesticks, a menorah, lapel pins and windows. He has developed techniques involving water, heat and shattering the material to process, enhance and fuse the glass and other objects, creating complex forms, nuanced hues and luminous finishes.

In addition, Cosgriff is an accomplished photographer who works in several formats – film and digital – most recently using a Rocket Sprocket camera that shoots panoramic images using the full sheet of film and three cells of film to make one image; no viewfinder is used. He also has a background in culinary arts.

## BOOKS



### Mystery Novel Earns 2011 Indie Book Award

**Wayne Zurl '76  
Long Island Center**

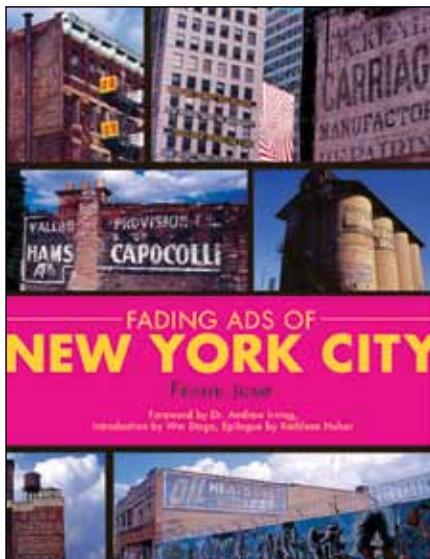
The newest work in the mystery series created by Wayne Zurl is titled "A New Prospect." Zurl, who holds an associate degree in Social Theory, Social Structure and Change, developed the series around the fictional (but very believable) character of a police officer named Sam Jenkins. Jenkins is a retired New York City crime fighter who finds ample opportunity to use his skills as a champion for true justice.

The full-length novel was named best mystery at the 2011 Indie Book Awards by the Independent Publishing Professionals Group.

The real-life Zurl passed up a career in computers, which he viewed as a "fad." He served in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War, and then spent 20 years with the Suffolk County Police Department on Long Island, where he was a section commander supervising investigators. Like his creation, Sam Jenkins, Zurl ultimately left New York to live in the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains.

# Portfolio

## PHOTOGRAPHY



### Faded Ads Become a Metaphor for Survival

**Frank Jump '98**  
**Metropolitan Center**

Frank Jump has been recognized with a Visual AIDS Vanguard Award for his Fading Ads Campaign, in which he photographed fading billboard ads on brick facades around New York City, work he captured in his book, "Fading Ads of New York City" (The History Press).

After being diagnosed with HIV/AIDS in 1987, when the disease was considered a death penalty, Jump says the transitory nature of the ads became a metaphor for survival. In 1995, he decided to finish college, studying music, theater and film at the Metropolitan Center.

"When I first encountered the vintage sign Omega Oil in Harlem, a gong went off in my head. I realized then that this was to be my documentary photo project for a class I was taking with (mentor) Mel Rosenthal." The award recognizes those who reinforce the culture, history and mission of Visual AIDS, which works to increase public awareness of the disease through the visual arts.

## ART



### Titanic Story Inspires Mixed-Media Artist

**Christine Jewell '03**  
**School for Graduate Studies**

Christine Jewell's latest multimedia artwork, including her "Across the Atlantic," was inspired by a juried exhibit at the Fairfield Public Library, in conjunction with its "One Book/One Town" selection, "The Watch That Ends the Night."

"This book, in poetry form, told the story of the Titanic from different viewpoints," Jewell explains. "It was fascinating and inspiring."

All of the photographs she used in "Across the Atlantic" are scanned from the originals and include her parents and ancestors from both sides of her family.

Jewell integrates history, spirituality and nature into her mixed-media work that includes bookmaking, fiber arts and collage. She earned her B.F.A. at Purchase School of Art and Design.

"This new work sparked a whole series of mixed-media work" she says, which has been shown throughout her home state of Connecticut.

## BOOKS



### Book Explores Young Jews in Nazi Germany

**Eric Brothers '86**  
**Metropolitan Center**

Eric Brothers, who works by day as an advertising copy writer and is the author of more than 200 published articles, essays, reviews and blog posts, has published "Berlin Ghetto: Herbert Baum and the Anti-Fascist Resistance" (The History Press, October 2012). Brothers tapped oral and written testimony of survivors, friends and relatives to tell the story of Herbert Baum and the anti-fascism movement in which Baum was a pivotal figure. Elie Wiesel, Jewish-American author, Holocaust survivor and Nobel Laureate, wrote the foreword.

According to Tom Grunfeld, his mentor at the Metropolitan Center, Brothers began writing the book while at the college. The book tells the story of a group of young Jewish people engaged in intellectual exploration, friendships and romances, dangerous and illegal political action and anti-fascist resistance during one of the most anti-Semitic regimes in history, Nazi Germany.



PHOTO: STOCKSTUDIOSPHOTOGRAPHY.COM

## Robert B. Carey

By Karen Nerney

**Education:** Bachelor of Arts, Wesleyan University; Master of Divinity, Union Theological Seminary and Ph.D. in American history, Columbia University.

