



Capital Campus

Staff Newsletter of Thomas Edison State College • February 2011



Kuser Mansion



Dr. George A. Pruitt

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~ Dr. George A. Pruitt
President
Thomas Edison State College

College Begins Renovation and Restoration Project at Kuser Mansion

Turn-of-the-century mansion is listed on the National Register of Historic Places

Thomas Edison State College's continued growth in the early 1990s prompted expansion into a three-story historic home known as Kuser Mansion. Built in 1905, Kuser Mansion was the home of prominent businessman Rudolph V. Kuser and his family until 1943. The building, which is one of Trenton's few remaining turn-of-the-century mansions, represents the eclecticism of the period featuring distinctive Georgian, Federal and Mediterranean architectural elements. The College plans to revitalize the 106-year-old treasure by restoring it to its original glory.

"We are excited to finally embark on the renovation and restoration project of the Kuser Mansion," said **Dr. George A. Pruitt**, president of Thomas Edison State College. "The significance of this project demonstrates our dedication to historical preservation and reinforces our commitment to the city of Trenton."

After a lengthy and detailed request for proposal (RFP) process, the Kuser Mansion RFP Evaluation Committee: **Mark Gordon**, deputy director, Office of Administrative Services; **Tracy Tosti**, associate director, Office of Administrative Services; and **Linda Vasbinder**, chief of staff, Office of the

President, identified Nadaskay Kopelson Architects (NK Architects) as the most qualified architect for this project. The kick-off meeting was held on Jan. 4 and the Initial Assessment Phase of this project has begun. The next step of this project is to generate and advertise a RFP for a General Contractor (GC). After the selection of the GC, the College anticipates construction to begin in the spring.

"It is with great enthusiasm that we begin this renovation project. I am excited to be part of bringing back the historic beauty of this treasured gem, which is so rich in history," said **Mary Hack**, director of Administrative Services

The staff at Kuser Mansion vacated the building on Friday, Feb. 4, and relocated to the following facilities: the Office of Human Resources has relocated to the first floor of the Canal Banks Building; The John S. Watson Institute for Public Policy has relocated to the first floor of the Academic Center; and the John S. Watson School of Public Service and Continuing Studies now occupies offices on the second and third floors of the Townhouses. Staff phone numbers will remain the same; however, some fax numbers will change.

Focus On: Kristin Gonzalez

Anyone will tell you that 2010 was one for the books. Economic and political uncertainty lashed the entire New Jersey State system, with higher education withstanding a good share of the pummeling. It is a saga that College staff can relate to on all levels and one the Office of Community Affairs & Government Relations can recount chapter and verse.

It is from that office, that Confidential Assistant **Kristin Gonzalez** moved to the front lines to coordinate her office's advocacy work and shared in its decisive role of representing the College to government and local constituencies.

"I coordinate communications, meetings and agendas for **Robin A. Walton**, director of Community Affairs & Government Relations, as she manages College relations at the local, state and federal levels," said Gonzalez. "I facilitate the administrative work associated with the many boards and committees with which she is involved while keeping track of emerging legislation affecting our institution."

The expectations connected with her position, though daunting, cause barely a ripple in Gonzalez' genteel demeanor. "On a few occasions, I have had the privilege of representing Robin in Washington, D.C., in the area of federal affairs and have attended State House hearings and voting sessions on her behalf," explained Gonzalez. "I find myself energized by these challenges and view the experiences as greatly fulfilling."

Though her external roles have their luster, it is the internal nature of the College that holds the most appeal for the confidential assistant. "The dynamic of the College is unlike anything I've ever witnessed," said Gonzalez. "We are a tight knit group and we believe in each other. Our people and our mission are what I like most about the College."

Gonzalez has been in her current position since June 2010. After working for the College as a summer intern with Office of Military &

Veteran Education in 2006, she later served as a consultant in that office, helping to manage its joint base – McGuire, Fort Dix, Lakehurst – program. "When the opportunity to work with Robin presented itself, I felt that it was the perfect fit for me," noted Gonzalez, who, by then, had already begun to put down her roots. "I knew I'd be on the move, making a difference, and growing in my career."



Confidential Assistant
Kristin Gonzalez,
Office of Community Affairs
and Government Relations

The sense of compatibility is mutual. "Kristin's experience, professionalism and diverse skill set make her an ideal representative for the Office of Community & Government Affairs," noted Walton. "She is a breath of fresh air, in the midst of the fast paced, ever-changing external environment in which I work. Kristin's contributions are critical to our office's ability to successfully represent the College at the local, state and federal level and in the community."

