Mentors & mentees celebrate success

On Dec. 18, the Peer Mentoring Program held its Celebration and Recognition Dinner. It was a festive event, enlivened by Christmas music from the Berks Harmony Quartet and performances by the JCI Jazz Trio, Jammy Alexis, the Magic of Wayne Shifflett, and the RACC Dance Club.

The Berks Harmony Quartet features members of our local Pretzel City Chorus. The JCI Jazz Trio features Cormick Costello, son of RACC profs Christopher Costello and Joey Flamm-Costello. Jammy Alexis is new to RACC and will be one of the mentors for the spring semester.

The RACC Dance Club closed the program with great energy, leaving the audience breathless and spellbound.

Susan D. Looney, Ph.D, president, Reading Area Community College, opened things up with a stirring speech on RACC unity and RACC pride.

(See “Celebrating,” page 3)

Staff, students convey warm wishes for healing

Attendees at the annual Holiday Sweater Contest paused to take a picture conveying affection and warm wishes for a return to health to Tutoring Center Coordinator Suzanne Christie, who was seriously injured in an auto-pedestrian accident on Dec. 3, and hospitalized as a result.

Photo: DJ Planté.
You got this: regrouping during dark days

By Dan Glass

Traditional school beginnings occur in August. Around the time the 4th of July decorations vanish, we start to see backpacks and school supplies. Our minds say it’s time to get folders ready and to strive for the 4.0 GPA we all know we’re capable of maintaining.

“This is our year,” we tell ourselves, and for many people it is.

However ... something happens around Halloween and continues through to Thanksgiving break. Our lives start to feel overwhelmed. The darkness, cold, and shortness of the days give way to the feeling that sets the mood of Moby Dick so well: a “damp, drizzly November in my soul.”

I call it the Home Stretch Blues. Students get this, and yes, so do teachers. Everyone has a whole lot of stuff to do, and suddenly, the dreams of 4.0 are now translated into getting essays in on time and achieving a respectable grade. Sure, an A would be nice, but a B would work, too.

Then, just like that, the work is done, and we’re on winter break. Other times, we receive the dreaded “less than a C” grade, so we need to figure out Plan B.

Either way, we’re forced to regroup before “halftime” is over and return to school in winter. Winter begins in the cold and dark, but it ends in the joy of flowers.

There’s a whole new challenge of getting through this unique term. Here are some tips on managing the change.

- Give yourself a halftime speech: You got this. You can still succeed in your dreams. We need positive energy to flow.
- Be realistic about your struggles. If you need math help, get tutoring. If you need a guide, get a mentor. Asking for help is not weakness.
- Early morning classes can be tough to wake up for. Who wants to leave a warm bed at 6 a.m.? If that’s you, be sure to get enough sleep, so you’re ready and willing to go or take later classes.
- Early morning classes can also be affected by snow, ice, or sleet. College doesn’t cancel as often as high school. Be ready for traffic delays, slow driving, and online replacement assignments. Online classes can help.
- When the weather gets nicer and it’s too nice to come to school (in the same way December was too miserable to come to school), you’ll be expected to be working extra hard. Remember this and work ahead.
- For most of the early part of the term, offices have lots of staff to help you plan your present and future, while making up for your past. Use these days to plan your next year, your transfer, your scholarships, and your goals—with a friendly RACC face.

You got this, and we can help you to stay #RACCproud!

Chemistry corner

Comic strip evolves into award-winning show

By Jesse L. Bussell

In a small, rural community in northern California, Marin County, one of the most eccentric and unique television scientists was born. In July 1991, You Can with Beakman, an American science and education syndicated comic strip by Jok Church, premiered in the Marin Independent Journal. The idea for the comic strip came to Jok while he was working for Lucasfilm and answering questions from George Lucas’s fan mail: Beakman would receive science questions from children, and he would answer them by giving directions for creating an experiment by means of which they would discover the answer independently. The strip, launched in 1991, was a success for Jok and gained in popularity over the next few years, with its last publication in 2016, when Church passed away.

About a year after the comic began, Jok published a book of collected works from the comic strip. This eventually led to the creation of the popular television series Beakman’s World, launched in September 1992 on TLC. Cast in the lead role as Beakman was puppeteer Paul Zaloom. This was a change from other children’s educational programs, in that the lead role did not have any training in any the STEM disciplines. Despite Zaloom’s lack of scientific knowledge the show was an almost instant success. One year after its premiere, the show was moved from TLC to CBS’s Saturday morning children’s lineup.

The show’s premise was identical to the comic strip it was based upon: To illustrate various scientific concepts, Beakman would perform comical experiments and demonstrations in response to viewer mail. Over the years, as in the original comic strip, Beakman was aided in his experiments by his "lab rat” Lester—a crude man in a tattered rat suit—played by Mark Ritts, and a female assistant. These changed throughout the show’s run: Josie (Alanna Ubach), Liza (Eliza Schneider), and Phoebe (Senta Moses).

