

CONNECTIONS

THE SUNY EMPIRE STATE COLLEGE MAGAZINE VOLUME 46 • FALL 2021

SUNY Empire's Newest Location:

4 Park Avenue, Manhattan

Celebrating
50 Years





CONNECTIONS

THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF
NEW YORK EMPIRE STATE
COLLEGE MAGAZINE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS



- 3 Letter from the Officer in Charge
- 4 An Update on SUNY Empire's Presidential Search
- 4 Black Male Initiative: Celebrating 10 Years
- 5 Start Spreading the News: SUNY Empire is in Midtown Manhattan
- 6 A Lifetime at SUNY Empire: Richard Bonnabeau
- 8 Changing Gears: From Professional Cyclist to Top-Tier Coach
- 9 A Legacy Continues
- 10 A Historical Perspective of SUNY Empire
- 11 SUNY Empire Celebrates 50 Years
- 14 How 9/11 Changed Emergency Services Forever
- 15 SUNY Empire Establishes Esports Program
- 16 SUNY Empire's First Doctoral Program Debuts this Fall
- 17 Always One Step Ahead
- 18 Alumni Notes
- 21 In Memoriam
- 23 Conversations Over Coffee

Cover Photo

Image of SUNY
Empire's newest
location at 4 Park
Ave., Manhattan.
Read more on page 5.



LETTER FROM THE OFFICER IN CHARGE

Anniversaries are a great time to reflect on the past and look forward to the future. In this issue of Connections, we do just that as we commemorate the 50th anniversary of SUNY Empire State College.

SUNY Empire emerged during a tumultuous time in American history. Protests against the Vietnam War were raging, and the battle for racial and gender equality was at a fever pitch. Against this backdrop of sociopolitical upheaval, SUNY Chancellor Ernest Boyer set out to reimagine higher education, giving rise to a college that did not rely on calendars or schedules, but instead on the unique needs of its students, who were mostly adult learners.

Among those who shaped our past is Richard Bonnabeau, our first archivist and historian, who arrived at the college as a postdoc fellow in 1974 and today works as a volunteer in our archives. In this issue, we have a profile of Richard. His long association with SUNY Empire gives him a unique perspective on the college's trajectory, which he shares with us in a separate piece.

We also take time to celebrate our past with a collection of photos and graphics from SUNY Empire history that is sure to evoke some memories. We pause to remember the 9/11 attacks, now 20 years behind us, with an article about how that event changed emergency management systems. From the ashes of that horrific tragedy have come advances that reshaped and improved the way we handle life-threatening events.

Looking to the future, we offer readers a glimpse of our vibrant, new location in the heart of midtown Manhattan (seen on the cover), surrounded by some of the city's most iconic skyscrapers. Also in this issue is SUNY Empire's rapidly growing esports program, a byproduct of the pandemic that forced us to find creative outlets for interaction and engagement. In addition, we provide a look at SUNY Empire's first-ever doctoral program, an Ed.D. in educational leadership and change, which enables us to anticipate exciting new academic horizons.

As we look back at where we've been and forward to where we're headed, one thing is for sure: we've accomplished a great deal in our 50 years, including the graduation of 92,000 alumni. Through it all and even with a global pandemic, SUNY Empire has remained true to its founding mission, to provide a quality education that's flexible, accessible, and affordable.

Sincerely,

Nathan Gonyea
Officer in Charge

An Update on SUNY Empire’s Presidential Search

By Winnie Yu

The process of searching for a new president at SUNY Empire began when College Council President John Maggiore was tasked with leading the presidential search committee. He convened a committee made up of 22 people representing faculty, staff, alumni, students, and members of the College Council and the SUNY Empire State College Foundation Board.

The committee worked with the national search firm Storbeck Search to find qualified candidates. They also solicited nominations from the college community. The result was a large pool of strong applicants that was eventually winnowed down.

“To begin with, we wanted someone with academic stature,” Maggiore says. “We also wanted a candidate who would balance the competing demands of a need for stability with the need for innovation. We asked ourselves, ‘Did this candidate want this specific job? Did this candidate have knowledge of what SUNY Empire is all about and who our students are?’ We wanted someone who wanted this job, at this college, at this time.”

The committee also wanted a leader who could assess and build on the strengths of SUNY Empire while being able to recognize and address its challenges, Maggiore says. Other important attributes included a willingness to be present at all locations around the state, strong communication and fundraising skills, and a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Final candidates are presented to Chancellor Jim Malatras, who then brings his choice to SUNY System Administration’s Board of Trustees for their approval and announcement. The SUNY Empire community looks forward to these next steps. ■



College Council President, John Maggiore

THE BLACK MALE INITIATIVE: CELEBRATING 10 YEARS



The Black Male Initiative (BMI) was launched as a way to support and encourage Black male students pursuing their degrees. BMI tapped into SUNY Empire’s strong alumni network and mentoring expertise to better connect black male students with student services, faculty and instructors, and, most importantly, with each other. Originally called The African-American Male Initiative, the program was later renamed The Black Male Initiative and expanded to include others. The idea for BMI came from David Fullard, Ph.D., an associate professor, who first began exploring ways to retain black male students in 2005; Maureen Winney, former alumni director; Anne Lopes, former associate dean of the Metropolitan Center; Carl Burkart, coordinator of student services; and Keith Amparado ‘88. Shown here with Fullard, left, is Jawana Richardson ‘16, ‘18, the first African-American woman to serve on the executive board of the BMI, and Amparado. ■

Start Spreading the News: SUNY Empire is in Midtown Manhattan

By Winnie Yu



SUNY Empire has a new flagship Manhattan location at 4 Park Ave., just blocks from the Empire State Building and the Chrysler Building.

The new site is located between 33rd and 34th streets, in the heart of one of the most iconic streetscapes in the world. The college will occupy a 29,747-square-foot space on the second floor and mezzanine levels.

“As we celebrate our 50th anniversary this year, SUNY Empire remains at the cutting edge, offering a blend of both in-person and distance learning,” said Officer in Charge Nathan Gonyea. “Four Park Avenue continues this tradition, allowing our students to pursue their educational dreams in a brand-new, state-of-the-art campus right in the heart of the business, labor, and media capital of the world.”

Scouting for Sites

With the lease at 325 Hudson expiring on July 31, 2021, SUNY Empire began looking for a new Manhattan location in March 2020. Six sites emerged as contenders, but only 4 Park Ave. met all the criteria, which included a community environment, availability by the end of July, and the ability to accommodate the college’s rigorous academic schedule.

Most important, it offered easy accessibility and visibility. Located in the bustling Murray Hill neighborhood, the site is easily accessed by public transit.

“The entire second floor space wraps around 33rd and 34th streets and Park Avenue, which gives us great signage capabilities,” says Diane Conard, SUNY Empire’s capital program manager. “This is also right on the subway line, and four blocks from Penn Station and close to Grand Central and the PATH station. The visibility and accessibility were leading incentives to move us there.”

Mutual Appreciation

SUNY Empire was also a good tenant for The Feil Organization, a New York City-based real estate corporation that owns the property. As a state agency, the college offers stability and benefits to the community.

“They came back to us with a very low rent, comparatively speaking, and they completely renovated the site to specifications at their expense,” Conard says. “They also gave us 10 months of free rent.”

Said Kevin Driscoll, Feil’s director of commercial leasing, “We are pleased to welcome such a prestigious tenant to our roster.”

Over the next decade, the new location will save the college more than \$12 million. And while the space is smaller than the previous location, creative scheduling and office sharing make it possible to accommodate all employees and classes, as did additional space in Harlem and at SUNY Global.

In addition to SUNY Empire, the site contains residential, office, and retail space, including Duane Reade, The Ainsworth, and Wolfgang’s Steakhouse on the ground floor. Students and faculty will have a separate, dedicated entrance on Park Avenue.

“It’s everything we wanted,” Conard says. “It brings vibrancy. It brings a wonderful student experience. And it brings SUNY Empire to a visible location. It brings together everything we set out to do.” ■



WHY WE’RE
EXCITED ABOUT 4
PARK AVE.

