



The Big Gig!

Crowd gathers at Meyer Theater for annual blues concert

Pages 6-7



Conflicting views, conflicting statements at board meeting

Jamie Hunt

Agora staff

During the Board of Trustees meeting Feb. 26, the conversation of restroom policies at MCCC made a return with more than just students feeling a concern for safety.

President Kojo Quartey said he reached out to GSA advisors following the Jan. 22 meeting, receiving no response. During that meeting several members of the community complained about the college's restroom policy while students and faculty came in support.

Jenna Bazzell and Melissa Grey, GSA co-advisers, disagreed with Quartey.

"The GSA co-advisors have never received an invitation from you to meet about this," Grey said. "You reached out to a GSA co-chair, who has replied to you."

Bazzell then emphasized Quartey's lack of communication.

"But you have never reached out to its advisors," Bazzell said.

Aaron Mason, chair of the Board, took the floor and referenced the Jan. 22 meeting while addressing the board made it clear that all members including President Kojo Quartey had looked into the concerns previously raised.

Mason proceeded to share his own brief understanding of the topic, stressing that his words were his own and not the board itself.

"Regardless of your personal views, interpretation of where case law was before this moment or how you may have solved the problem better. Our legislators and governor have decided to codify into law a gender identity based right to access," Mason said.

Later describing that the definition of gender may be seen differently based on the person however



Photo by Mick Valentino

Crowd members attend Board of Trustees meeting in support of the LGBTQ+ community

when it comes to restrooms the label of woman or man is determined by what each individual most closely identifies as.

During this short speech, Mason also expressed a desire for employees to be trained on the matter of gender identity, as well as making changes on campus directed toward the comfort of every student and faculty member.

"I told Dr. Quartey that I would be interested in knowing whether there are any other achievable facility possibilities that would offer more privacy such as ways to reduce gaps in stalls," he said.

Mason also made a point that it is important for gender neutral restrooms to not be seen as a substitute, rather an option for everyone to maximize safety and comfort.

Though it was his own words, this brief summary of understanding allowed listeners a bit of insight on the discussions surrounding these concerns.

He ended this summary acknowledging Quartey's effort to navigate the situation, admitting awareness for divide within the community surrounding this subject as well as a need for more to be done given concerns regarding safety and discrimination.

Mason then gave a final call for closing delegations, inviting members from the audience to speak one by one as they were called to the mic.

Out of the 12 who participated in delegations, 11 were in regards to the restroom policy at MCCC.

Students of varying gender identities took turns sharing their concerns when it came to harassment and discrimination on campus.

Referencing Nex Benedict, a 16 year old transgender student who was brutally beaten in a public restroom at their high school in Oklahoma, later dying from their injuries.

"This anti-trans rhetoric against

people using the bathroom of their choice leads to discriminatory crimes against LGBTQ+ individuals," said Sydney Godfrey.

Multiple students spoke up about their experiences, many of which recounted being mistreated by their peers. Being asked to leave the restrooms, questioned on their belonging, and glared at.

One student, Spencer Lyke, brought to light the unique issues intersex students face in public restrooms given that people who are intersex are biologically both sexes.

Lyke referenced Quartey's reaction when recounting the harassment they faced.

"Dr. Quartey approached me and asked me to tell him the situation, I described the entire event to him," Lyke said, "rather than help me file a report or give me instructions on how to do so, he gave me the location of other gender neutral bathrooms on campus and recommended I use those instead."

After the first board meeting where Lyke had referenced this harassment, they had been approached by Scott Behrens, vice president of enrollment management and student success.

"I was told an investigation would be open to discover why my experience wasn't reported, since then I have heard no confirmation of the investigation opening and have not been contacted by either Title 9 Coordinators," they said.

Jenna Bazzell and Melissa Grey, advisers of the GSA, spoke to the board not as faculty but as members of both the Monroe and LGBTQ+ community.

"Our concerns are beyond signs," Grey said.

Claimed that the administration has not confronted transphobia and

instead colluded with baseless fears. The two pointed out that the administration has taken down signs and banners that called for inclusivity and an end to harassment.

Only one of the commenters concerned over policies was against inclusivity for trans students, Sanda Bedee.

Bedee had been present for both meetings where this topic had been discussed. Actively speaking against the inclusive restroom policy during the first meeting, and returning to ask for updates on a separate meeting on Feb. 16.

"I really didn't wanna speak but like I figured you guys would cover that. What we discussed February 16th. Do we have.. Anything?" she said.

