

Winter Commencement Doubleheader at UCPAC

Alumni Board Member Suzanne Covine said attending commencement reminded her of legendary baseball player Ernie Banks who expressed his love of the sport by uttering the iconic words, "Let's play two."

For those of us at Union County College who love commencements, we all became Ernie Banks on Thurs., Jan. 14. The College held a doubleheader of ceremonies that welcomed more than 500 new Alumni into the fold while raising the roof on the Union County Performing Arts Center in Rahway.

The feedback we received from students, faculty, staff, Alumni, and Board Members attending both commencements was overwhelmingly positive. STEM Division Secretary Andrew McDermott's comments reflected those of many as he said, "The Performing Arts Center was a perfect venue for graduation. The theater is aesthetically beautiful and spacious enough to enable the graduates' friends and family to attend. And the ceremony itself—or should I say both ceremonies—really went off without a hitch."



The College first began holding a second annual commencement in January of 2014. The winter ceremony took place on the Cranford Campus, while the traditional May ceremony has been at Kean University. As President McMenamin says, "Commencement is our most important day of the year, our Super Bowl. We added a winter commencement to accommodate hundreds of students who achieve their goal of graduation in August and December—but then are obliged to wait several months before celebrating this milestone in a commencement ceremony. Many of these graduates miss out because during these intervening months they have left the area—transferring to complete their baccalaureate or else entering the workforce with a college degree in hand."

Two years later, and with the College setting all-time graduation rates with 1,505 graduates in 2015, the Winter commencement has outgrown Cranford. A Commencement team headed by Student Development Vice President Helen Brewer surveyed a number of other locations to accommodate the hundreds of students who would want to

participate in the Winter festivities.

Mrs. Brewer liked what the Union County Performing Arts Center in Rahway had to offer. "The (PAC) staff was really eager to host and they gave us several tours of the facility and walk-throughs so that we would be confident going in that we could effectively manage Commencement."

Another reason for choosing the Union County PAC in Rahway was location, location, location. The Theater is on the same block as the College's Rahway building, which has been offering credit and noncredit classes since 2014. During the commencement ceremonies, the Rahway building became an ideal staging area for the graduates.

With 500 students registering to participate, even a 1,400-seat facility like the Performing Arts Center would require a restriction on the number of guests each student could invite. "Graduation is a key milestone in the lives of our students," Mrs. Brewer says. "Our students worked hard to earn this honor, and they understandably want their family to share this proud moment with them."

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received a unit citation for apprehending three armed carjacking suspects in Newark NJ. A life-long resident of Union County, Matthew graduated from Union with an associate of arts in Criminal Justice as well as bachelor's and master's degrees in public administration from Kean University.

2008

Dr. Melinda Norelli has been a Psychology Instructor at Union County College for four years and has made an enormous impact on students. Her students say they enjoy the hands-on, active learning that takes place in her classrooms. Professor Norelli is also an advisor to the Student Government Association as well as the Psi Beta National Honor Society in Psychology, and the Psychology Club. She is a member of the "Operation Graduation"



Dr. Melinda Norelli (Class of '08) has been Psychology Instructor at Union since 2012.

team that has helped the College improve the graduation rate by 50 percent in the past year. In 2014, she created and began funding the Norelli Psychology Scholarship, which is awarded to Psychology majors who are on track to graduation. A Union County College alumna from the Class of '08, she successfully defended her Ph.D. dissertation in Psychology during the summer of 2015 to officially become Dr. Mindi Norelli.

2009

William L. Billson is a Freight Conductor for the NY-NJ-based Norfolk Southern Railroad Corporation. He is also a volunteer Firefighter and EMT for Westfield and Garwood. After graduating from Union with an associate in Liberal Studies in Fire Science, he earned



William Billson (Class of '09) is a freight conductor for the Norfolk Southern Railroad.

a bachelor's degree in fire science from New Jersey City University.

2012

Wanda Bull graduated this year from Rutgers with a bachelor's in accounting, and has an associate in accounting from Union. She is working in general accounting, specializing in bank reconciliations, inter-company transactions, cash applications, and journal entries.



Wanda Bull (Class of '12) is a 2016 graduate from Rutgers University.

