



FALL 2022 • VOLUME 1 / ISSUE 1

# INSPIRE





*Together we inspire and transform lives.*

INSPIRE is produced by the Marketing and Communications Department at Jackson College. If you have comments or questions about the publication call 517.796.8416.

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# REIMAGINING EDUCATION

Jackson College continues to transform our business practices and curriculum to make the learning experience extraordinary and provide opportunities to prepare students for the newest jobs in the market. Providing access to quality higher education is vital for the economic vitality of the communities we serve. Throughout the challenges of the past two years, our commitment has not wavered, nor has our innovative spirit. We continue to work and innovate ways to improve the student experience. Now, many projects are coming to fruition:

- STEAM Factory – The College has renovated space to create the STEAM Factory, standing for Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics. We will offer more classes in this flexible space, including manufacturing, ceramics and graphic design.
- Major improvements have been made to our baseball and softball fields, providing a remarkable first impression for those traveling to campus from the north. This has already reaped benefits when inviting athletic recruits and their families to campus. The new complex is complete with press boxes, bleachers, larger dugouts, and lights to allow night games for our students and the

community to use. Construction on the concession stand and restrooms will begin soon.

- Plans are underway to build a new observatory, very distinctive for a community college, with the second largest telescope in the State of Michigan.
- Our online learning, Jackson College Global, is available around the nation to offer some of the best online learning opportunities for students hundreds of miles away.

Jackson College continues to reimagine how we can improve for our students, our communities, and with online learning, our world.

This publication highlights the people and projects that make Jackson College an innovative, student-focused institution. It is our ongoing design thinking practices that have given us the distinction of being a board member institution of the League for Innovation in the Community College, one of the top 20 community colleges in the nation. I hope you are both informed and inspired by what is happening at your community college!



Daniel J. Phelan, President & CEO





# Nursing a **FAMILY AFFAIR**

**DREAMS COME TRUE AT JACKSON COLLEGE!**



**THREE FAMILY MEMBERS HAD THE SAME DREAM – JACKSON COLLEGE HELPED THEM BRING THEIR GOALS TO LIFE!**

While nursing had been a dream for sisters Tiffany (Newell) Rose and Anna Newell, both started in other careers. Tiffany worked six years as a paramedic, then spent several years running her own photography business. She found herself missing the medical field and held onto her dream of becoming a nurse.

“We have several nurses in the family; all of my aunts are nurses. With my love of wanting to care for people, I knew nursing would be a good, stable job that fit with my core beliefs,” Tiffany said. Hearing many good things about Jackson College’s nursing program, liking that their admission process meant no waiting lists, she enrolled. She found the program “phenomenal,” talking non-stop about it with her family.

Next came niece Waverly Harvey. After completing her Certified Nurse Assistant (CNA) license at the LISD TECH Center and listening to her aunt, Waverly realized nursing was the career for her. “I was drawn to Jackson and nursing from my aunt (Tiffany), who was the first in Jackson’s program,” Waverly said. She is now about to graduate. “I love

Jackson College’s nursing program! I feel like all of the professors are super supportive; if you are lacking in any area, they reach out to you and try to help you,” Waverly said.

Then it was Anna. She had earned a bachelor’s degree in exercise science and then had four children and got busy with life. When Waverly got accepted into the nursing program at Jackson, Anna was both happy for her and a bit jealous because it was her dream, too. “It motivated me to go back to school for nursing. Ever since I was a little girl, I have wanted to be a nurse. After years of dreaming, I applied and was accepted. I chose Jackson because of their intense program,” Anna said. She is in her third semester of the program. “We love Jackson College!”

**“ I LOVE JACKSON COLLEGE’S NURSING PROGRAM! I FEEL LIKE ALL OF THE PROFESSORS ARE SUPER SUPPORTIVE; IF YOU ARE LACKING IN ANY AREA, THEY REACH OUT TO YOU AND TRY TO HELP YOU. ”**

Tiffany continued her studies after graduating in 2015, earning her Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Eastern Michigan University, and is now completing her master’s degree at the University of Michigan. She will be a family nurse practitioner. Her continued studies have only reinforced the value of her community college education.

“One of the things I really, really appreciate about the community college is that you’re pushed more to excel. I think the learning is top of the line. The instructors are passionate, and they want you to learn and pass. It’s very personable; you are not just a number; you feel like they actually care about your success.”

# EDUCATING NURSES for the future

**Nursing programs at Jackson College have long prepared students for promising careers in today’s health care field.**

Nurses are in demand, a trend that has been accelerated due to the COVID-19 pandemic. An aging population and expanding access to health insurance also increases demand on health care. The career offers mobility with a variety of career opportunities available. Students may continue their education toward a bachelor’s, master’s or doctorate degree in nursing to further career possibilities.

“I personally love the diversity of nursing. Once you have a nursing degree, it is the key that opens the door to so many opportunities,” said Associate Professor Erin Mazur, nursing department head.

An associate degree is a first step to becoming a registered nurse (RN).

A certificate is required to become a licensed practical nurse (LPN). Jackson College offers both, and an LPN-RN associate degree program. Each program uses a second-admit process. After completing the RN program, students may transfer to several four-year universities to complete a bachelor’s degree thanks to several articulation agreements.

