

inside Bergen

COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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Bergen Builds a New Bridge with Medical Center

Leaders from Bergen Community College and Bergen New Bridge Medical Center see many similarities between the two public organizations. There are enough synergies that resemble a County-based extended family, driven by mission and values.

One stands as the No. 1 college for associate degree graduates in New Jersey; the other maintains the largest number of staffed beds in the state. Each holds a deep connection with Bergen County government and its leaders, who regard them as central to the County mission. Most importantly, both represent community centers for residents that offer access to high-quality resources. With so much in common – and being separated by less than three miles – leaders at both entities have taken significant steps in recent years to develop new meaningful connections. Those include additional clinical learning opportunities, employment pathways and joint initiatives to improve the quality of life in Bergen County.

“As president, I have sought to nurture partnerships in the community,” President Eric M. Friedman said. “One of the most important partnerships is found within our relationship with New Bridge Medical Center.”

According to New Bridge President and Chief Executive Officer Deborah Visconi, the feeling is mutual. “The relationship between New Bridge and the College is symbiotic,” she said. “There’s a direct pipeline between us that’s equally beneficial and rewarding.”

The partnership began over five decades ago when the College launched its health professions pro-

grams. Bergen County’s 2017 reimagining of the medical center inspired a new chapter of collaboration with the College.



Deborah Visconi and Dr. Eric M. Friedman



Bergen County Executive James J. Tedesco III, a vocal advocate of both entities, applauds the spirit of collaboration. It is Tedesco and the Bergen County Board of Commissioners who often refer

to the College and New Bridge “as two of the jewels in the county crown.”

“This incredible pair of organizations offer high-quality higher education and healthcare for the nearly one million residents of Bergen County,” Tedesco said. “I am proud of the opportunities they offer our residents and thrilled by their cooperation in support of a common goal.”

Throughout the last decade, hundreds of students in health professions programs such as nursing, radiography and diagnostic medical sonography have completed clinical rotations at New Bridge, with many accepting full-time employment offers at the medical center after their graduation. Janice Mazurek-Reilly, who earned an A.A.S. in nursing as an evening student, now works at Bergen New Bridge as a perioperative nurse manager.

“I really wanted to serve people that need good, quality care,” Mazurek-Reilly said. “By being a graduate of Bergen Community College, it... gave me an opportunity to see what I wanted to do and how I could be the best nurse I could be in Bergen County.”

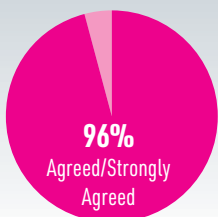
Many of the College’s non-health professions graduates have also found a home at Bergen New Bridge, including Liz Zimmerman, a senior security supervisor.

“Bergen Community College gave me lessons that I hold dear to this day,” she said. “Doors have been opened because of my education. Bergen New Bridge Medical Center provided that opportunity.”

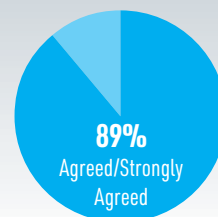
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BY THE NUMBERS - New Students Say ...

Fall New Student Survey, Center for Institutional Effectiveness



“Instructors want me to succeed.”



“I felt welcomed the very first time on campus.”



Grammy-nominated composer Rufus Reid (right) and his band members played a new work with four movements for the “With Faith, Coming to Jones Road” culminating event in April.

Bergen Captures Coveted Katz Prize



Bergen has earned the New Jersey Council for the Humanities Stanley N. Katz Prize for Excellence in Public Humanities for its series of projects revolving around the “Faith Ringgold: Coming to Jones Road” Gallery Bergen art exhibition. The series of artwork, inspired by the Ringgold family’s 1992 move to Englewood that subjected them to racism and hostility as Black people, chronicles her own story of survival while celebrating her ancestors and their journeys along the Underground Railroad into Harlem. The exhibition opened in January.

The celebration of the Englewood artist and activist included musical and stage performances, an oral history project and a children’s reading room/makerspace where parents could accompany their children to hear stories from Ringgold’s 17 books and create artwork inspired by what they had seen and heard. All of the activities serve the College’s goals of enhancing diversity and inclusivity.

