

TRANSFORMATIONS



A HISTORIC DAY FOR MATC

The Investiture of President Anthony Cruz, Ed.D.

STRATEGIC PLAN
UNITES THE COLLEGE

TENOR PARTNERSHIP
TURNS 20

ALUMNA ADVOCATES
FOR REFUGEES

TRANSFORMATIONS

Transformations magazine is a semiannual publication of Milwaukee Area Technical College. It is produced by MATC Marketing and Communications, 700 West State Street, Milwaukee, WI 53233-1443.

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PUBLIC GRANTS

Much of the excellent work taking place at MATC is supported by public grants. To see the impact this funding has, check out these stories:

“Getting Students College Ready”

MATC’s partnership with Tenor High School is supported, in part, with Perkins grant funding administered by the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS). Page 16

“From Badge to Blackboard”

The Criminal Justice Studies program receives support from WTCS, including Perkins. Page 20

“Envisioning His Future”

Student Accommodation Services participates in the Perkins Student Success grant. Page 28

“A Harmonious and Happy Partnership”

Workforce Advancement Training grants are funded through WTCS. Page 30

CONTACT US

For up-to-date MATC news, visit matc.edu. Send us your feedback at communications@matc.edu.

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MATC MOMENT



Dr. Cruz's family proudly watched as he became the 11th president of MATC during the investiture ceremony in September 2025.

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MESSAGE FROM THE President and District Board Chairperson

AS WE LOOK BACK on the past year, “historic” is the word that resonates most deeply across our campuses. In this issue of Transformations, we are excited to share the milestones we have reached, from new leadership to steadfast partnerships to the achievements of our students and alumni.

You will read about MATC’s first presidential investiture ceremony. We also bestowed three Medals of Distinction upon individuals who have consistently contributed to the college’s success in varying degrees.

Empowering students to change their own lives is at the heart of MATC’s mission. The college’s new strategic plan, Ascend Together, sets bold targets and focuses on three priorities: student success, community trust and caring culture (page 26). The priorities are tied together to help guide MATC’s direction for the next five years. The plan ensures that every individual, department and division is focused on students and the communities we serve.

Speaking of community trust, this issue also celebrates the 20th anniversary of MATC’s partnership with Tenor High School (page 16). MATC and Tenor work together to provide dual enrollment courses so students can finish college faster and save on tuition. Read about the school’s



historic founding as a charter school and hear from one its first graduates, as well as a recent grad and current students ready to spend their senior year at MATC.

The rest of the issue is filled with inspiring transformations: MATC instructor Connie Prange left the police department to train the next generation of law enforcement professionals (page 20); Sid Miller, who is deafblind, is studying Graphic Design at MATC (page 28); and Hasnah Hussin, a Rohingya woman who came to the United States as a refugee and now helps other refugees build new lives in Milwaukee (page 32).

Working with our philanthropic partner, the MATC Foundation, the college has helped thousands of students enter family-sustaining careers (page 34).

Whether you are a longtime donor, a local business partner or a friend of the college, you are an essential part of this narrative. Your belief in our mission is the fuel behind every “historic” moment we record. As you turn these pages, we hope you feel a sense of pride in what we have built together.

Thank you for being a part of MATC’s success. Here’s to the history we’ve made — and the future we’re currently writing.

Anthony Cruz, Ed.D.
MATC President

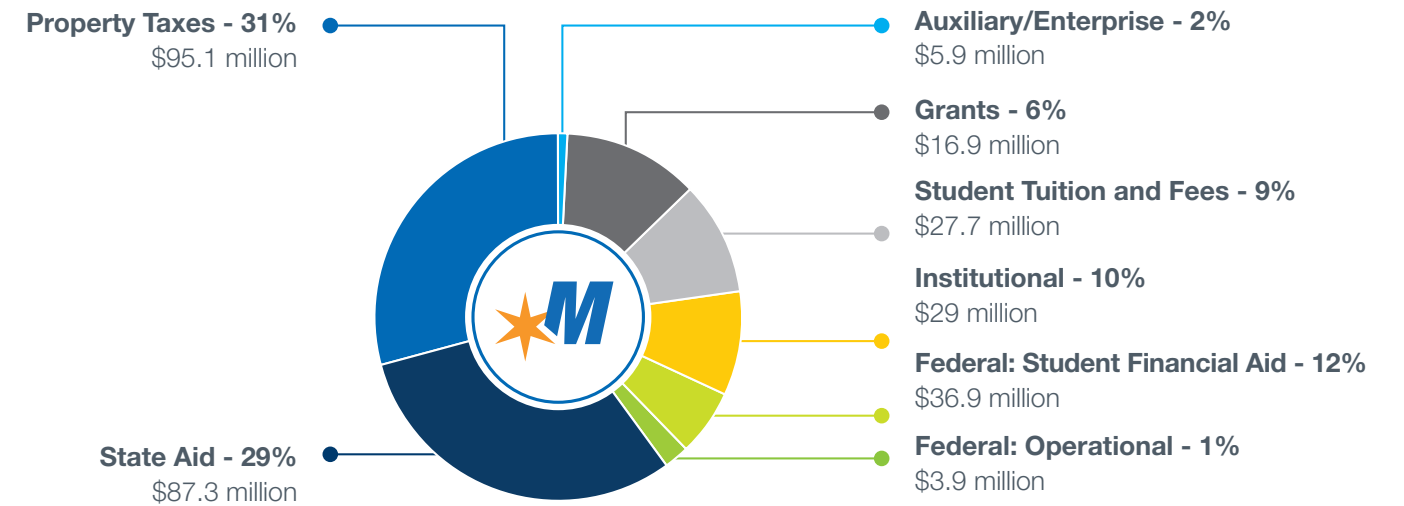
Erica L. Case
MATC District Board Chairperson



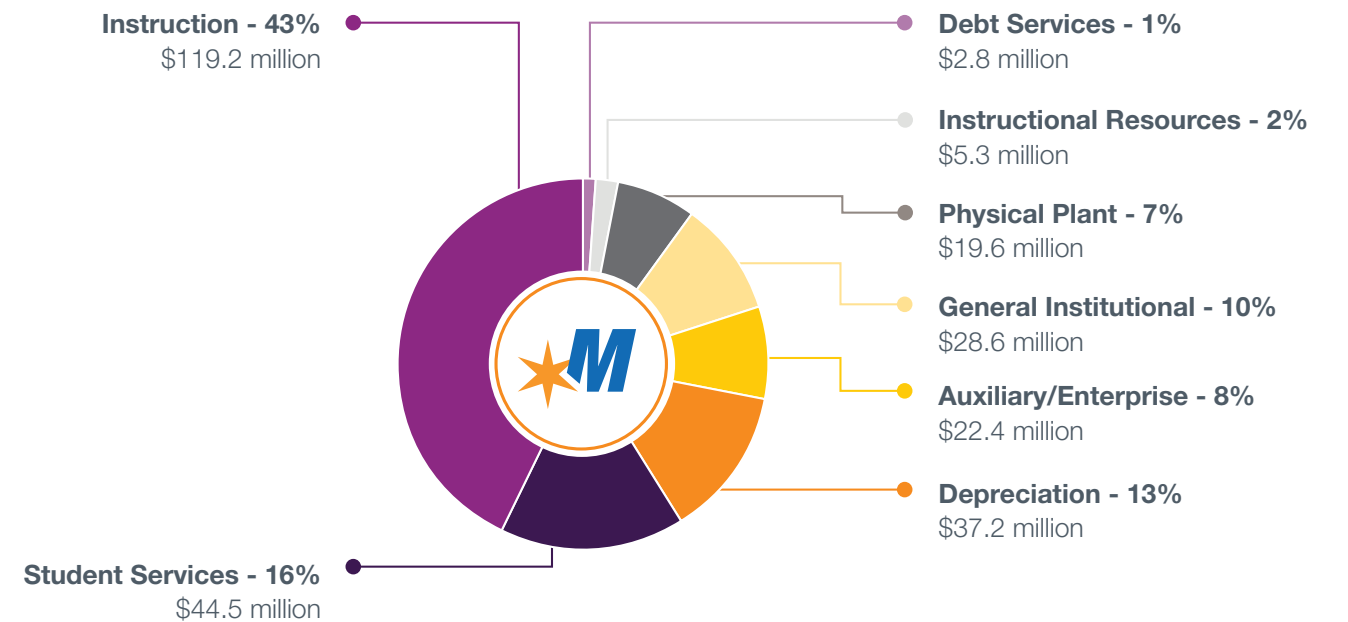
Community Connections events held during the investiture celebration introduced local leaders to MATC’s facilities, including the Al Hurvis/PEAK Transportation Center.

MATC 2025 Financials

Total Revenue \$302.7 Million



Total Expense \$279.6 Million



Milwaukee Area Technical College is fiscally responsible, balancing the needs of students and taxpayers.

The college retained a strong Aa1 bond rating from Moody’s Investors Service in the 2024-25 fiscal year. The tax levy decreased from .8367 (2024) to .8006 (2025) for every \$1,000 of equalized value. The owner of a \$100,000 home in the MATC service district paid \$80.06 in 2025, compared to \$83.67 in 2024, a decrease of \$3.61.