It was later revealed that while Quartey was able to meet with Bedee, a citizen who has openly expressed her disagreement with inclusive policies, he was unable to meet with GSA.

Quartey claimed to have reached out to GSA advisors, receiving no response. Bazzell and Grey, after being permitted to approach the board, shared their perspective.

This perspective points out contradictions made by Quartey. "The GSA co-advisors have never received an invitation from you to meet about this" Grey said. "You reached out to a GSA co-chair, who has replied to you,"

"But you have never reached out to its advisors," said Bazzell.

Mason had stepped in at this time, bringing public comment and the discussions that followed to a close, with the president giving a last reply before the board moved on.

"I'd like to meet with GSA," said Quartey.

Transphobia on campus cannot be ignored any longer

Bigotry at MCCC is blatantly disregarded

I assumed there would be another batch of protesters at this Board of Trustees meeting. I expected a new round of foolishness and asinine arguments. I genuinely expected to sit back and listen to protester after protester cry about their self-victimization and supposed threatened safety caused by a trans person in the same bathroom as them.

What I saw, though, were students and staff pouring their hearts out in front of the board. There were no arguments. No verbal devolution and no words toward dehumanization.

This meeting took place on Feb. 26, which was about a month after the first public circus of a Board of Trustees meeting. Unlike the previous meeting, the room was not filled with protesters trying to bastardize the transgender community.

To me, there was an air of disinterest the whole meeting. An air of disinterest during a moment of passion and bravery and genuine pride from students who just want to exist in peace. Students who want to



Mick Valentino
Agora Staff

feel safe on their campus. Students who are caught up in an argument that shouldn't exist.

Instead of arguments and protests, there was a call for safety. A call for the better treatment of gender diverse students facing a backlash that they should have never faced. It was a plea for support.

And to my surprise, the plea was answered— yet it was answered with law. When speaking on the discrimination students faced on campus, Kojo Quartey, president of our college, brought up the Elliott-Larsen Act. The Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act prohibits discrimination in

Michigan, including discrimination on the basis of gender identity.

“As a public institution, let me make this clear, we cannot circumvent or disregard the law,” Quartey said. “The Elliott-Larsen Act is clear.”

This act of support is the law, our president said. But if it wasn't the law, where would we be? If this protection against discrimination wasn't legally mandatory, would there still be protection at all?

What if we could just show unwavering support for the marginalized community under attack? What if, law or not, we stood up for the students who just want to feel safe? What if we bypassed the safety of claiming legality and bravely advocated for acceptance and equality?

I would like to know why the

“This has been a transphobic attack on the students of this college.”

blatant transphobia on our campus has not been called out. Why haven't we used

the word that explains what's happening here in our bathrooms and on campus? This is transphobia. This has been a transphobic attack on the students of this college.

The email Quartey sent on Feb. 29 regarding the affirmation of everyone was a good start, I suppose. But it wasn't specifically for the students under attack. It wasn't a public show of support for the people who needed to hear it. It felt disingenuous and performative. I want to know what comes next, though. Is that where the support stops? I've been told that actions speak louder than words and I want to know why actual action hasn't happened.

If there's a real, actual need to

make the students feel safe and welcome, then don't appease the protesters. Don't listen to their arguments and entertain their fears that aren't based in reality. Don't fan the fire of misinformation and mindlessness.

We need to stand up against those who refuse to move forward and we need to advocate for our gender-diverse community members. I want a clear show of support specifically for the LGBTQ+ people on campus. It's quite straightforward. Silence is compliance, and I haven't heard a word of support toward those who are affected by this mess.

“I am not your enemy and I don't think we're each other's enemy,” Quartey said.

You're right. We're not enemies. There are no enemies here in this battle for progression and equality. There's only victims and aggressors. And if you're conciliating the aggressors, you've become one.

The Agora

Editors

Maggie Sandefur
Ashley Atkins

Staff

Mick Valentino
Destiny Gallina
David Topolewski

Reese Bowling
Sidney Robison
Jamie Hunt

Adviser

Matthew Bird-Meyer

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@monroeccc.edu.

Agora

mcccagora.com

Get Involved With Your Student Newspaper

- Reporting
- Writing
- Photography
- Videography
- Broadcasting
- Illustration and Design

Email: agora@monroeccc.edu

Call: 734-384-4288

Robin West Smith's journey to empowerment

Lindsey Mata
For the Agora

The little girl stood next to her mother at the bus stop, waiting to go to a second-hand clothes store. The snow gently fell and as she looked to the sky, her sight landed on her mother who had tears rolling down her face. She knew her thoughts. Being on state assistance with her kids, she didn't know how they were going to survive.

