

RVC Bridge

SUMMER 2023

Connecting the campus to the community

ATHLETIC DIRECTOR OF THE YEAR

Darin Monroe

FIRST IN THE NATION

CRJ200

BARRIERS INTO BRIDGES

Scholarships

THE FAB FIVE

Massage Therapy

A PASSION TO SERVE

JUAN NOGUEDA

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Valley
College
FIRE SCIENCE PROGRAM

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FROM THE **PRESIDENT**



As I reflect on my third year as President of Rock Valley College, I am delighted to share our tremendous progress in our commitment to student-centered learning. Our primary focus has been to ensure that our students receive the best educational experience possible. One of our significant achievements

this year has been the establishment of valuable partnerships with the local business community. These partnerships, facilitated by enhanced course offerings and state-of-the-art facilities, provide our students with practical and relevant learning opportunities. The collaborations enrich our students' educational journeys and increase their chances of success in the real world.

Another cause for celebration was the inaugural Certificate Completion Ceremony, where the college honored the achievements of our students in Welding, Automotive, and Massage Therapy to name a few. This ceremony was a testament to our students' hard work, dedication, and commitment to their education. The college took great pride in their accomplishments and felt honored to have played a role in their educational journeys.

In alignment with our commitment to continuous improvement, Rock Valley College launched a new website in May 2023. The redesigned site aims to provide current and prospective students with easier navigation and improved digital accessibility. Recognizing the importance of efficient access to information and

resources, we made this upgrade to better serve our student community.

Furthermore, I am pleased to inform you that our sports teams have moved to D2 status, offering a more prestigious platform for transferring students. This advancement not only enhances the opportunities available to our athletes but also strengthens the reputation of our college in the athletic arena.

As we move forward, I want to assure you that we will continue to empower students and community through lifelong learning. Rock Valley College is committed to providing an outstanding learning environment, fostering personal growth, and equipping our students with the skills and knowledge necessary for success in their chosen fields.

We are RVC Strong because our community is strong. Together, we will continue to shape a brighter future.

Dr. Howard Spearman
President, Rock Valley College

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MAGAZINE **STAFF**

Editor in Chief – Jennifer Thompson
Editor – Gabriela Mar-Gagula
Art Director – George Winiarski
Writers – Jennifer Thompson, Heather Kelley
Photographer – Brent Jepsen



JUAN NOGUEDA

A PASSION TO SERVE

Growing up in Rockford, a city with challenges, Juan Nogueda is inspired to bring about positive change. "Juan Nogueda is an exceptional student and leader among his peers," said Sheila Ogbevire, Student Activities Coordinator. "He is always willing to take the lead to find a solution and help others. Juan has a bright future ahead of him because of his kindness and compassion towards others and his community." Juan began at Rock Valley College, pursuing an Associate in Applied Science in Fire Science. He's studying Fire Science to become a firefighter and make a difference in his community.

While working hard in his classes, Juan also takes on leadership roles at RVC. Juan is great at talking to people and making everyone feel included. He's also good at planning events and managing people, essential skills for his future career.

Adjunct Fire Instructor Timothy Free met Juan when he enrolled in the technical rescue class, then the following semester in the fire academy. "After almost 20 years in the fire service, I've had the opportunity to train several brand-new firefighters, some great, some good, and some that decided the job wasn't for them," said Timothy. "I have never met anyone like Juan before, he is a category all on his own. He's respectful, loyal, disciplined, and motivated, all of which make him one of the best I've had the privilege to help educate. In the fire service we follow a creed, service above self. Juan exemplifies this creed in his service to RVC and the community."

Besides his studies and plans, Juan is motivated by his two younger sisters. He wants to be a good role model and help his community. He believes that by caring about the present, future, and past, he can grow personally and help others. "It's important to have both motivation and discipline," said Juan. "Motivation gives you the desire to achieve your goals, but discipline helps you keep going even when you don't feel motivated." Juan has learned this from his own experiences with health issues and family problems. He knows that discipline is key to overcoming obstacles and staying focused.

Juan takes on many responsibilities at college. He joined student

organizations like Association of Latin American Students (ALAS) and Campus Activities Board (CAB). He's made a significant impact in ALAS, starting as a secretary and later becoming the vice president and eventually the president. Juan shows excellent leadership and dedication to both clubs even when unexpected things happen.

"Being a Golden Eagle, the mascot of Rock Valley College, doesn't mean changing who you are," said Juan. "It means embracing your culture and community while taking advantage of the opportunities the college offers. By choosing RVC, students can transform their lives, learn about different cultures, and make a positive impact in their communities."



The most important achievement for Juan is being elected as the Student Trustee for the 2023-24 school year. This is a unique role where he works closely with the college's leaders and ensures students' voices are heard. He wants to get more students involved in fun activities and use the college's resources to help them prepare for their futures. Juan believes RVC can produce great leaders by supporting and empowering students. He knows that being a student trustee is a big responsibility.

"I respect the previous student trustee, Mr. Russell, who balances his military service with his duties as a student trustee," said Juan. "I want

to grow personally and professionally in this role, knowing that by helping other students, I am helping the community."

Juan's passion for firefighting and serving the community has been clear throughout his college journey. The Fire Science program at RVC gives him the skills he needs and inspires him to make a difference.

"Juan has demonstrated a sincerity in character not typically so outwardly evident in someone so young," said Chief Joel Hallstrom, North Park Fire Protection District and RVC Fire Science Adjunct Instructor. "It is hard to verbalize the demeanor seen daily from Juan in class to describe what a great attitude he possesses, despite some challenges he's faced in life. As he progresses through his collegiate path, I'm excited to see his growth and where he lands after Rock Valley. Whatever fire department he lands at will be better with him in their ranks, and the community he'll serve will reap those benefits as well."