Highlights



Metallica's Foundation Supports Career Exploration

NEARLY 150 STUDENTS from Cudahy, Franklin, Greendale, Oak Creek, Greenfield, St. Francis, South Milwaukee and Whitnall high schools got a first-hand look at careers in the trades thanks to the rock band Metallica.

The Heavy Metal Tour, a daylong event held October 28 at the Oak Creek Campus, was sponsored in part by All Within My Hands (AWMH), a nonprofit foundation established by Metallica's members and management to support and advance careers in "heavy metal" manufacturing fields.

In addition to trying the trades (above), students heard from area employers about career opportunities.

AWMH and Metallica have given MATC nearly \$300,000 over the past four years to support scholarships and events like the Heavy Metal Tour. "Metallica believes that hands-on trades are worth their money," said Carol Voss, associate dean of the Manufacturing, Construction and Transportation Academic and Career Pathway. "They also believe in what MATC has done and is doing to promote those programs."



New Spaces Enhance Learning

THE COLLEGE OPENED new spaces this year, creating a vibrant learning environment for students at the Downtown Milwaukee Campus. Spaces include:

Testing Center — Thousands of students and community members will take placement assessments, standardized tests and credentialing exams in this bright, welcoming room conveniently located near the S Building, which houses many student services.

Healthcare Pathway Office — The new headquarters (left) will help staff provide direction, boost retention and completion, and expand programs. Enrollment in the Pathway has increased 40% in the past three years.

Students Learn How To Dress for Success

THE JOB MARKET IS COMPETITIVE and candidates who dress well stand out. That was the lesson conveyed at "Style Your Success," an interactive fashion show, held September 23 at the Downtown Milwaukee Campus. The event was hosted by CareerHub, the college's career services team.

Staff volunteers, including Dr. Clavon Byrd, dean of the General Education Pathway, strutted down a blue runway showing students what to wear, and not to wear, to job interviews and career fairs. Attendees used blue and orange pieces of paper to vote on the models' workplace attire. Orange meant success; blue meant the outfit was better suited for a lazy day at home.

"It's important how you show up," said Courtney Kelly, career services coordinator and event emcee. "The outfit you choose for a job fair is just as important as the outfit you choose for a job interview."

Students who need clothing to create a professional look for a job interview can turn to the Career Closet, an MATC resource that provides students with free attire.

"We can help you dress for the job that you want," said Equan Burrows, dean of student experience.



Dr. Clavon Byrd models work attire.

¡Viva MATC!

THE COLLEGE CELEBRATED National Hispanic Heritage Month by turning the Student Lounge at the Downtown Milwaukee Campus into a makeshift dance floor.

Dr. Anthony Cruz, MATC's president, and about 100 students, faculty and staff danced September 16 to the sounds of thumping percussion and vibrant marimba performed by local dance company Panandanza. The event was hosted and sponsored by Student Engagement and Community Impact, Student Life, the Hispanic-Serving Institution Committee, Latinx Unidos Student Organization, and HOLA, the college's Hispanic employee resource group.

"This month is a wonderful celebration," said Dr. Cruz, who is the son of Cuban immigrants and the first Latino to serve as the college's president. "We come from different backgrounds,



Dr. Cruz dances with Dr. Jacqueline Robinson.

different cultures, but many of us are under the one umbrella known as Hispanic. And we are part of a rich heritage of diversity at our institution."

National Hispanic Heritage Month runs every year from September 15 to October 15. Other festivities during the month included food workshops, discussions about becoming a Hispanic-Serving Institution, dance performances and more.



President's Student Leadership Series

CITY OF MILWAUKEE FIRE CHIEF Aaron Lipski and Milwaukee County Sheriff Denita R. Ball (left) shared their career journeys during a President's Student Leadership Series program hosted by Dr. Cruz on October 8.

The series, held once a semester and sponsored by Student Engagement and Community Impact, gives MATC students a unique opportunity to hear the educational and professional experiences of leaders in various careers. Many in the audience were students in the college's Protective Services programs, which are based at the Oak Creek Campus.

Lipski and Ball related how they started their careers, how they advanced through the ranks, and described their leadership styles and habits.

"You can never take enough classes, attend enough seminars or go to enough conferences," he said. "You need to know the things that will keep you alive."

Ball added, "Be a lifelong learner. Learn from the mistakes that others make so you don't make the same mistakes."

The inaugural President's Student Leadership Series featured Dr. Jesse Ehrenfeld, anesthesiology professor at the Medical College of Wisconsin, and Jess Johnson, chief operating officer at Aurora St. Luke's Medical Center.

Alumni Honored in BizTimes

FOUR ALUMNI were among the 2025 Notable Alumni featured in BizTimes: Jackie Q. Carter, director of employee relations for the City of Milwaukee; Nigel Harvey, founder of Cream Skills; Heather McClendon (not pictured), registered nurse at Advocate Aurora Health; and TrueMan McGee, founder of Funky Fresh Spring Rolls.



Jackie Q. Carter



Nigel Harvey



TrueMan McGee

Highlights



Employees Nominated for Service Excellence Awards

MATC HONORED 66 employees with WE CARE Service Excellence Awards on December 15.

The recipients were recognized for exemplary work between April 2025 and September 2025 at a breakfast held at Cuisine, the restaurant and training lab run by students in the Culinary Arts program at the Downtown Milwaukee Campus.

“You are doing the work inside the college and inside the classrooms that makes a huge difference in our students’ lives and in each other’s lives,” Dr. Cruz told the employees. “You exemplify the culture we are trying to create at MATC.”

The standards of WE CARE, which stands for Welcoming, Engaged and Empowered, Compassionate, Accountable, Resourceful, and Exceed Expectations, reflect how the college aims to interact with other employees, students and visitors.

Voice of the College Live Examines Student Satisfaction

MATC EMPLOYEES GATHERED October 15 to review the results of the student satisfaction survey.

They met during the academic year’s first session of Voice of the College Live, a forum where employees discuss challenges and propose solutions. Dr. Cruz encouraged attendees to “Think about what is both possible and impossible. The status quo is our biggest enemy. If we keep doing what we are doing, these scores won’t change.”

Nearly 1,350 students responded to the survey, about 10%. They answered 40 questions about their satisfaction with advising, admissions, registration, climate, services and safety.

MATC scored relatively well in almost every category, said Olya Finnegan, manager of research and reporting. These categories included inclusiveness, accessibility to computers and Wi-Fi, effective communication, clear academic plans, quick response to calls for assistance, and a welcoming environment.

Students reported that the college could improve in areas such as financial support, getting the “run-around” by employees, and adequate and safe parking.

“There is a lot of great feedback coming in,” said Greg Ware, manager of quality improvement projects and planning, who supervised the exercise at the Downtown Milwaukee Campus.



Greg Ware led the brainstorming activities during Voice of the College Live.



In Memoriam: A Legacy of Service

VIOLA HAWKINS, a longtime community activist, a 1985 MATC graduate, and a member of the MATC Foundation Board of Directors, died December 22 at her Milwaukee home. She was 86.

Hawkins, known to almost everyone as Ms. Vi, was an influencer long before social media. She was a commanding force of inspiration, encouragement and activism in the Milwaukee community for nearly seven decades.

The Ms. Vi Hawkins Grassroots Scholarship, which she started in 2019, helped dozens of young people realize their dreams of higher education.

“Ms. Vi was more than an MATC Foundation Board member; she was a steadfast champion of opportunity and a tireless ambassador for MATC,” Dr. Cruz said. “Ms. Vi believed deeply in education’s power to transform lives, and she gave her time, voice and heart to ensure students felt seen, supported and inspired. Her advocacy strengthened partnerships, elevated the Foundation’s mission and opened doors for countless learners.”

To read more about Ms. Vi’s contributions to MATC, see page 15. To support Ms. Vi’s scholarship, go to matc.edu/donate.



Forging Strong Links Between K-12 and College

THE 2025 M-CUBED IMPACT REPORT showed that the collaboration between MATC, Milwaukee Public Schools and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee has had a significant impact on helping MPS students tour colleges, earn college credits and connect with mentors.

“M-Cubed continued making a difference for individual student success, connecting staff across the education continuum and helping families discover what they need to guide their children’s education pathways,” Dr. Cruz said.

During the 2024-25 school year, M-Cubed programs helped more than:

- 1,900 high school students tour MATC and UWM
- 2,000 students earn college credit
- 1,100 students meet local employers at job fairs
- 300 educators unite to align learning from classroom to career
- 60 parents participate in the Milwaukee Parent Institute, strengthening their roles as partners in their children’s success

The 2024-25 academic year also saw the 11-year-old partnership get new executive leadership at all three institutions: Dr. Cruz (left) started as MATC president in July 2024, Dr. Thomas Gibson (center) is now UWM chancellor and Dr. Brenda Cassellius (right) is now MPS superintendent.