**What he does:** Professor/mentor at the Metropolitan Center in Manhattan.

**Academic interests:** American history, history of religions, the ancient world, the theory of evolution, critical reading.

**Defining moment:** An internship while at seminary in the early '60s landed him at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Ga., where the Civil Rights movement took root. He worked alongside Drs. Martin Luther King Jr. and Sr., in a congregation whose members remembered segregation and the Klan. "Seeing history unfold right in front of you ... it's still vivid in my mind."

**Why history:** "The thing that fascinates me about history is, how does this stuff work? What can we learn from it?"

**When in history he'd like to spend time:** "I've been gripped by the centrality of the Civil War as defining who we are."

**Example of a course he developed:** Food in history: Why is the pizza red? "It's a great way to get students to get into what causes historical change. It's endlessly fascinating."

**Another teaching passion:** Critical reading. "It's work of extraordinary cultural importance. The more you do it, the more wired you become for it."

**Historical figures he'd like to meet:** "My two aces are Abraham Lincoln and Charles Darwin."

**What he'd ask them:** "How did you manage to see as clearly as you did, what was the trick there? And, did that burden you?"

**Little-known fact:** He sang for 20 years in the choir at the Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine in New York City.

**Recent excursion:** In May, he completed his seventh Five Boro Bike Tour, a 42-mile trek through the city that draws more than 30,000 bicyclists. "It's a monster ride," he says with a smile.

**Best advice/tip ever got:** Find somebody to read with to hone critical-reading skills. "You'll feel comfortable unpacking a 900-page book and know you've read the essence of it."

**On the homefront:** He and wife, Patricia, married 47 years, have two adult children.

# Alumni and Student COMMUNITY

## Center for Distance Learning

**Justin R. Bourgeois '12** was accepted into the Ph.D. program at Albany Medical College in their Center for Neuropharmacology and Neuroscience. Advances in understanding nervous system function, dysfunction and treatment have created a need for more scientists, and this program will train researchers in this area.

**Greg Chako '09** is enrolled at the Eastman School of Music where he is working toward his Doctor of Musical Arts in Jazz and Contemporary Media, with a minor/certificate in ethnomusicology. Chako recently returned to the U.S. after living many years in Asia.

**Richard Locker**, a current student, performed at Carnegie Hall with pianist Hiroko Sasaki. A cellist, he has a stellar reputation in the orchestral arena. The musicians performed selections by Beethoven, Brahms and Debussy.

**Peter W. Meade '12**, a retired assistant chief fire marshal for Fire and Rescue Services for the Nassau County Fire Marshal's Office, was honored by the Kidney & Urology Foundation of America at its inaugural Top 25 Champions for a Cure reception benefit. The awards reception honored 25 advocates who have been committed to education, afflicted by or dedicated to finding a cure for prostate cancer and/or kidney disease. He is employed part time by Jacobs Global Buildings North America as a technical specialist. He has been a public fire safety education specialist for the Nassau County Fire Service Academy since 1985. Meade earned a Bachelor of Science in Community and Human Services, with a concentration in emergency management, at Empire State College.

**Iman Drammeh Nur '09** works and lives by a mantra that has taken her halfway around the world and back to the Bronx again, according to a profile of her in the Queens Chronicle. "If history happens and no one is there to tell it, it never happened," says Nur, 52, who was born in the Bronx, just a few miles from her current home in Co-op City. Nur is an artist by trade and passion and works in all manner of media, from sculpture to Arabic calligraphy. She honed her skills at the High School of Music and Art, and went on to attend Pratt Institute and Empire State College, where she received her bachelor's degree in Cultural Studies.

Current student **Joseph Putignano** plays Crystal Man in Cirque du Soleil's "Totem." Like other Cirque productions, "Totem" combines acrobatics, athletics, music and costumes for a show that is ever-evolving. He previously performed at the Metropolitan Opera and on Broadway in New York.

**Vincent Smith '88**, promoted from deputy chief, is the first Wayland, Mass. resident to become the Wayland Fire Department's chief in more than 30 years. Smith joined the department in 1978 and rose through the ranks while completing numerous certifications, including chief fire officer management training, fire inspector and emergency medical technician. He earned a bachelor's degree, with a concentration in fire administration, from Empire State College, as well as a master's degree in public administration from Framingham State University. One of Smith's most notable achievements before becoming chief was the introduction of new, advanced life-support services in 2009. He worked closely with members of the community on the Advanced Life Support Committee to see the initiative through to implementation.

**Wendy Stevens '11** has been appointed as a systems programmer/analyst for Herkimer County Community College. She also will provide technical assistance to computer users. She was formerly employed by the HCCC Faculty-Student Association as a bookstore operations assistant. She earned her associate degree in advertising design and production from Mohawk Valley Community College and earned her bachelor's degree, with a concentration in media arts, from Empire State College.

