



# From hiding in the shadows to shining in the light

## Riley Burns finds her niche as a writing fellow

**Ashley Atkins**  
Assistant Editor

Riley Burns sat across from Lori Jo Couch, assistant professor of English at MCCC, head down so she would avoid eye contact. Burns was there to be interviewed to join the writing fellows.

“I can see it in my mind like it was yesterday,” Couch said. “I thought to myself, ‘how is this shy of a girl going to tutor other students?’”

Burns said no one realized how burnt out she really was or how much that one email nominating her as a Writing Fellow meant to her. She said her anxiety and depression came to a head, and she felt suicidal.

“I thought, ‘wow if this is what life is like now then I would just rather not,’” Burns said. “Prior to that feeling of hopelessness, I had tried to get diagnosed with ADHD, but no one would listen to me.”

It was the lowest point in her life. She said she had felt for a long time that nothing was going right for her. She struggled with self-esteem issues as she suffered from an eating disorder, and she tried to get back into a routine after the isolation from the pandemic.

Burns hadn’t always felt that life was hopeless. She has fond memories of being on the MCCC campus as a young girl. Her father, Jack Burns, director of campus planning and facilities, has worked here since Burns was in the third grade.

Burns said she and her sisters, Maysie and Kinsley, were always on campus being involved in different activities and participating in the parades with their father.

Maysie and Kinsley Burns took dance lessons here on campus where Maysie still dances with the MCCC dance ensemble.

Burns said her father was excited to take martial art classes at MCCC,

“We all took Taekwondo at the same time, my dad wanted us to take it with him,” she said. “However, only he went on to earn his

black belt, Maysie and I didn’t enjoy it as much and we dropped out after getting our blue belts.”

Burns said her struggles began when her father was diagnosed with cancer during her middle school years.

“His health got really bad,” she said. “The cancer seemed to spread to a new area every time doctors thought they had it gone.”

Burns said her father went into remission and was able to return to his job just as she began at the Middle College at MCCC.

“I loved being on campus,” she said. “It was everything that school had not been for me for so long for so, so, long.”

She said she had a great group of friends, and everything seemed to be going great until the coronavirus.

Burns said when the MCMC went online, the school chose to not hold Zoom classes. Instead, everything was preloaded on laptops.

She said teachers knew what the students were doing because they had access to their work online, but there was no contact between teachers and students.

“I didn’t really have any connections with the outside world,” Burns said.

However, she said she doesn’t remember that time at home being hard, and that she said she enjoyed her seclusion. The issues didn’t start until they went back to school in person.

Burns said the school had students going to classes, but students and teachers were just using the classrooms and then going home.

“I hated school, and wanted to get as far away from MCCC as I could,” Burns said. “It was hard because I really didn’t know why I was so angry.”

It was her junior year of MCMC in 2021 when she said her mental health issues became increasingly worse.

Then in her senior year, she received an email that she had been nominated by her



Photo by Ashley Atkins

See Burns on page 3

Riley Burns, posing in front of the Writing Center, before starting her shift as a writing fellow.

# Safe restroom sign not so safe on campus

**Maggie Sandefur**  
Agora Editor

Safe restroom signs put up by the GSA promoting inclusivity have caused controversy around MCCC.

These signs were put up by the Gender & Sexuality Alliance in Fall 2023 after students approached them about harassment occurring in the restrooms toward transgender individuals. The signs state the bathrooms are for everyone, and request that nobody will be asked to leave.

The signs were initially posted in March 2019 by the GSA and advisers Melissa Grey, professor of psychology, and Jenna Bazzell, associate professor of English.

Grey said they contacted maintenance, facilities and human resources about the posting of these signs. She said the previous HR director, Molly McCutchan, reviewed the signs, gave feedback and approval before they were posted.

Kojo Quartey, president of MCCC, said he doesn't remember being aware of these when they were put up.

"I do not recall being made aware of these signs in 2019," Quartey said in an email. "A lot has happened since 2019 and I was informed of these signs by an external group close to the end of last year."

Bazzell said they assumed they

would be able to safely post these again in Fall 2023 since neither of them had heard of the approval being rescinded. However, Grey said students were slowly noticing the signs disappear without any warning, so they continued to put the signs up.

"In October, we posted signs, students repeatedly noticed they were disappearing, and so we were reprinting, posting, reprinting, posting— October, November, December," Grey said.

Bazzell said despite being the advisers of GSA, they were never directly contacted about the removal of the signs.

Grey said after these were taken down, she and Bazzell put up banners in the L Building to assess the response.

Grey said they began an initiative, Respect the Restrooms 2024, through the banners. She said MCCC policy permitted the banners to be posted on unapproved surfaces.

However, Bazzell said these banners were taken down Jan. 29, the day a statement was released to employees about restroom access.

Grey said they received confirmation from security personnel that the administration had requested they be taken down.

Following the removal of these,

MCCC released a statement to all students on Jan. 31. In this, they said they support students using the bathroom they feel comfortable in.

"The single use/gender-inclusive restrooms are for anyone who prefers to use them, and the college supports the option of individuals to

use the restroom that corresponds to their gender identity," the statement said.

Quartey said following the removal, the GSA will be meeting with the Vice President of Enrollment and Student Success, Scott Behrens, to come up with a com-

promise.

The Agora submitted a FOIA request for Title IX complaints on Jan. 31. The college responded Feb. 6, notifying the staff that the request was extended 10 business days, which was not in time for the publication deadline.

## COMMENTARY

### Bathroom access protest bleeds ignorance

I had no high hopes or great expectations for this Board of Trustees meeting. All I knew was that I was going to have to sit through argument after argument that were based on nothing but irrationality and prejudice from protesters.

The larger-than-usual crowd that gathered for the meeting on Jan. 22 consisted mostly of protestors who were upset over flyers posted around the school. The flyers in question explained that gender-diverse people could use the bathroom of their choice.