“There is art in the telling of all our stories. There is art in celebrating our roots, our re-rooting in the new places we call home and our upward-tending branches.”
– Bergen County Commissioner Mary Amoroso

“This project truly exemplified the humanities in a community-based context,” New Jersey Council for the Humanities Executive Director Dr. Carin Berkowitz said.

The Katz prize represents the latest honor recognizing the Ringgold project, as it previously secured \$22,500 in grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Puffin Foundation and the Bergen County Division of Cultural and Historic Affairs to develop the comprehensive celebration. Gallery Bergen Director Tim Blunk led the initiative and also collaborated with the National Coalition of 100 Black Women (Bergen/

Passaic Chapter), the Englewood Public Library, the Teaneck Public Library, the Bergen County Office for Children and the Black Child Development Institute (BCDI) – Paramus Affiliate in support of the projects. The Puffin Foundation presented a smaller, contemporaneous show of printed works by Ringgold at the Puffin Cultural Forum in Teaneck.

“The community response was far beyond what we ever imagined,” Blunk said. “Gallery Bergen has never had so many people from the community coming to visit the space. This was directly a result of having involved so many deeply rooted community organizations in the planning and articulation of the project.”

Bergen County Commissioner Mary Amoroso took a special interest in the project, writing a recommendation letter to Humanities Council officials to nominate the College’s work.

Named in honor of Stanley N. Katz, a longtime faculty member at Princeton University and former NJCH board chair, the College will receive a \$5,000 award for earning first place. A panel of peer reviewers selected Bergen’s submission from 20 nominated projects from throughout the state. To learn more about the annual Katz Prize, visit njhumanities.org/katz-prize.

Bergen will use the award’s proceeds to sponsor a new oral history project and verbatim theater piece centered on the institution’s “common read” book, “A Map is Only One Story: Twenty Writers on Immigration, Family and the Meaning of Home.” ■



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Middle States Matters

A delegation of Bergen officials led by President Eric M. Friedman and students recently attended the Middle States Commission on Higher Education Annual Conference in Philadelphia. The event featured opportunities for Bergen leaders to speak with community college colleagues from throughout the Middle States region and learn additional tactics for ensuring success during accreditation visits.

STEM students in attendance presented their research on topics such as urban hydroponics, microbial fuel cells and genetic mapping during a poster session at the conference.

Back on campus, working groups have finished their self-study chapter drafts and submitted them to the writing team for review and editing. The College remains on track for its 2025 visit by the Middle States visiting team. ■



Chloe Djedi and Dr. Eric M. Friedman.



Snapshotted



Hero 5K Fundraiser



Pizza with the President



Marvel Comics' Edgardo Miranda-Rodriguez



Professors Emeriti Annual Meeting



Students at the Meadowlands Chamber's "Eggs and Issues"

Partners Create Pathways for Grads

Nearly three-quarters of Bergen students enroll in the institution's transfer programs, indicating their desire to earn an associate's degree and continue their pursuit of a bachelor's degree at a four-year college or university. To create additional pathways for Bergen graduates, College officials recently signed revised transfer agreements with Ramapo College of New Jersey and Montclair State University. These agreements further enhance the partnerships between the colleges and lead to seamless transfer.

A delegation of staff members from each of the four-year colleges, including their presidents, visited Bergen in October to meet with President Eric M. Friedman and other College leaders. Members of Ramapo and Montclair's academic and student affairs teams even led a "takeover" of Bergen's student center on separate days to provide potential transfer students with information about the colleges. The events featured the colleges' mascots, giveaways and instant decision admission services while the presidents met one-on-one to discuss other aspects of the partnerships.

"As a community college with a significant number of students who plan to continue their education, Bergen has always sought to maintain robust transfer agreements with four-year partners," Dr. Friedman said. "However, it remains incredibly important to periodically

review these agreements and enhance them for the benefit of our students. Providing a streamlined transfer process helps all sides – Bergen, the four-year college, and most importantly, the Bergen graduate."

The newly revised agreements offer Bergen graduates with the assurance that their credits will successfully transfer to the four-year schools. As such, the graduates essentially enter the four-year schools with "junior" status, transferring with credits that place them halfway through their bachelor's degree. Both colleges recommend that students seeking to take advantage of the transfer agreements discuss the individual requirements with a Bergen adviser.

In addition to establishing revised terms for transfer students, the Ramapo agreement confirms a commitment by both institutions to begin an exploratory study regarding the feasibility of offering some bachelor's degree program classes at Bergen Community College at the Meadowlands in Lyndhurst.

