

# Union Re-Union

FALL 2015

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION OF UNION COUNTY COLLEGE

## Calling All Alumni Mentors

In Iowa, they'd call it a bumper crop. The 1,505 Union County College students who earned associate degrees or certificates in 2015 are the largest graduating class in the College's 82-year history.

That's 200 more grads than the prior year's record. That's another 1,505 college-educated people to enrich our community. That's another 1,505 of your fellow alumni.

Keeping with the "15" theme for the Class of 2015: The three-year graduation rate rose to 15.7 percent. For a little perspective on that percentage, it's the highest graduation rate in more than 20 years.

When President Margaret McMenam joined Union in 2010, the rate was a dismal 5.9 percent. A top priority for Dr. McMenam has been to lead a College-wide commitment to improving student success. She says, "We're building a climate and culture that promotes movement toward graduation and the finish line."

Faculty and staff have implemented a number of student-success initiatives. These include orientation for all full-



Psychology Instructor and Union County College Alumna Melinda Norelli (third from left) is a study in perpetual motion. She is a full-time professor, mentor, scholarship donor, and the advisor for student government, the Phi Theta Kappa honor society, and the Psychology Club. She graduated from Union in 2008 and this year earned her Ph.D. in Psychology. As Alumni mentors go, she would be the gold standard. You don't have to be Dr. Norelli to be a great Alumni mentor. Bring your own energy level, skills, and style to the role, and our students will be just delighted.

time students, improved developmental programs in Math and English, mandatory on-time class registration, a real-time tracking system for students' in-class performance, and academic-program pathways that ensure that

such as the Phi Theta Kappa honor society's three-year "Commit to Complete"—as each year thousands of students sign a banner as a pledge of their intention to graduate on-time.

The College has one other powerful—but as yet virtually untapped—resource in our quest to improve student success:

### That would be You, our Alumni.

Over the past five years at Union, the secret to improving graduation rates really hasn't been much of a secret. As Dr. McMenam says, "There's no secret sauce here. Students need to feel a personal connection to the College. Very often the first few weeks of their first semester prove critical in determining whether students make a connection and forge

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*our students have proven that they can be amazing."*

students register only for classes that keep them on track toward completing their degree.

Even the students themselves are engaged in student-success programs,

# Notes from the Graduating Class of...

## 1978

**Jack Toolan** is CEO and Board advisor for the Newport Board Group, a partnership of board directors and senior executive leaders with deep knowledge of capital markets, strategy and operations. The Group has created a specialized category of national professional service firm to help emerging growth, middle market and private equity clients navigate transitions and improve their performance. The Newport Expert Network facilitates delivering to clients the combined expertise of Newport partners across the country. After earning his associate in Liberal Arts at Union, Jack went to Rutgers where he received a bachelor's degree in Marketing.



Jack Toolan,  
Class of '78

## 1979

**Glenn Beyerl** is the President/Partner at KPM Exceptional, LLC. Located in Landing, NJ, KPM Exceptional is the



Glenn Beyerl,  
Class of '79

### Please Tell Us About



Since Union's 1933 founding, more than a million students have attended Union. Our mission is to keep in touch with all of you, but we need your help. Send us an update about yourself at [nacco@ucc.edu](mailto:nacco@ucc.edu) or by snail mail to Rebecca May, Union College Life, 1033 Springfield Av., Cranford, NJ 07016. You'll appear in a future issue of *Union Reunion*.

regional distributor of world-class commercial and consumer outdoor power equipment. He received an associate degree in Business Administration at Union and then completed his bachelor's degree in Accounting in 1981.

## 1982

**Paul DeNardis** operates a Viera, Florida-based business, DeNardis Consulting, which provides independent project-management and business-process consulting services. He earned an associate in Applied Science in Business Administration at Union. He also received a certificate in Application Programming from the Chubb Institute.



Paul DeNardis,  
Class of '82

## 1994

**Daphnie Manzione** is the CEO of Daphers.com, which provides a wide range of services for small-business owners and individuals. These include social-media management, social-media marketing, Web site design, graphic design, video production and customer-relationship management. Her associate degree from Union was in Communication and Media Studies. She also earned a degree in Social Work from Kean University.