"Give him a slip. Or her. Or..." Aaron Mason, chair of the Board of Trustees, fumbled awkwardly with pronouns before fizzling out. The board meeting, which centered around transgender bathroom issues, was off to a great start.

I was informed that a typical meeting ends with public commentators, but because of the supposedly controversial subject at hand, it is decided that the public commentators will start off. I was disappointed but not surprised that the citizens of Monroe were treating equality as a controversial topic.

For protestors, they were quite tame. I must admit I was expecting more. But the rules were followed by everyone and each public commentator had the chance to speak up about their concerns surrounding the trans bathroom "controversy."

I noticed that a majority of the protestors who spoke against the trans bathroom issue used the same wording. "Men in women's bathrooms." There was nev-



**Mick Valentino**  
Agora Staff

er a mention of 'trans women'. Just 'men who want to be women.' Was it out of ignorance or malice? Both options were a repulsive showing of backwardness.

A few protestors made their true feelings more well-known than others. In reference to the flyers and the fact that trans people can use the bathroom of their choice, one woman said she was "appalled that this was being allowed." Appalled that students could go to the bathroom peacefully? I find it appalling that this is considered a controversy.

Another woman spoke up and said "biological sex exists -- and in certain situations, it is vitally important-such as a bathroom, where sex and gender are not the same, and must not be conflated."

How does someone know that a trans person is in the bathroom with them? Do they peek around the stall

to see what "biological sex" the person next to them has? Are they lurking in the bathroom and staring at every single person who walks in? To me, that sounds much more predatory than the trans people they're worried about.

I think that every opinion surrounding the trans bathroom issue is based around the same argument. That trans people are predators. This 'predator' argument has been around for ages and used on different minority groups. The argument was used in the 1950s against homosexuality. It has been used to describe immigrants coming across to America. It was used when dealing with the Civil Rights Movement. It's just the same old fear-mongering argument draped over the current minority group of choice.

There is no rationality in the argument. No logical thinking. Just an overly emotional response to an ever-evolving society. Disgust. Outrage. Fear. The kind of feelings that hold us back.

This argument bleeds un-education. It screams about a refusal to learn and grow. It's just a blanket for prejudice and discrimination and we cannot fall for it.

This is a college campus. This is a place to be educated. To learn. To evolve. With this ridiculous, fear-baiting controversy consuming the community, I'm not seeing any sort of education though.

## The Agora

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### Editorial Policy

The Agora is published by the students of Monroe County Community College, 1555 S. Raisinville Rd., Monroe, MI, 48161. The editorial office is located in Room 213 of the Campbell Building.

**Submissions:** The Agora encourages submissions by anyone in the college community, including freelance articles, opinion columns or letters to the editor. All submissions must include a name, address and phone number for verification purposes. The Agora reserves the right to edit for clarity, accuracy, length and libel.

The Agora is a student-managed newspaper that supports a free student press. It is a member of the Michigan Community College Press Association, the Michigan Press Association, College Media Association, Associated Collegiate Press and the Student Press Law Center.

Story suggestions are welcome. Let us know what you would like to see in The Agora - it's your newspaper. Email submissions to [agora@monroecc.edu](mailto:agora@monroecc.edu).

# Fender bender leads to lifetime friendship

**BURNS: From page 1**

email that she had been nominated by her English professor Michele Toll to be a writing fellow. Burns said she'll never forget that day, Nov. 7, 2022, because that's when everything changed.

"I thought, 'OK if someone is still seeing my potential, I still have potential to do something,'" Burns said.

She went into the interview with Couch with the mindset that if this was going to be a lot of work, she would do the bare minimum to get by.

Today, you can find Burns in the Writing Center every chance she gets. The once quiet girl enthusiastically greets everyone who walks into the center. She also helped implement a presentation for classes, encouraging students to utilize the Writing Center for help.

Burns, along with her best friend Brooklyn Kayson, another writing fellow put together a slideshow presentation that is used by the Writing Fellows, to present to classes

around MCCC.

Kayson said they became friends in their advanced composition class. Even though Burns is shy by nature, Kayson said she is an amazing person to get to know.

"We were friends for months before we realized she was the one that backed into me in the parking lot one day," said Kayson, laughing at the memory of that day.

Burns said she attributed her change in behavior to being diagnosed with combination type ADHD and receiving treatment for it. She wears a smile as she speaks excitedly about her role in the writing center.

"I found my niche, I don't know exactly when I realized it but once I did it felt great," she said. "I'm so much happier now and I realize I have a whole life to look forward to."

Burns will graduate from MCCC at the end of winter semester 2024 and plans to transfer to either Appalachian State University or Oakland University. She also plans on minoring in communications and/



Photo by Ashley Atkins

From left, Brooklyn Kayson sits on Riley Burns' lap in Lori Jo Couch's office. Couch is adviser to the Writing Center where Kayson and Burns work as Writing Fellows.

or psychology alongside her chosen major, a master's degree in social work.

"It has been a privilege to see her blossom," Couch said. "I don't

know what it was that made the change in her, but it was amazing to watch her transform."

That angst-y teenager who sat across from her is no longer recog-

nizable today.

"She is an amazing person with so much to offer the world," Couch said.

# Four books to read for Valentine's Day

**Sidney Robison**  
Agora staff

Each year during February, I always gravitate toward reading romance books. When people are going out for Valentine's Day, I'm in my room, in my book corner, reading about fictional characters to escape reality.

## Night Shift by Annie Crown

This story follows Kendall who works at a college library and Vince who is a varsity basketball player. Kendall Holiday spends most of her time reading romance novels and staying in her dorm instead of partying with her friends. Vincent Knight, captain of the basketball team, turns up with an injured wrist and a need for poetry recommendations for a class he hates. Suddenly, Kendall is falling headfirst into her own romance novel, but it takes a lot more truth than tropes to get to a happy ever after in real life.