Looking back on his time at college, Juan loves how diverse and inclusive RVC is. People from different cultures and backgrounds come together like a family. They can pursue their passions and keep learning and growing.

"Juan was in my SPH 131 class during the Spring 2023 semester and 30 seconds into his first formal talk, there was a palpable buzz in the room," said Bob Betts, RVC Speech Professor. "His brilliance was obvious right away. The weeks after that say as much about Juan because he has uncommon kindness that is not forced. People are drawn to him because he is authentic and brilliant."

Juan's time at RVC is filled with passion, dedication, and a commitment to helping others. As he prepares to start his firefighting career, his influence on the college and the community will always be remembered. RVC, its students, and its future leaders will always be grateful for the fantastic contributions of Juan Nogueda, the student trustee with a compassionate heart and a burning desire for positive change.

RVCHEA

RVC EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION AWARDS



Faculty of the Year
Dr. Mathew Oakes
Professor of English



Employee of the Year
Vonnice Busker
Manager of Continuing Education



Leader of the Year
David Schneider
Dean of Enrollment Services



Rookie of the Year
Cara Vande Voorde
Accommodations Specialist



RVC Police Department was recognized by the **Lexipol Connect** program for achieving **Gold Level** for consistently and effectively disseminating policies to officers, issuing timely policy updates as laws change, and ensuring officers are trained on policies.



The **RVC Foundation** was awarded a \$32,000 grant from **Winnebago County** to plant trees lost by the tornado and to help replace benches along our walking paths.



Alumni **Richard Gessert**, completed his year as a **Fulbright Scholar** in Vietnam.



RVC Men's and Women's Bowling repeat as **NJCAA National Champions**.



RVC Foundation and **Crusader Community Health** partnered to address healthcare shortage through the creation of two new scholarships for the Medical Assistant and Dental Assistant programs.



RVC Police Department installed a **Drug Take-Back Kiosk** in the Support Services Building at Main Campus. This program provides a safe and permanent solution for our community to dispose of surplus and expired medications.



RVC Alumni, brothers TJ Hill and Aaron Hill, and Shelby Hill (Aaron's wife), attended the Cannes International Film Festival in France for their film "A Cloudy Moon."

Photo Courtesy of 48 Hour Film Project

DLINERS

PHI THETA KAPPA



Tim Spielman, PTK Advisor, was honored for more than **two decades of exemplary service** as the chapter's advisor.

RVC President **Dr. Howard Spearman** was honored with the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society (PTK) **Paragon Award for New Presidents** during PTK Catalyst 2023, the Society's annual convention. Dr. Spearman is one of 28 recipients to receive this honor, selected from among 406 college presidents, chancellors, and CEOs eligible to receive this award.



RVC student and Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society member **Isabella Wright** was named a **2023 Coca-Cola Academic Team**

Bronze Scholar, receiving a \$1,000 scholarship.



RVC Communications & Marketing was recognized by the National Council of Marketing and Public Relations (NCMPR) with a **Silver Medallion Award** at the district-level for their Follow Your Dreams at RVC commercial and earned a **Bronze Paragon Award** for their quick-turn, graduation sizzle reel.



2022 ATHLETICS HALL OF FAME

This year's class includes 2004 AVCA Midwest Coach of the Year **Ben Staup**, two-time National Player of the Year **Olivia Fluehr**, Conference Player of the Year and All-American **Cierra Morris**, and All-American mention **Tyrone Savage**.



2023 EAGLE AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE

Outstanding Student: **Sarah Hinde** and **Ryan Russell**

Outstanding Staff: **Eliza Franco-Gonzalez**, **Anna Wandtke**, and **Bianca Davis**

Outstanding Faculty: **Michelle Rotert** and **Robert "Bob" Betts**

Outstanding Community Partners:

League of Women Voters Greater Rockford

National Women Veteran United (She-Vet) Rockford Chapter

Theresa Paulette Gilbert
Distinguished Service Award: **Dr. Florence Cephus – Posthumous Award**

STARLIGHT THEATRE

for receiving five Lou Awards for excellence in theatre. The Lou Awards celebrate community and college theatre in the north and northwest suburbs of Chicago.

Starlight was nominated for a total of 25 awards in nine categories. 2022 Lou Awards for Starlight Theatre include:



Best Director
Christopher D. Brady
The Little Mermaid



Best Musical Director
Jodi Lynn Beach
The Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder



Best Scene Design
Carmen Turner
The Little Mermaid



Best Actor
Malachi Goldsmith
Dreamgirls



Best Supporting Actress
Laura Lydia Paruzynski
The Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder



NACDA NAMED **DARIN MONROE** ATHLETIC DIRECTOR OF THE YEAR



Rock Valley College Athletic Director, Darin Monroe, was recently named a recipient of the National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics (NACDA) Athletic Director of the Year Award.

"Darin has raised the bar of excellence in athletics on campus, in the conference, and beyond our region. We are RVC Proud of his accomplishments," said Dr. Howard Spearman, RVC President.

The award spans seven divisions (NCAA FBS, FCS, Division I-AAA, II, III, NAIA/ Other Four-Year Institutions and Junior College/ Community Colleges). Winners were recognized at the 2023 NACDA Convention on June 11-14 in Orlando, Florida.

Since taking over as Athletic Director at Rock Valley College, the Golden Eagles have had unprecedented success under Darin Monroe. Darin has been instrumental in the transition of Rock Valley College Athletics from NJCAA Division III to NJCAA Division II which began in the Fall of 2022.

