

WINTER 2019

# Invention

THE MAGAZINE OF THOMAS EDISON STATE UNIVERSITY

*Kith and  
Kindred  
Spirits*

Gabrielle Juba Frost, BSBA '17, MBA '18

UNIVERSITY LAUNCHES MS IN DATA SCIENCE AND ANALYTICS DEGREE PROGRAM | PASSIONATE CAREGIVER: JENNIFER NITZSCHE, BSN '17

UNIVERSITY RECEIVES \$10,000 GRANT FROM PNC FOUNDATION | UNIVERSITY PARTNERS WITH AUGUSTA TECHNICAL COLLEGE

THE 27TH ANNUAL GRANDE BALL | 2018 COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY | FORGING HIS PATH: GEORGE COLEY, AAS '13, BSAST '15





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**D**ear Alumni, Students and Friends,

For many of us, Thomas Edison State University is a family affair.

That's definitely the case for Gabrielle Juba Frost, who graduated from Thomas Edison with her Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (BSBA) degree in 2017 and earned her Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree in 2018. Frost follows in the footsteps of her mother and grandmother, who both earned bachelor's degrees in 2011, and she blazed a trail for her husband, Ed, who is currently enrolled in the Criminal Justice program.

Like so many of our students, Frost has juggled multiple responsibilities along her journey. But her training as a United States Marine, and her tenacity have helped to propel her toward her goals.

We are also proud to introduce you to Jennifer Nitzsche, a graduate of our Accelerated 2nd Degree BSN Program. This unique 12-month BSN degree program is designed for adults who have earned a non-nursing bachelor's degree and are interested in becoming a registered nurse. The intense, full-time program prepares graduates for the National Council Licensure Examination for RNs (NCLEX-RN).

Also in this issue, you will want to meet George Coley. As a single father and high school dropout, Coley assumed he lost the opportunity to advance his education until a job as a janitor changed everything. He earned his Associate in Applied Science degree in Applied Computer Studies in 2013 and his Bachelor of Science in Applied Science and Technology degree in Information Technology in 2015. Today, Coley works as a technical specialist for Enroute Computer Solutions, a government subcontractor in New Jersey that works directly with the FAA to support its information technology programs and special projects.

We are thrilled to share photos and stories from our 46th Annual Commencement, which took place on Sept. 29 at the CURE Insurance Arena in Trenton. Our annual Commencement is the highlight of the year for this institution. This year was especially significant for me as Thomas Edison's new president, since it was my first opportunity to share the joy and accomplishment of Commencement with our students.



Merodie A. Hancock, PhD  
*President*





## Nancy Distelcamp, BSN '18, Receives School of Nursing's 2018 Regina Sanchez-Porter Award

Nancy Distelcamp, RN, a 2018 W. Cary Edwards School of Nursing Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree recipient, was presented with the 2018 Regina Sanchez-Porter Award during a ceremony held at Thomas Edison State University's George A. Pruitt Hall on Oct. 9.

The award honors the memory of Regina Sanchez-Porter, PhD, RN, who served as a member of the School's Nursing Committee and a representative and examiner for the BSN program. The award is given annually to a BSN graduate who embodies Sanchez-Porter's commitment to the community and her profession.

"I was honored to receive the award, and my experience as a nursing student has been fabulous," said Distelcamp during an interview at the University's Commencement in September. "The most important aspects of my journey

were increasing my self-confidence and the professional recognition of having earned my BSN degree."

Distelcamp has more than 40 years of progressive nursing experience, the last 26 of which were spent at Capital Health in Mercer County, N.J. She also serves in a volunteer capacity as the vice president for the Board of Health of the Borough of Hightstown, N.J.

"She is a truly kind person and a consummate professional who is highly competent, warm and passionate about her work and deeply committed to helping others," said Lauren Lavine, executive director of Development at Capital Health, who nominated Distelcamp for the award.