“It’s an extremely student-centric space. The classrooms are lovely and filled with technology that a professor like me would use, like a smartboard and flat-screen TVs. If you’re in need of any kind of technology, it will be there. We’ll also have more space and be able to do more with the Black Male Initiative.”

— David Fullard, visiting associate professor and program coordinator for the Black Male Initiative

“This brand new, completely renovated and updated location in the heart of Manhattan showcases SUNY Empire for the world to see. Whether it’s visitors from all over the globe, or midtown neighbors frequenting the adjacent shops and restaurants, the floor-to-ceiling windows literally give passersby a glimpse of who we are: an innovator in hybrid higher education, leading the way into our next 50 years. With the SUNY Empire shield and torch adorned across all corners of the exterior, this home for higher learning doubles as a massive marketing tool.”

— Solomon Syed, assistant vice president of communications, marketing and government relations

“I like the fact the new Manhattan location is easy to get to. Transportation is within walking distance, which is a plus because many of the students we serve work in midtown. It’s four blocks from 34th St. Penn Station, which is where I commute to get to work and home. The easy traveling to 4 Park Ave. will be very appealing to a lot of people.”

— Jennifer Bent, ‘07, ‘12, assistant to the dean at the Harry Van Arsdale Jr. School of Labor Studies

“SUNY Empire’s new Manhattan location at 4 Park Ave. constitutes a thoroughly modern setting, featuring state-of-the-art bright and inviting classrooms, offices, and common spaces that create an unmistakable welcoming atmosphere.”

— Justin Giordano, professor of business and law in the School of Undergraduate Studies



Richard Bonnabeau in the Archives

Richard Bonnabeau, Former College Historian and Archivist, a Lifetime at SUNY Empire

By Stephanie Lamphere

Richard Bonnabeau has had a long and storied career with SUNY Empire State College — mentor intern fellow, faculty mentor, program administrator, college archivist, and now a retired volunteer working in the archives. He has been with the college for nearly its entire existence, and has no plans of leaving anytime soon.

In the fall of 1974, only a few years after the founding of SUNY Empire, Bonnabeau joined the Niagara Frontier Learning Center in Buffalo as a newly appointed post-doctoral fellow of the Eli Lilly Foundation's mentor internship program. "When I first came here in 1974, I had already missed the first three years," he says. "It felt like arriving in Los Angeles three years after the Gold Rush started."

His wife and young son stayed at their apartment in Clifton Park, just south of Saratoga Springs, while he traveled home to see them on weekends. The work, which consisted of learning about mentoring and raising interest in the college among Buffalo's Latino community, was challenging yet fulfilling. He was often so busy with a growing load of students that instead of traveling home, "sometimes I stayed for the weekend."

Toward the end of that year and the conclusion of the fellowship, Bonnabeau was tapped by the administration under founding President James Hall to work with a colleague to develop a new program called "Extended Programs." This program was intended to fill some of the gaps left open by face-to-face mentoring, such as students moving out of state or overseas, individuals with physical or mental disabilities that made travel to regional centers or satellites impossible, correctional inmates being moved from one location to another, and other students who could not or chose not to meet in person. This program worked alongside a similar initiative serving independent study students with homemade adaptations of British Open University courses.

The Rise in Distance Learning

In 1978, both programs were merged into what was then called the Center for Independent Study, and a year later became the Center for Distance Learning (CDL). At the time, "distance learning" was a new term in American higher education, and the idea of serving adult students at a distance was modeled on the Open University programs popular in Great Britain, although CDL was much more flexible for the adult learner.

Following his tenure at CDL, Bonnabeau was recruited by International Programs in 1992. The program had a different focus from those of traditional SUNY campuses, serving students of partner colleges in international locations who took courses through SUNY Empire. Bonnabeau explains that it wasn't a stretch from what mentors were doing already by working with overseas students at a distance. "International Programs was a way of encapsulating that distance learning model," he says.

International studies was a natural fit for Bonnabeau, whose own academic training is in history and cultural anthropology. "I've always had an interest in American economic history and Latin American history and culture," he notes. "I was one of the few students who went overseas already speaking a good deal of Spanish."

His undergraduate studies in Latin America deepened his already-strong Spanish language skills; he is also conversant in Portuguese. As an undergraduate student, he received a scholarship to study at Catholic University in Santiago, Chile. Ironically, his son later studied at the same university for his own junior year abroad. Bonnabeau believes that bilingual programs "strengthen the world," and he is a proponent of international and bilingual education.

Growing Interest in the Archives

Bonnabeau's engagement with the archives was an extension of his interest in history and experience developing programs at the college. In the early years of the institution, President Hall and his staff kept an archive of historical documents, but it wasn't until 1990 that the president advertised the position for a college historian and archivist. "I think I was the only one who applied," Bonnabeau jokes. "And I've been doing it ever since."

What began with a handful of boxes of documents collected by President Hall eventually became the more extensive archives of today. Those archives are located in a secure space in the administration building in Saratoga Springs, a space it is currently outgrowing. While the archives still contain print media — including newspaper clippings, commencement programs, alumni magazines, copies of academic resources, conference presentations, and grant materials — some of the most crucial documents have been digitized for permanent storage.

"It's very important for the college to digitize the collection, because of the vital role that SUNY Empire State College has played in adult education," Bonnabeau notes. Digitizing the collection is both an important and logical next step for the archives as the college continues to grow in its second half-century and archival material accumulates. "This college is evolving rapidly," Bonnabeau says.

"When I arrived, I wanted to learn as much about the history of the college as possible. I collected a lot of stories that sustained my interest. The importance of SUNY Empire State College as a singular event in the history of American public higher education has grown with time."

The impetus to digitize as much of the collection as possible, and his own devotion to the archives, inspired Bonnabeau to contribute financially to the archives digitization project, which was initiated in early 2018 by a faculty advisory group. This group emphasized the importance of recording our history. "The archives tell the SUNY Empire story in great detail, and give the college a 'public face,'" the advisory group stated in a 2017 letter to then President Merodie Hancock. "Long-term digitization is especially important to preserve the physical archives of our first half-century of existence. A second location of the archives in the cloud is key to their preservation."

Although he retired from his official role four years ago, Bonnabeau continues to volunteer regularly in the archives, while faculty member Anastasia Pratt has taken over as the current college archivist. He relishes his role as the founding archivist and historian, and appreciates the opportunity to continue to be involved. As for when he plans to fully retire? "I don't have a deadline, as long as I can still do it." ■

"The importance of SUNY Empire State College in the history of American public higher education has grown with time."



Dr. Ernest L. Boyer

Giving with Gratitude

The Boyer Legacy Society honors Dr. Ernest L. Boyer and his vision of accessible and affordable higher education for students of all ages and backgrounds. The society also honors Kathryn G. Boyer '78, an adult student whose needs mirrored her husband's vision.

Membership is open to all who notify us of their decision to include the college in their estate plans.

Contact Toby Tobrocke
(Toby.Tobrocke@esc.edu)

to explore ways you can join in supporting the future of SUNY Empire State College.



Michael Norton '10

Changing Gears: From Professional Cyclist to Top-Tier Coach

By Lindsey Clark

This past summer, the world's greatest athletes gathered in Japan for the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympics, a year later than planned. SUNY Empire has certainly had its share of high-caliber athletes and trainers.

As one of the top cyclists in the nation, **Michael Norton '10** triumphed in multiple competitions and received numerous awards during his 20-year professional cycling career.

Today, he owns MSN Pro Coaching, training athletes of all ages and skill levels in a variety of endurance disciplines, using his education and experience as a professional cyclist. Michael also consults coaches and athletes of the U.S. Olympic Men's Track Cycling Endurance team, predicting performance outcomes using training data analytics and statistics.

