Four Decades + Three Generations = One GCC Family

By Mary McClintock ’82

When Wil Roberts arrived at GCC to teach English in 1970, he found a young college that was open to new ideas and strongly committed to students. Wil realized he’d landed in a place where he could feel fulfilled and know he was contributing to the world. He was the father of four sons: Charles, Micah, Ben, and David.

In 1971, Diane Esser was 23 years old, working part-time as a laboratory technician at Franklin Medical Center, and a divorced single mother of five-year-old Wes. Diane started taking classes at GCC, her first steps on the path toward a lifelong career as an attorney.

Wil and Diane did more than further their careers at GCC, they met each other. Now, Wil, Diane, and their five sons have been a blended family for 43 years. All five sons attended GCC, and, last May, Wil and Diane’s two eldest grandchildren graduated from GCC.

Across four decades and three generations, the Roberts/Esser family is one big GCC family.

Actually, as Charles said, “GCC has always felt like part of the family. Last year, when I returned for my niece’s honor society event and everything was different with the beautiful new entry and library space, it was like visiting a favorite relative with a new haircut who suddenly looks very different from the person you know but who is still the same inside. I guess GCC is family.”

Meet these members of the GCC family.

Wil Roberts, 77, Greenfield
Novelist and SJC certified mediator, Wil is a retired professor of English and Folklore. Member of GCC English faculty from 1970 to 2001. Former Greenfield Town Councilor, President of the Town Council, and Planning Board member.

Early in my GCC teaching, I had a 16-year-old and an 80-year-old in the same class. It was fascinating to see young and old students recognize each other as equals intellectually and socially. Barriers broke down quickly. In the late 1990s, retired Leon Weeks took my Advanced Creative Writing class. When students wrote outrageous things, Leon would say to them, “I don’t get it, please explain it to me.” And the younger students would explain. They opened each other’s minds to their completely different worldviews.

Finding GCC allowed me to grow intellectually, socially and personally. Because of that, I was able to help provide an environment for my kids I was not capable of when I was younger. As one of the founders of GCC’s union and working with the union at local and state levels, I also got a political education.

Diane Esser, 66, Greenfield
Attorney practicing in Franklin County since 1979.

Greenfield Community College Foundation: Board member, Vice President (2009-11), President (2011-14)

Attended GCC: 1971-73, B.A. in Social Thought and Political Economy from UMass Amherst. J.D. from Boston University School of Law

When I began my studies at GCC Joan Skolnick-Chomse and Bob Malloy team taught several history/politics seminars for multi-disciplinary students. It was my conscious awakening to the idea of critical geo-political thinking and it put me on the track to the study of law and the articulation of ideas as something other than personal opinion. Joan remains a very close friend.

I love to participate in wide ranging and informed political and social discussions at family get-togethers, particularly because we all had the advantage of a stimulating educational experience which began with strong educational grounding from GCC faculty.

(continued on pages 4 and 5)
There are two reasons for hope and optimism.

On December 1st, 1862, Abraham Lincoln said “The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise — with the occasion.” It was as if he were talking about today. Our times are indeed stormy, piled high with difficulty. From the international to domestic to local – all of the easy answers gone. It would be understandable for one to find themselves in a downward spiral or an even more damaging outcome – to disengage. But for all the doom and gloom, for all of the pessimism that fills the day to day experience of all too many Americans, let’s not forget the last seven words of President Lincoln’s address that day in 1862 – “and we must rise with the occasion.” It was the occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we might not be able to change the world, but we can create a better tomorrow for all here in our community. I really do think this community offers the world a model for a better way. Thank you for all that you do for the students, faculty and staff of this community. I really do think that one can learn the skills and obtain the knowledge that will lead to a better life. But you all get this college and its impact as much as I do. You know that what is taught in these classrooms will then show up in the boardrooms, hospital rooms and voting booths of tomorrow. You already know that here at GCC that downward spiral of pessimism becomes a widening gyre of hope. Dr Jill Biden, GCC Professor and the Nation’s Second Lady said when asked why she preferred teaching at a community college over a four year elite she said that a community college is “where the gap between what is imagined at the beginning and what is achieved at the end is so wide.”

The second reason for hope about our future is our community. As you have heard me say, many times, I do not know of a college that works any harder to meet the needs of its community and I don’t know of a community that is more committed to meet the needs of its college. But it is not your gift giving to GCC alone that encourages one to think optimistically about the future. It is the collective culture of giving, collaboration, and sustainability that lifts one’s hope for tomorrow. Giving defined as much about the care of a neighbor as it is philanthropy. Collaboration defined as a way of being, born out of scarce resources and the need to do more with less. Sustainability defined as being thoughtful about the long term economic, environmental, health and educational wellbeing of our community. We might not be able to change the world, but we can create a better tomorrow for all here in our community. I really do think this community offers the world a model for a better way. Thank you for all that you do for the students, faculty and staff of Greenfield Community College. Lives are changing for the better every day at GCC and as a result families are growing stronger and so too our community. That would not be as possible without you.

