



JOLIET  
JUNIOR COLLEGE  
—1901—

# CONNECTIONS

joliet junior college magazine

## Our College. Our Journey.

Transforming The Future Through Unity & Community



FALL 2020



The purpose of Connections is to strengthen the relationship between JJC, its alumni and community. By sharing their stories and accomplishments, Connections serves as another example of the college's commitment to excellence in teaching and learning. Connections is published two times a year by the Communications and Marketing Division and the Institutional Advancement Office.



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# LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



Dear friends,

I asked our campus community at the start of the fall semester to make a pledge with me. We pledged that we would lead our interactions with compassion and respect for students, for colleagues, and for ourselves. This mindset has nurtured a spirit of support that I know propels Joliet Junior College and its community through the significant change we are experiencing.

As we reflect on 2020 and the deep pain of social injustice, the isolation of the COVID pandemic, and the volatility of our nation, we have invested in opportunities of reflection, as you'll see in Amy Chellino's stories on *The Soul of a Community is in The People*, and *Understanding the time of COVID-19 through JJC's oral histories*. We also know the opportunity inherent in this moment for transformational change. You will learn about these changes and future-focus through Scott Harvey's piece on diversity, equity, and inclusion at JJC today. You will also read about the conclusion of our five-year U.S.

Department of Education Title III grant how we have invested grant dollars to scale up resources for our students with great results, including increased graduation and retention rates.

In this time of uncertainty, here is what I am most certain of: Joliet Junior College is a resilient institution. As the nation's first public community college, this is in our DNA. We enter this new era with conviction in our mission and trust in you, our partners. Our collaboration now will shape the JJC of the future.

Be well,

**Judy Mitchell, Ed.D.**  
President

Queridos amigos

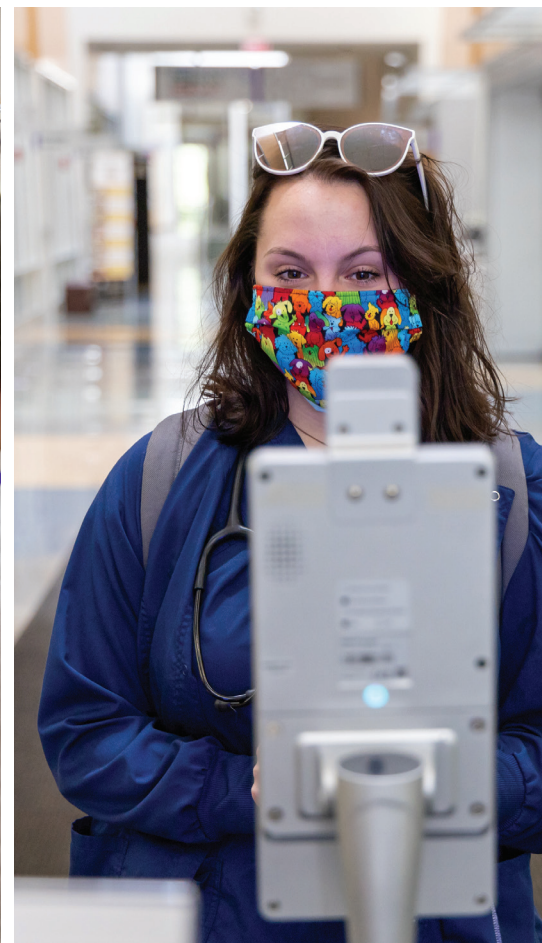
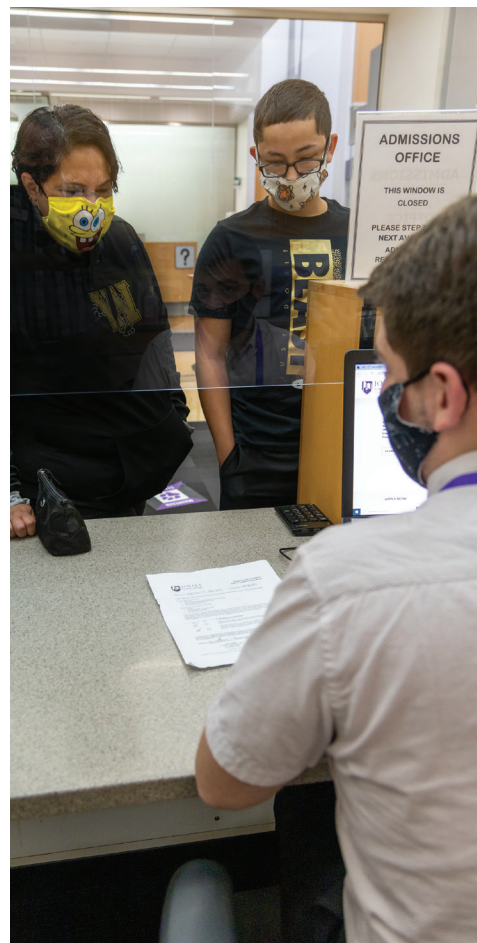
Durante el semestre de otoño pedí a la comunidad del campus que hicieran una promesa conmigo. Prometimos que conduciríamos nuestras interacciones con compasión y respeto a los estudiantes, a nuestros colegas, y a nosotros mismos. Esta mentalidad a nutrido un espíritu de apoyo, el cual impulsa a Joliet Junior College y su comunidad a través de los cambios tan grandes que estamos experimentando.

Al reflexionar en el 2020 y el gran dolor de la injusticia social, el aislamiento causado por la pandemia de COVID, y la volatilidad de nuestra nación, hemos invertido en oportunidades de reflexión, tal como vera en las historias escritas por Amy Chellino 'El Alma de una Comunidad está en La Gente,' y 'Entendiendo el tiempo de COVID-19 por medio de las historias orales de JJC.' También sabemos de la inherente oportunidad en este momento de cambio transformacional. Aprenderá sobre estos cambios y el enfoque futuro a través de una pieza sobre diversidad, equidad, e inclusión actualmente en JJC. También leerá acerca de la conclusión de la beca de cinco años otorgada por el Departamento de Educación de los Estados Unidos del Título III y como hemos invertido esos fondos para mejorar recursos para nuestros estudiantes con grandes resultados, incluyendo el incremento de tasas de graduación.

