

QCC

# Connections

THE PUBLICATION FOR FRIENDS AND ALUMNI OF QUINSIGAMOND COMMUNITY COLLEGE



## QCC Alumna Sowed an Amazing Future for Herself

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## Drive, Motivation and Support take QCC Grad to Incredible Heights

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**QUINSIGAMOND**  
Community College

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*QCC Connections is a publication of  
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### **Alumni Social**

Thursday, June 13  
5:30 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.  
Beer Garden  
64 Franklin Street, Worcester MA

Alumni: \$10 | Guests: \$15  
FREE for QCC Class of 2019 Graduates

Visit [www.QCC.edu/alumni-social](http://www.QCC.edu/alumni-social) for additional details and to register.

Cover Photo: QCC alumna Dianna Provencher.  
Inset: QCC alumna Fatin Alkhaledi.

# *From the Alumni Association President*

## **Greetings, QCC Alumni:**

Remember, life at QCC does not end when you graduate: it continues and thrives.

Since graduating from Quinsigamond Community College in 2004 with a certificate, then years later with an associate degree, I have remained quite active at the school. I was recently elected President of the QCC Alumni Association Advisory Board. I have been on the QCC Alumni Association Advisory Board for over 10 years and have enjoyed every moment of serving on this wonderful Board. I can assure you unequivocally that the rewards of making a commitment to QCC have been both exciting and valuable.

The QCC Alumni Association Advisory Board represents a major segment of the School's over 32,000 alumni population. The Board's primary objective is to advance the mission of the college, create opportunities, and to promote stronger relationships among the QCC Alumni population. Board members serve as advocates for QCC and the QCC alumni family, and we work to provide an infrastructure that facilitates meaningful relationships between the College and its alumni. My primary objective for this year is to increase alumni engagement. Our Board wants to keep alumni excited and motivated so that they will be more active in participating in QCC activities and events such as reunions, mystery dinners, and student & alumni events. You can find upcoming events on the Alumni Events Calendar at [www.QCC.edu/alumni/events](http://www.QCC.edu/alumni/events).

You might be interested to know just what our QCC Alumni Association Advisory Board does:

- We meet several times a year to plan programs and discuss ways we can further cultivate participation in the life and growth of the College. In fact, during the last several years, we have sponsored numerous professional and educational events, receptions, and events for informal socializing and networking, as well as attending numerous student club activities. The response to our past events has been extremely positive and we are pleased to provide opportunities such as these to bring alumni of the College together.

- We have not only spoken at various lectures and continuing education seminars, but we also represent QCC alumni on various other volunteer committees.
- We serve as mentors to students and are actively involved in mentoring incoming freshmen, as well as upperclassmen, ensuring that their QCC experience continues through graduation.
- We thoroughly encourage alumni to contribute to social media posts on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and elsewhere by adding their pictures, posting when they attend or have attended a college sponsored event, and sharing College news. Visit QCC's home page ([www.QCC.edu](http://www.QCC.edu)) for all the latest news.

Please consider volunteering as a mentor, speaker, or attendee at our events. In addition, we welcome alumni participation on any one of QCC's program committees. For more information visit [www.QCC.edu/alumni](http://www.QCC.edu/alumni) or call 508.854-4520. We hope that you will be encouraged to join our Board by filling out a nominating form (available on our website). The QCC Alumni Association Nominating Committee entertains nominations on a yearly basis.

Finally, and most importantly, we ask that you contribute to the QCC Annual Fund by visiting [www.QCC.edu/foundation/make-gift](http://www.QCC.edu/foundation/make-gift). U.S. News and World Report heavily considers alumni contributions in its ranking of colleges. You will not only make a difference at the College with your contribution, but you will also help to increase the value of your QCC degree. Please remember that it is not the amount that you give, but that you give.

In any case, wherever you go in the world, you always have a place at QCC. On behalf of the QCC Alumni Association Advisory Board, we look forward to seeing you on campus.



Cheryl Marrino  
*President, QCC Alumni Association  
Advisory Board*



Top & Right: Dianna Provencher, owner of Little Bit Farm and Apiary in Leicester gets her farm ready for spring.

## QCC Alumna Sowed an Amazing Future for Herself

As the Business Manager for Central MA Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC), owner of Little Bit Farm and Apiary in Leicester, as well as resident beekeeper and Leicester selectman, mother of two and grandmother of three, Quinsigamond Community College alumna **Dianna Provencher** is one busy lady. Persevering through challenges has been a way of life since she was a young girl who had to drop out of high school to help her family when her father got sick.

“The three older kids (there were also five younger ones at home) went to work so I never graduated high school but I wanted to be educated,” she said. “I had an early bucket list and wanted my education back.”

Obtaining her education would not come easily. Ms. Provencher became a single parent to two young children, working to support them but also working toward her dream of an education and better life. Ms. Provencher took and passed her GED and when her kids were both in school, began attending QCC. She took classes at night and during the day when she could fit them in between waitressing and taking care of her children.

“I was pretty nervous because I had already missed subjects by not finishing high school. I thought, ‘Where do I start and am I good enough; am I smart enough?’” she



said, adding, “I wanted to have a real diploma. I wanted to have something no one could take away.”

Ms. Provencher quickly found that QCC was a place where she could attain her educational dreams through the help and support of faculty and staff.

“My role models were my professors,” she said. “To this day I have a lot of respect for teachers.” Ms. Provencher not only graduated from QCC with a degree in business administration, she also earned a degree in data processing; however, she was far from finished with her educational goals. She said QCC had given her the confidence to believe she could succeed in education, enabling her



to continue on and earn a degree in business administration at Lesley College. She attended college in the evenings, while working days at Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC).

After earning her bachelor's degree, Ms. Provencher landed a job as a business system analyst with Quantum, the company that had bought out DEC. It would be a job she would hold for 18 years until everyone in her department was let go due to downsizing.