“As leaders, we remain committed to this impactful partnership and the shared infrastructure we have built to advance it,” Dr. Cruz said.





On the occasion of his presidential investiture, Dr. Anthony Cruz spoke about his parents' sacrifices and their faith in the power of education.

CELEBRATING a HISTORIC OCCASION

MATC's first presidential investiture ceremony officially recognized Dr. Anthony Cruz as the college's new leader

On September 19, 2025, Layla Merrifield, the president of the Wisconsin Technical College System, walked to the podium on the Robert L. Cooley Auditorium stage.

As a bank of spotlights bathed her in bright light, she gazed out at hundreds of guests sitting in the wooden seats of the 110-year-old theater, the largest space at MATC.

"We are all part of history today," she said.

Indeed they were.

On that day, more than 200 MATC students, faculty, staff and district board directors, along with business leaders, community partners and elected officials, attended the Investiture of MATC President Dr. Anthony Cruz.

A formal academic ceremony, the investiture — the first of its kind in MATC's 113-year history — officially installed Dr. Cruz as the college's new leader.

The event marked a professional and personal pinnacle for Dr. Cruz, the son of Cuban immigrants, the first person in his family to attend college and someone who at times struggled to continue this educational journey.

In his investiture address, Dr. Cruz conceded he constantly wondered if he belonged at college, if he mattered to anyone, if he could ever succeed.

"There were moments when I felt like giving up. Moments of doubt. Moments when the road was unclear," he recalled at the ceremony. "But what kept me moving forward was the sacrifice and resilience of my parents. They came to this country with nothing but hope. They didn't speak the language. They didn't have wealth. But they did have faith in the power of education and faith that their children could go further than they ever dreamed."

Cruz persevered, earned three college degrees and began a three-decade career in higher education.

He served as dean of enrollment and student development at Cincinnati State from 2009 to 2012; as vice president of enrollment management and student affairs at Sinclair Community College in Dayton, Ohio, from 2012 to 2016; and as vice chancellor of student affairs at St. Louis Community College from 2016 to 2019.

From St. Louis, he went to Miami Dade College, a nationally recognized community college valued for its diversity, affordability, accessible campuses, modern facilities, wide range of programs and extensive support services.

In July 2024, he came to MATC, where he became the college's first Latino president — another milestone.

The historical investiture last September began with speakers and guests processing into the auditorium to the melody of a Mozart divertimento. The U.S. and Wisconsin flags were presented by a color guard from the Milwaukee County Sheriff's Office, and the MATC Music Faculty Student Alumni Vocal Ensemble sang the national anthem.

Guests then heard remarks from speakers representing the MATC District Board; the college's faculty, staff, students and alumni; the region's business community; and the City of Milwaukee.

In his address, Dr. Cruz thanked his family, including his parents, Caridad and Antonio, who attended the event; his colleagues; and his friends for their support.

He also pledged to support MATC students, vowing they will always come first.

"To the students of MATC: You are the reason I am here," he said. "Every decision I make, every initiative we launch, every conversation we have at the executive table, it's all for you."

He added, "I never want a student to feel like they don't belong here. I don't want anyone to walk through our doors and feel that sense of uncertainty, that feeling I had as a first-generation college student, wondering, 'Do I really deserve to be here?' Yes, you do. You belong here. You matter. And your success is our mission."

To accomplish that mission, MATC recently developed a new strategic plan called Ascend Together. The plan focuses on three priorities: building community trust, fostering a caring culture at the college and ensuring student success.



Words of Praise

During the investiture ceremony, friends, colleagues and local leaders shared remarks about Dr. Cruz.

LEADERSHIP

It is a great honor for me to be a part of the board that brought Dr. Cruz here. It was one of the best decisions we ever made.

ERICA CASE

Chairperson of the MATC District Board of Directors

ENGAGED

You are walking the halls, showing up at our events and listening to our stories. We can tell you care deeply about the student experience.

We see how you see us.

NAOMI OMORUYI

WTCS Student Ambassador

GO-GETTER

In a world becoming more divided, we need leaders who are authentic and do those things day in and day out. Dr. Cruz will make great things happen in the region.

JOEL BRENNAN

President of the Greater Milwaukee Committee

VISIONARY

He has always led with heart, vision and grit. I've seen firsthand what he's capable of, and you should be incredibly excited to have him here.

NANCY YI

Assistant Professor Senior of English and Communications at Miami Dade College

PIONEER

As a Latina, I am immensely proud to have been a part of the process that gave us the college's first Latino president.

CITLALI MENDIETA-RAMOS

Vice Chairperson of the MATC District Board of Directors

To be successful, MATC must innovate in the classroom, partner with businesses and community leaders to ensure courses reflect the real working world, and provide needed student services, Dr. Cruz said.

"We'll do it all while remembering that technical education is no longer blue-collar — it's gold-collar," he said. "These are high-skill, high-wage, high-demand careers, and MATC is the launchpad for that future."



And everyone is more than welcome to attend MATC and find out what they can accomplish, he added.

"We are the hope for the students who didn't think college was for them. We are the bridge for the adult learner changing careers. We are the future for Milwaukee's communities and industries," Dr. Cruz said. "And under my leadership, we will continue to rise, not just for the students we have today, but for

the ones who haven't even walked through our doors yet."

After making his remarks, Dr. Cruz stood and faced Erica Case, chairperson of the MATC District Board. He bowed slightly from the waist. Case draped the Chain of Office, a medallion with the MATC seal on a chain with links representing the college's four campuses, the Education Center at Walker's Square and Milwaukee PBS, around his neck.

The ceremony ended, a new milestone reached in the long history of MATC. ■



After the ceremony, guests enjoyed a reception featuring Latin American cuisine, remarks from WISN anchor Diana Gutiérrez (top), a DJ (left) and selfies (below).



SUPPORTING the MISSION

At Dr. Cruz's investiture, MATC introduced the Medal of Distinction award. Each medal honors those who live the college's mission to transform lives.

IMPACT AWARD

Ellen and Joe Checota

In August 2022, Ellen and Joe Checota made the largest scholarship investment in the college's history by committing \$5 million to the MATC Foundation Inc. to establish the Ellen and Joe Checota MATC Scholarship Program. Their extraordinary commitment to match donations two-to-one created a \$7.5 million scholarship.

This program, the first of its kind at MATC, provides eligible students with a scholarship that covers tuition and required books, equipment, tools, and materials, as well as support for things such as child care, transportation and food. Checota scholars consistently say that the scholarship enabled them to complete their programs and pursue credentials confidently. Graduates, who reported an average household income of \$27,000 or less, now earn an average of \$57,000 annually. The Checota scholarship model, which offers full, renewable support with wraparound assistance, will help shape our approach to scholarship programs going forward. Clearly, Ellen and Joe's impact on the region, and MATC alumni especially, is deep indeed.

LEGACY AWARD

Julie Ebert

Julie Ebert's connection to MATC began through her grandmother Mildred Benson, a longtime MATC teacher. Julie established a scholarship in her grandmother's memory, which led to her deep involvement with the MATC Foundation.

Since then, Julie and her husband, Frank Daily, have significantly supported MATC student success. They pledged \$500,000 to the Ellen and Joe Checota MATC Scholarship Program and helped secure an additional \$2.5 million for the fund six months ahead of schedule.

Julie's commitment to MATC is also evident in her years of service on the MATC Foundation Board of Directors, where she has been instrumental in its growth and influence.

Julie and Frank consistently support numerous other MATC Foundation funds, including the MATC Promise, Supplies for Success, Greatest Need and Uniquely Abled Academy, and Julie was an early investor in the Student Parent Scholarship Fund.

Her legacy is an inspiration to everyone.