The little girl reached up and tightly held her mother's hand.

"Ma, you are always gonna be my hero. No matter what we go through," she said.

As they stood there in silence for a moment, Robin West Smith remembered whispering a prayer to herself, "God if I can keep my brain functioning and my arms and legs functioning, promise, promise, I will never have to do what my mother is doing right now."

West Smith gained the strength that her mother had in her childhood and uses it to empower other women. In 2011, she joined Professional Woman Network, otherwise known as PWN, an organization in Louisville, Kentucky, that helps build confidence and teaches women to become trainers and consultants. She aims to teach other women to be strong leaders by sharing her personal life experiences.

At 66 years old, West Smith has had multiple career changes such as a corporate supervisor and an usher for the Fisher Theatre. She is currently a sociology professor at MCCC but found a passion for helping other women through motivational speaking.

Her post-secondary education began at Wayne County Community College, but a job prevented her from finishing her degree. She eventually continued her education at Wayne State University where she earned her master's degrees in urban planning and sociology.

West Smith was born and raised in the heart of Detroit where the neighborhood was your family and the streetlights told you when to head home. She said growing up and working in this area sparked a need to understand the individuals with whom she had to interact.



Robin West Smith poses in the C-Building. West Smith is a sociology professor at MCCC.

Photo by Mick Valentino

West Smith worked at Electronic Data Systems for 28 years until she saw the opportunity for a career change.

"When corporate America told me, 'We're done with you,' for about 30 days I was in the wilderness," West Smith said. "And then I saw this little advertisement in the back of a magazine I read every month called Black Enterprise."

The advertisement was titled Professional Woman Network and read, "Would you like to learn how to train people?"

That same afternoon, she was on the phone with a woman named Linda Ellis Eastman, the CEO of PWN, which was the start of a friendship and motivational speaking career lasting over 20 years.

"I really like teaching," West Smith said. "Because maybe young

people out here need to know these things. Maybe people aren't telling them the things they should be hearing and understanding to help see themselves in society."

West Smith said too many women are apprehensive in professional settings. They feel as if other people's needs come before their own. She wants to help them gain confidence and a voice as she used to feel the same way.

"I did not realize the value I brought to different things," she said. "One day, I woke up and started listening to my own damn speeches."

PWN conferences are held once a year with multiple speakers covering various topics from building self-confidence to overcoming toxic relationships. West Smith said she quickly went from an audience member to a speaker and eventually

an author.

Eastman is a consistent audience member for West Smith's speeches. She said West Smith's knowledge is just one reason why she captivates the audience.

"There is always such a strong, positive response to Robin's speeches," Eastman said. "People come up to give her hugs and share their personal experiences with her."

West Smith's daughter, Jenifer Daniels, had a similar response.

"I was surprised by the way other people responded to her," Daniels said. "When I was younger, it would be like, 'Oh God lady, you don't know what you're talking about,' but she does."

West Smith always had strong female role models.

She uses them and their words as inspirations for her speeches — espe-

cially her mother.

"She is my hero," she said. "I am who I am because of her and not in spite of her."

In West Smith's book, "Transformation: Reinventing the Woman Within," she wrote a chapter about her mother and the lessons she taught her, earning her the Professional Woman Network Literary Award in 2011 for that chapter.

Today, West Smith walks into class with a designer purse dangling from her arm, boasting you'll never see her wear the same outfit twice. Her lessons are packed with personal experiences that show students that not every life path will be linear.

"I did not think this is where I'm gonna be, but damn I'm glad I made that right turn," she said.

MCCC student leaps into creating graphic novel

Cousins come together to produce a fantasy story about frogs

Maggie Sandefur
Agora Editor

A student at MCCC is working with his cousin on a graphic novel about frogs seeking revenge.

Xander Beyer, 20, and Dominic Albanys, 22, have been creating their graphic novel “The Pond” since 2020 and are now anticipating the release.

Beyer, a student at MCCC, said the inspiration for the story came from a character Albanys created while playing Dungeons & Dragons.

“We didn’t think it was gonna go anywhere and then eventually, it turned into— now we have a full issue and we’re working on the second one with an outline for the third on the way,” Beyer said.

The story is described by Beyer and Albanys as a high-fantasy revenge plot that features samurai

frogs. It revolves around an island called Sheora and takes readers through the journey of Skippy’s, the main characters, life.

Albanys, an artist from Michigan, describes Skippy’s journey as an internal conflict between reverting to his old ways and becoming a better version of himself.