Montclair and Ramapo consistently rank as the No. 1 and 2 destinations for Bergen graduate transfers. Bergen maintains transfer agreements with two dozen four-year college partners and offers students an opportunity to periodically meet with representatives from these colleges at its main campus. ■



Top - Bergen staff; Lower Left - Dr. Dianna O'Connor, Dr. Eric M. Friedman, Dr. Cindy Jebb (President of Ramapo College of New Jersey) and Dr. AJ Trump; Lower Right - Dr. Eric M. Friedman and Dr. Jonathan Koppel (President of Montclair State University).

Assistant VP Selected for Leadership Program

The Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) has selected Assistant Vice President of Financial Aid and Compliance Dr. Yessika García-Guzmán as one of 50 fellows for the fifth cohort of its Leadership Academy/La Academia de Liderazgo. The program seeks to increase diverse representation in executive and senior-level positions in higher education. During the one-year fellowship program, García-Guzmán will attend seminars in Chicago, Washington, D.C. and Spain.



"I am deeply honored and grateful to have been selected as a fellow for HACU's fifth cohort of its Leadership Academy/Academia de Liderazgo," she said. "I understand the responsibility that comes with this role, and I am committed to upholding the values of leadership, diversity and community engagement."

Fellows participate in an array of leadership development activities preparing them for roles in the full spectrum of institutions of higher learning, with an emphasis on Hispanic-Serving Institutions and Emerging HSI's. Academy faculty consist of current and former presidents, chancellors and senior administrators.

García-Guzmán joined the College in November 2022 as assistant vice president of financial aid and compliance after serving in student affairs leadership roles at Ocean County College. Born in the Dominican Republic, she came to the United States as an eight-year-old and settled in New York City. A first-generation college graduate, García-Guzmán earned her B.S. in finance and management from Fordham University, an M.P.A. from John Jay College of Criminal Justice, an M.S. in urban affairs and public policy from Hunter College and a Ph.D. in public policy and administration with a concentration on education policy and leadership from Walden University.

Bergen Community College meets all the criteria for maintaining its status as an HSI (Hispanic Serving Institution) with over 40 percent of its students identifying as Hispanic ■



STEM Students Shine at NSF Innovation Challenge

The STEM program capped another successful year with an invitation to the Community College Innovation Challenge sponsored by the National Science Foundation and American Association of Community Colleges. The prestigious innovation challenge spotlights community college student teams working with faculty mentors to use STEM in solving real-world problems. As one of only 12 finalists, the team earned the bid on the strength of an electric go-kart project. While in Washington, the team had the opportunity to present their project to government officials on Capitol Hill.

"Our team designed, built and tested a fully functioning electric go-kart, but more importantly, they documented everything they did so that other community college and high school students could incorporate the design challenge into the curriculum at their school," faculty mentor and professor Dr. PJ Ricatto said. "What better way to turn students on to electric vehicles and maybe even consider a career as an EV technician! You also get to drive around in your homework when you are done."

Student Sebastian Matio-Smith and alumni Richard Boada ('23) and John Griffith ('23) developed an electric go-kart prototype with a top speed of 40 mph and a driving time of approximately two hours at 80 percent power with an adult driver. The team developed the go-kart in the College's STEM Student Research Center – the nation's only one of its kind at a community college.

"Representing Bergen Community College at a national competition was surreal," Boada, the team leader who graduated with a degree in engineering science from Bergen and now studies mechanical engineering at Rutgers University, said.

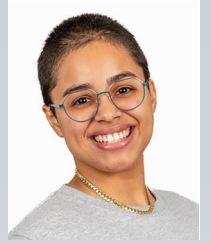
The students also thanked industrial design technology professor Mark Balzarette, who remained instrumental in helping them with the build, especially with fabricating special parts and welding.

The go-kart project represents one of many that STEM students worked on throughout their time at Bergen. The College sponsors a STEM project showcase at the end of the academic year to provide students with a chance to share their work with an expert panel of judges. Business leaders from companies such as Volvo Car USA, faculty from colleges such as the New Jersey Institute of Technology and even members of the NJ Commission on Science, Innovation and Technology participated in this year's showcase event in August. Projects included a biomimetic prosthetic arm designed with affordable materials and 3-D printed components, a vertical farming operation and an organic volatile compounds detector.