"Now I'm thinking that I'm in my 50s and who is going to hire an older woman. I worked at Walmart for a while, then sent my resume into CMRPC and got hired as an administrative assistant," she said.

She quickly worked her way to her current position at CMRPC (a position she has held for three years) and has worked there for over 10 years.

*Top: QCC alumna Dianna Provencher puts together some bee hives on her farm.*

*Right: Dianna Provencher finds time to give a bit of attention to the sheep on the farm. Several were due to give birth when this photo was taken.*

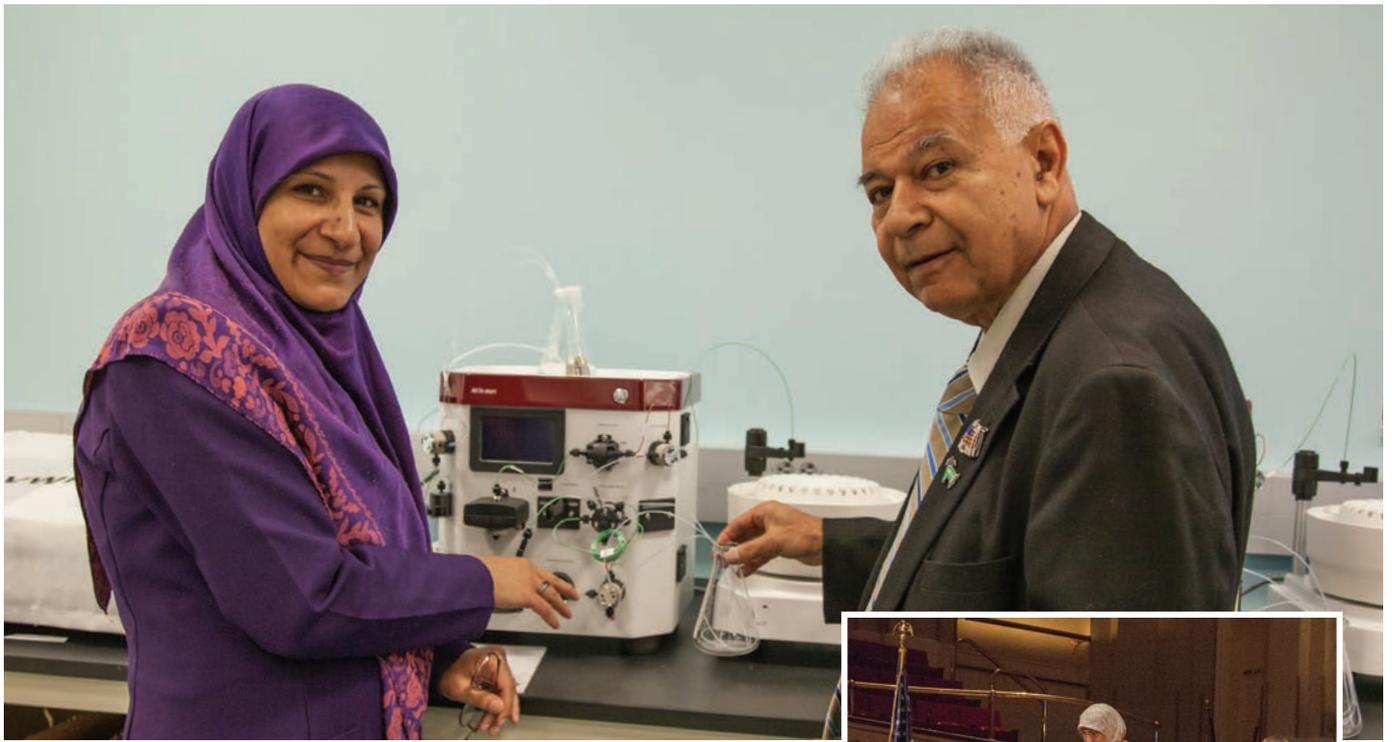
For many, the story might have ended there, but Ms. Provencher's story is far from ordinary. Along the way she met her husband, bought property, and started Little Bit Farm and Apiary. In 1998, she also began beekeeping after ordering her first packet of bees for her husband's birthday. Today, she sells honey, makes beeswax candles, lip balm and, when asked, teaches beekeeping to students in Sudbury. She also teaches gardening and

has gone to senior centers and had classes at the farm.

In her "spare" time she is a Leicester selectman, a position she has held since 2005. She also spent 18 years on the town's Conservation Board.

When asked how she could do everything she does, her answer is simple.

"QCC gave me that confidence."



Top: Fatin Alkhaledi and Professor Dadbeh Bigonahy work in one of the labs at QCC. Right: Fatin Alkhaledi receives the Engineering Student Distinction Award at the Honors and Awards Ceremony.

## Drive, Motivation and Support take QCC Grad to Incredible Heights

Imagine being driven out of your country and leaving your family and everything you've known behind. That's exactly how Quinsigamond Community College dual major (Engineering and Biomedical Engineering) graduate **Fatin Alkhaledi** found herself six years ago as a refugee from Iraq, trying to learn English and make a new life for herself and her family.

Ms. Alkhaledi, her husband and three children came to the United States in 2013 after running from Iraq to Syria in order to escape the kidnappings and killings of educated people in her homeland. The United Nations assisted the family in

finding asylum in the United States, giving them a travel loan to get to the U.S. Since the family knew no one in the States, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) made the decision to place the family in Worcester.

"All my family, my parents and four brothers and four sisters are back in Iraq," Ms. Alkhaledi said.

Told the requirements to stay in the U.S. were to attend school and search for a job, Ms. Alkhaledi realized she first needed to secure a firm grasp of the English language, and began taking English as a Second Language (ESL) classes at QCC.

Ms. Alkhaledi worked hard to master the English language with the assistance of her instructors. One of QCC's math professors recognized her strong aptitude for math and suggested she meet with Professor **Dadbeh Bigonahy**, Coordinator of Engineering, Biomedical Engineering & Sciences.