Beyer said Skippy is a character who isn’t always good, but is necessary to keep different communities at ease.

“The Pond” has not been released yet, but Beyer said they hope to get it out before summer.

Beyer said they are in the process of self-publishing and are currently promoting “The Pond” before releasing it.

Beyer said they plan on making the graphic novel available in two different ways— physical and digital copies. He said it will potentially

be available on Amazon.

Albanys also said they plan on sending the first issue free to anyone who signs up for their email list.

Albanys said the comic will be done in a hand drawn style to create a more realistic feeling.

“It’s all gonna be hand drawn because I want it to feel like I’m sitting, like, in class with you and I pass you a story, you know, because I’m bored in class, like ‘hey, read this,’” Albanys said.

He said he and Albanys wanted the opportunity to create something together since they had never done it before. Beyer said he had always loved writing and since Albanys is an artist, they were excited to write something they both wanted to see.

“Essentially we wanted to create something together for a very long time because I’ve been writing my entire life and he’s been drawing,”



Courtesy of Dominic Albanys

Beyer said.

Albanys said he hopes people give “The Pond” a chance.

“Just read it, you know?” Albanys

said.

The official Instagram page for “The Pond” is @the_pond_kingdom.

Hunger for education

Lessons shared by author, historian Anthony Brogdon

Ashley Atkins
Assistant Editor

A history lesson about the love of learning and how gaining an education was worth risking one’s life is what historian and author Anthony Brogdon presented to an audience Tuesday afternoon.

Brogdon gave a presentation on his book, “Black Business Book: Over 200 Facts With Emphasis on the History of Black Business in America 1800’s – 1960.”

The stories of what many slaves had to go through to get an education are presented as short summaries in Brogdon’s book.

Brogdon said, “I offer the facts without commentary to get straight to the point. I even number them to easily point to the reference section.”

He would pause briefly while reading so listeners could process the information being presented.

Reading from the third chapter, Brogdon said, “Even with the harsh conditions of slavery, Black people wanted to learn how to read, write and get a skill.”

He said they learned by teaching each other, their families and fellow slaves.

Brogdon read how slaves endured abuse and even faced death for their learning, but this did not stop them from continuing.

He read a story about Zack Hubert, a young boy from Georgia who learned to read and write because as a young boy, he was friends with the master’s son.

He said Hubert realized the importance of education and vowed if he ever gained his freedom, he would teach his children to read and write. All 12 of his children would go on to graduate college.

Brogdon told of the account of John Berry Meachum, a former

slave who started a school in 1825. For the safety of his students, he built a raft and named it Floating Freedom School as he taught while they floated up and down the Mississippi River.

Black Americans who were enslaved and then freed fought for their education and earned degrees as doctors, lawyers and other professional specialties. Brogdon used his book to show how they used these degrees to help further the education process for their fellow Black Americans.

Brogdon said there are Black Americans who opened businesses in the 1800’s that are still around today. R.H. Boyd Publishing was founded in 1896 by Rev. Dr. Richard Henry Boyd and is still publishing in Nashville, Tennessee where it started. E.E. Ward Moving & Storage was founded in 1881 and is still ongoing.

Brogdon’s book shares many

more facts about the history of Black Americans.

“There was a hunger by Black folks to gain an education no matter what the penalty, how they gained an education and that some were able to attend college -- both Black and white institutions,” Brogdon said.

The Black Business Book was written to share major moments in history.

“To feature some amazing Black history stories and at the same time cover major moments and offer this information in an easy to read and understand format,” Brogdon said.



Courtesy of Anthony Brogdon

Anthony Brogdon

This event was held on Zoom and hosted by Emily Willcock, human resources assistant and DEI lead.

'An Evening of Women Composers' a night to remember

MCCC hosts Agora Chorale, Symphony

Sidney Robison
Agora Staff

The Agora Chorale and College-Community Symphony Band hosted "An Evening of Women Composers" concert on Feb. 26 in the La-Z-Boy Center.

The concert featured 12 songs written by women composers, performed by both the band and the choir.

The concert began with a performance by the Agora Chorale, the college and community choir, directed by Jonathan Lunneburg.

The choir sang "Festival Gloria" by Sherri Porterfield and "Without the Mind is without Fear" by Vicki Tucker Courtney. Following that, they performed "Sanctus" by Terre McPheeters and "My Blue Heaven" arranged by Rosana Eckert.

They followed with "The Water is Wide" arranged by Audrey Snyder and "On Some Solemn Shore" by Andrea Ramsey.

