

Responding to COVID-19

Hometown Care

The Doctors Are In

RUTGERS CAMDEN

MAGAZINE

SPRING 2020



Serving Those Who Served

A university where generations of veterans have earned college educations, Rutgers-Camden today hosts an award-winning student-veterans program.



RUTGERS CAMDEN

Rutgers-Camden Magazine Vol. III, No. 2 Spring 2020

Rutgers University-Camden Chancellor Phoebe A. Haddon—who will step down from the chancellor’s role at the end of June, but will remain as a professor of law—with students Nikia Clark and Michael Santitoro. Read her farewell Chancellor’s Message on page 3 and more about her myriad accomplishments on pages 4 and 5.

PHOTO BY JONATHAN KOLBE





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We welcome your feedback on this issue of Rutgers-Camden Magazine. If you have questions or comments regarding the content of the magazine, please contact Sam Starnes at sstarnes@camden.rutgers.edu or 856-225-6857. For alumni address changes, please visit ralumni.com/mynews or call 848-932-7260.

CHANCELLOR'S MESSAGE

Since I joined Rutgers University–Camden almost six years ago, it has been a singular honor every day to be part of this great institution. We have achieved many extraordinary milestones that build upon our proud traditions and will shape our campus and our region for many years to come. After much consideration, I decided that this is the right time to turn over the reins to a new chancellor who will continue our strong performance. This semester will be my last as chancellor of this great university.

When we drafted our five-year strategic plan in late 2014, we set forth a catalogue of goals that initially seemed audacious in their scope and ambition. At the conclusion of that plan, it is truly inspiring to reflect upon our transformative accomplishments. Our new designation as a national research university announces to the world that Rutgers–Camden is a scholarly force with which to be reckoned. We have renewed our pivotal role as a place of access for first-generation college students seeking the life-changing opportunities associated with a Rutgers degree. And we play a cornerstone role in the resurgence of our host city. Through these and many other examples, the virtues of Rutgers–Camden have become more visible and prominent.

It is clear that Rutgers–Camden has charted an upward trajectory that will continue. Together, we have accomplished a great deal, and our future is bright. Rutgers–Camden is a place of optimism, creativity, and determination. Leading this campus has been—and remains—one of the defining honors of my life, and I will be forever grateful to be a member of this exceptional community.



Phoebe A. Haddon

Phoebe A. Haddon, J.D., LL.M.
Chancellor

CORONAVIRUS UPDATE

We were finishing up the production of this magazine in March when the world changed. The COVID-19 pandemic, which has shuttered doors of schools and businesses worldwide, forced Rutgers–Camden to convert to remote learning and postpone our May commencement ceremonies, which was a painful but absolutely necessary decision. The university has remained open and operational in a manner that puts safety first. At press time, Rutgers–Camden had begun to make plans for a virtual commencement celebration this spring and a potential in-person graduation event later in the year. As the news related to the virus is fast-changing and does not lend itself to the slow turnaround time required of printing and mailing a magazine, we ask you to check coronavirus.rutgers.edu, the Rutgers page devoted to the university's response to this crisis, for timely updates. You will see a page there specifically devoted to Rutgers–Camden. On pages 10–11 of this magazine, you will find three stories about our response to the crisis. Later this spring, our sister publication, *Rutgers Magazine*, will feature in-depth coverage of the universitywide response to COVID-19.

We felt it important to finish this issue of *Rutgers–Camden Magazine* to tell the remarkable stories of our students, faculty, and alumni. In the midst of this rapidly changing situation, we remain committed to making certain that we support each other as members of the Rutgers–Camden community. Please be well and continue to take care of yourselves. Working together, we will support and strengthen each other and the university we all share.

ON THE COVER



From the Korean War to the war in Afghanistan, many Rutgers–Camden students and alumni have served in the military before seeking their educations. Read about the university and its veterans on pages 10 through 17.

A CHAMPION OF EXCELLENCE, ACCESS, AND ENGAGEMENT



PHOTO BY JONATHAN KOLBE

Some of the seeds that Phoebe A. Haddon planted when she arrived at Rutgers University–Camden were literal: the new chancellor led the campus in a flower-planting exercise that beautified the grounds and strengthened a sense of community on campus. Other seeds she planted blossomed during her six-year tenure: Rutgers–Camden’s national profile grew, enrollment reached record levels, and research and civic engagement efforts earned greater prominence.

Haddon, who will return to faculty as a professor of law in July, led the university to new enrollment milestones, in part through the introduction of the

acclaimed Bridging the Gap tuition reduction program that focused on making college more affordable. As a result, the number of first-year undergraduate students choosing Rutgers–Camden has nearly doubled since fall 2014. “We have renewed Rutgers University–Camden’s pivotal role as a place of access for first-generation college students seeking the life-changing opportunities associated with a Rutgers degree,” Haddon said. “Our student body now reflects the rich diversity of our state, and Rutgers enjoys increased energy and engagement with our students as a result.”

Also during Haddon’s tenure, Rutgers–Camden grew academically,

adding graduate programs, including New Jersey’s first master’s program in forensic science, along with graduate programs in nursing practice, business analytics, investments and private wealth management, and digital marketing. Undergraduate opportunities also expanded with the addition of programs in digital studies, health sciences, and global studies, as well as a certificate in Spanish for the health professions.

Rutgers–Camden’s global stature was enhanced when it was elevated to a new Carnegie classification as an R2 national research university in 2019. “As an alumnus of Rutgers–Camden, I will be forever grateful to Chancellor Haddon and



Haddon presided over commencement beginning in 2015, when Jon Bon Jovi spoke and sang to Camden College of Arts and Sciences graduates. In 2018, Anita Hill addressed the Rutgers Law School ceremony.



New and renovated buildings dedicated on campus under Haddon's leadership include the Nursing and Science Building; the Alumni House; the Writers House; the Welcome Center; the Artis Building, home of the childhood studies program; and the Joint Health Sciences Center, which is shared with Rowan University and Camden County College.



Haddon earned numerous honors while chancellor, including the Ruth Bader Ginsburg (pictured with Haddon) Lifetime Achievement Award from the Association of American Law Schools Section on Women in Legal Education.



Haddon has been a familiar face at many celebrations, including Rutgers' 250th anniversary in 2016 that featured the induction of alumni into the Rutgers-Camden Finest, which honors outstanding graduates.



Haddon in 2017 welcomed Margot Lee Shetterly, author of *Hidden Figures*, as part of the Rutgers Reads program. Haddon's mother, Ida Bassette, worked at NASA's Langley Laboratory and is one of the women highlighted in Shetterly's book.

the incredible legacy that she has built," said Sandy Stewart CCAS'81, GSC'87, a biotech entrepreneur and donor who is a former chair and current member of the Rutgers Board of Governors. "Through her exceptional leadership and creative ideas, she and her team have transformed the campus into a highly ranked regional powerhouse with world-class faculty and innovative programs at a more affordable cost for many."

Carnegie also designated Rutgers-Camden as a national community-engaged university, a confirmation of Haddon's commitment to the university's civic engagement program and its role as an anchor institution for the city

of Camden and southern New Jersey. Among the many noteworthy initiatives launched to improve the quality of life for New Jersey families, Rutgers-Camden opened a health services center in Camden and is a lead partner in a \$1 million Bloomberg Philanthropies grant to reclaim dumping sites in Camden through public art projects.

A constitutional law scholar and an expert on access and equity in higher education, Haddon, in addition to teaching, will continue to serve as chair of the Board of Directors of the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, one of many leadership roles she fulfills in the Delaware Valley region and the nation.

Marian Wissman, sole trustee of the estate of Herman CCAS'62 and Marilyn Wissman CCAS'60, which in 2017 committed to a gift of \$3 million to support an endowed chair in the Rutgers-Camden Department of Economics and an additional \$50,000 to support the Department of World Languages and Cultures, said Haddon will be missed. "Phoebe Haddon is an educator, innovator, lawyer, and builder," Wissman said. "She also is dynamic, intelligent, and charming. It is an honor knowing her and having her as chancellor for the past six years. I know that she will be an asset to the boards she serves and an inspiration to those whom she mentors."



Margaret Marsh, a Rutgers University–Camden alumna, will begin serving as interim chancellor on July 1. Marsh, a University Professor of History, previously filled the interim chancellor role from 2007–2009. She also served as dean of the Rutgers–Camden Faculty of Arts and Sciences from 1998–2007 and again from 2009–2011.

Alumna Named Interim Chancellor

Among her many leadership achievements, Marsh launched the nation’s first Ph.D. program in childhood studies at Rutgers–Camden, and initiated Ph.D. programs in computational and integrative biology and public affairs/community development. “These milestones were vital to Rutgers–Camden’s evolution from a master’s-level to a doctoral university,” said Rutgers President Robert Barchi.

Additional accomplishments Marsh led include establishing the Honors College at Rutgers–Camden, boosting the school’s endowment more than eightfold, launching an M.F.A. in creative writing, and transforming the School of Business–Camden into a four-year school.

Marsh is as an expert in the history of infertility, reproductive medicine,

and reproductive technology, and has written three books on these subjects in collaboration with her sister, Wanda Ronner CCAS’74, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania. Since stepping down as dean in 2011, Marsh has divided her time between the Rutgers Institute for Health in New Brunswick and the Honors College and Graduate School at Rutgers–Camden.

A 1967 graduate of Rutgers–Camden, Marsh earned a master’s and Ph.D. in U.S. history at Rutgers–New Brunswick. She taught at Richard Stockton College of New Jersey from 1975–1991 and Temple University from 1991–1998, at which time she joined the Rutgers–Camden faculty as dean and a distinguished professor of history. She was inducted into the Rutgers Hall of Distinguished Alumni in 2010.



Monica Adya, a noted business education innovator and a scholar in the area of IT workforce issues, began her tenure as dean of the Rutgers School of Business–Camden on March 30. “I am honored to be given

New Business Dean Begins

this opportunity to lead the school and build on its strong foundation of teaching, scholarship, and civic engagement,” said Adya, who previously served as chair of the management department at Marquette University’s business school.

Adya, who was named to the dean’s position in January, has earned many honors, including Marquette University’s Teaching Excellence Award, the Instructional Innovation Award from the Decision Sciences Institute, and a special recognition award from the American Council on Education.