**Denise Szalkowski '02, '07**, assistant to the president of SUNY Fredonia, was recognized, along with other colleagues, with a President's Award for Excellence. As assistant to the president, Szalkowski is regarded as a consummate professional who – drawing upon strong organizational, technical and interpersonal skills – handles the task of managing the fast-paced, demanding Office of the President, according to an article in the Dunkirk Observer. Prior to joining the president's office in 2003, she served as a secretary in the office of the vice president for administration and as a secretary for human resources from 1986 to 1999. Szalkowski earned an associate degree in interdisciplinary studies as well as bachelor's degree, with a concentration in human resources management, from Empire State College.

## Central New York Center

**Sarah Barnard** has joined Cayuga/Seneca Community Action Agency, Inc. as its support services director. Before coming to the agency, Barnard worked as a program coordinator at Tompkins Community Action for housing services for low-income residents. She also coordinated the Family



**Michael Bresnahan**

## Student Named Chief of Staff for N.Y. Army National Guard

New York Army National Guard Colonel Michael Bresnahan, a Saratoga Springs resident and Iraq War veteran, has been named as the next chief of staff of this 10,500-member group. Bresnahan is pursuing a Master of Arts in Labor Policy Studies at Empire State College.

As chief of staff, he will oversee its day-to-day operations, under the direction of Major General

Patrick Murphy, the adjutant general of New York and commander of the New York Army National Guard.

Bresnahan has served as the J-6, or chief of communications and signal, for the Guard.

A career Army National Guard officer, Bresnahan earned his commission from Hofstra University ROTC in 1984 as a signal officer. He has served as a platoon leader and commanded at the company and battalion level. He served as chief of staff of the 53rd Troop Command and as director of domestic operations and military personnel for the New York Army National Guard.

He deployed to Mosul, Iraq from May 2010 to July 2011, where he served as an advisor to the Iraqi army and the team chief of a military transition team.

Prior to enrolling at Empire State College, Bresnahan earned a bachelor's degree from Excelsior College and a Master of Strategic Studies from the U.S. Army War College. He also has attended the Army Command and General Staff College and a number of military schools.

His awards include the Bronze Star Medal, the Army Meritorious Service Medal, the Army Commendation Medal, the Army Achievement Medal, the Army Reserve Component Achievement Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, the Iraq Campaign Medal and Global War on Terrorism Service Medal.

Development Roundtable and facilitated a New York State Community Action Association-sponsored training held in Hamilton.

Barnard is a 2008 graduate of Tompkins Cortland Community College and holds a family development credential through the University of Connecticut. She is currently pursuing a bachelor's degree in Community and Human Services, with a minor in program administration and development, at Empire State College.

**Carmela D'Agostino '89** was one of four individuals recognized by the Syracuse City School District Educational Foundation for tirelessly dedicating themselves to educating and guiding young children through young adults in the city of Syracuse. D'Agostino, a pre-K teacher at Grant Middle School, was named elementary teacher of the year. Having come to the United States, from Naples, Italy,

at age 19, she worked with PEACE Inc. Head Start which inspired her career path. Following two years with Onondaga Community College's Early Education Program and a Bachelor of Arts from Empire State College, she earned a master's degree in literacy education and another in elementary education – both from State University College at Oswego.

**Ann Rushlo '07** has been appointed to the Association of Leadership Professionals Board of Directors. She will serve a two-year term for the national organization. The mission of ALP is to advance the effectiveness of leadership professionals by recognizing excellence, fostering innovation, sharing best practices and building a national network. The 2-year-old membership organization supports community leadership programs around the country. Rushlo has been at the helm of the Leadership Mohawk Valley since 2008. She earned her

bachelor's degree from Empire State College and serves as immediate past chairwoman of the board of the Rome Area Chamber of Commerce.

**Audrey Terry '12** recently took her third trip to Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua, to deliver a wheelchair-accessible van filled with supplies to the community. This time she focused on the grand task of helping to build a new school, Los Pepitos, to serve those with special needs and their families by providing education and therapies. Leading up to this trip, Terry worked to secure donations of supplies and then drove the nearly 4,400 mile trip to Nicaragua through hazardous terrain to reach Puerto Cabezas.

## Genesee Valley Center

**Joanne Allen '00** was elected as vice president of the board of directors for the Creative Writers of the Southern Tier. Also, as part of the Allegany Arts Association, Allen organized a poetry slam contest at the David Howe Library. Writers of free verse, song lyrics, haiku and other poetic offerings competed.

**Peter M. Knittle '02, '05**, financial advisor at ESL Investment Services, LLC, was named to the list of Top 50 investment advisors by Bank Investment Consultant magazine. The ranking recognizes advisors who have the highest average production across the industry. In recognition of this award, the honorees were profiled in the December 2011 issue of Bank Investment Consultant magazine. Knittle began his career as a teller with ESL Federal Credit Union in 2001, and then moved into the roles of licensed banker, assistant branch manager and branch manager at the credit union's Brockport office. He assumed his current role in 2008. Prior to his employment at ESL, Knittle held the position of financial services representative at M & T Bank/Securities.