The closing song was "I Want Two Wings" arranged by Alice Price, which was an upbeat, melodic song.

After a 15-minute intermission, the concert continued with performances by the College-Community Symphony Band.

Mark Felder, director of the College-Community Symphony Band, said they enjoyed performing the new songs.

"This was a new theme for us this year, and I am very excited about it," Felder said.

The band began playing "Albanian Dance" by Shelby Hanson.

Following the first song, the band began "The Old Boatman" by Florence Price, who was the first African-American symphony composer and popular during the 1930's.

The third piece was "Three Places in the West" by Elena Specht. The band continued by playing "Circus Franticus" by Julie Giroux, who plays cello in the band.

Their last song was "Fanfare Ju-



Photos by Sidney Robison

ABOVE: Nancy Honaker rehearses with the Agora Chorale at "An Evening of Woman Composers."

RIGHT: MCCC's LNA program ran a concession stand at the Meyer Theatre to Raise funds.

bilee" by Stacey J. Berk.

The symphony and choir usually don't gravitate towards themes, but when they do, they are very special.

"I hope the audience enjoyed the diversity and the various pieces we had at this year's concert inspired by Florence Price and other famous women composers," said Felder.

The College-Community Symphony Band's next concert is scheduled for May 6 in the Meyer Theater. The event will be free and open to the public.



The Big Gig!

Music lovers gather for annual blues concert



A crowd waits in line outside the Meyer Theater entrance for The Big Gig!



People sit inside the Meyer Theater for The Big Gig!



Guitarist and singer Laith Al-Saadi was one of the featured artists at The Big Gig! Al-Saadi was a finalist on The Voice in 2016.



Photos by Reese Bowling

(From left) The Rev. Robert B. Jones, Sr and Laith Al-Saadi perform together on stage during The Big Gig Feb. 24. The two artists performed together for the first time during the 37th annual Black History Month blues concert in the Meyer Theatre.

Reese Bowling
Agora staff

Blues and jazz music lovers stood in line for more than an hour to attend The Big Gig! Monroe County's 37th annual Black History Month blues concert.

The free event, held at MCCC's Meyer Theater, featured the Rev. Robert B. Jones Sr., Laith Al-Saadi and The Bobby Murray All Star Revue. Special guest vocalists were Greg Nagy, Tosha Owens and Smoke Jones.



A couple stands in line outside the La-Z-Boy Center and waits for entrance into The Big Gig!



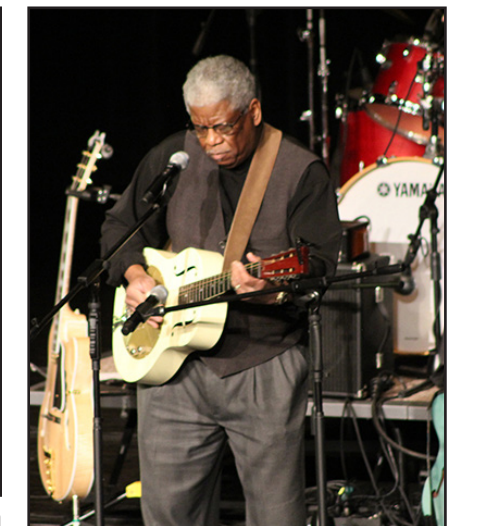
CDs for featured artist Rev. Robert B. Jones were available for purchase at The Big Gig!



(From left) Bobby Murray, Tosha Owens and Greg Nagy perform at The Big Gig!



(From left) Destiny Gallina and Ashley Atkins hold pizzas from the Clamdiggers Lounge & Pizzeria. The Agora thanks the Clamdigger for their generous donation.



Rev. Robert B Jones, Sr was one of the featured artists at The Big Gig!

Improvements made to Early Alert System, response rates up

Kennedy Bowling

For the Agora

The Early Alert System at MCCC has been revamped and success rates are increasing, according to Dean of Students Gerald McCarty in a recent press conference.

With the hiring of Angela Acosta as a student retention specialist in December 2023, McCarty, an administrator with more than 30 years of experience, said response time has reduced from more than a week to 24-36 hours.

The press conference took place as part of an Introduction to Journalism class on Feb. 15.

Answering Early Alert notifications along with Acosta are three other staff members who have access to the system. The staff is available to meet with students after class, over Zoom, via phone calls or text messages.

The Early Alert System allows faculty to fill out an online form to identify students who may be struggling. The system helps connect students to tutoring, mental health and disability services at the college.

McCarty said all full and part-time faculty members have access to the system and are trained in its

usage.

