

## Pride & Joy

# MCC Graduates Celebrate Achievements

A total of 1,486 degrees and certificates were awarded by Middlesex County College Monday, May 19 at the 47th annual Commencement exercises witnessed by approximately 3500 guests. The event was held in the Expo Center in the Raritan Center.

Valedictorian Stephanie Assad delivered the class welcome, sharing her experiences and aspirations. Ms. Assad is graduating with a Nursing Degree.

“Some of us had more challenges to overcome than others, like raising a family or learning the English language — all while attending classes, writing papers, and obsessively checking for grades,” she said. “Whatever our story

is, we all have one thing in common: we have worked hard to be where we are today. While we had support along the way, we are all graduating because of the work we put into our education. Whether you decide to continue your studies or jump into your career, remember that it was your hard work and dedication that brought you here today. Never forget the people who encouraged you throughout your journey, and strive to be that helpful for

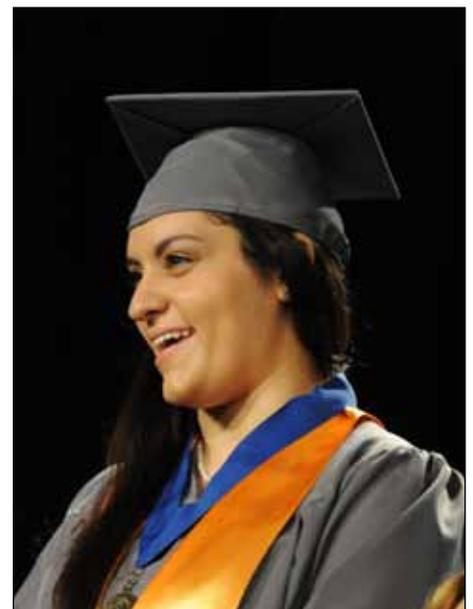
**To read more about Commencement, view photos and the video, visit [middlesexcc.edu/commencement](http://middlesexcc.edu/commencement)**

someone else.”

Approximately 670 members of the Class of 2014 participated in the exercises, representing the 352 graduates of August 2013, 363 of January 2014 and 729 of May 2014. Participants included several students who fulfilled the requirements for more than one degree or certificate during this academic year.

Dr. Ronald C. Goldfarb, interim vice president for academic and student affairs, presided. Greetings were delivered by Dr. Joann La Perla-

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Valedictorian Stephanie Assad addressed the class of 2014.

# MCC 'Star' Named Alumna of the Year

Lacey Plichta, a 2006 graduate of MCC, was named the 2014 Alumna of the Year for Contributions to the College, its Alumni Association or its Foundation. The award was presented during Celebration Day, an annual event that also honors College employees reaching milestone service anniversaries and three Outstanding Service to the College award winners.

Ms. Plichta was a member of the first class of New Jersey STARS, which is a scholarship program for high-achieving high school students who attend their community college.

She graduated with honors from MCC and Rutgers, where she went for her bachelor's and master's degrees. She is now teaching in the Princeton school system. She also owns her own business, Lacey's Gourmet Cupcakes.

She has been involved with the Alumni Association since graduation and is now treasurer.

Her engagement with MCC began in the fall of 2004, when she arrived on campus. She was one of 22 STARS students, recipients of a scholarship for those who graduated in the top of their high school class. She became outspoken in her support of STARS and community colleges. She presented an award to then-Governor Jim McGreevey, spoke to local newspapers and television stations, and appeared at a press conference for STARS II, which provided a scholarship to a four-year school for STARS I graduates. She testified before the Assembly Higher Education Committee in support of legislation that eased the transfer process for community college students. She was also an officer of the Middlesex chapter of Phi Theta Kappa, the international honor society for two-year colleges.

Even after graduation from MCC, she continued to speak with legislators and the public about the benefits of community colleges.

"My experiences at Middlesex have been nothing but wonderful," Ms. Plichta said as she accepted the award. "I had excellent professors who inspired my creativity and 'outside the box' thinking. I'll never forget creating the 3D cell model comparing how a cell operates to how a high school operates in Professor Donna Marie Gardner's biology class. Also, writing my first children's book *Sarah's Magical Snow Day* in Professor Shirley Wachtel's children's literature class. My students love listening to the story and are fascinated that I wrote and illustrated the book! Middlesex played a large role in helping me become the strong, confident, and inspirational educator I am today."

At the ceremony, Marilyn Rabinowitz received the award for Outstanding Service to the College for Adjunct Faculty, Dennis Stempinski for Staff and Tom Peterson for Administrators.



Lacey Plichta is flanked by Veronica Clinton, director of development and alumni relations (left), and Middlesex County College President Joann La Perla-Morales.

