

Putting Advocacy into Action

Perhaps never in the history of the American community college system has advocacy ever been more important.

Under the leadership of President Eric M. Friedman, Bergen has significantly expanded its government relations efforts to keep federal, state and county elected officials apprised of the specific needs of community colleges and their students. The efforts have positioned Bergen as a leading voice among its state peers, with President Friedman, students, faculty, staff and trustees each participating in numerous legislative action efforts.

In February, Board of Trustees Member Sheetal Ranjan and President Friedman and others from the College attended the Association of Community College Trustees' annual "National Legislative Summit" that took place in Washington D.C. Each year, the ACCT convenes the event so community college leaders and students can meet with elected officials and discuss key issues. President Friedman has prioritized his attendance at the summit, attending each year during his presidency.

Also in February, students Kimberly Abbas and Jency Jimenez travelled with Vice President of Student Affairs AJ Trump to Trenton to meet with Assembly Higher Education Committee members Linda Carter, Reginald Atkins, Cody Miller and Heather Simmons. The students shared their personal stories of resilience, crediting Bergen with providing them with the opportunity to succeed. The New Jersey Council of County Colleges, the advocacy organization representing the state's community colleges, organized the visit. Bergen's conversations with government officials

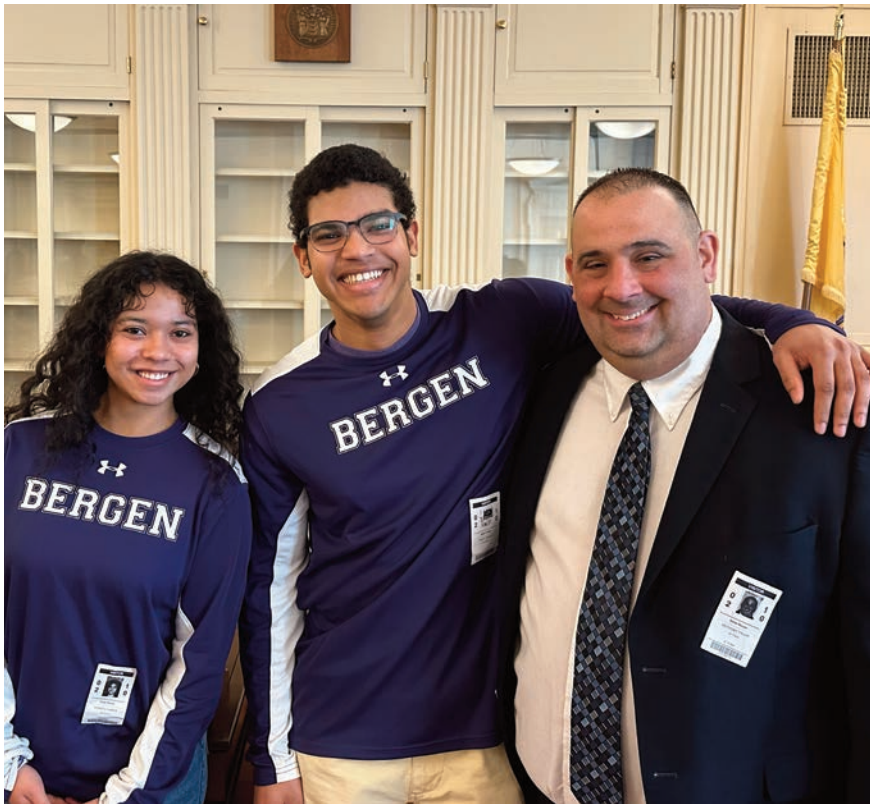


(Top: Trenton) Vice President of Student Affairs A.J. Trump, students Hanieh Kachooee, Jency Jimenez, Ryan Ruiz-Varela, Kimberly Abbas and Pamela Taveras, Director of Student Life Greg Fenkart and Coordinator of Student Leadership and Technology Jared Farra. (Bottom: Washington D.C.) The Bergen Delegation at the ACCT National Legislative Summit: President Eric M. Friedman, Alumni Trustee Kaylie Quezada, Board Chair Dorothy Blakeslee, Legislative Assistant Joshua Zucker (Rep. Josh Gottheimer, NJ-5), Trustee Sheetal Ranjan and alumna Amanda Karpinski.

often center on the value of a community college education, where students can significantly increase their socioeconomic status by graduating with an associate degree. In order to provide open access to all individuals seeking higher education, however, community colleges have a respon-

sibility to maintain some of the most affordable tuition rates in postsecondary education. This push-and-pull represents the most pressing issue for community college leaders.

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(Left Photo: Trenton) Students Kimberly Abbas and Jency Jimenez and Vice President of Student Affairs A.J. Trump. (Right Photo: Washington D.C.) Alumni Trustee Kaylie Quezada, Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (NY-14) and New Jersey Council of County Colleges President Aaron Fichtner.

Advocacy, continued from page 1.

Faced with this recurring financial challenge for the state's 18 community colleges – further complicated by uncertainty over federal funds – institutions are operating in a constant state of austerity, maximizing each dollar of public funding received.

