The Regina Curtis Student Success Fund: Honoring a Forty Year GCC Journey

Regina Curtis will leave an impressive legacy when she retires as Executive Director of the GCC Foundation at the end of August. Her journey at GCC began in 1981 when she first enrolled as a part time student taking night classes. Over the past sixteen years— as Director of Development and then in her current position— she has raised $27 million in grant funding and almost $12 million in private donations in order to maintain excellence, accessibility and affordability at our community's college. Regina has the blessing of having a career where she can live her values. She says, “There's nothing I believe in more than the mission of community colleges and access to education.”

In recognition of all Regina has done to build up financial resources for the College, a new fund has been established in her honor to ensure the continued success of GCC students going into the future. In early March, GCC Foundation President Mitch Anthony and GCC President Yves Salomon-Fernández announced the exciting opportunity for the community to contribute to the newly established Regina Curtis Student Success Fund. This new resource will help students succeed through such means as tuition support and emergency grants. The fund is a fitting tribute to Regina's life and work since she knows first-hand the power of an education to transform a life.

Regina's passion for supporting GCC students is rooted in her own life experience. In the late 1970's, she was working at a clerical job after having left high school. She did not think a college education was within her grasp. However, the fiscal officer of the human services agency where she worked saw her potential and for several years encouraged her to go back to school at GCC to take some accounting classes. She attended classes at night after putting in a full day of work five days a week at the.

Rob and Mary Cohn

GCC Changed Everything for Rob ‘71 and Mary ‘05 Cohn

Few would guess when prominent Greenfield community members Rob and Mary Cohn were both in their early twenties, they thought they would never go to college. Neither of them liked high school. Rob remembers, “In my own mind, I was a real loser. Then GCC professors turned my life around. Education became something I really enjoyed and not a drudgery.”

Mary looks back to taking classes when she was pregnant with her second child, "I'll never forget feeling overwhelmed by trying to learn how to use the computer in a GCC accounting class. I wanted to give up but my professor wouldn’t let me. He said, ‘you know what you’re doing— you just don't know you know it.’ I ended up getting an “A” in the class. It was the first time in my life I ever experienced that education could be fun and I loved it!"

Mary and Rob believe that GCC is the best thing that ever happened to Greenfield because of the opportunities it offers to so many people like themselves. Because of GCC, they went on to become extremely successful contributors to the community as philanthropists, previous owners of Cohn and Company Real Estate and members of numerous non-profit boards including Rob’s many years of service as GCC Trustee and Foundation board member.
From the President
Marking New and More Hopeful Beginnings

The chirping birds announcing the morning. The thick layer of ice on the nearby lakes melted. The longer days. The warmer weather. All these are signs that spring is here! As more and more of us get vaccinated, we can feel a sense of hope as the near future begins to permeate our minds and spirits. Will we host backyard barbeques this summer? How about going out to dinner with friends? Will we see our kids and grandkids? These are real possibilities in the coming months.

This is a festive time of year for the GCC community! It is the season of commencement ceremonies, of congratulatory presents and parties, of pride and joy, of culminations and new beginnings. I am pleased to share that this year, we will be able to give our Class of 2020 and the Class of 2021 a pandemic commencement. It won’t be quite what we have had in the past, but our students will be able to walk across the stage to receive their diploma. And, I am certain that many will celebrate with their pods in ways that are both joyful and safe.

Compared to last year, we have much to be hopeful about. When I think of the advances in modern science that allowed us to have vaccines ready within months of the outbreak of the global pandemic, I am grateful for the work of the entire biopharmaceutical ecosystem. I am grateful for the work of educators across the K-20 spectrum who educate generations of scientists, researchers, and others that support the creation of vaccines and other drugs. We all have the frontline and essential workers, across industries, to be grateful for. They kept our world going in our times of despair, fear, and uncertainty.

As we welcome spring, I encourage you to share your favorite poems, songs, family lore, and even memories from the last year with loved ones. Let us strengthen our human connections. Soon, we will be able to hug one another and share close space. We are surrounded by so much beauty, especially this time of the year.

Thank you for the wonderful possibilities that your gifts help blossom into realities. As we celebrate this year’s commencement, I am mindful that there are students who would not be crossing that stage, but for your gifts. We are grateful for your support of the students and the work of GCC. Together we are lifting up individuals and our communities!

With appreciation,

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

Looking Forward to Celebrating GCC’s 60th Anniversary 1962-2022

A year of celebration in honor of GCC’s 60th anniversary will kick off this fall. A 60th Anniversary Steering Committee will be named, charged with planning a series of events over the coming academic year to celebrate this important milestone for the College and our entire community. Starting in November 2021 through the summer of 2022, we will enjoy taking time to appreciate sixty years of the positive change that GCC has effected in our region.

