

The Viking News

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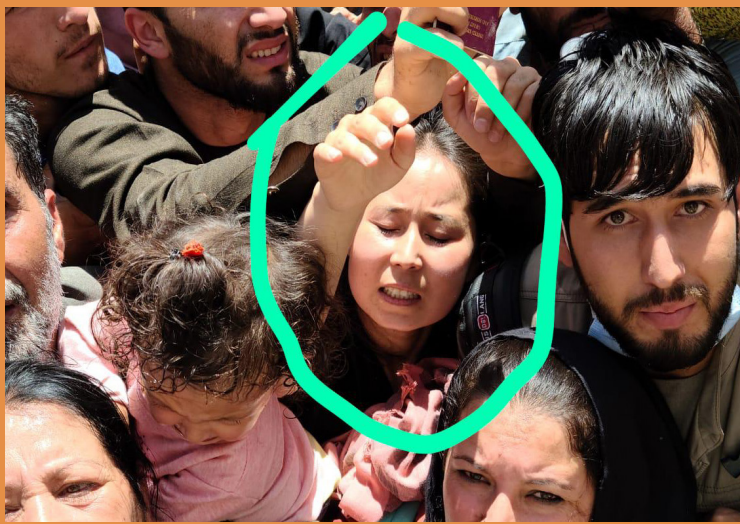
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Dr. Leroy Mitchell



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WCC Student and Prof Help Afghani Woman Escape the Taliban

By Liam Murphy



It is rare that a world event crosses paths with The Viking News's hyperlocal WCC news beat, but such was the exciting case recently. In a harrowing series of events that took place in August and September during the final days of the Amer-

ican occupation in Afghanistan, a WCC student and her professor were credited with crucially assisting a young Afghani woman to escape from the encroaching Taliban. The story began in late August, when a young lawyer named serving in

the American-supported Afghani government, wrote to her cousin Sofia Bator that she was frightened for her life. In the message she said that she had been in her office when news came that Afghani

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President Highlights Opportunities, Bright Future

Photo courtesy of Westchester Community College

By Jason Tamay and Liam Murphy

In a wide-ranging interview conducted by The Viking News as the college celebrates its 75th Anniversary amidst the unprecedented challenges presented by the Coronavirus pandemic—declining enrollments, re-scheduling of classes, enforcement of rules for masking and social distancing—President Belinda S. Miles wants to remind students of the good fortune we all share as members of the

WCC community. And she wants the news to spread. Not content with the frequently reported description of Westchester Community College as a “hidden gem,” the President says, “We want to be known as a place that has a culture of care because we do care about our students.

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NEWS

Escape from Taliban

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‘Taliban has surrounded Kabul. Run for your life.’”

When the trouble in Afghanistan became front-page news, Professor Sheldon Malev of the Psychology Department contacted his former student Sofia, whom he knew to be Afghani. Sofia told Prof. Malev that her cousin, Freshta Nazari was trapped in her small apartment in Kabul with food and water running out. She reported that Freshta had written “I’m a young woman without any protection and in grave danger to be taken by Taliban. I will appreciate any help possible to please get me out of here.”

“The image I had was one of Anne Frank,” Professor Malev says, referring to the young Jewish girl who hid from the Nazis during World War II before being tragically discovered and ultimately executed.

Malev’s immediate advice to his student was to seek help from as many public figures as possible. Then began a frantic period in which both professor and student reached out to public officials ranging from local town officers to members of Congress and the Senate. The thread of emails was also shared with various members of the WCC community.

Malev and Sofia as well as Sofia’s husband Cristian explored many possibilities, reaching out to both acquaintances and strangers. They were amenable to anyway to help. Sofia noted that on the streets of Afghanistan a woman walking by herself is illegal. “They will beat them up or arrest them,” she said. Professor Malev suggested she go to a mosque, a church, or even a hospital. “It seemed hopeless,” says Malev. “It is very important that people live with hope.”

Freshta desperately needed to get to the airport. On the verge of being evicted, she took to the streets. In the course of her communications with Sofia, made via a cell phone that was losing power, it emerged that she would need a U.S. document called an SIV, or Special Immigrant Visa. The office of Congressman Mondaire L. Jones, Democratic representative of New York’s 17th Congressional district, went to work to help secure this visa.