"It proved to be a wonderful venue to establish connections, network and get inspired about the future of STEM," Dean of Mathematics, Science and Technology Dr. Emily Vandalovsky said. ■

Catch a Rising Star: Liangy Gomez

The New Jersey Business and Industry Association (NJBIA) has selected student Liangy Gomez as one of five standout college students for the organization's "Rising Star Awards". Those awards recognize academic and community service excellence. The NJBIA recognized the awardees at the ninth annual New Jersey Women Business Leaders Forum, which took place in Newark in late September.



"It felt unreal receiving the email," Gomez said about the award notification. "I felt a mixture of emotions, but the one thing that was on mind was my hard work is paying off."

Gomez, of Leonia, has held several leadership positions at Bergen, including serving on the Phi Theta Kappa (PTK) board of student leaders in 2022-23 as director of recruitment. In the 2023-24 academic year, Gomez serves as the PTK board's general vice president and will represent their peers at regional and international conferences.

"Liangy has served on our PTK student leadership board since the spring semester of 2022 and has continually impressed us with their charismatic leadership, tireless work ethic, boundless energy and care for their community," Assistant Director of Phi Theta Kappa and Honors Anna Gergen said. "Their work has made such a positive impact and all of us at PTK are so proud that their efforts are now being recognized by the New Jersey Business and Industry Association."

In addition to their work with PTK, Gomez has served as president of the PRIDE club and played on the soccer team. They will earn an associate degree in business administration and plans to pursue a bachelor's degree in business at a four-year college. Passionate about entrepreneurship, Gomez intends to establish a business that promotes financial literacy to high school and college students.

The NJBIA New Jersey Women Business Leaders Forum represents the state's largest professional women's conference. The event brings together hundreds of women and men for workshops, forums and one-on-one coaching opportunities. ■



Bergen Builds a New Bridge, continued from page 1.
 The organizations have also partnered to launch initiatives that provide upward mobility for county residents. For example, in response to the statewide shortage of certified nursing assistants, the organizations came together in 2019 to sponsor a tuition-free Certified Nursing Assistant training program for medical center employees (pictured). Eligible employees participate in a 90-hour course led by College instructors in a learning center located on the New Bridge campus. Upon successful completion of both the program and the certification exam, graduates become part of the Bergen New Bridge long term care clinical team. The program enters its fifth year in 2024. Full-time New Bridge employees can receive a 50 percent tuition reduction in degree programs at the College, too.

"I am deeply committed to furthering the growth and education of our workforce," Visconi said.

Meanwhile, Visconi and College officials joined to play important roles on the county's COVID-19 taskforce, with members of each organization frequently appearing at county organized news conferences and meeting to devise strategies.

During the throes of the pandemic, Bergen New



Bridge and the College partnered to offer public drive-through testing and vaccinations at the College's main campus. The College's reopening plan relied heavily on New Bridge, too, with medical center personnel offering vaccinations and boosters specifically for students, faculty and staff on-campus.

"The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic stood as a seminal moment in our relationship," Visconi said. "We worked incredibly well together."

Friedman, who joined the College in the middle of the pandemic in January 2021, saw the importance of New Bridge as a partner early on in his tenure.

"The on-campus vaccinations and boosters were critical to the College returning to some semblance of normalcy," Dr. Friedman said. "It made the process so easy for our students, faculty and staff, helped instill confidence and got us back on our feet. I have a deep sense of gratitude for their assistance – especially as a new president coming into that situation."

Friedman and Visconi communicate frequently, often attend the same events and serve on local nonprofit boards together. They even serve as advisers to county government officials for economic development. Each believe their unique relationship will help inspire new initiatives for Bergen County residents.

"I'm not aware of another community college and medical center that share such a similar definable mission," Dr. Friedman said. "It's a unique partnership that transforms lives and has endless possibilities." ■



Employee Recognition

Bergen rolled out the red carpet for employees celebrating employment milestones and recent retirees as part of its annual recognition ceremony. The expansive event featured speakers from different milestone groups, including faculty member Dr. Gemma Figaro (top) and longtime staff member Robert Papp (middle). All honorees, including Walesca Rodriguez (bottom), received a certificate recognizing their years of service to the College. ■



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