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Alumni & Friends

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MCC Alum and Arizona native finds success as a longtime radio personality

that moment, Shannon decided she wanted to pursue a career as on-air talent.

Shannon graduated in 2005 with an Associate of Arts in General Education and transferred to Arizona State University's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication. The most exciting part of the new curriculum was securing an internship.

"I remember telling my dad that I wanted to do something really big for that required internship," she said. "Moving to New York seemed like a natural choice."

Shannon's search for an internship led her to Sirius Satellite Radio, now known as SiriusXM, in New York! The internship was a perfect fit, not only because of her dream of becoming a radio host, but also because of her love of rock music. Fast forward a few months and Shannon was driving across the country with an interview on the books.

Her entire experience of being in New York was thrilling and topped off when she learned her interviewers were Steve Covino and Rich Davis, two famous Sirius Satellite Radio personalities and the hosts of The Covino & Rich Show. While waiting for her interview, Shannon realized the familiar-looking woman sitting next to her on the couch was Janet Jackson. She was also waiting to go on air with Covino and Rich! This only added to the excitement of her interview experience in New York. Several days later, she was offered the internship and wholeheartedly accepted.

Interns aren't typically allowed to be on air their first week, but the novelty of Shannon's small-town background and her outgoing personality led Covino and Rich to give her a chance behind the mic. Her Arizona roots appealed to the satellite radio listeners and many formed a connection with her over her experiences growing up in the Southwest.

The internship was going so smoothly that Shannon decided to stay in New York. She transferred to Seton Hall University, where she graduated with her bachelor's degree in

journalism in 2007. After graduating, she remained employed with SiriusXM and moved around the country a bit, finally settling in Las Vegas.

Shannon has been with SiriusXM for nearly 15 years. During the week she hosts on the Ozzy's Boneyard and Turbo stations, and on weekends she hosts the Octane station. Before the pandemic she frequented music festivals and concerts -- interviewing artists and sharing her experiences with her listeners. Then, 2020 hit.

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, music production came to a screeching halt, so Shannon had to get creative to find content. Thankfully, in the latter half of 2020, more bands began to quarantine together in order to get back in the studio and start performing virtually.

Shannon's professional and personal lives both revolve around music. In October 2020, Shannon married Chad Gray, lead vocalist of two bands - Hellyeah and Mudvayne. One of their two French bulldogs, Milly the Metal Dog, has seen Ozzy Osborne perform and met members of Korn and Slipknot. Their second French bulldog, Mad Lee, was adopted during the pandemic and can't wait for life to go back to normal so he can meet rock stars like his sister.

According to Shannon, students thinking about pursuing a career in radio should be themselves.

Being a radio host for SiriusXM isn't exactly what she planned on doing, but according to Mesa Community College (MCC) Alumna Shannon Gunz, it is proof that life can surprise you with a fun and rewarding career.

An Arizona native, Shannon was born in Prescott and grew up in Chino Valley. She grew up close to her family, loving music, the outdoors and driving a stick shift. As a young adult, she moved to the Phoenix area to begin college.

Shannon's journey at MCC began when she set her sights on an Interior Design degree in 2002. During the course of her studies, an interpersonal communications class changed her focus.

"I really loved looking at the different dynamics of how relationships work, how conversations happen, and how certain people open up," she said. "At that point, I decided to get a degree in communications."

While attending classes at MCC, one of Shannon's roommates told her she thought she'd be a great talk show host due to her outgoing personality and love of music. At



"The thing that got me to where I am is being genuine. Hopefully you're that person people like, and if so, you don't have to pretend to be someone else," Shannon said. "People want to feel like they know you and they want someone to hang out with. Be yourself, and be relatable."





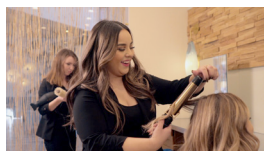
Mascot makeover

MCC's most loyal fan, Thor the Thunderbird, received a makeover in 2020. As Thunderbirds, we strive to be examples of kindness, caring and compassion. Thor, our cherished Thunderbird mascot, does the same. As a symbol of our appreciation for our mascot's unwavering support, we set out to hatch a new version in 2020. The goal was not to change Thor, but rather provide enhancements making the costume more colorful, engaging and bold – a makeover if you will.

Due to continued COVID restrictions and safety precautions, the “new” Thor, like many of us, remains mostly hunkered down, only leaving the nest for special occasions like the drive-through graduation in December. Thor couldn't pass up an opportunity to safely celebrate the outstanding accomplishments of the 2020 graduates, the most recent additions to the MCC Alumni Association!



NEW BEAUTY AND WELLNESS DEGREE



The college launched the Associate in Applied Science (AAS) in Beauty and Wellness in fall 2020. In partnership with Rolfs Salon, the degree is the first of its kind to help beauty professionals deliver innovative and intelligent client beauty experiences while enhancing their business management skills. The program trains already-licensed beauty professionals in finance, marketing and communication as well as organizational leadership, empowering them to expand their career opportunities.