In addition to her role for the Hightstown Borough Board of Health, Distelcamp has been active in launching and supporting educational programs in her community, which



Holly Leahan, MSN, RN, Nursing Program and Graduate Practicum advisor in the W. Cary Edwards School of Nursing, joined Nancy Distelcamp, BSN '18, recipient of the Regina Sanchez-Porter Award, on Oct. 9.

include championing a Stop the Bleed program, in West Windsor Twp., N.J. The program is part of a national grassroots effort to train local residents to help stabilize victims during a bleeding emergency before first responders arrive.

## Accelerated 2nd Degree BSN Program Pinning Ceremony EVENT MARKS A CEREMONIAL RITE OF PASSAGE FOR NURSING STUDENTS

The W. Cary Edwards School of Nursing honored graduates of its fall 2018 Accelerated 2nd Degree BSN Program with a pinning ceremony and reception on Sept. 27 at George A. Pruitt Hall.

The culminating event signifies a symbolic entrance into the nursing profession for the graduates of the program who are now eligible to take the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN).

Graduates represented those who came to the program with non-nursing undergraduate degrees and managed to complete the School's demanding nursing degree requirements within one year.

Members of the School's 2017 Accelerated BSN Program cohort achieved a 100 percent pass rate on the NCLEX-RN exam. That outcome

marked the third time that graduates of the program achieved a 100 percent pass rate on the NCLEX-RN exam in a given year. Graduates of the program who took the exam in 2012 and 2014 also earned a 100 percent pass rate.

The 2018 cohort is the seventh graduating class of the program. To learn more about this and other programs available through the W. Cary Edwards School of Nursing, visit [www.tesu.edu/nursing](http://www.tesu.edu/nursing).



Graduates of the W. Cary Edwards School of Nursing's Fall 2018 Accelerated 2nd Degree BSN Program, are (first row, from left to right): Robert Jose, Steven Spadafino, Alena Shiryayeva, Jordan Vetrini, Melissa Halbeison (2018 Dr. Christine M. Rosner Award recipient), Shila Stevens, Claricel Umali, Amy Elbertson, Dominika Tomczyk, Jillian Rogers (student speaker) and Marissa Siwak. Second row, from left to right: William Toth, Kelly Bailey, Priscilla Achirem, Kellee Baylis, David Edden, Jennifer Lyon, Melissa Nini, Matthew Christiani, Davia Titus and Kevin Hamilton. Not pictured: Sara Ariyeva.

## University Partners with Augusta Technical College

### AN AFFORDABLE FLEXIBLE PATHWAY TO A BACHELOR'S DEGREE IN CYBERSECURITY

The School of Applied Science and Technology at Thomas Edison State University (TESU) has partnered with Augusta Technical College (ATC), a unit of the Technical College System of Georgia, to create an affordable and seamless pathway for ATC students seeking a bachelor's degree in cybersecurity.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, jobs in the IT/information security analyst fields are expected to grow 28 percent through 2026 (much faster than average) with bachelor's-prepared practitioners earning a median annual wage of \$95,510. Employer demand is expected to persist due to the need for a highly skilled workforce to protect the nation's critical cyber infrastructure and information assets against continually evolving threats. The partnership between TESU

and ATC will help in educating more bachelor's-prepared cybersecurity professionals so that they can respond to this critical need.

Through the partnership agreement, students who earn an Associate of Applied Science degree in cybersecurity with ATC will be eligible to enroll in TESU's Bachelor of Science in Cybersecurity degree program.

"The partnership model makes it possible for ATC students to complete a substantial portion of their undergraduate course requirements at ATC and transfer those credits to complete an online bachelor's degree program in cybersecurity at TESU," said Dr. Amjad Ali, associate dean in the School of Applied Science and Technology at the University. "Due to the program's flexibility, ATC students

can complete their remaining courses at TESU from anywhere at any time."

In addition to online courses, students in the program will have the option of utilizing TESU's prior learning assessments to validate the professional training and certifications they already possess for earning additional credits toward their degree program.

"We're excited to partner with TESU to provide a cost-effective, workforce-responsive pathway to bachelor's degree completion for our students in the area of cybersecurity," said Terry Elam, president of Augusta Technical College. "Additional collegiate opportunities provide a positive overall experience for students who have made this important first step in their academic career."

