

1 in a million:

Student-Vet Lauded as Landmark GI Bill Recipient

In The Cordell Hull Conference Room in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building, next to the White House, Middlesex County College student-veteran Steven Ferraro was celebrated Friday, Nov. 8, as the national 1 millionth recipient of the Post 9/11 GI Bill. He urged his fellow veterans to take advantage of their educational benefit.

Sitting next to him was Dr. Jill Biden, wife of Vice President Joe Biden, a military mother, and a faculty member at a community college in Virginia, as well as Allison

Hickey, the Veterans Administration's undersecretary of benefits.

In a conference call with reporters from all over the nation, Mr. Ferraro explained why he attended MCC and he recommended fellow veterans to use the benefit.

"I chose Middlesex County College because my brother used his GI Bill benefit there and graduated and my sister currently attends," he said. "I figured with my family going here, it would be an easy transition from going from a full-time soldier to a full-time student. I want to thank Middlesex

County College and my veterans affairs rep, David Brimmer, for the support I have gotten.

"Middlesex County College is a veteran-friendly environment and the assistance I have received was a great help. Going back to school after serving in the military is a very big challenge, especially trying to balance school life with a family. I would recommend to all veterans and service members to use their VA benefits to help you make the most out of your next career."

Dr. Biden said she has seen how community colleges have changed the lives of so many students for the better.

"As a community college teacher myself, I am very happy that our 1 millionth beneficiary has chosen this path," she said. "Providing quality education and helping our veterans find meaningful employment is part of our obligation to those who serve. I have seen it in my own classroom: veterans bring the same determination and focus to their studies that they use serving our county. And it's great for our county because highly skilled, trained veterans will make our nation's workforce stronger.

"We have so many returning after the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and they're going to be looking for jobs. This is the perfect way for them to transition into new careers. I'm a



After the conference call, Second Lady Jill Biden signs an autograph for Steven Ferraro's mother.



Student Government Association officers, seated from left: Roma Gandhi, vice president, programming; Jean Fernandez, president; Precious Japheth, treasurer. Standing, Christopher Witte, vice president, student affairs; Stephanny Gomez, secretary; Kim Guerriero, vice president, student organizations; Christina Lam, vice president, academics; and Obaid Hussaini, executive vice president.

Student Government Association: A Whirlwind of Activity

Academic assistance and club development are the two main themes of the Student Government Association this year. The group is promoting increased opportunities for study, as well as assisting clubs with recruiting new members.

“We’re the voice of the student body,” said SGA President Jean Fernandez. “We’re trying to revitalize SGA to make a difference in the lives of the students and improve their overall experience here on campus.”

This fall, SGA, along with Phi Theta Kappa, the honor society, organized a debate asking if grades help or hinder

the educational process. They are planning another one for this spring, posing the question, “Is it better to start at a two-year college or a four-year college?”

SGA officers met with Middlesex administrators and asked that space be available for studying late at night.

“Some of our students go to Rutgers to study during finals and others go to a coffeehouse that is open all night,” Mr. Fernandez said. “We were able to get two rooms in Main Hall, plus the lobby area, open until 1 a.m. during finals, from December 2 through 13.”

On December 3, SGA will run a

Self-Awareness event, in which the Counseling and Career Services Office will provide tips and tricks about how to study, and the Dietetics club will promote healthy energy foods to keep students focused during finals.

But academics are not SGA’s only priority. During the fall semester, it organized a Club Expo, in which campus organizations informed students of the breadth of their activities.

“At the beginning of each semester, we have the Student Activities Fair, but then you don’t get the chance to see them again,” Mr. Fernandez said. “The Expo allows clubs to publicize themselves and recruit new members.” He plans two more Expos during spring semester.

Other plans include: a “stay motivated” campaign to keep students successful in the classroom; a fair so students can learn about food and culture from other nations; and collaboration between clubs.

“Our long-term goals are to keep SGA strong, so that it can be a viable voice for students,” he said. “When space becomes available after the College’s two new buildings are finished, we’d love to see a student lounge be developed. I’m proud of what we’ve been able to accomplish, and I hope next year’s officers will continue that momentum.”

THIS MONTH AT MIDDLESEX

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MCC honored veterans and service members during a Veterans Day program on Nov. 12. George Lisicki, a member of the College's Board of Trustees and former national commander-in-chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, spoke, along with Mike Miller, an Army veteran, motivational speaker and author.

Student is 1 Millionth Recipient of Post 9/11 GI Bill

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community college teacher so I'm hoping they come to the community college and then transfer to a four-year college. You've seen how it's worked for Steven."

The Post 9/11 GI Bill, which began in August of 2009, has distributed over \$30 billion in the form of tuition and other education-related payments to veterans, service members and their families; and to the universities, colleges, and trade schools they attend.