The College’s registered nurse program is now accredited by the National League of Nursing – Commission on Nursing Education Accreditation, a nationally recognized award and validation of program quality. The associate degree in nursing program has long held the approval of the Michigan State Board of Nursing.





# SAM BADJIE

## Graduate traveled far to attend Jackson College, but journey was worth it!

**Alumnus Sam Badjie traveled far to attend Jackson College, but the journey was worth it! Originally from Gambia, a friend recommended Jackson College for its nursing program, so he applied, and the rest is history!**

"I wanted to work with people in some form and getting into something health-related was key to me. Nursing combines science and the human aspect, which captivated me," Badjie said.

Going to college in the U.S. was very different from Gambia. The College helped this international student to transition to a new educational system. "All my faculty went above and beyond to make sure we were successful."

Jackson College offered opportunities to get involved beyond the classroom. He played soccer, served as president of the Christian Student Club, and was inducted into Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society. He continues to play soccer in his free time.

Badjie graduated from Jackson College in 2020, early in the pandemic. Today he is a registered nurse in Milwaukee and has worked with many COVID-19 cases throughout the pandemic. His curious nature led him to the opportunity to do research on monoclonal antibodies to treat COVID-19, and again, his background with Jackson helped him.

His professional journey is not finished just yet. In the future, Badjie plans to apply to medical schools to become a doctor. "I am happy with my choice of career. I am well prepared for what comes next thanks to my experience and background from Jackson College."

**"I am happy with my choice of career. I am well prepared for what comes next thanks to my experience and background from Jackson College."**





# JESSICA HENRY

## Corrections program offers student a new start

**Jessica Henry has faced her challenges. But with the help of Jackson College, she's overcome them to turn her life around.**

Henry's parents divorced when she was just 5, and she and her sisters bounced back and forth between her mother's home, foster care and then her father's home. At age 15, Jessica became pregnant and dropped out of school, eventually turning to the lifestyle of crime and drugs in her hometown of Detroit.

“The opportunity to do Jackson College gave me a new way of life.”

“The reputation and lifestyle I thought was successful had no glamour to it in the end,” she recalls. She ended up in prison, where she completed her GED. She tried to do college after release, but that need for money sent her back to selling drugs. Fighting addiction, she ended up in jail some eight times, with three inpatient rehab stays and numerous outpatient rehab attempts. Then she went to prison again after being an accessory in an armed robbery.

But this time around, she had an opportunity to make a new start with education.

“In prison, I was offered the opportunity to do Jackson College. It was there I found my place; my entire life changed,” she said. Though she didn't realize it at first, she believes she was placed in prison for a reason; to get an education. Her faith tells her that while she slammed many doors to

God, He never forgot her. “The opportunity to do Jackson College gave me a new way of life.”

Henry was one of the first women to graduate from the Corrections Education Program, in 2019. Today she is 6½ years clean and sober and completed three associate degrees – Associate of General Studies, Associate of Arts, and Associate of Applied Science in Business Administration.

After release, she moved to Jackson to be part of SOAR, She Overcomes and Rises, a two-year transitional housing program. She continues her studies at Spring Arbor University in social work in hopes of someday using her past experiences in helping others from troubled backgrounds find their way.

“Knowledge and learning are so important. If you have a passion for something that you want or a goal, it's never impossible.”





# KYLE LEIGHTON

## College helps entrepreneur build foundation for success.

**Kyle Leighton has made his mark in business. It all began at Jackson College.**

Leighton, an alumnus of Jackson College and Siena Heights University, learned early on to educate himself and go all-in in his business ventures. He started doing public relations for the commercial lighting industry and learned all he could about the field. Soon, he published articles in several national and international publications and trade journals such as the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine and became known for understanding the science of lighting. Others took note. His work led to a national award from the National Association of Electrical Distributors in 2013, and in 2014, Kyle received the Recent Graduate Award from Siena Heights University.

With his growing expertise, he moved to New York City in 2015, where he consulted with engineering companies in NYC and Moscow, Russia. After a few years, he formed his own company, First Building Solutions. "We design and source lighting components for large clients, auto dealerships, big-box retail customers, like that," he said. From

profits on these projects, Leighton invested in real estate in Jackson and currently owns 26 rentals.

From his experience in the lighting industry, Leighton learned of international procurement, sourcing and logistics. This knowledge helped him in his next venture: decorative tapestries and home decor. From his time at Jackson College, Leighton knew tapestries were a popular item for many college-aged women. Realizing there were no major U.S. tapestry companies, he saw an opportunity in the market, and founded Tapestry Girls. To date, the business has sold over \$1 million in products online and at major retailers such as Walmart and Redbubble, and continues to expand. "Once I got the company off the ground, doors started opening quick because Tapestry Girls was the only US based tapestry supplier, and we began making in-roads in domestic markets and with other retailers fast," Leighton explained.

This successful entrepreneur recognized value in his local community college, where his mother was teaching at the time. He attended Jackson College because he could save money while getting the

same education he could elsewhere for less. "My professors at Jackson College offered so much," he said. "They were very influential to me."

He also got the opportunity to give back, returning to Jackson College to teach as an adjunct instructor. "My time teaching and helping shape other students was equal to, if not more valuable, than the time I spent there as a student," he said. For his many accomplishments, Jackson College recognized Leighton with the Captain Zenneth A. Pond Soaring Young Alumni Award in 2021.