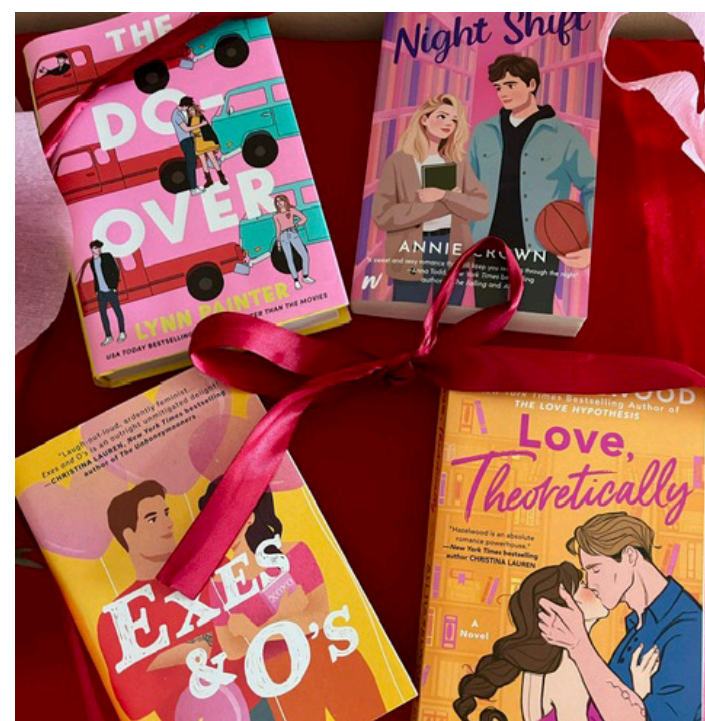
I really enjoyed this book. It was fast paced and the story progressed as I kept reading. I felt that I related to Kendall a lot during the story. This book was fast paced and entertaining. The romance was well done and it

wasn't cringe-worthy. The banter between the characters kept me laughing. When I first started the book, I didn't know that it was based off of a Wattpad story, which I thought was really cool.

## Exes and O's by Amy Lea

Romance novel expert Tara has been dumped ten times by different guys. Through obstacles, Tara is determined to find "the one." She revisits her exes in hopes of getting a second chance romance. She decides to get an apartment and meets her new roommate Trevor, who is a local firefighter. When Tara asks Trevor for help to reconnect with her exes, he agrees. But Tara's journey is leading him to discover his own new chapter.

While reading this book, I wasn't the biggest fan of the slow-burn. The main characters didn't kiss until about 200 pages in. I felt like it was worth it in the end because they did have very good chemistry from the beginning. Tara is a book worm and likes to read, which I also relate to. Trevor is a great book boyfriend, he really cared about Tara and went out of his way to make



See **Books** on page 8

# Building bridges of support at MCCC

## How Nancy Lucero-Altamirano is giving back to the community

**Destiny Gallina**  
Agora Staff

Nancy Lucero-Altamirano's journey to America was tough.

Lucero-Altamirano came to the United States at a young age with her family, facing language barriers and new culture.

As a first generation, undocumented college student, Lucero-Altamirano attended MCCC then transferred to U of M, where she earned her bachelor's degree in ethnic studies and a master's degree in social work. Lucero-Altamirano is now MCCC's new assistant director of multicultural and community engagement.

Her experience helped inspire her to open a nonprofit organization called Puente, meaning bridge in Spanish. Understanding the complexity of immigration firsthand, she said she was motivated to create a platform that aids both immigrants and those who may not have access to certain resources.

Through Puente, Lucero-Altamirano said she and her team offer a wide range of essential services. These include transportation support, translation assistance, cultural promotion, community advocacy and guidance in navigating resources.

"Everyone has a story, and we should be mindful of that," she said.

Sumary Hernandez-Pinero, Puente co-founder, said she and Lucero-Altamirano saw a need in the community and were ready to help.

"I knew Nancy from church. We saw the community and the work that needed to be done and we wanted to make it better," Hernandez-Pinero said. "We decided to open Puente as a nonprofit to give us access to other resources in the community."

After three years of service, Lucero-Altamirano and Hernandez-Pinero continue to help people who

face language barriers.

One of their key initiatives is scheduling doctor appointments for those who can't speak English and providing translation during these appointments. They also assist with special education evaluations, parent-teacher conferences, housing and apartment application processes, as well as naturalization and citizenship journeys.

The program also offers an extensive variety of assistance, including employment support, help with accessing state benefits through programs such as MI Bridges, immigration and law related guidance, access to health care, educational support and food.

Emily Hernandez-Pinero, the daughter of Sumary, a volunteer at Puente, said she benefited from the program.

"Puente is one of the best things to happen to the community," Hernandez-Pinero said.

Lucero-Altamirano isn't stopping at Puente. She also plans to start groups for students at MCCC that will begin during the winter semester.

She said the groups will provide a safe, supportive community for students who identify as African American or Hispanic and those who are first generation college students or single parents.

The multicultural groups are scheduled to meet on Wednesdays in the S Building.

"I plan to make safe spaces for all of our students, so they know they aren't going through this journey alone," she said.

She said the idea is to offer a platform to connect students, share experiences and uplift one another on their educational journeys.

"I hope that anyone who hears my story, it sheds light on the bigger picture of immigration," Lucero-Altamirano said.



Photos by Destiny Gallina

### ABOVE

Nancy Lucero-Altamirano, center, poses for a photo with students in the S Building.

### RIGHT

Lucero-Altamirano, assistant director of multicultural and community engagement, stands near the Campus Store in the S Building.



For more information, use the QR code above to see an episode of *The Forum* featuring Nancy Lucero-Altamirano.