En estos tiempos de incertidumbre, de lo que estoy bien segura es que: Joliet Junior College es una institución resiliente. Al ser el primer colegio comunitario de la nación, esto este en nuestro ADN. Entramos a esta nueva era con convicción en nuestra misión y confianza en ustedes, nuestros socios. Nuestra colaboración actual, moldeará el futuro de JJC.

Que estén bien,

**Judy Mitchell, Ed.D.**  
Presidente





## LETTER FROM THE JJC FOUNDATION



Alumni and Friends,

This year, our journey has taken many different directions. Through the highs and the lows, I am thankful to say that we were prepared when the pandemic hit.

Over the years, we have built a significant Student Emergency Fund. We were ready to step in and help our students as they navigated a new way of learning. Through this experience, however, it was clear many students did not have access to technology and the internet at home. Food insecurities became a top priority, along with scholarships, books and supplies. The foundation utilized Student Emergency Funds to aid our students; the hard work to build that fund since 2004 made a huge impact rather quickly! Since the beginning of the pandemic, nearly \$33,000 has been invested in this fund.

Another priority has been to grow scholarship opportunities for underserved populations. Royce Chandler, the recipient of our Jewell Dennis Tribute to Men of Color Scholarship this year, serves as an incredible example of why it is important to ensure equitable access for all students.

Not long ago, my father was diagnosed with renal cancer. Emboldened by his experience, I knew I wanted to do something that would make a difference – and make him proud. I decided to follow my passion and return to college following a six-year hiatus. I want to become a registered dietitian so I can help my father and others like him.

However, there was a problem: I had little to no savings to pay for my education. There were times I could not afford books and supplies for my courses and I was hesitant to buy food because I had saved up just enough for my next tuition payment.

I decided to apply for scholarships and I am so thankful that I did! I received many through the JJC Foundation. These scholarships, funded by generous donors such as yourself, made it possible for me to pursue my education with less financial worry.

Early last year, I was fearful I would lose my father. Thanks to donors like yourself, I was able to hand him a diploma with our shared name on it, which I can wholeheartedly say was a priceless experience.

- Royce Chandler



If you'd like to support a student like Royce, or make a donation to the Student Emergency Fund, please contact me, use the enclosed envelope, or make a gift on our website at [www.jjc.edu/givetojjc](http://www.jjc.edu/givetojjc). Every gift, no matter the size, is supporting a student on their journey.

Sincerely,

**Kristin Mulvey, MSM**  
Executive Director, JJC Foundation  
Executive Director, Institutional Advancement

## JJC NEWS

### FY21 Budget Approved Marking 48 Consecutive Years of Balanced Budgets



The Joliet Junior College Board of Trustees approved the college's operating budget for Fiscal Year 2021 at its June 24 meeting. This is now the 48th consecutive year that JJC's budget has been balanced.

The total operating budget for FY21 is \$99.53 million, a 1.7% increase over the FY20 budget.

"During the final stages of this budget development, the coronavirus pandemic began and introduced health, financial, and operating issues that the world - including our seven-county community college district - had never witnessed or experienced," JJC President Dr. Judy Mitchell said.

The college was able to combat the effects of the coronavirus by implementing certain planning goals. These goals included supporting innovation in new programming, maintaining an emphasis on student success, expanding resources through proactive financial planning and addressing the potential impact the state has on the budget.

The FY21 budget also keeps tuition and health care costs flat, as part of JJC's continuing commitment to fiscal responsibility. Tuition, state funding and property taxes account for 98% of the college's operating revenues. The college proactively works to adjust expenditures to ensure financial stability through class size, program offerings and staffing levels.

For the 14th consecutive year, JJC's financial team was awarded the Government Finance Officers Association's (GFOA) Best Practices in Community College Budgeting for FY19. This award is presented annually to colleges based on their budgeting of resources that promote student achievement.

"With no blueprint to follow and information changing daily, I am proud of the foundation we have built to support the college and the work we will continue to do as we enter FY21 to drive JJC into its 120th year.



**Awarded** Government Finance Officers Association's **Best Practices in Community College Budgeting**



FY21 budget keeps tuition flat



**\$99.53 MILLION**  
Total operating budget for FY21

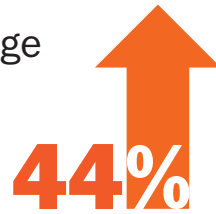




# In Every Challenge, There is Opportunity: Advancing the Online Course Experience



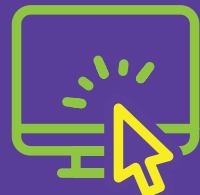
From **2015 to 2020**, Joliet Junior College added **80** online and hybrid courses, increasing enrollment by **44%** over that span.



Demand for online services in higher education had been growing long before the COVID-19 pandemic significantly increased reliance on technology. When the pandemic necessitated swift changes to operations, JJC took its online services to another level, thanks to a collective resiliency that not only ensured continuity but a vision for the future.

## FACULTY COMMITMENT & DEVELOPMENT

**370**  
JJC Faculty



As online courses continued over the summer at JJC, the distance learning model was expanded for the fall semester, with lecture courses online and in-person labs. With more time to prepare for the fall, 370 JJC faculty underwent a 3-week training through iCampus, the college's online learning platform. Under the leadership of iCampus Director Dr. Christopher Ostwinkle, iCampus staff and experienced online instructors, helped new online faculty build upon course quality and student experience. Additional plans include eight weeks of training through an external partner to build on the incredible work completed in 2020.

From creating assignments and video lessons to conducting grading and quizzes, professors learned how best to apply these online teaching tools to their newly revised courses.

"Faculty spent hours recording and editing video sessions to make them presentable for online viewing," Mike Brncick, director of JJC's Orthotics and Prosthetics Technology program and Online Instructional Steering Committee member, said.

"They found a way to capture that essential quality within their own courses."

**250**  
Professors



Building an online class requires not only the proper delivery mechanism, but effective communication with students, and the ability to manage any accessibility issues that may arise. 250 professors engaged in online instruction training for the spring 2020 conversion at the start of the pandemic. When the semester resumed on March 29, over 1,400 courses had been converted from in-person to online.

# STUDENT EMERGENCY FUND



**Kaelyn Armstrong**  
JJC Business Student

## Evolving Student Needs During COVID

The Student Emergency Fund was established by the Joliet Junior College Foundation in 2004 to help students facing short-term financial setbacks complete their courses. Students in need of food, transportation, books and sometimes tuition received the assistance they needed to stay in school. Without the help of the Student Emergency Fund thousands of students may never have completed their education.