"I met with him and he asked me a lot of questions and encouraged me to attend QCC in the Biomedical Engineering program," she said.

Ms. Alkhaledi took the placement tests after the ESL class concluded and scored high in all areas, and decided to major in biomedical engineering after Professor Bigonahy had sparked her interest.



*Ms. Alkhaledi was a part of the 2016 Women's Soccer team.*

"I already had an Engineering degree in Iraq and had worked there for seven years designing and maintaining electronics and communication circuits, but was not really ever comfortable as a woman working in that field," she added.

Ms. Alkhaledi began her studies at QCC in Spring 2014 and quickly became an active member of the community. Along with her course load and family, Ms. Alkhaledi held down a work study job at the Athletic Center; volunteered as a translator in the admissions office; became an active member of Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society; a member of the new Women in STEM student organization; acted as an ambassador for other refugees, and was even a player on QCC's first women's soccer team.

"I wanted to play soccer but was worried about my dress. My coach supported me and allowed me to dress the way I felt comfortable," she said.

Ms. Alkhaledi said the support and encouragement she received from many QCC faculty and staff has made

a huge impact on her. She was also quick to add that the first person who has supported her and continues to support her is her husband.

Since the very beginning of her career at QCC, Ms. Alkhaledi has remained focused on her educational objectives.

In May 2017, Ms. Alkhaledi graduated from QCC, earning top honors. As a Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society student she received a gold stole in commemoration of her academic and community service commitments. In addition, she was one of 15 who received the Engineering Student Distinction Award, which is presented to high achieving students in their respective engineering academic major. She also received a Woman of Distinction Award (2016), an award that is presented annually to women students who distinguished themselves by overcoming great odds and/or who made a difference in their community. Students are nominated by faculty members.

Ms. Alkhaledi was accepted into Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) in fall 2017 as a junior biomedical engineering student. She is expected

to graduate in 2019. Due to her high GPA at QCC, she received a \$32,000 scholarship from WPI.

As a recipient of a Research Experiences for Undergraduates grant ("REU") at WPI this summer, she has already made her presence felt as an integral part of a small 10-person team that has been growing heart tissue on a spinach leaf. This quite possibly could change medical history in the foreseeable future by one day using working heart muscle tissue grown on spinach leaves to help repair damaged organs.

Glenn Gaudette, PhD, Professor of Biomedical Engineering who leads the research team at WPI, assigned her one of the more difficult projects; improving the supporting system for cell growth perfusion. She is playing a vital role in the internationally acclaimed project. Her work has been met with rave reviews.

"I have a goal and want to be as good as I can be. I am an engineer and I am focused on the skills I need to improve," Ms. Alkhaledi said, adding, "We can do anything here at QCC if we have a goal."

# A Bumpy Road Leads to a Great Future

Sometimes, just when you think you have your life plan figured out, something goes awry. It was that way for Quinsigamond Community College alumnus **Joshua “Josh” Biernacki**, who had made a plan to join the Marines after graduating high school. Today, the Marines are a distant memory and he is poised to begin the next chapter in his life as a high level technical recruiter at an IT consulting and recruiting firm in Boston.

Mr. Biernacki’s journey to QCC began circuitously. He had decided to forgo all college applications and went to a Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS) after his high school graduation with the intention of entering the Marines. It was there that he found out he would have to fill out a lot of waivers and paperwork in order to be considered for the Marines, because he was deaf in one ear. Not wanting to hold up his life while he went through the lengthy process, he decided that he would forgo the Marines and signed up for classes at QCC, enrolling in the General Studies Mathematics program. He said he chose QCC for its convenient location and affordability, but quickly realized there was much more to the college.

“There are infinite opportunities at QCC and you’ll save yourself so much money. I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do when I first came here. I wasn’t a people person. This school opened the doors for me to be able to learn book skills and people skills,” he said. “Personal growth was everything to me at QCC.”

Mr. Biernacki acknowledged that he had been bullied in both middle and high school and because of this he said he was not a very social person. Once at QCC, he made the conscience decision to change this behavior.



*QCC alumnus Josh Biernacki.*

“The first or second week of classes the college had a Club Fair that I went to and it was there that I decided to run for Student Senate. It was at the Club Fair that things started to click for me and I knew I had to introduce myself to people. My goal was to go and meet 15 new people each day,” he said. “To this day I have lifelong friends from that journey.”

He became an active member of student life on campus, while also taking classes and working three jobs. During his time at QCC he was the Student Senate Treasurer

(2010); Student Senate President; Student Trustee for the College; was a member of the Massachusetts Community College Trustees Association; was QCC’s Representative on the Student Advisory Council to the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education and he served as President of the Student Advisory Council. He also was the Student Representative on the Governance Review Team, was a QCC Student Ambassador, was on the 2011-2012 nationally placing math team, was a QCC Student Orientation Leader, and was the Student Representative on the All College Committee.

As someone who once described himself as, “never really getting along with anyone,” he had become one of QCC’s best advocates and a shining example for others. He attributes his success to the many mentors he had at QCC.

“Everyone gave me so much time and personal attention. It was amazing. The staff really cares. What I learned here I can relate it to wherever I go. I always tell people that without QCC, I wouldn’t be anywhere near where I am today,” he said. “Here you are not a number... you are never a number.”

Mr. Biernacki graduated from QCC with two associate degrees, one in business administration and one in general studies mathematics. He said that the advice, guidance, and support he received at QCC was invaluable and helped to get him where he is today.

“Put everything you can into QCC and you’ll get out twice as much,” he said.