McCarty said he is passionate about connecting students with resources at MCCC and is proud the college can provide an environment where students can be successful.

“You’re here and we’re supposed to help you,” he said.

In addition to the Early Alert System, McCarty said the college has five licensed counselors on campus to assist students with mental health struggles. Two are located in the Warrick Student Center and three can be found in the Student Success Center in Founders Hall.

“Nobody has this,” McCarty said. “We are light years ahead of what other colleges have. They’re asking us how to do this and how to make it work.”

While the Early Alert System has many practical benefits for MCCC, like raising retention rates, McCarty said the emotional impact is one of the most important aspects of the program.

“The student is immediately comforted,” he said. “It says, ‘Someone noticed. Someone cares about me.’”

For more information, contact McCarty at gmccarty@monroeccc.edu

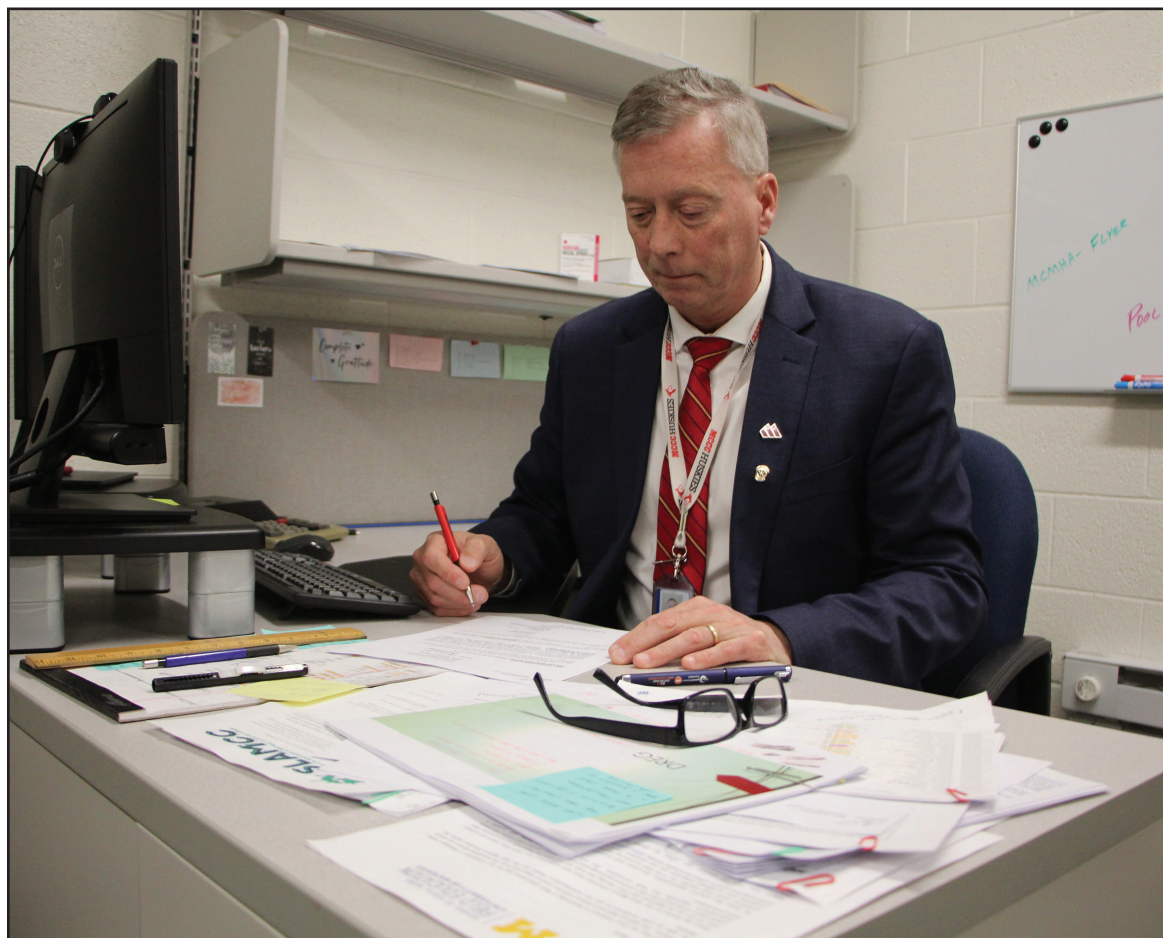


Photo by Reese Bowling

Dean of Students Gerald McCarty

New position for new hire at MCCC

Student retention specialist occupies role in Student Success Center

Jamie Hunt

Agora Staff

The student retention specialist is a new position at MCCC created Dec. 2023 and filled by Angela Acosta.