ALL OUR HEARTS ARE MOVED WHEN WE MEDITATE ON THE WORDS OF GREAT AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN AND WOMEN. THEY COME FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE TO SHARE THEIR WISDOM WITH US. PLEASE TAKE A MOMENT AND READ OVER THESE AMAZING QUOTES.

1957

**MARTIN LUTHER KING JR**

"Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

2018

**ARETHA FRANKLIN**

"We all require and want respect, man or woman, black or white. It's our basic human right."

2013

**MICHAEL JORDAN**

"Obstacles don't have to stop you. If you run into a wall, don't turn around and give up. Figure out how to climb it, go through it, or work around it."

2020

**CORETTA SCOTT KING**

"Hate is too great a burden to bear. It injures the hater more than it injures the hated."

2003

**NELSON MANDELA**

"EDUCATION IS THE MOST POWERFUL WEAPON WHICH YOU CAN USE TO CHANGE THE WORLD."

2014

**KARYN PARSONS**

"Black history isn't a separate history. This is all of our history, this is American history, and we need to understand that."

## WORDS OF WISDOM

### JOIN MCCC AT THESE EVENTS FOR BLACK HISTORY MONTH

**THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 5:30 PM**

LA-Z-BOY CENTER - MEYER THEATER

CREED'S HONEST CONVERSATION: YOU TALK, WE LISTEN  
A "LISTENING SESSION" FACILITATED BY ROBIN WEST SMITH  
SOCIOLOGY INSTRUCTOR AND AUTHOR.

JOIN US TO SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON RACE RELATIONS,  
HEALING AND RECONCILIATION IN OUR COMMUNITY.

CONTACT: PDORCEY@MONROECC.EDU  
OR CALL 734-384-4311.

**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 3:00 PM VIA ZOOM**

HOW ENSLAVED PEOPLE GAINED AN EDUCATION

HOW ENSLAVED PEOPLE GAINED AN EDUCATION

PRESENTED BY ANTHONY BROGDON,

HISTORIAN AND AUTHOR

JOIN ZOOM MEETING

MEETING ID: 975 3853 1306

PASSCODE: 795212

**WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 3 P.M.**

ROBERT S. DUNCANSON SOCIETY

PRESENTED BY PATRICK BARLEY

AND JEFF ALBERGO

WARRICK STUDENT CENTER -

DINING HALL

**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 3 P.M.**

CULTURE AND CURRENT AFFAIRS

RIVER RAISIN LEGACY PROJECT

PRESENTED BY BRIAN EGEN

JOIN ZOOM MEETING:

MEETING ID: 968 1827 6188

PASSCODE: 111219

**WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 7:00 PM**

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER AND FRIENDS

LA-Z-BOY CENTER, MEYER THEATER

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER AND FRIENDS

RECOMMENDED FOR CHILDREN PRE-K - 5TH GRADE

ADMISSION: \$5



Photo by Destiny Gallina

Nancy Lucero-Altamirano, assistant director of multicultural and community engagement, created circles of support to bring diverse students together.

## Support group designed for diverse students

Circles of support designed for African Americans, Latinos, single parents and first-generation students

**Destiny Gallina**  
Agora Staff

Breaking barriers and building bridges, MCCC proudly presents the circles of support program, a transformative initiative created by Nancy Lucero-Altamirano.

The circles of support program provide students and diverse groups with welcoming and supportive spaces.

The groups are meant for support and for people to come together, Lucero-Altamirano said.

These circles aim to foster open communication, build connections, and address unique challenges faced by different individuals.

By forming circles around common threads like cultural backgrounds or being a single parent, participants can engage in meaningful discussions and find support from other students who can relate to their specific situations.

Circles of support is an open space for people to come and have conversation and connect, Lucero-Altamirano said.

These circles not only help student broaden their social and professional networks but also encourage collaborations and interaction with fellow students they might not have otherwise connected with.

The different circles available include Black Excellence, Latinos Unidos, Single Parent Scholars, and First-Generation College Student Trailblazers.

Each group meets on specific Wednesdays of the month, providing regular opportunities for participants to come together, share their stories, and support one another.

The meetings take place in the Multicultural center, located in the work student center building, from 12:30 to 1:30, starting in February.



## Pet of the month

Shelby, a 2-year old Siberian Husky mix available for adoption at the Humane Society of Monroe County, located at 911 S. Raisinville Road, in Monroe.

The shelter has dogs and cats in need of good homes. Each adopted animal comes with all shots, microchip and paperwork.

For more information or to volunteer, contact Jackie at [jackie@monroe-humane.org](mailto:jackie@monroe-humane.org).

Photo by Sidney Robison

# One Book program to kickoff next month

Reese Bowling  
Agora Staff

Every year, One Book, One Community, a long-standing program in Monroe County, urges local residents to read from a book by a major author over a series of free programs.

This year, the group will be reading and discussing Angeline Boulley's inaugural novel, "Firekeeper's Daughter."

Elizabeth Hartig, faculty reference librarian, said once the book is selected, the author is invited to a month-long celebration of their work.

Hartig said through the program, The Great Michigan Read, presented by Michigan Humanities, libraries, universities and schools across the state are reading this book.

"Firekeeper's Daughter" was published in March 2021 and is a New York Times best seller, 2021 Goodreads Choice Award winner and winner of the 2022 Edgar Allan Poe Award for Best Young Adult Novel.

Boulley's book is available in print, ebook, audiobook and e-audiobook through the Monroe County Library System.

"Angeline Boulley is the author and she is from Michigan," Hartig said. "The story is set in Michigan and was picked up by Netflix. They're going to make either a movie or a TV show about it."

An excerpt posted on the One

Book, One Community page on MCCC's website, "Boulley paints a detailed portrait of Daunis Fontaine, a young Sault Ste. Marie high school senior who is caught up between two worlds and many aspects of her life. She is part of two families – her father's Ojibwe Firekeeper family and her mother's Fontaine family of local prominence."