The Starting Line

Michael's passion for cycling began in Goshen, New York, where he was inspired by a childhood neighbor, an avid rider. At the age of nine, Michael participated in the Boy Scouts' cycling merit badge with his brother and sped past most of the older riders. The outcome strengthened his passion for cycling as a serious sport. When he entered his teens, he competed in state and national cycling competitions. By the time he was 15, Michael was ranked among the top six youth cyclists in the nation.

At 19, Michael joined the elite amateur level of cycling. He competed against the nation's top bikers in 100-mile races, but struggled to complete the events. "I couldn't keep up," he says. "So I dove into books and studied training methodology, nutrition, and human physiology." Once he learned the significance of sports sciences in athletic performance, he changed his training regimen and became a competitive athlete. He went on to win multiple cycling competitions and medals at the U.S. National Championships. In 2009,

Michael retired in the top-15 ranking for American professional cyclists.

Back to Books

Following his cycling career, Michael decided to return to college to earn his bachelor's degree. During his cycling off seasons, he attended SUNY Orange where he worked closely with the sport physiology department and received his associate degree in science and mathematics. With a continued passion for athletics, he wanted to pursue a new career in professional coaching. He sought additional education to further his knowledge in exercise physiology.

A friend recommended SUNY Empire for the college's notable reputation as a flexible and high-quality online college for adult learners. After enrolling, Michael worked with mentor Sarah Zarnelli, who took the time to get to know and understand his past achievements. She helped him create a degree program that combined his experience in competitive cycling with his new interest in training.

Michael also credits Professor Jim Sawyer, who taught human physiology at SUNY Empire, for taking the extra time to help him comprehend the depth of the subject matter. "It was clear that Michael's interests in the subject ran deep and that it would be part of his life's work," Sawyer says. "I found the effort he applied toward extending his understanding in the subject refreshing."

Michael earned his Bachelor of Science degree in athletic management in 2010. In addition to numerous nationally recognized certifications, he received his master's degree in exercise physiology at Carroll University in Waukesha, Wisconsin.



ERIN HAMLIN

Hometown: Remsen, New York
Sport: Luge
Years in Olympics: 2006, 2010, 2014, 2018



"It's still crazy for me to think that I'll carry the Olympian label with me for my entire life...and even crazier that it can include 'four-time' and 'medalist.' The 19 years of training and competing came and went so quickly, but now that I'm retired, and a full-time working mom, they seem so far behind me that I have to remind myself that it's still part of my identity! I do think that every time the Olympics come around, the excitement will be there and all the memories of repping the USA, proudly standing on the podium, pulling on the race suit, and the amazing moment of carrying the American flag will come rushing back clear as day!"

ASHLEY CALDWELL

Hometown: Ashburn, Virginia
Sport: Freestyle Skiing
Years in Olympics: 2010, 2014, 2018

"I started my degree with SUNY Empire State College right before my first Olympic Games in Vancouver 2010, when I was 16 years old. Empire State's online program allowed me to train and compete while getting my degree. I was able to finish my undergraduate degree right before my second Olympic Games in 2014 in Sochi, Russia! I'm still training and hope to compete in the 2022 Olympics in Beijing!"

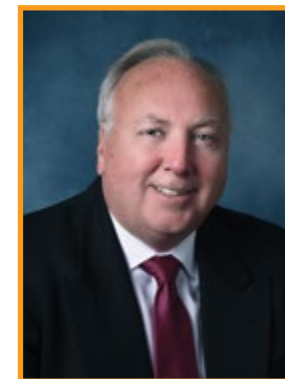
Michael credits higher education for serving as the catalyst to his successful business, MSN Pro Coaching. "I needed education to become an expert in exercise physiology, which is a continual process," he says. "I wanted to be confident in explaining the training process and relate to my clients." Today, athletes and coaches, as well as some of the nation's most prestigious sporting organizations, including USA Cycling and the United States Olympic Training Center in Colorado, look to Michael's knowledge and expertise. ■



A Legacy Continues

By Winnie Yu

The first Metropolitan New York Learning Center housed both the Labor College and the New York City Division.



Growing up, **Christopher Erikson '83, '85** lived in Electchester in Flushing, New York, a cooperative housing complex specially built for electricians and their families. As the grandson of Harry Van Arsdale Jr., he watched his grandfather lead Labor Day parades on TV. At age 20, Erikson became an apprentice of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) and enrolled at the Harry Van Arsdale Jr. School of Labor Studies (HVASLS).

Getting an associate degree was a mandate instituted by none other than Harry Van Arsdale Jr. himself. "He recognized how important it was for apprentices to get an education and for workers to solve their own problems," Erikson says.

When he finished, Erikson decided to pursue a bachelor's degree in labor/management relations. "It was worth it," he says. "I've used my degree every day since I became a business agent and had to negotiate collective bargaining agreements, review business contracts, or write a letter. I put the skills I learned at SUNY Empire to work every day."

Today, Erikson, 66, is the business manager of Local 3, the New York City chapter of the IBEW that represents 28,000 members. It's the same position held by his grandfather from 1933 to 1968 and then his uncle Thomas Van Arsdale, Harry's son, from 1968 to 2006. During his tenure, Erikson has successfully negotiated more than 150 collective bargaining agreements and been honored by various union and political organizations, including the NAACP and the Jewish Labor Committee.

Since 2016, Erikson has also served as the chairman of the IBEW's International Executive Council, the parent organization. The IBEW legacy is likely to continue — Erikson and his wife Denise have four sons who all work in the industry in various capacities.

Erikson says he is excited to see that SUNY Empire has a new midtown location — he attended the college when it was on 42nd Street, between Eighth and Ninth Avenues — and looks forward to meeting with Maria Figueroa the new dean of the HVASLS to find new ways to collaborate. He says IBEW will continue its support of SUNY Empire, a tradition rooted in the belief that higher education plays a critical role in the trades, perhaps now more than ever.

Erikson says one of his favorite quotes from his grandfather still holds true, though he said it in 1939: "There are many pressing problems facing the working men and women of this country today and present indications are that the problems will increase. If these problems are to be solved properly, the workers must find the solutions themselves. In order to do this, they must know how to study, analyze, discuss, introduce and put into effect the remedies." ■



Historical Perspectives on SUNY Empire's 50th Anniversary

By Richard Bonnabeau

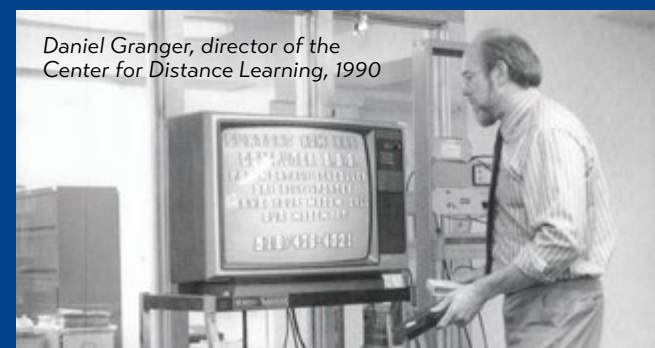
Ernest L. Boyer was a visionary. When he succeeded Samuel B. Gould in 1970 as SUNY chancellor, he answered the call from Alan Pifer, then president of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, to create a college that offered a degree that was both external and nonresidential. This was at a time when New York's economy was starting to falter, and SUNY was nearing completion of a costly statewide university system of large brick-and-mortar campuses to accommodate the postwar population boom.

This was a singular opportunity to create a non-campus campus and, in effect, break through barriers to serve students beyond SUNY's reach, including the rebellious young high-school and college students of that era who clamored for change.

Boyer appointed a task force to draft a SUNY version of how the nonresidential college might work. One cannot read A Prospectus for a New University College: Objectives, Process, Structure and Establishment without being moved by the enthusiasm imbued in this document. It speaks of experiment, boldness, and reaching out with a sharp focus on the individual needs and interests of the student. Its visionary language reflected "the spirit of the age" — one that called for all kinds of societal reforms.

For Boyer, it was an opportunity to turn a new page, to have the state university system create a shining example for the rest of American higher education. The plan received full endorsement from the SUNY Board of Trustees and the State Education Department, as well as major funding from the Carnegie Corporation and Ford Foundation, and special funding in Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller's executive budget. Soon, labor leaders would join the chorus of supporters.