Milestones

Members of the GCC family, who touched and changed the lives of many students during their years at the college, are named here in recognition and appreciation of their service.

Recently retired…

• Gail Tease, Admission Staff
  17 years of service
• Abigail Jenkins, Human Services Faculty
  15 years of service
• Karen Bross, Business Office
  13 years of service
• Sharon Roth, Education Faculty
  13 years of service

In memoriam…

• Robert Merriam, 90
  President’s Office
  July 23, 2014
• Warren J. Johannson, 93
  Science Faculty
  August 28, 2014
• Carolyn Sautter, 82
  College Bookstore
  October 13, 2014

If you would like to make a gift in honor or in memory of a former GCC employee, please visit www.gcc.mass.edu/give or call 413-775-1600.

You may direct acknowledgement of your gift to the honoree or to a family member/friend of a memorial gift.
Greenfield Community College’s quest to secure an on-campus child care center received legislative backing on Thursday, with a proposed $9.5 million allocation from the state.

Sen. Stan Rosenberg, D-Amherst, said the Senate’s capital bond bill included the child care amendment. It will now go to conference committee, where Rep. Stephen Kulik, D-Worthington, said he intends to fight for its passage.

The money would allow GCC, the only community college in the state without a child care center, to build a 15,000-square-foot center in one of the college’s parking lots.

The college plans to partner with Community Action, which would run the facility, offering the federally subsidized Head Start program for low-income families. It could hold at least 60 children and would likely open within the next two years.

“The need for a child care center on GCC’s campus to provide stable, quality care is clear,” wrote GCC President Robert Pura after hearing the news.

The center would not only provide early field work, but also serve as a “lab school” for GCC education students to do field work.

“This would be great for the college, and great for the community,” said Clare Higgins, executive director of Community Action and a trustee of the college. “This would be a facility built for young children that would help them grow and thrive.”

Construction on the GCC campus, coupled with lack of funding, forced the college to close its child care center in 1999 and it was never reopened.

College officials have been planning the project for some time, but the details weren’t firmed up when the House passed its capital bond bill version earlier this spring.

Now the House and Senate will meet in conference committee to compare the two versions of the bill, and will need to act on it before the legislative session ends in six weeks.

Kulik said that the entire Franklin County delegation will be pushing for the child care center’s allocation. “It is very seriously needed and I’m going to be advocating for it very strongly,” he said.

When the Greenfield Community Foundation asked the community to “Inspire Hope through Education,” the community responded. Thanks to strong community support by business and individual donors alike, the recently completed 2014 GCC Annual Campaign met its original goal by 12%, raising $928,443 to support the College. The funds raised are $103,443 more than the original $825,000 Campaign goal and include additional new or increased donations to meet the $100,000 Challenge offered by an anonymous donor.

The GCC Annual Fund Campaign involves many members of the community.

GCC Foundation Annual Campaign Surpasses Goal, Raises $928,443

More than 70 volunteers worked on the Campaign, individually soliciting funds from other community members, alumni, parents, current and retired faculty and staff, foundations, and businesses. A total of 919 donors contributed to the Campaign, with an 82% increase in dollars received from new donors over last year, including 9 who joined the Grace Mayers Leadership Giving Society with a gift of $1,002 or more to honor the “mother of Greenfield Community College.

Diane Esser, President of GCC’s Foundation Board of Directors, said, “That so many have contributed so much is a testament to the confidence that our community has in GCC and to the recognized value of supporting quality, affordable education for students seeking to advance their academic skills and future earning potential.”

Honorary campaign co-chairs Chia Collins and Michael Cohen were enthusiastic promoters of this year’s campaign. When agreeing to serve in the role, they noted that they were pleased to help promote access to education, stating that “Greenfield Community College is an incredible resource in our community and is one of the finest community colleges in the Commonwealth”.

Mary Rice ’91 Named 2014 Distinguished Alumna

The Distinguished Alumni Award was established by the GCC Alumni Association to recognize GCC alumni who have achieved substantial public recognition for their accomplishments.

2014 recipient Mary Rice received her Associate’s in Liberal Arts - GCC ’91, Bachelor’s in Developmental Psychology - Smith College ’93 and Master’s in Social Science – Harvard University ’98. After an impressive career in social services and emergency response, Mary is now a GCC student in the Nursing Program.

An Amazing Day at Mike’s Maze

GCC students, faculty and staff volunteered for GCC Day at Mike’s Maze on Sunday, October 18th. Special thanks to Warner Farm for generously donating a portion of the proceeds from the maze to support GCC students and programs, and to all who helped out that day.