Today many JJC students are struggling financially with the downturn of the economy and loss of their jobs; making it hard to justify the cost of continuing their education.

For Kaelyn Armstrong, a business student, the Student Emergency Fund helped her stay in school during the pandemic.

"The Student Emergency Fund helped me by allowing me to pay for school supplies. It also helped me pay my major bills, which allowed me to focus more on my schoolwork than I would have been able to," said Armstrong.

The fund raised \$7,000 in its first year and in total has raised over \$250,000 to assist students in need. Since March, \$33,000 was raised to aid students during the pandemic. More than 90% of the donations come from JJC employees.

Kim Dawid, a diagnostic medical sonography student, also faced setbacks when the pandemic hit.

The Student Emergency Fund provided her assistance with food and gas when she couldn't afford it.

"It helped my family, especially during the pandemic when resources were limited," said Dawid.

"The biggest challenge I've faced, and am still facing, is being unable to see my family. I still live with my immediate family, but it's been difficult to go without seeing extended family members. I've dealt with this by keeping in contact through texts, phone calls, and video chatting!"

- Kaelyn Armstrong

Dean of Student Success Angie Kaysen-Luzbetak manages the college's Student Emergency Fund. When informed of a student's situation, she said it's important to connect with them on a human level, identify the need for any additional resources, and to let them know JJC cares.

"When a student reaches out to us we automatically become part of their team," Kaysen-Luzbetak said.

You can make a donation to the Student Emergency Fund by visiting [www.jjc.edu/givetojjc](http://www.jjc.edu/givetojjc).



# HEROES IN AND OUT OF THE CLASSROOM



Alfredo Pena



Doug Smalley



Ginger Hammen

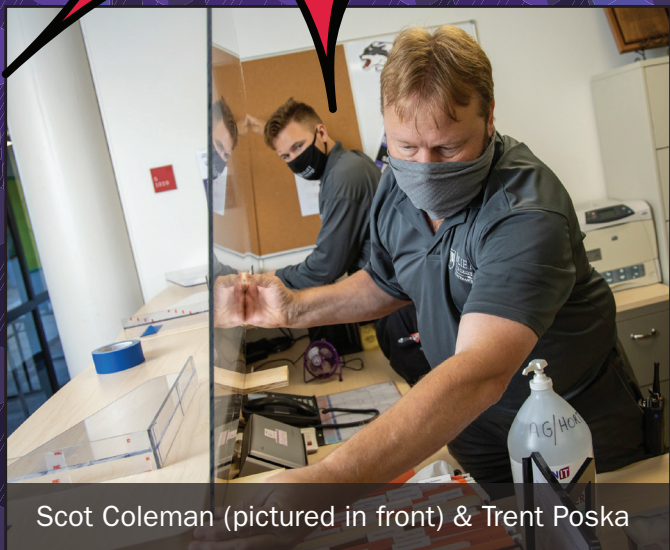


Connor Goron

## THE GUARDIANS

### Facility Services

JJC's custodial, maintenance and grounds crews have been instrumental to operational continuity since on-site services were closed in March. They maintained a safe campus for essential workers over the summer, and have continued to deploy rigorous sanitization techniques since employees and students resumed certain on-campus services and course labs in the fall.



Scot Coleman (pictured in front) & Trent Poska



Steve Gorman

## THE PROTECTORS



Jason Rose

### JJC Police Department

Not only did Campus Police continue on-site services throughout the spring and summer, they helped distribute materials to campus visitors when buildings were closed. Since August they have also been greeting visitors and guiding them through JJC's hands-free temperature scanners.





**Savanna Rusch**

Rusch, a nursing student, is set to graduate this December. She's looking forward to joining fellow nurses on the frontlines fighting the pandemic.

**THE STUDENT ACHIEVERS**

**Dontae Crowder**

Dontae Crowder has created video tips on social media for how students can make the most of online classes.



**Katherine Quezada**

Katherine Quezada was one of 15 costume design students who put their hand-sewing techniques to great use. Under the leadership of Fine Arts Professor Julia Giampaolo, students sewed and donated over 500 masks to 10 area businesses and health organizations.



**David Lozano and Latinos Unidos**

As one of the most active and popular clubs on campus, Latinos Unidos has continued to make their members a priority throughout the pandemic. Newly elected Latinos Unidos President, student David Lozano, said the club has hosted online video meetings since last spring and they have no plans to stop, especially since students won't get the chance to traditionally meet their peers in the classroom this semester. Currently gathering ideas from online workshops and from other college students across the state, it is on the top of Lozano's mind to host interactive events, such as online cooking tutorials and more, that will help bring positivity to members. "It is so important for clubs – not just LU – to keep meeting. These clubs give students a place to socialize and a sense of normalcy," he said. "While I have faced struggles coming up with ideas that can work online, I have tried to keep a positive vision for this semester. Overall, I think the pandemic has taught us to be more organized and responsible."



**Royce Chandler and Frimpong Boateng**

Royce Chandler and Frimpong Boateng are both members of JJC's Phi Theta Kappa (PTK) honor society. During the pandemic they worked alongside other PTK members to help their fellow students adjust to online learning. One way they did this was by creating a directory of videos that coincided with course objectives for every math class at JJC. This gave students the extra help they needed to learn the material. Chandler and Boateng were also tutors in the Tutoring and Learning Center where they assisted their peers by offering virtual tutoring appointments.



**THE STEWARDS**

**Lauren Czudak**

Lauren Czudak is an alumna of the vet tech program and is currently the senior veterinary technician at the Shedd Aquarium in Chicago. While the Shedd Aquarium was closed to the public during the pandemic, Czudak and the animal care team continued to care for patients that were in need of urgent care and ongoing treatments. The staff had to adjust their work schedules to accommodate a new work environment in order to provide the animals with the best care possible.



**Michael and Yolanda Sullivan**

Mathematics Professor Michael Sullivan, along with his wife Yolanda, both attended community college and know the value it provides students. Especially for those in financial need. The two have been generous contributors to the Student Emergency Fund, which has been a key form of support for students during the pandemic.





# THE INVENTOR

## Debra Daun

Daun spent countless hours in the college's MakerLab 3D printing over 3,000 face mask shields that were donated to healthcare workers.