**Petra Page-Mann** parlayed her interest in sustainable agriculture into a hands-on workshop on seeds at Wood Library. Whether a participant is experienced or new to gardening, she told MPNnow.com, the workshop would be fun and informational. Page-Mann is a full-time student at the college earning a bachelor's degree, with a concentration in sustainable agriculture.

**Lakeisha Smith '10** has been working to raise awareness for child sexual abuse. In 2009 and 2011, she presented at the college's Student Academic Conference and told her very personal story. In 2010, she completed an autobiographical documentary on child abuse which has aired locally on cable access channels. She also has been doing local interviews and volunteering with Bivona Child Advocacy Center, [www.bcac.org](http://www.bcac.org), to raise awareness.

**Mary Lou Swicklik '86** joined a group of professional artist friends from the Irondequoit area to form the Artemis Art Group, which had its first exhibit, "Sands of Time," at A Different Path Gallery in Brockport. Swicklik, who was a member of the founding faculty at Monroe Community College, where she was a professor of chemistry, retired after 20 years and earned a bachelor's degree in The Arts from Empire State College, where her mentor was Kurt Feuerherm. Swicklik says her paintings and collages, in which she seeks a sense of movement, "turn into puzzles which are solved through redesign, reinterpretation, color or shape."

**Bernice Yunker '76**, a Batavia Society of Artists member of more than 50 years, won Best of Show at the organization's spring show for her watercolor, "Quiet Retreat."

## Hudson Valley Center

**Michael J. DiTullo '89** joined the Rockland Economic Development Corporation as its new president and CEO. Chosen from a pool of more than 90 candidates, DiTullo is responsible for providing leadership for the organization by developing a focused strategy consistent with REDC's mission to enhance Rockland County's economic vitality. This strategy encourages and facilitates regional, national and international businesses to locate, remain and grow in the county. Prior to joining the REDC, DiTullo was president and CEO of Mid-Hudson Pattern for Progress and the Orange County Partnership, respectively. He also was recently elected president of the Empire State College Alumni Student Federation Board of Governors.

**Carlos Fittante '05**, who specializes in Balinese and baroque dance styles and performs as a guest artist in baroque opera, is a graduate of the School of American Ballet. He performed with the Balam Dance Theatre, a nonprofit, professional dance company that launched its 2012 season at the Lenoia Public Library, N.J. The company fuses ballet, modern and diverse cultural styles with Balinese theater. A certified yoga teacher, he also has a B.A. in dance from Empire State College, and is a guest lecturer at Queens College.

## Long Island Center

**Joanne de Simone '07**, had a dramatic reading of her award-winning play, "Judy's Dead," performed as part of a Women's History Month program at the Dwyer Cultural Center in New York. The play won first prize in the 79th Annual Writer's Digest Stage Play Competition.

**Juanita Torrence-Thompson '83** did seven readings of poetry recently in both New York and Massachusetts. She read from her 2012 book, "Talking with Stanley Kunitz," and Pushcart-nominated poems from her sixth book, "Breath-Life."

**Lynn Kay Winters '93** was profiled in the Shelter Island Reporter. Winters, who comes from a long line of Shelter Island natives, was working as a receptionist in a physician's office before she earned her bachelor's degree from Empire State College, at the urging of her supervisor. She was promoted to a management position and went on for an MBA in medical group management at St. Thomas University.

## Metropolitan Center

**Constance Lynn D'Alessio**, a student, was awarded a scholarship by World of Women (WOW) in Staten Island at a gala celebrating Women in History Month. She was awarded the scholarship along with another adult woman who had returned to school.

### Decades of Achievement Honored



PHOTO: MARTY HEITNER

The Long Island Center honored four distinguished alumni at its 40th anniversary celebration, one from each decade. Pictured from left to right are: Marian Conway '01, '04, Marc Herbst '86, Dean Michael Spitzer, President Alan Davis, Barbara O'Connell '76 and Maureen Dillon '98.



PHOTO: PROVIDED

## Alumnus Publishes Story in The Sunday New York Times

Damian Van Denburgh, Metropolitan Center, had an article published in the Modern Love section of the Sunday New York Times earlier this year. Van Denburgh's article, "The Spell of My Father's Wedding Band," explored the symbolism of his father's gift of his wedding band to his son after a period of the elder man's infidelity.

His father, who later reconciled with his wife after he was diagnosed with cancer, gave

### Damian Van Denburgh '10

the ring to his son during a time he was "feeling relatively free about his life," and engaging in an extramarital affair that later ended.

Van Denburgh uses the symbolism of the ring to explore his and his peers' feelings about the commitment of marriage. He talks about a period of time when he was still single, but felt compelled to wear the ring that his father had discarded. "She and I were talking about him one afternoon . . ." Van Denburgh writes of his mother, and he spontaneously offered her the ring.