The Beauty and Wellness program includes Mesa Community College's first Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) offering. Licensed beauty

professionals may receive up to 31 college credits, nearly half of their associate degree, at no cost by enrolling as an MCC student and submitting a PLA form for the Beauty and Wellness program.

Upon completing the associate's degree, graduates may follow a transfer pathway to Arizona State University to earn a Bachelor of Applied Science with a Personal Care Emphasis.

The 21 students who are in the first cohort of the Beauty and Wellness program received full scholarships from Rolfs CEO Francis Tesmer. The group is on target to earn their AAS degrees in May 2021.

Learn more about this exciting new opportunity at mesacc.edu/beauty-wellness.





Thunderbirds THRIVE

Mesa Community College Strategic Plan 2020-2025



Thunderbirds THRIVE – The MCC Strategic Plan 2020-2025

Mesa Community College's future direction is determined through a dynamic, collaborative, and continuous process of strategic planning designed to ensure the long-term viability of our institution for the students and communities we serve. The 2020-2025 Strategic Plan, Thunderbirds THRIVE, translates our vision - to inspire, ensure access, and empower action - to reality.

Led by the MCC Strategic Planning Committee, MCC engaged hundreds of students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community members. The investments each of these groups make in MCC is inspiring, and the development of our targeted Wildly Important Goals (WIG) could not have been completed without their candor and ideas. The plan, Thunderbirds THRIVE, encompasses three strategic directions.

1. MCC is an agent for diversity, equity and inclusion

WIG: By 2025, MCC will attain equitable two-year college completion outcomes* across all racial groups.

2. MCC improves student experiences and outcomes through Guided Pathways

WIG: By 2025, MCC will increase overall successful two-year outcomes* of new-to-college students from 11% to 16%.

3. MCC is a great place to work

WIG: By Fall 2021, MCC will establish goals and key strategies for this strategic direction based on employee feedback.

*Successful two-year outcomes are defined as earning a credential, transferring to a university or, for part-time students, earning 30 or more credits.

Review the full 2020-2025 Strategic Plan online at mesacc.edu/about/strategic-plan.



Training frontline medical professionals during a pandemic

The demand for skilled nurses, nurse assistants and paramedicine professionals continues growing and Mesa Community College (MCC) is dedicated to supporting the educational goals and needs of these essential, frontline medical professionals.

Today's classes may look a bit different compared to 2019; however, our expert faculty remain dedicated to teaching a rigorous curriculum.

The pandemic changes how we do things, not what we do. Faculty and college administrators worked together early in spring 2020 to adjust in-person learning to virtual modalities. Classroom configurations and lab schedules were modified to provide safe in-person sessions to teach the necessary hands-on skills our students need to stay on track and meet their goals.

NURSING

Woven into the fabric of MCC since 1969, the college's Nursing Program is part of MaricopaNursing, a consortium of Maricopa Community Colleges Nursing Programs. MCC offers an Associate in Applied Science in Nursing, a Certificate of Completion for nursing assistants as well as nurse refresher courses.

"The MCC Nursing Program is the most requested Nursing Program in the Maricopa County Community College District," said MCC Nursing Department Chair Mary Boyce, RN. "Our nurses have a consistently high National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX) RN pass rates – 97% of our nurses passed the 2020 exam on their first attempt."

The MCC Nursing Program was awarded continuing accreditation from the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN) in 2017, affirming the quality of the program, as well as its ongoing commitment to serve students and the community at the highest possible level.

NURSE ASSISTING

The MCC Nurse Assisting Program was restructured and moved to a renovated education facility at the Red Mountain Campus in 2019.

The course restructuring altered the traditional full-semester program into an eight-week block, allowing the college to serve more students interested in this in-demand occupation. The course prepares students for the state required exams that qualify them to become a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) or a Licensed Nursing Assistant (LNA).

Renovations to the Acacia Village Building at the Red Mountain Campus feature a 10-bed laboratory for student training. State-of-the-art equipment and media for the space were made possible through the use of federal Carl Perkins funds.

PARAMEDICINE

The Paramedicine Program builds upon the college's Emergency Medical Technician Program.

"We are one of Arizona's top paramedicine programs," said Sean Newton, MCC director of Paramedicine Education. "Our students consistently pass the paramedic National Registry exam, a majority, typically 95% or more, on their first attempt [according to the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians]."

The MCC Emergency Medical Services Paramedicine Program was awarded accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) on Sept. 15, 2017; citing the program for its high level of compliance with the nationally established accreditation standards. Onsite reviewers reported they had rarely seen a team so robust and dedicated to the success of their students, while keeping a patient-centered focus. They also noted the faculty and staff assembled at MCC are exceptional.

