



# Alumni & Friends

A Publication for the Mesa Community College Alumni Association

Spring 2019

## Meet MCC's 2018 Hall of Fame Honorees

Ten outstanding alumni, staff and community members were welcomed into the Mesa Community College Hall of Fame during a reception and ceremony hosted by the MCC Alumni Association Nov. 1 at the MCC Theatre.

The MCC Hall of Fame honors alumni, community members and MCC employees whose personal and professional accomplishments and positive contributions to the college and community set them apart.

Learn more at [www.mesacc.edu/alumni/hall-fame](http://www.mesacc.edu/alumni/hall-fame)



### Alumni Achievement Award

Allison Tyler Jones,  
Robert Klee, Sherri Thomas  
and Donna Wallace

### Service Award

Arlen Sykes

### Outstanding Athlete Award

Shea Hillenbrand,  
Dan Manucci, Neville Myton  
and Vance Wilson

### Distinguished Staff Award

Nora Amavisca Reyes, Ed.D.

## Alumni Achievement Award recipients

### Allison Tyler Jones,

Professional Photographer and Founder of Allison Tyler Jones Photography



The Allison Tyler Jones Photography Studio has been ranked as one of the USA Top Performing Studios, according to the Professional Photographers of America. Her portrait clients include many Who's Who in the Valley of the Sun. A mother of seven, she attended MCC in 1983 and 1984. Allison, an author and coauthor of multiple books, has been featured by Professional Photographers of America, holds workshops and is invited to speak at seminars.

### Robert Klee,

Superintendent, Crane Schools (retired)



Robert dedicated his 40-year career to public education in Arizona, serving as a teacher, coach and an educational leader. He served as a principal for ten years before serving as an assistant superintendent for five years. A proponent of Year-Round Education, he received the 1996 Pioneer Award from the National Association for Year-Round Education and the 2017 June Pallack Excellence in Education Outstanding Leadership Award. He was a nominee for the 1997 University of Arizona Outstanding Educator Award, a member of the MCC 1975 NJCAA National Championship football team, Robert graduated from MCC in 1975.

### Sherri Thomas,

Career Strategist, Owner of Career Coaching 360



Graduating from Mesa Community College in 1983, Sherri is the Founder and President of Career Coaching 360 and helps others transition into meaningful and purposeful careers. She created the Maricopa Community College Foundation's Pass-It-Forward scholarship fund for working women, and provides free coaching scholarships to women in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Kenya. As an Intel employee, Sherri led the "She Will Connect" program in Kenya to teach women how to use the internet to further their education and career. The author of several award-winning books, Sherri speaks globally from Israel and Ireland to Singapore and Kenya.

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# Patrick McGarey's non-linear path to NASA

When Patrick McGarey graduated from MCC with an Associate in Arts degree, he never expected to be where he is today. Patrick, a robotics technologist at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (NASA) in Pasadena, admits the path to his career was not a straight one. He tells students that all the diverse knowledge and experience he obtained along his journey was absolutely invaluable.

Patrick attended MCC in 2008-09. He previously tried music school and had even toured in a USO band where he played for service members around the world. He took a couple of MCC astronomy classes with professor Kevin Healy and a geology class with professor Donna Benson; both instructors inspired him and changed the course of his life.

"The Astronomy 101 course with Kevin Healy blew my mind," said Patrick. "This topic, that I was previously not interested in, grew like wildfire in my brain. It came more naturally than in high school. I began to fill my extra time programming the star show in the planetarium and stargazing from the rooftop of the college."

Benson's geology of natural disasters class sparked interest as well.

"Her energy made me think that science is cool and something I wanted to go into," he said.

With an associate's degree from MCC in hand, Patrick enrolled in Earth and Space Exploration at Arizona State University, but continued to take courses at MCC and recommended that others do so as well.

"It was a great way for me to complete physics and calculus and other needed classes," Patrick said. "The MCC teachers are so excellent, it costs less and you can take on more coursework during a semester."

Patrick ended up pursuing robotics projects at ASU, specifically for earth and space exploration. He gained experience as he flew a kite plane over the San Andreas Fault and took aerial photographs for geologists to analyze, to see how earthquakes changed that region of the U.S. He also worked on an airborne balloon payload which rose to 120,000 feet. He generally had a great experience.

