

# Biomanufacturing Camp

In July, a biomanufacturing camp was offered free of charge to rising 10<sup>th</sup> graders through 2024 high school graduates. A special appropriation from Commonwealth of Virginia to BRCC and JMU made this camp possible. The camp helps to build a talent pipeline for Merck and other Shenandoah Valley biotechnology manufacturers, while also raising awareness for biotechnology certificates and degrees.



Biomanufacturing is a type of manufacturing or biotechnology that uses living organisms and cells to produce molecules or other biological materials for making products such as medicine, food and beverages, and other industrial applications. From bacterial cell culture to purification and analysis of protein products, students received incredible hands-on experience in BRCC’s state-of-the-art Bioscience facility. Skills students learned could translate to working in a lab, doing research, or a job in manufacturing.

BRCC Educational Foundation Board

Chair Bret F. Harrison	Kelly R. S. Blosser	Donna S. Hahn	James C. Hawkins	Paula C. Moore-McClure	Justin T. Rexrode	Keith J. VanBenschoten
Vice Chair Holly M. Rasheed	Cynthia K. Didawick	Richard K. Halterman	Catherine H. Hughes	Mary Pavlovskaya	B. Randolph Roller	Andrew P. Vanhook
Secretary John A. Downey	Crystal L. Farmer	Hans C. Harman	Larry K. Landes	Tassie L. Pippert	Jerry D. Sheets	
Treasurer Anastasia O. Triplett	Dinah Gottschalk		David R. Metz	Heather Ream	Courtney W. Thompson	

# Message from the President

Every decade or so, colleges and universities embark on an extensive quality review process to reaffirm their accreditation status. Although the accreditation process is technically voluntary, any institution that receives federal financial aid is required to be accredited by one of the six regional accreditation agencies in the United States. Blue Ridge Community College is accredited by the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) and we are currently engaged in our decennial review for our reaffirmation of accreditation.



*BRCC President Dr. John A. Downey*

The College's accreditation review process begins with an extensive process of self-study, which we completed during the better part of last year. That self-study has been reviewed by a committee of individuals from community colleges located in states outside of Virginia. They provide feedback, based on a series of standards against which we are measured against, that we then react to in another,

more focused report. Once we submit our focused report, a new team of community college leaders review that report and then visit the College to consult with us in person. There is something so encouraging about people from other colleges, that are similar to our own, visiting our campus to reinforce what we do well and to consult with us on how we can become even better!

Our visiting team arrived in September to a campus full of people eager to show them the impact that Blue Ridge Community College has on individuals, businesses and the community at large. Having been immersed in this process for the past several years, and having served frequently as an accreditation committee chair for colleges in other states, I know first-hand the hard work that goes into documenting the strengths and challenges of institutional quality. As I write this, we are awaiting the team's feedback and good news related to our reaccreditation.

As we near the final stages of our decennial review this year, I am struck by overwhelming feelings of gratitude and appreciation for the community that makes up BRCC. Our students inspire me, as they show how to overcome tremendous life difficulties while persevering to earn a degree, certificate or certification from the many programs we offer. Our dedicated employees fill me with pride as I watch them support and challenge our students to create a better life for themselves through the educational growth process. Finally, I remain in awe of the community we are privileged to serve, as so many of you provide tangible encouragement and support to help us create an even better institution each and every year.

The accreditation process is a method of ensuring continuous quality improvement in higher education. At Blue Ridge Community College it is also an opportunity to appreciate the community we have established and reflect on the many blessings we have been fortunate to enjoy. I count each of you among those many blessings!

# Message from the Executive Director

**A**s I write this message, we are a couple of months into the new fiscal year that began July 1, and a couple of weeks into the fall semester that started on August 26. Despite that, I'm going to take a moment to look back and share some of the successes that you made possible in 2023-24.



*BRCC Educational Foundation Executive Director Amy Laser Kiger*

By all measures, the BRCC Educational Foundation had a very successful year – raising \$1,347,978 to support the mission of Blue Ridge Community College! This amount makes it the fourth best fundraising year in the Foundation's 39-year history – and definitely the best year we've ever had when not engaged in a major gifts campaign.