Exactly how Freshta got to the airport is not yet public knowledge. Freshta had lost her primary means of communicating and somehow, she got into a vehicle, which drove her to the airport. That was just the beginning. There was bedlam at



Prof. Sheldon Malev

the airport with thousands of people trying to get through narrow gates. Freshta stood packed in a crowd where she couldn’t move for over 24 hours.

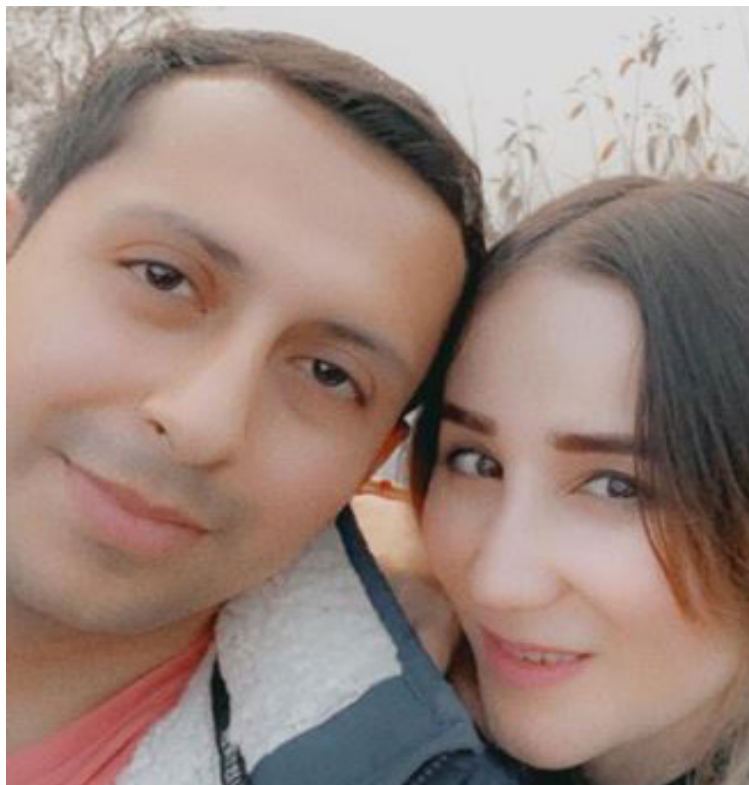
In the end, it was a team of Marines that rescued Freshta. Through the team working on Freshta’s behalf in Westchester, the Marines had received a picture of her. When a sharp-eyed Marine spotted her, he took a photograph and called Sofia, who identified the photo as her cousin.

Marines literally drove through the crowd and pulled Freshta inside the airport. “They were the real heroes,” says Sofia. Tragically, thirteen Marines were killed when a bomb exploded shortly afterward at the gate.

As if in a movie thriller, Freshta faced another obstacle when a U.S. State Department official refused to permit her to leave. When the Marines heard about it, they contacted a lawyer one of them knew in New York, who then contacted the official. This lawyer, who wishes to stay unnamed, said “If anything happens to this young lady we will hold you directly responsible.” This changed the official’s mind and Freshta was cleared to come to America.

In a podcast in which Sofia and Malev related the story, Sofia thanked her former professor, the Marines and all of the elected officials who rendered aid to her endangered cousin. In an emotional address, she said “In the end we are all human and we have to take care of each other.”

In true Hollywood fashion, there is a happy ending to the story related by Prof. Malev to the podcast audience. Freshta is safe in the U.S. and the couple who worked so hard to save her, Sofia and Cristian, are shortly expecting their first child.



Sofia Bator with her husband Cristian Lojano Peña.



THE LETTER THAT STARTED IT ALL

The following is an excerpt from a letter written by the endangered Afghani woman identified in this news story as Freshta to her cousin, a WCC student named Sofia Bator. It was this letter that prompted Sofia to seek the help of WCC psychology professor Sheldon Malev, which ultimately led to Freshta’s rescue.

My name is Freshta Nazari. I born in September 16, 1996. Currently, due to the situation in Afghanistan I have been lock myself in a little room. I can't go out to even by a food becuse outside is very dangerouse for woman.