AMBASSADOR AWARD

Viola "Vi" Hawkins

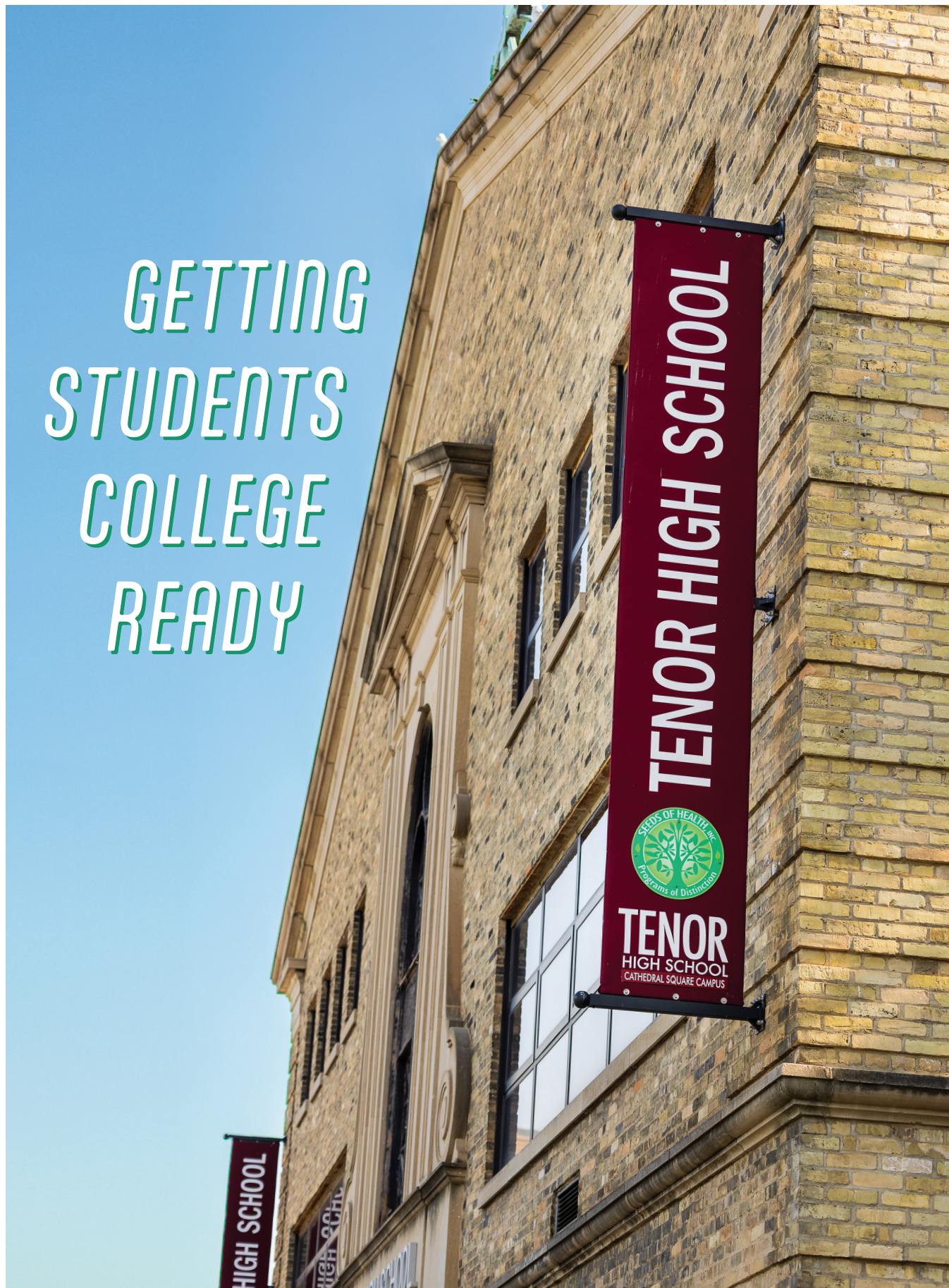
Ms. Vi's enthusiasm for MATC was unmatched, as was her commitment to our region. With over 60 years of service to the community, Ms. Vi's engagement included marching alongside the late Father James Groppi and the Rev. Jesse Jackson.

Ms. Vi attended MATC in the 1980s to study Business Administration, calling it "the foundation for anything else I wanted to do." She encouraged her 30-plus godchildren to consider the college and actively participated in MATC events.

After graduating with straight A's, she worked for the City of Milwaukee Housing Authority, served on the City's Safety and Civic Commission, and chaired Milwaukee County's Commission on Aging, connecting officials to MATC programming.

To ensure future generations have access to an MATC education, Ms. Vi established the Vi Hawkins Grassroots Scholarship, funded by her donations and those of nearly 100 others. ■

GETTING STUDENTS COLLEGE READY



MATC's unique collaboration with Tenor High School endures after 20 years

Lupita Rodriguez grew up on Milwaukee's South Side, the oldest of three children to parents from Mexico. Her family struggled to make ends meet. Higher education seemed improbable, if not impossible to her.

"Kids like me didn't go to college," she said.

But in the fall of 2005, Rodriguez enrolled at Tenor High School, a brand new charter school with a dual enrollment concept: Students take classes at Tenor for three years and then attend MATC for their final year, exposing them to college and preparing them for success.

Students would earn a diploma from Tenor and a certificate or a technical diploma from MATC. They then could return to MATC to get an associate degree or earn credits to transfer to a four-year university.

Rodriguez signed up.

"We all understood this was a trial run," she said. For her, everything worked. She was one of 18 students in Tenor's first graduating class in 2008, and her free year of college at MATC laid the foundation for her future success. She received associate degrees in Hospitality Management and Culinary Arts from MATC by the time she was 22, then returned to the college in 2017 to take prerequisite courses before earning a bachelor's degree in special education and a master's degree in curriculum and instruction at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Today, Rodriguez works as a special education teacher at Milwaukee Public Schools' Morgandale Elementary School.

"I had a great experience at Tenor and MATC. It gave me a lot of confidence," she said. "They told me I could go to college, get a degree and become a better person in the community. And that's what happened."

Twenty years later, the Tenor High School-MATC partnership is still going strong. The program has produced hundreds of graduates, many of whom have returned to MATC to earn degrees and start careers. Others have transferred to four-year universities. The class of 2025 received more than \$1.4 million in scholarships.

Two decades of service

Today, 620 students are enrolled at Tenor's two campuses. The current senior class has 131 students.

Jodi Weber has been there since the beginning. She started as a principal at Tenor and is now the chief executive officer of Seeds of Health, the community-based organization that operates the high school. The agency also operates Seeds of Health Elementary

School along with Veritas and Grandview high schools.

"This idea has exceeded our expectations," said Weber, a vocal, visible and energetic champion of Tenor. "It started small but has really blossomed. The model works.

"The magic is the kids and the opportunities we get to help them find their own path and become productive community members," Weber added. "We help open the door to college for many students who might not otherwise consider education beyond high school."

Last October, Tenor held a 20th anniversary celebration. The event attracted educators, city officials, alumni and local historians.

"We help open the door to college for many students who might not otherwise consider education beyond high school."

JODI WEBER, chief executive officer of Seeds of Health

"We're a proud partner of Tenor," said MATC President Dr. Anthony Cruz, who attended the event. "The program gives Tenor students the opportunity to get a jump start on earning MATC college credits while they are still in high school. We look forward to strengthening and growing our partnership in the years to come."



Tenor High School is a successful model of dual enrollment. Students graduate with a high school diploma and a college credential from MATC.



Tenor students attend classes at one of two campuses: Cathedral Square on Jackson Street and Journal Square on Vel R. Phillips Avenue.

The Cathedral Square campus includes a gymnasium and a coffee bar run by students. Launched in 2023, the coffee bar evolved from a folding table where students served coffee from a French press to a custom-built kitchen space where they learn to make specialty drinks and run a business.

The Journal Square campus opened in November 2021 in a remodeled building that once housed the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel newspaper operations.

A third floor of classrooms is scheduled to be completed by the fall of 2026 and a fourth floor by the fall of 2027. That project will include a culinary career lab, a real-life entrepreneurial venture where students will get hands-on instruction in culinary skills, food science, nutrition, food safety and sanitation, budgeting, marketing, and logistics.

By the 2028-29 school year, Journal Square is expected to serve 500 students and the two campuses a combined 775 students.

“Everything we do here is getting students ready for MATC,”

said Theresa Yurk, principal at Journal Square. “The college is affordable, the students know how to navigate the campus and they know how to ‘do college.’”

Finding their career paths

Brissia Esqueda is a senior at the Cathedral Square campus. Her older sister attended Tenor and her parents liked the program, so she applied. She is taking courses in MATC’s Early Childhood Education program. After earning her degree, she plans to continue her education at either UWM or the University of Wisconsin-Madison, then work as a school counselor.

“The staff at Tenor helped me see how important education can be,” Esqueda said. “They have shown me how you can create bonds and memories with students.”

Jeremy Gonzalez transferred to Tenor in 2024 from St. Augustine Preparatory Academy. He is also studying early childhood development at MATC. “This is a free year to explore what I want to do,” he said.

As seniors, students check in at their high school campuses once a week, said Brenda Jeske Schmidt, principal at Cathedral Square.

“They get to find out what they want to do on their own, but we make sure they have some guidance,” Schmidt said. “We’re always there to help them with the next steps.”

Joshua Valdivia is a senior at the Journal Square campus who is taking classes in MATC’s Phlebotomy program. He got interested in healthcare after taking an anatomy class at Tenor as a junior.

MATC was a challenge to get around at first, but Valdivia quickly found his voice and began asking for help when he needed it, he said. After graduating, Valdivia plans to work as a phlebotomist and then return to school and earn a degree as a surgical technologist.

“I chose Tenor because this is a great opportunity,” Valdivia said. “There will always be jobs in healthcare.”

A supportive culture

Charmin McGlaston, a counselor at Cathedral Square, works with about 70 students, helping them choose their courses, manage their time and plot their futures.

“I always tell them to have a backup plan,” said McGlaston, who has worked at Tenor for five years. “And then a plan

C and even a plan D after that. I feel like I am meant to be here to assist students as they begin their next chapter. This partnership is a great opportunity to help students get a jump start on that chapter.”

A counselor at Tenor for 17 years, Carol Pook helps seniors at Journal Square select courses, connect with scholarship opportunities, prepare financial aid forms and secure recommendation letters.

