

panorama

UNITED FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION



Thank you, Norma!

PA honors past president of 13 years,
welcomes Erica Brindisi to the role

Many thanks to everyone who joined us for the Fall Luncheon on Aug. 27!

In addition to great food, it was the joy of being together that made the day truly special. Nearly 100 members attended the event, where we celebrated colleagues' work milestones, including continuing and career appointments, years of service, and recent promotions.

We also had the pleasure of hearing from new MVCCPA President Erica Brindisi, who shared inspiring stories about her union journey. One of the most meaningful moments was honoring Past President Norma Chrisman for her remarkable 13 years of leadership in keeping



our union strong. Although she has stepped down from the presidency, Norma remains an active member of the PA Executive Board and serves on the Grievance Committee.

— Yue Riesbeck

CONTENTS

| | |
|------------------------------|------|
| Prez Desk | 2 |
| Holiday AJAR info | 3 |
| Gompers Award Recipient | 4 |
| PA Finances Update | 5 |
| Textbook Scholarship Fund | 5 |
| Social Justice Committee | 6 |
| Benefits Corner | 7 |
| Community Outreach Committee | 8-10 |
| New Member Committee | 10 |

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EDITORIAL POLICY

Panorama is the voice of our local. In addition to the PA website (www.mvccpa.org), email, and bulletin boards, Panorama is a principal vehicle for bringing you, on a regular basis, information on the views and activities of our members.

We welcome articles by, for, and about PA members of union-related issues and concerns as reflected in NYSUT and AFT activities as well as in the purpose and functions of the PA's standing committees: Community Outreach, Education & Training, Grievance, Internal Communications, Political Action, and Research & Records.

All submissions are subject to the review and acceptance of the Editor and/or Internal Communications Committee. We do not accept articles that make personal attacks and we reserve the right to edit articles for length. We look forward to hearing from you.

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Erica Brindisi

INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS CHAIR

Robin Saxe

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PREZ DESK: My Union Story and a New Chapter for the PA



Erica Brindisi

When I joined MVCC back in 2005 as an adjunct instructor for General Biology and the Coordinator for CSTEP, I never imagined that one day I would be writing this column as President of the MVCC Professional Association. Yet here we are, and I could not be more proud or more grateful for the opportunity!

Unionism runs deep in my family. My grandmother was a proud shop steward at a local manufacturer right here in Utica, standing up for her coworkers and fighting for fairness long before I even knew what collective bargaining meant. My grandfather was a Teamster truck driver, and my mother worked for over 30 years for the Teamsters pension fund. In our house, solidarity was not just a slogan, it was a way of life.

When I first joined the College, there was never any hesitation about becoming part of the PA. It felt like home from the start, a place where people looked out for one another, where we lifted each other up, and where our shared voice made a difference. Even after stepping away briefly when my son was born, returning as a full-time instructor in 2013 reaffirmed that feeling of belonging.

Over the years, I have served on committees, volunteered where I could, and most recently served as First Vice President before being voted in as President this past May. Each experience has taught me something about the power of collaboration and the strength that comes from standing together.

I also want to take a moment to express my gratitude to our outgoing president, Norma Chrisman, who led the PA for over thirteen years with dedication, wisdom, and compassion. I am deeply grateful for her leadership and to have her as a mentor as I begin this new chapter.

As your new PA President, I want to continue building on that foundation. I want our union to be a place where every member

New Chapter (continued)

feels seen, heard, and supported, whether you have been here 30 years or just started this semester. The work we do together, from negotiating contracts to supporting our colleagues through challenges to engaging in our community, truly matters. It shapes not only our working conditions but also the culture of care and respect that defines us here at MVCC.

Looking Ahead: Priorities for the Year

Besides the day-to-day PA operations, this year I have three major goals that I hope will strengthen our union's structure and communication for years to come.

1. Create a PA Manual

One of my first initiatives will be developing a PA Manual, a document that outlines the day-to-day operations and responsibilities of the Executive Board, including committee chairs and union officers. As leadership changes over time, some of the institutional knowledge we rely on can get lost. This manual will serve as a practical guide to ensure continuity and ease transitions. It will complement, not replace, our Constitution and By-Laws and will help us build a sustainable legacy plan for future leaders.