This includes \$256,357.92 in the Blue Ridge Fund – setting a new record for annual unrestricted giving to the Foundation! We successfully held our second-ever “Casino Royale: All In for BRCC” fundraising effort in April. Along the way, we thanked and stewarded current donors, and identified and cultivated new friends for BRCC.

Most importantly, these fundraising efforts allowed the Foundation to support – in meaningful ways – Blue Ridge Community College, our students, faculty, campus and community. Several highlights from 2023-24 include the following:

Awarded \$513,929 in scholarships to 427 individual students (another new record this year!)

- Helped to launch a new Pharmacy Technician program to address employment shortages at local pharmacies
- Made improvements to the dog and cat kennel rooms for Veterinary Technology
- Underwrote 10 instructional mini-grants that enhance faculty effectiveness in the classroom
- Purchased a side-by-side utility vehicle for the Buildings and Grounds department
- Supported career coach positions in 12 public high schools in our service region
- Upgraded technology to keep the Black Box Theatre state-of-the-art
- Provided meaningful emergency financial assistance for students in need

But, please be assured, we are not going to rest on our laurels! We know that the Foundation needs to continue to partner with our generous philanthropic community in support of Blue Ridge Community College. Please watch future issues of this *Community Link* newsletter, as well as BRCC's social media, for updates on some exciting new initiatives that your generosity is already helping to make possible in 2024-25, including:

- Workforce credentials for high school seniors
- Agriculture Science program
- BRCC Career Clothes Closet
- Student Ambassadors

To say that we would not achieve these successes without your support would be a massive understatement. Thank you for your investments of time, talent, and treasure at BRCC! We are exceptionally grateful.

# BRCC's 2024-25 Student Ambassadors



*Ali*



*Azeez*



*Derrick*



*Rhodes*



*Valencia*

**F**ive stellar BRCC students recently received a new and prestigious BRCC Student Ambassador scholarship. They will be working closely with Student Activities, Student Services, the President's Office and the BRCC Educational Foundation over the course of the year, representing BRCC, assisting with community events, campus tours, and much more. Each Ambassador brings a valuable and unique perspective to the collective table.

**Mal Ali** is a second-year, non-traditional student returning to school in her mid-30s, and is enrolled in the Human Services program at BRCC. She plans on transferring to a four-year institution next year to pursue a bachelor's degree in social work. Mal has always cared deeply about our most vulnerable communities and hopes to build a career where she will be a strong advocate for their needs. She volunteers with Skyline Literacy and is currently training with CASA to become a court-appointed volunteer advocate for children and youth in the foster system. Mal and her wife moved to the Shenandoah Valley from Toronto, Ontario two years ago. Mal enthusiastically supports the community college system and its mission to provide individuals of all backgrounds access to higher education.

**Zhir Azeez** is a health sciences major at BRCC. He moved to this area from Kurdistan four years ago in 2020. Zhir's goal is to be accepted into medical school and become a doctor. He appreciates the close-knit community at BRCC, where connecting with professors and fellow students is easier in a smaller environment. As a student ambassador, he's eager to help other students make the most of their college experience and find their place within the BRCC community.

**Annie Derrick** is in her second year at BRCC. Before college, she was home schooled. Her plan is to transfer to Liberty University for a degree in counseling. Annie struggled with dyslexia throughout her childhood, learning some helpful life lessons and tools along the way. Annie lives on her family's small farm and enjoys baking, cooking, sewing, painting, and growing flowers.

**Connor Rhodes** is currently enrolled in his second year at BRCC in the Engineering Technology Program. He has lived in the Shenandoah Valley his entire life and graduated from Fort Defiance High School in 2023. Aside from his current studies, Connor has also taken the welding fundamentals class at BRCC and participated in multiple summer programs. He is also working to complete his four-year machinist apprenticeship. In his free time, Connor enjoys spending time with friends and family, fishing, playing guitar, and relaxing with his two pups. Connor is excited to be a student ambassador this year and looks forward to new experiences.