## Cheryl Heeneman

With the help of take-home kits, students have been able to receive hands-on experience remotely. Natural Sciences Professor Cheryl Heeneman equipped her students with the tools to conduct plant growth experiments from home.



# THE CHAMPIONS

## Pattie Katralis

One of Pattie Katralis' favorite things about teaching is interacting with her students. Since the human services professor and chair of the Social and Behavioral Sciences Department has had to switch all her classes to an online format, she has tried to implement this interactivity the best that she can. She still enjoys getting to know her students online, but her priority is to make sure they are understanding the material properly, especially during a time when human services professionals are becoming more important to the community. "There are larger numbers of people who are living with fears, anxiety and job losses," Katralis said. "Human service workers help people deal with these issues in a variety of ways. They often also provide a connection to important community services such as elder care, childcare, legal assistance, transportation and food pantries. Even when this pandemic eventually ends, its effects will not immediately disappear. The need for more human service workers will remain high."



## Lori Carpenter and Tammy Foster

Lori Carpenter was asked to take the lead as temporary payroll manager in March 2020. Little did she know that shortly after settling into this new role, a worldwide pandemic would turn everything upside down. Through technical glitches, power outages, individualized payroll requests due to odd hours and the increased difficulties that came with working from home away from important documents and tools like check printers, Carpenter and Foster have worked diligently to make sure every JJC employee is paid appropriately. "I have learned so many things in my new roles – and I'm still learning!" Carpenter said. "I hope that Tammy and I have helped employees maintain some normalcy by receiving their paychecks without disruption."



# THE SPECIAL AGENTS

## Information Technology

With precision and without panic, JJC's information technology staff shifted JJC to a completely remote campus overnight. Often working long hours, many staff went above and beyond to ensure college operations were fully available for students, faculty and other staff. Fueled by a desire to help, staff had to be innovative and keep up with the pace of technology to serve the college effectively. From addressing individual technical issues, keeping up with security measures and more, JJC's dedicated IT staff never wavered under the pressure the pandemic created. "Behind the technology that we utilize to service our students and administrative operations are highly skilled people charged with bringing it all to life," said Jim Serr, JJC Chief Information Officer. "Technology is great, but without skilled people behind it, it's useless. I have no doubt that our IT staff will take the college to amazing new places through some really exciting technology in the coming years."



# THE MASTERMINDS



# THE ADVOCATE

## Erica Trejo

### Silver Cross Hospital Records Processing, JJC alumna

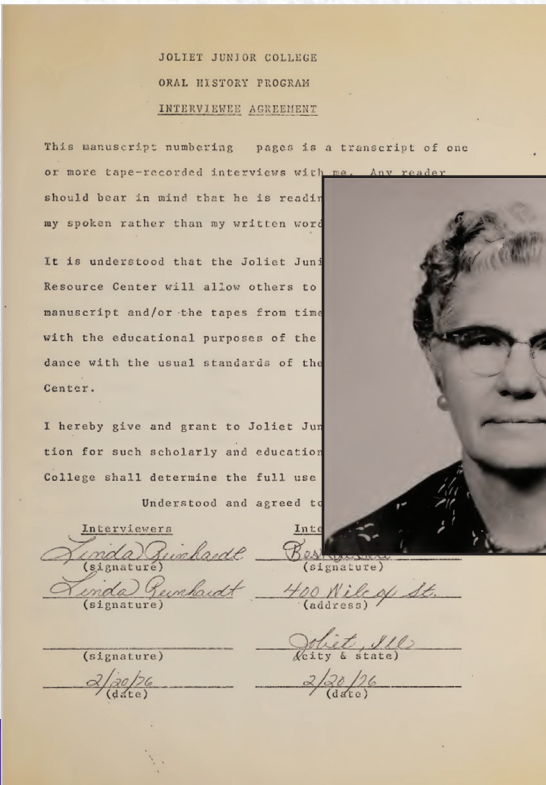
JJC alumna Erica Trejo is part of a field that hasn't received much recognition during the COVID-19 pandemic: Health Information Management Technology (HIMT). As Silver Cross Hospital's Manager of Records Processing, Trejo said her work has become more important than ever this year. From keeping her team motivated and informed to sustaining accurate records, confidentiality and contributing to the hospital's revenue cycle for all patients, Trejo and her team have been exceptionally busy. "From daily operations to the management of my team, I believe that JJC's HIMT program gave me a solid foundation to be able to handle all the challenges that the pandemic has thrown at me," Trejo said. "Healthcare careers are always a good choice for students. The field is always changing, growing and evolving. This is a great career path for someone that likes a challenge and enjoys continued learning."



# “I’m Kind of an Optimist”:

UNDERSTANDING THE TIME OF COVID-19 THROUGH ORAL HISTORY

By Amy Chellino



Bess Bassett

Bess Bassett, born in 1886, shared her reflections in an interview transcript from JJC’s Oral History Program. You might be surprised that these fitting words for our current time were spoken during a student-led interview on February 20, 1976.

“It’s the challenges by trial and error that we grow. And we have to bless those things as well as we bless the beauties that we have, because that brings out character.”



Professor Robert Sterling

Joliet Junior College’s Oral History Program began in 1972 and was coordinated by Professor Robert Sterling as an assignment for his History 210 classes. The primary goal of the program as stated in the Manual for Practices and Procedures was, “To record and preserve the historically significant reminiscences of Joliet area residents for the present and future understanding of this Region.”

The collection of 88 interview transcripts of local area residents born in the late 1800s and early 1900s has recently been digitized by the JJC Library and are available to read online at <https://library.jjc.edu/collections/archives>.

The transcripts provide firsthand experiences on the first half of the 20th century including World War I and II, the flu pandemic of 1918, The Great Depression and daily life before modern conveniences.

This memory explores the sacrifice and creative thinking during wartime struggles on the home front. Everyone pitched in to do their part. From these eyewitness reports, we gain a deeper level of understanding of the past from the purity and clarity of thoughtful reflection. JJC history professor John Lyons illustrates, “United States and World History textbooks provide the bigger picture, but they neglect to tell the personal stories: sad, happy or funny memories that people find so fascinating about the past... Only oral histories and personal testimonies can bring to life the day-to-day experiences of ordinary people.”

Alice Spangler, born in 1902 and interviewed on May 29, 1973, remembered of World War II.