# QCC Alumnus Launches an Amazing Career

**Juan Poma** has rocketed himself into Quinsigamond Community College alumni lore. The 2013 QCC Engineering alumnus has taken the foundation he received at the college and jettisoned himself into a career at Boeing Aircraft Manufacturing Company. Today he is an Information Technology (IT) Engineer and an Assistant Business Manager, acting as the bridge between business and IT. Recently Mr. Poma came back for a quick visit to QCC, reminiscing about his time at the college where he said his future began.

Mr. Poma said his journey to QCC began in 2010 after graduating from a high school in Bolivia. He eventually settled in Worcester with a family member who was living there at the time. Having come to the U.S. not knowing any English, Mr. Poma knew that while he wanted to further his education, he must first learn the language of his new country. He spent the next six months at a private school immersed in learning English and at the end of 2011, he felt ready and applied to QCC.

"I took my placement tests and started from the bottom with basic English and math classes," he said.

While taking classes at QCC, Mr. Poma also worked nights, before attending class full-time during the day. He took the bus to the college every morning and was there by 6:15 a.m.

"You want to do better to help your family. It's a great motivation," he said. "My mother couldn't have an education (in Bolivia). She's a housekeeper. She fought hard to bring me to this country to have better opportunities. She led by example."

Eventually, Mr. Poma was able to quit his full-time night job by becoming both a math tutor and student ambassador, which allowed him to practice his English while also taking classes and studying.

"I had a plethora of resources at QCC that I took full advantage of," he said, add that one of those opportunities was to become a QCC student ambassador." The goal (of being hired as a student ambassador) was to force myself to keep learning English." That opportunity led him to a lot of on-campus connections, which included mentoring other classmates.



*QCC alumnus Juan Poma.*

After graduating from QCC, Mr. Poma attended Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI), earning his Bachelor of Science in Computer Science. It was during an RPI Job Fair that fate gave him the chance to speak with a Boeing representative. An hour he received a call for an interview the following day.

"They liked my honesty and technical experience and I got the offer. I never planned to work for such a great company," he said. "QCC provided me with the foundation to succeed. It provided me with everything I needed."

Today, Mr. Poma lives in St. Louis, Missouri working at one of Boeing's sites. In addition to his current position, he is a NASA Boeing SLS (Space Launch System) Ambassador, which gives him official permission and training from Boeing to go to schools and talk about the SLS program.

"We motivate the student base on the importance that this program has for the future. The people who are in high school and college will play a role in the continued development of SLS that will pave the wave for deep space exploration," he said.

In his "spare time," Mr. Poma has started a non-profit with a couple of family members to help promote STEM to Bolivian students.

He reiterated that it was QCC, which gave him the foundation to be successful and encourages current students to make the most of their time at the college.

"If you are able to take advantage of all the resources at QCC it will help you in your career and everywhere you go," he said.

# PTK Alumna's Enthusiasm is Contagious

To meet Quinsigamond Community College alumna **Kayla Paterson** is like meeting a breath of fresh air. A former Phi Theta Kappa (PTK) Alpha Zeta Theta Honor Society Chapter president of the college, Ms. Paterson has never truly left QCC, even though she officially graduated with a degree in elementary education (EE) in 2016.

Today, she holds a Bachelor of Arts in EE from Anna Maria College and is working as a paraprofessional with third and fourth graders at a nearby school district. She is also working several hours each week in QCC's PTK office, a place she fondly refers to as "home."

Ms. Paterson took an indirect route to QCC. She said her lifelong dream was to become a teacher and after high school, enrolled in a four-year institution as an elementary education major.

"I was commuting to school and also working full-time. Then life happened and I dropped out. I wasn't ready for it (college)," she said.

She continued working full-time but knew that she needed to go back to school if she was ever to fulfill her dream of becoming a teacher.

"I knew I could do a two-year college, but wasn't ready for a four-year commitment. I did my research and chose QCC because it was affordable, was an easier drive, and I had heard good things about it," she said.

Although she had a great love for teaching, her first collegiate experience had made her a bit gun-shy to major in elementary education at QCC; instead deciding to get her degree in deaf studies. Ms. Paterson quickly became immersed in the college and the deaf studies program, enjoying the classes, professors and her classmates. She



*Kayla Paterson (left) stands with her mentor PTK Advisor Bonnie Coleman.*

was excelling academically, which got her an invitation to become a member of PTK. She was inducted into PTK in 2015 at the same time she was elected the honor society's president. It was during this time-frame that she was asked by one of her professors if she wanted to become a tutor in the writing center. She jumped at the chance.

She loved the experience so much that when one the students she was tutoring, who happened to be an elementary education student, suggested she become a teacher, a light bulb went off in her head.

"It made me so happy. I loved working with the students and tutoring them. I went home, woke up the next day and came to school and switched my major to elementary education," she said.

Her core classes in deaf studies transferred easily into the elementary education program and the only classes she had left to take were the education classes. In her education classes, she went to schools in Worcester where she was able to observe teachers in action, which solidified her desire to one day become a teacher. In 2016, she entered Anna Maria College as a junior, excited to complete the next chapter of her education.

*"QCC has such a good program. I felt there was nothing I missed out on or didn't know."*

"I felt so prepared when I entered Anna Maria. It was a smooth transition. All my education courses were accepted and I started there as a junior. QCC has such a good program. I felt there was nothing I missed out on or didn't know. Some of the professors at QCC work in the school district and they had so much real-world teaching experience, which was just great," she said.

Ms. Paterson also continued working in the PTK office as the Fundraising/Event Specialist part-time, having forged a legacy there by raising thousands for the PTK chapter and its community service projects.

After graduating with her bachelor's degree she began substitute teaching, while she applied for full-time teaching positions. A short two-week stint as a legal administrative assistant and then a three-week, longer-term substitute teaching position for an area sixth grade

class confirmed to her that teaching was the only job she wanted to do.

The substitute position ended and she accepted a paraprofessional (teaching assistant) in a nearby school district, with the hope of one day being a teacher and having her own classroom.

She is still a part of QCC, working several hours a week in the PTK office after her teaching job.