In the final season as NJCAA DIII, Rock Valley won National Championships in Men's Bowling, Women's Bowling, and Softball, had a National Runner-Up finish in Volleyball, Third Place finish in Men's Basketball, and were national qualifiers in Women's Basketball. RVC Athletics finished 14th in the 2021-

2022 Learfield Directors Cup Two-Year College Final Standings, the highest ever for Rock Valley.

"It is rare to find such a dedicated professional that holds himself, his fellow coaches, his student-athletes, and his campus community to such high standards of integrity and work ethic. Every action and activity is done with purpose and with focus on excellence," affirmed Dr. Patrick Peyer, RVC Vice President of Student Affairs.



In Darin's tenure as Athletic Director, 38 RVC student-athletes have been named NJCAA All-Americans, RVC coaches have won eight National Coach of the Year awards, and 12 Region 4 Coach of the Year honors.

In addition to his roles at RVC, Darin is an active member of the NJCAA, serving as an NJCAA Board of Regents member as the Region 4 representative and NJCAA Division II Oversight Committee Chair. In 2022,

Darin was recognized by the NJCAA as the prestigious Loyalty Award winner.

"Darin is an excellent ambassador of collegiate athletics. As a member of the NJCAA Board of Regents, while representing Region 4, he is a visionary whose work is always thorough and all-encompassing," explained Arnie Chavera, Black Hawk College Director of Athletics & Community Recreation & Region IV Director. **"The level of professionalism of operations within his athletic department is a direct reflection of his leadership capabilities. It's no surprise that Rock Valley College Athletics continues to achieve success."**

Darin's success does not only span across administrative duties. He is also the Head Coach of the RVC softball program that in 2022 won an NJCAA record eighth consecutive National

Championship. And because of his success as both a Coach and Administrator, Darin was inducted into the NJCAA Region 4 Hall of Fame in 2023. He will be inducted into the RVC Hall of Fame in December 2023.

JADEN NEWSON CROSSES THE LINE AT RVC

"Jaden is truly an Ambassador of Rock Valley College," said Annie Romanello, Welcome Center Coordinator. "She shares her enthusiasm and care for others in the classroom, on the court, and at the Welcome Center. Her infectious smile is always ready to share her love of RVC with current and future students, staff, and the community. We are lucky to have had her here for the last two years."

Jaden Newson submerged herself into all things RVC, serving as a Student Ambassador, becoming the President of the Student Athlete Advisory Council, and joining The Bookworms Club. She was a fixture at the college's Welcome Desk, greeting prospective students with a contagious enthusiasm that never failed to ignite the same passion in them.

Jaden's decision to attend college far from home was underlined by crossing the line, a running theme in her family. Her maternal grandparents had emigrated from Mexico to the United States in the '90s with a modest sixth-grade education and scarcely enough money to get by. They worked relentlessly, her grandmother initially as a cleaning lady and her grandfather as a carpenter, and they owned their own business. On her father's side, Jaden's ancestors



had migrated from the South before the civil rights movement. Her great-grandfather found a factory job in Rockford in 1948 as part of the Great Migration.

From the moment she crossed the state line, a sense of nervous anticipation gripped Jaden. Leaving the comforting familiarity of Sterling, Colorado, a small town about two hours northeast of Denver, she took the daunting leap toward an unknown future at RVC. A highly talented basketball player, Jaden had been

recruited by RVC to join their Women's Basketball team, an offer that presented a fresh set of challenges and opportunities.

The road to success at RVC was challenging, but Jaden met every hurdle head-on. She embraced the balance of being a student-athlete, honing her time management skills,



and overcoming her procrastination. She embodied the very spirit of RVC, juggling her responsibilities with grit and determination.

"Jaden is well-versed on RVC, an environment that she, in fact, impacts significantly on a daily basis," said Tim Romanello, Assistant Athletic Director-Compliance. "She's an incredibly intelligent, passionate young woman that desires nothing less than seeing people around her succeed. She exemplifies the very person RVC is all about – an individual striving for more and wanting to give back all at the same time."

But it was not just the academics and sports that enriched Jaden's life at RVC. It was the people. From the

staff to her fellow students, she found a sense of community that went beyond mere friendships. It felt like a family.

"I have met some lifelong friends here at RVC," said Jaden. "Not only that, but the staff is so amazing that I know if I am struggling, there is always someone willing to help."

Throughout her journey at RVC, Jaden found her calling in Education. A lifelong love of school translated into her desire to cultivate an environment where students felt the same adoration for learning.

"If I could study to be a student for the rest of my life, I would," said Jaden. "The world is in our hands. I want to have a hand in teaching and guiding the next generation to be ready to take the world."

In her two years at RVC, Jaden achieved significant accolades. She made the dean's list during the 2021-2022 school year and received her Associate of Arts degree. Her profound impact on the college and its community did not go unnoticed. Jaden's commitment and zeal earned her glowing reviews from her peers, professors, and staff at RVC.

As Jaden prepares to further her education at North Central College in Naperville, Illinois, she looked back at her journey with a sense of accomplishment. She had crossed that state line, leaving behind everything familiar, but in the process, she had found a new home, a new family, and a clearer vision for her future.

From basketball to academics, from her role as a student ambassador to her part-time job at Marshalls and her babysitting gig for two amazing boys, Jaden immersed herself fully in her new life. Despite the unfamiliarity and the challenges, Jaden wouldn't trade her time at RVC for anything. To her, it was exactly where she was supposed to be.



REMOVING BARRIERS TO SUCCESS WITH RVC's **CAREER CLOSET**

A Career Closet is something RVC Dean of Students Terrica Huntley has wanted to start for quite some time. She's seen many students struggling financially in what seems to be a cycle in our community. Many are advancing their education to earn more money for themselves and their families. Often, they are held back



from participating in job interviews because they don't have the clothing or tools to do well. The Career Closet can fill those basic needs that are lacking.