Some students know exactly what they want to do, while others have no idea what they want.

“I urge them to try it out and see if it fits,” Pook said. “Figure out what you like. If you don’t fall in love with it, at the very least, you’re learning how to go to college.”

“The opportunities our students find at MATC are just amazing,” Pook added. “The college has so many programs, and it’s wonderful that our students are allowed to take classes shoulder to shoulder with adult students.”

Tenor alumna Lupita Rodriguez still remembers the first time she stepped into a college classroom.

“At first it was scary,” she said. “I was 17 and taking college-level courses with people way older than me. But I was never discouraged. I was encouraged. The people

in my classes were from all backgrounds, and I figured if they could do this, I could do this.”

Rodriguez also met her future husband, Jose, at Tenor. After graduation, he joined the Army and served a tour in Afghanistan. He later earned a bachelor’s degree at Concordia University and now works as a project manager. The couple has three children, including a 13-year-old daughter about to complete eighth grade.

“We’re still thinking about high schools. Tenor is pretty far away from our house, so I don’t know if she will follow us there,” Rodriguez said. “I’m just happy we can show our children what we were able to do. My husband and I came from low-income families and were first-generation college students. We can show them what is possible with higher education.” ■



Each August, Tenor students prepare for their senior year at MATC by getting to know the college during a boot camp-style orientation. They set up their student email accounts (opposite), visit the bookstore (left), get student IDs (above) and make themselves at home in the student lounge (top).



From Badge to Blackboard

Former Milwaukee police detective Connie Prange brings her street smarts and experience to the Criminal Justice Studies classroom

The wall was 6 feet high and had to be scaled in one try.

There were no second chances.

Getting over that wall was required to get into the Milwaukee Police Academy, a place 16-year-old Connie Prange was dreaming about attending back in 1984.

“That wall was a physical and a mental barrier to becoming a police officer,” Prange recalled. “Most people run up to it and stop. You have to keep going. I’m a pretty determined person. I was prepared to do what it took.”

Prange scaled the wall and never stopped showing her determination: first by serving as a Milwaukee police officer and detective for 15 years, and then by training the next generation of law enforcement personnel as lead instructor in MATC’s Criminal Justice Studies program for the past 22 years.

As lead faculty and instructional chair, she teaches courses in the Criminal Justice

Studies associate degree program as well as police academy recruit classes at the Oak Creek Campus, imparting knowledge amassed during her years of service.

“I believe MATC’s instruction is right on point because instructors bring real-world experience and keep up with current trends in the field,” she said. “We try to give them a realistic view of the job.”

“People who are doing this job have a calling to do it.”

CONNIE PRANGE

Prange’s determination, along with her dedication to physical fitness and mental wellness, helped her navigate the dark world of violence, brutality and depravity she encountered on the job, and the mistrust some people had with the police.

“People who are doing this job have a calling to do it. It’s not a job for everyone,” she said. “It used to be very competitive to get this job, but now departments are having a hard time finding people, and I can understand why. For me, it’s been a fantastic career.”

Over the wall

Prange grew up in Miami, Florida. Her mother raised her and three brothers alone. Her father wasn’t in the picture.

“I grew up pretty poor. We were in and out of homelessness,” she said. “So I always wanted to do something that had a measure of financial security.”

The family moved to Milwaukee when Prange was in the eighth grade. She lived on the city’s North Side. As a high school junior, she saw an eye-opening presentation about the Milwaukee Police Department’s Police Aide program. The work seemed interesting; she could attend

college classes and could eventually land a secure job. She was hooked.

“I pretty much decided right there and then that I was going to be a police officer,” she said.

She graduated high school in June 1984 and started as an aide in January 1985. For three years, she worked in the identification division, taking fingerprints, checking records and visiting the medical examiner’s office.

“I got to see what the job was really like,” she said. “For me, everything went very smoothly. I felt respected. I believe the police officers there knew we were an asset for them. To them, we were up-and-coming police officers.”

She also attended police science classes at MATC, earning 30 college credits.

In high school, she knew she would have to pass the written, oral and physical exams to get into the academy. So she started running and working out. She found a 6-foot wall in her neighborhood and practiced getting over it. Each day at 6 a.m., she jogged 3 miles to a gym, lifted weights, ran back home and went to school.

The hard work paid off. She passed all the exams. She turned 21 in August 1987 and entered the Milwaukee Police Academy. “I was excited,” she said. “I was ready to get on the street.”

Prange said there were about 30 students in her academy class, and perhaps four or five were women. “We were a tight group, but we weren’t exclusive,” she said.

Working undercover

She graduated from the academy in January 1988 and was sent to the city’s District 2, at Second Street and Lincoln Avenue. For six months, she worked third shift. In November 1988, she was told in a 3 a.m. phone call that the next day she would be working as an undercover narcotics officer. She was 22.

“I didn’t really know what drugs were,” she said with a laugh. “I got a big suitcase full of pills and things that I had to learn. But there was a lot I learned on my own.”

For two years, she worked undercover throughout the city, looking to buy drugs wherever she could. In houses. On boats. In alleys. Even at a dentist’s office. She wore wires. She developed informants. She carried wads of cash. “I was never afraid, but I probably should have been,” she said. “Some of this was extremely risky business.”

In April 1993, at age 26, she passed the detective exam. For the next eight years, she worked in narcotics, sensitive crimes and criminal investigation units. She processed horrific crime scenes, assisted traumatized victims and spent long hours tracking down perpetrators.

“You have to understand your role, and your role is to help people,” she said. “I did what I could to do that the best way I could.”

To keep her keel even, she ran, worked out, socialized with friends outside the force and started a family. In 2000, she went to law school and left the force. She earned her law degree from Marquette University in 2001 and spent time with her young children.

In 2003, she took a teaching job at MATC and now serves as lead faculty and instructional chair of the program. She counsels students about how to be successful in law enforcement and how to handle the job mentally, physically and emotionally.

“About 99% of policing is having good communication skills,” she said. “I tell them that what they do now matters. Police background checks are serious and extensive. I also tell them to take the physical part seriously. If you can’t do one push-up, start by doing one and build up.”

Prange has no plans to leave the college.

“I love mentoring students and people who are making career changes,” she said. “I still find this work interesting and rewarding.” ■



Staging real-life scenarios is crucial to training officers. On this day, students staged a domestic violence call, which entailed role playing (below), a touch of makeup (left) and discussing what students did right (opposite).





A



B

Now in its fifth year, MATC's Community Art Collection proudly displays the works of local artists, including students, at all campuses and Walker's Square. The collection is a celebration of shared history and diversity through art.

"Our students, faculty, staff and community need to see representations of themselves and of their lived experiences when they step onto our campus," said Dr. Julie Ashlock, co-chair of the college's Community Art Committee. "Building the MATC Community Art Collection is an incredibly powerful way for us to support a feeling of inclusion and belonging."

Here is a sampling of the pieces you'll see throughout the college:



C

C THE GOLDEN CYCLE OF KNOWLEDGE AND HEALING

Sisters Brianna and Chelsea Stehling Santacruz convey the healing power of family through this piece. The golden spiral symbolizes knowledge shared from one generation to the next.

D COLLEGE BOUND

Terrell Morgan fuses the energies of pop and street art to celebrate the journey to higher education. The "king" and "queen" symbolize leadership and self-determination.

E '25 BONNIE & CLYDE: KC & BELLS

Raised by a family of makers, Crystal Montgomery transforms denim into hair. Her work is inspired by her grandfather, who could fix anything and embodied a can-do spirit.



D

A WE CARRY THE FUTURE OF EACH GENERATION IN OUR HANDS

The woman carrying a baby in alumna Della Wells' work symbolizes the importance of using one's education to help the next generation.

B THE ORIGINAL SIN

Aidan D'Acquisto wondered what happened to Adam and Eve after they bit the apple and what they saw after leaving the Garden of Eden. This painting attempts to answer those questions.



E



F GINGER FLAME
In Adjuha Nsorom's painting, the woman represents ginger, which symbolizes warmth, prosperity and healing.

G LONG LASTING IMAGINATION
Encouraging adults to use their imaginations beyond childhood is a recurring theme for art therapist Sasha Kinens.

H INDIVIDUALITY IN UNITY
Bob Bobrowitz's sculpture celebrates humans working through any circumstance.

I IN THE THICK OF HOPE
Catching the viewer's attention and holding it is Jaymee Harvey Willms' intent.

J MY PEACE
Leather artist Pamela Graham teaches her craft at group homes and shelters, bringing art to everyone.



G



H



I



K



L

K ESSENCE
Incarcerated artist M. Winston builds tiny houses inspired by his travels.

L MISSISSIPPI
Winston also paints landscapes that are steeped in nostalgia for his childhood in Louisiana and Mississippi.

M KNOWLEDGE IS EMPOWERING
Books form a ladder leading to knowledge in this painting by Grace Moll.