For a sneak peek at the fun to come, enjoy these GCC memories from the 1960s and 70’s.
Darryl Shaw ’96 insists— even though he has traveled the world serving in the U.S. Army and today works as the Assistant I.T. Director at the Earth Institute at Columbia University that “GCC was life-altering for me. I would not be where I am now without my GCC education and the wonderful people I met there.”

Moving to Greenfield in the early 90’s as a 31 year-old African-American man and eventual single dad was “a little like landing on Mars,” Darryl smiles. However, GCC ended up being just what he needed to help him rebuild his life. “I got a level of support and caring at GCC that literally got me through.”

When asked how someone who grew up in Queens ended up in Greenfield, Darryl explains that one of his Army buddies suggested he check out the town. He did not want to move back to the New York area to raise his son after he got out of the Army. He was pleasantly surprised that even though he was one of the few African Americans in town that “everyone was nice and welcoming.” It was not easy to find a job, however. He had left high school in 9th grade and then enlisted in the Army at age 17, where he discovered he enjoyed working with computers. He soon realized that furthering his education was the best chance he had of getting a good job. He could see GCC from where he lived at Princeton Terrace and decided to give it a try even though he dreaded going back to school. Darryl remembers, “I ended up practically living at GCC between classes, studying in the library and my work-study job as a computer lab monitor.” He marvels about how supportive his teachers were, “It seemed like every time I wanted to drop out, there was a professor who could read my face and would say ‘Darryl—stick with this. You can do this.’ That’s what got me through it.” After graduating, he decided he wanted to work on the customer support side of the computer industry.

Darryl got to experience working in the corporate world when he had to relocate to the New York area to be closer to family. He got a job as the manager of desktop support at the publishing house Simon & Schuster. After living in Greenfield, Darryl laughs, “Corporate America was Mars 2.0! It was the craziest environment to work in.” He was at Simon & Schuster more than 5 years when the 2008 recession hit and the whole I.T. department was cut. However, he did have an unforgettable opportunity before his job ended— he met a princess.

Darryl remembers, “The most amazing redhead walked by me in the hallway and said ‘hi’ with a big beautiful grin on her face.” I almost was fired that day because I went back into my boss’s office since I had to meet her. When introduced, I grabbed her hand, kissed it and said, ‘Ma’am, I hope I’m not being too forward but you look even more beautiful in person than you do on television.’”

The princess was children’s book author “Fergie”, Princess Sarah Ferguson, the Duchess of York. Darryl continues, “My boss called me in and said, ‘if you ever embarrass me like that again, you are fired!’ Then she started laughing as I walked out the door.”

Darryl continues his exciting career adventure in his current role as assistant director of I.T. at the Earth Institute at Columbia University as they prepare to open the very first Climate School in the world. “We’re going to teach this generation how to save the world. I’m really excited about this and my job is going to grow ten-fold.” For Darryl, providing I.T. support for the Climate School will be the pinnacle of his career, “This for me is my legacy tour. I’m going to work nine more years until I’m 70. I hope this saves the damn world!”

Darryl will always be grateful to GCC for providing a pathway to a wonderful career in I.T. and he is a prime example of how GCC gives us our future leaders. Explaining why he hopes others donate to support the College as he does, he says, “Education is a very powerful tool to help people get where they want to go. I would not be where I am now without both my education and GCC giving me that opportunity.”
office and waiting tables on the weekends. Besides the excellent and supportive GCC faculty, she succeeded thanks to a group of fellow night school students with whom she formed a study group. They would eat dinner together and then study each weeknight in the cafeteria before classes started at 7 pm. This common experience created the basis of life-long friendships. Regina smiles, “two women from the study group are still very close friends to this day.”

Regina remembers, “It took five years to obtain my two year associate’s degree— but without GCC, that goal would never have been reached.” She went on to earn a bachelor’s from North Adams State and finally an MBA from Fitchburg State all while working full time. Thanks to her education at GCC, she was able to go from having a job to building a career. She learned the art of forging relationships with people and of financial administration from her 25 years of work in human services at Community Action, in town government for New Salem and Wendell, and then as a legislative aide for State Representative Stephen Kulik. Regina reflects, “I learned the questions that draw people out and get them engaged. People deserve to be heard and remembered.”

In the late 1990’s, Regina returned to GCC as a Foundation board member and volunteer raising money for the Annual Campaign and in subsequent years increased her commitment as the Annual Campaign co-chair and finally as President of the Foundation Board. In 2005 when she accepted the position as Director of Development at GCC, it was like coming full circle. “Being a part of keeping community college accessible to all who want to change their lives through education is a really great thing,” Regina reflects. Gifts to honor Regina’s legacy at GCC to the Regina Curtis Success Fund are a welcome and a fitting tribute to Regina’s life work to ensure our community’s access to higher education.