According to Michele Toll, assistant professor of English, the program started as "The Big Read" in 2007 with a focus on classics and changed to "One Book, One Community" in 2011 with a selection of more contemporary books.

"This year, we are partnered with The Michigan Humanities Council and they have gave us a lot of grants to do our programs along with no cost copies of the book," Toll said.

Toll describes the program as an effort for everyone in the county to read the same book and discuss how the book relates to the community. She explained why she enjoys this year's selection.

"I think the characters in the book are really special," she said. "The protagonist, Daunis, seems like the kind of young woman that every teacher would want for a student. She's curious and goes with her gut. She's brave."

Toll said one aspect of the program is that the community enjoys meeting the author and getting their book signed.

The kickoff event for One Book,

One Community is planned for Tuesday, March 12 at the MCCC Library in the Campbell Academic Center from 6-8 p.m. featuring Michigan author Sally Cole-Mish.

"We are working with The Library of the Great Lakes, which is an organization which highlights books about the Great Lakes. Sally Cole-Mish is from Michigan as well and her book, 'The Best Part of Us,' really compliments 'Firekeeper's Daughter,'" Hartig added.

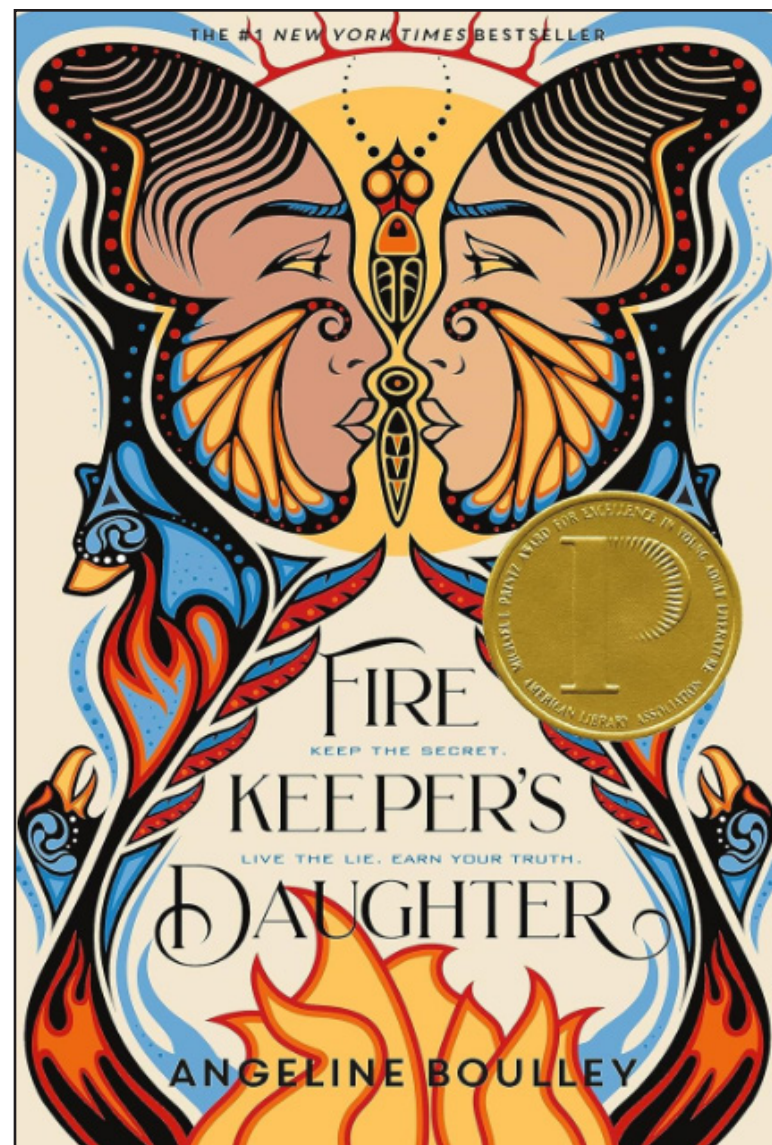
Boulley will be on campus Tuesday, March 19 at 7 p.m. in the Meyer Theater in the La-Z-Boy Center to discuss her book, "Firekeeper's Daughter."

Other events are planned throughout the month of March, featuring several professors, including MCCC faculty.

Monday, March 18 – Dr. Ken Mohny, professor of Anthropology, will have a presentation on "Small Things not Forgotten: Reflecting on the Past and Present" from 1-2 p.m. in the Campbell Learning Resources Center, Room C-224.

Monday, March 18 – Dr. David Erban, professor of Language and Literature at the University of Toledo, will present "Origins of Native Americans" from 3-4 p.m. in the Campbell Learning Resources Center, Room C-224.

Wednesday, March 27 – Dan Wood, professor of Criminal Justice, will talk about "Criminal Jus-



tice Topics in 'Firekeeper's Daughter'" from 2-3 p.m. in the Campbell Learning Resources Center, Room C-224.

For more information, contact Michele Toll at mpersin@monroeccc.edu or at 734-384-4336 (office)

or Elizabeth Hartig at ehartig@monroeccc.edu or at 734-384-4612 (office). Information is also available on the college website under One Book, One Community at <https://www.monroeccc.edu/one-book-one-community/2024>.

## More students now qualify for Michigan Reconnect

Jamie Hunt  
Agora Staff

Everyone who's attended or considered enrolling in college understands that tuition can be a difficult step toward their education, and with the cost of living steadily rising, not many can afford to attend college.

This is where Michigan's Reconnect pro-

gram can come of use. Prior to Fall 2023, the minimum age required to apply to this program was 25. However, the state has recently lowered this age requirement to 21.

This program is put in place to aid Michigan residents in attending community college at a lower cost with free tuition for students within the district, or up to \$1,500 towards eligible training programs.

