



Legisletter

an update from the MVCC Professional Association
for Oneida County Legislators and Leaders

Spring 2005

Our message to State leaders: “Community colleges need more funding”



PA members Steve Getchell, Dan Ianno, Ellis Gage Searles, and Mike Sewall discuss funding issues with Senator David Valesky March 1 in Albany.

Some dates in this year’s PA calendar look very much like last year’s.

Beginning in February and for weeks thereafter, members of the Mohawk Valley Community College Professional Association have sought out New York State lawmakers to urge their support for community college funding. Independently, and in conjunction with others in the MVCC community, the PA has scheduled meetings, provided testimony, and sent communications—all in the interest of securing better funding for our institution.

The February 15 SUNY Community College Day was followed two weeks later by a higher ed lobby day organized by New York State United Teachers (NYSUT). On both days, faculty and professional staff from the MVCC PA traveled to Albany to meet with legislators. Assembly members RoAnn Destito, William Magee, and David Townsend, as well as Senators Ray Meier and David Valesky heard our concerns about inadequate state funding and its impact on MVCC.

On March 10, Assemblyman Herman D. Farrell, Chair of the Assembly Ways and Means Committee, and Assemblywoman Destito heard budget testimony from community members about the impact of proposed state budget cuts. PA President Ellis Gage Searles was among them.

And throughout the months of budget debate, PA members and our colleagues in SUNY community colleges across the state made phone calls and sent letters, faxes, and emails to the offices of Governor Pataki and every New York State legislator.

Fortunately, as a result of our efforts and the efforts of others who share our commitment to public higher education in New York State, further cuts were averted and funding restored. Knowing that more is needed, though, we’ll be back in Albany in May with continued requests for the support that will be necessary for MVCC to continue to provide the high quality education for which it is known.



Members of the MVCC community meet with Assemblyman David R. Townsend in Albany during SUNY Community College Day.

Welcome to the latest edition of the MVCC PA’s newsletter created especially for the Oneida County leadership. In an effort to maintain the communication that has been developing over the last few years, we’ll be publishing these occasional updates about PA activities.

As always, we welcome your feedback. If there’s something you’d like to see featured in an upcoming issue, please let us know.

Ellis Gage Searles, President

excerpts from **PA President's Testimony
to Assembly Members' Utica Hearing**
By **ELLIS GAGE SEARLES**

...While New York faces great fiscal challenges, we cannot forget that the only long-term solution will be in our readiness to meet the new demands of a changing economy. Here in Central New York, we can see the changes firsthand. The industries we formerly depended on are gone. Gradually, new businesses are coming in to replace them. Will our region be ready to provide the skilled technicians, the professionals, the thinkers—in short, the workforce—these employers will require?

The answer lies in education and training. The answer is Mohawk Valley Community College.

Central New York needs what MVCC has to offer: excellent programs, top-notch faculty and professional staff, strong commitment to our region, and the willingness and flexibility to respond to community needs. We stand ready. But we can't do it alone.

Under education law, the funding for New York State's full opportunity community colleges was intended to balance the costs: the state would pay 40% of the budget, local sponsors 30%, and students 30%. A fair distribution, it recognized the community college's mission and limited the responsibility of any one group for financing it. But the formula hasn't been implemented. Instead, the burden continues to shift. In the current year, the state share has fallen to 29% on the average, and the students' share has risen to 39%. What the state does not pay, the students do.

Tuition at New York's community colleges is too high. It's the third highest in the nation and rising, by an average of \$112 this year alone. In our classrooms, we see students striving to learn, to re-train, to improve their lives and the lives of their families at the same time that they work—often full time—to support themselves and pay tuition, fees, and books. Every hundred dollar bill counts. All too often, it makes the difference between getting an education and giving up.

...Students can't be asked to bear more of the burden. And local sponsors can't either.

Throughout New York State, counties are dealing with reduced revenue and impossible choices. Nowhere is this truer than here in the Mohawk Valley. As MVCC's local sponsor, Oneida County has made its community college a priority. Even in hard times—*especially* in hard times—the



Assembly Ways and Means Chairman Herman D. Farrell and Assemblywoman RoAnn Destito follow testimony at the Utica hearing.

college's value to the community is recognized. But our local economy cannot absorb another state shortfall. Taxpayers are already stretched to the maximum.

So then, what's to be done?

With your help, New York State can capitalize on one of its major assets: the SUNY community college system. Right now, \$7 is returned to the state for every \$1 invested. Greater investment, coupled with growing enrollment statewide, can only add to that effect.

...Every semester, students come to Mohawk Valley Community College with hope and high expectations. At the same time, our community looks to us for cultural enrichment, academic excellence, and vision. The members of the MVCC Professional Association have much to offer. But we'll need your help...

