A year ago, Jacob Milton ’16, The Elms ’19 left, on what was supposed to be a three-year mission to Thailand with the Peace Corps as a Youth in Development volunteer to teach life skills. It was early January 2020 and people in the U.S. had hardly heard of the virus that would soon change the world and take so many lives. In late March after only 3 months, the Peace Corps recalled Jacob home along with 6,000 of his fellow volunteers around the globe—with only a couple of days’ notice. As part of an effort to see how GCC alums are coping with our utterly changed circumstances in the U.S., the GCC Foundation spoke to Jacob recently.

There has been so much upheaval in our country since you returned home at the end of March— the pandemic, intensified Black Lives Matter (BLM) activism and the presidential election. How are you doing in the context of it all?

As tragic as the disease is, COVID has given me more time to make sure that I’m doing the things that create happiness for myself. The pandemic may have interrupted my life, but it has not ended my life.

As far as the BLM movement— it is far past time that the country, and frankly the world, had the hard conversations.

Cont. on page 4

Responding to the Call for Racial Justice: GCC Equity Initiatives

Before the tragic killing of George Floyd in May 2020, many at GCC were well aware of the ways racism creates serious threats to the health of a college community. However, in the pre-George Floyd world, the conversation often centered on celebrating diversity or strategizing to support for students of color, rather than on the more uncomfortable task— for White people— of examining a system that largely works well for them, but often does not for non-White members of the College community.

The brutal murder of George Floyd opened many White peoples’ eyes for the first time to the disturbing reality many Black and Brown people in our country must endure daily, fearing for

Cont. on page 6
From the President

Oh, What a Year!

As I sit down to write this, I think back to our last community event, pre-COVID. In February, the local band, Swing Caravan, led by GCC Music Department Chair Matthew Shippee, serenaded a gathering of GCC alumni, supporters and friends with delightful music at Hawks & Reed. I am allowing this memory to transport me to the future where I can imagine the band singing “Oh, What a Year”—a tune sung to the melody of “Oh, what a Night.”

COVID-19 settled in by mid-March and 2020 was nothing we’d dreamed it’d be. And, as you know, it is lasting much too long and could not end soon enough. Can you help me fill in the rest of the lyrics?

Speaking of celebration, this year GCC will kick off the beginning of its 2022 60th anniversary celebration! In September 2021, we will start our academic year of celebration with remote and in person events. Then, in 2022, we will celebrate in proper fashion, in person, with all the celebratory bells and whistles over the course of that entire year. We have a great legacy that spans six decades, giants on whose shoulders we stand, and alumni who are stewarding our local businesses and organizations. We have much to celebrate now and will have even more to be grateful for when this pandemic ends.

We welcome your ideas on how to mark the 60th Anniversary of Greenfield Community College, both remotely and in person, with reverence and joy. We want to capture your best memories, pictures, and artifacts of GCC from over the years. We want to engage all of our alumni, friends, retirees, and supporters. We welcome families to come up with creative ways to involve everyone. Stay tuned for the launch of our online portal for submissions of stories, photos, and other items to be featured in our virtual and tangible book.

Until then, let’s make the best of the year ahead. Let us remember and honor the ones we have lost last year and in years past. May their memories, laughter, and smiles give us solace when we need it most. Let us keep in our thoughts those most affected by this pandemic and the most vulnerable in our global community. Lastly, let us wish for the return of good health and joy into our homes and to the world.

Have a happy and healthy year ahead!

Yves Salomon-Fernández, Ph.D.
President, Greenfield Community College

Recent Events

GCC Golf Tournament
GCC President Yves Salomon-Fernández (middle) joined President John Howland (far left) and other members of generous sponsor Greenfield Savings Bank’s team.

Mike’s Maze
For every ticket sold on October 24 at the famous Sunderland corn maze, $2 went to support an affordable education for GCC students to raise a total of $1,520.

Alumni Drive-In
Lily Walker, Emily Singley ‘15, and Aaron Cohen are excited to watch “Groundhog Day” at the Alumni Association event: “Night at the Drive-in” on August 20.
Ambassadors in the Community: GCC Alumni Council

Expanded in October of 2019, the GCC Alumni Council strives to increase opportunities for meaningful engagement to all past, present, and future GCC students. The members of the Council serve as ambassadors of the college to provide outreach and strengthen alumni presence and effectiveness in the community. Planning social, cultural and recreational events that bring together GCC alumni, faculty and staff are major goals, along with increasing participation of alumni in social media. The Council promotes and reviews nominations for the Distinguished Alumni Award as well as applications for the Alumni Scholarship. The Council also promotes lifelong learning programs with content based on alumni needs.

For more information contact: Alumni@gcc.mass.edu or 413-775-1600.