Van Denburgh had earlier decided not to wear it for his own nuptials.

"If he didn't want it, I don't want it, either," she said, suddenly glaring at me. And with that, our gentle reminiscence snapped shut."

Van Denburgh, who received a New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship in Nonfiction in 2011, also was the recipient of the Beverly Jablons '77 Scholarship. During a difficult time juggling competing demands while earning his degree, Jablons was a constant source of encouragement to him, says Betsy Boland, coordinator of stewardship and donor relations for the college.

"He expressed to her that he so often wanted to give up on his dream of becoming a writer, but that her encouragement kept him trying, as painfully disappointing as it could be at times (lots of rejections before you score)," says Boland.

"Now he's had his first publication in The New York Times. What a fantastic example of the tremendous boost scholarship support can have on students, both financially and to their confidence and desire to persevere."

Van Denburgh's story can be found at:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/12/fashion/a-gold-band-carries-baggage.html?ref=fashion>

**Rodney Holman '94** has expanded and rereleased his book "The Universal Solvent," which was featured in Connections, fall 2010. It is now a full book of poetry. Holman also recorded an audio essay, "Kavi Means Poet," on National Public Radio's "Real People, Real Stories" program.

**Rafa Maciejak '04** has been hired as manager of residential sales at Rose Associates, a New York-based, full-service real estate firm. Maciejak will be responsible for overseeing the sponsor apartments in the Rose portfolio, as well as managing the sales staff at the Oro condominium. Prior to joining Rose Associates, he acted as sales director at the Argyle condominium in Park Slope and at Court Street Lofts in Carroll Gardens, and was part of the sales team for the Two Trees conversion of the Sweeney building in Dumbo.

**George Malave '90** is editing a book titled "Migratory Dreams: A Puerto Rican Journey," which contains contemporary Latino poetry and images. In addition, Ben Fernandez '87, New York Times photographer, and Charles Biasiny-Rivera '90, co-founder and artistic director/editor for En Foco, Inc., are contributing their artwork.

**Carly Mayo '08** performed in the New Voices Cabaret at the Society Hill Playhouse in the spring. The cabaret show featured three performers from Philadelphia and New York City. Mayo performed in "Hairspray" at the Fulton Theatre, "Respect" at both the Society Hill Playhouse and the national tour, "Camelot," "Grease" and "A Chorus Line" at the Shawnee Playhouse, and "Olive," "All Shook Up" and "Showboat" at the Media Theatre.

**Walter Dean Myers '84**, a children's book author, is one of six people honored with a new award created by New York City Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg to honor living writers whose work and lives have been informed by New York City. The awards are a way of highlighting the city's place as home to the publishing industry and an inspiration to authors. The honorees, who were feted at an evening ceremony at Gracie Mansion, include Paul Auster for fiction, Roz Chast for humor, Robert A. Caro for nonfiction, Marie Ponsot for poetry, Robert Silvers for literary life and Walter Dean Myers for children's literature.

**Viki Goldberg '75** was the brains behind "Eat and Grow Healthy," a program for kids in Michigan. The program was held at the Loutit District Library in downtown Grand Haven and featured a garden fest, with kids

and adults "at play with soil, worms and whole fruits and veggies." She and her writing partner, Wendy Schweifler, have written a book, "BOD-E-NOMICS," which urges people to treat their bodies as if they were its CEO.

## Marking Black History Month at the Metropolitan Center

**Josephine Quinones '91** celebrated her 85th birthday with her children at the American Crossword Puzzle Tournament. She was one of some 700 participants. Will Shortz, tournament creator, commented that the youngest participant was a 15 year old from California and Josephine may be the oldest.

**Guy Sanfilippo '89** was appointed to the newly created position of director of sales engineering by Data Storage Corp., a cloud storage and cloud computing company focusing on data protection and business continuity solutions. Sanfilippo earned his B.S., with a concentration in business management, from the college, as well as a degree in computer science from Pace University. He has served on the boards of the United Way of Tri-State, as well as the American Federation of Musicians and Employer's Pension Fund.



PHOTO: MARTY HEITNER

In celebration of Black History Month, the college honored (from left) retired Metropolitan Center Dean Nancy G. Bunch, noted jazz musician Kenny Barron '78 and retired mentor Dorothy C. Burnham.

## Niagara Frontier Center

**Wilma Fleming '95** has published her children's story, "Backward Bryan Buzzworth," in "The Story Shop: Stories and Poems for Sharing," a collection of humorous stories and poems for children authored by the members of the Children's Authors Team, whose effort and fiction-writing talents have supported causes for young children.

**Helga Hulse '96**, who this year marked her 90th birthday, has begun teaching music at the Carolina Academy of Music, in Aiken, N.Y., a community she moved to so that she may be near her children and grandchildren after 38 years in her Jamestown, N.Y. home. She first began playing the piano at age 3 and turned to teaching while attending the University of Southern California. Hulse also has held positions as a church pianist, music director

and accompanist on concert tours as well as playing at social events such as weddings, funerals, baptisms and private parties.