## THIS MONTH AT MIDDLESEX

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### Middlesex County Board of Chosen Freeholders

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From left: Joann La Perla-Morales, president of Middlesex County College; Mat Spano; Donna Marie Gardner; and Ronald Goldfarb, interim vice president for academic and student affairs.

## Outstanding Profs Receive Excellence Awards in Teaching, Scholarship

Two outstanding professors at Middlesex County College were recently honored: Mathew Spano, professor of English, was selected as the 2014 Faculty Scholar; and Donna Marie Gardner, of the Natural Sciences Department, received the 2014 Excellence in Teaching Award.

Coincidentally, both are graduates of Middlesex County College. Dr. Spano received his Associates degree in 1988 and Dr. Gardner in 2000.

Dr. Spano is an expert on the life and work of Carl Jung, the noted

psychotherapist and author of “The Red Book.”

“Dr. Spano’s students are extremely fortunate to have a professor who is so deeply committed to scholarship within his discipline,” said Christine Harrington, director of the College’s Center for the Enrichment of Learning and Teaching (CELT) and the chairperson of the selection committee. “His impressive work on Carl Jung has gained national attention. Mat is an inspiration to all of us at MCC.”

Dr. Gardner is a superb teacher who motivates her students.

“Donna Marie Gardner’s discipline and pedagogical expertise translates into high-level learning in her classroom,” Dr. Harrington said. “She brings her passion for biology and learning into her classroom each day. Donna Marie’s innovative approaches assist her students with gaining a deep understanding of biology. As her positive attitude and endless energy are contagious, we are very fortunate to have Donna Marie as a colleague.”

### Essentials of Oceanography

Students in the Essentials of Oceanography course taught by Dr. Claire Condie participated in a four-hour boat trip offered by the Wetlands Institute in April. Three marine biologists from the institute gave them a hands-on experience. Students baited crab traps, participated in a discussion about the importance of the horseshoe crab, heard a review of the crab’s anatomy and their history that dates back 65 million years. They also learned how to release 300 feet of line to set a trawl net behind the ship. They were also able to touch and identify species such as sea stars, echinoderms and whelks. From left: Irene Howard, Thi Quan Pham, Ashley Flournoy, and Kaitlin Gannon, environmental educator with the Wetlands Institute.



# Commencement

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Morales, College president; Dorothy K. Power, chairman of the Board of Trustees; and Ronald G. Rios, Freeholder director.

Dr. Martin N. Pearlman, professor of History and Social Science, led the academic processional as grand marshal.

Earlier in May, the College held an honors convocation for students with the highest academic achievement in each program. MCC also presented the Chambers Awards to graduates with a 4.0 grade point average, and the nine individuals were recognized during Commencement. They included Ms. Assad, Jessica L. Raub, the salutatorian, and Kimberly Flynn, Evelyn Fuertes, Louis J. Liang, Lauren N. Madden, Megan E. Moast, Tara L. O'Day and Kendra L. Thatcher.



Mother and daughter graduates Ausilia (right) and Michelle Gurbisz were among the grads.

## PTK Presents Awards to MCC President and Co-Chapter President

Joann La Perla-Morales, president of MCC, was awarded the 2014 Shirley B. Gordon Award of Distinction by Phi Theta Kappa, the international honor society for two-year colleges. The award was presented at “NerdNation,” the society’s 96th annual convention in Orlando last month.

Ronald Rubanick, co-president of the MCC chapter, received a Distinguished Officer Award at the convention.

Dr. La Perla-Morales credited the students for the organization’s success.

“I’m honored to receive this award and I want to thank the leadership and members of PTK for all they have done to make this chapter so vibrant,” she said. “In a short amount of time, they have improved from a two-star chapter to a five-star chapter, the highest level possible.”

Twelve other community college presidents and one provost also received the award.

They were selected based on their outstanding efforts toward promoting the goals of Phi Theta Kappa. The

award is named for the late Dr. Shirley B. Gordon, Phi Theta Kappa’s longest serving Board of Directors chair and president emerita of Highline Community College in Des Moines, Washington.

Mr. Rubanick was one of 30 chapter officers selected from among 450 applications.

“I’m very happy to receive this award, but I really think it belongs to the entire MCC chapter,” he said. “We’ve made great strides as an organization and I’m proud of its success.”

The MCC Dance Ensemble held a bake sale during its Spring Concerts in April and raised \$200, which was donated to the James Monroe Elementary School. Fire destroyed the school’s building in March and the children have been attending classes at MCC since then. On ground, from left: Nikola Palivoda (backbend), Amanda Guerra (split), Melissa Langholff (split); Michael Korner (backbend). Standing, Aimee Mitacchione, professor of dance and the Ensemble director, is presenting the check to Lynda Zapoticzny, Monroe’s principal. Standing behind them are, from left: Jennifer McCue, Michael Lemaine, Lauren Braconi, Charles Jones and Corinne Hughes.