**Maritza Valencia** was born and raised in Harrisonburg. She is a first-generation college student who initially graduated from BRCC in 2020 and transferred to JMU where she received her Bachelor of Science degree in Health Sciences. Maritza returned to BRCC and is now enrolled in the Nursing program. She is a mom of three kiddos and is bilingual (Spanish and English). Maritza enjoys hiking, reading, spending time with friends and family, and learning. She is proud to attend BRCC and be an ambassador!



# Remembering Jeff Lanigan



In the spring of 2024, the Blue Ridge Community College community lost a dear friend, colleague, and educator when history professor Jeff Lanigan passed away after a brief illness. Jeff left behind a legacy of dedication to the College and his students that impacted thousands of individuals over the past 30 years. His passion for his subject – History – was only outweighed by his love for his students and the College he served.

During his time at BRCC, Jeff was involved at all levels of shared governance – helping to guide the College through several strategic plans and accreditations, and always with a focus on our vital mission. In the late 90's he established a learning community program called the Wilson Scholars, and even took a cohort of those students for a study-abroad trip

to Ireland. Above all, Jeff loved to teach. He had many well-known and treasured stories, as well as a common saying for his students that, “If you hate history, after my class you will love it.” This was the case more often than not for the more than 20,000 individuals taught by Jeff during his career.

Jeff was a mentor, colleague, and friend to all, and while he argued with some, he never held a grudge. His passing has left a void in our community, but he will never be forgotten.

Honoring Jeff's remarkable impact, BRCC's Faculty Senate led an effort to raise funds for an award to be given to an outstanding history student. The Jeff Lanigan Memorial Award for Excellence in the Study of History will be presented annually at graduation, celebrating the spirit of dedication that Jeff exemplified. We invite you to join us in contributing to this meaningful award. To donate, please use the enclosed envelope or scan the QR code below to give online, designating your gift with Jeff's name. Thank you for helping us remember Jeff and his lasting influence on our community.

## You Can Make a Difference

Blue Ridge Community College is equipping students with the knowledge and expertise to transform themselves, our community, and the world, and the Foundation is vital to helping make that possible. By investing in the Blue Ridge Fund now, you give the Foundation the flexibility to respond to the College's needs in a timely and effective manner. To make a gift, please use the enclosed envelope, or scan the QR code to the right (which goes to our new Humanitru donation page). Thank you for your continued support!



# Beads with Intention

BRCC's Student Success Center hosted a creative "Beads with Intention" event to kick off the semester. Students made beaded bracelets and keychains to express their positive intentions for the year ahead. The inspirational words and phrases are now wearable art, serving as a daily reminder when academic pressure and everyday-life stress creeps in to take a deep breath and stay positive.

45 students from a wide variety of BRCC programs, including Accounting, Social Science, Nursing, Business/Marketing, Automotive, Civil Engineering, Liberal Arts, Information Systems Technology and Human Services participated, making new friends and cross-campus connections. They found the activity, funded by the BRCC Educational Foundation, to be "very relaxing" and said that "it was so fun and calming."



This event is one small example of a unique activity that offers an opportunity to build relationships, and ties into BRCC's proposed Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). Part of the process to reaffirm BRCC's accreditation status (see Dr. Downey's "Message from the President" in this issue) includes designing, implementing, and assessing a QEP. BRCC's proposed QEP is titled "Connect to Succeed: Academic Success through Intensive Engagement." Through a multi-level system of support employed throughout BRCC, we will address challenges related to student engagement, academic preparedness, and psycho-social challenges over the next five years. The overarching goal is to create a culture of care at BRCC

which not only supports student learning but improves a student's connectedness and sense of belonging. Ultimately, this will result in successful graduates who live in and work in our community. Stay tuned for more information as this process unfolds!