2. Reestablish an Area Representative Model

Before the pandemic, the PA had a system in place for member representation across campus. This year, we plan to reestablish and strengthen that model to better connect our membership. The Executive Board will be working to map out where our members are located as we design

this structure. Having representatives in different areas of the College will make it easier to share information, gather feedback, and engage members, especially during negotiations and key decision-making moments. This approach will improve communication within our union and ensure that every voice is heard. In the coming months, I will be reaching out to individuals to serve in this capacity. If you are interested in volunteering as an area representative, please reach out — I would love to hear from you.

3. Establish a Health and Safety Committee

Many other community colleges across the state have established Health and Safety Committees within their unions, and this year we plan to begin the work to create one for our union on our campus. In light of a few recent issues, it is important that we have a dedicated group focused on identifying and assessing potential safety concerns and bringing those concerns to the union for review and action. The Executive Board will be working to establish by-laws for this committee, with the goal of holding elections in the spring semester. We will also look to NYSUT and other community colleges for guidance and examples as we develop this framework.

As always, I invite your ideas, questions, and participation. Whether you have been active in union work for years or are just starting to get involved, there is a place for you in this important work. Together, we will continue to make the PA a strong and supportive community.

In solidarity,
Erica

Holiday AJAR information for full-time employees

Please be advised that most College offices will be closed for the AJAR period beginning Wednesday, Dec. 24, 2025, and will re-open on Monday, Jan. 5, 2026.

For PA members, Columbus Day, Election Day, Veterans Day, and Lincoln's and Washington's birthdays have been designated as in-lieu-of days for the 2025-26 academic year and will be observed during the AJAR period.



Kotary receives Gompers Award

Please join us in congratulating Kathy Kotary on receiving the Samuel L. Gompers Distinguished Service Award.

Each year, the Central New York Labor Council hosts the Samuel L. Gompers Dinner, bringing together locals from across the region to recognize members who embody the values of the labor movement. The award honors Samuel L. Gompers, founder of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), whose lifelong mission was to improve the lives of working people through collective action, advocacy, and solidarity.

This year, the PA proudly selected Kathy Kotary as our 2025 Distinguished Service Award recipient — a recognition truly earned through decades of dedication.

Kathy has been a driving force behind the PA's Community Outreach Committee, especially on Rome campus, leading initiatives that connect our members with the community in meaningful ways. Her leadership has supported organizations such as the Abraham House and the Rome Rescue Mission, and she has helped coordinate our participation in Relay for Life, the

Heart Run, Breast Cancer Shadow Walks, and other local events that strengthen our community partnerships.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Kathy organized donations of coffee and donuts to essential workers, ensuring the union remained a caring and supportive presence even during the most challenging moments. Each year, she also plays a key role in Trick-or-Treat Street on the Rome Campus, bringing smiles to local families through face painting, candy distribution, and festive volunteerism.

In addition to her extensive outreach work, Kathy serves on the MVCCPA Benefits Trust Fund, overseeing COBRA benefits for retirees with the same dependability and compassion she brings to every responsibility.

Her colleagues often say that when the union needs something, Kathy is always the first to step up. Her dedication has truly embodied the spirit of Samuel Gompers' legacy: solidarity, service, and unwavering commitment to working people. The MVCCPA and the community we serve are stronger because of her tireless efforts.

PA Finances Update

The following is a brief overview of the current member dues structure and a report as to the actual financial results for the prior academic year.

Dues Structure for 2025-26

Dues are paid by our members, which contribute towards our annual budget, consisting of expenditures for community outreach, member engagement, training, and negotiations and grievances with the college. A portion of dues collected are paid to our affiliates, New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) and American Federation of Teachers (AFT). Our affiliations date back to 1970 and we receive numerous benefits resulting from these affiliations, such as training for Executive Board members, legal advice related to grievances and negotiations, and guidance for our local PA leaders. During arbitration and legal matters, NYSUT's labor relations specialists and legal staff are available to assist the PA. In addition, we have the support of a multitude of professionals within the NYSUT office that welcome questions as they arise.