J



M



Ascend Together

MATC unites under a new five-year strategic plan

Together, Milwaukee Area Technical College can soar. Together, MATC can help students succeed, strengthen the college's connection to the community and recognize the outstanding work of its faculty and staff.

That's the mission outlined in the college's five-year strategic plan called Ascend Together, approved by the MATC District Board last spring.

The plan was shaped by voices reflecting deep engagement at every level including more than 500 MATC employees, 300 students and nearly 100 community members who participated in roundtable sessions hosted by MATC President Dr. Anthony Cruz.

"The name underscores how this plan will serve as our guide to building a shared, focused future for an MATC that achieves at even higher levels," Dr. Cruz said.

Ascend Together has three strategic priorities, each supported with three objectives. "This approach allows us to give greater

attention to what is going to be most important for us moving forward," Dr. Cruz said.

The three priorities are to build community trust, foster a caring culture at the college and ensure student success.

Community trust

"Community trust means showing up for Milwaukee — not just talking the talk, but walking the walk. We must be visible, credible and accountable to the people we serve," Dr. Cruz said.

MATC has been a visible, vital part of the community in the past



year. The college has hosted early voting in elections, trained frontline workers, partnered with Milwaukee Public Schools, offered high school completion courses and supported Juneteenth celebrations.

Last September, the college took that engagement a step further by hosting listening sessions called Community Connections at each campus and Walker's Square. Residents were invited to hear about the college's signature programs, celebrate its successes

and share their feedback for improvement.

"This is a great idea," said Henry Bruno, a relationship banker at BMO who attended the session at the Oak Creek Campus. Bruno was an MATC student before transferring to the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.



"You can't know enough about what is happening in your community. I believe it's important to feel like you're being seen, being heard, being appreciated and being served."

Caring culture

Under Ascend Together, that appreciation is also focused inward and extended to the college's faculty, staff and students.

"A caring culture means that everyone — students, faculty, staff — feels seen, heard and valued," Dr. Cruz said. "That we celebrate your wins, lift you when you fall and never forget that empathy is the foundation of excellence."



The college has numerous recognition programs for employees, including Emerging Leaders, a yearlong program that prepares full-time staff to be supervisors and managers.

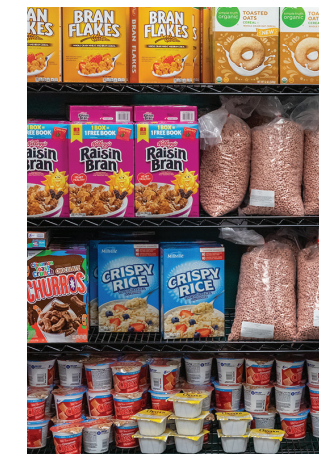
And, most recently that caring culture inspired MATC to organize a collegewide food drive to benefit students who lost their SNAP benefits in November due to the U.S. government shutdown.



Student success

And having inspired leaders will help all MATC students succeed.

"Student success is the whole reason we exist," Dr. Cruz said. "We are here to help students complete, to transfer, to skill up, to find purpose and to transform their lives."



Mariel Farina, born and raised in Argentina, certainly had her life transformed at MATC. In the spring of 2025, Farina, who came to the United States in 2020 to work as an au pair, graduated from the college with an Accounting associate degree.

"I always liked accounting, but when I got to MATC, my instructors helped turn it into a passion," she said. "They had such a passion for teaching me that it made me realize what I wanted to do with the rest of my life." ■

Learn more about Ascend Together at matc.edu.



Ascend Together captures the essence of what MATC does every day: support students and the community. Clockwise from far left: Dr. Cruz engages with the public during a Community Connections event; Emerging Leaders graduate; the Food Pantry is stocked with goods to feed students; commencement; Culinary Arts instructor congratulates a student on a job well done; welcoming high school students to MATC; bonding at MATC Day.



Envisioning His Future

Deafblind since birth, Graphic Design student Sid Miller is pursuing his passion for art and technology with support from MATC and a scholarship

Graphic Design student Sid Miller

For the first three years of his life, Sid Miller existed in murk and murmur, a world of shadowy, sketchy shapes and faint, infrequent sounds.

He was born prematurely in Thailand. He weighed little more than 2 pounds — the same heft as a couple heads of cabbage. The auditory nerves in both ears were severely damaged, and the retinas in both eyes were detached.

Miller underwent a dozen surgeries before he turned 1, then was sent to an orphanage.

He didn't utter a word until he was 3 years old.

Today, Miller is 19. He wears thick-lensed glasses to help him distinguish contours and outlines; he's completely blind in his right eye and legally blind in his left eye, which lacks peripheral vision and depth perception. He wears hearing aids in both ears.

Miller is deafblind, a rare condition of combined hearing and vision loss. In the United States, about 10,000 individuals between infancy and 21 years old identify as deafblind. In Wisconsin, there are currently 157 children on the state's Deafblind Registry.

But his disabilities have not deterred him. And after hardly saying anything for three years, he certainly has found a clear voice.

"In public school, they always thought I would be the quiet kid.

But I wasn't," Miller said. "I wanted to ask questions; I wanted to be a leader. But it's hard when no one lets you try to lead. People with disabilities should have a voice. I'm not afraid to use my voice."

Now Miller is giving college a try. He is enrolled at MATC and plans to earn a Graphic Design associate degree, find work in the field and live on his own in Milwaukee.

"People with disabilities are everyday people," he said. "We're doing the same things as everyone else, only we can't do it the same way as everyone else."

He is attending MATC thanks to a \$10,000 scholarship he received from the Lighthouse Guild, a national group that provides rehabilitation, assistive technology, mental health services and programming to people who are blind or visually impaired.

Miller was one of 17 students from across the country to receive a scholarship from Lighthouse. The awards are based on academic excellence and merit.

"These remarkable students have demonstrated exceptional academic achievement and perseverance," said Thomas Panek, president and CEO of Lighthouse Guild. "We are proud to support them as they pursue their goals and contribute their talents to the world."

A new life

When Miller was 3, Todd Miller and Jennifer Robers Miller traveled to Thailand from Wisconsin and adopted him. His new parents christened him Siddhartha, to honor the name Gautama Buddha had before he attained enlightenment. The family lived in Janesville for several years, then moved to Cedar Grove, about 50 miles north of Milwaukee along Lake Michigan.

In elementary school, Miller learned to play the piano. In middle school, he taught himself to play the guitar and the drums.

But aside from the music, attending public school wasn't pretty. "I was bullied. I was made fun of. I was tripped a lot," he recalled. "I didn't have the greatest experience. It was rough."

After ninth grade, his family enrolled him in the Wisconsin Virtual Academy, an online public school serving students across the state, for his last three years of high school.

The difference was startling.

"My academic performance jumped by leaps and bounds,"

Miller said. "I had a ton of great teachers. They encouraged me to ask questions and to participate."

Miller was inducted into the National Honor Society and, in March 2025, he was nominated for Student of the Month. He received his high school diploma in June.

Equal access, equal opportunity

Miller said he selected MATC because of the college's Student Accommodation Services (SAS) and Graphic Design associate degree program.

Last fall, Miller took classes in design elements and principles, digital imaging, and typographic fundamentals. A support service person from SAS assists him in class and getting around the Downtown Milwaukee Campus.

"These remarkable students have demonstrated exceptional academic achievement and perseverance"

THOMAS PANEK,
president and CEO of Lighthouse Guild

"At first it was kind of tricky; but after a week or two, my support service person and I were able to find where everything was," Miller said. "It has been a great experience so far. The teachers and staff are helpful and always accommodating in what I need."

For Miller, graphic design, like making music and playing instruments, is another way to express himself. "I love art, I love creating and I love technology," he said. "I can draw very well, and I am very good with technology. At MATC, the Graphic Design program has classes that get right to the point of what I want to do."

He already has used assistive technology to experiment with graphic design and has used a 3D printer at the Wisconsin Deafblind Technical Assistance Project, a federal program that provides technical assistance to deafblind students. Using the printer, he created a mini sailboat, a fidget ring and an infinity cube.

In the summer of 2025, Miller interned at Career Coaches of Wisconsin, which specializes in customized employment solutions

and coaching to accommodate people with disabilities. He helped design e-commerce websites.

Miller lives at home. His father, a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, drops him off and picks him up at MATC.

"This is a new journey," Miller said. "There are a lot of things I have conquered in my life, but I still have fears. Sometimes I worry about whether or not I'll be able to get a job or find a place to live. But I believe I am responsible, motivated and dedicated to achieving independence, not only for myself, but also to support and inspire others. I believe you can always be a role model, a person people look up to." ■

MATC SPOTLIGHT

Student Accommodation Services

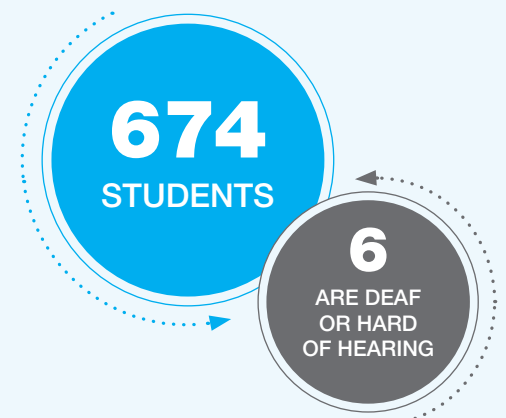
At the college, Student Accommodation Services ensures that students with disabilities receive equal access opportunities to all programs, courses and services according to federal laws, including the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Services and accommodations available include disability specialists to provide one-on-one support, adaptive/assistive technology, computers with enlarged text, note-taking, sign language interpreting and tape recording of lectures.

