Campus Retiree Organization Profile

Keepers of the Flame at HVCC

by Eric J. Bryant, Assistant Director of Communications and Marketing, Hudson Valley Community College

Keeping emeriti faculty and longtime administrators engaged in the life of the college was the goal when Hudson Valley Community College (HVCC) established the Keepers of the Flame organization 14 years ago. The then 45-year-old institution was seeing an abundance of stalwart teachers and administrators – many of whom had been around in HVCC’s first two decades – moving into retirement, and a new organization was envisioned to keep them connected to each other and to the college.

First established in 2002, the Keepers were instrumental in the creation and execution of many activities for the college’s 50th anniversary celebration and several years later, they were heavily involved in fundraising for the Frank J. Morgan Clock Tower, which now stands at the center of campus. Morgan served as dean of the Liberal arts division for 16 years; his wife, Anne, was one of the founding Keepers of the Flame and also a faculty member for over 30 years.

Each spring, the Keepers of the Flame return to campus for a luncheon that celebrates and welcomes new members who have retired during the past academic year. But the annual gathering is more than just a reunion of old friends and former colleagues; it provides a forum for the Keepers to get an update about what’s happening at the college and provide feedback from the perspective of their years of experience.

“We have a good core group of people who are interested in attending and get to all of the events,” said former college administrator Marie Stasiak, who has also been involved with the group from its outset.

Stasiak said that each summer the HVCC Foundation invites Keepers to attend one of several games of the Tri-City ValleyCats, a Class A affiliate of the Houston Astros organization that plays at the college’s Joseph L. Bruno Stadium. “It’s another opportunity for us to get together on campus,” she said.

President Drew Matonak stops by the annual retiree luncheon to visit with retired colleagues and talk about what’s on the horizon for Hudson Valley. Both physically and in the number of students it serves, the college has grown tremendously over the past two decades. He believes it’s important that those who helped build and grow the institution keep abreast of its continual growth.

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Hudson Valley President Drew Matonak visits with retired Mathematics Department faculty members Deanne Sodergren, Cherie Pash-Corr and Joan Shack at the 2015 HVCC Retiree Reunion and Recognition Luncheon.

“The luncheon provides an opportunity for retired faculty and staff to get together and engage in a discussion about where the college has been and where it is headed,” said President Matonak. “These emeriti faculty and longtime staff members have a real wealth of knowledge and experience to offer.”

Now that the staff of the Hudson Valley Community College Foundation has returned to campus from a short stay off-campus, Foundation Interim Executive Director Regina LaGatta hopes to make their office a campus hub for reconnecting with the Keepers of the Flame. She hopes that making its conference room and kitchen space available for Keepers will encourage them to meet more frequently on campus and attend college events.

One example is this fall’s homecoming, which will also feature a unique event involving the Keepers. When alums from the 50th anniversary classes of 1966 and 1967 arrive at the homecoming football game, they’ll be greeted by some faculty members from that era, several of whom will likely be Keepers of the Flame.

“These people gave decades of their professional lives to make this institution what it is today and we are proud to honor that fact and learn from their experience and institutional memory,” LaGatta said.

To learn more about the HVCC Keepers of the Flame organization, contact Regina LaGatta at r.lagatta@hvcc.edu.