Her scholarship consistently appears in peer-reviewed journals, such as *Decision*

Support Systems, Information Technology & People, and Human Resource Management, as well as in books such as *Global Women in Computing* (Cambridge University Press) and the *Encyclopedia of Gender and Information Technology* (IGI Global). She serves as associate editor of the *Decision Sciences Journal of Innovative Education* and the *Journal of Forecasting*.

Adya earned her Ph.D. in management from Case Western Reserve University in 1997, her master’s degree in computer systems management from Creighton University in 1991, and her bachelor’s degree from Shri Ram College of Commerce in India in 1989.

RESEARCH



PONTES

'Teenagers Aren't Meant to Die'

Nursing professor's research focuses on preventing teenage suicides by reducing victimization

By Sam Starnes

Behind only accidental deaths, suicide is the second-leading cause of death for teenagers, accounting for 6 percent of all teenage fatalities. Research by Nancy Pontes, an assistant professor at the Rutgers School of Nursing–Camden, aims to illuminate and prevent the underlying factors that can lead to teen suicides. “For the most part, suicide is preventable,” she said. “We can do a lot to prevent it.”

An article Pontes and two coauthors published in the journal *Nursing Research* in spring 2020 contains a disturbing finding: suicide attempts with injuries requiring treatment by female teens rose

36 percent from 2009 to 2017. “It’s an alarming increase,” she said.

In previous studies, Pontes found that female bullying victimization has increased, and that females are more negatively affected by bullying than males, which may account for some of the increase in female suicide attempts. Pontes said bullying, both in person and over the internet, and other forms of victimization, such as sexual abuse and child abuse, are leading factors in motivating someone to try to take their life. Pontes’ goal is that her research can help schools and others to develop programs that will prevent suicide and the factors that lead to it. “My passion about this is that I really truly believe if

our world could prevent victimization of children, we would see a dramatic decrease in deaths by suicide,” she said.

Pontes said research shows that middle schools and high schools with suicide prevention programs, as well as programs to decrease bullying, are effective in decreasing suicides by about 25 percent.

She said interventions by teachers, parents, and peers into bullying and other forms of victimization can be very effective in stopping someone from taking their life. “We know if there is a meaningful person in someone’s life to whom they feel connected, that relationship can be a preventive factor in suicide,” she said.

Pontes’ newest article, “Trends in Depressive Symptoms and Suicidality: Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2009–2017,” was coauthored with two contributing researchers: Cynthia Ayres, an associate professor of nursing at Rutgers–Camden, and a professor from Rowan University.

In evaluating surveys of 76,000 teens from the ages of 15–19, they found that although suicide attempts by females increased drastically, attempts by males decreased by 13 percent over the same period. However, although fewer males attempt suicide, they account for more deaths by suicide because they often choose methods such as hanging, shooting, or jumping from buildings that often result in death; females more commonly resort to taking pills or cutting their wrists, actions that often lead to injury, but not death.

Regardless of the method or the gender, Pontes, who has been studying ways to prevent teen suicide for five years and has published four papers on the subject, is committed to reducing the numbers of teens taking their lives. “Teenagers aren’t meant to die,” she said.

THE ARTS

A New Harmony

Rutgers–Camden’s first gospel choir established on campus

By Andin Ncho CCAS’20

Monday evenings in the Mallery Room in the Fine Arts Building commence with warm greetings and boisterous laughter—defining characteristics of the weekly Rutgers–Camden Gospel Choir rehearsals. Once the liveliness settles down, harmonious student voices echo down the halls, accompanied by the strumming of guitars and tapping of piano keys.

This welcoming community of singers and musicians encapsulates the vision of Dionne Fields, director of the choir and a part-time lecturer of music who led the creation of the gospel choir in 2018. “The purpose of the gospel choir is to bring encouragement, joy, and to be uplifting—to not only the students—but to everyone who comes to our concerts,” Fields said.

Montrell Sanders, a master of public policy student from Palatka, Florida, is one of more than 15 students who have joined the choir. “The Rutgers–Camden Gospel Choir is a space to join together with friends and make great music that



encompasses something bigger than all of us,” Sanders said. “It’s a great refuge from the hectic life of a student.”

The choir became a credit-offering course in spring 2019 and performed its first concert that semester. Since then, the choir has gone on to perform multiple concerts and engagements at the university. The choir also appeared on

Philadelphia television, performing on a PHL17-TV morning show.

Fields, a 2012 graduate of Rutgers–Camden’s music program who went on to earn a master’s degree in music education from Boston University, plans to continue accepting engagements for the choir, both on campus and throughout the region. “I really want the gospel choir to bring joy to the campus and beyond to provide an outlet where members can just come and enjoy themselves,” she said.

Music technology major Haashim Miller, a junior from Camden, enjoys singing with the group. “It is a wonderful experience and any student who loves to sing should join,” he said.

Andin Ncho, a member of the Rutgers–Camden Gospel Choir, is a senior with a triple major in English, digital studies, and global studies who will graduate in May.



Dionne Fields, director of the Rutgers–Camden Gospel Choir, leads the group in rehearsal (top) and in concert at the Walter K. Gordon Theater (bottom).

ATHLETICS



PHOTO BY CURT HUDSON

Diminutive soccer star excels on field and in classroom

By Sam Starnes

Sarah Zuzulock didn't find it easy to play in every single Rutgers–Camden soccer game for four seasons and simultaneously earn grades that made her a regular fixture on the Rutgers School of Nursing–Camden dean's list. "Some days you have to get up early, and some days you stay up late," Zuzulock said. "I did a lot of studying on the bus to away games."

Zuzulock, who stands 5 feet, 1 inch, sometimes found her stature to be a disadvantage on the soccer pitch. "I'm very short," she said. "That's worked against me in some cases, but I'm a fighter."

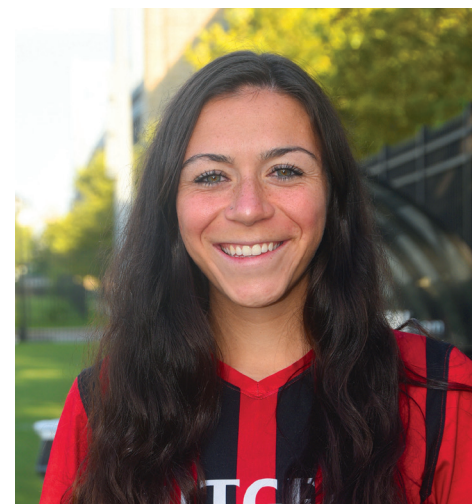
Zuzulock's talent, effort, and fighting spirit earned her awards for her play and her efforts in the classroom, culminating

in her final semester by being named Rutgers–Camden's Woman of the Year by the New Jersey Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women. A four-year standout, she played in all 69 Scarlet Raptor soccer games from 2016–2019, starting all but two of those games. She finished her career tied for 16th in games played and 13th in assists. During her junior season in 2018, Zuzulock earned recognition as the team's Most Valuable Player while helping Rutgers–Camden qualify for both the Eastern College Athletic Conference (ECAC) and New Jersey Athletic Conference (NJAC) playoffs for the first time since 2007. "We all had tears of joy," she said. "It was something our program hadn't done in a very long time."

A two-time team captain, Zuzulock posted classroom accomplishments that were equally impressive. She has earned a pair of NJAC Academic Honorable Mention awards and is expected to add more NJAC academic honors in June when the conference cites its top student-athletes for 2019–20. "I hold myself accountable," she said. "I don't like to fail."

Zuzulock grew up in National Park, New Jersey, and attended Gateway Regional High School in Woodbury Heights. Her older sister, Kaitlyn, who also played soccer at Rutgers–Camden, earned a nursing degree in 2019.

In January, Zuzulock began working as a nursing associate for two 12-hour days a week on the pediatric intensive care unit at Cooper University Hospital. After graduating, she plans to take the nursing exam to acquire her license and work as a nurse, a career choice motivated by her desire to care for others. "I like to help people," Zuzulock said. "It's nice to be able to help people in need."



Sarah Zuzulock's athletic and academic success led to her being named Rutgers–Camden's Woman of the Year by the New Jersey Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women.

RUTGERS-CAMDEN RESPONDS TO COVID-19

These stories explore three Rutgers University-Camden responses to the global crisis. For updates related to Rutgers and COVID-19, visit coronavirus.rutgers.edu.

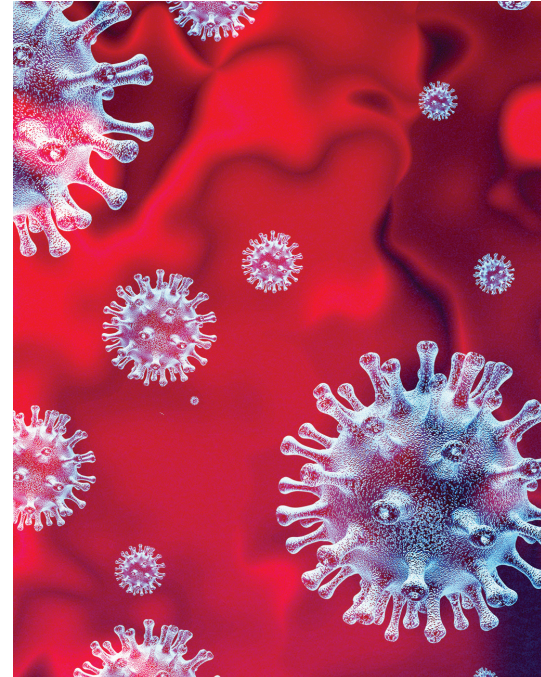
Predicting Demand for New Jersey Hospital Beds

A multidisciplinary team of Rutgers University-Camden researchers in March worked around the clock to develop models predicting when New Jersey hospitals could surpass capacity due to the spread of COVID-19. The university's Senator Walter Rand Institute for Public Affairs and the Center for Computational and Integrative Biology, in collaboration with New Jersey Health Initiatives, released two research reports that compared estimates of available hospital beds in New Jersey counties with the likely demand for those beds during the pandemic. Rutgers-Camden researchers in computer science, math, nursing, psychology, and public policy contributed to the timely research. "We did this study to show the local impact of a global disease," said Sarah Allred, lead researcher on the study and

faculty director for the Rand Institute. "This information will help state and local governments in deciding how to prioritize resources."

The analysis stressed a major need for more coronavirus testing in New Jersey. It also showed the impact of social distancing measures in delaying when hospitals would reach capacity. The difference between strong and moderate measures was plotted over a three-month period and highlighted that under only moderate social distancing measures, several New Jersey hospitals would reach peak capacity in less than a month. "This localized study shows not only how important strong social distancing efforts are across the nation, but also how they protect our family, friends, and frontline workers," Allred said.