The new university college would be mercurial in nature, assuming many shapes without the rigidities of traditional campuses. In effect, it would define itself by the individuals, groups, and institutions it encountered in fulfilling its unique mission.



Daniel Granger, director of the
Center for Distance Learning, 1990

"Higher education is in the middle of a revolution. Every basic assumption on which we've built in the past is being sharply challenged."

— Ernest L. Boyer, memorandum to the
SUNY Board of Trustees, January 27, 1971



Mentor Xenia Coulter with student in Ithaca

By fall 1971, the gears of the new college began to move. Centers were established in Manhattan and Albany, and these pioneers started working with students from Day One. They quickly developed a clear sense of purpose, and most important, a willingness to work together to meet challenges, support the newly hired, and conduct vital long-range planning. They saw themselves as agents of change and charged ahead with no guarantee of success.

Faculty, staff, and administrators reached out to Black and Latino students in their communities. They began developing special programs for students with career interests in allied health, social services, and nursing. They targeted active-duty military members, veterans, firefighters, and students in government agencies and businesses. Centers and satellites supporting these initiatives sprung up throughout the state among SUNY campuses, community colleges, business enterprises, government agencies, and even overseas. In the process, the college created a new faculty role in the sphere of public higher education; the term mentor, which is now inseparable from learning and counseling, spread throughout the state, nation, and globe as the college's impact grew.

A half-century later, this sustained momentum of service — accelerated by the advent of the internet and powerful personal computers — has created a great legacy. From just a handful of students earning degrees that first year, SUNY Empire is now approaching 100,000 graduates. Among them are alumni who earned our first master's degrees in the mid-1980s. The graduate program has since diversified and grown rapidly, offering 21 separate master's degrees, and, in the midst of the 50th anniversary year, an Ed.D. in educational leadership and change.

All told, it has been quite a journey, one in which all members of the SUNY Empire State College community can rightfully take great pride. ■



Celebrating 50 Years

The year was 1971. Starbucks and Disney World opened their doors. National Public Radio made its debut. And in upstate New York, SUNY Chancellor Ernest Boyer unleashed his vision of a newly imagined college experience, one "that would not depend on the rigidity of the calendar or class schedule but on the creativity of the students."

Over the next five decades, as the college expanded and offerings grew, SUNY Empire enabled thousands of busy adults to pursue their dreams of higher education. The college's unyielding commitment to flexibility and mentorship meant these non-traditional students could earn a college degree, while holding down jobs, raising families, and meeting other obligations. In time, SUNY Empire would graduate more than 92,000 alumni from all over the world.

In these next two pages, we offer a glimpse of SUNY Empire's storied past, the people who made the promise possible and those who know the college best. We hope they capture the energy and spirit of the college, and evoke fond memories of your time at SUNY Empire.

1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s 2010s 2020s



1971



1983



1987



1990



1996



1999



2003



2014



2019



Peter Gilbert, a mentor in the Saratoga unit, with an unidentified archeology student in 1972



Lydia Tillet, left, a student, meets with Imani Fryar, mentor and program coordinator of the SUNY Empire Transitional Program, 1987



Students and alumni on the Board of Governors in 1989



Former SUNY Chancellor Ernest L. Boyer, Sr. and his wife, Kay '78, in 1978



President Jim Hall with Assemblyman Edward Sullivan, chair of Assembly Higher Education Committee, and Dean Nancy Bunch of the Metropolitan New York Regional Center, September 1988



Former President Jim Hall, outside College Hall in 1990



SUNY Empire's nursing program celebrated its 10th anniversary in 1988

Bob Watson '99 was the first black general manager in Major League history, and is noted in the Baseball Hall of Fame as the player who scored the millionth run in baseball



President Joe Moore and wife, Beth Chiquoine, relax at their first All College in March 2000



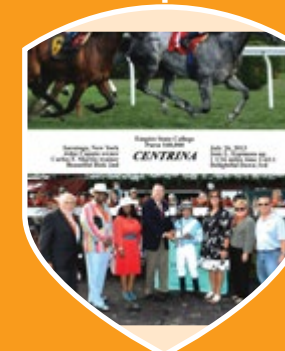
Richard Bonnabeau writes a book commemorating SUNY Empire's first 25 years



SUNY Empire's commencement in Prague in 2008



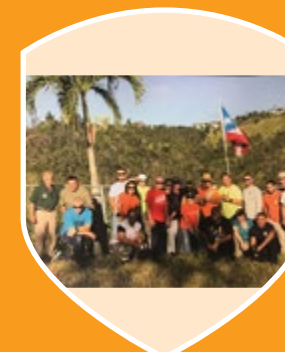
SUNY Empire's nursing program celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2018



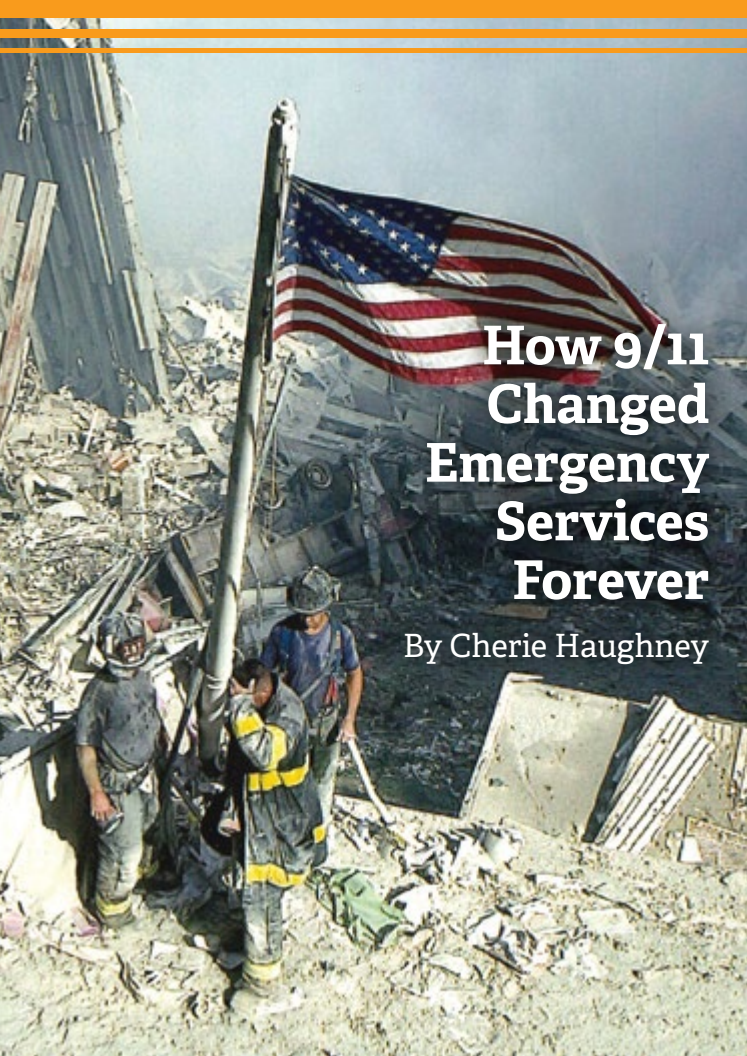
Alumni Day at the Races in 2013



SUNY Empire's new mascot Blue, a bluebird, in front of 4 Park Ave 2021



SUNY Empire pitched in to help Puerto Rico recover from Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2019



How 9/11 Changed Emergency Services Forever

By Cherie Haughney

Photo courtesy of Ricky Flores '96/The Journal News

Four members of our SUNY Empire community were at Ground Zero on 9/11. We asked them what they saw and how that fateful day changed emergency services forever.