“During the war food was rationed... We had real big gardens... They had women take charge and they had canning centers and you would go and take your vegetables... and they canned them in tin cans.”



Professor John Lyons



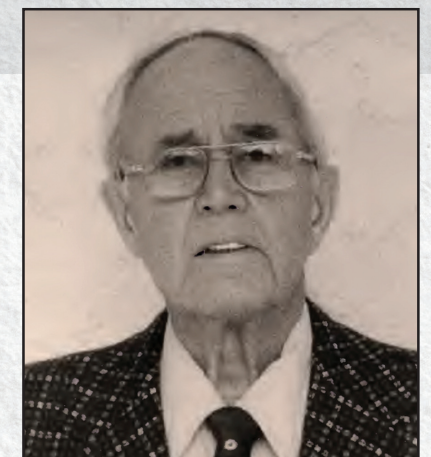
Theresa Reilly

With oral history, we can learn about and understand our connection to past generations through common challenges. Theresa Reilly, born in 1902 and interviewed on May 28, 1971, described quarantining when ill.

“A long time ago, perhaps around 1910, when a neighbor of ours had smallpox they put a shed out in front of her house and a man stayed in there and watched that nobody went in or out of the house but the doctor... If you had the measles, smallpox, chickenpox, diphtheria or scarlet fever, the Health Department always put a red sign up on your door.”

Dr. George Sehring, born in 1903 and interviewed on November 5, 1976, discussed progressive medicine.

“It was not until about 1944 when we had the use of the sulfa drugs—shortly, later, the antibiotics, both of which were a tremendous aid in the treatment of our infectious diseases.”



Dr. George Sehring

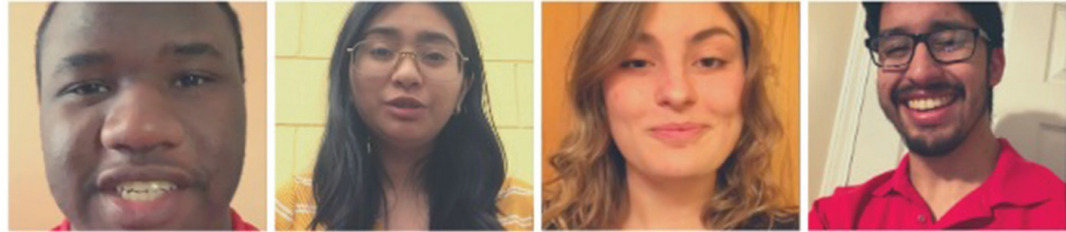


# Living in 2020

Our daily lives have become about adapting to a new normal with quarantines, face masks, school closures, and a general feeling of uncertainty. There will be a future day when a new generation will ask us, "What was life like during COVID-19?"

The preservation of this history is essential. As the JJC archives librarian, I have been collecting materials that will define JJC's COVID-19 experience for generations to come. The eventual artifacts include emails, social media posts, documents and photographs that will all be remembrances of the campus closure, a shift to total online learning and careful reopening with the health of our students and staff at the center. Sparked by the Oral History Program of the 1970s, I collaborated with Professor Lyons on collecting oral histories from his students through an essay assignment explaining how their lives were affected by COVID-19.

## JJC STUDENTS SPEAK OUT ABOUT ONLINE LEARNING DURING PANDEMIC



"Personally, the hardest part was having to adjust to constantly being at home with my parents where we were all working, studying, and using technology to socialize...our entire world was now in our house."

- Allison Michaluk

"While I feel I can relate to things my children have experienced and share with them this was something I struggled with because I never experienced anything like this."

- Lindsey Chojnicki

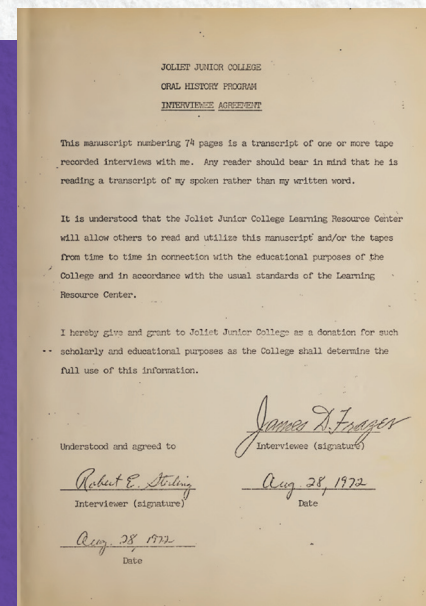
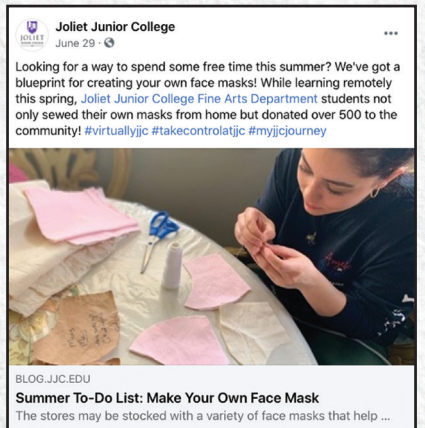
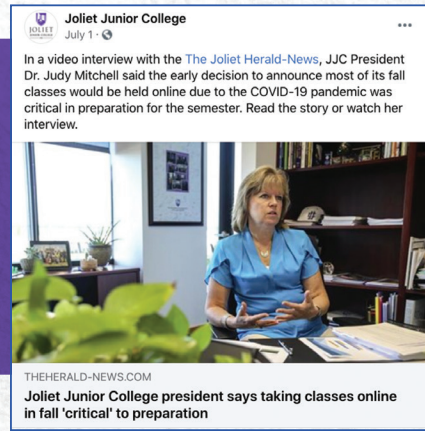
The essays convey the common challenges and fears many of us are facing during this pandemic and have an immediacy and raw emotion as we are still vulnerable and the near future with COVID-19 is unknown.

"The COVID project is rather different because the students are describing their experiences as they live through a major historical event...But the value of the project, and many of the outcomes, are the same...We see how people understand and adapt to the pandemic."

- Professor John Lyons



TRIO director DeAndre Butler recognizes students at home.



We can learn remarkably from oral history—the courage past generations demonstrated, the difficulties they endured, and ultimately the peace they found in their collective experience. Time, patience, perspective, and learning through our past and present trials will cultivate a greater understanding of our journeys and the common thread of our shared humanity.