Acosta described this position as multi-dimensional, as she works around a student’s needs rather than following a specific method.

She works closely with the Early Alert System, receiving information from faculty about students who are showing early signs of struggling.

It is her responsibility to evaluate the concerns described and reach out to the student, working with a variety of departments and referring these students to services on cam-

pus that could benefit them.

“We’re a Student Success Center, so our focus is to try to help students remove barriers,” Acosta said.

She described a list of services offered on campus, including tutors, workshops, note takers, test readers, and an on-campus counselor for both students and staff struggling with mental health.

Acosta described her favorite part of working at MCCC as both the people and the environment.

“This has just been such a delight for me to step out of what I was doing and come in and do something different,” she said. “I feel very impactful with the ability to just remove hurdles for people,”



Angela Acosta

The Student Success Center is always looking for ways to improve services, reviewing what’s missing and what can be provided in addition to what they already have.

Spring break work



Photo by Maggie Sandefur

Writing Fellows Anna Muth and Riley Burns decorate the Writing Center’s display March 1 in the C-Building hallway.

Play educates youth about influential Black Americans



Photos by David Topolewski

(From left) Budda Deloney and Lane Pippen pose together after their production of "George Washington Carver and Friends."

Some 20 children attend 'George Washington Carver and Friends' production

David Topolewski
Agora Staff

Bright Star Touring Theater's production of "George Washington Carver and Friends," performed at MCCC's Meyer Theater on Feb. 28.

About 20 people attended the play performed by actors Lane Pippen and Budda Deloney.

Focused toward an elementary aged crowd, "George Washington Carver and Friends" offers a look into influential Black Americans who have helped shape the nation.

According to Bright Star Theater's website, the show is designed as a fast-paced introduction to inventors and heroic Black Americans that overcame great adversity.

The play is centered on Pippen's character, who is searching for a historical figure to feature in a school essay before he is swept back in time to George Washington Carver's laboratory and is then introduced to numerous characters, all of whom are played by Deloney.

Pippen said people sometimes take for granted many of the inven-

tions depicted in the show.

"But when you learn about how those things were created and against the adversity that these Black Americans faced, it makes it so inspirational," Pippen said.

For Deloney, he hopes that those in attendance walk away learning not let limitations hold them back.

"There is so much more out there that we don't know about ourselves," Deloney said. "The world has expectations for us based on who we are, but you can do anything you want to do, no matter the limitations."

Pippen said he and Deloney at first just went by the scripts they were given, but it's an act he's come to embrace because of the ability to interact with the crowd and share the stories of Americans that, against the odds, beat the expectations.

Deloney said, "It's important we know these stories so people can be inspired and not make the same mistakes."



Visiting artist hosts workshop and presentation on campus



New painting by David Larkins added to MCCC's Art Collection

Mick Valentino
Agora Staff

David Larkins, MCCC alumnus and local artist, treated community members to a painting workshop and a presentation on his life, inspirations, and creations on Feb. 27.

“Every artist has their own little dialect, their own little twang, and that’s what I’m going to show you tonight.”

Larkins hosted the workshop where he led a step by step process of replicating a Monet painting. Later in the day he held a presentation and talked about his life, his works and the stories and meanings behind them.

His piece “Winter Sunrise-Valentine’s Day,” which was inspired by a photograph taken in Monroe County, is the newest addition to the MCCC Art Collection. With this piece being added, the MCCC Art Collection now has Larkins’ work in all three paint mediums, which are oil, watercolor and acrylic.

Larkins attended MCCC starting in 1979, and in his art class is where he first picked up watercolor paints.

Up until then he used oil paints, which won him his first blue ribbon when he was 16.

Once he switched to watercolors from oil, he stuck with watercolors until 2003, the year he was awarded a Signature Membership from the National Watercolor Society. After 2003, he switched to acrylic until he was awarded a Signature Membership from the National Oil And Acrylic Painters Society in 2018. Following that award, he switched from acrylic paints back to oil.

When asked about his inspiration and his favored art style called abstract realism, he spoke of late American artist Andrew Wyeth.

“Andrew Wyeth is my inspiration. He’s kind of my mentor that I never met.”

Larkins said specific photographs also inspire him and his work.

“They jog a memory for me. I see a photograph of someplace we’ve been and I can picture the place, the smell, the time of day, the heat—everything about it, it just jogs all those memories again,” he said. “And then I’ll set the photographs



Photos by Mick Valentino

TOP: David Larkins’ artwork is displayed at MCCC’s Library in the C Building as well as the second floor.