There’s nothing I believe in more than the mission of community colleges and access to education.” — Regina Curtis ’86

GCC Foundation Executive Director

Highlight on Spring Campaign—Invest in Students Now: Change Lives for Generations

Each year, with help from a wonderful team of volunteers, the GCC Foundation spends the months of April and May inviting generous community donors to sustain accessible, affordable and high-quality education at GCC. Last year, in spite of the pandemic and thanks to many generous donors, the annual campaign raised an amazing $1,166,215 from 907 individuals.

This year, community support is just as critical to ensure GCC remains an economic anchor for our region. The state funds only 48% of the cost to make a GCC education available to our community. When young people have access to a college education, they can get better jobs and their prospects for future financial stability for their families is greatly improved. To highlight the benefits of access to an affordable college education to our whole community, the theme for this year’s spring campaign is, Invest in Students Now: Change Lives for Generations. The Campaign has the exciting goal to raise $1,300,000 to support GCC.

This year’s campaign co-chairs are Elizabeth “Liz” Fisk, Account Executive at WHAI/Bear Country Radio at Saga Communications and Tara Brewster, Vice President of Business Development at Greenfield Savings Bank. Liz and Tara share a passion for community building. Remarkably, they also have a common formative experience from their senior year in high school— their mothers battled terminal illness. Regarding this time when she was a dual enrollment student, Liz says “GCC provided me with a sense of community and a home during a really difficult time in my life. The college provided me a safe place and taught me who I am as a person. GCC has always been very special to me.”

For Tara, the tragic loss of her mother when she was only 16 deepened her compassion for others. “For me education is so important and it’s a gateway to opportunity. I just feel so blessed to be able to be a part of this campaign and make asks of my neighbors who have the capacity to give.”

Gifts to the GCC Annual Fund drive this spring will go towards such vital student supports as scholarships and other college programs such as tutoring, counseling and emergency assistance for food, transportation and other basic needs. You can give online at gcc.mass.edu/give, or send a check to the GCC Foundation, One College Drive, Greenfield, MA 01301.
We wanted to check in with GCC Chief Student Affairs Officer & Dean of Students Anna Berry to find out how she thinks students are doing. Anna’s dual roles at GCC include oversight of all student affairs activities from enrollment services to student support and engagement. She is passionate about ensuring student voices and needs are central at the College. Anna puts students first and regularly meets with them in order to help address any issues they may be having that interfere with their education.

**How do you think GCC students are doing a year into the pandemic and in mostly remote classes?**

We did a survey in the fall asking students how they were doing. Overall, the general feeling was that many were actually getting into the rhythm and understanding the remote environment. Still, many of them acknowledge that remote learning wouldn’t be their preference.

However, in spite of coping better than they expected, everyone is fatigued. We’ve had this trifecta of traumatic events—the pandemic, a very contentious election and incredible racial injustices all happening at once. People are exhausted. It’s a complicated time.

**What are some of the most effective ways the College has been able to support students during all this?**

So much of what students have needed are practical things like food and money. We kept our food pantry operating remotely since last spring and have been sending students grocery store gift cards if they are struggling to afford food. Thanks to incredibly generous donations to GCC from individuals and the Community Foundation of Western Mass, we’ve distributed over $95,000 of COVID emergency funds to students in mini-grants ranging from $500-$2,000 to meet basic needs such as rent, utility bills, childcare and money for tuition and books. Additionally, when they reach out for financial assistance, students receive support to connect with community resources that can address long-term needs.

Our Peer Tutoring program has developed an excellent online option utilizing Google Meet that gives a lot of flexibility. We’ve upgraded and updated many of the College’s technology systems and we now have much more efficient ways for student to do things like drop a class, request a transcript, or upload required documents. Additionally, we have remote Admission events and advising appointments. These have drawn more people to engage with the college and learn about our programs.

**When someone writes a check in support of students at GCC, it’s the same as saying “I believe in you.”**

— Anna Berry

**Can you tell us about the video you helped make recently for students that featured you in a tutu?**

Student support services thought it would be fun to do something that could cheer our students on. With Marketing Department social media consultant Jamie Cocco’s help, we met on campus, outside and socially distanced, and created a short video to tell our students “We’re rooting for you. Keep your chin up!” Jamie posted it on our social media channels. I invited people to wear colorful things and someone offered me their light-up tutu. How could I resist? I’m a super outgoing person but interestingly, I don’t like drawing attention to myself. However, I’ll do anything for a good cause that will brighten someone’s day.