As a reminder to each of us that no matter the obstacle we will find the strength to persevere, I close with these words of wisdom from James D. Frazer who was interviewed on August 28, 1972 and born in 1883:

"To tell you the truth, I'm kind of an optimist... I think this is a pretty good old world...I think it is going to keep on being a pretty good world."



# JJC's Path Toward a More Diverse, Equitable, and Inclusive College

By Scott Harvey

As one African proverb goes, if a slave learned to read or write, it was their duty to teach someone else. For Dr. Escortina Ervin, having successfully navigated many of the challenges associated with being a minority, she believes it her duty to teach the same to others and live by the "each one teach one" philosophy.

Ervin, who in July became Joliet Junior College's first executive director of diversity, equity, inclusion and compliance, enters the position amid heightened conversations and actions to combat racial oppression in America and beyond.

"It is more important now than ever before that higher education elevates its role in assisting students from underserved backgrounds because our campuses, communities and employees are becoming more diverse than ever before," said Ervin. "While much has been done to address equality at many higher education institutions, much is still to be done. The civil unrest around the world and verifiable discrimination of underrepresented populations is evidence that oppression continues especially for people of color."

Motivated at a young age to change her life's trajectory and guided by opportunities in adulthood to assist others, Ervin is poised to lead the college in serving underrepresented populations and carry out its recently approved Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Plan.

Raised in Gary, IN, Ervin grew up in poverty, and witnessed first-hand the systemic issues facing people of color. She describes her mother as the epitome of selflessness, to the extent that she would give of her time and money even when her family couldn't afford to. It taught Ervin the importance of serving others, the value of education, and resilience.

Some 30 years later, Ervin sees herself in the black students of today, who are experiencing the same financial, academic and racial challenges she did, and wants to help them succeed. As director of black student initiatives at Aurora University, Ervin implemented principles of diversity, equity and inclusion through program management, student affairs and faculty development. Establishing meaningful partnerships gained support campus-wide, resulting in record retention for at-risk students. When the opportunity at JJC arose, Ervin drew inspiration from the college's seven Core Values, one of which advocates respect and inclusion for all, and the goals outlined in its DEI Plan.

**"It is more important now than ever before that higher education elevates its role in assisting students from underserved backgrounds because our campuses, communities and employees are becoming more diverse than ever before."**

- Dr. Escortina Ervin

"I believe a culture of diversity, equity and inclusion is most effective when embraced by executive management and supported holistically across campus," said Ervin. "President Dr. Judy Mitchell mentioned in her Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan that recruitment of diverse staff is the cornerstone of JJC's commitment to an inclusive education community. I agree with JJC's approach. Both staff and students need to see a reflection of themselves on campus."

The 2020-2023 DEI Plan, put forth by the President's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Council, formalizes JJC's efforts to foster inclusive practices across the institution.

It's a living document that will continuously guide the college and strengthen its support for students and employees.

"Nurturing a culture of inclusion, as well as assessing areas of strength and opportunity are the primary goals of this plan," said Mitchell. "Moreover, this plan underscores the critical connection between a culture of inclusion and student success."

For Ervin, implementation of the DEI Plan starts by examining JJC's current infrastructure, and is carried out by developing tracking and reporting methods, routine communication, and by creating partnerships across campus and throughout the community.

"I will work with key stakeholders to determine innovative ways to hear our student's voices and understand their unique needs. I want to create a safe place for faculty, staff and students to talk about their feelings, concerns and ideas," Ervin said.

Ervin will work in concert with the DEI Council to carry out these goals. The Council was reestablished by Dr. Mitchell in 2016 and through various education sessions and leadership trainings has helped increase minority student retention over a five-year period.

This June, as protests swept the nation following a series of killings of unarmed black civilians, the DEI Council developed messaging on behalf of the college to stand in solidarity with the Black Community.

This loss of life, coupled with the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, starkly illustrates the inequities within socioeconomic and racial demographic groups. Those challenges are not lost on Ervin, who in living by the "each one teach one" philosophy will strengthen JJC's mission toward a more diverse, equitable and inclusive college.

"I will treat these challenges as fuel needed to ensure I do my part in history for this generation."



**Dr. Escortina Ervin**  
Executive director of diversity, equity, inclusion and compliance



# 'THE SOUL OF A COMMUNITY IS IN THE PEOPLE':

## Recognizing the Impact of JJC's Black Student Union

By Amy Chellino

After the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, a Black Student Union formed at JJC to educate JJC students, faculty, and staff by celebrating Black culture and history on campus. "History has a curious way of dealing with black men—it usually deals them out," was a statement expressed in a program for JJC's Black History Week in 1971. The importance of JJC's Black Student Union cannot be understated for transforming our college into a culturally aware and focused institution. These photos from the JJC Archives recognize and honor the BSU during the years of 1969-1971 and highlight distinguished members who contributed vitality, spirit, and imperative learning opportunities at JJC. Our college today is a place of diverse backgrounds, cultural richness, and a united respect for our students and colleagues due to the foundation the BSU established.



JJC's Black Student Union formed in 1969. The goals of BSU as stated in a Blazer newspaper article from March 3, 1971 were, "To gain recognition of the members of the black community, and establish a more effective way in which races may live in harmony."



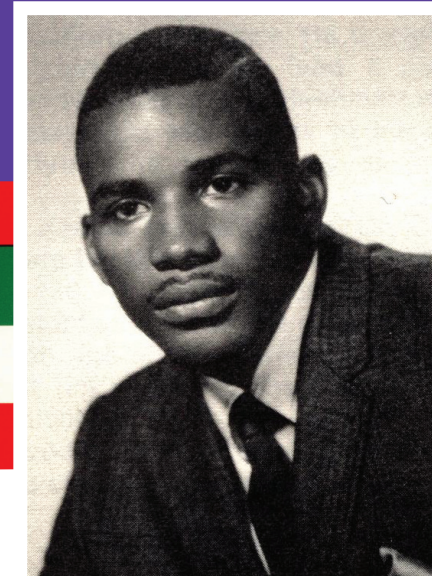
Food drives were coordinated by the BSU to support families in need during the holidays.



Dances were hosted by the BSU that encouraged unification of the campus community.



Professor Charles Kennedy was the BSU faculty sponsor and a Political Science professor. When asked about his political philosophy in a Blazer interview from November 17, 1970, Kennedy shared, "We tend to have traditions that take precedence over right or wrong... We tend to be...sympathetic rather than show empathy for man's rights and beliefs."