Support for current paramedicine professionals

In addition to preparing paramedicine professionals for the workforce, MCC serves as a resource for skill building for those already serving in the field. Inaugural offerings of two courses supporting career advancement launched in January 2021.

The Critical Care Paramedicine course prepares students to earn Critical Care and Flight Paramedicine credentialing certifications. The Paramedicine Refresher serves as continuing education to assist current providers in maintaining professional competencies and certification standards.

The Paramedic to RN Bridge Pathway at MCC offers experienced paramedics a route to advanced placement in the MaricopaNursing Program by providing paramedics with the theory and clinical competencies to successfully progress into the second or third semester of the MaricopaNursing RN Program of study.



Manuel “Manny” Romero (1992), executive director of Public Affairs for Borough of Manhattan Community College-City University of New York, says, “Everything I learned at Mesa Community College led me to where I am now.”

This first-generation college student was at Nogales High School when MCC caught his eye. His aunt, Toni Hughes, lived near the Southern and Dobson Campus. Romero thought the college looked as though it would be ideal for him to attend.

“MCC always had more of a university atmosphere with a beautiful campus, clubs, cheerleaders, an undefeated football team and other things you don’t always think of as being at a community college,” he explained.

Personalized advising was another factor Romero credits with helping him excel on his career path. He remains in contact with MCC advisor, Paul Spencer Peterson II. Their mentor/student relationship has transitioned into colleagues in higher education.

It was at MCC that Romero decided he wanted to be a writer. A work/study position on the Mesa Legend set him on the fast track to becoming a journalist. He started out delivering papers and sending ad clips to advertisers, progressing through the ranks to reporter and then features editor. When one of the Legend reporters graduated and left her part-time job at the Mesa Tribune, Romero was hired for the obituary and wedding announcement beats by the legendary Arizona journalist John D’Anna, who became a role model and friend.

Of the MCC paper, he says, “Lynn Milner was the advisor to the Mesa Legend. She was very stylish, articulate and intelligent. Professor Milner shared her journalism experiences and led by

MCC was a foundation for success for alumnus Romero

example. She always advocated for us and taught us to pursue the story, controversial or not.”

Romero tells this anecdote about the rich diversity of Thunderbirds he came to know. He was showing the student taking over Mesa Legend deliveries on campus how it was done. Romero said because she had this long, dark hair and skin tone like he did, he started chatting with her in Spanish. She kept staring at him and finally pointed out she didn’t speak Spanish, she was Navajo.

“I was so excited to find out I had a Navajo friend,” he laughs. “She would bring in food from her home, teach me about her traditions and even came in one day in Navajo attire. Getting to know so many different people helped me grow my self confidence on many levels.”

Although he toyed with the idea of staying after earning his Associate of Arts degree to become the Mesa Legend editor-in-chief, Romero knew he needed to move forward, transferring to earn his Bachelor of Science in Broadcasting at Northern Arizona University. His first job was the education reporter for the Yuma Daily Sun.

Wanting to move back to Phoenix, he became the public relations manager for the State Bar of Arizona. He then joined the media relations team at Arizona State University, becoming director of Hispanic Media. While working at ASU, Romero earned his Master in Mass Communications and became the first president of the alumni chapter of the Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communications.

Romero says a growing dream of his was to live in New York City, riding the subway, going to Coney Island and enjoying the arts, fashion, culture and nightlife. So, he packed up and moved to the Big Apple, connecting with former ASU colleague David Harrison to do promotions and fundraising for Parsons Dance, a contemporary

dance company. He later became the PR director for Marymount Manhattan College, a liberal arts college located in the Upper East Side of Manhattan, then joined the City University of New York’s Baruch College as their director of PR. He continued moving up in the higher education field to his current role leading the Public Affairs Division at BMCC.

Currently working on his doctoral degree in higher education leadership, Romero’s dissertation is “Intentional marketing practices focused on the recruitment and retention of Latino students at community colleges.” Part of the research is autobiographical as well as informed by discussions with colleagues in the field, such as his former advisor Peterson.

He asserts, “It is critical for colleges and universities to continue learning about the needs and challenges of students, especially those from underrepresented populations. As higher education leaders, we need to continually research and learn how we can help ALL students achieve their dream of earning a college degree.”





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EXCITING START, EXTRAORDINARY RETURN

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MCC Hall of Fame

Hall of Fame celebration set for fall 2021

A fall 2021 celebration is scheduled for the Hall of Fame honorees selected in 2020. The traditional ceremony planned for spring 2020 was postponed due to COVID-19 health concerns. This January, the Hall of Fame Selection Committee voted to forgo a call for nominations in 2021, designating this past year's selected group as the 2020/2021 Hall of Fame honorees. A celebration is being planned for November 2021, preferably in an in-person gathering, but virtually if necessary.