"I love working here. QCC and PTK are my home," she said, adding, "Everyone should start at QCC. It's affordable, it connects you to so many things and you are getting the best education. Even if you don't know what you want to do, there is a program here for you. There's so much variety you will find a program."

You may also find a "home away from home," just like Ms. Paterson did.

## Alumni Share their QCC Experiences at S.H.E. Event

Quinsigamond Community College and Phi Theta Kappa (PTK) alumni have never forgotten their roots. Six alumni came back to QCC to share their unique stories, experiences and offer current students insights into QCC and beyond.

The event was made possible by S.H.E. (Support, Help, Encourage), a female mentoring group at the college. Alumni who attended the event included: **Chad Bleakney, Nancy Bohan-Broderick, Miranda Craig, Suzanne Graham Anderson, Kim Lawrence, Monique Manna and Deb Noble.**

Mr. Bleakney told of his decision to change careers after 10 years and the support that he received from QCC, which he said was instrumental to his success. He credits the nurturing environment of QCC and Phi Theta Kappa (PTK) with helping him attain a degree in engineering before transferring to Worcester Polytechnic Institute, where he obtained a Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering.

Today he works for Saint-Gobain Northborough Research & Development Center as a Research Engineer II.

It all started here at QCC," he said. "I can honestly say I would not be fulfilled in the way I am now without having started at QCC."

This was the message that was echoed from each panelist. Through personal or career changes they came to QCC seeking an education to a better future.

Ms. Craig, a 2013 QCC alum, said it was QCC's flexible schedule and affordability that were standouts for her.

Ms. Graham Anderson spoke of being in a very successful career for 20 years, before one day finding herself unemployed and unable to find a new job doing the same work she had been doing in her previous job, all because she didn't have a college degree. She came to QCC by way of Workforce Central, not only attaining her Associate in Science in Business Administration, but also excelling academically. Ms. Graham Anderson transferred to Nichols College in 2018 and earned a degree in business. She has continued working in the retail world, started her own business, recently became an ordained minister, and was accepted into Nichols College dual Master's program

"I encourage my friends to go to QCC," she said. "It's a path they can take and you won't come out in debt. I'm very excited where I am now."

# QCC Alumnus Focuses on His Future

Quinsigamond Community College's Enrollment Counselor **Eduardo Rivas** is a shining example of determination and perseverance. A former Math Learning Specialist, as well as an adjunct faculty member of the college, he has become a valuable resource to QCC and its student body. He is also on a career path that he hopes may one day land him a job as a financial officer in the higher education field, or perhaps even a college president. His journey to that future began, thanks in large part, to QCC's Future Focus program.

QCC's Future focus Program began in 1999 and is funded by QCC and a grant from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. QCC is one of only three community colleges that received \$100,000 from the state – the most a college can receive. The program was developed to offer non-traditional students a pathway to higher education.

Future Focus students are non-traditional students who generally fall into one of three categories: students who have either gone through the tradition U.S. education system but did not complete their school requirements and instead earned their GED or HiSET high school equivalency; English as a Second Language (ESOL/ESL) participants who already have their high school diploma; or students who graduated from high school years ago and went directly into the workforce. Participants receive comprehensive support in order to help them succeed as they transition into higher education.

For Mr. Rivas, the program was the perfect fit for him, having taken engineering-focused classes in high school and then attending some college business classes in El Salvador. Once he was in the U.S. and settled in Worcester, he took English as a Second Language classes at a variety of Worcester area programs; working hard to master the language. After learning English, he entered the Future Focus program at QCC. He took the college's Accuplacer tests, and proudly states that he got a perfect score in math and a high score in English. He immediately began taking classes at QCC in the evenings, while also working during the day. Through hard work, dedication and assistance of the former head of the Future Focus program, he excelled in all of his classes, becoming a member of the Phi Theta Kappa Honors Society, Honors Program and recipient of a QCC Honors program scholarship.

During his time at QCC he also became a math tutor after discovering the math tutoring center. "I'd never had a tutor so



*Left to Right: Student Trustee Benjamin Aryeh, QCC student Marcela Rivas, Admissions Enrollment Counselor Eduardo Rivas and WCCA Executive Director, Mauro DePasquale discuss the VITA program on "Soapbox," a program on WCCA TV, "The People's Channel 194."*

I didn't check out the math tutoring center right away. When I did, I was amazed at all the resources at QCC," he said.

The Future Focus program has been an important educational foundation for the Rivas family. Mr. Rivas' younger brother, Rodrigo Rivas, also attended the Future Focus program (and was a QCC math tutor), graduating from QCC with an associate degree, before transferring to Worcester Polytechnic Institute where he earned his Bachelor of Science in Engineering. His mother, Irene Rosales who works in QCC's general academic tutoring center, also completed the Future Focus program and is set to graduate from QCC with an Accounts Payable and Receivable Certificate. His sister Marcela Rivas is also a member of the QCC family and is currently a business major.

In 2013, Mr. Rivas earned his Associate in Science in Business Administration then transferred to Assumption College and earned his bachelor's and MBA, as well as a Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies in Business. Additionally, he was the graduation speaker at Excelsior College, where he also earned a degree in technology management.

He has made it a point to give back to the Worcester community, donating his time at the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program, where he is now a coordinator. He has taken the existing volunteer training program at the college and expounded upon it to include a class that QCC business majors can take as an elective.

"QCC was such a helpful college. I got a great start here thanks to the Future Focus program," he said.



Top: QCC alumni reminisce as they look at an old yearbook in the QuEST Center Student Lounge on the college's main campus. Right: Paula Moore was the person to the right on the cover of the 1967-68 college catalog.



## A Solid Foundation for First Alumni

Who says you can never go home? For Quinsigamond Community College alumni Paula (Gagnon) Moore and her husband Douglas “Doug” Moore, a recent visit to the college solidified their belief that “it all started at QCC.”