Jeff King became the student president of BSU mid-1969. He brought to light the importance of hiring Black faculty at JJC and also created a task force on campus to study the concerns of minority groups including the addition of courses that focused on urban and ethnic studies. In 1971, King was the first Black student to speak at a JJC graduation ceremony.



Emma Craft was a BSU member and crowned Miss Shield 1969-1970 for leadership, personality, and her service to the school and to the community.

### BLACK HERITAGE

BLACK HISTORY WEEK-FEBRUARY 7-14, 1971  
Co-Sponsored by Black Student Union  
SOCIAL SCIENCE DEPARTMENT OF JOUETT JUNIOR COLLEGE

The BSU commemorated Black History Month in 1971 with a special week of programs called "Bridging the Gap of Ignorance with Understanding." The programs included guest speakers, music from the Northern Illinois University Black Choir, and performing arts centering on Black History and culture. The program book was dedicated to, "The black student at the college with his curiosity and enthusiasm who is most deserving of our recognition, for without pride in his past, there would be no Black Heritage celebration.... The soul of the community is in the people."





## Inside the 5-Year Project that Elevated JJC's Student Success

By Scott Harvey

In 2015, Joliet Junior College embarked on a quest that reimagined how students access, navigate, and succeed through use of the college's in-person and digital services. It had just been awarded a \$2.1 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education that would enhance a number of service models. Now came the challenging yet vital process of creating a more serviceable JJC.

"Building the infrastructure as a guided academic pathway (GAP) institution has positioned JJC to meet the ever-changing and challenging higher education landscape," said Dr. Yolanda Farmer, senior vice president of student development and grant program director. "We made a commitment to execute high-touch, high-tech support services, implement academic innovations, and strengthen technology to support student success."

### Guided Academic Pathways

The Title III Strengthening Institutions Program: Progressive Pathways to Student Success was shaped by

in-depth analyses of JJC processes, from the point of acceptance through graduation. By modernizing the college's technological systems and strengthening in-person assistance, JJC sought to increase student achievement, retention and completion.

Students can now more easily identify the career path that best suits them as part of JJC's adoption of the GAP model. Supportive content is woven into the college's website and its nine academic pathways through testimonials, videos, related programs, and 24/7 chat service. By dedicating space for these navigation tools, it creates a consistent and connected experience across all programs in each pathway.

GAP also drove collaboration across campus. Joint trainings between JJC's Student Development and Academic Affairs divisions brought unique perspectives and enabled collective outreach from offices to students in general and to those struggling academically.

### Admissions & Orientation

When JJC submitted its application in 2015, it noted that only one out of every two students stay at the college into their second year. Furthermore, even fewer students were graduating. By modernizing admissions procedures and recruitment strategies, students and employees alike have a more streamlined path by which applications are submitted and processed.

"It really brought us to where we needed to go," said Dr. Stephanie Braun, dean of academic intervention and support and Title III activity director, who added the grant's training component improved communication channels with students. "As students are working through this enrollment pipeline you can send very specific messages to them, encouraging them to move to the next step."

"Building the infrastructure as a guided academic pathway (GAP) institution has positioned JJC to meet the ever-changing and challenging higher education landscape."

- Dr. Yolanda Farmer

Through JJC's new student orientation, which consists of a presentation and advising session, students are not only engaging with the college at a higher rate, but continuing their academic journey. Over a three-year period, retention rates for those completing the full student orientation jumped 15%. This year, over 5,600 students took the online orientation, more than double the participation from two years ago.

### Advising Redesign & Mental Health

Dean of Student Success Dr. Angie Kaysen-Luzbetak, who was part of the grant-writing team, said rethinking how to advise students was a significant portion of the project. At the heart of this was the need to provide intensive first-year experience advising to support student onboarding.

"The first-year experience is actually a specific methodology employed at numerous institutions that drives student success with significant onboarding experiences," said Kaysen-Luzbetak. "The Student Advising Center (SAC) was developed to follow this methodology."

Students also benefited from a significant shift in mental health support on campus, which is operated through the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities.

"This distinction provides students with access to on-campus clinicians who really are equipped to handle anything," she said.



2015-2020  
**2.1M**  
FIVE-YEAR  
FEDERAL GRANT



Retention rate among students completing new student orientation jumped

**15%**  
OVER 3 YEARS







**Academic Intervention & Communication Center**

The Communication Center, established thanks to the grant, serves as a conduit between students and resources to increase persistence, retention, enrollment, and graduation rates. Its systems identify students' academic success and can alert staff to those who may need reminders or assistance to stay on track.

Through the center, JJC modernized its process for notifying students who are at risk of being dropped from a class due to non-payment. The new system has helped keep more students enrolled at JJC, in turn maintaining their academic path and saving the college millions in potential lost revenue.

"Once we switched to the new system, 70-80 percent of students contacted would stay and pay," said Braun.

The college's academic intervention campaign helped more students persist from the fall into the spring semester.

In FY19, 85% of students contacted through the campaign continued their education at JJC, 27% higher than the year before.

**Title III's Impact During Pandemic**

Never before has access to technology and remote services been necessary that during the COVID-19 pandemic. As in-person assistance was significantly reduced, JJC was able to maintain a high level of service by utilizing the digital resources established through the grant.

"Although the transition to a remote campus was not easy as a college community, we experienced significant successes because of the Title III initiatives instituted," said Dr. Yolanda Farmer.

"Online orientation is a product of Title III," added Braun. "The timing was perfect so we could be prepared to provide student orientation within a remote environment."

At a time when communication channels were limited by remote learning, faculty also relied heavily on the Communication Center to connect with current students as the need arose. The grant also funded the purchase of servers for greater support through the MyJJC portal, the college's internal service and account platform, which thanks to its redesign three years prior has received a large boost in traffic. In August 2020, the portal had over 161,000 unique pageviews, 24% higher than during August 2019, and nearly twice as high as August 2018.

Experience with existing digital resources also gave staff the confidence to create new processes during the pandemic. In less than one month, Career Services built an online tool to help students that are undecided navigate career exploration. By late June, 115 students had attended a virtual career information session and more than three-quarters of attendees requested additional one-on-one virtual career advising.