Leighton is married to Heather, and they have one daughter, Vera. In what little free time this busy entrepreneur does have, he enjoys reading and continuing to educate himself. "In business, everything boils down to education. That's how you keep building and growing."

**“My professors at Jackson College offered so much. They were very influential to me.”**







# Scholarships touch the future, one student at a time

## LOVE OF MUSIC PLAYS ON WITH NEW BENNY AND BARBARA POOLE SCHOLARSHIP

For decades, Jackson area music lovers loved the sounds of musician Benny Poole, known for his jazz saxophone riffs. While Benny Poole might be gone, his legacy lives on in the joy of his music and the memories of his children.

*Benny Poole*



*Barbara Poole*

While very successful in his career, Poole chose to stay close to home to raise his family. Now, after his passing in 2020, his daughter Teresa (Poole) Littlejohn has established a music scholarship at Jackson College. The Benny and Barbara Poole, Sr. Music Scholarships honors both her father and her mother, who was a lifelong supporter with a great appreciation for music, especially jazz.

"I wanted to establish this as a tribute to my parents," Teresa said. "My sisters and brothers and I grew up around music. I felt it would be satisfying and honor my parents' legacy to help another individual in their education."

So, Benny and Barbara's memory will live on in a way they would have loved – helping a student of music.

"My parents were very special in my life. To leave a memorial scholarship can mean so much; what a way to give back to someone. I truly believe in that," she said.

## PARMA MASONIC LODGE SUPPORTS LOCAL STUDENTS WITH SCHOLARSHIP

Parma Masonic Lodge No. 183 F&AM wants to aid students in attaining their dreams. In order to do this, they've decided to give back to the community by providing scholarships to Western High alumni.

Since the Parma lodge members have ties to the College, giving back was an obvious choice.

"I attended Jackson Community College after graduating from Western High School," recalls member Gilbert Fennimore. After studying at the University of Michigan and living in Ann Arbor and Detroit for a few years, he and his wife moved back to the Parma area. A scholarship to help a local student in the hometown community where they've spent their lives was the right choice.

When the Masons Grand Lodge of Michigan let them know that they could be reimbursed for certain charitable contributions, things started falling into place. Lodge members met with a representative from the Jackson College Foundation, and a new scholarship was created.

To qualify for this \$1,000 annual scholarship, students need to have a minimum 2.0 grade point average and live in Jackson County. Applicants are reviewed by foundation committee and a winner is notified.

"I'm quite happy that we are able to do this," Fennimore said. "Supporting students from two of the schools I've attended. It would be a boost for the recipients of this scholarship as they head into college."

*Parma Masons and Brigitte Robinson, Director of Annual Giving and Alumni Relations*