The 2014 annual campaign was very ably managed by its hard-working campaign co-chairs, Joe Roggieri and Rich Fahey. In describing their motivation for taking on the commitment to lead the GCC Foundation staff and campaign volunteers in the fundraising effort, both noted their desire to support GCC’s essential role as a resource for education, job training and economic support in the region. Fahey is clear that “keeping GCC alive and well is essential to our community,” while co-chair Roggieri states that “the strength of the economy will ebb and flow, but GCC will always be a foundation of long-term sustainability.”

Reflecting on what the Campaign means for the College and the community, GCC President Bob Pura also expressed his appreciation for “the good work of the campaign leadership and all of the many community volunteer fundraisers who reinforce the message that hope is created through education.” He added, “lives change for the better every day at GCC - families then grow stronger and so too our community. Each of the 919 donors in this year’s Campaign helped to make that possible. GCC really is the community’s college. On behalf of the students, faculty and staff, I thank you.”
Charles Roberts, 54, Greenfield
Architect, Kuhn Riddle Architects, Amherst
Liberal Arts degree, math/science concentration.
BFA and B.Arch from liberal arts degree, math/science concentration. Currently enrolled in GCC's Computer Assisted Bookkeeping program.

Extracurricular activities: Work Study in Student Activities office and on grounds crew.

It was great to watch my kids as they graduated from GCC - 31 years after I did.
A community college education is a great option. It shouldn't be considered a last resort. GCC is an integral and invaluable part of the community. Online courses through GCC give me the flexibility to continue my education while maintaining full-time employment.

Lisa Henry, 46, Greenfield
Fine Artist and Art Teacher
Rigorous critiques in GCC’s Art Department prepared me well for a future as a fine artist and art teacher. I developed an interest in charcoal drawing during my class with Peter Dudely. I am now preparing an exhibit of my charcoal and graphite drawings for the D’Amour Museum of Fine Arts in 2015. Through my work on the Greenfield Local Cultural Council, and as an artist working in the community, I have organized several exhibits at the GCC Downtown Center.

Extracurricular activities: Work Study in Student Activities office.

I placed in the top 1% of students in my major and was researching various schools for my future education. GCC helped me realize it’s okay to talk with faculty about interests and concerns. Because GCC’s bureaucracy was so small, people encouraged you to take issues to Financial Aid, or the Registrar, and they actually helped. When I went to other, bigger colleges, I knew how to approach people to get what I needed.

I went to class with my Mom when I was five years old because she didn’t have child care. It says something about my Mom’s charism that she brought me along and let me know about GCC that it was okay for me to be there. I knew Deon Risky Case and she kept me going. As a student representative to the President’s Council, I was at the table with people who had been at my house for dinner. What do you do when your Dad’s best friend is your teacher? How do you talk with him in class? I entered GCC knowing teachers were people and approachable.

Mia Roberts, 49, Greenfield
Baker, Green Fields Market, Greenfield

Extracurricular activities: Work Study in Student Activities office.

For me, GCC was my Dad’s place. It felt like the family business. It’s been part of my life since I was a little kid. I remember visiting faculty members at the Arch Street building and getting bubble gum from one of them. It was time for college, it was easy and comfortable to go there. The best thing about my time at GCC is that’s where I got to know my wife, Rachel.

Rachel Roberts, 43, Greenfield
Educational Consultant
Attended GCC: 1990, Bachelor’s in Elementary Education and BERC from UMass Amherst.

My time at GCC allowed me find my path and pursue it. So much of the growth in my life has come from my relationship with Miah. I married into a GCC family. I love that GCC is in the community, employing many people, providing opportunities for students, and creating a texture to Greenfield. GCC is always there for the community. Whenever I walk into GCC, I feel energized.

Maddy Roberts, 18, Greenfield
Data Analyst, Fazzi Associates, Northampton
Attended GCC: 2012-14, Associate Degree in Accounting, Certificate in Computer Assisted Bookkeeping, Certificate in Computer Information Systems.
Extracurricular activities: Hiking, and cooking big dinners with groups of friends I met at GCC.

On the first day of advising, Professor Galbraith was so enthusiastic. Even through my major wasn’t in his department, he still took me on as his advisee. He guided me through course selections during my entire time at GCC.

The advising and programs at GCC, specifically the Mass Transfer Compact, facilitated a seamless transition to UMass Amherst, where I am now majoring in history and minorning in classical civilizations.

At GCC, I had the opportunity to meet people with diverse backgrounds. It was clear that education was important to everyone I met, and GCC provided a positive learning environment. As I was growing up, the stories I heard from my parents, grandparents, and uncles about the college inspired me. I felt secure that there was a community both at home and at the college that would teach me important information and valuable life skills.

Ben Roberts, 52, Greenfield
Buyer, Green Fields Market, Greenfield
Attended GCC: 1981-83, Associate in Liberal Arts, Math/Science Concentration.
Currently enrolled in GCC’s Computer Assisted Bookkeeping program.

Extracurricular activities: Work Study in Student Activities office and on grounds crew.

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