Member dues are set at the national, state, and local levels. National dues are set by AFT, state dues are set by NYSUT delegates from across New York, and local dues are proposed by the PA Executive Board and approved by you, our members. The approved dues structure is then submitted to payroll. The dues structure for the 2025-26 academic year was approved at our membership meeting in May. Both NYSUT and AFT increased their dues this year, which

accounted for the change in your member dues (\$0.50 more per paycheck). After decreasing annual local dues by over \$50 in 2022, we will continue to monitor our fund balance in the coming years to determine if any additional changes should be made to the dues structure.

Financial Results for 2024-25

In 2024, the membership approved a PA budget of \$206,310.40 (mostly passthrough national and state dues to AFT and NYSUT). During the 2024-25 academic year, we underspent the budget by \$11,603.71, but due to the 2022 decrease in local member dues, that still resulted in a net decrease to our fund balance of \$7,362.62. The variance in expenditures was primarily caused by fewer grievances against the college resulting in less spent on arbitration.

Financial records for the 2024-25 fiscal year were examined by the PA Audit Committee in August. The Audit Committee found proper financial documentation and reporting had occurred throughout the year and had no recommendations.

If you have any questions related to the budget or the dues structure, please feel free to contact me or plan to attend our next membership meeting. Thank you for your continued support and I look forward to continuing in my role as Treasurer this year. I wish you all the best this semester.

In Solidarity,
Ross Wittenberg, Treasurer

Remind students of PA Textbook Scholarship Fund

The PA established the Textbook Scholarship Fund in 2019 to help students purchase books and supplies for a course. If you know of students in need, please email Grace Costello at gcostello@mvcc.edu. Here's how it works:

The Textbook Scholarship Committee decides a student's eligibility based on guidelines established by the PA Executive Board:

- It will not fund a student's entire Academic

Advantage Pack for any given semester.

- Funds will be used to purchase supplies, access codes, or a textbook for one course.
- The student can only use the Textbook Scholarship Fund once while at MVCC.
- The student must have exhausted any other source of funds, with the Textbook Scholarship Fund being their last option.

Social Justice Committee



Tree planting in the City of Utica

On Oct. 18, 2025, the Social Justice Committee and a group of MVCC volunteers participated in a tree-planting event hosted by Olmsted City in F.T. Proctor Park. This was a great blend of environmental action and social justice.

Planting trees may seem like a small gesture, but its ripple effects are enormous, especially in urban spaces. Trees clean the air, help with stormwater management, reduce noise pollution, and provide food and shelter for local wildlife.

Access to natural areas also improves physical and mental health. Spending time in green spaces is associated with reduced blood pressure, lower stress levels, and decreased rates of heart disease. Not everyone has equal access to these

benefits. Studies show that across the country, low-income neighborhoods and communities of color are less likely to have tree cover and parks nearby. This lack of green space means these communities are more vulnerable to heat waves, air pollution, and related health risks. It also means fewer opportunities for recreation gathering in shaded environments.

That's why tree-planting initiatives matter so much. We were excited to do our part to help beautify our area and ensure our community has access to green spaces provide for generations to come.

In Solidarity,
Mike Kuczynski
Social Justice Committee

Warm clothing drive for C3

The Social Justice Committee is collecting donations of warm clothing for C3. If you have any extra usable warm clothes — including sweaters, mittens/gloves, hats, and scarves —

that you are willing to part with, please consider donating them to help C3 support our students in need. A collection box will be in the Library through the end of the semester where you can drop off any clothing donations.

Updates from the 2025 NYSUT Benefits Conference

The recent NYSUT Benefits Conference in Saratoga offered valuable insights into the wide range of supports available to union members across New York State.

I attended the conference with our PA President, Erica Brindisi, and wanted to share a few takeaways.



Premium Calm subscription

Did you know that as a NYSUT member, you have access to a free premium subscription for Calm, an app designed to help reduce stress, sleep better, and build habits of calm and focus? It's a free benefit for all NYSUT in-service AND retiree members. And it gets better — members can add up to five dependents (age 16 or older) to receive their own premium Calm subscription.