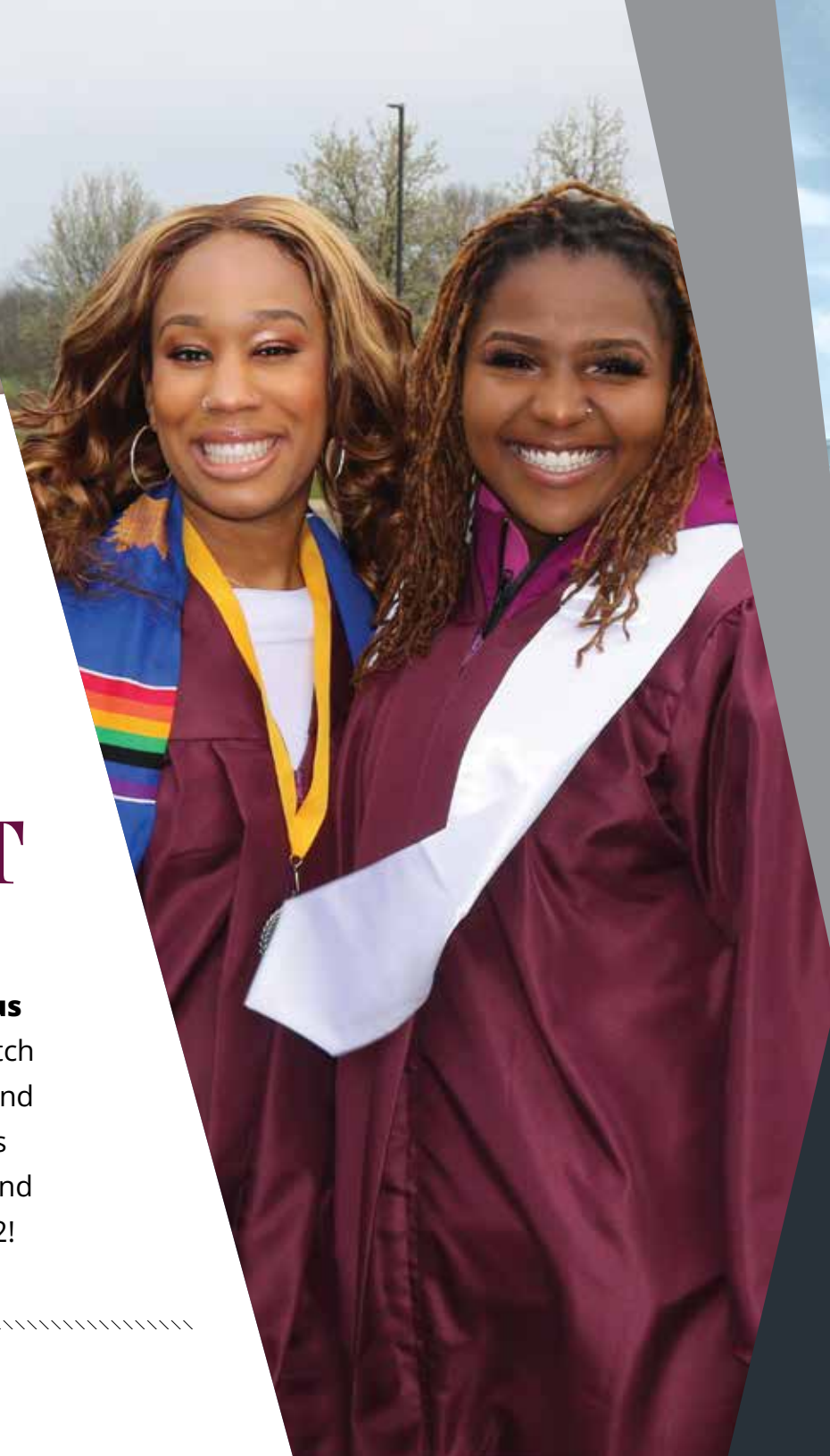






# 2022 COMMENCEMENT

**More than 300 excited graduates attended the outdoor commencement ceremony at Bert Walker Hall on Central Campus on April 30.** It was also a pleasure for faculty and administration to watch the graduates from the terrace and cheer them on. With ample space and audience seating in the parking lot areas, this outdoor location provides open spaces for families with children. The event was a huge success, and a great opportunity to celebrate the hard work of the classes of 2021-22!





# EDDIE BURKHEAD

## Learning that makes a difference guides outstanding faculty member.

**Revamping the advanced manufacturing program, helping to plan a new facility and teaching – it's been a busy year for faculty member Eddie Burkhead!**

New directions promise to be exciting, as Burkhead works to develop curriculum and craft plans for the new STEAM Factory. Burkhead – himself an architect – teaches manufacturing, energy systems, electrician and electronics courses for the College. He's been very involved with the new advanced manufacturing/industry 4.0 curriculum, bringing manufacturing together with information technology. It introduces students to today's integrated, automated factory setup -- making a factory operate more like a computer network. Robotics and automation are part of the program, giving students what they need for today's advanced manufacturing careers.

"There is a sense of everything coming together. It's more about a person conducting the orchestra to see how all the parts are working together and how you can line them up using computers."

The College recognized Burkhead's efforts this spring with the J. Ward Preston Outstanding Faculty Award. "I have always liked helping people and enjoy the process of helping people grow," he said. "Now that I've been doing this a while, I sometimes will run into former students at a store, and they'll tell me how well they're doing and that I made an impact. Watching people grow and improve is really an amazing thing."

Regardless of the subject, taking time to get to know his students helps him to understand how best to teach them. His classes tend to have more adult learners, students who are coming back to college to boost their job situation. They

balance classes with marriage, family, jobs and life, so college can't always be a priority. Burkhead understands and works with each student to find the right balance necessary to succeed. Teaching for a college committed to student success is the perfect fit.

"We're constantly evolving, in a good way. We want to give students what they need to get the jobs they want," Burkhead said. "Students can feel confident that they are getting a relevant education that is current and needed today."

**“Students can feel confident that they are getting a relevant education that is current and needed today.”**





# CLEVESTER MOTEN

## Leading tomorrow's leaders. Moten strives for positive impact in classroom.

**Dr. Clevester Moten enjoys the positive influence he can make on students as a college instructor. Helping students to shape their future and giving them the tools for success makes teaching much more than a job!**

"One of my goals for teaching is to always make a positive impact on the lives of students," said Moten, business instructor and developer of the College's public administration and management program. "A quality education is a game-changer for all students, a chance to transform lives. It's a dire need for students in poverty."

Moten learned about helping others from his mother, who was a supervisor at Jackson's Interfaith Shelter for 25 years. She would seek

out solutions for individuals' particular needs while helping them overcome poverty and homelessness. "She was inspirational," he said.

Moten previously worked with LifeWays Community Mental Health as a supervisor of recipient rights. He brought his insights and educational background to the College to develop the public administration program, equipping students with skills to manage all levels of government and nonprofit organizations. With aspects of social justice and equality added to the public administration curriculum, students can gain valuable skills necessary for today's workplace.

"I've always had a passion for teaching," he said. "I'm not only instructing but also learning from the students. I'm always learning, understanding what

**"I'm always learning, understanding what is needed to help transform lives and give students skills for a lifelong, sustainable career."**

is needed to help transform lives and give students skills for a lifelong, sustainable career."

Moten is thankful for the opportunity to teach at Jackson College. "This is a very caring institution. We not only want to get the best out of our students, but we want to provide the best course content and resources so we can educate students to be all that they can be."





# NINA KNIGHT

## Instructor leads from experience.

**Nina Knight's high school English teacher believed in her, helping her apply to and get started in college. Fittingly, today Knight is paying it forward as an English composition and literature professor for Jackson College.**

Knight's path was not easy. From a rough background, her first college expelled her because of poor grades – her GPA was just 1.9. She struggled with drugs and alcohol and spent

time in rehab. But she overcame. Today, these experiences help her relate to the struggles that many students face.