Jay Jonas '97, Deputy Chief and Division Commander of New York City Fire Department Division 7

Jay Jonas was a 43-year-old husband, father of three, and captain of New York City Fire Department's Ladder Company 6 when he ran into the World Trade Center's North Tower the morning of September 11, 2001. It would be nearly five hours before he would re-emerge, one of only 22 survivors of the tower's collapse during the worst terrorist attack on the U.S. mainland in the nation's history.

"A lot has changed in our response and communications since 9/11. September 11 was the first time in my career that we used mutual aid — fire departments from outside the city. We haven't done it since, but at least now we have an open dialogue and procedures with the Nassau and Westchester fire departments. We practice with them once a year."

Gennaro Bonfiglio, FDNY Hazardous Materials Battalion Chief and Battalion Commander, SUNY Empire Lecturer

Gennaro Bonfiglio was captain of Engine Company 323 in Brooklyn and off duty on September 11. He watched the coverage unfold on TV and knew he'd be called into work. Within minutes, the call came and Bonfiglio reported for command. He didn't leave the World Trade Center site for 24 hours, consumed with firefighting and rescue efforts.

"The men and women who died raised the bar for all of us."

— Jay Jonas '97, Deputy Chief and Division Commander of New York City Fire Department Division 7

"There was an adage when I was a young firefighter: The job is fire. That's all we were concerned about. Activities that had to do with terrorism weren't our purview. There were silos. The police department did their thing and kept information sharing to a minimum. The fire department did it as well. We didn't cooperate and collaborate with each other. After September 11, we received an influx of money from the Federal government to the state and local level for training to learn about chemical weapons, bombs, radiation, you name it. We're not just firefighters. We respond to emergencies, subways, terror attacks. The relationship between agencies is the best it's ever been. It's a change that has been very heartening to see. We got this change, but at a great cost."

Chief Michael Massucci '19, Deputy Assistant Chief in the NYC Fire Department

Michael Massucci was on his way to class at Fire Tech when he looked up at the beautiful September sky and saw a black cloud near the World Trade Center. As he crossed the Verrazzano Bridge, he could see the towers and knew this was no freak accident. He arrived at the trade center site after the second tower collapsed. What he saw was "total devastation." He describes the scene as "just dust, steel, and paper."

"The fire department was decimated on that day. We had to rebuild. We're the most capable and most ready fire department in the world now for terrorism events. Every unit now has radiation detection equipment on their apparatus. Our HAZMAT battalion has been trained to the top level for chemical and biological terrorism. We developed a bureau in the fire department called the Center for Disaster, Terrorism, and Preparedness that collaborates with agencies including the NYPD, FBI, and ATF (Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives). We try not to have the lack of imagination we had before 9/11. We didn't see what was coming because we couldn't fathom it. We've come a long way since 9/11."

Joseph Nugent, retired NYPD Lieutenant in Special Operations, current NYPD liaison to New York City Transit, former SUNY Empire adjunct professor

On September 11, 2001, Joe Nugent was an NYPD transit bureau lieutenant assigned to special operations. When he arrived on the scene, he said it was like walking in a blizzard with snow up to your ankles. When he reflects on that day, he says he smells sulfur, sees the ashes falling like snowflakes, and hears the eerie silence punctuated only by the automatic distress signals coming from fallen firefighters buried in the rubble.

"Prior to 9/11, the NYPD and FDNY had a very competitive relationship, and it did not help the public at all. One of the things that has gotten so much better is the communication, cooperation, and interagency drills that the public benefits from and the departments benefit from. We have different core competencies, and we strengthen and support each other." ■

SUNY Empire Establishes Esports Program

By Winnie Yu



When former President Jim Malatras asked for ideas on how to improve SUNY Empire State College in 2019, Jon Easton proposed esports.

"He basically said, 'Great idea, make it happen,'" recalls Easton, now an adjunct computer science professor at SUNY Empire. "After speaking to many collegiate coordinators and directors, I found the best source of knowledge right here. Jen Hookway, a web designer at SUNY Empire, was the president of SUNY Poly's esports club when she was in college."

It wasn't long before the two lifelong gamers teamed up as founders and coordinators of SUNY Empire's esports program. When Easton left to become a cybersecurity analyst at SUNY System Administration over the summer, Hookway took over as the sole coordinator.

Esports Takes Off

In the spring of 2020, with the pandemic raging across the state, SUNY Empire made its debut in the competitive world of esports, when 15 students played three games in the SUNY Chancellor's Esports Challenge.

By the fall of 2020, SUNY had launched the systemwide esports league. SUNY Empire responded with 10 teams and also joined the ECAC (Eastern College Athletic Conference) Esports Conference, which includes more than 90 colleges.

In spring 2021, SUNY Empire had nearly 60 active students with almost 20 teams in two leagues. The college also has 150 members in the SUNY Empire Esports Discord group, which Hookway describes as the Microsoft Teams for gamers.

Getting Recognition

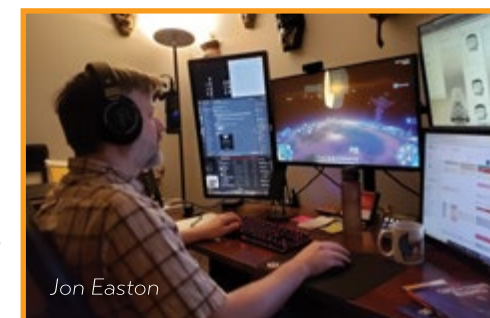
SUNY Empire's esports program achieved acclaim last June, when two students were named MVPs by the SUNY Esports League. (See sidebar)

"The esports community here at SUNY Empire is amazing," Jackson says. "Jon and Jen have been great managers and are so easy to talk to about anything that goes on throughout the season. They always have our backs, which is such a good feeling. It makes it so much more enjoyable to be a part of the esports team."

Hookway says the program reflects the passion she and Easton share for gaming and the students who do it. "We regularly engage with students, both in regards to gaming and their personal lives," she says. "We try to make SUNY Empire esports feel like a supportive family, not just an afterschool club."

Easton credits the program's success to its simplicity — no ice breakers, just show up and play. "Your teammates will know you by your performance and your interactions with them," he says. "They'll get to know you as a person before they ever see your face. That's appealing to a great many students."

Both predict esports at SUNY Empire will grow. Hookway says she's working on making the Discord site more user friendly, and looking for ways to entice more players by linking students to webinars, online expos with industry professionals, and discounts on hardware and programs. ■



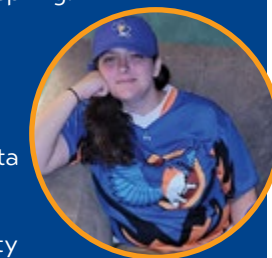
Jon Easton



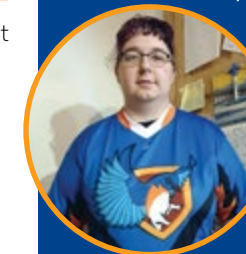
SUNY EMPIRE STUDENTS LAUDED FOR ESPORTS EXCELLENCE

Two SUNY Empire State College students won MVP awards in the SUNY Esports League last spring.

Nancy "Phancy" Jackson, 20, of Watkins Glen, New York, was named Fortnite MVP. Aferdita Skudrinja, 25, of Staten Island, New York, won Call of Duty MVP and overall SUNY League MVP.



"To have a smaller and newer program like ours take home such prestigious awards says a lot about the strengths of these two students," says Jennifer Hookway, coordinator of SUNY Empire's esports program.



Though this was the first time SUNY Empire students were recognized by the SUNY League, it was not the first time they caught the attention of the ECAC. Several SUNY Empire students have won ECAC Rookie of the Week and ECAC Player of the Week.



Jennifer Hookway

SUNY Empire's First Doctoral Program Debuts this Fall

By Winnie Yu

SUNY Empire has launched its first doctoral program — an Ed.D. in educational leadership and change designed for mid-career higher education professionals. Fifteen students are enrolled in the program this fall and will emerge with the know-how to become leaders in the ever-evolving landscape of higher education.