"My hope with the Career Closet was that we could remove this barrier to help students go on interviews and look and feel good doing so without a large financial burden," said Dean Huntley.

Dean Huntley brought her idea to the RVC Student Government Association (SGA) for assistance with initial start-up costs, including garment racks, labels, and hangers. "Many students may not have the funds within their income to buy new clothes, especially business clothes which can be very expensive," said Karina Martinez, SGA President 2022-2023. "It will be nice for them to come in and get clothing for free."

The RVC employees and community

have stepped up to meet the needs of students. So far, the closet has received donations of 600 clothing items and 250 accessory items (shoes, bags, jewelry, scarves, and hats) from 20 people. Since the closet opened on October 3, 15 students have received assistance with 45 articles of clothing and accessories. Goodwill and Salvation Army are good resources for clothing, but RVC was looking for a free option for students.

"We all are so blessed and have so much, so I thought our community could share resources by donating clothing we had," continued Dean Huntley. "I know I certainly had clothing with tags (that don't fit anymore) just sitting and figured I could give them away for a student to benefit from them."

Kavonnie Dotson, a member of SGA, thinks the Career Closet is amazing. "I'm shocked that you don't have to pay for these clothes," said Kavonnie. "There's nice stuff here, coats and sweaters. I feel like I can look presentable for any occasion, whatever I do."



Vanessa Sims, Student Navigator Generalist, assists with putting stylish outfits on display at the Career Closet. She recently became the advisor of the new RVC Fashion Club, which



meets regularly throughout the semester. The organization's purpose is to provide a platform for students to express themselves through fashion and fashion-related areas to better understand the art.

The Career Closet is currently accepting donations of gently-used and clean, ready-to-wear professional and career attire, including suits (pants or skirts with matching jacket), suit jackets or blazers, skirts, dress pants or slacks, business casual pants or khakis, button-down shirts, blouses, skirts, dresses, ties, closed-toe dress shoes, sweaters, scarves, purses, briefcases, laptop bags, belts, and hangers.

Students can select three FREE clothing items (suit, jacket, blazer, pants, skirts, blouses, shirts, dress, etc.) for each visit and up to two FREE accessories (purse, bag, ties, scarves, shoes, jewelry, belt, etc.) each time you visit.

RVC Career Closet is located at CLII 219 and is open by appointment. For more information, call (815) 921-4101 or email RVC-DeanofStudents@RockValleyCollege.edu



"RVC is the first school in the nation to have a fully operational CRJ 200 aircraft," said Ryan Goertzen, Vice President of Workforce Development of AAR Corp.

The arrival of the CRJ at Rock Valley College's Aviation Maintenance Technology (AMT) program hangar at the Chicago Rockford International Airport was three years in the making. At that time, Goertzen authored a white paper outlining an aggressive plan to grow AAR's workforce in Rockford in a way that had not been done before.

"We have created something so unique in the State of Illinois. This should be stood up as a model for workforce development across the country," continued Goertzen.

Thanks to Illinois legislatures, a grant was awarded to The Workforce Connection that facilitated the purchase of the aircraft. And ultimately, it was AAR's connection to SkyWest Airlines that made the purchase and delivery possible.

"The strong partnership that The Workforce Connection, Rock Valley College, and AAR have is the result of many hours of hard work and dedication," said Gina Caronna, Executive Director of The Workforce Connection. "In order to have partnerships like this be successful, everyone has to be committed to staying at the table for the long haul, and that is exactly what you see in this partnership."

The college's AMT program has more than tripled in size in recent years. Currently, the program serves 178 students with three cohorts of

students running in the morning, afternoon, and evening.

RVC's program chair, Todd Morgan, speaks with great pride regarding the program. "We are able to provide training at a fraction of the cost



because we are a community college. A student can get to work rather than being saddled with debt upon completion of our program."

When conversations first began about adding a larger aircraft to the program, Todd said they were initially looking at a Cessna Citation as it was a smaller aircraft and was within the budget. He credits Goertzen's connections and Caronna's tenacity for raising the bar and securing the CRJ 200.

Students in the AMT program monitored the flight radars and watched with great anticipation the day the aircraft arrived.

"We watched as the plane taxied down the runway knowing that we were receiving a new plane. We were really excited to know that we would get to work on an aircraft similar to the ones we will see in the field," said Amanda Friedman, a student in RVC's AMT program.

Amanda moved back to Rockford in 2020 to be closer to family and returned looking for a lucrative career to support herself and her three-year-old son. With the guidance of her stepfather, who is a commercial pilot, she found herself in a position at UPS.

As she watched the airplanes come in during her 10:30 p.m. – 3:30 a.m. shift, she eventually turned her sights across the tarmac to RVC.

"It's been an exciting ride so far," exclaimed Amanda. "It's not just aviation that is so wonderful; it's also the people that are part of the aviation world."

The sky's the limit for Amanda who has already had the opportunity to travel all over the Midwest in support and promotion of aviation.

With the addition of the aircraft, both Amanda and Todd are excited about the future of the program. Todd is looking forward to continuing his work with students to improve the program and curriculum, and Amanda is already thinking about the vast opportunities that await her after graduation next winter.

Todd concluded, "This is a small program. It's a community college-based program. I am very proud that we have one of the lowest cost programs as well as one of the highest quality programs in the country."

Visit RockValleyCollege.edu to learn more about the Aviation Maintenance Technology Program.

GRADUATES STRIVING FOR SELF-IMPROVEMENT

57TH ANNUAL COMMENCEMENT

“I have five kids. My older son is 25. So, I wanted to show them that it doesn’t matter how old you are or your limitations. You can do it. If it is something that you want to do, you can do it.”