Patrick said, "I was still not sure about grad school yet when I finished ASU in 2012. I ended up working in two labs as a technical



engineer. After a year, I took the Graduate Record Examinations, applied for a Fulbright Canada STEM scholarship, and was one of two students who applied and won it."

"I found I was really embracing my different background, the non-linear path, and when things started clicking, I was more mature. It seemed amazing that I received the Fulbright scholarship—someone who dropped out of music school, went to MCC, completed this wonky Earth and Space degree, with no specific direction. Now, here I was, a Fulbright scholar in another country, with top students from MIT and Stanford."

Patrick continued his education, receiving a Ph.D. in Aerospace Engineering from the University of Toronto. After every accomplishment, he emailed Healy.

"I'd write, 'hey I just got a scholarship, hey, I just defended my Ph.D., hey I just got into NASA.' I'd tell him it was directly because of him. These professors sacrifice their own research and go into a world of education and I wanted to make sure he knew how appreciative I am of that."

Today Patrick is working on the proposed concept of a cliff-descending, tethered moon diver for the exploration of the Tranquillitatis Pit, near where the Apollo 11 astronauts landed on Earth's moon. The proposed concept is that an extreme terrain rover called Axel will explore the layers of past eruptions to gain information on how the moon formed, which may also provide information on the Earth's development.

Patrick returned to MCC recently to talk with students about his career. He's also working on a plan to bring MCC students to tour the Jet Propulsion Lab at NASA.

***"I started at MCC," he said. "How could I not go back and talk about the benefits of a different path? No one told me that there was any pathway to work at NASA. I had to go and pay it forward to whoever is in Kevin's class now."***

"I told students during my talk that there's no one path to some eventual goal. At MCC I found the freedom to try something new, in classes that are of high quality and low cost. There's no need to be afraid to take a risk and keep an open mind."



**Xavier Patten started out as a music major at Mesa Community College. His focus changed after taking a dance class.**

**Today he works for Walt Disney World in Orlando as a parade performer and at Universal Studios as a dancer.**

“I just enjoyed the MCC dance class so much,” Xavier said. “MCC gave me the core of my dance training and I feel like it was the best place for me to get that foundation. Without it, I would not be where I am.”

He said the dance program gave him plenty of opportunities in the field of entertainment, from volunteering with other schools, to doing a fashion show at the Ritz Carlton and even performing in the Pepsi Super Bowl XLIX Halftime Show.

## Dance class at MCC prepares Xavier Patten for success as a performer at Walt Disney World and Universal Studios

Xavier was a Disney Program intern while at MCC in 2015. The experience led him to become a regular season performer at Disney World in 2016. Even though he was in the midst of pursuing an Associate in Arts, Fine Arts-Dance degree, he took advantage of the opportunities to perform at Walt Disney World and Universal Studios.

***“The training I got at MCC prepared me to audition for not just Disney but Universal Studios Orlando, Vincent Sanrocco Dance Company; and Modern Theatrical, a small theatre group,” Xavier said.***

He became a puppeteer at Universal Studios in 2017 and a dancer in 2018.

“Performing and knowing that I would finally get paid to do what I have been paying to learn was a great feeling and made me feel very accomplished,” Xavier said.

Though working in his chosen field, he does plan to return to college. “Someday I will finish the degree,” Xavier said.

He’s learned to take things in stride during his experience in the entertainment industry. Xavier advises other students who go into the field to do the same.

“You must keep your body in shape and realize that entertainment is subject to change,” he said. “You can do plenty of shows here in the theme parks but at any moment a show that you do will eventually close. Four of my shows have closed since I’ve become a part of them, but I’ve also been able to open three of them.”

He also recommends community theatres for those pursuing a career in the performing arts.

“Auditioning and getting involved with the community theatres and dance companies is a perfect way to keep current on your skills,” Xavier said. “And keep taking classes because you can only get better.”

# Make It Happen



MCC president, Dr. Rich Haney reached new heights at Mt. Pichincha and Cayambe in Ecuador. He made his dream come true; using the MCC Health and Wellness/Human Performance Lab resources monitor his readiness for the journey. What's your dream? How can MCC help make it happen?

## Alumna shares passion, serves as writer-in-residence at local library



Sharon Skinner, a Mesa Community College alumna, is the Tempe Library's Spring 2019 Writer-in-Residence. Sharon is the author of fantasy, science fiction and paranormal novels for audiences of all ages. Sharon is an active member of Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI) and serves as the regional advisor for SCBWI Arizona. She graduated from MCC in 1997 with highest honors and was a member of Phi Theta Kappa. She went on to complete a Master of Arts degree in creative writing from Prescott College.