This program is only available to students as young as 21-24 for a limited time and will go back to an age minimum of 25 by Nov. 15 of this year.

Michigan Reconnect lowering the age requirement provides opportunities for both enrolled students and individuals who may need help affording tuition.

Apart from the specified age, applicants must meet other requirements concerning education and residency within the state of Michigan.

To view these requirements as well as any additional information, those who are interested can visit the page at [www.monroeccc.edu/reconnect](http://www.monroeccc.edu/reconnect).

# Amanda Althouse wins Fall 2023 Enriching Lives Award

**Jamie Hunt**  
Agora Staff

The Enriching Lives Performance Award is an award given out to staff here at Monroe Community College once every semester. This award is dedicated to someone who commits themselves to making positive changes within the college and strives to help students succeed through incorporating MCCC's mission into their work.

In Fall 2023, this award broke college records by seeing the largest number of nominees recorded.

The recipient of the Fall 2023 Enriching Lives Performance Award was Amanda Althouse, coordinator of student success. She began her position in January 2023.

Tutoring saw a positive increase in appointments going from about 600 in the Fall of 2022, to around 1,100 in Fall 2023 with the plan to keep moving forward and making improvements.

"My biggest goal is just working towards reaching a student wherever they're at and making sure they have the support that they need," Althouse said.

She expressed immense gratitude having received this award and made sure to thank her team for all the hard work they've put forward.

"I wouldn't be able to do anything without this group," Althouse said.

Althouse wanted to thank the students and people who nominated her.

"I would definitely first say thank you," Althouse said. "To be thought of like that is really motivating and powerful and I really, sincerely appreciate it."

Althouse also wanted to encourage students



Amanda Althouse stands with her Enriching Lives Award.

Photo by Jamie Hunt

to help one another.

"I would also just say that there's so many people on this campus working so hard, and students working so hard that we just need to take a minute and really make sure we're al-

ways encouraging each other to be going for that next thing," Althouse said.

Althouse also expressed interest in hearing directly from students to gain perspective on what she and her team can work towards im-

proving or adding in order to benefit students. She welcomes students to reach out with suggestions either at the student success center or emailing her with ideas that are relevant and helpful.

# Enrollment up for the winter semester

## Winter 2024 enrollment up 52 over this point last year with 2,394 students

**Jamie Hunt**  
Agora Staff

With the beginning of 2024 comes the winter semester here at Monroe County Community College. The start of a new semester is always a point of change here on campus for professors and students, both returning and first time enrollments.

When it comes to comparing the Winter se-

mesters of 2023 and 2024, this year saw an increase in the number of students attending MCCC.

As for the total number of students enrolled at the college, there are 52 more students enrolled for the Winter 2024 semester than 2023, bringing the overall number to 2,394.

Out of all the areas of enrollment, students enrolling in college for the first time saw the

most change; going from 227 in 2023 to 271 in 2024.

The number of students who are continuing their enrollment to MCCC on the other hand saw a slight decrease. However, this decline only being made by 3 students means that a large majority, that being 1,858, will continue their education within the college.

This positive increase in enrollment can be attributed to the changes made on campus this past year aimed at making the process of enrollment easier for students.

Administration not only made communication with students more accessible and timely

but also worked hard to build strong connections with high schools in the area, broadening the ability for individuals to be dual enrolled.

This communication also included college staff reaching out to students who had yet to register for classes during the winter semester.

The efforts made by staff here at MCCC by focusing more on accessibility and efficient communication has seemingly paid off. With this comes more opportunities for individuals to receive higher education and hopefully reduced stress whilst getting accustomed to college life.

# MCCC working to revise Emergency Response Plan

David Topolewski  
Agora Staff

A group of faculty members and administrators have joined to revise and update MCCC's Emergency Response Plan.

The current ERP has been put to the test over the past year, and at times, the execution of the plan has faced criticism from faculty members.

As reported by the Agora in April of 2023, MCCC received a bomb threat that was deemed a hoax. Then, in July of the same year, an emergency response to an electrical fire in the H Building was delayed due to a fire alarm being set to test during the college's annual system maintenance.

Curtis Creagh, vice president of finance and administration, said the ERP, which is included in the Safety Services department, is included in his division.

Creagh said he is accountable for reviewing the ERP and making sure it is "updated for accuracy, relevance, and reflecting comprehensive perspective for a campus response."

Through conversations with Cox, Creagh said it was clear the plan needed to be updated.

"The plan included information that needed updating, as well as, a fresher look to ensure it reflects current practices for handling and responding to current day emergency

concerns.

Creagh selected MCCC Chief of Security Services, Troy Cox, to lead the effort of revising the ERP.

"Troy is experienced in this area of response, accepts and understands his role as leading and directing this effort, and engages with a diverse group or team with whom he can vet the plan, discuss ideas and practices, and conclude on an updated plan, accordingly," Creagh said.

Patrick Wise, professor of psychology, is also a member of the group that has been tapped to update the ERP.

Wise said his background will bring a lot to the group in its pursuit of developing a more up-to-date emergency response.

Before coming to MCCC, Wise said that he worked as the program manager for assessment, emergency services, and the Link Crisis Hotline for a county behavioral health agency for 11 years.

"My responsibilities were to manage, provide direct service, and train professionals/paraprofessionals in these areas," Wise said. "One area of responsibility was to manage, assess, and train clinicians to assess people who were a threat to themselves and others."

During his time with the county behavioral agency, he said he assisted, supervised or reviewed more than 2,000 cases and directly as-

sessed over 1,000 cases.

Wise said he believes his previous work makes him a valuable asset to the group, and that a main goal of his is to make sure the plan is comprehensive – especially when it comes to active shooter scenarios, but he said the ERP is about more than just human created problems.