Maricela Garcia

GED Graduate & Commencement Speaker



“CNC lathes and mills, it’s sort of a pivot for me from machining into welding. Makes things fun. I don’t know at this point if I’m a machinist who knows how to weld or if I’m a welder, who knows how to machine, but either way, it’s a good combination.”

Joshua Reding

Welding Student &
Certificate Ceremony Speaker



“I chose the Associate of Science program because I plan to go to medical school. This is the best degree for me as it has opened my eyes to more entry-level courses like Biology, Chemistry, and Anatomy that I’ll take when I attend a university. Starting at RVC helped prepare me for what it’s like and what I’ll be doing.”

Alyssa Bird

AS Graduate & Commencement Speaker



"If I could study to be a student for the rest of my life, I would. The world is in our hands. I want to have a hand in teaching and guiding the next generation to be ready to take the world."

Jaden Newson
AA Graduate & Commencement Speaker



"I was happy to see an Electric vehicle class added to the curriculum this year. It's prepared me and my classmates in the automotive field along with the rest of the required courses."

Angel Rivera
Automotive Student & Certificate Ceremony Speaker



"If there's anything I've learned in the last few years, it's that there's always going to be change, even when you think there's not going to be, it's just always going to be there."

Grace Petrus
GED Graduate & Commencement Speaker

RVC FOUNDATION IMPACT AT A GLANCE

The Rock Valley College Foundation is delighted to present our Fiscal Year 2023 Impact at a Glance, highlighting the significant achievements and impact we have made together over the past year.

\$1.4 MILLION

Donated in FY23

Donors and community partners generously donated more than \$1.4 million in support of educational opportunities through the Rock Valley College Foundation. This incredible achievement has enabled us to make a profound impact on the lives of our students and the broader community.

We are proud to share that 18% of our dedicated donors are alumni of RVC. Alumni donors, having experienced firsthand the transformative power of education, demonstrate their commitment to giving back and ensuring future generations receive the same opportunities.



\$440,145

in Scholarships Awarded in
Academic Year 22-23

RVC Foundation's mission is building regional relationships and securing resources to advance RVC and its students. By reducing the financial barriers to education through the funds provided by our donors, we are ensuring that every motivated student has the chance to thrive at RVC.

Because of the generous support of our donors, 247 deserving students were awarded an RVC Foundation scholarship in academic year '22-'23. These scholarship recipients embody the spirit of dedication and resilience, and their achievements serve as a testament to their hard work and determination. Together, we are empowering the next generation of leaders, change-makers, and trailblazers.

247

Scholarship
Recipients



148

Active
Scholarships



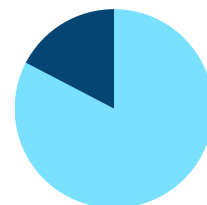
8%

of recipients
identified themselves
as a single parent



3.34

Average GPA
among recipients



21%

of recipients had
an Expected Family
Contribution (EFC) of \$0

RVC FOUNDATION SCHOLARSHIPS TURNING BARRIERS INTO BRIDGES



"You have changed my life by offering a token of financial support, and I hope to one day be able to change the lives of future students as you've changed mine." - Stephanie R.

"I want to convey to you all in the most gracious of ways, what an honor it is to receive such a blessing, not only this scholarship but also the thought of being able to present a future for not only the generations to come, but for myself and my little boy."

- Emily M.



"By making the contributions that they have, everyone who donates to the RVC Foundation has, on some level, substantially improved the lives of everyone who receives these scholarships."

- James S.

This past fall, the Rock Valley College Foundation hosted its much-anticipated annual Scholarship Donor and Recipient Luncheon, an event that brings together the extraordinary scholarship donors and their deserving recipients. This important luncheon serves as a strong reminder of the transformative power of scholarships and the profound impact they have on the lives of Rock Valley College students.

Themed "Where Generosity Meets Gratitude," the luncheon celebrates the immense generosity of the donors and provides an opportunity for the recipients to personally express their heartfelt appreciation. This gathering not only strengthens the bond between the donors and the recipients but also highlights the unwavering support and belief in our students that scholarships represent at RVC.

One of the most cherished aspects of the luncheon is the chance for scholarship recipients to meet the individuals behind their named scholarships. Joy and gratitude radiate throughout the room as these

remarkable individuals connect, creating meaningful moments that extend beyond the financial support awarded. The donors' belief in the students, sometimes even before they believe in themselves, leaves a permanent mark on their educational journey.

"Our annual Scholarship Donor and Recipient luncheon is my absolute favorite event of the year," says Brittany Freiberg, Chief Development Officer with the Rock Valley College Foundation. "Witnessing the deep gratitude of our students and the joy and pride on our donors' faces bring to life our day-to-day efforts and truly humanizes the scholarship experience at RVC."

For many students, scholarships offered through the Rock Valley College Foundation turn financial barriers into bridges, opening doors to a brighter future. With the generous support of donors, these scholarships provide not only financial relief but also a sense of validation, encouragement, and the belief that their education and career goals are attainable.

Last year's luncheon was made even more special by the generous contribution of Coleman CPA & Consulting, a Rockford-based accounting firm known for its commitment to education throughout our community.

Our scholarship program at RVC serves as a testament to the vital role played by the Rock Valley College Foundation in creating opportunities for students to overcome obstacles and pursue their educational aspirations. The Foundation's steadfast dedication to empowering students and fostering a culture of philanthropy is reflected in the success stories of countless scholarship recipients.