Four years ago, when I was working as a woman activiest in Mazar-e-sharif my car has been under attack of roadside bomb.

I have been paralyzed for over a year. finally, after many surgery I have been able to walk again.

“I was in my office and everyone started running around burning all documents in small flower pots. Everyone scared, terrified, screaming “Taliban has surrounded Kabul, run for your life”. Few minutes later I was informed that president Ashraf Ghani had run away and left the country to Taliban invasion. As I get out of the office suddenly, I saw an army of Taliban with machine guns approaching towards me and everyone in the street run away.

“I got myself to svafety, and enter my little room that I rent in Kabul. Immediately locked my door and block it with a table. I have not been able to get out as I’m alone with no protection as young woman. From a small window I see Taliban with there machine guns walking the streets and often I hear gunshots. Several times my door has been knocked with force but I have made no noise to make them believe no one is living here. My food and water are running out as I eat little pieces of bread once a day. At night every few hours the silence is broken by several gunshots. To my tragedy the landlord of the building has asked me to leave the room ASAP as the Taliban had order him that no single women without men companion is allow to live by herself.”

“I desperately ask everyone for help to save my life. I have tried to call all the embassies but no one has able to help me. And this is not how I see my future as I prefer to end my life before being capture by this evil regime.”

News Briefs

Adjunct Film Prof Wins Emmy Award By Elma Pejcinovic

Adjunct professor of film Maria Clinton has won the Emmy for Outstanding Short Documentary for “The Love Bugs,” which she co-directed with Allison Otto. The film centers on the relationship between an octogenarian married couple, Charlie and Lois O’Brien, and their shared love of insects. In May 2019, the film gained exposure through multiple U.S. film festivals and gained international attention by being selected for the government’s film diplomacy program. The award was announced on September 29 that the 42nd Annual Emmys. Clinton says she was inspired by a National Public Radio (NPR) broadcast about the O’Briens donating more than a million specimens of their bug collection to Arizona State University along with 10 million dollars. According to the co-directors, the film is critical in showcasing the importance of entomology research for our ecosystem and climate change problem.

Photo courtesy of Westchester Community College



Social Justice Day Committee Seeks Proposals By Max Gruenbaum

Social Justice Day, an annual event at WCC conducted by the Faculty Senate Diversity Committee, will take place this year on Tuesday, November 9. Presentations will all be remote and will be offered throughout the day. The sponsoring committee has issued a request for proposals for presentations on a variety of social justice issues, such as healthcare availability, education, climate justice, refugee crisis, racial discrimination, gender inequality, and others. Everyone in the WCC community, including faculty, administrators, staff, and students with a faculty mentor

are welcome to submit proposals. Clubs with a faculty advisor are included in the invitation. The committee requests the following information in the proposal: topic, length of presentation, and best time to schedule it. IT professionals will be working with the committee to help with technical issues. Proposals should be submitted to either ekta.bhatia@sunywcc.edu or erik.fortune@sunywcc.edu. Deadline to submit a proposal is Friday, Oct 22, 2021.

SGA Announces New Student Senators

SGA has announced the election of nine new Senators to serve in Student Government for the

Academic Year 2021-22. They are:

- | | |
|------------------|------------------|
| Isaiah Baylor | Liam Murphy |
| Tahj Blake | Yolanda Pinckney |
| Nicholas Caicedo | Danasia Smith |
| Celena Kubbier | Jaci Williams |
| Connor Miller | |

President Highlights Opportunities, Support, Bright Future

(Continued from page 1)

We want to attract students, we want to retain them, we want to see them complete their programs and have opportunities to transfer to four-year institutions or enter the workspace. We hope students feel that.”

The president exhibited enthusiasm and energy as she enumerated the evidence for an abundance of opportunities presently available to students here.

High on the list, and clearly a matter of pride, was the Jack Cooke Kent Scholarship awarded to a recent graduate. “This is a highly competitive scholarship and is only awarded to 80 individuals across the nation’s 11,000 community colleges,” she says. “These students are selected to get \$40,000 a year to transfer to a 4-year institution. Westchester Community College has 11 total Jack Cooke scholarship winners. I don’t want this gem to be hidden, I want it to shine and let people see that there is a pathway for their goals.”