Elected officials such as Bergen County Executive James J. Tedesco III have heeded the College's call for advocacy, recognizing the importance of supporting regional economic engines such as community colleges. In addition to in-

creasing the county's share of funding to the College, Tedesco became the highest-ranking elected official to testify on behalf of the state's community colleges at last year's Senate Budget Committee hearings, urging state legislators to restore a proposed \$20 million reduction in funding to the institutions. President Friedman and current Board of Trustees Alumni Representative Kaylie Quezada also appeared before the Senate committee. The testimony, alongside the work of the NJCCC, helped convince the senators to return the \$20 million in funding to the state budget.

Once again, the draft 2025-2026 state budget includes a \$20 million reduction in funds to New Jersey's community colleges. Bergen's advocacy team has already sprung into action, with Vice President of External Affairs Suzanne Wetzel emailing students, faculty and staff to visit an NJCCC-provided website that includes a submission form to urge Governor Phil Murphy to reconsider the reduction in funds. President Friedman has also made plans to testify at the Senate budget hearings once again.

State lawmakers must pass a final budget by July 1 at midnight. ■



Take Action to Support Community Colleges!

Scan here to send an email to state legislators urging them to reverse a \$20 million reduction in funding to community colleges.



Snapshotted



The "Heart 2 Heart" Valentine's Day event offered complimentary blood pressure checks and advice on circulatory health.



The grants department hosted an open house to showcase the many opportunities available for students, faculty and staff.



The College closed its Black History Month celebration with an evening banquet.



Nursing students collected more than 200 cans of soup for the Bergen Cares food pantry.



Dr. Kimmy Cushman (Yale) and Dr. Marvin Lee (Cambridge/Yale) visited campus to discuss the interplay between ethics and science.

Bergen's CFO Celebrated by PTK

Chief Financial Officer Wilton Thomas-Hooke has earned the Distinguished College Administrator award from Phi Theta Kappa, the honor society of two-year colleges. Bergen's Alpha Epsilon Phi chapter of the international organization nominated Thomas-Hooke for the honor based on his support of their work, according to PTK President and CEO Lynn Tincher-Ladner.

"This prestigious award celebrates college leaders who go above and beyond in their commitment to student success," she said in a letter notifying Thomas-Hooke of the award. "Although you were nominated for this award by the highest-achieving students on your campus, it truly reflects your commitment to the success of all students. They see and appreciate your dedication - both inside and outside the classroom - knowing you support their learning and the success of others like them. Because of you, they have a richer, more meaningful college experience."

PTK will recognize this year's honorees, including Thomas-Hooke, during the organization's annual convention that will take place in Kansas City, Missouri in April.

"It's gratifying that this nomination came from students," Thomas-Hooke said. "I have a deep affinity for education and supporting our students, so it comes as a great honor to receive this award."

Bergen's CFO, Thomas-Hooke, provides executive leadership for the institution's business operations as a member of the president's cabinet. The areas he oversees include budgeting, accounting, student financial services, purchasing and grants. Thomas-Hooke joined the College in 2019 after holding leadership positions in finance and business administration at New Jersey City University and Nabisco/Kraft Foods. He graduated from Rutgers-Newark with a bachelor's of arts in computer science and a minor in



mathematics; he earned an M.B.A. from Rutgers Business School and is currently pursuing a doctorate at Rowan University. His previous honors include the 2023 Bergen County Caribbean-American Outstanding Community Service Award. ■



Bergen's "Little Giant" Stands Tall

Retired Bergen track and field and cross-country coach Don Bozzone has added a new title to his Hall of Fame-career: published author. Bozzone's autobiography, "The Little Giant," hit Amazon's digital shelves last year with all proceeds benefiting Habitat for Humanity of Bergen County. Bozzone has volunteered at the nonprofit for nearly 30 years.

"The Little Giant" follows Bozzone through his upbringing in Jersey City to his success as an athlete, coach and volunteer. Bozzone's stature serves as a point of reference throughout the narrative, using his below-average size as the galvanizing quality that encouraged him to make a big impact on his community.

his leadership, six student-athletes notched All-American honors; Bozzone also coached a 5K national champion. In 1982, as the men's coach, Bozzone earned both the region and conference coach of the year awards. He would later win conference coach of the year awards in 1990 and 1991 as the women's coach. Additionally, Bozzone led Bergen's cross-country teams from 1977 to 1995, winning 15 region and conference titles and 15 coach of the year awards. In 2016 the National Junior College Athletic Association Track and Field Hall of Fame inducted Bozzone, recognizing his success at Bergen. He also coached at Emerson High School and Edison High School, where he taught physical education.

When asked what he enjoyed most about coaching at Bergen, Bozzone said the student-athletes.

"We competed very well," he recalled. "And most of the schools we went against were four-year colleges."