To view research produced by the Rand Institute about COVID-19, visit rand.camden.rutgers.edu.



Nursing in a Wartime Scenario

While millions of Americans stay safely at home during the COVID-19 pandemic, nurses—including many of the more than 3,000 who are Rutgers-Camden nursing graduates—answer the call to serve. "Nurses continue to care for patients 24 hours a day, seven days a week," said Donna Nickitas, dean of the Rutgers School of Nursing-Camden. "It's the nurse who is staying right there on the front lines during this health crisis."

Nickitas, a retired U.S. Air Force

Coping Through Nostalgia

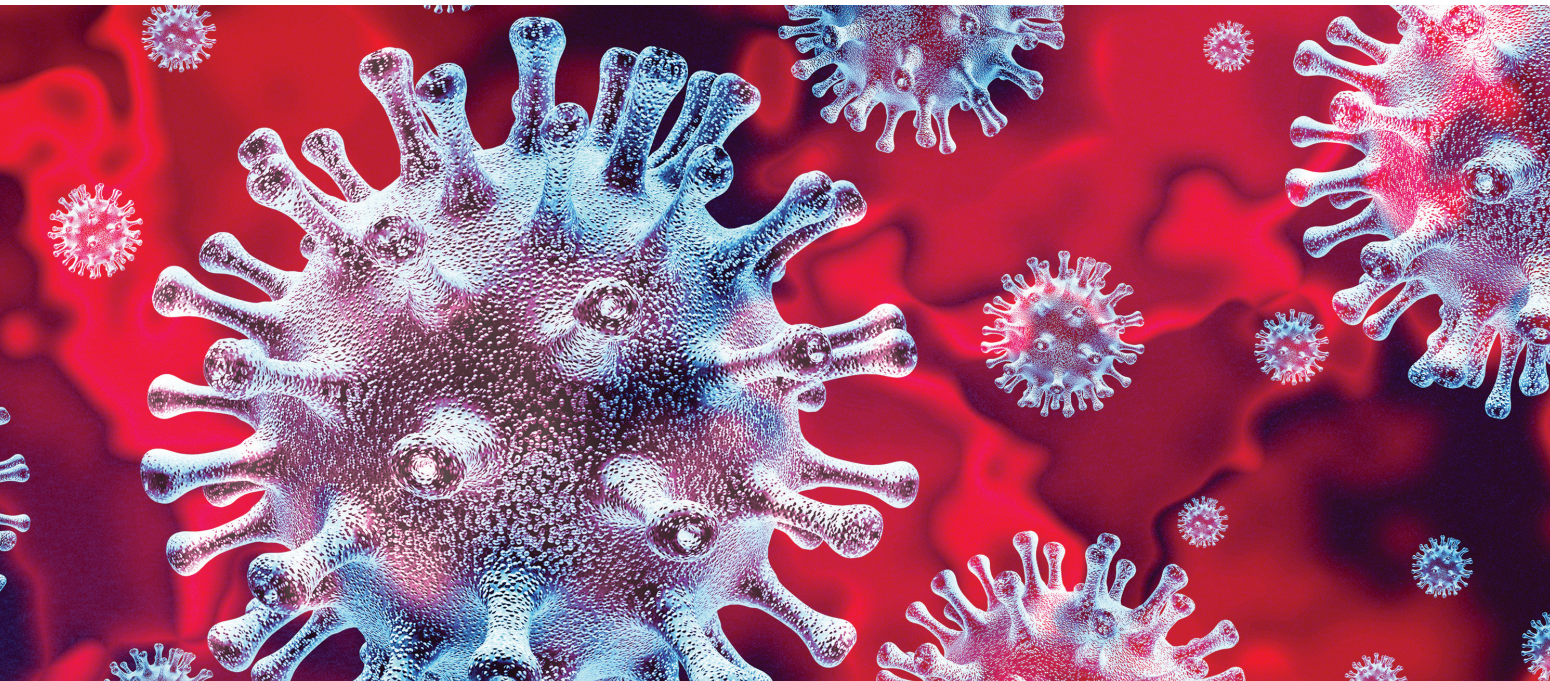
By Tom McLaughlin

Throughout the world, many are struggling with the mental toll of the COVID-19 pandemic. "People are

worried about the well-being of family and friends," said Andrew Abeyta, an assistant professor of psychology. "They are worried about their jobs, and how the virus will impact their goals going forward."

The Rutgers-Camden researcher said people have a fundamental need

to maintain a sense of meaning in life, defined as a person's sense that their lives are purposeful, significant, and coherent. Abeyta said one way to deal with fears is to tap into the power of nostalgia, which can have profound psychological benefits during periods of uncertainty. "People naturally turn to



Nurse Reserve Corps major, said the tremendous challenge of this pandemic, which has been compared to a wartime scenario, is a shortage of personal protective equipment. “When you go out into the battlefield, you have everything you need on your body for your safety and protection, particularly during an emergency or in case of a crisis,” she said. “Nurses want to protect the public, while at the same time being battleground ready.”

Nickitas said the situation, which can be unsafe for nurses without the

appropriate protection, has forced nurses and nursing educators to confront new ways of responding. “We have to use the technology that is available to us to continue to advance our practice,” she said.

The School of Nursing, which utilizes various remote learning platforms, is establishing telemedicine options to continue offering care by faculty and students to the community in a safe manner. “We want to provide safe care that protects us and the patients,” Nickitas said.

She said nurses also play a role in

helping to persevere. “We want to stay hopeful. This too will pass. If we remain resilient, we will succeed.”

EMERGENCY STUDENT FUND:

You can help students in crisis by making a gift that supports those in need. Visit give.rutgers.edu and choose the Rutgers University–Camden Chancellor’s Emergency Fund, or call 856-225-6028.

nostalgia during such difficult times, and for good reason,” Abeyta said. “Nostalgia is a potent reminder of what makes our lives meaningful. For example, when people engage in nostalgic reverie, we are usually thinking about our most meaningful relationships—the people who love us, make us feel important, and

give us confidence.”

He said people also may reflect on special accomplishments or personal successes. “Either way, these memories can be reassuring in the face of uncertain times and make us feel optimistic about finding meaning in the face of tragedy,” Abeyta said.

In a time of isolation brought on by social distancing, nostalgia also can help people to satisfy basic social needs. “Reflecting nostalgically on meaningful experiences with family and friends can help ease loneliness when people are unable to directly interact with others,” he said.



SERVING THOSE ★★ ★★★ WHO SERVED

A university where generations of veterans have earned college educations, Rutgers-Camden today hosts an award-winning student-veterans program.

By Sam Starnes

DESIGN BY KARAAAMAT ABDULLAH. PHOTOS BY JONATHAN KOLBE.



It was much more than a handshake when Andrew Jackson, an 89-year-old Korean War veteran resplendent in his green Army dress uniform with a chest full of medals, extended his hand to Bobby Hughes, a 24-year-old Army veteran who recently served as an infantryman in Afghanistan.

The two veterans of wars more than six decades apart clasped their right hands. “How are you doing, son?” asked Jackson, a 1958 Rutgers University–Camden alumnus.

“I’m good, sir,” said Hughes, a junior on a premed track at Rutgers–Camden. He smiled. “Thank you.” Hughes wore jeans and a button-down shirt, but carried a camouflage ammunition vest, a symbol of his service, for a photo shoot for this magazine.

Jackson, a former captain who often speaks to student-veterans on campus, leaned in closer and put his left arm on Hughes’ shoulder and gripped his right hand tighter. “No, son, how are you really doing?” Jackson’s gesture and the warmth of his voice conveyed the message: *I know what war is like and I care about you.*

Hughes nodded, his strong, soldierly face revealing a flash of emotion at the older soldier’s concern. He nodded. “Thank you, sir, I’m doing good,” Hughes said. The look in his and Jackson’s eyes said much more about the special connection that they share as veterans.

This deep bond established in a brief meeting is just one moment of

many representative of the care for veterans at Rutgers–Camden. Over the past decade, the university has expanded and enhanced its services to veterans on campus through the Office of Military and Veterans Affairs, led by founding director Fred Davis, and grown the number of veterans enrolled. Rutgers–Camden has been a leader in higher education for veterans services, winning numerous accolades for its program, including being the first college in New Jersey to be named a Purple Heart University. Rutgers–Camden also has been a leader on veterans issues statewide. Within Rutgers, it was the first campus to re-establish services for veterans, and it continues to enroll the highest percentage of student-veterans. Efforts at Rutgers–Camden also influenced the creation of two new state laws that ensure veterans at colleges in New Jersey are rewarded for their service.

This collection of articles tells a variety of stories about the university and veterans, including profiles of student-veterans and veteran alumni. It also looks back at how the current veterans program was established, and explores scholarships for veterans and two grant-funded programs—one that helps veterans begin careers as nurses and another that enables veterans to reflect on their experience through writing. To see additional photos online, visit magazine.camden.rutgers.edu.

VETERANS AT RUTGERS-CAMDEN

Accolades



PURPLE HEART UNIVERSITY STATUS FROM THE MILITARY ORDER OF THE PURPLE HEART



A YELLOW RIBBON SCHOOL DESIGNATION FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Undergraduate Student-Veterans

92%

RECEIVING FINANCIAL AID

38%

FEMALE

31

AVERAGE AGE

TOP MAJORS: BUSINESS, NURSING, CRIMINAL JUSTICE, HEALTH SCIENCES, PSYCHOLOGY

Graduate Student-Veterans

34%

FEMALE

36

AVERAGE AGE

TOP PROGRAMS: BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION, LAW, PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION, NURSING, SOCIAL WORK

On-Campus Services

DEDICATED OFFICE OF MILITARY AND VETERANS AFFAIRS
VETERANS LOUNGE
EMERGENCY LOAN FUND
SCHOLARSHIPS FOR VETERANS
EXPEDITED CLASS REGISTRATION

Student-Veteran Roll Call

Rutgers-Camden student-veterans come from all branches of the military with big dreams for their futures.