The University at Buffalo has appointed **John Lambert '07** to temporarily head its division of athletics. Lambert, formerly the university's senior associate athletic director, was appointed as interim athletic director. Lambert does not plan to seek the job on a permanent basis, but will assist UB President Satish Tripathi in "whatever role I can," as a national search is undertaken for a permanent hire. An Ontario native, Lambert is a graduate of Niagara College, Canada. He also holds a B.S., with a concentration in business management, from Empire State College, and is a graduate of the Sports Management Institute Executive Training Program.

A legislative resolution was issued honoring **Nechama (Nechelle) Stolzenberg '11**, director of the Yeled v'Yalda WIC Program, upon the occasion of her recognition by Brooklyn Housing and Family Services for extraordinary leadership and community services. She has been with the nonprofit service agency's Early Childhood Center, whose mission it is to serve the whole child and family, since 2000. Earlier in her career, she helped establish the Ezra Medical Center.

## International Programs Graduation



PHOTO: PROVIDED

The 2012 class from the college's program in Thessaloniki, Greece, celebrates its commencement.

## Northeast Center

**Mary Shearill Jones '87** was profiled in the Faces of Faith series in the Albany Times Union newspaper. She came to Albany in 1961, and held a number of jobs before retiring from the Office of Child and Family Services, where she worked following a stint in the state budget office under then-Gov. Hugh Carey. A deaconess in her church, she also has been Sunday school superintendent, a trustee and financial secretary. She was on the board of the Capital Area Council of Churches and volunteers with the tennis program 15-Love, that reaches out to young urban school children.

**Sadie Spada** was appointed chief executive officer of the Adirondack Arc. Spada has been with the nonprofit since 1976, when the agency was in its infancy. She has served in various roles over the years, most recently as senior associate executive director for administrative services. She earned her degree in human resource management at North Country Community College and is studying business administration with Empire State College. She also is certified as a senior professional in human resources, and has held leadership roles as president of HR-PRO, a statewide organization of human resources professionals in the field of human services, and as secretary of the New York State Chapter of the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.

*In Memoriam:* **Robert Paul O'Brien '81** passed away earlier this year. O'Brien was an associate architect for the state of New York.

## School for Graduate Studies

**Gabriela Ackert '06 (HVC), '09**, a Spanish teacher at the C.J. Hooker Middle School in the Goshen Central School District, was awarded the New York State Association for Computers and Technologies in Education Lee H. Bryant Outstanding State Teacher Award. Ackert was nominated for the award by her teaching colleagues, who noted her use of Edmodo, YouTube, iLife, Moodle and a variety of Web 2.0 applications on her teacher website.

**Thomas Dolan '07**, a town councilman from Coeymans, N.Y., plans to run for state senate



PHOTO: PROVIDED

**Alidea Karakushi '11**

## Helping the Environment by Banning Plastic Bags

In the Oscar-winning movie, "American Beauty," a floating plastic bag was used as a metaphor for the beauty and fragility of life. Yet, in one Eastern European country, plastic bags are *non grata* after a campaign waged by a group including alumna Alidea Karakushi.

Karakushi, who received her degree last fall through the college's International Programs location in Albania, has been actively engaged in securing a ban on the use of plastic bags in that country, and in March the effort succeeded.

Karakushi is a board member of Korpusi Vulinetareven Shquipta (the Volunteer Corps of Albania), which has been working toward cleaning up beaches, streams, lakeshores and other sites contaminated by trash.

With the new ban in place, all food products, such as bread, cheese, meat, butter, sausages and everything else that has direct contact with the package, will be sold in paper bags.

The National Food Authority is waging a public awareness campaign to make citizens aware of the new regulations.

"During the inspections, we noted that some cities have replaced the plastic bags with certified organic paper, but in Tirana, where there are a great number of citizens and businesses, this was seen on a much smaller scale. On the other hand, we need civil awareness for this type of packaging, which should be used not only for bread, but for all food products," said Manjola Vraja, NFA food inspector.

Besides certifying the packaging, the NFA emphasizes that it is necessary to have labels in Albanian, with all food ingredients specified, together with the country of origin, and the expiration date.

Eric Zencey, Karakushi's mentor, says, "Alidea took Ecological Economics: Principles and Policies with me. The final assignment in the study was to prepare a position paper on an environmental topic of interest, using the concepts learned in the course to make a case for a new or improved policy. Alidea chose to write a policy memo calling for the banning of plastic bags as a contributor to litter and trash and as an environmental hazard (they harm aquatic life, sea turtles in particular, since in the water the turtles mistake them for jellyfish)."