GCC Alums More Supportive Than Ever During a Challenging Year

The outstanding increase in generosity by alumni to support students during the GCC Foundation 2020 Annual Campaign gives us ample reason to believe in a stronger future for our community. Alumni giving more than doubled in 2020 to an impressive total of over $92,000 from 301 alum donors. Forty-one alums made their first gift ever, a striking 44% increase from 2019 in first time giving by alums. GCC Foundation Executive Director Regina Curtis ’86 reflects:

“We are deeply grateful for the notable increase in alumni giving this past year. It speaks to the recognition by our alums of the value of a GCC education that has been provided to each of them and by extension to our community these past six decades and their desire to ensure the opportunities they had are extended to those who follow. As a proud GCC alum myself, I know the trajectory of my career could never have followed the path that brought me here without my start at GCC.”

Because of GCC Alum and community generosity, together we raised $1.2 million from 907 donors last year to support our students and ensure that GCC remains an anchor of hope in our community.

GCC Foundation Board Elects New Leadership and Members

At the GCC Foundation Annual Meeting in November, Board President Leigh Rae (pictured below right) was thanked for her leadership for the past two years and Vice-President Mitch Anthony (pictured below left) was elected to begin his tenure as President. Much gratitude was expressed for departing board members Charles Conant, Kathy Cole and Patricia Coffin. The Board was also pleased to welcome new members Tim Grader and Shardool Parmar.

The College community is deeply grateful for all the board members’ service in support of raising funds to support the mission of Greenfield Community College and student success.

Top Left - Christina Postera ’89
Top Right - Bill Fitzpatrick ’84
Bottom Left - Caryl Connor ’84
Bottom Right - Jon Bolaski ’74

Above; Left to Right: Evelyn Stankowski ’12, Carol Aleman ’71, Melissa Osborne ’18, Greg Corcoran ’17, Lindsay Stromgren ’95, Carmen Bassett ’94, Lori Grover ’83, Michelle Dwyer ’03
with themselves, their loved ones and their communities about the very real and dangerous racial discriminations that stunt, ruin and end lives. Even in my own life, I’ve had to have uncomfortable conversations educating white family members on the reality of what has been done and continues to be done to keep Black people in different kinds of bondage since 1619.

My response to the recent presidential election is to say: let us as Americans not take our democracy for granted and to work hard to make sure it’s a solid foundation for our country.

What it was like to be a Peace Corps volunteer in Thailand earlier this year?

I learned so much in a small amount of time, such as trying to speak a language I’d never known until a mere weeks before. Life as a Peace Corps volunteer is challenging: you’re in a country you’ve never been in with people you don’t know and with a language you’ve never spoken. On top of that, you’re sweating immensely from biking miles to school, miles to a learning center and you’re really giving your all to learn from and to teach others.

But really, it was beyond rewarding and life enhancing. They call it the land of smiles and that is so correct. Everyone is smiling. I wasn’t in any vacation spots or at the beaches but it was a beautiful, beautiful place.

Training is two to three months. At first, we stayed in a hotel for a week or two where we got culture and language training. Then there was a ceremony where I met my host family. They treated me like a son from day one and I will always see them as my family.

What surprised you the most about your experience in Thailand?

I was nervous to go there as a tall, bi-racial man with dreadlocks. But when I got to the country, my host family treated me as one of them immediately. They would joke about how our skin color wasn’t that different, they would refer to me as, “my son”, and people would say, “When did you have him?” And my host family would laugh. There was a kinship between us that I wasn’t expecting.

What was it like to have to leave Thailand so suddenly?

It happened so fast, it was hard to process. Teachers were crying. Staff were crying. Thai family members were crying. It was so emotional everywhere you went. I was very sluggish my last few days.

My host family was so kind and they just spent as much time as they could with me. We were creating memories so we could all keep going forward. They had a party for me before I left and a birthday party for me because my birthday was the next week. It was really beautiful.

Have you been able to stay in touch with some of the people you met there?

I stay in touch with fellow volunteers online and meet for socially distanced gatherings with some in our region. I talk weekly with Peace Corps staff and my host family from Thailand. Every time there’s something big in the news about the U.S., such as COVID and the Black Lives Matter movement or global anxiety about the presidential election, my host family reaches out to say, “How are you?” It’s heartwarming that they remain so thoughtful about me.

What are your hopes and dreams for yourself in 2021?

My hope for everyone is that we continue to cultivate happiness in our own lives and let go of the anxiety that comes with uncertainty. I hope to continue to feed my mind, to nurture my body and stay in touch with my soul. I hope for continued success in my personal and professional life and that I’ll be able to return to Thailand healthier, wiser and more loving than the first time.

Since his return, Jacob has continued his education in a paralegal program at Boston University and started a new job in November as a refugee case manager at Ascentria Care Alliance in Waltham, a non-profit whose mission is to strengthen communities by empowering people to respond to life’s challenges.
Starting this fall, we’ll celebrate 60 Years of Effecting Positive Change in Our Community!