"I know what it's like to have adult responsibilities as a young person, to work and go to college and pay your own bills. It's incredibly stressful. Especially if you are the first in your family doing it," she said. "I'm not standing there as someone who doesn't understand but as someone who has overcome and made it, and they can do the same."

**“When Jackson College says we are totally committed to student success, I don't feel that is a bumper sticker slogan to anyone. We truly feel it, we truly believe it.”**

Student success is much more than a saying, Knight adds.

"When Jackson College says we are totally committed to student success, I don't feel that is a bumper sticker slogan to anyone. We truly feel it, we truly believe it. If they are willing to put in the effort to try, we are going to do everything in our power to help them succeed. Not if, you can and will succeed, every one of us will be here each step of the way."

Teaching at Jackson College since 2019, her reach extends beyond the classroom. Knight gives back by participating in Challenge Day events and the Jackson County Martin Luther King Breakfast Committee. The Modern Language Association (MLA) recently appointed her chair of the Committee on Community Colleges.





# COMING SOON The STEAM Factory!

**Advanced manufacturing, smart factories, robotics, automation, networked processes – there is a new revolution happening in how goods are manufactured! Jackson College is helping students prepare with an exciting new facility, the STEAM Factory.**

STEAM is an acronym for Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, Mathematics. The Jackson College STEAM Factory provides a promising space for learning about manufacturing and more. The former automotive technology annex has been transformed into the STEAM Factory, providing space for industry 4.0/smart manufacturing classes, graphic design and studio art, bringing together programs that focus on creativity from different perspectives! The facility is equipped with state-of-the-art equipment to provide students with the knowledge and skills to be competitive.

“We’ve made it flexible so it can change over time, because technology changes,” said Eddie Burkhead, instructor. There will be a smart factory area, a robotics area, a 3D printing area and simulations of conveyor belts in manufacturing. A graphic design space will look like an agency, and there will also be pottery and art studios with kilns. Movable divider walls will allow for changes as needed.

## **FLEXIBLE LEARNING**

The STEAM Factory’s flexible space will allow classes to come together in the smart factory model. “One class may teach how to program a robot, while another teaches how to program a conveyor belt, but in the real world all of that is done together. This flexibility allows us to build classes, curriculum and projects that link different components, so students learn and

understand the whole process and how things tie in with one another,” Burkhead said.

Students have sought flexibility in learning. Since all classes moved online following the pandemic, students liked the online learning but also wanted to learn hands-on skills. STEAM Factory teaches students hands-on skills in more concentrated time than previous weekly labs. More manufacturing and automation tracks will be offered in the future.

Preparing for today’s manufacturing world with flexible spaces, learning concepts and whole processes, and combining creative arts – Jackson College is moving full steam ahead to enhance student opportunities!

## **WHAT IS INDUSTRY 4.0?**

Industry 4.0 represents what’s been called the Fourth Industrial Revolution. It is revolutionizing the way companies manufacture, improve and distribute their products using new smart technologies. These bring together information technology, the Internet of Things (IoT), cloud computing and analytics, and artificial intelligence and machine learning into their production facilities. More efficiency and responsiveness than ever before possible is the result. *(Source: IBM.com)*







# Serving <sup>the</sup> WHOLE student

**Innovative teaching techniques alone will not help a student struggling with anxiety or one who is sick and does not have access to medical care. JACKSON COLLEGE IS COMMITTED TO SERVING THE NEEDS OF THE WHOLE STUDENT.**





THE COLLEGE OFFERS:

- A **campus Health Clinic** and Oasis Center to assist with medical and behavioral health needs.
- The **Dental Hygiene Clinic** provides dental cleanings and other services.
- A **professional clothing closet**, Jackets for Jets, helps prepare students for the workplace.
- The **Harriet Myer Student Emergency Fund** assists with emergencies that can be insurmountable for students, like car repairs or an unexpected utility bill.
- The latest effort is a **Hunger-Free Campus** initiative, providing meal coupons to students who identify as being in need.

These services are in addition to college services from the TRIO Student Support Services program, Center for Student Success, and other clubs and groups.

Serving the “complete” student helps keep students on track to their goals.

**DENTAL CLINIC BRINGS SMILES!**

Shaina M. Dilag, an international student from the Philippines, never had her teeth cleaned before visiting the Dental Hygiene Clinic. “This was my first cleaning, and I liked it. They took care of me there,” she said. “I have been there four times now. It is very convenient, and they give me all I need to take care of my teeth and gums!”

**TRIO OFFERS SECOND FAMILY**

Toneka Smith returned to college after marriage and starting a family. While she describes her first

semester as “chaotic,” she soon found the help she needed with the TRIO program. “My first semester I was all over the place, trying to work and being a new student. In my second semester, someone came in and talked to me about TRIO. I was super excited; I knew I needed extra support. I knew I found a second family to support me at school, and I loved it.” She recently graduated with both an associate degree and certificate in business administration and is looking forward to completing her bachelor’s and master’s degrees in the future.

**College officials are considering partnerships with countywide resources to help our students in additional ways. Our work is ongoing as we focus on the needs of the whole student.**

# An all-around student recognized with Potter Award

Talin Khanna made the most of Jackson College’s student experience!