Further evidence of opportunity is WCC’s acknowledged leadership when it comes to economic advancement for its students. “Our college has a distinction of helping students who start in the lowest 5th quintile of earning, earn over their career lifetime, and become a part of the highest quintile of earnings,” she says. “This particular institution amongst all of the community colleges in the nation, really excels on that metric, economic mobility. That’s a big deal! That’s the kind of thing you want to pay attention to, that this degree has value!”

A long list of other opportunities awaits new students, the President continued, mentioning an award-winning Phi-Theta-Kappa organization, national recognition as a veteran’s friendly campus, a varsity gaming team that has beaten everyone and is number one in the nation, an honors college and an honors program. WCC has received numerous accolades for many programs

and clubs such as The Viking News and its LGBTQ activities. “The great news is that any student can participate in anything I’ve just mentioned.”

The level of support services available to incoming and continuing students is unparalleled in the college’s history, and clearly a matter of great pride to the President. “College is a time of identity, development, self-discovery, and social engagement,” she says, citing the need to recognize students who need help in achieving these things. “WCC being an open-door access institution allows any student to enter who is facing challenges in their lives such as financial barriers, family issues, lack of high school achievement, years away from school, and others.”

Among the challenges the school is committed to helping students face by means of financial aid, counseling and other services, the President says, the issue of mental health is a top

priority at WCC. “At the college we are making it front and center. Our counseling department has established the department of mental health and counseling services. They put mental health right in their title so that it is something we should not shy away from, but be able to gravitate toward, know where it is and feel that we can reach out.”

“We’ve also trained several faculty and staff on how to identify when a student might be in crisis.” In addition, she continues, “the school has enhanced the number of peer support groups that offer telehealth services, which is an online assistance therapy available to all students. The goal is to make mental health help become more normalized, to influence students who are seeking help to avoid feeling hesitant or isolated.”

President Miles has some tips for incoming students: “Be adaptable, move with the flow almost like a surfer going through the waves. There is no

elevator ride to success. It is a long staircase and it’s got lots of twist and turns and maybe some nails that stick out along those steps,” she warns. “The point is that there is going to be adversity, there are going to be challenges. And being able to hone the skill of sticking to your goal is going to be critical.”

The President had praise for the faculty and staff who adapted to the demands of the pandemic, noting that 100% of the faculty received training in remote teaching and that the “financial aid services, admissions office, counseling, clubs, open house, and activities successfully switched into an online modality.”

Her conclusion is unsurprising: “I can only see the future as being bright both for the institution and the students!”

FEATURES

A Perfectly Poetic Activist

The Return of Roya Marsh to WCC

By: Marygrace's Orfanella

On September 23rd at 11am, this reporter joined twenty other students who logged into a zoom link that would bring them into a poetry workshop. Heather Ostman, WCC's own English professor and Director of the Humanities Institute, kicked off the event by introducing the guest poet Roya Marsh, a favorite in the WCC community, returning for a second year following her presentations that occurred in the fall of 2020.

When asked about how she chose Marsh to be the workshop's guest poet Ostman responded, "When I invite a poet, writer, or a scholar to the Humanities Institute, I try to find someone who is doing interesting, current work that might 'speak' to our students." Going by the given criteria Roya Marsh was the perfect candidate, starting with the fact that she is an award-winning poet. In addition to her poetic achievements, Roya Marsh is also an avid activist. As an activist Marsh works

hard, as she tells her audiences, to push back against white supremacy, and to seek justice for members of the LGBTQIA community, two issues that are very near and dear to the WCC community. Marsh summed up her entire mission in one sentence when she said, "If I'm ruining the problematic things, then I'm doing my job".

Marsh began her lesson by asking the students a question that most people would find unusual for a class setting. When each participant introduced themselves, she asked what the student was feeling emotionally at that exact moment and what song they would pick to define that feeling. This gave the students a chance to warm up to her and become more comfortable with the group. Marsh herself answered with the song "What Do You Mean" by Justin Bieber, whose opening lyrics allude to uncertainty: "What do you mean? Oh, oh When you nod your head

yes But you wanna say no What do you mean?" However, despite any conflict or confusion in her personal life these words might imply, Marsh remained positive and engaging throughout the workshop.