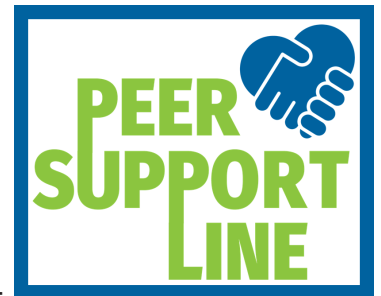
Find more information on how to access this benefit here: <https://memberbenefits.nysut.org/free-member-benefits/calm-app>



*BENEFITS
CORNER*

Peer Support Line

NYSUT Member Benefits offers a free service to provide resources, answers, and support for many of life's challenges. The Peer Support Line is a confidential helpline that is available to all NYSUT members and their loved ones at no cost.



More information can be found here:
<https://memberbenefits.nysut.org/free-member-benefits/peer-support-line>

Advocacy Matters!

NYSUT continues to push for equity in pay, access to benefits, and better working conditions for all higher ed professionals. Be on the lookout for information sessions at upcoming institutes!

Your benefits are here to support your well-being. If you have questions or need help making the most of what's available, please email me at cvannamee@mvcc.edu.

In solidarity,
Christine VanNamee
Benefits Fund Chair

Community Outreach Committee

The MVCCPA Community Outreach Committee has had a busy and meaningful semester!

Here are a few highlights:

Trick-or-Treat Street in Rome

On Oct. 30, 2025, the MVCC Rome Campus hosted its annual Trick or Treat night, and it was a spooktacular success!



Breast Cancer Shadow Walk

On Oct. 24, 2025, PA members joined Team MVCC for the Making Strides Against Breast Cancer Shadow Walk on the Utica and Rome campuses.

Participants wore pink, raised awareness, and collected over \$1,885 for the American Cancer Society.

Livin' on a Legacy: The Sandy Cummings Memorial Benefit

On Oct. 28, the MVCC community honored the life of longtime member Sandy Cummings.

The event raised more than \$4,200 for the Sandy Cummings Student Engagement Memorial Scholarship, bringing the total to over \$22,000 — now fully endowed to support students for generations.

The PA is proud to have supported this meaningful celebration.



FEZtival of Trees

The PA once again sponsored a tree for the Ziyara Shriners' FEZtival of Trees with a family game night theme.

Thank you to everyone who donated games and helped make this year's tree a success!



Community Outreach Committee

Kernan Elementary School Partnership

Since 2018, the PA has supported Kernan Elementary with school supply and food donations. This fall, Norma and Robin met with the sixth-grade leadership group to discuss fundraising for their class trip to Enchanted Forest Water Safari. In the most heartwarming business meeting ever, the students said they plan to use funds first to support the school's end-of-year fun day before their trip, putting their classmates ahead of themselves.

The PA is now even more committed to making their trip a reality. Students will be selling World's Finest Chocolate (which we will make available for sale on campus), and we'll be exploring additional ways to support their efforts.

Thank you for your continued generosity; Kernan students are always grateful for all we do!



New Member Committee

Hello, fellow PA members! For those who don't know me, my name is Brad Dixon and I work as the Coordinator of Assessment & Academic Programming in the division of Learning & Academic Affairs. As of the Fall 2025 semester, I am also honored to serve as the chair of the PA's New Member Committee. It has been exciting to meet all our new members and introduce them to all that the PA has to offer and some of the ways that they can get involved at the College.

I'd like to give a special shout-out to all our new members who've joined the PA over the last few months! (Listed at right)

In solidarity,
Brad Dixon, New Member Committee Chair

WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS!

- | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Medina Besirevic | Alexander LapeChristen |
| Patrick Beilein | Kaitlyn Mars |
| Tracy Branch | Madeleigh Place |
| Krista Colucci | Shalon Palmer |
| Gabrielle Coffey | Heather Roberts |
| Alexander Ciambriello | Christopher Surprenant |
| Donald Cinque | Michael Zombek |
| Kate Donnelly | |