After her group's success, Karakushi wrote to Zencey, "I'm very happy that finally the Albanian government approved the law banning plastic bags from circulation. We are very glad to have influenced this decision. So thank you, professor, for your help, as well! Our movement was embraced by intellectuals, students, the U.S. embassy here, and media, and we acted on many plans to succeed, but there is still a lot to be done!"

in the newly organized 46th Senate District. Dolan told the Ravena News-Herald that he has received the endorsement of the Albany County Democratic Candidate Review Committee. Dolan has 20 years of experience on various boards in the town and county. He holds an English degree from SUNY Albany and a master's degree in social policy from the college. He is employed as a Cornell Cooperative Extension administrator.

**Doreen Guma '01 (CDL), '03** has launched a new website dedicated to helping people in their quest for improved quality of life and happiness. She says she was inspired by Connections and reading about her fellow graduates and how they have reshaped their lives and "are doing such wonderful things." Her goal is simply to help one million people. For more information: [www.timetoplay.com](http://www.timetoplay.com).

**Penny Jennings, Ph.D. '03, '06**, executive director of A.C.T., Inc.: Adults Caring for Teens, recently received the Dennis J. Fleming Award for demonstrating a long-term concern for, and involvement in, enhancing the quality of life for children and their families in Rockland County.

**Patrick Johnson '08**, a warden of the Chautauqua County Jail, presented a lecture, "This Place is Crazy: Mental Health Problems in County Jails," as part of a lecture series sponsored by the Criminal Justice Student Club at SUNY Fredonia.

**Karen Macier '00** has accepted a new position as director of program development at East Hill Family Medical. She had previously served as chief development officer at Tompkins Cortland Community College.

**Janet Verneuille '11**, who counts more than 20 years of experience in the banking industry, has been appointed executive vice president and chief financial officer with Empire National Bank. She earned a Bachelor of Business Administration from Hostra University, is a graduate of the Stonier Graduate School of Banking and has worked for the former European American Bank, KPMG and Bridgehampton National Bank. ○

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### Genesee Valley Center Artists Share Their Work



Faculty member Adele Anderson (right) meets guests Kathleen '12 and Conrad York at the GVC alumni student art show at the Memorial Art Gallery in Rochester.

PHOTO: JEFFREY MILLS

### Solar Car Wins Trophy in National Competition



Charles Dazzo '02, Metropolitan Center (far right), whose Tottenville High School (Staten Island) team came in second in the U.S. Solar Cup Challenge in Texas, meets with Mayor Michael Bloomberg at City Hall with their four-foot trophy. Dazzo is pictured with his winning team.

PHOTO: PROVIDED



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## Game-Changing Institution



Our college was founded to be a game changer back in the early 1970s. We were conceived to be the SUNY alternative for attaining a college degree and have been innovative educators since our inception. After 40 years of highly creative work, we are seeing a resurgence of interest in the way we do our work and are beginning to achieve the recognition we so richly deserve.

Most every college receives acknowledgment of one sort or another, but we have been lauded this year with accolades by many in higher education. Former President Alan Davis, Nan Travers, director of our Office of Collegewide Academic Review, and I recently wrote a chapter for the book “Game Changers,” published by EDUCAUSE, a nonprofit leader in the use of technology to advance higher education. In it we highlight the innovative and diverse ways the college is using emerging technologies and alternative approaches to mentoring and learning.

Dr. Diana Oblinger, president of EDUCAUSE, was awarded an honorary degree from the State University of New York this June and spoke at our Center for Distance Learning graduation. She’s a visionary who has brought attention to technological innovation in teaching and learning, and our association with her and the EDUCAUSE organization has helped raise the college’s profile.

Additionally, internationally renowned author, philosopher and educator Dr. Michael Peters, was awarded an

honorary degree at our Metropolitan Center graduation. His scholarly writings have shaped and influenced alternative methods of teaching and learning throughout the world. In a webcasted session led by the our College Professor of Adult Learning and Mentoring Alan Mandell, Peters shared and embraced the values of globalization for our students through open and digital connections.

And we’re not just talking about the principles of adult learning or using emerging technologies, we’re preparing the next generation of adult educators. The college now offers a Master of Arts in Adult Learning and a Master of Arts in Learning and Emerging Technologies, which will engage our learners in researching and exploring emerging online technologies. Thus, we continue to be on the cutting edge of emergent teaching and learning initiatives.

Our impressive alumni continue to lead, not only in their professional disciplines, but also as role models, as they share their experiences with our learners by speaking at our graduations. This past June, three of our alums spoke at graduation ceremonies – Carol Evans ’77, president and chief executive officer of Working Mother Media, at our Hudson Valley Center ceremony; Kimberly Backey ’08, director of the USDA’s Child and Adult Care Food Program, at the Niagara Frontier Center graduation; and Mike Russo ’10, director of government relations for GLOBALFOUNDRIES, at our Northeast Center graduation.

Our faculty, staff and professionals continue to receive accolades from SUNY, and a variety of national and international organizations. They are active leaders, not only in their fields of expertise, but in their communities, thus adding to the college’s prominence.