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MVCC Professional Association Joins Effort to “Save the Lab”

By **BILL PERROTTI**

A new round of hearings by the Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRACC) is slated for later this year and the Air Force Research Laboratory (the Rome Lab), the Northeast Air Defense Sector, and the Defense Finance Accounting Service on the former Griffiss Air Base in Rome will be on the docket. No one who has lived in the Mohawk Valley for even a short time has to be told of the devastating impact on the central New York economy and the quality of life in Utica, Rome, and the surrounding communities if those facilities close and their more than 2,000 associated jobs leave the area.

Knowing that this is a vitally important issue for us all, the MVCC Professional Association has taken an active role in supporting regional efforts to save these facilities and these jobs.

First, when the BRACC effort was announced, the PA Executive Board voted to contribute \$1,000 to the cause. In addition, PA President Ellis Gage Searles alerted colleagues in Oneida County school districts to the effort and encouraged their participation and donations.

Then, during February, under the leadership of the Central New York Labor Council and its President Pat Costello, the Professional Association



Blues guitarist Joe Bonamassa and band in concert

tion was able to join other brothers and sisters in the labor movement in planning a region-wide fundraiser that gained expressions of support from the business community and local leaders also. County Executive Joe Griffo gave his enthusiastic encouragement and issued an official proclamation commemorating the special event. New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), the Professional Association’s statewide affiliate, became involved as well.

To help “Save the Lab,” local blues legend Joe Bonamassa and his band returned to the area to perform on February 28 at the Capitol Theater

in Rome, donating their considerable musical skills to the cause. An acoustic set was followed by an electric performance by the whole band, giving the audience a concert to remember.

As a further demonstration of the PA’s commitment, in the weeks leading up to the concert a “buy one/get one free” offer was advertised on campus. The first fifteen members who bought a ticket could get a free one from our union to take a friend. This represented another \$300 contribution to this important cause.

And it’s not over yet. With others in the Mohawk Valley, the membership of the MVCC Professional Association will continue to work to keep the jobs and facilities at Griffiss here. As the BRACC hearings draw closer, more will be done. And the PA will be a part of it.



Bill Perrotti is PA Past President and current CNY Labor Council Vice-President

The Value of a Community College Education

By STAN BRIDGMAN, 2004-05 PA Scholarship Recipient

With each passing year, the politicians in this state attempt to divert more funding away from our community colleges in an attempt to balance the burgeoning budget deficits they have wrought. This year, the following cuts are on the table: “13.8 million to be cut from the SUNY community colleges budget, \$2 million from part-time financial aid, and millions more from operating and full-time faculty funding”

(www.nypirg.org). Once again, it seems, our elected leaders look upon our community colleges and see only the financial “burden” they are upon the tax rolls. To the student attending MVCC, the community college is so much more than a line-item on an Albany spending bill.

First of all, many of the students who choose to attend MVCC are returning adult learners who do not have four years to invest prior to showing a return—the community college provides a high-quality alternative. I can speak to this personally because being 35 years old, raising a daughter and tending to aging parents, I fall into this category. As I approach the end of my learning here at MVCC, I can absolutely say that my time in college has kept me from being the father (and the son) that I should be. Between studying, lecture and clinical, there has been little time for anything else. Beyond question my daughter’s life will be the better for my education, but were I forced to pursue the four-year route instead, I would have put it off until my daughter left home—I simply



Stan Bridgman thanks the professors who have supported him after receiving the PA scholarship at a luncheon at MVCC in January.

could not have put my daughter “on hold” that long.

Second, the community college offers educational refuge to those who cannot afford to attend a private or public four-year institution (2004 average tuition \$11, 354 [public] and \$27, 516 [private]

www.money.cnn.com). At \$2, 850, MVCC provides an affordable education that is just as solid as that provided at one of the higher-priced institutions. It is this concept of affordable education that makes our country the technological and free-thinking leader of the world that it is.

To the student attending MVCC, the community college is so much more than a line-item on an Albany spending bill.

Last, the community college system encourages its graduates to remain in our area. As the Central New York economy has suffered blow after blow, many of our citizens have decided to move to areas that are more prosperous. We began to see the result of this migration a few years ago—dilapidated and boarded buildings, elementary schools closing from lack of enrollment, and social service program cutbacks just as the rolls of those requiring assistance has risen. In other words, our community is bleeding—more accurately, hemorrhaging. Meanwhile, it has been bemoaned to the nth degree that the only way to stem this flow and reverse our situation is to retain the present core of professionals that we have to motivate the up-and-coming to remain and right the ship. MVCC fans this flame by providing hometown mentor-mentee relationships, establishing internships at local companies (read: future employers), and installing a sense of community pride in its students.

At the end of the day, the value of a community college education (and MVCC in particular) cannot be measured solely in dollars and cents. Instead, it must be held against the profound and lifelong positive effect this education has on those who receive it.

Note: This essay was written as part of Mr. Bridgman’s application for the Professional Association Scholarship. It is reprinted with his permission.