"We need to have emergency plans, but not just for active shooters," he said. "There are from a framework standpoint other threats, you have natural and hazardous situations – that are human related or not – a tornado would be natural, a meltdown at Fermi would be hazardous," he said.

Wise said the delay in updating plans is not solely related to MCCC, but rather an issue across the board.

"Plans usually sit on shelves and most people don't know what they say and people don't know what they say and they are not routinely reevaluated and they are not routinely practiced," he said.

Wise acknowledged that the campus does fire drills, saying "I don't want to imply we don't do anything," but he wants to prioritize honing the ERP's chain of command.

"Where is the handoff to state and federal authorities, where do we go? So, the plan has to incorporate a number of things," he said.

As the group works to update the ERP, Creagh said "important goals



File Photo

Patrick Wise, professor of psychology, presents a student an award during Honors Night in 2022. Wise, who has a background in managing emergency situations, is a member of a group at MCCC tapped to update the college's Emergency Response Plan.

in emergency management include saving lives, protecting property, and clear communication."

"We are prepared to address some emergencies now and strive to prepare for others. Recognizing this, we have in place, the College's Cabinet administration, a team with diverse experience in managing

their respective areas of campus, a threat assessment and emergency management team, and a supporting staff from other parts of campus."

Chief of Security Services Troy Cox responses were pending review at the time of this article's deadline.

## Four books to read for Valentine's Day

BOOKS: From page 3

her feel better whenever she felt down. Overall, I really enjoyed this book and I feel that it is perfect for Valentine's Day.

### The Do-Over by Lynn Painter

After living through a terrible Valentine's Day, Emilie Hornby escapes to her grandmother's house for some comfort. She passes out on the couch, but when she wakes up, she's back home in her own bed and it's Valentine's Day all over again

and again. Emilie is stuck in some sort of time loop nightmare that she can't wake up from as she re-watches her boyfriend, Josh, cheat on her day after day. In addition to Josh's recurring infidelity, Emilie can't get away from Nick, who she keeps running into.

This book was interesting to read. I really liked the concept of how Emilie had to relive the same day over again. She always tried to find a way to break the rotation and make different decisions.

Nick is a grumpy guy who doesn't believe in love and hates Valentine's Day. It was fun to see Emilie have fun with him and try to cheer him up each day. This was my first Lynn Painter book. I thought she did a great job portraying these characters.

### Love, Theoretically by Ali Hazelwood

By day, physicist Elsie Hannaway is an adjunct professor, grading labs and teaching thermodynamics. When she's not in the lab, Elsie of-

fers her services as a fake girlfriend, tapping into her people pleasing skills and giving her clients whatever they need. Jack Smith, the annoyingly attractive, older brother of her favorite client, turns out to be the cold-hearted physicist who ruined her mentor's career. Jack now sits on the hiring committee at MIT, right between Elsie and her dream job.

Ali Hazelwood is my favorite romance author, so I was excited when she released this book. I real-

ly like how she focuses on STEM empowered women and their experiences in a male-dominated career. I really like the tension and dynamic between Elsie and Jack. There were moments where I was laughing but also crying. Jack was always attentive to Elsie and cared about her deeply. The plot wasn't very fast or slow, it was just the right pace for me.

Overall, I loved this book and it's probably one of my favorites from Hazelwood.



## Caption Contest Recipients



Photos by Maggie Sandefur

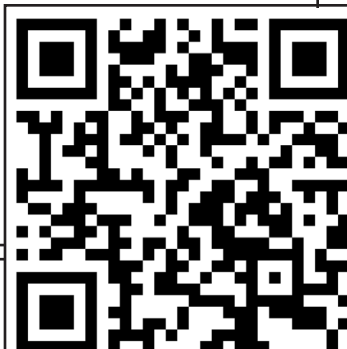
President Kojo A. Quartey on Feb. 2 presents David Peck, left photo, and Kennedy Bowling, right photo, \$50 gift cards after winning the Agora's caption contest featured in its Dec. 4, 2023, zine.

## Paragon Awards



Photo by Maggie Sandefur

The MCCC marketing team won two Paragon Awards from the National Council for Marketing & Public Relations for their Pathway for Every Dreamer print ad and their Online MCCC Viewbook in the Digital Electronic Media/E-publications category. They will learn whether they won bronze, silver or gold at NCM-PR's national conference, scheduled for March 14-16 in Seattle.



Use the QR code attached, to the right, to watch our first episode of the semester, "The Forum: Meet the new Agora staff."

## Self-defense on campus



Photo by Destiny Gallina

Frank Stasa III wraps his arm around Olivia Letray, playing the role of aggressor. Mark Bergmooser, assistant professor of communication, held a Women's Self Defense seminar on Feb. 6 in the H Building.



Photo by Reese Bowling

Edmund La Clair, associate professor of history, is the new curator of the Monroe County Labor History Museum in downtown Monroe.

## New curator wants to bring life to history museum

### La Clair appointed curator of Monroe Labor History Museum in January

**Layla Pavlick**  
For the Agora

MCCC students have the opportunity to learn Monroe history with Edmund La Clair, the new curator for Monroe County Labor History Museum.

In January La Clair, associate professor of history was offered the position as Curator at the Monroe County Labor History Museum. He had expressed interest about the museum to Board of Trustees member Trent Varva.

La Clair has a long history of working at museums. Before La Clair came to work at MCCC 16 years ago, he was working at the

Monroe County Historical Museum. He places students at both the Monroe County Historical Museum and River Raisin National Battlefield as interns.

“I’ve done internships myself at the Monroe County Museum which is why I believe so strongly in internships” La Clair said. “It’s sort of how I was able to get the job here at the community college.”

Varva said he recruited La Clair and invited him to museum meetings.

Varva said that La Clair will bring unique perspectives to the museum and provide knowledge to the community.

Varva encourages that people come and check out the museum as labor history is very important.