Marsh's chosen lesson was on the use of epigraphs, and in true Roya fashion chose an emotional and empowering poem as an example of their usage, "What Women Are Made Of" by Bianca Lynne Spriggs, which begins with the epigraph "There are many kinds of open," a quote from Andre Lorde. After reading parts of the third and fourth stanzas, ---"We are hippocampus and exposed nerve/And cornea. Areola, pigment, melanin, and nails."---Marsh asked the students to think about what this poem might mean, and received an overwhelming number of responses that leaned towards vulnerability and strength, two attributes that can be found in Marsh's own work. After giving multiple ex-

amples of this style, she encouraged students to find a quote that meant something to them to use as an epigraph and to build a poem around it. After giving the students some time to work she shared her own poem, in which the epigraph was something that an acquaintance had said to her; "Leave that anxiety shit in the crib and just come." Marsh continued on to explain that this statement was something that stuck with her and that she had internalized it, leading to the powerful poem that followed.

When asked if she frequently internalizes things and uses them in her work Marsh responded with a resounding "Absolutely!" Marsh encourages students to use experiences and actions that occur in their own lives to fuel their creativity. On September 30th Marsh returned for a follow up workshop to hear the work of her students and share more of her own poetry.

The WCC Humanities Council sponsors lectures, workshops, films, and other presentations throughout the year. It is funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. For further information contact Professor Heather Ostman: heather.ostman@sunywcc.edu.



Student Spotlight on Gabriella Quartey

Her choice of major says it all: Human Services.

Gabriella ("Gabby") Quartey, the president of the Student Government Association (SGA) for year 2021-22, looks on her college experience here at WCC as a path paved with opportunities to help people. Gabby, who transferred to WCC from another college, is a fan of community colleges, which she thinks are often stigmatized. She believes community colleges allow students to "embrace who they are."

Known for being the President of the Mount Vernon Activities Club, Gabby joined WEB this past fall as co-chair of Performing Arts. When asked about why she wished to serve in these

leadership positions, Gabriella responded that she "loves to see people have fun and enjoy themselves and create events."

Her background played a role in the work she pursues. She believes that having been raised in Ghana under the influence of Christianity has taught her to be compassionate to others. Gabby's family, especially her mom and aunt, were important figures in shaping her decision to choose a Human Services major because of her interest in communicating with people.

In the next five years, Gabby sees a continuing role as a student for herself. She plans to go to Mercy Col-

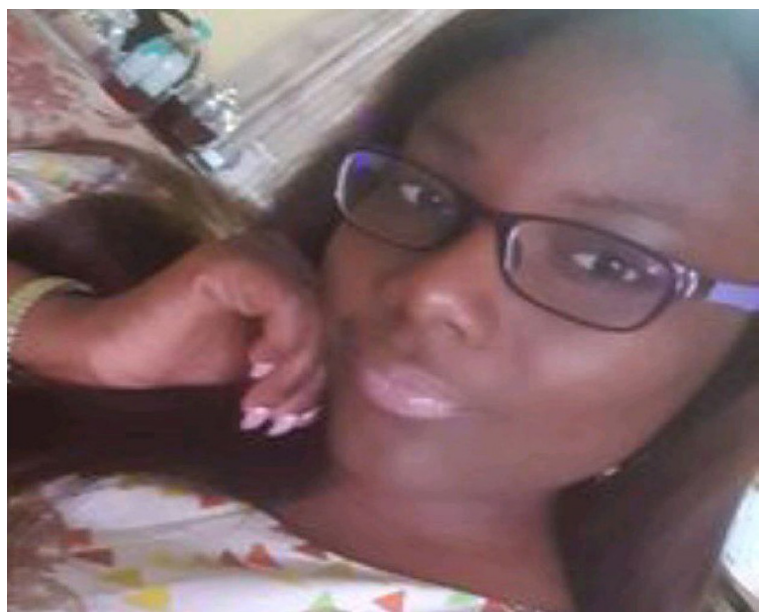
lege or Lehman College after WCC for her Bachelor's and to pursue a Master's degree in the future. Her goal is to do social work, a field in which she can continue to help people.