To learn more about the RVC Foundation's scholarship program, how you may support these efforts, or to learn how to apply for a scholarship, please visit:

RockValleyCollege.edu/Foundation
or call **(815) 921-4500**



WELDING STUDENT RETOOLS CAREER

Joshua
"Red"
Reding
was curious
about bigger
opportunities

for his career when Rock Valley College announced the opening of the Advanced Technology Center. Tuition waivers were available for CTE programs like Welding, Machining, and Mechatronics, and he saw it as an opportunity to learn additional skills.

When Josh discovered the welding program at RVC, he was already taking classes toward an engineering degree and planned on taking Intro to Welding as a prerequisite or an elective. At first, he just wanted to dabble in it, as he couldn't see it as a career. But Josh quickly discovered his passion. Welding was rewarding work and something he had the potential to be truly great at it.

About three years ago, Josh took a leadership role in his company when COVID started to explode in the area. Soon, co-workers were turning to him for advice on what they should do about all sorts of outside issues, and his leadership role quickly grew. After a while, he decided he was no longer interested in a leadership position and started looking around to see what else he might be passionate about.

"He seemed a bit burnt out, constantly a troubleshooter and giving 110%. This is a fault of any hard worker, and "Red" certainly is one. He's a talented welder and has since changed positions within his company to weld full-time," said Bill Isham, Welding Instructor.

Josh has been in manufacturing for 11 years and is still with the same employer. He changed careers there and has been a professional welder for several months.

"CNC lathes and mills, it's sort of a pivot from machining into welding. Makes things fun. I don't know at this point if I'm a machinist who knows how to weld or if I'm a welder, who knows how to machine, but either way, it's a good combination," said Josh. He's never been happier with his job and can see himself improving more and more each day.

"Josh is an excellent student. He came into our program as a machinist and supervisor of his department," added Bill Isham. "He took classes mainly to improve his welding skills, as one aspect he used in his process at work." Josh works with stainless steel welding for food manufacturing, piping pressure vessels, mixers, homogenizers, the pharmaceutical industry, medicine, and food.

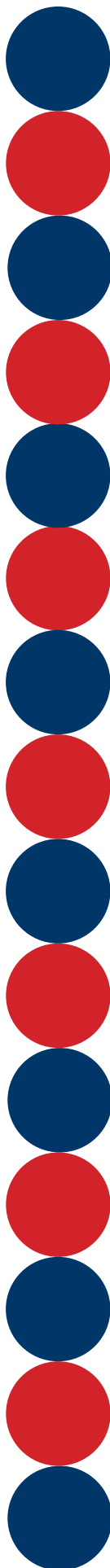
Looking ahead, Josh plans on continuing to take classes, whether it's CTE at the Advanced Technology Center or resuming the engineering

degree that he started with the welding program. He's hoping the welding program expands and becomes a degree.

"The core curriculum, state-of-the-art welding lab, and cutting-edge technology and equipment make this a good program. But the guidance and knowledge from instructors like George Bane, Bill Isham, Jeff Petty, Rob Zezniewski, and the other ATC teachers and the energy they bring make this a truly great program," said Josh.

"Admittedly, Josh did benefit from that financially, but most importantly, you can tell he enjoys his work," said Bill Isham. "We'll miss him as a student, but I'd like to think we'll have "Red" back as an adjunct sooner rather than later."





ILLINOIS SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CENTER RETURNS TO RVC

After nearly a decade, the Illinois Small Business Development Center (SBDC) returned to Rock Valley College this spring. This move was made possible with a \$150,000 grant from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity.

According to the U.S. Small Business Administration's Office of Advocacy, there are 1.2 million small business owners in Illinois employing more than 2.5 million people, representing about 45% of the private workforce.

"The addition of the SBDC to our Golden Eagles family is at the heart of our mission to empower the community through lifelong learning. The SBDC allows the college to expand its offerings to the community and enhance our outreach and services to business and industry partners," said Dr. Howard Spearman, RVC President. "Helping our community entrepreneurs develop and strengthen their businesses from concept to implementation is in alignment with our strategic plan."

The SBDC provides services by appointment to small business owners and entrepreneurs, many of whom are women and minorities in the Stateline area. Services are provided at no cost and include confidential business advising, strategic and financial review and planning, market and industry research, and business plan assistance.

According to Nancy McDonald, Executive Director of Grants and Small Business Development at RVC, "Last year, the Illinois SBDC provided more than 1,100 direct service hours to over 100 clients, assisted with 9 new business start-ups, and provided a pathway for small business owners to obtain \$1.7 million in financing. With the SBDC a part of the Rock Valley College family, we look forward to supporting small business owners and entrepreneurs in the future."

The SBDC team may be small, but they are mighty, and they have their sights set on exceeding last year's



numbers. In addition to Nancy, the SBDC Team includes Nate Jordan (director), Megan Wright, administrative assistant (pictured above), and business advisors, Ed Caceres and Mike Rogers (pictured above).

"The entire SBDC team is excited to be a part of Rock Valley College," said Nate. "The combined resources of the SBDC and RVC will allow us to not only continue, but to also enhance our offerings. Along with community partners, we have provided a host of training such as 3D printing, financial literacy, commercial real estate acquisition workshops, insurance 101, and more. We are excited about SBDC's future at RVC."

Dr. Spearman continued, "Here at RVC, we have a saying - we are RVC Strong because our community is strong. Having the SBDC at RVC contributes to the strength of our small businesses, our economy, and, most importantly, the community we call home."

The SBDC is located on RVC's Main Campus in Rockford. If you are interested in learning more about how you can access services or are interested making an investment in the SBDC, contact:



Nate Jordan
(779) 423-9558

**N.Jordan@
RockValleyCollege.edu**

Learn more at
RockfordSBDC.org

RVC ALUMNI WAYS TO CONNECT

Whether you graduate from Rock Valley College or simply take a few classes to further your education, you not only gain invaluable educational experiences and knowledge to last you a lifetime, but you also become an important member of the RVC family.