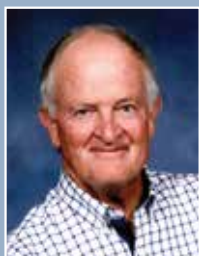


## BRCC Art Faculty "Multiverse of Media" Exhibition

Blue Ridge Community College Art faculty's works were featured at the Smith House Galleries in Harrisonburg through the month of September in the **Multiverse of Media** exhibition. The show included collage, drawing, mixed media, painting, photography, and ceramics from Brittney Barnhart, Claudia Furlow, Jessica Martinkosky, Jerome Sturm, and Herb Weaver, showcasing their talent and artistic perspectives.

# Meet Our New Foundation Board Members

**Richard K. Halterman, II** is a Merger and Acquisition Professional and a top-performing business broker with Murphy Business Brokers, based in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. With over 44 years as a practicing CPA, Richard profoundly understands financial analysis and accounting principles. His expertise spans various industries, including manufacturing, retail, healthcare, and professional services. Richard has a history of public service and community involvement. He has been a member of the Economic Development Authority for over a decade, promoting economic growth and development in the region.



*Halterman*

Additionally, he has held various leadership roles within his church and has served on numerous boards. Richard graduated from Fort Defiance High School and Virginia Tech with a degree in Accounting. He resides in Fort Defiance with his wife of more than 50 years, Sally. They have three children, Ben, Abe, and Molly, and nine grandchildren.

**Hans C. Harman** is President of Momentum Earthworks, based in Rockingham, Virginia. Hans began to develop a passion for the built world during a five-year period in Jackson, Wyoming, after completing undergraduate studies in business. He moved to Wyoming with a business degree but completed graduate course work in fly fishing for trophy trout, as well as skiing powder! In 2008 Hans found his way home to his native Virginia to lead a new vision to be integrated with his family's past formulas for success. Hans is a local leader in the emergence of LEED construction and green building. Hans currently serves on the state board of the Associated General Contractors of Virginia and has served on the Eastern Mennonite University Board of Trustees. He has also served with Shenandoah Valley Builders Association, Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance, and VMRC Foundation boards, and is very involved in several church-based and civic organizations. Hans lives in McGaheysville with his wife Sarah and three children, Nina, Graly, and Pace.



*Harman*

**Heather Ream** is the Director of Marketing and Communications for the Shenandoah Valley Airport (SHD). Heather began her full-time career with SHD in 2005 as a Customer Service Representative after discovering her love for aviation during a college internship. A year later, she moved into her current role. A native of Stuarts Draft, Heather graduated from Longwood University with a degree in Business Administration and Marketing. She is actively involved in the community, serving as President of the Shenandoah Valley Public Relations Council, and is a board member of both the Explore More Discovery Museum and the Harrisonburg Rockingham Chamber of Commerce. She is also a member of the Virginia Airport Operators Council. Heather lives in Rockingham County with her husband, Matt, and their two daughters, Lidia and Vayda. They share their home with two beloved rescue dogs, Isabelle and Clarabelle.



*Ream*

**Jerry D. Sheets** is a retired Client Executive of BB&T Insurance Services. He is a native of Staunton, VA and a graduate of James Madison University with a bachelors degree in Marketing and Management. He later graduated from the Certified Employee Benefits Program, Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. Prior to joining BB&T Insurance he was employed by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Virginia as a District Manager and as a Regional Account Manager. Jerry is not new to the BRCC Educational Foundation Board, having served two terms previously. BRCC gave him a bit of a break to relax and enjoy more free-time in retirement, and then asked him to return to service; he graciously accepted! He resides with his wife Lindy, Nursing graduate in the BRCC class of 2005, in Weyers Cave, VA. They have three grown children, two of whom also attended BRCC.



*Sheets*



Blue Ridge Community College  
Educational Foundation, Inc.  
P. O. Box 80  
Weyers Cave, VA 24486  
(540) 453-2211  
[www.brcc.edu/EdFound](http://www.brcc.edu/EdFound)

*Non Profit Org.  
U. S. Postage  
and Fees Paid  
BRCC*



## **SAVE THE DATE**

### **BRCC's 3rd Annual Casino Royale**

Friday, April 25, 2025, 6:00 p.m., BRCC Recreation Center

Special thanks to our Casino Royale Signature Sponsor



**Graves Light Lenhart**  
Build. Protect. Thrive.