Pre-pandemic, many student service offices had already established remote support mechanisms thanks to the grant. For the SAC, it was able to assist 45 students by virtual appointment during the first week of remote operations alone.

**Institutionalization**

The Title III grant was key in funding new paths for JJC student success, but what it also established was a creative framework for project team members to build processes that will support the college and its students for years to come.

"There are so many successes that have come from Title III," said Kaysen-Luzbetak. "Often, it is not even the grant specifically, but the collaboration of ideas that come from the new ideas and energy."

While grant dollars helped establish new processes, they were built to and have become self-sustaining methods of operation for JJC.

"We are now all looking at the student from a holistic lens," said Kaysen-Luzbetak. "Everything from adding and dropping a course, to exploring course overload processes, and transitioning students to their faculty advisor has taken center stage. These are significant moments because we are a big community and yet we are keeping students at the heart of what we do."



**FIRST-TIME RECORDS**

**66% Full-time Student Retention**  
From fall 2018 to fall 2019 (exceeding 54% goal).

**25% Full-time Transfer Rate**  
Over 3 years (exceeding 18% goal).



**18% Increase in student graduations over three years**



# RESPIRATORY THERAPY PROGRAM COMING TO JJC IN 2022

By Sam Sottosanto



Respiratory therapists are needed now more than ever. This career path, now a new focus for Joliet Junior College's Health and Public Safety Department, will be available for students to pursue beginning fall 2022.

With a projected 21 percent increase in positions from 2018 to 2028 according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and the challenges of COVID-19 as a respiratory disease, this career path is receiving more attention every day. But the pandemic isn't the only reason this career path is in-demand. With the country's growing elderly population and many current respiratory therapists nearing retirement, this national shortage will only become more apparent as time passes.

Right now, the college is working on perfecting its curriculum with insight from local professionals to make sure this new program is relevant and up-to-date. JJC will also build a 6,000 square-foot state-of-the-art addition to the college's U-Building, which will include:

- Two classrooms
- One respiratory therapy lab
- One multipurpose classroom
- Storage space
- Three staff offices
- One simulation lab with five beds
- One exam room

According to Jorie Kulczak, interim dean of health and public services, and Amy Gray, interim vice president of academic affairs, this new, competitive program will allow for two cohorts, made up of 24 students each. Students can expect to spend approximately four to five semesters on coursework and clinicals before graduating with an associate of applied science degree in respiratory therapy.

Those who graduate from JJC's respiratory therapy program can expect an average salary of more than \$60,000 per year with only an associate degree, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Kulczak and Gray added that JJC's program will also include a transfer agreement for those who want to obtain a bachelor's degree in respiratory therapy.

For more information about JJC's Health and Public Safety Department, please visit: [jjc.edu/choose-your-path/health-public-safety-human-services](http://jjc.edu/choose-your-path/health-public-safety-human-services)

## Respiratory Therapy Floor Plan

JJC's 6,000 square-foot respiratory therapy classroom addition to JJC campus' U-Building.



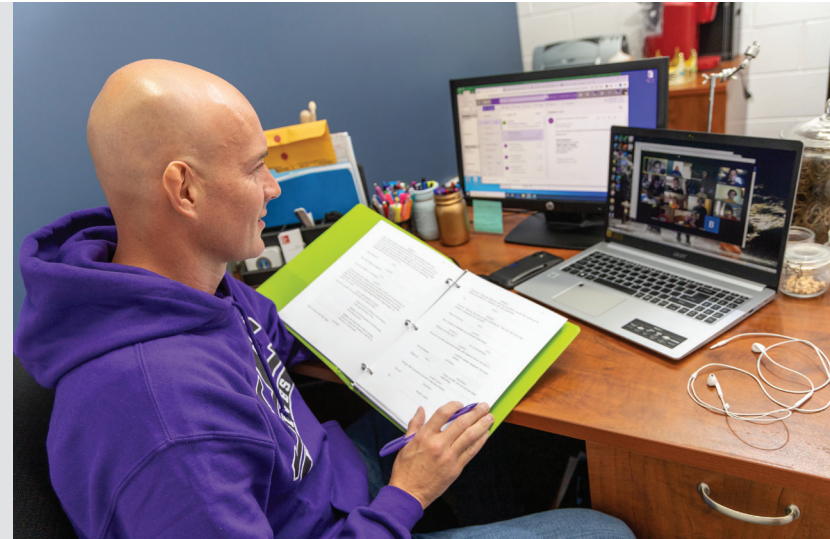


## 2020 VIRTUAL EVENTS

Events at Joliet Junior College looked a little different this semester. From student activities to graduation, students and staff had to find new ways to connect with one another.

### Zoom Play

JJC theatre students participated in their first ever virtual play, *The Ulysses Blanket*, via Zoom.



### Welcome Week Jackbox Virtual Game Night

The Office of Student Activities welcomed students back to campus by hosting a virtual game night.

### Graduation

Since the annual May commencement ceremony was canceled due to the pandemic, 2020 graduates were able to celebrate their accomplishments by participating in a virtual ceremony.



## THANK YOU 2020 FOUNDATION SPONSORS

Thank you to our business and community partners that stood by our side in 2020. Although many events were canceled or postponed, these partners stayed committed, knowing that their sponsorships would fund future scholarships for JJC students.

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**Cornell D. Lurry, Sr.** serves as the Northeast Illinois Regional Community Development Relationship Manager for Midland States Bank. Lurry has over 20 years of financial and banking experience with a strong emphasis in community and economic development. His leadership development began during his time on the Wolves basketball team where he achieved high scoring accolades. This experience has served as a catalyst for his professional career and community involvement around inclusivity, cultural awareness and change facilitation within social economic structures. JJC has provided a solid foundation for his success as he continues to build long-term relationships to evolve and refine vibrant ecosystems.

**"As one of the most prestigious community colleges, one can see how JJC embraces diversity through its curriculum and career development programs. This community pillar provided me with a foundation that refined my core educational beliefs and an ability to make change happen. Thanks to my time at JJC, I could make a difference on the court then and within my community now. I am proud to be a graduate and continue to serve in the JJC community."**

**- Cornell D. Lurry, 1990**

## WHAT IS YOUR JJC STORY?

We want to hear how JJC helped you start your career, realize your dreams or begin a new path in life.

Visit [www.jjc.edu/stayconnected](http://www.jjc.edu/stayconnected) to submit your story and reconnect with your college.