Gonzalez, who is currently pursuing a BA degree in psychology at the College, resides in North Hanover, Burlington County, with her boyfriend, Chris. "Anyone who knows me at the College knows that my two Chihuahua-mix puppies, Tia and Kirin, are my pride and joy" she said, and added that her parents and four sisters often take center stage in her personal life.

She has recently summoned her planning skills in the capacity of maid-of-honor for her sister Brielle. "She will be married this May and as you can imagine, I've been quite busy planning pre-wedding celebrations and making sure the rest of the bridal party is on task. I'm very excited for her!"

A die-hard Philadelphia sports fan, Gonzalez also loves reading, fishing, skeet-shooting and running. In her free time, she serves on the Trenton Downtown Association's Destination Trenton PR/Marketing Committee, the Trenton Public Education Foundation and is a volunteer advocate for the Pancreatic Cancer Action Network.

Watson School and Watson Institute Promote College at Conferences

The John S. Watson School of Public Service and Continuing Studies successfully promoted Thomas Edison State College and the Watson School during the three-day *New Jersey State League of Municipalities 95th Annual Conference* in Atlantic City, N.J., in November. Staff from The John S. Watson Institute for Public Policy coordinated symposia on behalf of the New Jersey Urban Mayors Association (NJUMA) in conjunction with the event.

The Watson Institute serves a policy advisor for the NJUMA, which is comprised of the 26 largest municipalities in New Jersey. The Watson Institute's staff disseminate information and develop various platforms from which the NJUMA can collec-

tively provide feedback to state policymakers. In keeping with tradition, **Barbara George Johnson**, executive director of the Watson Institute, and **Dr. Joseph Youngblood**, dean of the Watson School and associate vice president of Academic Affairs, selected substantive, current topics for the NJUMA's Urban Issues Symposium held during the conference.

Topics centered on regional and local initiatives and pilot projects that drive shared services and tools for implementing New Jersey's abandoned property regulations. The wide interest in these subjects was evidenced by the positive feedback received from many of the more than 100 local municipal leaders who attended the symposium.

The NJUMA panel discussion "The Impact of Childhood Obesity on Municipal Government" was facilitated by George Johnson and Wayne Smith, mayor of the Township of Irvington and president of the NJUMA. Others making presentations included Watson Institute staff members George Johnson and **Dr. Nicky Sheats**, director of the Center for the Urban Environment, and Dr. Tirzah Spencer, a consultant for the Watson Institute.

George Johnson also currently serves on the advisory board of the New Jersey Partnership for Healthy Kids, a statewide initiative born out of the Watson Institute's work with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Provost Visits Elementary Schools in Vietnam

William J. Seaton, vice president and provost, recently traveled to Vietnam as part of a delegation from Paul's Kids, a foundation that supports educational and medical assistance to children in Vietnam.

Seaton visited schools supported by the foundation and met with teachers and administrators to discuss the educational progress being made in the schools as well as future assistance the foundation might be able to provide.

"This was a very valuable and eye opening experience," said Seaton. "With very limited resources the dedicated educational staff is making significant progress in developing the educational opportunities for poor rural children."

The foundation's support has helped hundreds of children attend school that would otherwise not have had the opportunity. More information about the foundation can be found at www.paulskids.org.



Provost William J. Seaton (right) with Paul's Kids representative Dr. Robert Bettiker (center), Seaton's grandson, Xavier (left), and five Paul's Kids students.

Strategic Vision Plan Update

Over the last year, the College engaged in efforts to recast the Strategic Vision Plan to address Thomas Edison State College's changing internal and external environment. Focused on the remaining two and a half years of this plan, vice presidents and senior staff directed efforts on an enhanced student focus as well as the challenges from College's competitors.

Thirteen goals are structured in four main areas: Transforming the Academic Enterprise; Assuring Quality; Strengthening Infrastructure and Leveraging Assets; and Advancing and Supporting the College's Mission. This retooled plan is appropriately aggressive and competitive. The FY 2010-2012 Strategic Vision Plan goals and strategies are in the president's *Annual Report* and in myEdison® under "Reports." In addition, the progress reports: *Strategic Vision Plan (2006-2010)* and *SVP Mid Course Review 2010-2012* may be found in myEdison® under "Documents."

Staff Activities

John P. Thurber, vice president for Public Affairs, participated in the "topping off" ceremony for the new Mercer County Courthouse in his capacity as chairman of the Mercer County Improvement Authority (MCIA). The MCIA is the project manager for this construction project on behalf of Mercer County. Once complete, the 141,000 square foot facility will stand four stories tall and contain nine courtrooms. It will replace the old criminal courthouse that has stood on South Broad Street since the early 1900s, which has been plagued with structural problems. Funded partially through the use of "Build America Bonds" that were made available as part of the federal stimulus programs, the total cost of the project is \$80 million, which includes the design and construction of the building as well as the demolition of a detention center and parking garage formerly on the site.