An Army Couple with Medical Career Goals

Army veterans Bobby Hughes, of Hammonton, New Jersey, and his wife, Klea Hughes, a native of Columbus, Ohio, met in 2014 on a base in Kentucky. Soon after, Bobby was deployed to Afghanistan, serving on a high-pressure reconnaissance unit that reacted to “fallen angels,” as downed combat helicopters are known. “We only got called out if someone was already in trouble,” he said. “You had to go from sleeping to in your gear and on a helicopter in ten minutes.” Bobby, who served until 2016, is working on majors in biology and health sciences and minors in psychology and chemistry. “I don’t have much free time,” he said, adding that he

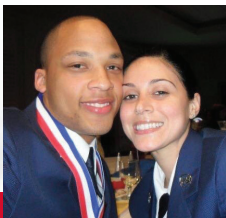
gets up at 4 a.m. each day to study. He maintains a 4.0 grade-point average and plans to pursue dual M.D./Ph.D. degrees with a focus on neuroscience. Klea, who served as an Army medic for three years, enrolled in the Rutgers School of Nursing–Camden in 2017. “This was the best nursing program in the area,” she said. Klea and Bobby, who are on schedule to graduate in 2021, stay busy taking care of their 5-year-old daughter. Between classes, they are regulars in the veterans lounge in the Campus Center. Klea said she enjoys the community of Rutgers–Camden student-veterans, and that the on-campus veterans office is very supportive. “They are so helpful with anything you need,” she said.



Air Force Couple Deployed Often

Lizviette Fernandez, a 2018 nursing graduate, and her husband, Jaron Brown, a student working toward a liberal studies degree with plans to earn an M.B.A. at Rutgers–Camden, deployed to the Middle East a combined eight times as staff sergeants in the Air Force. Brown, a native of North Carolina, served for 12 years and was deployed to Iraq in support of several combat operations. “You never think the Air Force will be close to combat action like the Marines or Army, but we were right there alongside them,” said Brown, who continues to serve in the New York Air National Guard. Fernandez and Brown met at Joint Base Charleston in South Carolina in 2005 when he

enlisted and she was the one to process him into the base. Fernandez, who grew up in Massachusetts, left the service after their first son was born in 2013. When Brown was transferred to Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst in New Jersey, Fernandez enrolled at Rutgers–Camden. “I liked that the campus is very diverse,” said Fernandez, who works as a nurse for Jefferson Health. Brown, who works as an administrative assistant in the Office of Military and Veterans Affairs, is a familiar face to other veterans on campus. He said the student-veterans at Rutgers–Camden are a talented group with bright days ahead. “I cannot wait to see the amazing things that they do in their futures,” he said.





A Navy Petty Officer's Worldwide Experience

Leslie Demark's eight years of service in the Navy took her around the world and back. A native of Houston, Demark attained the rank of hospital corpsman petty officer third class in the Fleet Marine Force. Assignments included serving at a Navy hospital in Spain, on a humanitarian mission to Bangladesh, and at a Marine Corps station in California. "I was introduced to many high-pressure situations and was given so many responsibilities at a young age," Demark said. She was discharged from active duty in 2015 and served for two years in the Navy Individual Ready Reserve. She sought out veteran-friendly colleges, and that search led her in 2018 to Rutgers-Camden, where she found the university's recognition as an excellent choice for veterans to be advertised. "From the beginning, it felt like home," said Demark, who lives in Gibbsboro, New Jersey. After she finishes her biology degree, she plans to earn a second degree in nursing and return to active duty.



A Veteran Air Force Mechanic Finds Purpose

Justin Eldridge experienced an overwhelming pain in his back while serving as an Air Force mechanic on C-130 planes at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida in 2007. Doctors found he'd suffered a MRSA viral infection, which developed an abscess that worked like a tourniquet on his spinal cord and left him partially paralyzed. Eldridge, who began serving in 2000 and had been frequently deployed to the Middle East, spent nine months in a VA hospital where he met many veterans with combat wounds and PTSD. Today, the Bordentown, New Jersey, resident is seeking a bachelor's degree in social work with plans to earn a master's in order to achieve his goal of serving veterans. "I met many people who have PTSD and hopefully I can help them out," said Eldridge, who retired from the Air Force with full benefits. "They have gone through a lot more than I have. This is a good way to help people. It gives me a purpose."

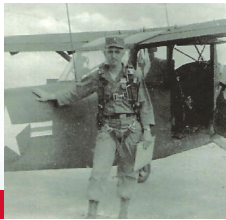


Army Finance Officer Preparing to Teach

Theresa Trujillo was an Army reservist in her native Utah when she was deployed to Afghanistan to serve as a financial management technician in 2013. The Army specialist worked with vendors at Bagram Air Base to ensure that they followed the proper procedures. When Trujillo returned stateside, she filled a number of roles, including serving as a noncommissioned finance officer at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst. She enrolled at Rutgers-Camden in 2018 as a liberal studies major, a decision she is glad she made. "I am not fresh out of high school, so I really appreciate all that Rutgers-Camden has to offer nontraditional students like me, as well as the amazing camaraderie among student-veterans on campus," said Trujillo, who now lives in Pitman, New Jersey. At Rutgers-Camden, Trujillo has discovered her true career aspiration—becoming a high school history teacher. "It has become a passion of mine to learn about American and world history," she said.

Generations of Veterans

Rutgers-Camden has a long history of educating veterans



A Korean War Combat Veteran

Andrew Thomas Jackson CCAS'58 was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1951 and served as an officer in the Korean War. "They took me up on top of a hill and put me in a bunker and said, 'The Chinese are over there. It's your job to make sure they don't come over here and attack us and kill all the men.' I was going on 21 years old." A native of Almonessen, New Jersey, he served three years before returning home to earn a Rutgers-Camden degree in economics in 1958. He went on to work for 50 years as a controller and senior accountant. He also served an additional 17 years in the Army Reserve, retiring as a captain. A Cherry Hill resident, he and his wife, Elizabeth, who wrote him letters daily when he was in Korea, have been married for 63 years. "She put the letters in a pink envelope, and put perfume in the letters. The fellow who delivered the mail would hold it up and say 'Jackson, I know who this is!' I would open it up and smell her perfume. It helped with my morale."



Veteran Alumnus Supports Students

Frank Brown Sr. CCAS'79 of Atco, New Jersey, enlisted in the Army in 1966, serving three years that included deployments in Korea and Japan during the Vietnam War. He enrolled at Rutgers-Camden in the 1970s, commuting to campus and earning a degree in social work while working as a peer counselor for other student-veterans. "Throughout my college time, I was helping veterans," he said. Brown, who worked for 32 years as an equal opportunity officer supervisor the New Jersey Department of Human Services, continued to serve part-time in the New Jersey National Guard and the U.S. Army Reserve. He retired from the military in 2001 as a major. An ordained minister, he is involved in numerous civic activities, including serving as the Rutgers-Camden student liaison for the Veterans of Foreign Wars. "I still enjoy working with Rutgers and veterans," he said. His son, Frank Brown Jr., also is a Rutgers-Camden veteran alumnus, having earned a master's degree in social work in 2018.



Vietnam Veteran "The Singing Sergeant"

William Mead CCAS'79, GSC'88, who served as an infantry company radioman with the Marines in the Vietnam War and fought in three major ground combat actions in 1972, enrolled at Rutgers-Camden in 1977. "Vietnam veterans were extremely unpopular and treated relatively badly," he said. "I actually hid the fact that I was a veteran while getting my bachelor's degree." When Mead returned to campus in the 1980s to work on a master's, he began to connect with student-veterans. As an alumnus, he took the lead in founding the Veteran Alumni of Rutgers University in 2008, serving as the first president of the organization that expanded to all three Rutgers campuses. In 2010, he received the Rutgers University Block R award for exemplary volunteer service. Mead, who has served as the state vocalist for the New Jersey Veterans of Foreign Wars and is known as the "Singing Sergeant," sang the national anthem at the Rutgers-Camden commencement ceremonies from 2010 through 2012.



From Rutgers Law to Air Force JAG

Sally Stenton RLAW'1990, who was working as investigator for the Camden County Prosecutor's Office and serving in the National Guard in the late 1980s, didn't consider applying to any law schools other than Rutgers Law School in Camden. "I could only afford to go in-state," she said. After earning her law degree in 1990, she went on to an accomplished 21-year-career with the Air Force, serving as a judge advocate general (JAG) and reaching the rank of lieutenant colonel. About half of her service was spent overseas, including a 2010–2011 tour in Afghanistan, where nine of her friends and fellow advisers were killed in an attack. Stenton, who has taught as adjunct faculty for Rutgers Law, is an active member of the Veteran Alumni of Rutgers University. She continues to practice law, representing veterans who have been denied benefits by the VA, a cause near and dear to her heart. "We wouldn't have our country if it weren't for our veterans," she said.



Intelligence Specialist Serves Those in Need

Jake Jones CCAS'10, GSC'13 spent almost a decade, from 1992 through 2001, serving in a military intelligence capacity in the U.S. Army at bases in Massachusetts and New Jersey. After leaving the Army, Jones, a native of Parlin, New Jersey, earned an associate's degree in music and enrolled at Rutgers–Camden with plans to become a music teacher. He earned an undergraduate degree in music and built on that study with a master of liberal studies degree. In graduate school, he gravitated to working with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, a field where he has excelled. He has served in several directorial positions—most recently, chief executive officer of The Arc Gloucester, a nonprofit agency. Jones, who was honored with a leadership award from the New Jersey Association of Community Providers, is secretary for the Veteran Alumni of Rutgers University. "Rutgers–Camden provided me with everything I needed to get to where I am today," he said.



Afghanistan War Vet Pens Memoir and Play

Mark Bodrog CCAS'08, GSC'16 served two tours of duty from 2010 to 2012 as a Marine Corps lieutenant during the war in Afghanistan. As he heard news reports that conflicted with what he saw, he decided to write a book about his platoon. "I realized this is part of history and I didn't want to lose it," Bodrog said. He returned to New Jersey, where he completed and published *Second Platoon: Call Sign Hades: A Memoir of the Marines of the Combined Action Company*. Bodrog, who had earned a criminal justice degree before serving in Afghanistan, earned a master's while serving as a captain in the Marine Reserve. In 2018, he coauthored *22 A Day: A Tragedy in Three Acts*. Bodrog was motivated to write the play—which is scheduled to be performed in June at the Blue Moon Theatre in Woodstown, New Jersey—after hearing frequent stories of veterans suicides. "We want to try to stop this epidemic of America's finest from taking their lives," Bodrog said.

Scholarships Support Student-Veterans



Melinda Kane with her son Jeremy's burial flag (above), and Jeremy in 2009 (below).



It was an emotional moment when Melinda Kane read over a recent batch of applications from Rutgers–Camden student-veterans applying for the scholarship in her son's name. "They were all remarkable," she said. "Each one made me cry, because it reminded me so much of Jeremy."