Ali Ait Si Mhamed, director

“Our students and alumni have been asking for this for many years,” says Cammie Baker-Clancy, director of graduate student outreach and admissions. “Our strong graduate-level education programs made the Ed.D. the ideal first program to offer.”

The 54-credit post-master’s program is designed for working professionals, including faculty, college deans, assistant deans, and other academic administrators. SUNY Empire’s flexible degree program will enable candidates to earn the degree on their own time, at their convenience.

“As the only higher-education-focused Ed.D. in SUNY, this program provides unique value for those looking to advance their careers in higher education while continuing to serve their current institution,” says Officer in Charge Nathan Gonyea.

The program was also driven by strong interest from SUNY’s community college faculty and staff, and SUNY Empire’s partnerships with those schools, says Ali Ait Si Mhamed, director of the Ed.D. program.



Fishner Family



MEET JASON FISHNER: FIRST TO ENROLL IN SUNY EMPIRE'S NEW ED.D. PROGRAM

Jason Fishner '12, of Delhi, New York, an alum of our MBA program and director of residence life at SUNY Delhi, was the first to enroll in SUNY Empire’s new Ed.D. program. The 41-year-old married father of two holds a Master of Science in higher education administration and policy from the University at Albany and an advanced certificate in higher ed administration from Stony Brook University. He also has advanced certificates in project management and human resource management. His wife, Carrie, is currently working on an advanced certificate in public history at SUNY Empire.

We spoke with Jason about his decision to enroll in this new doctoral program.

What attracted you to this program?

I consider myself SUNY born and raised, having done all of my education as a student in the Educational Opportunity Program. I also worked on different SUNY campuses as a professional. After I got married and had two children, commuting 90 minutes each way to earn a doctorate was no longer an option since I didn’t want to miss events as my kids grew up. When I heard SUNY Empire might be offering a doctorate related to higher education, I immediately inquired with graduate studies and have been keeping an eye out on the website.

How did you land at SUNY Empire the first time?

I started at SUNY Empire in fall 2008 by taking the course “Teamwork.” I’ve always been interested in student leadership and consensus building, so I figured I’d give the course a shot since it was going to be my first course online. I loved learning online. It gave me the flexibility of not having to commute to school, which was a big advantage since the closest campuses offering master’s degrees were more than an hour away from me. After I finished my course, I realized that with that course and transferring in credits from my previous master’s degree, I was 25 percent done with an MBA, so I kept going to earn that.

What are your goals?

I love my role in residence life and student affairs. It’s a great balance of administration while still having lots of student contact. In the short term, while my kids are still in school, I will likely continue my work at SUNY Delhi. After that, while I can see myself moving up in student affairs, it would need to be at a campus where I still have the opportunity for student contact, so I can assist with their growth and development. This new degree will give me the ability to apply new knowledge in the workplace and to stay competitive in a changing job market. Being a lifelong learner, taking new courses and learning new information keeps me motivated. ■

Always One Step Ahead

By Lindsey Clark

“SUNY Empire increased its undergraduate applications by 9 percent, while graduate applications increased by 27 percent for the Fall 2020 Term”

When COVID-19 became a serious threat to the United States in March 2020, colleges scrambled to adapt to a fully online environment in order to continually (and safely) serve their students and communities.

While some college admissions offices struggled to quickly transition to a virtual format, SUNY Empire State College never skipped a beat. Our Office of Admissions had been offering virtual information sessions and office hours long before COVID-19 became a household word. “There was no pausing. We added more virtual events and continued to work together between multiple territories for a seamless enrollment process,” says Jennifer D’Agostino, director of admissions.

SUNY Empire’s reputation as a premier online institution became even more appealing when in-person learning was not an option. Beginning with SUNY Empire’s Center for Distance Learning, a non-residential higher-education option dating back to the college’s founding in 1971, the college now offers more than 110 online degrees and certificates. Many adult learners returned to college seeking a new career path or advanced degree during the pandemic.



SUNY Empire uses these viewbooks to recruit new students

With an effective, streamlined enrollment process, an expanded virtual presence, and the college’s trusted online curriculum, SUNY Empire increased its undergraduate applications by 9 percent, while graduate applications increased by 27 percent for the Fall 2020 Term. “We were able to successfully pivot during this pandemic, which really speaks to who we are as a college,” says Andrea Hennessy, associate vice president for enrollment management and marketing. “Being innovative and flexible is built into our culture.”

The admissions office plans to implement a hybrid recruitment model moving forward, holding in-person and virtual sessions. SUNY Empire will continue its commitment to flexible, accessible education for students to invest in their futures. ■

Your Generosity at Work

“This scholarship is a blessing and will enable me to pursue my dreams of becoming an educator for students with disabilities at the secondary level. When these students are given the right supports and courage to speak, they’ll develop a voice that’s not only heard, but can spark change.” — Erika Backus '16, MA Teaching, Special Ed



Erika Backus '16

Scholarships can bring a SUNY Empire degree within reach. Generous annual gifts from alumni and friends to The Fund for SUNY Empire State College support our robust scholarship program, as well as faculty and staff development, a rigorous yet flexible academic program, and whatever is needed across our statewide campus to help students like Erika succeed.

For more information or to make your gift, please visit www.esc.edu/giving or email Stephanie Corp (Stephanie.Corp@esc.edu). Thank you!



1980s

David Shakes '85 and the North Star Players presented "Emancipation Denied," as a live radio drama. The play tells the story of the Tulsa race riot of 1921, called the "single worst incident of racial violence in American history." The company presented the full version of the play by Debra Washington in 2017, and Shakes had initially wanted the North Star Players to put on another full version this year for the 100th anniversary. Amid the coronavirus pandemic, Shakes opted to record a live reading at SUNY Empire State College.

Musician and songwriter **Elliott Murphy '88** graduated from the metropolitan location and moved to Paris a year later. He has lived in Paris for over 30 years and continued his musical career. In 2013, the French minister of culture awarded him a Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres. In 2021, he graciously spoke and performed at the SUNY Empire State College virtual commencement.

1990s

Jean M. Hale '92, '98 was named vice president for institutional advancement at Westminster College. She brings more than 20 years of higher education experience, most recently as executive director of community and corporate relations at California University of Pennsylvania. Hale holds an Ed.D. from the University of Pittsburgh School of Education, a master's in business and policy studies and a bachelor's in business management and economics from SUNY Empire State College.

Timothy J. Cosgriff '93 was a featured speaker at SUNY Geneseo for **Jasmine Tang '96's** class. Timothy spoke about the importance of a liberal arts education and showcased some of his photography and artwork.

Michael G. Garber '97 has published two scholarly works this year. The first was a chapter in the anthology "Paris and the Musical" (Routledge, 2021). The second, out in July from the University Press of Mississippi, is a full-length book titled "My Melancholy Baby: The First Ballads of the Great American Songbook, 1902-1913."

2000s

Dennis J. Richards '00, '01, '12 is retiring as chief of detectives for the Buffalo Police Department in New York. Dennis began his career at the police department more than 40 years ago as a report technician. He is continuing his career as director of the Erie Crime Analysis Center, through the state Division of Criminal Justice Services.

Gene I. Katz '01 graduated from SUNY Empire with a B.S. in community and human services. This past December, he earned a Doctor of Management degree in criminal justice from Colorado Technical University, where he has been teaching since 2011.

Janice I. Mitchell '04, a retired investigator and adjunct professor in the criminal justice department of Tiffin University has written a book. The book is being published and will be released later this year.

Artist and Kingston, New York, native **Bruce Bundock '08** had his artwork featured in a solo exhibition at the Arkell Museum in Canajoharie, New York, last spring. His art is based in the realist tradition, and inspired by three geographic locations: the Hudson Valley, Maine, and Cape Cod. He received his M.A. from SUNY Empire, and his B.F.A. from Maryland Institute College of Art.