Mr. and Mrs. Moore are some of the very first alumni of the college. They attended in the sixties when QCC was located at Belmont Street in Worcester. They met in the cafeteria of the college, fell in love and were married in 1968. While many would say that was what they took away from their time at QCC, the Moores said it was much more than just finding a life partner. It was a foundation for their future that they have carried with them to this day.

Mrs. Moore attended QCC from 1964 -1966 and said it was a dream of her father’s that she attend college; however, cost was a large concern.

“It was important to him I go to college, but with two brothers and a sister coming behind me I knew it would be very difficult for him to afford college,” she said. So she decided to go to QCC. “I knew I did the right thing for him, me and my mom and it gave me a good footing for continuing on. It was affordable and it still sounds like it is.”

Mr. Moore’s story is a bit different. He attended for one year before transferring to Nichols College and said QCC was a

“stepping stone” that changed the trajectory of his life. He ended up obtaining his bachelor’s degree, an MBA from Suffolk University, and had a career at Nabisco, retiring after a prolific 30 years with the company.

“I was lucky to graduate from high school so without this foundation here at Quinsigamond it wouldn’t have been possible. QCC turned around my whole attitude toward education. It gave me a great foundation so that when I went to Nichols, I thrived. It was kind of fun to thrive for a change,” he said. “Quinsigamond is definitely the way to go in our estimation.”

The Moores have been evangelizing QCC since their time at Belmont Street and the recent tour of the college’s main campus solidified their feelings even more.

“We had a good foundation but gosh, the growth here is phenomenal. When you go into some of these labs it’s amazing. It’s those community connections that you likely would not have if you weren’t here in a community of people who see the potential, and potential is where we are,” Mrs. Moore said.

Alumni who would like to visit QCC can contact Executive Director of Development Karen Rucks at [krucks@qcc.mass.edu](mailto:krucks@qcc.mass.edu) to schedule a tour.

# The Power of Perseverance

**Narda Bondah's** journey to Quinsigamond Community College reads a little like a made for television movie. Ms. Bondah and her younger brother came to Worcester from Ghana to live with their father, after the death of their mother who died in childbirth with her sister. For many, these circumstances would seem insurmountable, but for Ms. Bondah, they are just a part of the story that makes up her life.

According to Ms. Bondah, the educational system in Ghana is extremely competitive. Placement tests are required to decide high school admissions. After scoring well on her placement tests, she was sent to a high level boarding school for girls, where she graduated from before moving to the U.S.

Her goal had always been to one day attend a good college and become a doctor, however, upon coming to Worcester she learned that she might need to attend a U.S. high school first before beginning college.

"I didn't take the SATs," she said. "I was actually done with high school and so a Worcester Public School guidance counselor suggested I get college credits by attending QCC," she said.

Ms. Bondah was able to do just that and began a slow transition to college life, initially taking 10 credits at QCC. "The Advising Center was great and they advised me to take only a few courses to start with so that I could get used to the style and rigor of college," she said.

Ms. Bondah started out as a general studies major, working toward her career goal. Associate Professor of Biology, Jessica Crowley, became not only her biology instructor, but also a trusted advisor.

"She was very interested in me and has been so helpful," Ms. Bondah said. "I love all the professors here and I particularly find the female professors very inspiring."

A few months after being on campus, Ms. Bondah saw a poster mentioning biomedical engineering. This was when QCC Professor Dadbeh Bigonahy, Coordinator of Engineering, Biomedical Engineering & Sciences stepped into her life.

"I met with him and he said to get into biomedical engineering. I loved the idea of the engineering program. It's so very broad," she said.



*QCC alumna Narda Bondah received a top award in Engineering and Biomedical Engineering at QCC's honors and awards ceremony.*

Ms. Bondah excelled in her classes at QCC and availed herself of the College's resources. Of particular note were activities supported by the STEM Starter Academy that included a robotics tour to UMASS Lowell's NERVE center, women in STEM program and tutoring sessions.

In the fall of 2016, through a collegiate relationship between QCC and Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI), Dr. Kristen Billiar, head of the Biomedical Department at WPI, came to QCC to speak with the biomedical students. He discussed the 10-week Research Experiences for Undergraduates grant ("REU") available at WPI during the summer months. Ms. Bondah applied for the program and was accepted into Dr. Billiar's lab. There she used the knowledge she acquired at QCC to work on a unique project – preventing regurgitation of blood in tissue engineered heart valves.

"People can have misconstrued thoughts about the academics at QCC, yet my educational knowledge and skills were just as good as the other girls from WPI," said Ms. Bondah. "I used everything I learned in Jessica's class about cell biology. It made me feel like a pro."

Ms. Bondah's hard work has paid off for her. She was a recipient of a 2017 Women of Distinction award; a member of the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, and a 2017 recipient of the QCC Alumni Scholarship. Ms. Bondah graduated from QCC in 2018 and transferred as a junior to Cornell University.

# Alumnus of Gateway to College Program Opens Own Business

A collector of fish, as well as a fisherman, Gateway to College graduate **Dylan Marengo** had wanted to open his own store for some time, and at 22, he did! Opening a tropical fish store in Worcester and making his longtime dream a reality. The store is a culmination of his hard work and dedication, tangible proof of how he has taken steps to change his life and choose a different path than one that was once before him.

Mr. Marengo started in the Gateway program when he was 17 years old, after he had been kicked out of South High and an alternative high school program.

“Previously in high school, I was getting in trouble. I was surrounded by unmotivated people who were causing trouble,” he said. “At Gateway, I was surrounded by people who were trying to excel and better themselves. It rubbed off on me, I started enjoying school and working harder.”

“By the grace of God, they took me, and it turned my entire life around,” Mr. Marengo said.