2013

Paola Cruz Soriano is a Realtor at Coldwell Banker King Thompson in the Columbus, Ohio, area. She graduated from Union with an associate in business and this year earned a bachelor's degree in accounting from Ohio State University's Fisher College of Business



One of Union Reunion's favorite Alumni couples—Linda McQuilla-Jones (Class of '93) and Barry D. Jones (Class of '02)—are pleased to share their daughter's wedding picture with us. From left are Barry, Linda, the groom Jason Nedrick, and the bride Vanessa (Jones) Nedrick. Both the wedding ceremony and the reception took place at the Galloping Hill Golf Clubhouse Club in Kenilworth on Oct. 11.

Meet Nancy Benz

Congratulations to Nancy Benz (Class of '73) on receiving the Union County Freeholders' "Women of Excellence Award in Mental Health." Ms. Benz is a licensed professional counselor and a donor to the College's scholarship fund. In addition, she serves as Vice President of the Alumni Association and is the Alumni Association's appointment to the Union County College Board of Governors.

After graduating from Union with an associate degree in liberal arts, Nancy went to Kean University to earn a bachelor's in psychology in 1975 and a master's degree in counselor education in 1980. Along with being a licensed professional counselor, she is also a national-certified counselor, certified clinical mental-health counselor and an approved clinical supervisor.

Since 1983, Nancy has run a successful Cranford-based counseling practice with a particular interest in survivors of suicide, relationship counseling, life stage issues and supervision and consultation of mental health clinicians. Over the past five years, she has served as the part-time executive director for the New Jersey Counseling Association. In this role, she is responsible for the overall day-to-day operation of the professional membership organization for counselors in New Jersey.



Notes from the Graduating Class of...

1972

Rob Rubilla has had an amazing life since graduating from Union with an associate of arts in Political Science. For more than 17 years, he was a senior account executive for Verizon Information Services. For more than 30 years, he served as an elected official for the Borough of Roselle Park, having been elected to public office five times. Twice he won election to the Roselle Park Board Of Education (the first time at age 19). He served several terms on the City Council and was appointed Police Commissioner in 1991 and again in 2005. He served on the Planning and Zoning Boards under five different mayors. He was elected Council President in 1991 and 2007 and also occasionally as Roselle Park's acting Mayor. He is currently the Senior Media/Marketing Specialist for EDGE Magazine, which is produced in support of Elizabeth-based Trinitas Regional Medical Center. In September 1995, he was cited for heroism (along with Roselle Park Police Captain Daniel McCaffrey)



Rob Rubilla (Class of '72) has been a five-term elected official in Roselle Park.

when he administered chest compressions and rescue breathing to an individual who went into cardiac arrest. The attempted rescue took place on Union County Highway 619 in Roselle Park in the center of the road during rush hour traffic. Rob has a New Jersey teachers' certification as well as a bachelor of arts in Political Science from Kean University.

1983

Francisco Melendez Sr. has served as the Vice President of Operations for New Jersey-based Netta Architects for more than five years. He's responsible for the operation of the firm as well as for assigning resources to meet deadlines and for addressing clients' problems and contracts. After graduating from Union with an associate of arts in architecture, he went to the New Jersey Institute of Technology to earn a bachelor's degree in architecture.

1984

Mary McTigue is the Vice President of Patient Care Services at Trinitas Regional Medical Center and Chief Nursing Officer. She earned both a diploma and an associate in nursing from Union, a bachelor's in nursing from Kean University, and a master's in nursing administration from New York University.

1988

Michael Saccento has been the Managing Director for more than six years for the Greater Metro Financial Group of the Prudential Insurance Company of America. He previously served Prudential for more than 18 years as the Manager of Financial Services.

1989

E. Steven Naraine has been a Vice President for NYC-based TMC Bonds over the past five years. His prior experience includes increasingly responsible accounting assignments at BNY Mellon, AXA Advisors LLC, Lord, Abnett & Company, Deutsche Bank, and

JP Morgan Chase. After leaving Union, he earned a bachelor's degree in business administration and accounting from the City University of New York-Baruch College.

2003

Detective Sergeant Matthew Nazzaro has served the Cranford Police Department with distinction for more than 13 years. His prior position with Cranford PD was for the Juvenile Bureau/School Resource Program within the Investigative Division. Matthew has been certified by the Police Training Commission as a Police Academy Instructor. He's a member of the Departmental Field Training Unit for incoming police recruits and is certified as a School Resource Officer. He has been the department's lead instructor in CPR since 2006. He's received three commendations for saving lives, a departmental citation, and numerous letters of commendation. He was previously assigned to the Essex/Union County Auto Theft Task Force and was featured in a police documentary. He

Union Re-Union

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

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, Deborah Fonteix '75, and Marion Menzer '47.