Joseph Juracka '08 recently moved back to his hometown to open a dental practice. He is a Saratoga Springs, New York native and U.S. Navy veteran who enjoys creating beautiful, healthy smiles for his patients. He earned his undergraduate degree at SUNY Empire State College and his Doctorate in Dental Medicine (DMD) from Rutgers University School of Dental Medicine in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

Amalia Z. Dache-Gerbino '09 has been appointed an associate professor at the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education. With this designation, she becomes the first tenured, female Latinx Professor at the Graduate School of Education. Dache received a bachelor's degree in English literature from SUNY Brockport State College in 2003 and a master's degree in liberal studies from SUNY Empire in 2009. She received a Ph.D. in educational leadership from the University of Rochester in 2014.

2010s

Dwana A. Smallwood '10, former principal dancer with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, was one of four distinguished alumni of the University of North Carolina School of the Arts to headline the first-ever UNCSCA Virtual Festival of Dance earlier this year. Dwana is also founder of a nonprofit performing arts center in Brooklyn, New York. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree from SUNY Empire in 2010.

Former body builder **Jeremy Freeman '11, '14** has become a motivational speaker since his retirement. He is the founder and CEO of "Freeman Formula," where he teaches people about physical and mental health. Jeremy grew up in New York's north country and now lives in Florida. He was the inspiration for the animated character Bob Parr in the 2004 Pixar film, "The Incredibles."

Allison Cherkosly '12, '15, Saratoga WarHorse's executive director, was named in Albany Business Review's "40 Under 40" list for 2021. Allison served in Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. She translated her experience in the military into a successful 10+ year career in the nonprofit sector, focusing on fundraising and organizational management. Allison teaches nonprofit fund development and grant writing at the University at Albany, where she earned her Ph.D. in educational policy and leadership studies. Allison also holds an MBA and M.A. in public policy from SUNY Empire, as well as a B.A. from UAlbany.

Trenton native **Chanel Jasmin Clark '12** brought her international "Narc Abuse Support Group" tour to Philadelphia in July for a book signing. The seven-time author and life coach, known on social media as "The Spiritual Whistleblower," is the creator of the "Inner Healing After Narcissistic Abuse" podcast, where she shares her personal stories to help victims who have been abused by narcissists spiritually, emotionally, physically, and financially.

Christian Nanry '14, a military policeman and criminal investigator, recently published an article about human trafficking. His experiences include time as a military dog handler, special reaction team member, protective services, and fugitive and threat investigator. Christian holds a B.S. from SUNY Empire, and a master's degree from Seton Hall University. Recently, he successfully defended his dissertation for a Doctor of Philosophy at Texas State University, where he is awaiting graduation.

May Dorothy Brymn '15, a SUNY Empire graduate with a B.A. in cultural studies has received an MFA in creative writing and publishing arts from the University of Baltimore. She also recently published a book of poetry. May, a Connecticut native now living in Maryland, says her works are inspired by childhood memories, and captivating humorous and moving stories told to her by relatives.

Rasheada Caldwell '16 of Syracuse, New York, a political newcomer, ran for one of two open Common Council seats and received more votes than anyone running for any office in the Syracuse Democratic primary. Rasheada is a mom and a youth advocate. She has worked with youth her entire adult life, first at PEACE Inc., and now with the Allyn Foundation. Her son, Rasheed Baker was gunned down in front of their home in 2017. His murder is still unsolved. As a council member, she plans to focus on housing and youth violence. Rasheada received a B.A. from SUNY Empire in 2016. She is a former standout basketball player and now coaches at Syracuse Academy of Science, where her daughter goes to school.

Ryan Anthony Zieno '16 was a featured speaker at a 2021 Council of College and Military Educators Professional Development Symposium this summer. Ryan attended SUNY Empire and completed his B.S. degree in 2016, while on active duty. As a military-aligned student, Ryan appreciates the support he received from the college and would like to thank everyone who continues to support our military-aligned and veteran students.

Anthony T. Gaskin '17, who graduated from SUNY Empire with a B.S. in early childhood development, went back to school after many years away and is now writing a series of children's books. The first, "Mr. Tony Explores Space," is now available at Barnes & Noble.

Kristina Kwacz '17 presented for the first time at the 5th Annual Memory Studies Association conference, which was held virtually. She discussed her final project for her M.A. in liberal studies, the exhibition, "In the Shadow of the Twenty." There were more than 900 participants at the conference.

Said Shaiye '18, who earned his B.A. from SUNY Empire in 2018, has written a book, "Are You Borg Now?" The book blends nonfiction, poetry, and self-interrogation. Shaiye uses the Borg from "Star Trek: Voyager" as a foil to answer the central question of his existence. The book explores how hope, culture, race, faith, and nationality shape one's identity. It asks what it means to be Somali American, and how childhood war trauma skews that meaning.

Michael Gorchov '01, rector and resident priest at St. Paul's Church in Troy, New York, has embarked on a "Keep Making Music" campaign to raise funds to restore the church's organ, which was installed in 1921 and has fallen into disrepair. His goal is to complete the campaign by Nov. 27, 2021, the centennial of the first time the instrument was played. Michael, who actively shares the campaign on social media, was recently featured in a Times Union article discussing the organ and its history.

Erin Heindl '18, '21 has been hired by Dannible & McKee, LLP, a certified public accounting and consulting firm in New York, as an audit staff accountant. She will assist the engagement team on audits and reviews in the financial statement areas. Erin earned her A.S. and B.S. degrees from SUNY Empire.

2020s

Alexis Gooding '20, a recent graduate with an M.A. in social and public policy at SUNY Empire, has just been accepted to the Pipeline to Justice program at CUNY School of Law. ■



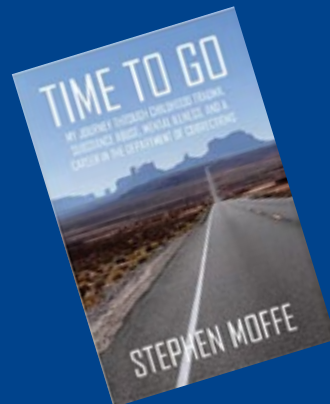
SUNY Empire alumni have always been prolific writers and artists. Here's a sample of some of their latest works.

Sally Steinwach '82's artwork has been featured in several pop-up art shows at the Artist Cave gallery in Rochester, New York. The Artist Cave has been hosting local artists for parking lot shows during the pandemic. Sally's work has been on display and is for sale.



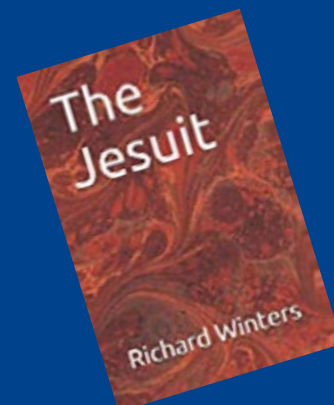
Robert Martin '90 has written his second book titled "9/11 Remembered: Twenty Years Later." The book is a moving tribute to all those who served.

Ruth E. Maryland-London '00, retired dietitian and nutritionist, recently published her first book, "Powerful Herbal Remedies, Positive Thoughts, & Natural Movements."



Stephen Moffe '12 wrote a book called "Time to Go: My Journey Through Childhood Trauma, Substance Abuse, Mental Illness, and a Career in the Department of Corrections." By sharing his personal experience, Stephen hopes to raise public awareness around mental illness and its effective treatment.

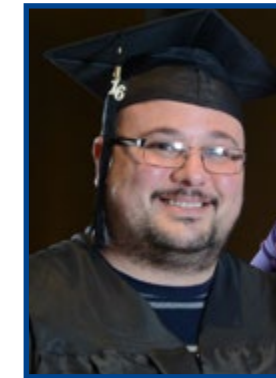
Richard Winters '13 published a novel earlier this year titled "The Jesuit." The story features an intuitive detective who hunts down a serial killer terrorizing New York City. Richard lives in the Adirondack Mountains in upstate New York. He earned his B.A. from SUNY Empire in 2013.