Yet, I believe the most important reason we remain innovative is our students, who themselves are the game changers. The learners of today want and need new and innovative ways of obtaining a college degree. Many bring with them knowledge and experience we are able to credit as college-level learning. Empire State College has earned a national reputation as a leader in prior learning assessment for experiential learning and has put forward a proposal to SUNY to be the lead institution for recognition of experiential and academic learning. Our proposal is called “SUNY REAL.”

Empire State College is changing the game of higher education by insisting on learner-engaged mentoring that’s enhanced by technological delivery; we’re refreshing, reinventing and redrawing the boundaries of learning, all the while remaining true to our mission to “... use innovative, alternative and flexible approaches to higher education that transform people ...” That’s the very definition of “game changer.”

  
Acting President

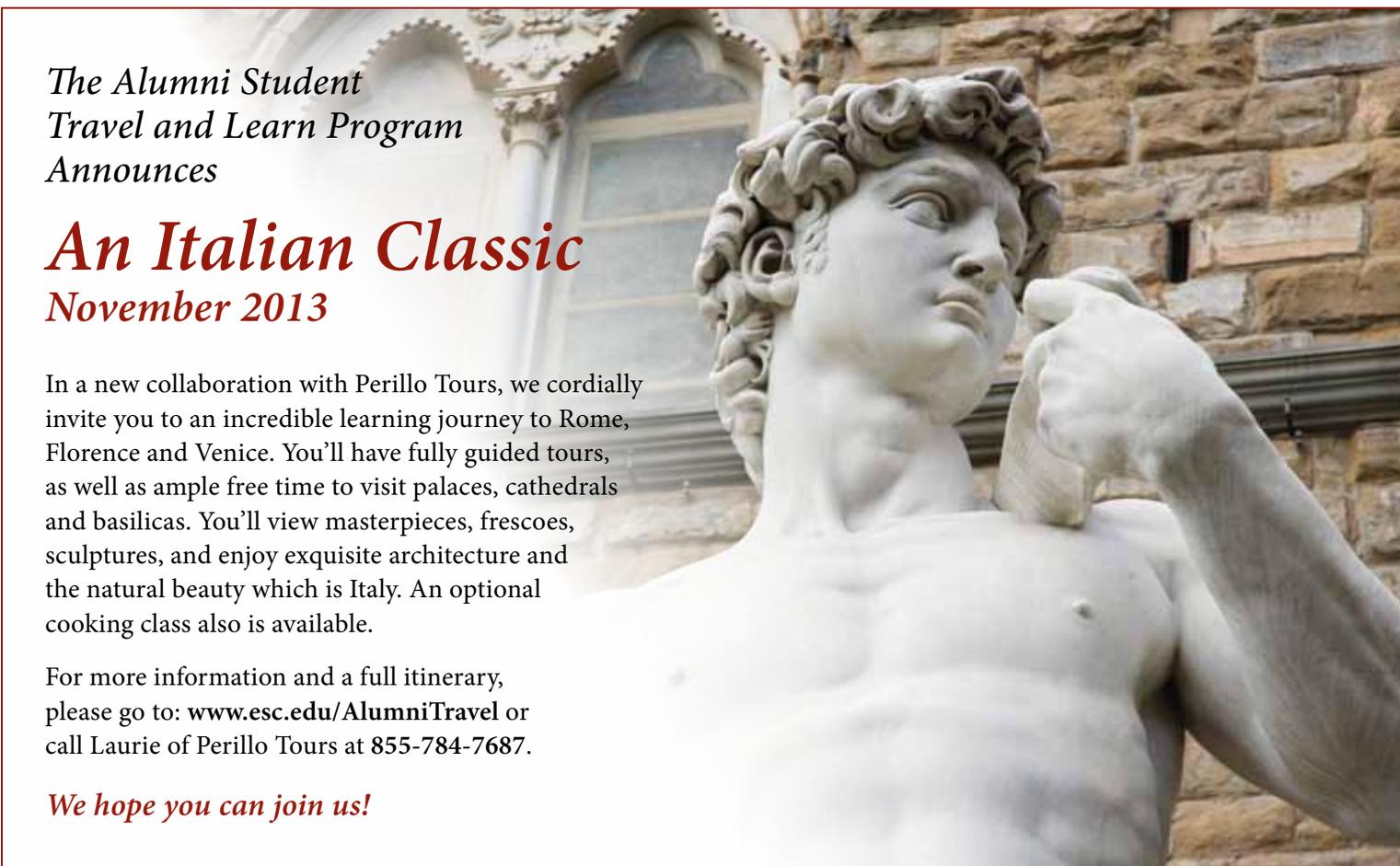
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Janice Pastizzo '98, '00, '04, center, a graduate of the Northeast Center and the School for Graduate Studies, is joined by members of her family at the Saratoga Race Course, for the 18th annual Empire State College Day at the Races. The Pastizzos were among the 230 alumni and students who attended the event and watched as SUNY Chancellor Nancy Zimpher presented the Empire State College Cup in the winners' circle.