As a student, Khanna has experienced nearly every service available and joined as many student organizations as possible. For his achievement and involvement, Khanna receives the 2022 George Potter Outstanding Student Award Winner.

That involvement began early with Ready, Set, Jet! summer program that connected him with the Center for Student Success for studying and the Men of Merit student group. He was a Junior Writing Fellow, helping fellow students improve their writing skills. “I was glad I was given this opportunity to help other students improve their writing because I, myself, became a better writer in the process,” he said.

Khanna was a walk-on on the men’s cross-country team and used the College Health Clinic for sports physicals and tests. During the pandemic, he was active in Student Government and met with the College’s Leadership Council. The Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society welcomed him, and he found the TRIO Student Success Services program helpful in connecting with his transfer school, Western Michigan University. He has even taken Japanese lessons from Affinity Liaison Ai Yoshida.

“I’ve had so many opportunities at Jackson College. I’m glad I could take advantage of all that is offered,” he said.

Khanna completed three associate degrees and two certificates at Jackson College and has transferred to Western, where he is studying anthropology.





## BRIAN COLE

### Going to college a good bet for bus driver

**Brian Cole enrolled in college on a bet. Turns out, it's for more interesting than he expected, and now he's looking forward to earning a bachelor's degree.**

Cole is a 54-year-old Navy veteran, retired flight attendant who now drives a Jackson city bus. During the pandemic when the Futures for Frontliners program was announced, it gave him an idea. With a son who was nearing graduation age but had no interest in furthering his education, Brian bet him that he could enroll and get a degree. "I thought it was a good idea to go," Cole said. "Growing up in high school, I really had no interest

in furthering my education, though I did quite well. When my son graduated, he really wasn't interested in college, so we made a little bet, a competition. He still hasn't enrolled, but I'm still going!"

Cole has five sons, all adopted from the foster care system. With his experience with the state and their adoption, he plans to major in social work and hopes to continue his studies at Eastern Michigan University.

"College is more interesting than I thought it would be. It's a personal pull at this point, continuing on so the kids can see that it's never too late," he said.

Futures for Frontliners is a state scholarship program to give Michiganders who risked their health and lives working in essential industries during the state's COVID-19 shutdown access to public community colleges.

“College is more interesting than I thought it would be. It's a personal pull at this point, continuing on so the kids can see that it's never too late.”





# ASIA JOHNSON

## Nursing student's persistence pays off

**Time doesn't matter, advises Jackson College student Asia Johnson. "If you're considering college, you should go and don't give up," she said.**

Johnson has had dreams of becoming a nurse since she was in middle school. This Jackson native has attended Jackson College since 2013, and she is determined not to let anything hold her back from achieving her goals! Despite juggling a full-time job alongside being a full-time college student,

challenges are just opportunities for learning more and discovering new skills. Her philosophy? You can't let failure get the best of you.

"Just pick yourself back up and try again until you get it right," she said.

Since her start at Jackson College, Johnson's experience has greatly improved thanks to changes made to the student experience, from student services to the nursing faculty. The result? A campus that cares about its students' success and

offers them resources so they too can live out their own success story!

"They care about students, offering resources and helping students be successful," she said. "Darlene LoPresto has been amazing; she's super-friendly, welcoming and helpful."

Johnson enjoys spending time with her family away from school and work. And when she has the chance, she encourages others to pursue their education. "It may take time, but it will be worth it in the end."

“Just pick yourself back up and try again until you get it right...It may take time but it will be worth it in the end.”





# Honoring our best

## UNDERSHERIFF SIMPSON HONORED WITH CROCKETT AWARD

Christopher Simpson’s distinguished record illustrates decades of committed service. Jackson College recognizes Simpson with the 2022 Dr. Ethelene Jones Crockett Distinguished Alumni Award. A Jackson High graduate, Simpson served in the U.S. Army and Michigan Army National Guard, deploying to Iraq in 2003. He attended Jackson College and graduated from Spring Arbor University with bachelor’s and master’s degrees. He also graduated from the FBI National Academy, Police School of Staff and Command, and New Chief School and Executive Leaders. A decorated Jackson City Police officer for 26 years, Simpson served many assignments and rose to the rank of lieutenant. He currently serves as undersheriff of Jackson County, appointed in 2020.



Simpson has served in leadership roles for the Domestic Violence Coordinating Council, Jackson Human Services Coordinating Alliance, Jackson YMCA, Jackson Community Foundation, Highfields, Jackson Chamber of Commerce, Jackson County NAACP, and the Jackson College Foundation. He was recently appointed to Jackson College’s Board of Trustees.

Honored for his dedication to service, he’s received numerous military medals and citations, police honors, and community recognitions. He and his wife, Erica, have four children and one grandson.

## DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD HONOREE RECOGNIZES GENERATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Alumnus Leland Bassett believes in generational responsibility, giving back to those who come after us. Jackson College recognized Bassett with the 2022 Distinguished Service Award.

A fourth-generation member of a pioneer farm family, Bassett graduated from Jackson High School and attended Jackson Community College on his way to Michigan State University.