The Post-9/11 GI Bill is a comprehensive education benefit created by Congress in 2008. In general, veterans and service members who have served on active duty for 90 or more days since Sept. 10, 2001 are eligible.

Service members have the opportunity to transfer the benefit to immediate family members. Legally, GI Bill benefits are tiered, based on the number of days served on active duty, giving activated National Guard and Reserve members the same benefits as all other active duty members. These benefits include:

- Up to the full amount of tuition and fees for a state-operated college or university. The Yellow Ribbon Program may provide additional assistance for students attending

private institutions or who are charged out-of-state tuition and fees;

- Monthly housing allowance, which is based upon the location of the school; and
- An annual books and supplies stipend of up to \$1,000.

Ms. Hickey, VA's undersecretary of benefits, congratulated Mr. Ferraro on his achievement and also looked to the future.

"We're here to congratulate a very special veteran – the 1 millionth

beneficiary of this landmark program, both as an individual and as a representative of the post 9/11 veteran generation, which has sacrificed so much for our country. We're also getting ready to help the next million use this benefit to get a quality education and find meaningful employment."

Mr. Ferraro was interviewed by other media later in the day, and had a tour of the West Wing of the White House, including the press room and a peek inside the Oval Office.



David Brimmer (left), the director of the MCC Center for Veterans Services, speaks with Robert Worley, director of education service, and Allison Hickey, undersecretary of benefits for the Department of Veterans Affairs.



From left: Freeholder James Polos, College President Joann La Perla-Morales, and Dave Gregor, coordinator of the Middlesex County Traffic Safety Program. Signs painted on campus walkways say “Look Up – Be Safe,” which promote awareness as does the “Only a Dummy Would Drive Distracted” road sign that has been on campus all semester.

Contest Focuses on Texting Accidents

The number of pedestrians injured while using cell phones has more than doubled since 2004, according to a study published in the August 2013 edition of “Accident Analysis and Prevention.” Young people were especially at risk, with 16- to 25-year-olds most likely to be injured as “distracted pedestrians.”

In an effort to combat this growing trend, the Middlesex County Comprehensive Traffic Safety Program was developed, and it is promoting a contest for students to create a radio public service announcement or a poster or infographic explaining the dangers of distracted walking or cycling.

The first prize is \$500; second prize is \$300; and third prize is \$200.

“The significant rise in pedestrian accidents caused by walking and texting is a major concern and we hope that this awareness campaign will help change habits that place walkers at risk,” said Middlesex County Freeholder James Polos, chairman of Public Safety and Health.

The Distraction Awareness Contest is open to students enrolled at Middlesex County College or Rutgers University.

The aim of the campaign is to change the culture of distraction so everyone becomes focused on themselves and those around them and realizes the effects on others when distracted. For more information and official rules, go to <http://mctrfficsafety.com/contest>.

Dance Concert Set for Dec. 6 & 7

The MCC Dance Ensemble will present its 13th annual fall dance concert entitled *Dance Spectrum!* on Friday, December 6 and Saturday, December 7. Both performances will be held in the Performing Arts Center on the College’s Edison Campus at 7 p.m. and are free with a suggested donation of \$5 per person.

“The dances presented are each inspired by various colors such as red, blue and purple,” said Aimee Mitacchione, artistic director of the ensemble and professor of dance at the College. “Our dance company is modern dance-based, yet also branches out to other dance genres such as hip-hop, jazz, tap, contemporary and ballet. We are elated to have professional guest choreographers Lees Hummel and Erin Pride working with our dancers.”

Student and alumni choreographers include Abigail Allen, Tatyana Aponte, Leanna Cotton, Tabitha Edwards, Rodney Green Jr., Melissa Hurst, Sarah Hussain, Charles Jones, Juliette Kelliher, Melissa King, Nikola Palivoda, Melissa Langholff, Joisa Reyes, Asia Vaganek and Nicole Zygler.

“Our dancers range from advanced dancers to absolute beginners,” Professor Mitacchione said. “The MCC Dance Program prides itself on providing opportunities to a diverse group of artists who may not have otherwise been given the chance to gain performance experience. We strive to provide a professional concert that will be thought-provoking and inspirational.”

To follow the MCC Dance Ensemble via social media, go to the Facebook page, “Middlesex County College Dance Department,” and click Like. For more information, email Professor Mitacchione at Amitacchione@middlesexcc.edu.



Honored for Years of Service

Jerry Katcher (seated, center), member of the Foundation Board of Trustees and a former member of the College’s Board, was recently honored at the Scholarship Reception for his years of service to students. The reception brought scholarship donors together with the students they have helped.