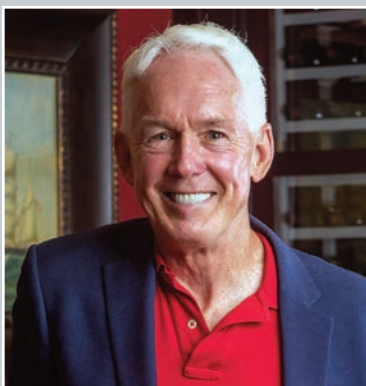
Since its September release, "The Little Giant" has earned \$3,100 for the Bergen County Habitat chapter. Purchase Bozzone's story at Amazon.com. ■



Focus on Facilities Continues

Enhancing the College's facilities to create more engaging, welcoming and open spaces has represented a post-pandemic priority. The spring semester has brought a number of improvements across the College's facilities

- A. The Cerullo Learning Assistance Center has undergone a complete transformation that will make the award-winning space brighter, more engaging and conducive to interaction.
- B. Bergen for Business is open for business at Bergen Community College at the Meadowlands!
- C. The Child Development Center features a new security system and flooring to promote a more hygienic, comfortable and safe space. ■



Foundation Chair Makes a Move

Noted commercial real estate broker and chair of the Bergen Community College Foundation Dan

Foley has found a new home, joining Cresa, a commercial real estate firm, as a managing principal. Foley previously worked for Savills, representing clients such as International Paper, the New Jersey Turnpike Authority and Eisai. Foley has served as chair of the Foundation since 2018. Under his leadership, the Foundation has expanded its outreach and its portfolio of donors. ■



Chief Development Officer Hired

Peter Kirk, a Bergen alumnus ('10) and longtime fundraising executive with Boy Scouts of America – Northern New Jersey

Council, has joined the institution as the Bergen Community College Foundation's director and chief development officer.

In the role, Kirk not only provides leadership and direction for the College's 501 (c)3 charitable organization, but serves as the institution's top fundraising official.

Kirk began his tenure with the Foundation in late 2024 after more than a decade with the Boy Scouts.

In addition to earning an A.A. from the College, Kirk received his B.A. from William Paterson University. ■



Spotlight

Ruben Alvarez

It's March. And that means it's time for baseball.

Bulldogs who will take the field this spring include Ruben Alvarez, a second-year infielder who takes pride in embodying both words in "student-athlete."

"I chose Bergen because it was the right fit for me," he said. "Being able to play baseball while getting a degree was the goal."

Alvarez said baseball has a way of teaching life lessons.

"You build a bond with so many different people just by playing the sport," he said. "What interests me the most about baseball is that you won't always succeed on good swings. You will get out, but on bad swings, you may get a hit."

Before graduating in a few months, Alvarez will continue to serve on the Student Athlete Advisory Committee, where he provides feedback on the College's athletic program and offers guidance to Bergen officials.



Studying sports management, Alvarez hopes to make a career out of the game he loves, aspiring to coach, instruct or direct sports programs. Although still a player himself, Alvarez has already adopted a mantra for young ballplayers.

"Some days are going to be stressful and difficult, but the good days will make it all worth it," he said. "Keep going. The work isn't going to do itself." ■



Common Read Author Talks Poverty

The federal government estimates that nearly 37 million people in the United States live below the poverty line, with 9.7 percent of the New Jersey population and 6.6 percent of the Bergen County population among them. To foster dialogue on the issue, Bergen will host the "Poverty in Our Communities Summit" featuring Matthew Desmond, the Pulitzer-Prize winning author of "Poverty, by America," on Wednesday, April 2 at 3 p.m. in the Moses Family Meeting and Training Center (Technology Education Center room 128) at the main campus. The summit is free, open to the public and presented by the Office of Community Affairs, Equity Council and Common Read Committee.

The College has made the study of poverty a central focus of the current academic year, selecting Desmond's book on the topic as the institution's "common read." The initiative encourages all members of the College community to read the book and participate in various discussions, activities and projects surrounding the work throughout the year. Faculty also thread the book through coursework and assignments.

During the April 2 summit, Desmond, a Princeton University professor and sociologist, will discuss the book, which offers a multifaceted argument for ending poverty. His concept of "poverty abolitionists" seeks to inspire audiences to develop a deeper understanding of the underlying issues of poverty in the United States. Desmond will sign copies of the book at the event. Visit bcc-events.ludus.com/200475471 to register for the summit. ■

BERGEN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

2025 Spring OpenHouse

Thursday, April 3
3-6 p.m.
Main Campus
400 Paramus Road, Paramus
openhouse.bergen.edu

Accreditor Adds Educator Piccininni to Board

The Committee on Accreditation of Educational Programs for the Emergency Medical Services Professions Board of Directors has voted to add Paramedic Science Program Director Joanne Piccininni as a representative of the National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians.

For more than 30 years, Piccininni has worked in the EMS field. In 2023, she received the NAEMT Presidential Leadership Award and recently led the College's paramedic science program to the National Conference on EMS "Director's Award" on the strength of a 99 percent-pass rate for Bergen students' certification and licensing exams. ■