La Clair was interested in this position because he is a proponent of history. He also thinks there is a need for the community to give credit to the labor workers who are a part of Monroe’s history.

“We need to do more to acknowledge and share the stories of the people who really built Monroe” La Clair said, “We have a long history of labor in Monroe that people don’t even know about.”

Beverly Tomek, dean of Humanities and Social Sciences Division, believes that La Clair’s involve-

ment with the museum will bring opportunities to students on MCCC campus.

“It gives him connections that he can then use to help our students,” Tomek said, “so that our students can get new learning experiences.”

La Clair talked about the internships he has provided to his students at the battlefield and he now hopes to do the same at the museum. He said he thinks students planning on going into archival work would benefit from an internship at the museum.

He said this partnership would benefit the community by preserving and providing access to the

county’s history – a history that most are unfamiliar with.

La Clair stresses that the museum is always looking for volunteers, especially on Saturdays where members of the Board of Trustees dedicate their own time in order to keep the doors open.

“I want to talk to people who have been involved in labor,” La Clair said, “I want to save those stories before they are lost.”

For more information on internship opportunities, contact Edmund La Clair, associate professor of history, at [elaclair@monroecc.edu](mailto:elaclair@monroecc.edu) or 734-384-4238.

# Making people scream creates scary sense of satisfaction

## Haunt actor shares wickedly scary experiences from spooky season

**Reese Bowling**  
Agora Staff

Months before the spooky season begins, haunt actors like me are training and preparing for some wicked weekends.

In just a few months, I'll be back in costume preparing to scare for a halfway to haunt event happening in May.

October 2023 marked my first year as a haunt actor. A group of friends and I portrayed sinister clowns at Spooky's Haunted Attractions, an indoor event held at Our House Games, 1211 S. Monroe St.

I created a creepy clown named Malo. Dressed in a black and white jumpsuit splattered with paint to look like bloody handprints, Malo carried a circus horn in one hand and a prop knife in the other. Needless to say, he was a real cut-up with the crowd.

I spent two weekends making guests scream.

It's important to stay hydrated when you're scaring people for hours. Your throat can get dry very quickly, making it difficult to yell. Without a voice, it's tough to scare folks.

I quickly learned from my peers in the haunt industry there are a list of dos and don'ts, such as don't stress over it, not everyone is going to be scared so just move on to the next group. Another important don't is not to scream in someone's ear. You don't want them going deaf halfway through the attraction and

let's be real, it's annoying.

And then there are the things to do:

Do stay out of punching range, you don't want the blood on your costume to be real.

Do pay attention to problem guests. There are times when guests can be too aggressive. It's a good rule of thumb to get a description of this person and share it with the other actors so they can be prepared.

There's so much that goes into a night of haunting. It takes a great deal of energy to jump out of the shadows and spook your guests while trying to be successful as an entertainer. Your job is to scare people - lots of people, from children to adults. I have to admit, one of the most rewarding aspects of my first haunt was seeing grown men cry.

As weird as it may sound, you need to be prepared for rude people and those trying to scare you, so it's important to stay in character. People will call you names, curse at you and might even try to touch you. Keep moving and focus on the scare.

When people get frightened, their bodies release adrenaline and that often gives them an energy boost. They get in a hurry to exit the room or they stand in the middle of it, so scared they refuse to move. One girl was so afraid, she literally jumped out of her shoes and hid behind her four friends. That level of fright gives this haunt actor a scary sense of satisfaction.



Photo by Kennedy Bowling

Reese Bowling, dressed as Malo the clown, a character he created, works as a haunt actor in the fall.

## News Brief

### Listening session scheduled for Feb. 15

MCCC, the Coalition for Racial Equality, Equity and Diversity and the NAACP of Monroe County are hosting a session called "LISTEN" for Black History Month.

The session is for anyone who wants to share their thoughts on race relations, healing and reconciliation in the community.

Robin West Smith, adjunct instructor of sociology at MCCC, will facilitate the listening session. West also works at Wayne State University's Department of Urban Studies and Planning.

She is the founder and CEO of the WADE Center for Self Devel-

opment.

The free event is planned for Thursday, Feb 15, at 5:30 p.m. on MCCC campus at the Meyer Theater.

No registration is needed and it is open to the public.

For more information, contact Penny Dorcey, executive assistant to MCCC's president and Board of Trustees, at pdorcey@monroeccc.edu or 734-384-4311.

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**Ashley Atkins**  
Assistant Editor



In a month that celebrates love I have asked myself many times in my life, "Who is the most important person to love?" A new relationship I started in 2022 inspired me to search once again where love starts. Not everyone may agree that love starts with ourselves but here is a poem I wrote about my journey to love.



### I Love ME

The first time I heard him say those words I laughed, don't you mean to say I love you?

I do love you, he replies, but I also love ME.

The words ponder through me every time he says those words.

I don't know how to love ME, it feels wrong to say something  
you never felt towards yourself.

I love ME is such a powerful statement, how can I love ME?

What is there to love about ME?

My mind swirls through all the negative things ever told to me  
that made me believe I wasn't good enough to love,  
so how can I love ME.



Slowly he showed ME how important I truly was,  
slowly he helped ME see my worth,  
slowly he helps ME to heal the pain of the past.

I can see myself in a more positive light. I realize love starts with ME,  
I can't give all the love I have if I don't save some for ME.

I take the words of the past and push them behind me  
so I can see what is right in front of ME.

He stands there smiling with open arms.

I love you, he whispers in my ear and at that moment  
I realize that not only do I love him too, but I left some love  
for the one person I have never given love to before.

I look up at him and smile, I love ME,  
I tell him the beaming smile he gives back tells me all I need to know  
in that moment, he is so proud of ME.

I say those words more and more and with each passing day  
I begin to actually believe them.

How powerful three little words can be.



I LOVE ME!