IN MEMORIAM



Herman W. Benson '75
 Edwin J. Boylan Jr. '96
 Ann S. Bryant '84
 Joan K. Cauley '97
 Ronald P. Clark '77
 James F. Coffey '11
 Erick W. Contreras '14
 Joan A. Damick '74
 Christopher Del Vecchio-Dzikowski '16
 Shirley A. Deponceau '87
 Ramona A. Deratzian '87
 Van E. Dykeman '78
 Tracy Elkin '15
 Robert P. Faynor '79
 William C. Ferrero
 Benedict Joseph Fernandez '87
 Douglas A. Fisher '94
 Timothy A. Gregory '00
 Anita Harris
 Ronald Hilton
 William A. James '00
 Robert "Bob" Johnson '96
 Edith T. Keasbey '03
 Angelo J. Lisandrelli '92, '94
 James "Jim" McMahon '96
 Margaret Mary McNamara '78
 Rhoda Miller
 Caroline M. Murray '99
 Steven Nelson '18
 Kathleen P. Norton '84
 Mary Jean O'Connor Heath '97
 Michele Ogle
 Rosalie B. Parsons '75
 Patricia F. Polak '87
 Mary Ellen Porter '14
 Karen Price '10
 Thomas Pugliese '76
 Scott R. Rockefeller '90
 Charles W. Rutherford '75
 Florence Sillen '94
 Leo D. Smith '88, '95
 Bruce W. Sowalski '86, '92
 Frances R. Stanton '82, '87
 Lucy M. Suhr '80
 Valoree N. Suttmore '01
 Marian N. Taylor '02
 Diane Thiele
 Edward S. Todd
 Frank Tommasini '01
 Carol Trahan '85
 Mabel Walker '79
 Nancy W. Walker '79
 Susan Stockwell Yates '91



Christopher Del Vecchio-Dzikowski '16 passed away on Nov. 30, 2020. He graduated from SUNY Empire in 2016 with a Bachelor of Professional Studies in business, management and economics with a concentration in human resources. He later received an advanced certificate in community college leadership from the University at Albany. Christopher was also pursuing his master's degree in management at Excelsior College. Christopher started his professional career in 2005 as part of the Disney College Program at Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida. He later moved back to Schenectady and worked at Schenectady

Community College before joining the staff at SUNY Empire in February of 2020 as the assistant registrar. He is survived by his parents, six siblings, and his husband Michael Dzikowski.



Mabel Walker '79 of Watertown, New York, passed away at her home, at the age of 93. Mabel was a North Country philanthropist and wife of former Watertown Mayor Tom Walker. She attended nursing school at Allegheny General Hospital in Pittsburgh, graduating in 1948 with a degree in nursing. After raising her family, she returned to school to earn a B.A. degree from SUNY Empire State College in 1979. Mabel was the inspiration, co-founder, and a past president of Hospice of Northern New York and with her family established the Walker Center for Cancer Care at the Samaritan Medical Center. Both initiatives were prompted in part by the loss of two

of her daughters, both from cancer. Mabel volunteered for several nursing and health-related causes throughout Northern New York and held various leadership roles at organizations in her community.

Mabel was also a mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother who loved spending time with her family. She regarded education as a priority in people's lives, and together with her husband created student scholarships in institutions all across northern New York. The Walkers established two scholarships at SUNY Empire State College to help students realize their goals. Shortly before her death, Mabel received the SUNY Empire State College Alumni Distinguished Leader Award for her philanthropy and leadership throughout New York's North Country. Among other family members, she is survived by her husband, Tom, daughter, Laurel, and son, Tom.

This list includes updates on alumni and other members of the SUNY Empire State College community reported by family members, newspapers, and other sources. To submit a name to be included in In Memoriam, please contact alumni@esc.edu.

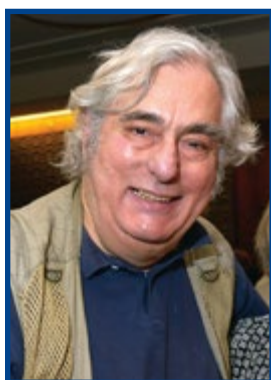


James "Jim" McMahon '96, a long-time employee, alumnus, and friend of SUNY Empire, passed away on August 26. Jim was the coordinator of Student Services at the Harry Van Arsdale Jr. School of Labor Studies. Jim's compassionate and outgoing nature would brighten even the cloudiest of days. Jim passionately supported the students at HVASLS, helping

them stay on track and ensuring that they took full advantage of the co-curricular opportunities at the college. Jim graduated from SUNY Empire in 1996 and later earned an MBA from Wagner College on Staten Island.

He originally joined SUNY Empire as an adjunct for the partnership between SUNY Empire and Verizon Corporate College. Colleagues remember him as a dedicated employee who served hundreds of students each semester, often going above and beyond the call of duty. In 2018 and 2019, Jim led a two-week trip to Puerto Rico, where he worked alongside SUNY Empire students to help the residents rebuild after Hurricanes Maria and Irma. "Our students learned a great deal about disaster recovery, Puerto Rico, and about construction and project management," he said at the time. "I'm so proud of how well we worked as a team."

Jim will be missed by all who knew him well, especially the students whose lives he touched. He is survived by two daughters and three grandchildren.



Benedict Joseph Fernandez '87 passed away earlier this year at the age of 84. He graduated from SUNY Empire State College with a B.S. in 1987. Ben was an American educator, photojournalist, and documentary street photographer. He is noted for photographing the protest movements of the 1960s, particularly those of the civil rights movement and

the anti-Vietnam War movement. Ben received SUNY Empire State College's Distinguished Alumni Award in 2013. His collection of 80 images of Martin Luther King became a traveling exhibition entitled "Countdown to Eternity," which was featured around the country and on display at SUNY Empire's metropolitan location in 2014.

Patricia F. Polak '87 of Sayville, New York, passed away last December. She was 74. Patricia was a graduate of SUNY Empire, earning a B.A. in 1987. She went on to earn a master's from Manhattanville College. Patricia was an educator, writer, and poet. She is survived by her husband Emil.

William C. Ferrero passed away last summer at his home in Gansevoort, New York. He was 75. For many years, Bill served as the vice president of administration at SUNY Empire State College until his retirement. Bill was an avid golfer, and a devoted husband, father, and grandfather. He will be remembered for his gentle and humble spirit. He is survived by his wife, daughter, two sons, and grandchildren.



Robert "Bob" Johnson '96 passed away this summer in Sarasota, Florida. He was 84. Bob was a member of the SUNY Empire State College Foundation Board. Johnson and his late wife Carol created The Robert and Carol Johnson Scholarship to assist minority students with financial need who live in the Genesee Valley region. In 2014, SUNY Empire honored

him with its Citizen Laureate Award. Born and raised in Chicago, Bob became a prominent businessman and proprietor of Bob Johnson Chevrolet, a minority-owned car dealership. He founded the Bob Johnson Auto Group in 1981, sold it in 2001, and retired to Florida the following year. With 17 locations and more than 1,200 employees, it is one of the largest family-owned dealership groups in the nation. He is survived by his wife Barbara, two daughters, and several grandchildren and great-grandchildren. ■

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SUNY Empire Alumni Gathering Virtually

"Conversations Over Coffee" is a virtual midday coffee break that started during the pandemic.

Each month, we feature new speakers and a new topic. All speakers are part of the SUNY Empire community – alumni, faculty, staff, and students. Topics include alumni stories, current events, career advice, faculty research, interesting hobbies, music, and more.

To learn about upcoming events, or ask a question, please visit: www.esc.edu/alumni.

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ALUMNI REFER-A-STUDENT PROGRAM

Do you have a friend, family member, or colleague interested in starting or finishing their degree?

Through the Alumni Refer-a-Student Program, a friend, colleague, or family member you refer to SUNY Empire State College can receive a \$100 Better Together scholarship toward one term of enrollment and a \$50 orientation fee waiver. In addition, we'll put them in touch with a recruitment professional from their area to answer any questions they have during the application process.

Visit alumni.esc.edu/get-involved/refer-a-student for more information or contact the alumni office at Alumni@esc.edu.

Refer a student today and let future SUNY Empire alumni know their dreams are within reach!