He completed the Gateway program, earning his high school diploma and in 2017 graduated from Quinsigamond Community College with an Associate in Science in Criminal Justice. Mr. Marengo’s goal was to become an environmental police officer or game warden. He enjoys kayak fishing, and even traveled to Tennessee to compete in a kayak fishing competition. However, things changed.

Mr. Marengo has been keeping fish since he was young. “It was my dream to have a tropical fish store, I just never thought I could do it,” he said.

He had been breeding and selling fish on the side, and through his own interest realized there wasn’t a fish store in the area. When he saw a retail spot available that fit his needs for space and affordability, he decided to go for it.

His store, Lucky’s Aquarium, is at 70 James St., Suite 111A in Worcester. The store is named after his freshwater stingray Lucky, who he rescued from a pet store.

# QCC Grad Named Site Director of Summit ElderCare Charlton

Taking cues from the nursing faculty at Quinsigamond Community College, Dudley resident and QCC graduate **Lisa DeWitt** took all she learned about being a nurse at QCC and ran with it. Ms. DeWitt is currently the Site Director of Fallon Health’s Summit ElderCare location in Charlton.

Ms. DeWitt, who was an LPN before pursuing an RN associate degree at QCC, said the college provided her with a fast track from LPN to RN, allowing her to apply credits from her previous nursing education. She credits QCC for giving her the support she needed in order to advance her nursing career.

“The education I received at QCC provided a solid foundation for nursing, which enabled me to graduate and be hired as a nursing supervisor when I became an RN,” Ms. DeWitt said. “As a nursing student (at QCC), I really got to know the staff and students. The staff was so invested in the student nurses’ success in the program, providing additional support outside of clinical or the classroom. You could tell they enjoyed teaching and being a nurse — a great example for the future nurses to come. It made you want to work harder and strive for your goal of being a nurse.”

Today, she oversees the daily operations of Fallon’s Summit ElderCare program. She leads an interdisciplinary team that includes a range of professionals who specialize in geriatric care, ensuring that each participant’s personalized care plan allows him or her to live as independently as possible. Ms. DeWitt received a degree in nursing from QCC, a bachelor’s degree from Worcester State College and a Certificate in Legal Nurse Consulting from Bay Path Community College.

“I picked a very tough program at QCC, and I can say with confidence I would not be where I am today if it wasn’t for my education at QCC. I am thankful for my education and proud I am a graduate of QCC.”



*QCC alumna Natasha Torres.*

For the last five years Quinsigamond Community College alumna **Natasha Torres** has been a successful entrepreneur operating Garden of Eden Spa, a skin, make up, waxing and nail services spa in Oxford, dedicated to making her clients feel relaxed, pampered and special.

Ms. Torres's journey into the cosmetology world began at a young age, and by the time she was in high school, she knew she wanted to one day own her own business in the field of cosmetology. Ms. Torres attended Bay Path Regional Vocational Technical High School in Charlton, focusing her career path in cosmetology. She knew she needed to have a strong business acumen before taking the leap into entrepreneurship and chose to attend QCC after high school, to obtain her degree in business administration.

"I chose QCC because it was affordable; it was a well-known school; I could commute easily, and my mom went there," she said. "QCC is an awesome college and it gives you a strong foundation, without having to be in debt."

# QCC Alumna Has Found Her Own Piece of Paradise

Ms. Torres said she was already familiar with the college because of her mother.

"My mom never finished classes because she had me and was in the hospital a lot with me, so she had to drop out," she said.

Ms. Torres was born with spina bifida, a birth defect that occurs when the spine and spinal cord don't form properly. While this has left her using a wheelchair to get around, it has never stopped her from any accomplishments she set her mind to do. Ms. Torres worked in QCC's Math Center as a work study student, in addition to working an off-campus job in the food service industry. During her time at the college she made an indelible impression on virtually everyone she met and was even honored with a Women of Distinction Award. She said she got a terrific start at QCC by taking a college preparation class, which gave her a clear path on how to maneuver college classes.

"I loved that class. It taught me how to study and get ready for college. They don't teach you that in high school. It was so beneficial and so useful," she said, adding, "The accessibility and having the buildings closer together was also very helpful for me."

At QCC she took a psychology course and she said it gave her great insight into the future clients she would hope to one day have.

"The psychology course was so amazing and I realized if I was going to be working with clients these

classes would be very helpful," she added. "I feel like I learned so much at QCC; there were so many wonderful teachers."

Ms. Torres was awarded her Certificate in Small Business Management in 2003 and then in 2006 completed her Associate in Science in Business Administration. From there she transferred to Worcester State University where she hoped to earn her bachelor's degree; however, family issues led her to put her education on hold and work full-time in food service. While this would have deterred many people, Ms. Torres remained unfazed and kept alive her dream of one day owning her own business.

Eventually she was able to leave her food service job and go back to cosmetology; however, a chance encounter at a beauty supply shop eventually led her to her true love - being an aesthetician. In 2011 she opened her own spa. Her successful and thriving business has even brought in staff members from QCC.

Ms. Torres said it was QCC that gave her the foundation she needed to get where she is today and has a bit of advice for anyone who is considering attending, but is afraid to take that first step.

"QCC is adept with different learning styles and it gives you different opportunities. I'm physically disabled, but if I can do it and make it there (at QCC) you can do it and make it," she said.

# Three Generations of Women Experience QCC

Children often emulate their parents and for QCC alumna **Cheryl Marrino** that took on the form of attending Quinsigamond Community College, becoming a part of the unique fabric that has made the college home to her for more than 20 years.

Ms. Marrino had her first taste of QCC when she was about 10 years old and her mother, QCC alumna **Sandra Sorenson** attended the school. Sometimes she brought Ms. Marrino and her three other siblings to experience the campus and attend the community activities that the college occasionally held.

"I remember lots of fun things on campus from graduation to eating in the cafeteria," she said.

The community events stuck and when her mother graduated and went on to attend Worcester State University, it was those memories of QCC that stayed with her.