Her son, Jeremy, was a senior at Rutgers–Camden and a Marine Corps reservist when he was deployed to Afghanistan in November 2009. He was killed by a suicide bomber the following January. A scholarship for Rutgers–Camden student-veterans was named in his honor, and since its inception, a total of 26 student-veterans have received the award. "As a mother, you want to feel like someone will remember your child," said Kane, a Camden County freeholder who was inspired by her son's service to get involved in civic life. "And Rutgers remembers Jeremy."

In addition to the Veterans for Education and Jeremy Kane Endowed Scholarship, there are a number of scholarship programs available to Rutgers–Camden student-veterans.

The Joshua Piccoli Memorial Scholarship is named for the Marine Corps veteran, 2014 Rutgers–Camden alumnus, and law student who worked in the campus Office of Veterans Affairs for six years until his death in 2016.

Other scholarships include the Veterans Emergency Fund and the Rutgers–Camden Nursing Veterans

Scholarship Fund. Bill Spych CCAS'95, GSC'11, a Vietnam veteran who has supported all of the scholarships, has been a longtime supporter of the



Rutgers–Camden student-veterans program. "When you come from the military back into civilian life, that transition is quite difficult," Spych said. "That's why the campus veterans office is critical."

In addition, donors can set up their own funds. Greg Wade CCAS'70 and his wife, Donna CCAS'71, support a scholarship bearing their names. A donor who has asked to remain anonymous has committed \$250,000 to fund scholarships for student-veterans.

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To support veterans scholarship programs, visit veterans.camden.rutgers.edu/gifts. For more information, contact Kate Brennan, senior director for development, at 856-225-6577 or katecb@camden.rutgers.edu.

Nursing for Veterans by Veterans

The Veterans Serving Veterans Nursing Fellowship Program, designed for student-veterans seeking nursing degrees at the Rutgers School of Nursing–Camden, is funded by a three-year, nearly \$1.5 million grant

from the federal Health Resources and Services Administration. The program—the only one of its kind in the Delaware Valley and the state of New Jersey—began in fall 2019 with the dual goal of helping veterans launch careers as nurses and improving health care for veterans by training veterans to be nurses who serve veterans. "Nurses who have served in the military will be the best possible health care providers for veterans in their care, because they intimately understand the needs of veterans," said Donna Nickitas, dean of the School of Nursing.



From left: School of Nursing Dean Donna Nickitas, a retired Air Force Nurse Reserve Corps major; Clinical Associate Professor Kevin Emmons SNC'04, an Army veteran; and Sandi Blood McKay SNC'18, a Coast Guard veteran and coordinator of the Veterans Serving Veterans Nursing Program.

Revival of Rutgers Veterans Programs Began in Camden

On his first day at Rutgers–Camden in fall 2007, Bill Brown Jr.—a Navy SEAL who had served three overseas deployments, including one in Iraq—and a fellow student-veteran took note of the Greek banners hanging in the Campus Center. “We joked that we should start up our own veterans group,” Brown said. Carpooling home later that day, Brown and his friend, Iraqi war vet John Cosby CCAS’09, continued the discussion, brainstorming about possible group names. “John said we should call it Veterans for Education, and it kind of stuck,” Brown said.

With that, a movement was born. Student-veterans formed a club and began to meet. The following spring, Brown organized and completed a 65-mile ultra marathon from Rutgers–Camden to Rutgers–New Brunswick to raise money for a scholarship for



Bruno with an early Veterans for Education T-shirt.

veterans and to publicize veterans issues. “It got a lot of people’s attention,” said Brown, an attorney with McCarter & English in Newark who earned a bachelor’s in political science and a law degree.

Brown soon bonded with Bryan Adams, a fellow student and former Army sniper who was shot twice in Iraq and earned a Purple Heart before starting school at Rutgers–Camden. Brown, Adams, and other student-veterans, including Agustin Bruno, a Camden resident and Spanish major who served in the Army in Iraq, met regularly with each other and the administration. The group also organized events, including hosting a congressional debate. The advocacy efforts resulted in the creation of a campus staff position to assist veterans. The progress in Camden resonated



From left: Bill Brown Jr. CCAS’11, RLAW’14; Agustin Bruno CCAS’12; Mary Beth Daisey, vice chancellor for student affairs; Bryan Adams SBC’12; and Fred Davis, director of the Office of Military and Veterans Affairs.

throughout the Rutgers system, which expanded services for veterans universitywide. “Rutgers–Camden was definitely the pioneer,” said Adams, a marketing graduate who is assistant director of the Rutgers Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services in New Brunswick.

In Search of Alumni Veterans

How many of Rutgers–Camden’s more than 50,000 alumni are veterans? The alumni database counts 1,427, but administrators believe there are more. The university did not start tracking veteran status until 2009, missing several generations. The Veteran Alumni of Rutgers University (VARU) wants to grow its membership and reach out to all Rutgers–Camden alumni veterans. “It’s important for veteran alumni to know



BROWN SR.

that they are not alone,” said William Brown Sr., a 1981 graduate of Rutgers–Camden and president of VARU. The association asks that all veterans update their contact information and identify themselves with the university by filling out a veterans affiliation form at ralumni.com/veterans or by calling 856-225-6028. For more about VARU, call 609-937-9200 or email Rutgers.Veterans@gmail.com.

Veterans Write

The Rutgers–Camden Writers House partners with Warrior Writers to host programs that help veterans harness the power of the written word. Outside the Wire—which includes monthly writing workshops, a public program focusing on veteran experiences, and an exhibit of wartime communications—receives support from the New Jersey Council for the Humanities. For more, visit writershouse.camden.rutgers.edu.

Hometown Care

By Jeanne Leong

Melody McCulley was greatly moved by making a difference. A registered nurse in the doctor of nursing practice program in the Rutgers School of Nursing–Camden, McCulley is among students and faculty who have worked clinical rotations at the new university-sponsored health center in the Branches at Centerville housing complex in Camden. Since the Rutgers–Camden health center opened its doors in November 2019, faculty and students have provided more than 500 hours of services to residents—including conducting blood pressure screenings and hearing tests, and offering classes on first aid, nutrition, and managing chronic health problems, such as diabetes. Students and faculty at the center also have performed more than 90 physical exams for children who needed them in order to participate in sports leagues. “Organized sports are such a tremendous emotional and physical outlet for children,” said McCulley, a resident of Marlton, New Jersey, who earned her bachelor’s degree in nursing from Rutgers–Camden in 2016. “A lot of these kids would not have been able to participate in these sports if we weren’t able to provide that service for them.”

Her experience in the health center has influenced McCulley’s career plans—she wants to work in a pediatric health clinic in an underserved community after she completes her doctorate in 2021. “I learned how fulfilling it is to provide a service that helps our neighbors,” she said.

McCulley is just one of many School of Nursing students who provide pro bono nursing services in the community. Most of the nearly 1,000 Rutgers School of Nursing–Camden undergraduate students and 80 graduate students perform clinical rotations at hospitals, schools, or community-based settings. With the addition of the health center at the Branches at Centerville housing complex and a program that sends students to work with senior citizens in the Northgate housing complex in North Camden, the School of Nursing continues to grow the number of people in Camden it serves. “We take our students out into settings where they can have an authentic experience in one-to-one interactions caring for patients where they need it most—in their community,” said Donna Nickitas, dean of the School of Nursing. “We are committed to being civically responsible and meeting the needs of Camden residents.”

Through collaborations with the city of Camden, community groups, and local health and social service organizations, Rutgers–Camden is a driving force to improve the health of city residents. The newest of these efforts is the health center at the Branches at Centerville, which partners the university with the Housing Authority of the City of Camden and The Michaels Organization, the company that is constructing additional homes in the complex and is donating the space for the health center. “Having a health center located within the complex where these families live is a true asset in disease prevention and



Rutgers School of Nursing-Camden Programs Take Health Care Services into the Community



Valora Ballance, center, a resident of the Branches at Centerville, has her blood pressure checked by School of Nursing students Yaazmyn Rosa, at left, and Keana Aquino at the Rutgers health center in the Camden housing complex.

PHOTO BY JONATHAN KOLBE

care,” said Carmen Rodriguez, director of the City of Camden Department of Human Services. “The presence of the health center serves as a reminder for individuals to be proactive in taking care of themselves.”

Valora Ballance, who has lived at the Branches at Centerville for more than two years, is very happy about the new center. She has participated in the center’s educational programs, and one day when she was not feeling well, she stopped by for a checkup. “They checked my blood pressure,” she said. “It’s a good thing I went because it was very high, so I knew to follow up with my primary care doctor.”

Ballance since has been back to the center to have her blood pressure re-checked. It has dropped to a safer level. She is now an advocate for the center and encourages her neighbors to make use of the services offered by Rutgers faculty and students. “It’s a good service to have,” she said.

Victor Figueroa, executive director of the Housing Authority of the City of Camden, said the free care provided by the School of Nursing is a valuable benefit. “We admire and appreciate the quality of the staff and student nurses and the professionalism and dignity they bring to our residents and the community,” Figueroa said. “This partnership has been such a positive experience and they truly care about the health and welfare of our families.”

Clockwise, from front right: Northgate II housing complex resident Armado Picox with nursing students Carmen Iossa, Emily Kahn, Erin McGrier, Yaazmyn Rosa, and Taylor Johnson.

Students Working with Camden Senior Citizens

At Camden’s Northgate II affordable housing complex, one of two towers near the entrance to the Ben Franklin Bridge, nursing students provide in-home consultations to solve complex care issues for the elderly. Through the New Jersey Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Program, led by the Rowan School of Osteopathic Medicine in partnership with the Rutgers School of Nursing–Camden, students visit residents weekly to check for health issues common to senior citizens, including depression, dementia, and risk for falling. The students review medications with the residents, provide them with education about health issues, and advise them on ways to stay safe in their homes. Students sometimes will recommend that a resident have a

follow-up visit with their primary care provider for issues such as memory loss or trouble walking.

Yaazmyn Rosa said her weekly visits to Northgate II were some of the most inspiring experiences in her education. Rosa, who graduated in December 2019, and her classmates in the accelerated bachelor of science in nursing program were among a team of health care workers and social workers who provide in-home consultations for seniors citizens who live in the tower. “What you’re learning in class, you’re able to put it in practice,” Rosa said.