As a valued alumnus, the Rock Valley College Alumni Network strives to create opportunities for you to reconnect, engage, network, and grow alongside the college and your fellow Golden Eagles.

We hope you'll take time to explore our many opportunities to connect with RVC in a way that feels meaningful to you. Below is a sampling of our events and avenues for connection and engagement:

JOIN & FOLLOW

Join our growing Rock Valley College Alumni LinkedIn page.

Like our Rock Valley College Alumni Facebook page to stay connected and abreast of all alumni-focused events. There is no cost to join.

Update your email preferences by sending them to:
RVC-Foundation@RockValleyCollege.edu

ATTEND & PARTICIPATE

Attend our two Alumni and Retiree Breakfasts held each spring and fall. These events feature an inside look at the current happenings of RVC and are free to attend.

Participate in our Alumni & Community tailgate on Sunday, September 24. See the invitation on the back cover.

Look for our alumni happy hours and networking opportunities shared on our Facebook page.

SHARE YOUR STORY

Read our quarterly e-newsletter and consider sharing your RVC story and career successes with the RVC Foundation team. We're always looking for alumni to feature in an upcoming newsletter!

Complete our alumni survey by scanning the QR code or visiting

RockValleyCollege.edu/Foundation



SOAR With Us

In partnership with RVC Athletics, the Rock Valley College Foundation is embarking on an ambitious fundraising campaign seeking support for athletic scholarships that will have a lasting and profound impact on student-athletes and the athletic program here at RVC. From a recruitment tool for the best and brightest young athletes to a mechanism for generational change in the lives of their families, athletic scholarships have the ability to elevate every facet of our sports program.

We are thrilled to share that thanks to a group of dedicated booster club members who share our deep passion for RVC Athletics, we have an exciting opportunity for you to double your impact. Our lead

donors have collectively given \$15,000 to use as a challenge match between now and December 31, 2023. What does this mean for you? It means for every dollar you donate, our lead donors will match your gift 1:1. Not only does your gift double, but so does your impact.

Will you help our Golden Eagle athletes fly twice as high through this important Soar With Us Campaign? We humbly ask you to help us seize this incredible opportunity today.



To give securely and hassle-free, simply scan the QR code or visit **RockValleyCollege.edu/Foundation**

2023 SANKOFA CEREMONY & CELEBRATION

Each year since 2009, RVC has conducted a Sankofa Ceremony and Celebration. This year's ceremony was held on Friday, May 12, 2023, at the Stenstrom Center for Career Education.



Sankofa is not a graduation; instead, like other cultural celebrations, it is considered a rite of passage, a moment when a society or community recognizes that some of its members have reached a milestone and will move on to the next steps in their journeys.

Respected community members were invited to address the students and be recognized as those whose

shoulders we stand, honoring national and local historical persons who have made lasting, positive contributions to our nation and community. Families, friends, and loved ones who have supported our students are honored, and most importantly, students are honored for their career, academic, athletic, and life achievements.

Sankofa is a West African (Akan) word that means "it is not forbidden to go back and retrieve what you have forgotten" or "go back to the past to build for the future." It is represented by a bird that flies forward while looking backward with an egg (symbolizing the future) in its mouth.

Fourteen years ago, Professor Theresa Paulette Gilbert, Department of Composition and Literature, presented the concept of a celebration for our African American graduates and completers to the members of the college's Black History and Culture Committee, and she still remembers their enthusiasm for it. "Over several years, I had witnessed similar ceremonies at colleges and universities across the country, said Dr. Gilbert. "It seemed to me and the committee that our community college students had as much to celebrate, maybe more than many of their four-year counterparts."

During the ceremony, students received a Kente cloth stole to wear at Commencement that represents the community's recognition of their accomplishments and its pride in them. Kente cloth is a hand-woven fabric made in West Africa; it is worn on special occasions and is highly prized. Wearing it connects one to the rich heritage that provides guidance, encouragement, support, and a constant reminder of one's human dignity and worth.

"Our students' successes had come at greater sacrifice for some of them, over longer periods of time for others, and with challenges unknown to other students," said Dr. Gilbert. "In other words, our students deserved a "Sankofa Moment" and so did their families and our community."





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THE FAB FIVE OF MASSAGE THERAPY

You've likely heard of the "Fabulous Four," but have you heard of the Fabulous Five? And no, we are not referring to Yoko Ono. Rather, we are referring to the most recent graduates of Rock Valley College's Massage Therapy program: Lilia Mendoza, Shauniqua Jones, Jozlynn Overton, Monica Snyder, and Tracy Orims. So, how did they earn this title?

On the first day of class, these five women entered the classroom frightened of what was before them. As a cohort, they quickly discovered that to get through the 600-hour comprehensive and hands-on training program, they would need each other.

"I think I can speak for all of us teachers, when I say that from the first day, we knew these women were going to be an incredible class and they would be just the group of personalities we needed, to make the year an adventure to remember," said Tiffany Czerwin, RVC Massage Therapy Instructor. "The energy that these students brought with them every week, the drive they showed us even when things got difficult for them...is something you simply do not see every day as a teacher."

Starting off the program as strangers, their bond and support for one another grew to be unmistakable. Together, they experienced the highest of highs and the lowest of lows; from the joys of a new life to the grief of loss, illness, and self-doubt. While they had each other, they credit their instructors for getting them through the program.

According to Tracy Orims, one of the Fabulous Five, "I gained a family that never gave up on me when I was

battling health issues that could have taken my life. My director, instructors, and classmates fought for me until the day I walked across the stage."