ABOVE: Larkins has his workshop participants raise their paintbrushes and repeat a pledge.

aside and they might sit there for a year, because something has to talk to me about it. I like it for a reason, but what is it?”

Larkins said he wants young art-

ists to know they need to follow their artistic motivations.

“Find something that inspires you, that motivates your creativity, and follow it. Art is a language— a

universal language— and you have to find your own dialect,” he said. “Don’t ever forget that, that it is a language, and you have to speak out.”



Landscape scene hanging in the Capitol during President Joe Biden's inauguration

How an apprentice house painter became a renowned landscape artist

Presentation about Robert S. Duncanson's art held on campus

Ashley Atkins
Assistant Editor

Murals hidden behind wallpaper, a tour around Europe, a painting made for a king and one hanging during the president's inauguration.

The story of Robert S. Duncanson paints a picture of a man who started as an apprentice house painter, but chose to pursue landscape painting and had remarkable success in it.

Jeff Albergo and Patrick Barley came to MCCC to share Duncanson's life works on Feb. 21.

Albergo is a co-founder of the Robert Seldon Duncanson Society, along with fellow artists Dora Kelley and Sandy Vanisacker. Barley is president of the chapter.

Their mission is to spread the word about Duncanson's art and try to get the recognition that they feel his work deserves.

"History lives on every corner, is what I used to say," Albergo said.

During his presentation, Albergo

said he was shocked that out of 175 historic markers in town, there is not one for Duncanson.

"There's not a school, there's not a road, there's nothing," he said.

Robert Seldon Duncanson was born in Seneca County, New York, in 1821. His father was a Canadian of Scottish descent, and his mother was African American, thus making him born free from slavery.

He followed in his father's footsteps as an apprentice to his house painting business. Duncanson started that business with John Gamblin.

House painting was not what Duncanson wanted to do, so he began painting landscape paintings in his 30s and moved to Cincinnati, Ohio, and one of the first people to notice his work was Ruben Graham.

The two became friends and in 1842, Duncanson married Gra-

ham's daughter Rebecca and they had two children. Not much more is known about them.

A winemaker and one of the first millionaires of Cincinnati, Nicholas Longworth, hired Duncanson to paint murals on the walls of his home. These paintings were 9 feet tall and 6 ½ feet wide. He painted a frame around each mural in gold paint.

Longworth paid Duncanson for his work with a tour around Europe, touring England and France. He was asked to paint a picture for the King of Sweden and Norway Oscar I.

In 1853, Hunter Conover hired Duncanson to do a painting of the book cover for "Uncle Tom's Cabin," a novel written by Harriet Beecher Stowe. He painted a scene from the book of Uncle Tom and Little Eva.

Albergo said the paintings that

"History lives on every corner, is what I used to say."

Jeff Albergo



Photos courtesy of Jeff Albergo

Robert S. Duncanson, photographed in 1864 by William Notman in Montreal, Quebec.

Duncanson did for Longworth were covered over with wallpaper.

Joseph Longworth inherited the estate after his father died in 1863.

It was in 1932 that Duncanson's murals were uncovered and restored. The museum is still open in Cincinnati and the murals cover eight walls of the home.

In addition to all the paintings that gained recognition, Duncanson remembered his roots and how he may have been born a free man, but he showed support in ways he could. He completed portraits of

abolitionists, donated paintings to the cause, took part in protests and attended anti-slavery lectures.

Albergo said he was amazed when watching the Jan. 20, 2023, inauguration of President Joe Biden that a Duncanson painting was hanging on the wall of the Capitol.

Before his death, Duncanson wrote to his son, "I have no color on the brain, all I have on the brain is paint. I care not for color. Love is my principal, order is the basis, progress is the end."

Poem by Ashley Atkins
Assistant Editor

There is three

There is three people inside of me

The person I was, the person I am

The person I am striving to be

The person I was, I no longer wish to be

Because that person was not really me

I lived in a world where everyone told me

Everything I needed to be

That when I looked at my reflection it taunted me

Because I was living a life that wasn't for me

I woke up one day and determined as could be

I would live my life only for me

Those of my past became angry with me because

I refused to be what they wanted me to be

There is no looking back what is there to see

But a shadow of a person that wasn't me

I look at my reflection and examine what I see

Today I have grown into the person that is me

Yet I am not finished because you see

I have yet to become the person I strive to be

So, there will always be three with me

The person I was

The person I am

The person I strive to be