The experience at Northgate II also helps to boost the students’ confidence in their nursing skills. “It was nice to work together as a team, and say, ‘OK, I can explain this’ and ‘I can help them with these issues,’” said nursing student Emily Kahn of Cherry Hill.



Camden Partnerships

In a partnership between the Rutgers School of Nursing–Camden and the Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers, nursing students screen Medicare and Medicaid patients at the Virtua Healthcare Emergency Department in Camden and Cooper University Hospital’s labor and delivery floor for a variety of issues, including housing and food insecurity, lack of transportation, interpersonal violence, and difficulty in paying for utilities.

The nursing students provide patients with resources to help them apply for aid and direct them on a course to get their basic needs met for health care, housing, food, personal and family stability, and education. People with two or more emergency department visits in the last 12 months are directed to community health workers who will help them find a primary care provider. “We are really excited to have nursing students participate because they can bring their knowledge and their skills and also get a better understanding of how the social-related needs can impact people’s ability to access care, receive care, and become well,” said Andrew Katz, associate director of accountable health communities at the Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers.

The project is just one example of the School of Nursing’s holistic approach to Camden residents’ overall health and well-being. “We’re looking at the social determinants of health,” Nickitas said. “Individuals who are exposed to high levels of poverty, food insecurity, homelessness, lack of transportation, and illiteracy have sustained challenges on a daily basis.”

She said addressing residents’ social and personal issues along with their medical needs will ultimately lead to improved health. “Helping people improve their health also helps them improve other aspects of their lives,” she said.



At the Branches at Centerville health center, from left: Marie O’Toole, senior associate dean; students Yaazmyn Rosa, Karina DeCasablanca, and Keana Aquino; Donna Nickitas, dean; and Kathie Prihoda, clinical assistant professor.

An example of how the School of Nursing faculty have facilitated this holistic approach is an effort to bring nutritious food to Camden residents. While conducting research on the health concerns of Camden residents, Kathy Jackson, a nurse practitioner and clinical assistant professor in the School of Nursing, discovered that in addition to a desire for quality health care, residents also wanted access to fresh fruits and vegetables. Through a partnership initiated by Jackson in 2015, Farmers Against Hunger, an initiative of the New Jersey Agricultural Society, has been delivering fresh fruits and vegetables to the Ablett Village housing development during the growing season from mid-June through the fall.

Jackson is also a key player in a partnership with Project H.O.P.E., which offers health care services for the homeless. One day a week Jackson and other Rutgers–Camden nursing faculty provide preventative care to patients at Cathedral Kitchen, a nonprofit mission in Camden that “uses food to change

lives.” The care is a cost benefit to local health care systems since it prevents future expensive emergency room visits or hospitalizations.

In fall 2019, a group of students led by Marie O’Toole, senior associate dean and professor of nursing, provided free flu vaccines to guests having meals at Cathedral Kitchen. O’Toole said such experiences can have significant impact on career choices. “Some students enter nursing school saying they want to work in a high-paced, high-tech hospital environment, but when they see how much needs to be done in the community, this is an option they might want to consider,” O’Toole said.

Nickitas agrees that having a hand in improving healthcare in the community is rewarding for students, faculty, and administrators. “To be in the city of Camden and to provide health care at no cost and having the opportunity to feel that you could make a difference just blocks away from campus—that’s a great return on our investment,” Nickitas said. **R**

THE DOCTORS ARE IN

Rutgers-Camden's three Ph.D. programs have worldwide impact

By Tom McLaughlin

When Neeta Goel arrived at Rutgers University-Camden nine years ago to begin her doctoral studies, she had spent almost two decades in her native India working to improve the lives of children. She hoped that a Ph.D. in childhood studies would deepen her understanding of children's issues, which it did, but Rutgers-Camden offered her much more. "The curriculum struck the perfect balance between enjoyable qualitative research courses and a significant opportunity to build my skills in quantitative research," said Goel, who earned her Rutgers-Camden doctorate in 2016 and now works for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in Delhi, India.

A senior program officer of measurement, learning, and evaluation for the Gates Foundation, Goel said the expert statistical skills that she developed at Rutgers-Camden serve her well in her role focusing on insights from research and evaluation to inform and improve policies and programs. She is a member of a growing cadre of alumni of Rutgers-Camden's burgeoning doctoral programs—in childhood studies, computational and integrative biology, and public affairs/community development—who are making their marks throughout the world. "Our three Ph.D. programs,



Neeta Goel, who earned a Ph.D. in childhood studies, is a senior officer for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation supporting children's programs in India.

each of which has been in place for more than a decade, have produced exceptional scholars and professionals who are leaders in their fields," said Dan Hart, a distinguished professor of psychology and childhood studies who is serving as interim provost. "These doctoral programs continue to flourish, and will have a long future of sending Rutgers University-Camden scholars and professionals into the world."

The Nation's First Childhood Studies Ph.D.

The doctoral program in childhood studies at Rutgers-Camden launched in 2007, becoming the nation's first Ph.D. program of its kind. Sarada Balagopalan, associate professor and director of graduate studies for the Department of Childhood Studies, said that Goel's

success is emblematic of the program's emphasis on research that focuses on the issues, concepts, and debates on childhoods across time and space. In addition to Goel, successful graduates of the childhood studies doctoral program include Deborah Shine Valentine GSC'13, executive director of early care and education at the University of California, Los Angeles, and Lara Saguisag GSC'13, an expert on children's and young adult literature who is an associate professor of English at the College of Staten Island-City University of New York. "The department's unique multidisciplinary training is a valuable asset to successfully pursuing high-quality doctoral research as well as a broad range of careers related to children and childhood," Balagopalan said.

Goel was able to take a lifelong



Grace Brannigan, left, graduate program director for the Center for Computational and Integrative Biology, with Ph.D. student Kristen Woods.

passion for working with children—she spent years as an aid worker assisting disadvantaged children—and focus her doctoral dissertation on how an Indian government antipoverty policy affects the life outcomes of children. “I found that we may be mistaken in our assumption that these programs always benefit children,” Goel said.

Balagopalan noted that such invaluable contributions to solving real-world issues are indicative of the childhood studies program’s ability to prepare students for successful careers as academics, as well as policymakers and practitioners, in the fields of child welfare, education, and child advocacy. “Graduates of the program become productive advocates for children and figure in a larger discourse of childhood studies in policy, politics, and

scholarship,” Balagopalan said.

An Integrative Approach

Back in New Jersey, fellow Rutgers–Camden alumnus Matt Niepielko, an assistant professor of computational biology at Kean University, is teaching his students how to navigate multiple scientific disciplines. Integrating computer programming, mathematics, and experimental biology is a rarefied, comprehensive skill set that he learned en route to becoming the first graduate of the Ph.D. program in computational and integrative biology in 2014. “The advancement of research technology has enabled biologists to collect an enormous amount of data at a very fast rate,” he said. “In order to make sense of these data, one must have a diverse skill set and understand different disciplines

of science. My training in the Center for Computational and Integrative Biology has enabled me to adapt to these advancements.”

Grace Brannigan, an associate professor of physics and graduate program director at the Rutgers–Camden center, said the application of computational approaches to fundamental principles from chemistry and physics proves beneficial, time and again, to the study of biological systems. “Physics and chemistry provide powerful toolboxes that have been very useful to biology,” she said. “But gone are the days of working out models by hand—we now allow computers to do the modeling.”

Brannigan said one of the hallmarks of the Ph.D. program is its integrative approach. It prepares

**RUTGERS-CAMDEN
PH.D. PROGRAMS**

CHILDHOOD STUDIES

| | |
|------------------------|------|
| YEAR PROGRAM BEGAN | 2007 |
| FIRST DEGREES GRANTED | 2013 |
| PH.D. GRADUATES | 24 |
| CURRENT PH.D. STUDENTS | 29 |

COMPUTATIONAL AND INTEGRATIVE BIOLOGY

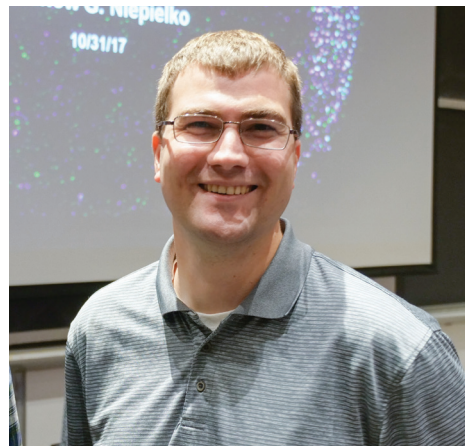
| | |
|------------------------|------|
| YEAR PROGRAM BEGAN | 2010 |
| FIRST DEGREES GRANTED | 2014 |
| PH.D. GRADUATES | 19 |
| CURRENT PH.D. STUDENTS | 22 |

**PUBLIC AFFAIRS/
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

| | |
|------------------------|------|
| YEAR PROGRAM BEGAN | 2010 |
| FIRST DEGREES GRANTED | 2016 |
| PH.D. GRADUATES | 13 |
| CURRENT PH.D. STUDENTS | 43 |

scholars such as Niepielko to explore how their research fits into the larger body of existing biological research and equips them with tools from other disciplines to inform their work. In addition to Niepielko’s success, Rutgers–Camden doctoral graduates hold post-doctoral and tenure-track faculty positions throughout the United States and Europe; researcher positions in companies such as Genentech, Evotech, and LG Chem; and jobs with federal agencies such as the Federal Drug Administration and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. “For students, working in a lab with an integrative approach allows them to have a more flexible mindset, and will open them up to studying many different problems at later points in their career,” Brannigan said.

Niepielko’s quick trajectory from Ph.D. student to tenure-track professor teaching biology and computer programming courses is a testament to the approach. “The unique skill set



Matt Niepielko, who earned a Ph.D. in computational and integrative biology, is an assistant professor at Kean University.

that I gained from the Rutgers–Camden program has also allowed me to collaborate on projects and build new relationships with other scientists that are outside my main field of research,” Niepielko said.

**Public Affairs and
Community Development**

Prentiss Dantzler, a 2016 graduate of Rutgers–Camden’s Ph.D. in public affairs/community development, is busy preparing the next generation of leaders and advocates in community development as an assistant professor in the Urban Studies Institute in the



Andrew Young School of Policy Studies at Georgia State University in Atlanta.