SAS currently serves 674 students, six of whom are deaf or hard of hearing.

"Student Accommodation Services ensures that every student has the access and support needed to achieve their fullest potential," said Carla Eichelberger, director of Student Accommodation Services.

STUDENT ACCOMMODATION SERVICES SERVES





A Harmonious and Happy Partnership

MATC's Workforce Solutions team helps Sellars Absorbent Materials secure state grant and train workers

In the mechanized symphony performed each day at Sellars Absorbent Materials on Milwaukee's North Side, Edwin Roman Jr. is the maestro of his machine.

He operates and monitors high-tech converting equipment that helps the company manufacture and package shop towels, disposable wipers, tissues and absorbents made with recycled fibers.

Roman makes sure his machine keeps humming, playing its proper part in the factory's carefully orchestrated manufacturing chain. But when it skips a beat, he has the skills — and the confidence — to diagnose what's wrong and repair it.

"When a machine has problems, I see if I can fix it myself before I call maintenance," said Roman, who has worked at Sellars for two years.

Roman was one of the seven Sellars employees who completed a series of Manufacturing Maintenance courses taught by MATC instructors. The training was funded by a state grant that Sellars secured in 2023. MATC's Workforce Solutions team helped Sellars customize the maintenance courses to fit the company's needs.

"Sellars believes that by investing in their workforce they are changing lives," said Trisha Stehr, client services manager at Workforce Solutions, which helps clients improve employee productivity, reduce costs and increase revenue. "They have shown how important it is to invest in employees' educational growth. They really embrace growing employees from within. And by

investing in their employees, they have created a positive work environment."

Roman wholeheartedly agreed. The Milwaukee native was working at a cemetery when his father, Edwin Roman Sr., who works in Sellars' maintenance department, referred him to the company.

"I came here and my life changed," Roman Jr. said. "Participating in the Manufacturing Maintenance program was a great opportunity, and I took it. I made a great choice."



Recruit and retain

Sellars was founded in 1985 by John Sellars out of his home and garage.

The company uses proprietary technology to enhance the strength, absorbency and bulk in making paper towels and wipes. It is one of only two facilities in the world that makes Double Re-Crepe (DRC) towels and wipes, and the only one that manufactures these products with recycled materials.

The company's ToolBox band shop towels can be found in major home improvement retailers and mass merchants. Its Clean Task products are sold through numerous janitorial/sanitary maintenance, industrial, safety and specialty distributors in North America and Europe. The newest product, Bravo household/kitchen towels, are made of 90% recycled material and available at Target.

Chief People Officer Dr. Nilda Cintrón-Cortez, Chief Operations

Officer Julie Graverson and Chief Executive Officer Tom Sellars recognized the company needed to recruit and retain skilled manufacturing maintenance employees, improve the customer service rating and increase overall morale.

Dr. Cintrón-Cortez, who attended MATC in the 1990s before transferring to Mount Mary University, reached out to the college's Workforce Solutions team. "I had worked with Trisha on and off in the past," she said. "We knew how they could help. We appreciate the support we received for this program that helps improve lives."

Workforce Solutions developed a customized training program for Sellars and that helped secure the \$237,295 Wisconsin Fast Forward grant in May 2023.

With the money, seven Sellars employees, including Roman, completed 10 Manufacturing Maintenance courses taught by MATC instructor Patrick Hanson. The classes included math, blueprint reading, basic hydraulics and pneumatics, and introduction to motor controls.

The first year, Hanson came to Sellars and taught courses. In the second year, the employees went to MATC to do hands-on training.

"They were so excited about learning," Graverson said. "They found it challenging — some of them had not been in school for a while — but they felt rewarded by that challenge. It also built their self-confidence."

Graverson added, "We would definitely do this again. We believe in investing in our people so they become long-term employees. This is career and professional development."

"We would definitely do this again. We believe in investing in our people so they become long-term employees."

JULIE GRAVERSON, chief operations officer, Sellars

A caring corporate culture

Offering additional training is just one of several programs Sellars has to help recruit and retain employees. Along with providing quality healthcare and generous retirement benefits, the company helps employees buy homes through the Havenwoods Neighborhood Partnership, helps pay for transportation to work and offers tuition assistance for workers wanting to further their education.

Investing in these programs is working. Turnover rates at Sellars have declined by nearly 50%.

"The company supports these things. There is a cost, but these are programs we are very proud of. It is very rewarding to see the positive impact that our support has on our peoples' lives," Graverson said.

Dr. Cintrón-Cortez agreed: "We believe in servant leadership and want to serve our employees at a high level. We want to set high standards." ■

MATC instructor Patrick Hanson taught Edwin Roman Jr. how to maintain machines on the shop floor. Inset: Kenyatta Robinson, Chief Operations Officer Julie Graverson, Roman Jr. and CEO Tom Sellars.

MATC SPOTLIGHT

Becoming a Leader

Sellars employee trains on the job and returns to MATC for a degree



Kenyatta Robinson (inset) grew up facing many challenges and adversities.

"I had a chip on my shoulder," the Milwaukee native said. "I didn't trust people."

She carried her grudges to Sellars Absorbent, where Julie Graverson, then the vice president of supply chain, hired her as a machine operator in 2018.

"Julie and I bumped heads a lot,"

Robinson recalled. "But she always said she saw something in me and that was eye-opening. For once, I started thinking, 'There are people in the world that want me to succeed.'"

She applied for a supervisor position and got it. Dr. Nilda Cintrón-Cortez, the company's chief people officer, discovered that Robinson had attended the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee for several years and suggested she go back to school.

Thanks to Sellars' tuition assistance program, Robinson enrolled at MATC and earned a Leadership Development associate degree in December 2024.

"I was scared to death about going back to school," she said. "But MATC has people and resources that support you all along the way. I loved the flexibility, and I found that I was putting what I learned into action at work."

The Leadership Development program, in the college's Business and Management Pathway, trains students to think critically, solve problems, organize, build work teams, develop and maximize human resources, and develop effective leadership soft skills.

Today, Robinson manages 22 employees and bought her first home through the company's home ownership program.

"She's a strong woman with an education, her own home and true leadership qualities," Graverson said. "Now she's trying to help others realize their full potential."

Robinson transformed her anger into confidence.

"I have come a long way," she said. "Now I try to be positive and to uplift people. I know what it's like to have no one have your back and to be negative about almost everything. I'm the very example of you can do anything you want, if you really want it and work hard for it."



Freedom From Fear

After fleeing persecution in her homeland, Hasnah Hussin started a new life in the United States helping refugees

Hasnah Hussin knows all too well that fear has no borders.

She has met hundreds of people who have trekked thousands of miles to get to America. Many of them arrive here drained, spent and afraid.

As a refugee community outreach specialist with Catholic Charities of Milwaukee, her first duty is to alleviate their anxiety, even for a short time.

“My job is to help others sleep without fear,” said Hasnah, who earned an associate degree from MATC in 2023. “I want to help them not think about anything bad for at least one day.”

Her message resonates with her clients because she, too, was once a stranger in a strange land. She was born and raised in

Malaysia and came to the United States for the chance to build a better life.

“I’m more than an open book,” she said in her spartan office at Catholic Charities. “It’s easy for me to share my story. I can tell the people I work with that I have been on their journey. I believe that they can relate to what I am saying.”

Hasnah, who speaks seven languages, has been with Catholic Charities since July 2021. She creates educational content, coordinates citizenship tutors, prepares clients for naturalization exams and trains volunteers.

“Catholic Charities is lucky to have Hasnah on our staff,” said Claire Reuning, associate director of migrant and refugee services

with the organization. “It’s not just her impressive language abilities; it’s also the depth of experience she has working with diverse refugee communities in Malaysia and the United States.

“She is adept at having difficult conversations about mental health and trauma with our clients, provides compassionate services to clients in crisis, and is always willing to answer questions about daily life in Milwaukee,” Reuning added.

When Hasnah graduated from MATC in the fall of 2023, she was selected as the college’s outstanding associate degree graduate that semester. She addressed her fellow graduates at the commencement ceremony at Fiserv Forum.

Two years later, she said the support and encouragement she received at MATC had been the foundation for all her success. “At MATC, I felt involved and I felt that I belonged,” she said. “That gave me the courage to speak.”

A challenging childhood

Hasnah is an ethnic Rohingya, a stateless ethnic group primarily in western Myanmar, formerly Burma, who fled the country to escape violence. The United Nations has called the Rohingya one of the most persecuted ethnic groups in the world.