In her role as SGA president, Gabriella encourages students to participate in the Department of Student Involvement (DSI) activities. She thinks social media is especially important in the COVID era as an outlet for student involvement.

She has just overseen the election of a new slate of officers in the Student Senate. Gabby also has a strong interest in getting word out to all of WCC's students about the

help that is available to them. "There are a lot of resources at WCC for students who need funds, food, tutoring, etc. There is always someone there to help," she says.

As the SGA president, Gabriella invites all students who need help to contact her. She can be reached at sgapresident@sunywcc.edu.



Visionary Viking



Roya Marsh is the Poet in Residence at Urban Word NYC. In September she conducted two workshops via Zoom at WCC. (See the FEATURES section article “Perfectly Poetic” by Marygrace Orfanella in this issue for a workshop description.) The poem below is the opening work in her collection of poems called *dayliGht*, which was published in 2020. It is a copyrighted work reprinted here with the permission of the author. For those who wish to read further, *dayliGht* is available for \$11.99 on Amazon.



In Broad Day Light Black Girls Look ghost

Carefully, I arrange my disguise. It has been designed not to stand out . . . I decide to look like a poor Black woman.

—Assata Shakur

i'm good with my tongue. it
makes me most visible.
with a shut mouth I'm a good dresser. a
flapping tongue makes me:
sexy well
learned a
conquest
my voice is more pronounced than my skin tone and
i need to know why
i track down my ancestry through DNA
i track down someone with my last name
she tell me it's hers

she white
says it's funny how I'm black i
say, “ha-ha”
results say i'm hers
in history
in old law
in old English
say her great greats
owned my greatest on
this soil.
“wow,” she say
and i hold my tongue. tight. between molars. 'til it
bloody and useless
'til i can't speak
'til she don't see me
and swallow back the blood iain't ask for in the first place

OPINION

The Viking News

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Photo Courtesy of Westchester Community College

Should vaccination be required?

Barbara Coscia I do think vaccines should be mandatory for students. As schools are returning to in person, classes and the campus will become more crowded. Historically, germs and sicknesses travel fast in these environments.

Kat Murray I believe the vaccination should be voluntary. While I am 100% for vaccinations and I am fully vaccinated myself, I understand the hesitation people are having ... as I did have some hesitation myself. People are worried about the effects of the vaccination short term and long term and what it may or may not do to their bodies. And in my opinion the vaccine did come out very quickly.

Kevyn Castillo Simmons Mandatory vaccination is inhumane, unconstitutional,

and a step forward towards the complete loss of our freedoms... What should occur is those who feel they want/need it be able to and those who don't should still be able to live their lives as this is not as deadly a virus as they make it out to be.

ANONYMOUS I do think students should be ordered to get vaccinated because it helps other members of society even if they themselves will probably be okay if they catch the coronavirus. A lot of students would not go out themselves and get the vaccine if it was not mandated. Students already have to receive other vaccines such as the Hepatitis B, polio, and chickenpox vaccines.

Kristina Nikoljic I think everyone should have their freedom. Nobody should be forced to get the vaccine if they don't want to.

Johanna Runolfs-son

I feel that all students should be vaccinated...[but] I find it difficult to come to a strict yes or no. Some reasons I do think students should get the vaccine are so we can protect students and teachers on campus as well as push towards fighting for the end to this pandemic, but...I understand why it might frighten people. Since the CDC approved the Pfizer vaccine my opinion on mandating the vaccine has become more in favor.

Melissa Velecela I think students should be ordered to be vaccinated but if they have a medical condition then they should not. If a student is healthy

and has no medical conditions, then I feel like they should be vaccinated for the safety of themselves and their families. However, if a student has any or multiple health conditions then they put themselves at risk. It would be a lot to worry about on top of what they already got.

Eric L. Jimenez Yes because I want to be able to interact with my fellow students without worrying about getting sick if someone is infected with COVID. Plus schools always had mandates with vaccinations to ensure the health of faculty and students.

Andres Cardona No, I don't think students should be ordered to be vaccinated. It does not seem to make a difference if students are vaccinated or not if they still have to wear a mask

Letter From the WCC Board of Trustees

Dear Students,

Westchester Community College is here for you.

You may have already seen this phrase in an email or #WCCHereForYou on social media. For the college's trustees, it has special meaning. It means that we truly care about you and your success.