Dantzler, who was named a Fulbright Scholar in fall 2019,

was inspired to study community development more than a decade ago. He graduated from Penn State University and returned to his home in West Philadelphia in 2009 to see change had come. An old housing site in the neighborhood was fenced off and awaiting demolition, and his family was facing a foreclosure crisis that mirrored similar crises happening throughout the country. “The idea of community development was really prevalent and very personal to me,” he said.

He soon turned his attention to Rutgers–Camden’s Ph.D. program to get a handle on the many moving parts that shape a community. He particularly wanted to investigate housing issues more closely and

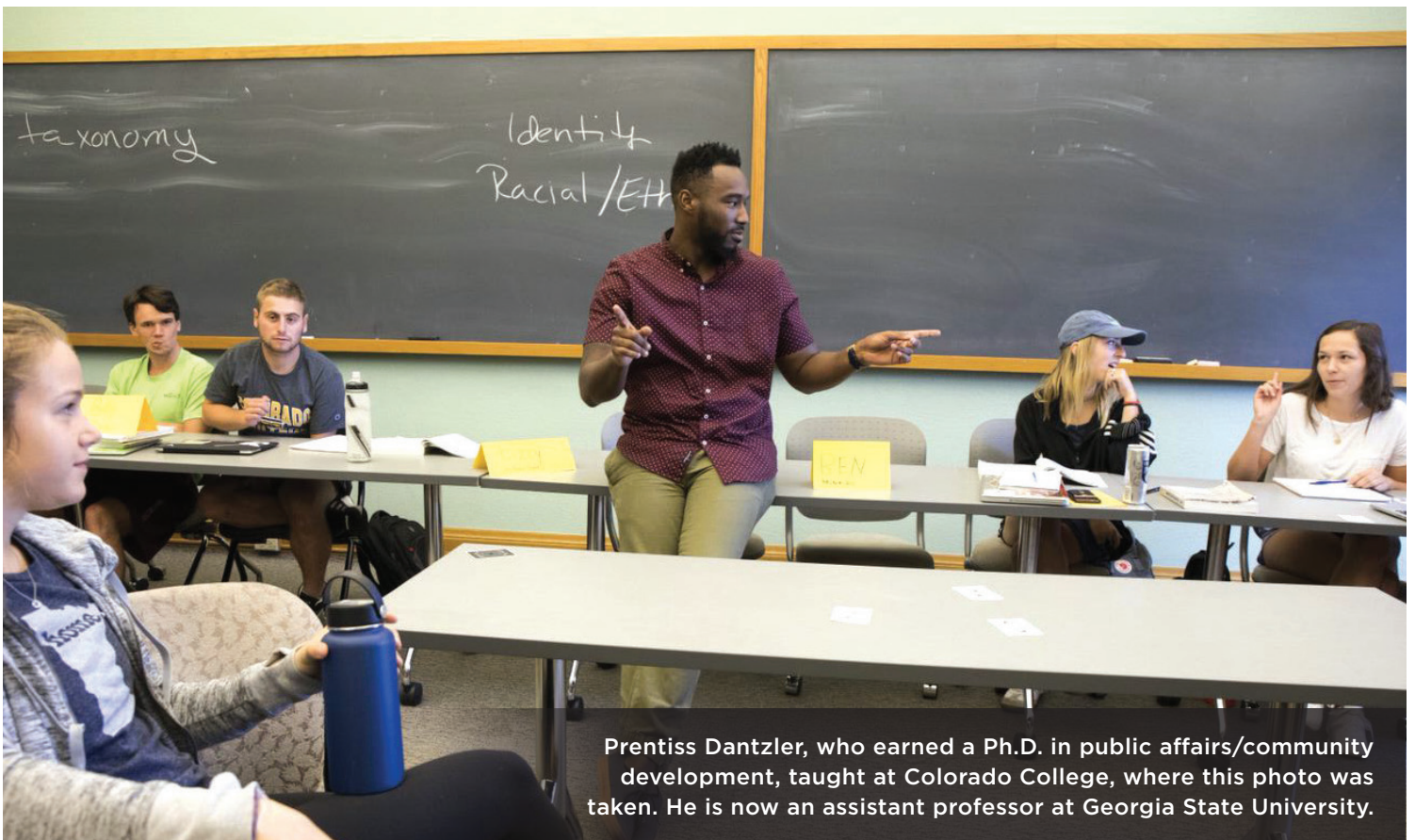
jumped at the opportunity to do so in his own backyard under the guidance of Rutgers–Camden scholars making headway in the field. “I got to see firsthand how communities come together and how they are destroyed,” Dantzler said.

Dantzler credited the doctoral program for giving him the space to cultivate his own journey. In addition to working as a full-time research assistant, he was able to pursue his own research, publishing papers on housing policy with fellow cohort members. He ultimately developed an “intersectional look” at community issues, he said, working alongside researchers and practitioners across a wide range

of fields, including city planners, sociologists, economists, and public policy professionals. Moreover, he had the rewarding opportunity to pass along what he had gleaned while leading his first undergraduate courses in urban affairs. “The Rutgers–Camden doctoral program was a great opportunity for me to become more independent, and that has really translated into me being more successful in my career,” said Dantzler, who taught at Colorado College from 2016 to 2019, when he joined the Georgia State faculty.

Dantzler is among a field of outstanding graduates of the public affairs/community development doctoral program. Other notable

alumni include Wendy Osefo GSC’16, an assistant professor at Johns Hopkins University and frequent commentator on national television, and Christopher Wheeler GSC’17, the chief data officer for the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs. “We’re dedicated to ‘doing the work’ of community development,” said Stephen Danley, graduate director of the program and an associate professor of public policy and administration. “That means supporting and training our students as they conduct world-class research that has real-life impact in communities struggling with issues such as gentrification, displacement, and lack of affordable housing.” **R**



Prentiss Dantzler, who earned a Ph.D. in public affairs/community development, taught at Colorado College, where this photo was taken. He is now an assistant professor at Georgia State University.

SCARLET PROFILES

Finding Art in Fences



Alumna artist achieves national success after three decades of creating work

By Sam Starnes

Lavett Ballard was seeking a distinctive surface for her paintings depicting African-American women, a project she planned for her senior fine arts thesis at Rutgers University–Camden, when nature intervened. “It just so happened my neighbor’s fence got knocked down during a storm,” said Ballard, who lives in Willingboro, New Jersey. “My husband helped to remove the fence, and I said, ‘You know what? I think I’m going to use this fencing for my thesis.’”

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Ballard’s artwork on a *TIME* cover in March. Courtesy of *TIME*.



Ballard cleaned up the old wooden picket fence and started painting on it. A quotation from August Wilson’s play *Fences*—“Some people build fences to keep people out, and other people build fences to keep people in”—stayed on her mind. “That line has so much symbolism with what I was trying to paint,” Ballard said.

Ballard earned a Rutgers–Camden art degree in 2014. While earning an M.F.A. at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia, she transitioned from painting to creating mixed media collages on fencing and other pieces of recycled wood. In 2019, Ballard’s images focusing on the identity of African-American women earned her national recognition. She was named by *Black Art in America* as one of the top 10 female emerging artists to collect, which resulted in acquisitions of pieces by a number of prominent collections, including the Petrucci Family Foundation Collection of African-American Art.

In early 2020, when she was asked to create a piece to appear on the cover of *TIME* magazine, she initially didn’t believe the email. “I thought ‘This has got to be a scam,’” she said. But it turned out to be “the real thing.” Her image of Rosa Parks and four other women who led the Civil Rights-era bus boycotts was one of ten pieces of art that graced the magazine’s Women’s History Month editions in March.

Ballard’s success comes after more than 30 years of creating art, dating back to her high school years in North Jersey. She enrolled at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York, but left to give birth to her first child. She continued to paint while raising a family and working a number of jobs in insurance, finance, and human resources. She returned to college in her 30s to earn an associate’s degree at Burlington County College before enrolling at Rutgers–Camden in 2011. She credits art professors Margery Amdur and Elizabeth Demaray for being profound influences. “They really opened my eyes to the bigger art world,” Ballard said.

Today, Ballard, who has children ages 29, 16, and 13, recently became a grandmother. She said she has often heard the adage that one cannot make money as a professional artist, but she is glad she persevered. “I may be an exception, but if you really work at it and totally immerse yourself in it, it’s possible,” she said.



Ballard with her work in the Rutgers–Camden Student Works Gallery.

A Leader's Foundation

Former health care CEO's career began in the Rutgers-Camden nursing program

By Anna Lockhart GSC'16

When Adrienne Kirby looks back on her 40-year career as a leader in regional hospitals—including serving as CEO for the hospital in which she was born—she values her first choice of professions. “As I moved through my career and gained increasing levels of responsibility, I always thought back to how important my nursing experience was to me,” said Kirby, who earned a degree in nursing from Rutgers University–Camden in 1979.

Kirby, who in addition to her Rutgers–Camden degree earned a master’s in nursing and a Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania, retired from her role as president and CEO of Cooper University Health Care in 2019. She has compiled a long list of accolades, including the Alumni Nursing Pioneer Award from the Rutgers School of Nursing–Camden and the *Philadelphia Business Journal’s* Woman of Distinction and Most Admired CEO awards.

Kirby’s Camden connections run deep: Her grandparents immigrated from Europe and settled in Camden, and her mother’s first job was at Cooper Hospital, where Kirby was born. “I’m a native of Camden, and lived in the city until I was four years old,” she said.

After graduating from Haddon Heights High School, Kirby enrolled in the then-new Rutgers–Camden nursing program. Upon finishing her undergraduate degree, Kirby began her career at the University of Pennsylvania Medical Center as a staff nurse in a busy obstetrics unit. While observing managers

in high-stress situations, she made the choice to develop a collaborative style. “If you can build relationships and get everyone to feel valued, it makes a huge difference,” she said.

As she moved up into higher management positions, she continued to focus on team building. “My leadership style is like that of an orchestra conductor,” she said. “I can’t play all the instruments, but my job is to set the tempo and timing and make sure that everybody is operating at their best and highest potential.”

Her collaborative approach helped Kirby with some of her most significant achievements: early in her career at Virtua Health, she worked to petition the state of New Jersey to expand disease screening for newborns. She also was a leader in driving changes in postpartum depression screening.

Later in her career she oversaw implementation of Cooper University Hospital’s partnership with the M.D. Anderson Cancer Center. The partnership overhauled Cooper’s cancer program, improving access to clinical trials, implementing interdisciplinary care models, and growing the cancer treatment volume by 80 percent. “We transformed care,” she said.