He has been a pioneer in the application of communication psychology and strategic planning to public relations and corporate communication. He co-founded the nation’s first commercial communication arts and sciences-based professional services firm with his spouse, Tina, in 1986, the Detroit-based Bassett & Bassett, Inc., Communications Managers and Counselors. It is now part of The Bassett Business Group with a communication skills school and consulting office in Pune, India.

To give back to future generations, the Bassetts established the Vera Bassett Nursing Scholarship at Jackson College in honor of his mother who was instrumental in establishing the nursing program. The scholarship has benefitted 300 students.

The Bassetts support their community through involvement in the Jackson College Foundation Board, and in both the fine arts and performing arts in Detroit. They maintain a summer home on a Jackson County Lake.

◀ Leland Bassett and Trustee Philip Hoffman

## LOCAL DENTIST RECOGNIZED WITH EMERGING ALUMNI AWARD

Dr. Brianne Mezo is a Jackson native who followed her dreams.

Her journey to becoming the community dentist she is today involved many steps. Graduating with honors from Western High, she attended several colleges and universities along the journey, earning multiple degrees – Jackson College, Central Michigan University, Kellogg Community College, University of Michigan, Spring Arbor University and Michigan State University. Beginning her career as a dental hygienist, her dream of becoming a dentist persisted. She moved with her family to Indianapolis to attend Indiana University where, in May 2018, she graduated with her Doctor of Dental Surgery before heading back to Jackson.



She opened her own practice, Northwest Dental Excellence, from scratch in September 2018. Known as “Dr. Bri,” she has immersed herself as a supporter of the Jackson community. Dr. Bri is committed to helping her patients and building a positive practice.

For all she has given, she receives the 2022 Captain Zenneth A. Pond Emerging Alumni Award. “When I learned that I was nominated, I felt truly honored. It brings forth great gratitude for my journey from student to a dental professional and all those who mentored and supported me along the way,” she said.

## 2022 DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. MEDAL OF SERVICE AWARD

Jackson College recognized Monica Pierce, a longtime educator, with the 2022 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Medal of Service Award.

As Principal of Instruction at Jackson High School, she is known as “Momma Pierce” for her commitment to wanting the best for her

Monica Pierce ▶



students. She is Jackson High’s first African American, female principal for instruction, and under her guidance, multiple programs have been put in place to help students and staff succeed. Before this, she was an associate principal at JHS and previously taught English for 11 years before transitioning to an administrative role.

In 2018, Pierce received the Elnora V. Moorman Dignity and Determination Award, and in 2021 she received recognition for her work with youth at the 1st Annual Black Excellence Awards. She is a voice for young people as a member of the MHSAA Equity Committee, SEC Board of Directors, Jackson College Advisory Council and My Brother’s Keeper of Jackson/Battle Creek/Albion. Pierce is an alumna of Jackson Community College, Spring Arbor College, and completed her Master of Arts from Michigan State University. She is married to the Reverend Billy E. Pierce, Jr., and they have eight children and eight grandchildren.

◀ Christopher Simpson and Trustee Matthew Heins

◀ Kelly Crum, Chief Diversity Officer/Director of Diversity, Equity and Belonging and Dr. Brianne Mezo



# Biology professor’s legacy lives on with \$1.3 million donation

With her love for education and nature, late faculty member Myrna Berlet’s influence will live on through a generous gift of \$1,295,000 to Jackson College. The donation will create perpetual funds for science equipment purchases.

Berlet taught biology, botany, zoology, nature photography and many field biology classes for 32 years at Jackson Community College, influencing generations of students. She guided development of what would become the John and Mary Dahlem Environmental Education Center, a concept initially developed in a class she was teaching. Her unique perspective as a science faculty member helped her understand the challenges of finding funds for new equipment. This donation will create an endowment fund for the sciences, providing annual income to purchase biology, chemistry, and physics equipment.

“I am grateful for the legacy from Professor Berlet. Through this gift, she has created the perfect vehicle that helps to ensure the vibrancy of our

instructional program in the sciences,” said Jackson College President & CEO, Dr. Daniel Phelan.

Dr. Jon Powell, professor of biology at Jackson College, recalls being a student of Berlet. “I had the pleasure to have Myrna Berlet as an instructor my first year at JCC. She was certainly one of my favorite instructors throughout my college education, and I would like to think that I am helping to carry on her legacy as a JCC professor,” Powell said. “Her incredible gift to the Science Department will help us continue her commitment to providing an outstanding education to our students!”

In addition to teaching, she and her first husband, Walter Berlet, built an award-winning nature film business. Myrna was an avid photographer and became an accomplished woodcarver. Her drive, faith and passion shined through in all she did. Berlet passed away in 2021 at the age of 80.



JACKSON COLLEGE AGAIN RECOGNIZED AS NATIONAL LEADER COLLEGE BY

## Achieving the Dream

Working to help more students complete a college education, Jackson College again received Leader College status by Achieving the Dream, the national reform movement focusing on higher education.

Jackson College uses data to inform policy and practice to help students achieve their goals. This is a renewal of Leader College status for Jackson College; it was first recognized in 2014 and has been part of ATD since 2007.