No matter where you are on your journey here – just starting for the first time, continuing your studies, or coming back after some time away – we congratulate you on setting academic and career goals and persisting on your individual pathways. We are deeply interested in your success and wellbeing, and we want you to feel welcome and part of a community of care.

We acknowledge that the current circumstances are hard and constantly changing. We face adversity in our own lives and understand how difficult it can be to juggle major commitments that are sometimes in conflict. As you navigate your pathway, keep in mind that the college trustees, President Miles, and all the dedicated faculty and staff are here for you and for each other. With your help, we will make 2021-2022 the college's best year ever!

Chairperson Dr. Leroy Mitchell & the WCC Board of Trustees

Giants Off to Rocky Start

By: Laim Murphy

But—stop the presses!—does victory over Saints in Game 4 point to a *Rocky* finish?



The Denver Broncos traveled to New York to meet Big Blue on Sunday Sept 12, the day after the 20th anniversary of 9/11, to open the Giants season. It was the first time since 2019 that MetLife stadium welcomed fans back to a regular season game. (A Jets/Giants exhibition match took place there in August.)

Once again Giants fans showed why they are among the most loyal in the NFL. Despite a non-stellar record in recent years, the stadium was at full capacity. Continuing a streak of disappointments, the Giants lost 27-13 to the Broncos in the opener.

For some fans, the disappointment is not confined to the game scores. Not everyone welcomes the decision not to enforce COVID restraints in MetLife Stadium. WCC student Stephen Qumburji is one of those who has concerns about the Giants inviting fans to back to the stadium in full force.

“I feel like it is irresponsible that the Giants are inviting fans back to the stadium,” he says. “This decision is a child-

ish one as the organization has announced that they will not be requiring proof of a COVID-19 vaccine to enter.”

Qumburji says that he would feel safer attending games this season if he knew fellow fans had gotten the shot. Other New York venues including restaurants and theaters are requiring proof of vaccination to enter. Qumburji is looking forward to going to Giants games again when he feels it is safer to attend. The atmosphere in the arena formerly called Giants Stadium is “like no other,” he says. “I have been to Giants games before and the crowd roared the loudest sounds I’ve heard, cheered with the highest passion, and really made me proud to say I was a Giants fan.”

Giants’ fans were not very proud after losing 27-13 to the Broncos. After the loss, head

Giants coach Joe Judge said, “We’ve got to earn the fans’ respect, point blank. These people come out here and spend their hard earned money. They sit in the seats, they cheer for us, they give us energy within the seats. We have

to give them something to cheer about.”

Resilient Giants fans had hopes for the following game, when the New York team was scheduled to play the Washington Football Team (formerly called the Washington Redskins), but ultimately were again disappointed. After Washington missed a field goal during the final seconds of the game, Giants fans thought they had their first win secured. This turned out to be false hope, as a heartbreaking flag on the defense ultimately cost the Giants the game. The losing streak continued with a 17-14 loss to the Atlanta Falcons on Sept 26.

Commenting on the Giants season thus far, Qumburji says “I am not jumping with joy...With the Big Blue’s 0-3 start for the season, I can see most of the season not going our way. The best thing that can come out of this season is a potential high draft pick because of how poorly they perform.”

With the Giants season not looking too bright, fans are left only with feelings of nos-

talgia. This season will be the tenth anniversary since Eli Manning led the Giants to a Super Bowl victory over Tom Brady and the New England Patriots. After Tom Brady won his 7th Super Bowl last year, Giants fans could nurse a sense of pride knowing that the Giants have a 2-0 Super Bowl record against the ‘GOAT.’

Qumburji, too, feels pride thinking back on that Super Bowl. “I remember 10 years ago sitting in the living room on my little brother’s birthday when Eli was about to be sacked, then somehow cut loose and sent the ball

down the field. A miracle was brought into the world that day when David Tyree caught the ball between his helmet and hands. Everyone in my living room went

crazy.” On Sunday, September 26, many Giants fans must have recalled that day as Eli Manning had his jersey retired and was inducted into the team’s Ring of Honor.

Photo credit: MetLife Stadium Instagram (@mlstadium)

Photo Credit (photo 2): NY Daily News





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