**Why do you think people in our community should support GCC students?**

I hear repeatedly from students how grateful they are for the money they get from the emergency fund and through scholarships. Not only does community support like this help them continue on the path to their future but it’s also an expression of care. When someone writes a check in support of students at GCC, it’s the same as saying “I believe in you.” Education is the ultimate equalizer. Many of the students who come to GCC never imagined that a college education was open to them— that they were capable of it, that they could afford it and that somebody else would believe in them.
Donor Voices  Jim Slavin

Dr. James Slavin is a philanthropist carrying on a family legacy of commitment to GCC that started with his father Morton A. Slavin, one of the three founders of the College in 1962. Along with helping to fund the Morton A. Slavin Wellness Center, Jim and his family are also generous donors to the Student Emergency Fund, which has been critical to helping GCC students continue their studies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Jim is a retired orthopedic surgeon who lives with his wife Dr. Monica Mottolese, in Menands, NY. He is a ski instructor/instructor trainer at Jiminy Peak, a food pantry volunteer and works for a Land Trust in Rensselaer County, NY.

My father [Morton Slavin] taught our family that it is important to leave the world a better place than we found it. That’s why all of his children are involved in philanthropy. As a child of the Depression born in 1920, my dad knew what it was to like to struggle financially.

He knew how important it was to have access to higher education. Lack of funds forced him to discontinue his college studies several times before finally graduating with the assistance of the GI Bill. He obtained his degree in engineering and moved to Massachusetts to take a job at Erving Paper Mills. We grew up in Erving and my mother was a school nurse in the Greenfield public schools. Like my father, she valued the community and used her position as a school nurse to help her students who were living in poverty.

My wife and I have a family foundation and we focus our giving on three priorities: basic needs for low-income families, a local land conservancy, and public education. I believe giving to public colleges is just the right thing to do. Over the last year, I have become more concerned about diversity, inclusion and social justice. If we look at social inequality, it is often based on privilege versus a lack of opportunity. Community college is a way to level that playing field. If we care for the well-being of our community, then we should do everything we can to cultivate the talents of all of our citizens. We need higher education to be affordable and responsive to our community’s needs.

“My father [Morton Slavin] taught our family that it is important to leave the world a better place than we found it.” — Jim Slavin

The Regina Curtis Student Success Fund will help GCC students succeed into the future through such direct aid as tuition support and emergency assistance. Rob glows, “the College is an easy place to donate to because we know there’s not one penny that gets wasted. If you have money to give, there’s no better place to put it than toward GCC student success. GCC stands strictly for all that’s good. There’s nothing I don’t like about GCC.” Rob and Mary encourage community members to make a gift to the Regina Curtis Student Success Fund online at gcc.mass.edu/give or by sending a check to the GCC Foundation, One College Drive, Greenfield, MA 01301.
All are invited who received degrees or just attended a class at GCC. Connect with other alums and stay up to date on alumni and college events. Join now: www.gcc.mass.edu/alumni
Follow us on Facebook @ facebook.com/GreenfieldCCAlums
Donate online at www.gcc.mass.edu/give
Send a check to the GCC Foundation
One College Drive • Greenfield • MA 01301
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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.

Join the Alumni Association!
Did you attend GCC? Membership is FREE!

All are invited who received degrees or just attended a class at GCC. Connect with other alums and stay up to date on alumni and college events.

Join now: www.gcc.mass.edu/alumni

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Why Your Support for GCC Matters

"You go to local hospitals like Baystate Franklin, talk to any of those nurses. I guarantee that many of them are going to say, 'I graduated from GCC.' The care you're getting there depends on community support for nurses when they're still students." Tylor knows first-hand how important community donations to GCC can be. Without help from scholarships, she would not be graduating this May with her Associates in Nursing and on her way to becoming an RN. Tylor stepped up this year to share her story in hopes of inspiring community generosity this spring for other GCC students.

When she was just 18 years-old, Tylor was the new mother of triplets and working part-time at Dunkin Donuts. She knew she wanted more for herself and her babies than just living paycheck to paycheck. She enrolled in a CNA program at another community college and remembers, "The large campus was overwhelming and I didn't feel supported. I didn't do well and felt like giving up. A friend from high school had graduated from the LPN program at GCC and suggested she try it. Tylor's experience at GCC was life changing.

"People at GCC were SO helpful. They answered my questions, believed in me and encouraged me." With help from scholarships to pay for tuition and books, Tylor graduated from GCC's LPN program in 2019 and will complete her Associates in Nursing in May. She has already been accepted in the dual program with GCC and Westfield State to earn her Bachelor's in Nursing in one year. Go Tylor!

Tylor is so grateful for her education at GCC and the financial support from generous donors like you that made it possible to have a better life for herself and her family.