Zaloom also appeared as various guest scientists and historic figures, including Thomas A. Edison, Robert H. Goddard and Philo T. Farnsworth. At the beginning and end, as well as before or after commercial breaks, the show featured short scenes starring puppet penguins Don and Herb watching Beakman’s World on television. The penguins were named after Don Herbert, who starred as Mr. Wizard.

Although CBS canceled the show in 1998 after four seasons, the show had won numerous awards and critical acclaim, including a Daytime Emmy Award for outstanding achievement in live and tape sound mixing and sound effects. Zaloom still performs as Beakman in live appearances around the globe, and the show is currently running in syndication on MeTV.
Mentors, mentees, and RACC faculty and staff at the Dec. 18 Peer Mentoring Program Celebration & Dinner.

Celebrating success (continued from p. 1)

Barry Wilson, director of Academic Advisement & Retention; Carmela Capellupo-Beaver, student support specialist; and Jane Mahoney, academic support specialist, emceed the event.

Contributors to the program were recognized, with each receiving a gift card as a token of appreciation for their service.

DJ Planté, student coordinator of the Peer Mentoring Program, spoke about the ways in which our individual stories are enriched when we incorporate those of others, creating an ever-expanding and tapestry of voices in which each thread strengthens another.

Dr. Looney, the emcees, and DJ took time to honor Suzanne Christie, the founder of the Peer Mentoring Program, who is hospitalized after being injured in a pedestrian-vehicle accident.

More information: [www.racc.edu/academics/peer-mentoring-program](http://www.racc.edu/academics/peer-mentoring-program), or email Jane at jmahoney@racc.edu.

Better Health

Save lungs, and dollars

By Writing Lab Staff

Need an impetus to stop smoking? Consider changing your spending habits—and improving your health and wealth. If you drop the habit and invest your savings it will make a huge difference over the long term.

Let’s do the math, using a compound savings calculator (see link below): 1 pack of cigarettes a day, @ $8, equals roughly $240 a month. If you put that into a stock fund, rather than into hurting your body, after 10 years (assuming the average S&P gain of 6.6% a year), you would have $40,430. Twenty years? $117,038. Thirty? $262,198.

Let’s assume you’re 20 years old and plan to retire at 65. Your non-smoking nest egg would be $756,556.

So smokers, think twice, or however many times it takes, before you burn any more of your hard-earned cash.


As for your health, according to [smokefree.gov](http://smokefree.gov), these are just a few of the benefits of quitting smoking:

- Lower risk of cancer, diabetes, emphysema, heart disease, and other diseases.
- Clearer vision, better hearing.
- Stronger bones and muscles.
- Improved immune system.
- Less risk of dangerous blood clots.
- For women, lower estrogen levels, healthier pregnancies.

If you want these benefits, here are free resources to help you:

- PA Free Quitline, 1-800-Quit-Now (784-8669), 1-855-Depel-Ya (335-3569). The deaf and hard of hearing may contact the PA Free Quitline by using the TTY line, 1-888-229-2182, or by using their personal service provider to place a video relay call using the regular Quitline number, 1-800-774-8669 ([www.sepatobaccofree.org/quit](http://www.sepatobaccofree.org/quit); [www.sepatobaccofree.org/faq](http://www.sepatobaccofree.org/faq)).

One-on-one help, just for you

RACC’s tutoring staff is ready and waiting

By Writing Lab Staff

Having a tough time with a particular class? Eager to improve your academic performance?

RACC’s tutoring centers have just what you need: one-on-one help.

Here you can focus on getting over a rough spot, honing already sharp skills, or getting some general help with academic choices, time management, and other important issues.

Drop in for immediate help or schedule an appointment at racc.mywconline.com.

If you’re unable to visit the campus, e-tutoring—24-hour turnaround during the work week—is also available at most of the centers.

Here’s where to go. Note that hours and services may vary.

- **Math Learning Center**, B506: See schedule at [https://www.racc.edu/services/math-learning-center](https://www.racc.edu/services/math-learning-center), walk-in only
- **Academic Coaching**: By appointment, walk-in or [https://racc.mywconline.com](https://racc.mywconline.com) Questions? Contact Jane Mahoney, B209, jmahoney@racc.edu.
December had one of its merriest moments at RACC on Dec. 5, when staff and students decked themselves out in seasonal finery to compete in the Holiday Sweater Contest.

Dozens turned out for the event, which was emceed by Barry Wilson, director of Advising and Academic Services.

The Reading High School String Ensemble provided music to open the program.

A panel of judges picked the winners:
- Ugliest Sweater: Bibi Safia (student)
- Funniest Sweater: Sonia N. Rieger (staff)
- Most Beautiful Sweater: Jules Minotto (student & staff)

The event closed with all of the attendees and participants gathering for a group photo in honor of Suzanne Christie, who is recovering from injuries suffered in an auto-pedestrian accident. (See page 1)