“We have a great legacy that spans six decades, giants on whose shoulders we stand and alumni who are stewarding our local businesses and organizations. We have much to celebrate.”

— President Yves Salomon-Fernández
their lives. GCC Sociologist and expert on social justice education Linda McCarthy, who is white, says “It’s been heartening and inspiring to see that people have finally started to pay attention. It is exciting to see how many people reacted this time. Finally, things aligned to get White people to notice in a way that most hadn’t up until now.”

— GCC Sociologist, Linda McCarthy

“Working Group on Racial Justice” to develop a substantive response on campus. The group is engaging in hard conversations such as those about the often unconscious and subtle ways even avowedly liberal and progressive White people do and say things that undermine people in Black and Brown communities. In November, Career Services Coordinator Shannon Doran took over leadership of the group from departing Dean Leo Hwang in collaboration with Peer Tutoring Co-Coordinator Cindy Snow. Going forward, the plan is for leadership in the group to rotate two to three times a year. This ambitious ad hoc working group has decided to focus on racial justice at GCC as it concerns curriculum, hiring and other campus operations.

In order to provide the intellectual underpinning to facilitate growth, Linda McCarthy co-facilitates a campus-wide book group with Alyssa Arnell (Chair of the History Department) and Christine Monahan (Co-Chair of the English Department). The group is currently reading From Equity Talk to Equity Walk: Expanding Practitioner Knowledge for Racial Justice in Higher Education.

Even a well-intentioned community like that of GCC that does an excellent job of supporting and educating students has much work to do and knows it is only at the beginning of a journey. GCC President Yves has set a goal: “We must continue prioritizing racial equity as part of our curricula, as a major area for improving academic and non-academic outcomes, and as an area where we all are willing to experience some discomfort.”

Donor Voices:
Deborah Keith

“GCC saved you when you needed to be saved.” These words, spoken by Blain Keith, my beloved husband of forty-three years, encapsulate the utterly essential role the College played in my life. The opportunity presented by my enrolling in GCC after high school graduation in 1969, is in a word—priceless. I received knowledge which was foundational to my personal happiness and professional fulfillment.

I give to Greenfield Community College out of gratitude for the pivotal experience it provided me with on the higher education road. I can say with assurance that my life would have been different—and definitely diminished—without GCC being a crucial aspect of it.

I sought assistance from the Counseling Center while enrolled at GCC. I am also thankful for Ellie Goodman and the hope and joy she exuded in her work.

I increased my donation this year and specified it to be used to aid other students seeking assistance from the Student Wellness Center. It is my intent to provide encouragement and resources for those seeking guidance and support as they seek their own opportunities to improve and enhance their lives.

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All are invited—whether you got a degree or just took a class at GCC. The College is proud of its more than 30,000 alumni. We encourage you to celebrate your time as a GCC student and stay connected as an alum.

Enjoy the benefits of being a member of the GCC Alumni Association—invitations to special live and on-line Alumni Affairs and College events, access to Career Services, use of the GCC Fitness Center and the GCC Library. We welcome your involvement at all levels!

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We’d like to hear from you! Please contact us at 413-775-1600 or foundation@gcc.mass.edu for information about Foundation events, the Annual Campaign, planned giving opportunities, the Alumni Association and/or to sign up to receive news from us.

We invite YOU to invest in our community’s future!
Together we can build a stronger future by investing in GCC students. If you are able, please make a gift today to be part of GCC’s mission to offer high quality, affordable education so that students are able to achieve their dreams.

YOUR support helps keep our community vibrant and strong.

To learn more, contact Regina Curtis, Executive Director, at CurtisR@gcc.mass.edu.

Learn more:
www.gcc.mass.edu/foundation
Contact us:
foundation@gcc.mass.edu
413-775-1600

Ways to Give

- Donate online at www.gcc.mass.edu/give
- Send a check to the GCC Foundation
  One College Drive, Greenfield, MA 01301

Join the Alumni Association!
Membership is FREE

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GCC Business Administration major

Emma Rueter used her skills as a photographer and designer during a Small Business Development/Marketing internship at Se-Tu Yoga and Retreat Center in Brattleboro. Thanks to a lead gift from Greenfield Savings Bank to establish the program, GCC offers students internship opportunities—whether they are recently out of high school or already have significant work history—to provide them with the tools and resources they need to prepare for work in their chosen field of study.

“I was really happy to be using my skills to be creative, coming up with my own designs to best promote Se-Tu’s image,” Emma says. Her experience was meaningful and substantive and included such responsibilities as product and service marketing; business development and operations; connecting with existing businesses and setting up meetings to pitch Se-Tu’s ideas for future collaborations and designing promotional materials and photography.

When asked what about her internship was most fun, Emma responded: “Being a part of the owners’ Emily and Harmeet’s dream for Se-Tu Yoga and Retreat Center and seeing everything become real for them and just being a part of the excitement and ideas that were constantly flowing.”