## 2009

**Jacqueline Ziarek** is a Personal Banker at Wells Fargo. Her associate degree at Union was in Business. By 2012, she completed her bachelor's degree in Management, with a minor in International Business, at Kean University.



Jacqueline Ziarek,  
Class of '09



The Alumni Association sponsored a seminar by author Nancy Burke (sixth from right) on Oct. 4 in the Roy Smith Theater. Ms. Burke discussed her most recently published book, *If I Could Paint the Moon Black*, the true story of an Estonian childhood interrupted first by Russian, and then German occupation, during World War II. When she isn't writing books, Ms. Burke works full-time in marketing and business development for the Industry-Business Institute at Union County College.

## Alumni Association Meeting Dates

**Weds., Oct. 14 – 7 p.m.,**  
Seminar B on the Cranford Campus

**Weds., Dec. 9 - 7 p.m.**  
Seminars A and B on the Cranford Campus  
(Meeting followed by Holiday Party)

### Union Re-Union

This is an official publication of Union County College: Dr. Margaret M. McMenemy, President; Dr. Maris Lown, Chief Academic Officer; Mrs. Helen Brewer, Vice President, Student Development; Tammy Smith, Dean of College Life; and Rebecca May, Assistant Dean of College Life.

The newsletter is produced quarterly by the College Relations Department, Ellen Dotto, Executive Director; Sara Bontempo, Graphic Designer.

**Alumni Board of Directors:** Melinda Ayala '11, President; Nancy Benz '73, Vice President; Suzanne Covine '58, Treasurer; Susan Lordi '13, Secretary. Trustees: Bonnie Bendlin '68, Jeff Chait, '94, Camille Cormier '81, Marion Curka '50, Donna Herran '85, Jean Kellogg '01, Linda Ives Kurdilla '89, Patrick LaQuaglia '76, and Marion Menzer '47.

## Our Amazing Alumni: Meet Michael Libertazzo

Michael Libertazzo is one of those kids who slipped through the cracks riding his bike in circles on the hardscrabble streets of blue-collar Rahway in the late 1960s.

In high school, the guidance counselors stuck Michael in shop classes because diagnostic tests said that he didn't have the brains for college. When he was 17, he crashed his motorcycle and suffered spinal-cord damage that permanently impaired the way his hands functioned. Michael would then hit rock bottom when he was busted for pot.

As a condition of his release from jail, he needed to find a job or get into a trade school. However, his untreated injuries severely limited his dexterity. As a result, he was sent back to the Union County jail for failing to comply with the judge's orders.

While behind bars, Michael received a visit from a caseworker from the NJ Department of Vocational Rehabilitation. Michael said he wanted to work with people, and so the caseworker made a deal with him: If Michael could complete just one semester at a college, the State would determine what they could do regarding offering financial assistance.

Michael raised the tuition money by selling his guitars, motorcycles and his 1949 Dodge Pickup truck. He applied to 10 colleges and all 10 rejected him, primarily because of his low SAT scores and dismal high-school grade point average.

Michael's saving grace was Union College (as it was then called). Union had open enrollment and gave anybody with a high school diploma a second chance.

Now at the age of 21 his one-semester college trial in the Fall of 1975 proved to be a resounding success. He recalls, "The professors at Union did something with me that nobody else ever did: They received me, were interested in me and listened. They cared about me as an individual and wanted to help my 'mind' learn. They believed in me."

Union helped launch Michael toward an amazing career in counseling psychology. Five college degrees later, and after six years of post-doctoral training, Dr. Michael Libertazzo became a psychoanalyst and a licensed psychologist. He worked his way up in the counseling center at another of his former universities to become the director. He also was the president and founding director of The Acumen Group which is a management and organizational development consulting group.

After working for many years at the World Trade Center



Dr. Michael Libertazzo is taking time out from his counseling practice to stick a toe in the water in a trout stream in the Ken Lockwood Gorge in Califon NJ.

and the Wall Street area, he moved to Princeton and has been operating a private practice for more than 30 years. His record of achievement includes American Psychological Association recognition of Dr. Michael Libertazzo as a "Diplomate"—a title for psychologists who are able to uphold the highest standards of the profession.