Discover the Fountain of Youth

Any graduate or former student with 30 credits or more may join the Union County College Alumni Association.

Dues are only \$15 for three years, or a Lifetime Membership for \$125. Be a member of this dedicated group who value the education they received at Union.

Membership includes:

- Discount at College Book Stores
- Fitness Center Membership for only \$25 per semester.
- Free library privileges at all three campuses.
- Invitation to join trips, events, and other projects

To join, use the attached envelope.



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The College's decision to "play two" was all about the numbers. The 2 p.m. ceremony featured the large group of Associate in Arts graduates along with the smaller Associate in Applied Science. The 6 p.m. commencement combined Associate in Science grads with the students who earned certificates.

Mrs. Brewer says, "By splitting the ceremony, with about 250 students attending each commencement, we were able to offer each student up to five guest tickets and also to fulfill additional requests for students with big families."

College Life Assistant Dean Rebecca May and Dean of Students Dr. Terrence Hardee co-chaired the Commencement team for the Rahway ceremonies. Facilities Director Henry Key deployed a squadron of Facilities staff to move equipment, flowers, and assorted commencement paraphernalia in and out of the PAC. Public Safety officers worked with the Rahway Police Department and the County Sheriff's Department to manage traffic—the automotive type as well as the pedestrians along Rahway's Irving Street.

As for parking, which had been the number-one source of pre-commencement jitters and hand-wringing: "Parking worked out just fine," Ms. May smiles. "We had ample spaces for both groups and there wasn't a single attendee unable to find parking in the Hamilton lot or in our other lots."

The graduates looked regal processing in. President McMenamain welcomed the

1,500 attendees for each ceremony. The President thrilled the crowd when she invited graduates to stand to thank the family and friends—as well as the faculty and staff—who supported them throughout their successful journey at Union County College.

Board Chairman Vic Richel reminded the audiences for both ceremonies about the historical significance of the Theater. Built in 1928, the Theater featured vaudeville performances but fell into disrepair two decades ago. As Mr. Richel pointed out, "The County's renovation of the theater has become a prominent symbol of Rahway's renaissance. By choosing to stage its biggest show—graduation—here in Rahway and to open a center for learning in close proximity to this theater, Union County College is playing a key role in the revitalization of the City."

The two student speakers charged up the graduates—Kevin Steele for the 2 p.m. ceremony and Daniela Rengifo at 6 p.m. A graduate of Rahway High School, Kevin felt very much at home giving his speech in the Rahway PAC. "I was really excited about it being at the Performing Arts Center because I live in Rahway. Overall, I think it was a good choice."

As always, both commencement ceremonies hit their crescendo when Dr. Denise Lagos and Associate Professor Katy Cedano read the students' names as each and every strutting, prancing, fist-pumping, crowd-pleasing success story climbed onto the stage to receive handshakes and recognition for their new stature as Union County College graduates.

Among the dignitaries attending both ceremonies was Gabrielle Charette, the executive director of New Jersey's Higher Education Student Assistance Authority. "Union County College really understands how to make commencement an uplifting event. Graduation is critically important and ceremonies like these in Rahway today reinforce that importance."

Other dignitaries attending were Freeholder Vernell Wright, Rahway Mayor Samson Steinman, Assemblyman James Kennedy, NJ Council of County Colleges President Dr. Larry Nespoli, and Deputy Commissioner of NJ Higher Education Gregg Edwards. Along with Mr. Richel and Mr. Bashe, Board Members attending one or both ceremonies included Alumni Association President Melinda Ayala, Governors Frank Raudelunas, Mary Zimmermann, and Dr. Sondra Fishinger, and Alumni Board Members Susanna Chewing and Camille Cormier.

The plan is to return to Rahway for another doubleheader commencement next January. As Ms. May says, "A parent whose son graduated this year wants to come back to Rahway next year when his daughter graduates. He told me, 'You can't beat this place for a graduation. There's not a bad seat in the house.'"

Alumni are always welcome for a "Homecoming" at Commencement. The College's Spring Commencement will be at Kean University on Weds., May 25. If you'd like to attend, contact College Life Assistant Dean Rebecca May at (908) 709-7495.