John P. Thurber

Dr. Ann Marie Senior, director, Office of Institutional Research & Outcomes Assessment, recently attended the *North East Association of Institutional Research (NEAIR) Annual Conference* in Saratoga Springs, N.Y. The theme of the conference was "Fountain of Knowledge: IR Collaboration for Effective Change."

Todd Siben, senior program advisor, Liberal Arts and Sciences Programs, attended the December planning meeting for the 2011 regional NACADA (National Academic Advising Association) conference, which will be held in April in Charlottesville, Va. Siben serves as the New Jersey representative for NACADA.

Several staff from the College attended the 2010 *Annual Conference of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education* held in Philadelphia, Pa. Staff included **Dr. Penelope Brouwer**, accreditation liaison officer, **William J. Seaton**, **Kathleen Melilli**, **Dr. Ann Marie Senior**, and **Dr. Ray Young** and **Dr. Susan Davenport**, co-chairs of the Executive Committee for the Self-Study. The conference theme was entitled "Implementing an Effective Accreditation Process," which included hands-on workshops and sessions that covered various topics such as assessment issues, follow-up reporting, the self-study process, commission processes for handling substantive change and commission reporting expectations.



Dr. Susan O'Brien

Guard **James Ellis Jr.** is a member of Rick Goodman's "Sheer Fantasy" Performers that opened the *Philadelphia Department of Human Services 1st Annual Awards & Honors Affair* at the Pennsylvania Convention Center on Jan. 18. The semiformal gala, which was attended by the mayor, members of city council and state representative, honored outstanding city workers.

NJ Higher Education Task Force Submits Report to Gov. Christie

The New Jersey Higher Education Task Force recently submitted its recommendations to New Jersey Gov. Christopher Christie, who released the report Jan. 4.

The task force was chaired by former Gov. Thomas H. Kean and also included Thomas Edison State College **President Dr. George A. Pruitt**; John McGoldrick, chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Association of State Colleges and Universities; Peggi Howard, vice president of Administration at Drew University; and Robert E. Campbell, former vice chairman of Johnson & Johnson.

"It was an honor and a privilege to serve on the task force and to work with such distinguished individuals under the leadership of Gov. Kean," said Pruitt, the only current college president appointed to the task force. "We believe our recommendations provide appropriate measures that recognize the current fiscal climate while setting short- and long-term strategies to strengthen higher education in New Jersey."

The report outlines ambitious goals for New Jersey's system of public higher education, which includes exploring private partnerships, updating regulations and improving governance.



Holiday Spirit



In keeping with the holiday spirit, AFT Local 4277 spearheaded a College-wide drive to collect items for two charities. Through the generosity of staff, 25 bags of nonperishable food items were donated to EnableNJ and more than 40 baskets of children's pajamas and art supplies were delivered to Angel's Wings.

The drive was organized by the AFT Holiday Project Committee: **Christine Carter, Nykea Ali, Rhonda Beckett, Karen Bitner, Cheryl Dienes, Jaclyn Joworisak, Iris Lewin, Charlene Martucci, Jenn Montone, Jocelyn Tucker** and **Larsicena Vance-West**.

Staff Provide Customer Skills Training to New Employees

For the first time, a group of Thomas Edison State College staff members presented Customer Skills Training to new employees on Jan. 20.

This peer-led Customer Skills Training session was presented to 19 recent hires by **Jennifer Montone**, assistant director of Purchasing, Office of Administrative Services; **Ana I. Berdecia**, MEd, senior fellow/director, Center for the Positive Development of Urban Children, The John S. Watson Institute for Public Policy; **Janet Eickhoff**, manager, Strategic Partnerships, Office of Enrollment Management & Strategic Partnerships;

Garry M. Keel, director, Academic Advisement; **Nia I. Abuwi**, CPM, associate director, Academic Advising; and **Cathy Punchello-Cobos**, senior associate registrar and director of Academic Records, Office of the Registrar.

The training session included a lecture and role-playing, and even a game of Customer Service BINGO - the winner of which was **Yvette Raven**, instructional designer, Center for Directed Independent Adult Learning. The wrap-up evaluations were complimentary of the training team, which plans on holding sessions

for new employees every six months.

"The most important thing for employees to remember is that all of us at Thomas Edison State College have customers," said Montone. "For some, our customers are our students, for some it may be other colleagues or donors, but we all have them and need to treat them with courtesy and respect."

This initiative is a vital part of Goal 7 of the Strategic Vision Plan, which relates to developing the College's human capital.



Capital Campus is produced by the Office of Communications at Thomas Edison State College. To submit a story idea for the newsletter or for more information, please contact Linda Soltis at extension 2065.