That director is Jamie Fanara. With over 17 years of experience as a licensed massage therapist and business owner, she has a passion for the industry and a desire to mentor and support other therapists. This passion led her to create the program at RVC in partnership with Bodycraft Wellness & Massage Center.

"From the very beginning, I meet with all of the students to discuss their goals and aspirations, and

rewarding field.

Upon completing the program, graduates are eligible to take the licensing exam required to become a licensed massage therapist. With their comprehensive training and education, graduates are well-equipped to embark on a fulfilling and rewarding career in massage therapy, helping others heal and promoting wellness in the world around them.

The program is rigorous, and life doesn't stop for continuing education. Whether it was memorizing muscle groups or taking notes when

someone was out, this group stuck together and crossed the finish line.

"These women have passion and some of the biggest, most sincere hearts. They all helped each other study and build each other up if one of them was struggling," continued Tiffany. "These women are strong. They fight for what they want even when it might feel like the world around them is crumbling."

With the work

behind them, the Fabulous Five are off to their careers as licensed massage therapists. And, the RVC faculty have no doubts that they will be successful in the next leg of their journey.

In regards to their journey, Tracy concluded, "RVC is a place where all are welcome and no one is left behind. This school gives hope and lots of love. I am blessed to be a part of the RVC family."

To learn more about the massage therapy program at RVC, visit [RockValleyCollege.edu](https://www.rockvalleycollege.edu)



ALUMNI LISA & JAVIER JIMENEZ

INSPIRE AREA ARTISTS

Every year the art department at RVC reaches out to local and regional artists to display in our campus showcases. Past displays include a collection of Matta Ortiz pottery from Mexico, a private collector of Chinese ceramics, and a collection of Intaglio prints from a Chicago firm. Faculty art has also been on display from time to time. "We also host an annual regional RVC High School Exhibition and have an Art show of our RVC Art Students at the end of the Spring semester," said Lynn Fischer-Carlson.

This year, Lynn is focusing on former students of RVC who have continued a life with art in some way. "I reached out to Lisa and Javier Jimenez as I have worked professionally and socially with them through the years. I had Lisa in ART 121, and Matt Vincent worked with her during her student teaching experience when he taught at Guilford High School over 15 years ago." Lisa is an RVC alumnus, where she earned her associate's degree and transferred to Northern Illinois University (NIU) for her Bachelor of Science in Art Education. During her time at RVC, Lisa took every art course offered and reflects fondly on her time here. "RVC is where I got a chance to experiment with a variety of mediums and lay a strong foundation for my future art career," said Lisa.

For the last 18+ years, Lisa has been an art educator in the Rockford area, teaching youth from grades 6-12. She is a mixed media artist whose work often incorporates patterns, layers, and inspiration from nature. Her work changes and flows depending on what materials spark her creativity, but she always has her signature whimsical style. Lisa's materials of choice include acrylic & watercolor paint, pen, colored pencil, collage, and even a bit of screen printing.

Javier, in many ways, is a self-taught artist with guidance and instruction

from various sources in his early years. In his late teens, he was drawn to screen printing when he and a couple of friends and family members started a commercial printing business together called Connecht. Initially, he saw screen printing as a way to make additional income as well as a way to learn & experiment with a new medium. Around the same time, he took on a steady day job that evolved into his full-time career at a utility company.

"While working a full-time job, I fit in a screen printing class through RVC that gave me the tools I needed to pursue my passion," explained Javier. "By day, I worked long hours while we raised our son, and by night I hustled in the art studio, experimenting and perfecting my craft." Over the course of two decades, Javier has created an expansive artistic career, including being a member of the Rockford, Illinois-based, and internationally known print collective Fatherless.

Javier and Lisa Jimenez have significantly impacted many young and inspiring artists throughout the community through teaching, exhibitions, and participation in other art experiences locally and regionally.



EXPLORE AREAS OF STUDY AT ROCK VALLEY COLLEGE

Whether you are interested in Career & Technical Education, that is designed to be completed in two years or less, or you wish to start at RVC and transfer to another college, Rock Valley College has great options for you. Options vary by area of study and can include credit and non-credit coursework, certificates, and degrees. Learn more at RockValleyCollege.edu.

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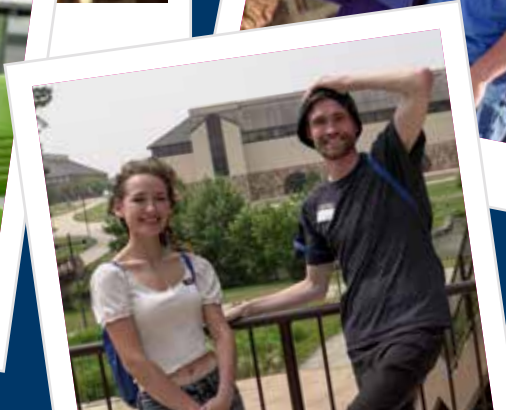
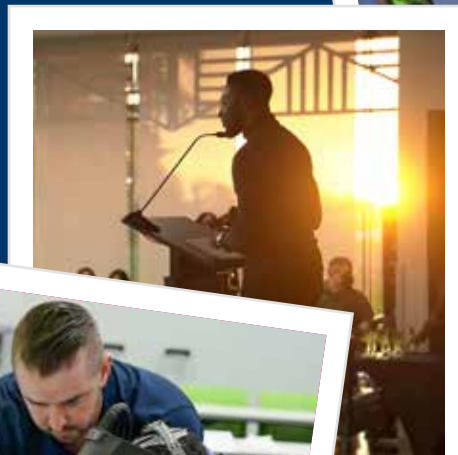
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