Her parents fled that persecution and settled in Malaysia, where Hasnah was born and raised. Hasnah’s father helped construct the Petronas Twin Towers, an interlinked pair of 88-story skyscrapers in Kuala Lumpur. Standing 1,483 feet, the structures were the tallest buildings in the world from 1998 to 2004.

Despite his contribution to this landmark, Hasnah’s father was arrested for being an undocumented refugee and then trafficked to a fisherman.

Her mother worked as a domestic in three houses during the day and in a bakery at night to support the family.

As a young girl, Hasnah was mocked and ridiculed at school, but she persevered. She played sports and did well in her studies. She completed high school in 2009.

Almost every day, Hasnah and her family confronted injustice, intolerance, hostility and persecution, but she never gave in to the hate. She resolutely resisted it with kindness, care, compassion, faith and a deep love for her mother.

“In my religion, it’s not OK to continue to be angry, to be vengeful, to have an overwhelming negativity,” she said. “My mother never allowed me to be negative about the world.”

Refugee to advocate

After high school, Hasnah worked as a researcher, case worker and human rights project training officer with a nonprofit organization in Malaysia.

She became an expert in issues affecting refugee children and the mental health of women refugees. She also worked as a medical interpreter. In March 2020, she delivered a TED talk in Malaysia about the refugee crisis.

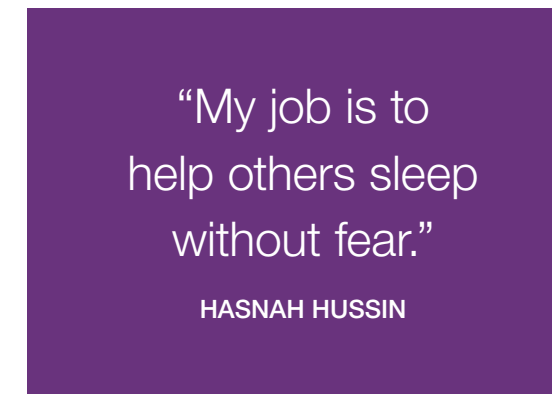
In 2021, Hasnah, her young daughter and her parents came to Milwaukee, which has a large community of Rohingya refugees. She took her job with Catholic Charities, then enrolled at MATC.

“Knowledge never ends,” she said. “Concerns change, issues change. Learning is all about strengthening my skills so that I can help people even more.”

In December 2025, Hasnah received her bachelor’s degree in social work from Alverno College. She plans to get a master’s degree, provide mental health services and become a Rohingya-speaking counselor. She is also on the path to becoming a United States citizen.

Additionally, she is developing a nonprofit organization called New Roots, which will create short videos aimed at helping the Rohingya community and post them on YouTube. She will share her journey and address mental health concerns.

“There is a taboo in the Rohingya community about mental health,” she said. “People get stressed, depressed and scared. They shouldn’t be scared to talk about what they are feeling.” ■



Alumna Hasnah Hussin (opposite and above) advocates for refugees as a community outreach specialist.

MESSAGE FROM THE
Foundation Board President
and Acting Executive Director



Unwavering and generous. In a nutshell, these two words describe the support you have provided to MATC students through your investment in the college’s philanthropic partner, the MATC Foundation.

And we are your partner, too. We are your partner in transforming the lives of students who seek careers that will provide them economic stability and mobility for themselves and their families. Whether enrolling in MATC directly from high school or pursuing higher education a few years later, MATC students supported by the Foundation consistently demonstrate improved retention and higher GPAs, and they reach graduation day more quickly.

The 2024-25 school year closed with MATC’s adoption of a new five-year strategic plan called Ascend Together. With three priorities — student success, community trust and a caring community — this plan will guide the work of the MATC Foundation and our engagement with you, our remarkable donors.

Your generosity and MATC students’ hard work has already proved a winning combination, leading to student success. In 2024-25, 54% of MATC graduates were supported by the MATC Foundation at some point in their educational journey.

In fact, over the last 10 years, student support through scholarships and emergency grants has increased by over 600%. That growth has been fueled by donors like you who share the Foundation’s vision of a prosperous region built on expansive access to education and economic opportunities.

On behalf of our board of directors and the entire Foundation team, thank you for joining us as we Ascend Together.

With gratitude,

Dave Megna
 Board President
 MATC Foundation Inc.

Ginny Finn
 Acting Executive Director and
 Chief Development Officer
 MATC Foundation

MATC Foundation Inc.

Financial Statements

2024-25 Revenue

Revenue Type	Amount (in Thousands)
Student Success - Scholarships, Emergency Student Assistance and Programs	\$ 4,370
Investments - Net Gain (Loss)	\$ 3,900
In-Kind	\$ 774
Other	\$ 61
Milwaukee PBS	\$ 8,450
Total	\$ 17,555

2024-25 Expenses

Expense Type	Amount (in Thousands)
Student Success - Scholarships and Emergency Student Assistance	\$ 5,679
Program Administration	\$ 1,682
Management and General	\$ 484
Fundraising	\$ 424
Milwaukee PBS	\$ 6,391
Total	\$ 14,660

Net Assets \$45,403,920

As of June 30, 2025

The MATC Foundation's financial statements for fiscal year 2025 can be found online at matc.edu/foundation.



MISSION

As the college's philanthropic partner, the MATC Foundation builds donor relationships to facilitate private investments that remove barriers to education, accelerate careers and deliver skilled talent to the Milwaukee area.

The Foundation also serves as the financial steward of private donations to Milwaukee PBS, a viewer-supported service of MATC.

VISION

A prosperous region built on expansive access to education and economic opportunities.

New Faces at the MATC Foundation

We are grateful to Milwaukee-area leaders who joined the MATC Foundation Inc. Board of Directors in 2025



Trevor D'Souza

Senior Vice President, Commercial Banking, Associated Bank

Trevor D'Souza is a senior professional with a diverse skill set and executive-level experience in a number of roles and industries. D'Souza has served in fiduciary and nonfiduciary roles on the boards of publicly traded, privately

owned and not-for-profit foundations, and advocacy and educational institutions.

D'Souza is a big supporter of technical colleges and believes they are vital to replenishing the skill sets needed in Milwaukee and Wisconsin to capitalize on and create economic opportunities for the region.



Laila Valters

Vice President, Enterprise Compliance, and Chief Compliance Officer, Northwestern Mutual

Laila Valters has 27 years of experience at Northwestern Mutual. She oversees compliance practices for Northwestern Mutual and its subsidiaries

Additionally, she serves as president and CEO of Northwestern Mutual Investment Services Inc., the sixth largest independent broker/dealer in America.

[Learn more about the MATC Foundation board at matc.com/foundation.](https://matc.com/foundation)

Make Student Success Your Legacy With Gift Planning

Scholarships give MATC students access to an education and a path to family-supporting careers.

“Getting the scholarship has pushed me to do even more. I feel a responsibility to succeed because of how this school and the people here have helped me.” — JERMAINE HOUSE, MATC Business Management graduate



BENEFICIARY DESIGNATIONS

Share your resources after you no longer need them!

Assets that can be designated for charity via beneficiary designations include:

- Bank accounts
- Retirement plans (IRAs, 401(k) plans, profit-sharing, 403(b) plans)
- Donor-advised funds

GIFTS OF APPRECIATED STOCK

Wonder if that mystery stock inherited from Grandma is worth anything?

Or whether something you purchased yourself could do a lot of good right now?

You can make a tax-wise gift by donating appreciated stock directly to the MATC Foundation. You must have owned the stock for at least one year and a day to take advantage of potential tax benefits.

IRA QUALIFIED CHARITABLE DISTRIBUTIONS

Are you 70 ½ or older and required to take a minimum distribution from your IRA?

In 2026, you can donate up to \$111,000 of your required minimum distribution to charity without increasing your taxable income.

You must instruct your fiduciary to distribute the money directly to the MATC Foundation as a qualified charitable distribution.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

Bob Holland
hollanrj@matc.edu
414-297-6825

Ginny Finn
finnvvr@matc.edu
414-297-8514

Legal name: Milwaukee Area Technical College Foundation, Inc. Mailing address: 700 W State Street, M244, Milwaukee WI 53233. Federal Tax ID number: 39-1341603

2025-26 MATC Foundation Board of Directors

*Indicates new board members in fiscal year 2025-26

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ROBERT “BOB” HOLLAND

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EVERYONE DESERVES A STRONG FOUNDATION.

MATC Foundation donors' return on generosity = changed lives.

Financial support for students leads to improved retention, increased GPAs and timely graduation. Your gift changes lives.

Our Investment in Students

\$5.2 M

in scholarships and emergency grants

2,335

students receiving support

Donors' Return on Generosity

54%

of graduates supported by the MATC Foundation

600%

increase in students receiving financial support since 2015

All data from the 2024-25 academic year unless otherwise noted.

matc.edu/donate

Qualified Charitable Distributions welcome. Contact foundation@matc.edu

Thank you to our donors

As the college's philanthropic partner, the MATC Foundation is grateful for the support of the following foundations, corporations and individuals.

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