Today, Kirby serves as an independent board director for three private equity companies and provides strategic advice for other companies. Lessons she learned in nursing

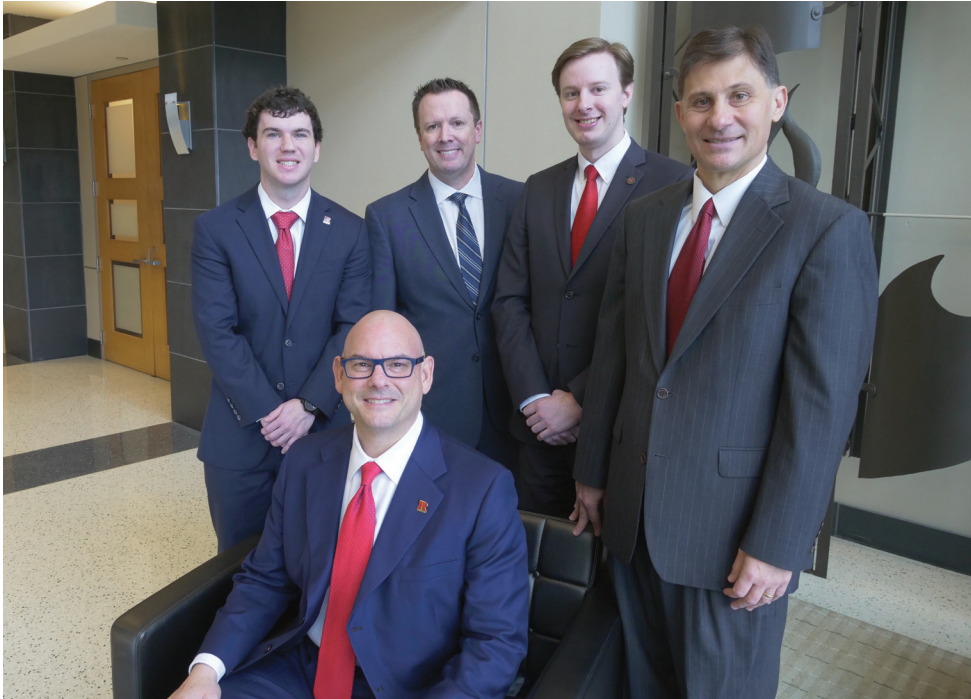
continue to inform her leadership. “Having had that clinical nursing experience and understanding what was going on between the patient and provider has enabled me make better decisions in regards to health care leadership,” Kirby said.

Anna Lockhart is an editor and freelance writer who holds an M.A. in English from Rutgers–Camden.



KIRBY

A Transformational Experience



Albert Fox SBC'94, seated, co-managing partner of Fox, Penberthy & Dehn at Morgan Stanley, with Rutgers-Camden alumni he has hired into the practice. From left: Alex Vicente SBC'19, John Williams CCAS'00, Erik Opczynski SBC'11, and Joseph Dehn SBC'99.

Alumnus credits his Rutgers School of Business-Camden education for helping him to launch a longstanding financial services practice

Fox credits his career success in part to many of his Rutgers-Camden professors who allowed him to make mistakes and explore opportunities while still working a full-time job. “When you are responsible for yourself financially, you need to succeed in work and school,” he said. “The educational environment at Rutgers allowed me to run a dual path. I’m really grateful for that.”

Fox said he found that his situation of trying to overcome financial and personal challenges was not uncommon among his peers at Rutgers-Camden. “The defining factor today that makes me passionate about Rutgers-Camden is that everybody that I’ve ever met who comes out of there has some level of a personal story where there is a grit factor associated with it,” he said. “Grit is the magic glue of that community.”

Fox has long been supportive of Rutgers-Camden students, hiring numerous interns over the years, including Joseph Dehn, a 1999 finance graduate of the School of Business-Camden who started as an intern and eventually rose to be a partner. Often interns hired by Fox go on to fill full-time positions, and five of its 13 employees are alumni. “I know the determination of graduates from Rutgers-Camden,” said Fox, a member of the School of Business-Camden’s Dean’s Council. “They become the kind of professionals who succeed.”

By Sam Starnes

When Albert Fox was a student at Rutgers-Camden in the early 1990s, his professor in his organizational behavior class, Gayle Porter, mentored him. “She gave me a forum once a week to have a conversation,” Fox said.

A 1994 accounting graduate who is co-managing partner of Fox, Penberthy & Dehn at Morgan Stanley, a financial services practice in Mount Laurel, New Jersey, Fox had enrolled at Rutgers-Camden in the wake of financial hardship brought on by his parents’ divorce. “I didn’t have a lot of resources to go to college and I didn’t have the ability to go away,” said Fox, who grew up

in Marlton, New Jersey. “Rutgers was the best opportunity locally to work full time and get a great education.”

His weekly conversations with Porter ran the gamut and delved deeply into social psychology, a forerunner to the field of behavioral finance. With Porter’s guidance, he wrote a 20-page paper about the role of social psychology in building a financial services practice. Fox, who went on to build a practice that has been named to the *Forbes* Best-In-State Wealth Advisors rankings, looks back on that paper and Porter’s support as a defining moment. “I didn’t realize it at the time, but that was enormously transformational,” he said.

Law Alumna Breaks New Ground

A native of Colombia who immigrated to North Jersey as a child, Juliana Diaz is the first woman appointed to a municipal court judgeship in New Jersey's fourth-largest city

By Sam Starnes

It took a challenging start at Rutgers Law School in Camden for Juliana Diaz to find her calling. “The first semester was rough for me,” said Diaz, who attended law school after graduating from George Washington University. “I was very discouraged.”

Unsure if she wanted to continue, Diaz sought out advice from Eve Klothen, then assistant dean for pro bono and public interest programs for the law school, who advised her and helped her find her focus. “She was a stepping point in changing my trajectory to focus on public interest,” Diaz said, adding that Klothen helped her land an internship doing pro bono work for indigent clients. “The rest of my law school career was really focused on public interest law.”

Diaz’s career remained on a public interest path after she graduated from Rutgers Law in 2007, culminating in her being the first woman named to the Municipal Court in Elizabeth, New Jersey, in February. “Elizabeth has been around for 350 years, but at the municipal court level, there had never been a woman appointed to the bench,” she said.



Juliana Diaz RLaw'07, center, with her mother, Leonora McCain, and her stepfather, Jacob McCain, after Diaz was sworn in as the first female municipal court judge in Elizabeth, New Jersey.

Diaz, who came to New Jersey from Colombia with her family when she was 9, started her own practice in Elizabeth in 2009, which has focused primarily on representing Spanish-speakers in real estate, immigration issues, and family law. She said she is now proud to serve as a judge in the city of 128,000 residents, approximately 65 percent of whom are Hispanic, including many with roots in Colombia. “It’s good to have a reflection of your community on the bench,” she said. “It’s very important for people to see their own faces there.”

She credits her experience at Rutgers Law School in Camden—where she participated in the Immigrant Justice Clinic and helped to develop a program for children in need of Social Security

Disability representation—as being very supportive of her. “It was a familial type of community,” she said. “Everyone was very welcoming to one another. It was competitive, yet inclusive.”

Before starting her practice, Diaz worked as a legal services attorney in Newark representing low-income tenants facing eviction matters. Beyond practicing law, she has spent time serving the Latino community in various needs, such as shelter and health. In 2019, she served as the legal advisor for the Colombian Consulate in Newark.

Her decision to focus on public interest law that she made at Rutgers Law School is one she does not regret. “It is gratifying to help out the community,” she said.

THE BACK PAGE

A GREEK AND LATIN LEGACY

When Gabriela Gonzalez pledged the Rho chapter of the Lambda Theta Alpha Latin Sorority at Rutgers University–Camden in fall 2017, she was following in her mother’s footsteps. Teresa Ramos, Gonzalez’s mother, was one of the founding members of the sorority’s chapter on the Rutgers–Camden campus two decades earlier. “I saw what LTA did for my mother since she was a founding sister of the chapter,” said Gonzalez, a resident of Mount Laurel, New Jersey, who graduated in January 2020 with an English degree. “I also wanted to become a voice for the Latin community through the organization.”

The sorority chapter has remained active since it was chartered on campus in November 1993. Ramos said the founding sisters met through the campus Latin American Students Organization (LASO). The administrative hurdles for establishing the sorority, which was the first of its kind on Rutgers–Camden’s campus, were not easy, but she is glad they persevered. “We all grew a lot from that experience and gained valuable tools



Gabriela Gonzalez CCAS’19, left, with her mother and Rutgers–Camden Lambda Theta Alpha Latin Sorority sister, Teresa Ramos CCAS’94.

we are still drawing from,” said Ramos, a social worker. “I am so very proud that the sorority is still going strong after all this time.”

The sorority won two 2019 Rutgers–Camden Greek Life awards: Chapter of the Year and Program of the Year. Ashly Estevez Perez, a senior urban studies major from Camden who is the current LTA president, said the sorority supports fundraisers for the national St. Jude’s Children Hospital and LUCY Outreach, a Camden nonprofit that supports local youth. These efforts and others bring the



At the Lambda Theta Alpha Latin Sorority awards banquet in 1993 are, from left, Ramos, Esmeralda Vasquez, Edith Velez, and Tzeitel Chacon CCAS’96.

sisters together for a common good. “Our principles are unity, love, and respect,” Estevez Perez said. “We are committed to continuing the sorority’s efforts in behalf of social justice, cultural recognition, and personal growth.”

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There are currently seven active sororities and six active fraternities at Rutgers–Camden, ranging from social and service oriented to historically African-American, Latin, and multicultural organizations. For more information, visit greeks.camden.rutgers.edu.



At the 2020 St. Jude’s Gala fundraiser, clockwise from front are Ashly Estevez Perez CCAS’20, Victoria Rivera CCAS’21, Yocelyn Hernandez SNC’18, Sara Hanna-Vazquez, Angelique Nieves, Gabriela Gonzalez CCAS’20, Maryah Soto CCAS’21, and Rosy Briones CCAS’06.



At the 25th anniversary celebration of the chapter on the Rutgers–Camden campus are, from left, Gabriela Gonzalez, Esmeralda Gonzalez CCAS’20, Heidi Estevez CCAS’19, Maryah Soto, Johangeliz Febo SNC’19, and Ashly Estevez Perez.



Ashly Estevez Perez, left, Gabriela Gonzalez, center, and Maryah Soto present at the Hispanic Heritage Month kickoff celebration for the Camden Charter Academy High School.

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