The Writers-in-Residence program promotes writing in communities by connecting local, professional authors to serve as Writers-in-Residence at local libraries. Sharon will conduct a workshop series and one-on-one consultations from February to April 2019 in the Tempe Library at 3500 S. Rural Rd. in Tempe.

For more information on the program, visit <https://www.tempepubliclibrary.org/event-calendar/tempe-writes>.  
For more information on Skinner, visit <http://sharonskinner.com/>.

## Insurance: A career worth considering

Are you looking for a meaningful career with an opportunity for professional growth?

The Maricopa Corporate College, established by the Maricopa County Community College District to deliver high-impact training and development solutions for business, has partnered with USAA and State Farm. This connection could help you launch a new career. Learn more about companies looking to hire alumni like you at [mcorcollege.com/alumni](http://mcorcollege.com/alumni).

Arizona's insurance industry is booming, with nearly 2,000 organizations employing tens of thousands of Arizonans. The numbers continue growing as major companies such as USAA and State Farm expand their presence in Arizona. These two companies also offer education assistance — making it easier for you to continue your education.

Insurance companies offer great benefits and numerous career paths - sales agents, claims and policy processing clerks, appraisers and underwriters to name a few. Additionally, they employ large numbers of marketing, IT, human resources and other professionals.

**MCC alumni Brian Perez, who currently works in State Farm's Customer Care Center while attending Arizona State University, says, "My supervisor works my schedule around my classes. There are so many different departments and things you can do."** Read Brian's story at [maricopacorporate.com/maricopa-community-colleges/blog/maricopa-community-college-student-finds-career-state-farm](http://maricopacorporate.com/maricopa-community-colleges/blog/maricopa-community-college-student-finds-career-state-farm).



**Donna Wallace, R.N., M.S., C.P.N.P.,**  
Nurse Practitioner at Cardon Children's Medical  
Center Neurosurgery



Donna graduated from MCC in 1979 and has devoted her professional life to improving the care of at-risk populations. Currently a Neurosurgery Pediatric Nurse Practitioner, Donna served as director at large for the American Association of Neuroscience Nurses (A.A.N.N.) and a recipient of its A.A.N.N. Mary Decker Mentorship Award. She was coeditor of Nursing Care of the Pediatric Neurosurgery Patient, 3rd edition, which was chosen as one of the American Journal of Nursing's 2017 Books of the Year. Donna is also the author of numerous publications, including the Hydrocephalus chapter for Handbook of Neuroscience Nursing, and the Hydrocephalus and Pediatric Developmental Disorders chapters in the AANN Core Curriculum. She volunteers locally and globally on medical missions to South America and Mexico.

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## Service Award recipient

**Arlen Sykes, Volunteer for Red Cross, National Kidney Foundation, Special Olympics, and various other organizations, retired elementary school teacher and U.S. Navy veteran**



Serving in the United States Navy during the Persian Gulf War, Arlen Sykes went on to become an accomplished educator and extraordinary volunteer. Arlen is the recipient of teacher and educator honors from numerous organizations locally and nationally including Congressional Recognition for working with veterans in the Troops to Teachers program. His 18 years of service to the Civil Air Patrol garnered a multitude of recognitions including Southwest Region Aerospace Teacher of the Year. As manager of the Arizona Red Cross Shelter at the Arizona Coliseum Arlen oversaw the care of more than 5,000 hurricane Katrina survivors. He is also renowned for work with Arizona Special Olympics and the National Kidney Foundation of Arizona to name few.

## Outstanding Athlete Award recipients

### Shea Hillenbrand,

MCC Baseball 1993-1996, professional baseball player 1996-2007



This Mesa native graduated from Mountain View High School and attended MCC 1993-1996. He played for the Thunderbirds 1994-96 where he was First Team All American and 1996 Arizona Community College Athletic Conference Player of the Year. Shea played Major League Baseball from 2001-2007 including with the Arizona Diamondbacks and the Boston Red Sox. He was Player of the Year three of his five years in MLB and played in the All-Star games in 2002 and 2005. He left MLB to be with his family in 2008, founding the Against All Odds Foundation to assist athletes of all ages with life transitions through preparation, inspiration, and education and to inspire children from many backgrounds through baseball. Shea donated "The Shea Hillenbrand Field" to the Chandler Boys and Girls Clubs in 2004 and in 2016 he founded a baseball academy in Mexico.