"I've always wanted to reduce suffering in the world and increase people's capacity for peace," he says. "My work as a therapist is grounded in my life-long quest to find meaning in life, understand and live in concert with the creator of life and the soul. I've always been a wonderer and a seeker at heart and also someone who values the message that our inner experience has in guiding us if we learn to listen deeply within. My patients are most successful when they're able to value and learn from their own experience."

Having served as a World Trade Center "first responder" during the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, Michael has battled several serious illness and has had many major operations.

During the summer, Michael thought to contact Union to say thanks to the College that helped turn his life around four decades ago.

Two of his favorite quotes about Union County College are, "The College took where I was, and who I've been, to make me who I am" and "The College helped me take my broken wings and learn to fly."

During a recent medical exam, Michael was diagnosed with a life-threatening illness. His physician, a medical-monitoring doctor for 9/11-related conditions, is also a long-time friend and said, "Michael, This is just going to make you a better therapist."

Michael says that having heart and drive are the key to overcoming adversity. "Back in the day, I always knew I had the heart of my mother and the drive of my father to do something positive with my life," he says. "With the ill effects from the WTC, I once again had to reach down



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ahead or else just quietly and tragically drop out from our radar.”

Positive, productive, precious interactions between students and employees help build connections with the College. Engagement with other students is also a key, such as through social clubs or sports teams or honor societies. President McMenamin adds, “Most important is quality teaching that enriches the lives of our students.”

As Alumni, you can also play a key role in helping our students succeed. Depending on your personal interests, your own career path, and your life experiences, you could serve as an Alumni Mentor for a student or groups of students in a number of different ways.

You could help encourage our students to succeed at any stage of their Union County College experience, and not just when they first enroll. You could volunteer to mentor students at the mid-point of

their studies, students on the threshold of graduation, graduates looking to transfer to complete their bachelor’s degree, and graduates looking to enter into a career.

You may have a professional expertise—let’s say as an engineer or a game designer or even a contralto—that would greatly benefit a student pursuing a similar field. We also have an acute need for alumni willing to mentor students in a specific demographic, with the mentor coming from the same hometown or being of a similar race, religion, or sexual orientation. (Even your dominant hand may lend itself to a connection, as left-handed people have a natural affinity for other lefties.)

Please consider this our invitation for you to become an Alumni Mentor at Union County College.

To get the process started, we welcome you to contact our Dean of Student Success Rebecca Royal at (908) 709-7042. Or shoot an email to Ms. Royal at [Rebecca.royal@ucc.edu](mailto:Rebecca.royal@ucc.edu). Ms. Royal

and her staff will be pleased to answer any questions you may have about being an Alumni Mentor and look forward to hearing your thoughts about mentoring students at your alma mater.

As President McMenamin says, “Our students need us to pay attention to them, to know we care about them. Given the right amount of care and attention, our students have proven that they can be amazing.”

As an Alumni Mentor, you can help turn around the lives of our students. You can be amazing too.



Michael Osiecki, a student and a Foundation scholarship recipient, has decided to create his own scholarship and fund the Osiecki Excel Scholarship. He is the first Union County College student ever to create a scholarship while enrolled full-time at the College. On Fri., Sept. 18, Mr. Osiecki met with Dr. McMenamin and Doug Rouse, Executive Director of the Union County College Foundation, to make a \$1,000 donation to the fund. His message: “When I needed financial support after my mother lost her job, the College came through for me with a scholarship. What I want to do is ‘pay it forward’ so that I can help some student who was in the position I was in.” Michael will be graduating in May.

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deep into my heart and drive and be open to all the loving support that surrounds me. I will continue to learn, evolve my character toward increasing my capacity for peace and doing service.”

Union County College will be in his thoughts as he battles to regain his health. He says, “With my deepest heart-felt gratitude I give my sincerest thanks to Union County College for their incredibly significant role in helping me become ‘who I am’ and for helping me ‘learn to fly.’ Without you, where would I be? Without you, who would I have become?”

Don’t bet against this plucky kid from Rahway. Union County College has never stopped believing in him.