A highlight of Jackson College’s success, the fall-to-fall semester persistence in reporting years fall 2016 through fall 2019 saw increases for these groups:

- Male students, 6 percent
- Black students, 16 percent
- Pell Grant-receiving students, 5 percent
- Non-traditional aged students, 10 percent

“Our work with ATD has transformed our institution, moving us to be student-centered and

▶ Ashley Van Heest, Assistant Dean of Strategic Initiatives/Director of Scheduling; Justin Gaeta, Director, Institutional Research & Effectiveness; Kelly Crum, Chief Diversity Officer/Director, Diversity, Equity & Belonging

student-ready,” said Ashley Van Heest, assistant dean of strategic initiatives/director of scheduling. “We are thrilled with our gains and successes, but recognize we have more work to do. This year, and in the coming years, we’ll continue using disaggregated data to drive our practices and will be focusing on our efforts to achieve equitable outcomes for all students.”

Leader Colleges are recognized for the quality of their work in whole-college reform, resulting in increased completion rates for all students. Jackson College has adopted many initiatives and strategies

to improve student persistence, retention and completion, including:

- seven-week classes that help students focus on and complete college credit in less time;
- guided pathways which provide a clear path to a credential;
- more student success navigators to guide students throughout their journey,
- freshman year course, Seminar in Life Pathways, to help all students develop skills and behaviors for success in college and career, and
- a co-requisite model for foundational education, enrolling in both a foundation studies course and a college-level class in the same semester, to help increase students’ ability to take gateway English and math courses in their first year.





# Jackson College recognized, named Veteran Connector School

**JACKSON COLLEGE CONTINUES TO GO ABOVE AND BEYOND TO MAKE  
STUDENT SUCCESS A REALITY FOR MILITARY-CONNECTED STUDENTS!**

For the fourth straight year, Jackson College has been named a Military-Friendly School® by Viqtory Media - G.I. Jobs magazine, moving up to Silver status. The Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency has again recognized the College with Gold Level Recognition. In addition, it has also been certified JC as a Michigan Veteran Connector for supporting military veterans and their families.

These recognitions exemplify what students are saying.

"Jackson College made the transition and going to college extremely simple," said graduate Eric Hubbell. "Anytime I had a question, the Veterans staff either knew it or got back to me extremely fast. That transition from former military, husband and father to student was a seamless transition."

Jackson College offers a dedicated Veterans Center located in Bert Walker Hall. Students may participate in a Student Veterans of America organization, which welcomes student veterans and others to provide connection and networking opportunities and ease the transition from military to academic life. Hubbell served as president of the Student Veterans Association.

"The veteran community is small, so it gives us somebody to vent to with people who have gone through similar situations. And there comes a time when you are one of the more senior veterans, and it is your time to take that younger veteran under your wing and say these are the challenges you are going to face. It worked like a well-oiled machine."

#### **Extending its reach**

Becoming a Michigan Veteran Connector extends the College's reach beyond the campus community. This initiative identifies and cultivates community partnerships to broaden referral capabilities for Michigan veterans and connect with the best possible resources. Colleges can help by identifying student veterans during admissions and asking, "Is there anything you would like us to know about your service?" From there, the school can start the

referral process to resources ranging from employment and training services to education benefits to VA health care. JC is one of the first eight colleges and universities certified.

"Any veteran can come in and, depending on what they're dealing with, we can work to connect them with the resource they need," said Randall Locke, veterans resource representative and student success navigator. "The MVAA is trying to get more points of contact for veterans out there. Any veteran can come to us."

"The transition from active military to the civilian world is extremely challenging. We need to get together to talk about things and support each other. These efforts are part of a community approach to helping veterans and their families."

“ANY VETERAN CAN COME IN AND,  
DEPENDING ON WHAT THEY’RE DEALING  
WITH, WE CAN WORK TO CONNECT THEM  
WITH THE RESOURCE THEY NEED.”





# POTTER CENTER

## season celebrates renovations

**From great entertainers to local community groups and organizations, the George E. Potter Center at Jackson College has been a hub of entertainment and community for more than four decades. But like all things, a few updates are necessary after a while.**

Those updates happened while the College was closed for the COVID-19 pandemic. Crews got busy tearing out seating and revamping the Harold Sheffer Music Hall. When guests returned to the

Potter Center for the 2021-22 season, a newly renovated performance venue awaited them!

Renovations include a stunning makeover with new paint, seating and carpeting in the Music Hall. The main curtain is new, and additional rails for the center aisles and a new handicap seating area nearer to the stage. The south exterior entry renovations are complete also, removing all steps and allowing a gradual slope entryway. New plantings, trees, sitting walls and pavers greet

visitors. The first phase included renovations to the second-floor mezzanine area and grand staircase, completed in 2017.

Music Director Matthew Aubin of the Jackson Symphony Orchestra shared that the lack of handrails and exterior stairs were often cited as reasons for patrons not renewing season tickets. "The new seating is much more comfortable, and the color scheme is fresh yet timeless," Aubin said. As a bonus, the red color matches the Weatherwax Hall banner, he shared. "I'm thrilled not only with the interior improvements but also with the lobby and the new projector!"

The Potter Center was built in 1976, and the Harold Sheffer Music Hall was completed in 1980. It is a versatile performing arts complex that has welcomed performers of all kinds over the years and nearly 50,000 patrons annually.





## JACKSON COLLEGE

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Jackson College became a board member in the League for Innovation in the Community College in 2019.

Jackson College is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission ([hlcommission.org](http://hlcommission.org)), a regional accreditation agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.



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