**Dan Manucci, MCC Football 1975 NJCAA Champion, professional football player 1979-1987**



A quarterback for McClintock High School, Dan played baseball and football at MCC in 1975 and 1976. He earned a football scholarship to Kansas State University where he led the Big 8 in passing his senior year and was named 1978 All-Big 8 Honorable Mention. In 1979 Dan was selected by the Buffalo Bills in the fifth round of the NFL Draft where he played three seasons. He also played for the Canadian Football League's Toronto Argonauts (1981) and the United States Football League's Arizona Wranglers (1983). He co-hosted the Phoenix sports radio talk show "Roc and Manuch," is on the Advisory Board of National Football Foundation Valley of the Sun Chapter and is a participant in the local NFL Retired Players Association.

**Neville Fitzgerald Myton,**  
MCC Track & Field 1968 NJCAA Champion, 1964 and 1968 Olympics



Neville has set records at countless local and national meets. In 1964, he ran the 880 yards in 1.47.2 seconds, becoming the first Jamaican Junior World Record Holder, a title he holds to this day. In 1965, the British magazine World Sport awarded him a Certificate of Achievement and the local newspaper dubbed him The Indomitable Distance Man. Following high school he helped MCC win a NJCAA Track and Field championship, earning three individual national championships, twice in the 880-yard run and once in the 440-yard hurdles. In 1969, he ran on a sprint medley relay team at the Fresno Relays clocking the second fastest time in history, missing the world record by one-tenth of a second. He also competed for Jamaica in the Tokyo Olympics in 1964 and Mexico City in 1968; twice in the Commonwealth Games; and once in the Pan American Games. He earned a Bachelor of Social Science and another in Physical Education from San Jose State College in 1971 and returned to Jamaica to teach and coach several Olympians. In 2016, Neville was inducted into The San Jose State University Hall Of Fame. Neville was manager of the JAMALCO Sports. In 2006 Jamaica awarded him the Order of Distinction, Officer Class recognizing his unselfish contribution to his community and nation, particularly in the field of sports.

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Additional information about the MCC Hall of Fame, including previous honorees and nomination instructions is available at [mesacc.edu/alumni/hall-fame](http://mesacc.edu/alumni/hall-fame).

MCC will officially call for nominations for the 2019 Hall of Fame later in the spring. Start thinking about who you'd like to nominate and become familiar with the categories and process online at [mesacc.edu/alumni/hall-fame/categories-criteria](http://mesacc.edu/alumni/hall-fame/categories-criteria).



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# MCC

## Alumni Association

EXCITING START, EXTRAORDINARY RETURN

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### Vance Wilson, MCC Baseball 1993-1994, professional baseball player 1994-2008



A graduate of Red Mountain High School, Mesa, Vance played for MCC 1993-94. He was Second Team NJCAA All-American and 1993 and 1994 All-Arizona Community

College Athletic Conference. Selected in the MLB draft by the New York Mets in 1993, he signed after his 1994 season at MCC, making his major league debut in 1999 as a defensive replacement. He played parts of six seasons for the Mets and two years with the Detroit Tigers. Vance became a manager in the Kansas City Royals minor league system in 2011 and was named Bull Pen Coach in 2017. He and his family reside in Arkansas where they helped raise \$150,000 to build a Children's House for abused youth.

### Distinguished MCC Staff

#### Nora Amavisca Reyes, Ed.D., Vice Provost MCC Red Mountain Campus



Vice Provost of the MCC Red Mountain Campus, Nora is known for her strategic planning and tireless efforts to help students succeed through

innovative programs and inspiring one-on-one engagement. This second grade bilingual teacher joined MCC as a Education faculty member. She has been assistant chair and chair of Education Studies Department, acting dean of Innovative Learning and Academic Affairs, and chair of the MCC Department Chair Association. Nora also served as Education Instructional Council and Articulation Task Force chair; Guanajuato and Xalapa Study Abroad director; and a DoE grant project administrator. Nora earned a Bachelor in Education, an M.Ed. in Multicultural/Bilingual Education and an Ed.D. in Curriculum & Instruction, Bilingual Education from ASU.



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