It was that sense of community, which led Ms. Marrino to decide to register for classes at QCC. While she didn't end up actually starting that first time she registered, she came back to school the following year, registered again and began taking classes. Initially registered as a criminal justice major, a chance computer class she took changed her mind on her choice of majors.

"I didn't know anything about computers and I took this class and thought 'wow' this is interesting. Eventually I even ended up doing web pages for the college through a co-op

program. I found out who I was and what I loved and that was software," she said.

At the time she was attending classes, Ms. Marrino was a mom to four young children; often bringing them to events the same way her own mom brought her many years before.

"We're a community here at QCC. It's really about family and bringing people together," she said. "To me this campus has a lot of heart and compassion from the professors and staff to the students."

Ms. Marrino graduated in 2004 with an Applications Specialist Certificate and started working part-time at QCC in both the Fuller Student Center and the Athletic Center. In 2008, she earned her Web Applications Certificate.

Her daughter **Ashley Marrino** also began helping out at the Athletic Center when she was old enough, and when she graduated high school, QCC was her college of choice. This was particularly special for Ms. Marrino as she was able to graduate with her daughter in 2015, earning an Associate in Arts in General Studies, while her daughter earned her Associate in Science in Business Administration Transfer, as well as a Certificate in Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management.

Today, Ms. Marrino's daughter works as a manager at a European Wax Center and Ms. Marrino works at QCC as the Fuller Evening Supervisor. When she is not in the Fuller Student Center, you may find her helping out students



*Alumni Ashley Marrino (left) and Cheryl Marrino (right) hold a photo of matriarch, QCC alumna Sandra Sorenson.*

in the Athletic Center or helping downtown with student IDs. She is also the president of the QCC Alumni Association and works on fundraising events. Ms. Marrino has continued her education at QCC, earning degrees in computer information systems and liberal arts in 2018.

"I want others to know that education goes on and on...as far as you can reach for it," she said.

Sadly her mom passed away a few years ago, after retiring from working at the IRS, but the legacy of QCC lives on in the next generation. Ms. Marrino's youngest daughter Angelleyez is planning on attending QCC when she is old enough and follow in her grandmother, mother and big sister's footsteps.

"I think a lot of people have a fear of going to college, but QCC is different by a mile. Everyone is here to help guide you on your way," Ms. Marrino said.



## In Memoriam

We're sorry to hear about the loss of our alumni. Join us in expressing our condolences to the families of the following:

**Richard Auclair**

Class of 1967, 3/13/19

**Liz Ortiz**

Class of 1983, 9/8/18

**John Ryan**

Class of 1988, 4/2/2019

**Carol Ann Lamothe**

Class of 1976, 6/23/18

**Christopher Roy**

Class of 2006, 12/9/18

## QCC Foundation

The QCC Foundation supports the College in its efforts to provide accessible, affordable, and high-quality educational and training programs and services. One of its primary goals is to ensure that every student who needs a scholarship receives one.

We invite you to consider establishing an annual scholarship fund or lifelong scholarship fund\* to memorialize a loved one or honor someone, or contribute to an already established fund. For more information, please contact Shirley Dempsey at 508.854.4520 or [sdempsey@qcc.mass.edu](mailto:sdempsey@qcc.mass.edu).

*\*A lifelong scholarship fund is placed in the endowment and held in perpetuity, with 50% of the net income awarded to students annually. Endowments help to guarantee a financial future for QCC's mission of educating students and is an important source for scholarships at a time when less than 30% of QCC's budget is funded by state appropriations.*



## QCC's Alumni Association Bake-Off Was A Sweet Treat For All

2/20/19

The Alumni Association Board held its Bake-Off on February 20, with all of the \$600 raised going to the Alumni Scholarship Fund. A total of 22 students, faculty and staff bakers dusted off their rolling pins and brought in their best homemade baked goods, with students faculty and staff voting on their favorites. In addition to the baking contest, there was a bake sale table and donations from local organizations for raffle prizes. Four bakers won the coveted QCC Rolling Pin and bragging rights as QCC's Best Baker. There's no "knead" to say more!

## QCC Men's Alumni Basketball Game

2/2/19

QCC Men's Alumni Basketball game held on February 2 brought out some former QCC standout players such as QCC alumnus **Maurice "Mo" Horton**, current player on the Worcester 78's, a professional basketball team. Funds from the event went towards QCC's men's basketball team.

Other QCC basketball alumni who played included: **Billal Shakir, Jeff Moore, Daequon Antonie, Julio Leon, Ernesto Guerrer, Elijah Perez, Corey Johnny Dombrowski** and **Jimmy Louissaint**.



## Mystery Dinner Theater

10/13/18

On October 13, the QCC Alumni Association's held its annual mystery dinner theater at the Worcester Senior Center. This year's show titled, "Haunted by Murder," featured the Comical Mystery Tour Players.

Proceeds from the dinner theater benefited the QCC Alumni Scholarship Fund.



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## QCC Alumni Association

As a graduate of QCC, there are several ways that you can remain involved in the life of the College. Various activities include participating on the Alumni Association Advisory Board (meetings once a month), becoming a mentor for a QCC student, volunteering, and attending events throughout the year.

We invite you to stay connected, send us your news, and get involved at [www.QCC.edu/alumni](http://www.QCC.edu/alumni), or contact Shirley Dempsey at [sdempsey@qcc.mass.edu](mailto:sdempsey@qcc.mass.edu) or 508.854.4520.

### Upcoming Events:

- ✓ **June 13 — Alumni Social**
- ✓ **September — QCC Employee Alumni Lunch**
- ✓ **December — Mystery Dinner Theater**
- ✓ **May 21, 2020 — QCC Day, Celebrate the Class of 2020**

Please visit [www.QCC.edu/alumni/events](http://www.QCC.edu/alumni/events) for details, updates and additional event listings.