## University Launches MS in Data Science and Analytics Degree Program

### NEW PROGRAM PROVIDES STUDENTS A PATH TO ADVANCEMENT IN A RAPIDLY EXPANDING FIELD

Thomas Edison State University (TESU) has partnered with The Institute of Statistics Education at *Statistics.com* to offer a Master of Science in Data Science and Analytics degree program that is delivered completely online and structured around the unique needs of working professionals.

The program will provide students with graduate-level theoretical knowledge, applied skills and the ability to derive value from data in real-world decision making.

"Today, businesses have the ability to collect more data than ever before, but managers now need to analyze and interpret that data for it to be truly applicable to their endeavors," said Dr. John Woznicki, dean of the Heavin School of Arts and Sciences at TESU. "We are excited about this new graduate degree, which is designed to prepare those seeking leadership positions with the skills to leverage big data in

strategic decision making. The rapid emergence of data science and analytics and related disciplines provides a unique opportunity for students to be part of a data science transformation during the next decade."

Upon completion of the program, students will be able to:

- › Identify appropriate statistical and machine learning methods to gain value from data in various business and organizational contexts;
- › Use software or programming languages to develop statistical and machine learning models to gain insight from data and make predictions;
- › Apply software or programming languages to explore relationships in data, and prepare data for analysis; and
- › Specify the decisions (including automated decisions) that should result from the analytic methods.

According to Woznicki, the target audience for the program is computer science professionals as well as anyone who seeks to extract meaningful insights from a range of data sources and includes those who lead analytics teams or oversee vendors in the process. "This is a credential that those already in the field may lack, but will be of great use to them for career advancement," he noted. "Data science and analytics is an emerging interdisciplinary field that incorporates computer science, statistics and mathematical modeling with applications in business, government, life sciences and social sciences."

To learn more about this and other graduate degree programs at TESU, visit [tesu.edu/academics/grad-programs](https://tesu.edu/academics/grad-programs).

# PASSIONATE

## ❖ Jennifer Nitzsche, BSN '17

Patient care is extremely important to Jennifer Nitzsche, but the most rewarding part of her job is often elevated to the emotional level.

“The career accomplishments I am most proud of are not of the clinical sense, rather the emotional sense,” Nitzsche explained. “I have received a few letters from patients and co-workers about their appreciation of my care. Being able to leave a shift and know that you made a difference, however small, in a patient’s life, is an accomplishment unlike any other.”

Nitzsche, who earned a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree through the Thomas Edison State University W. Cary Edwards School of Nursing’s Accelerated 2nd Degree BSN Program (Accelerated Program) in 2017, was also one of the recipients of the Dr. Christine M. Rosner Clinical Excellence Award.

“It was a shock to be chosen for the Christine Rosner award,” Nitzsche enthused. “I worked hard to give the best care to my patients, which includes not only clinical aspects, but also emotional and spiritual connections. To be honored with this award is validation of those efforts.”

The award is in honor and memory of Christine M. Rosner, PhD, RN, associate dean for Undergraduate Programs in the W. Cary Edwards School of Nursing, who died unexpectedly in August 2014. The award is given to graduates of the Accelerated Program for clinical excellence and commitment to innovation, leadership, teamwork and collaboration in the profession.

Nitzsche, who is a registered nurse with St. Barnabas Healthcare System

working on the Cardiothoracic Step Down Unit, credits her TESU degree with advancement in her field.

“We get a variety of patients, many of them surgical, including post open heart surgery patients coming from the ICU, cardiac catheterization, pacemaker surgery and patients with cardiac problems. I began working there in April 2018 and, without my BSN, it would not have been possible!”

What attracted Nitzsche most to the program was the convenience of completing her BSN in such a short timeframe.

“I have known that I was meant to work in healthcare since a very young age, and did not want to go the conventional route of a two- or four-year program to attain my BSN, because I wanted to get into the clinical setting and start helping people,” she explained. “I heard about TESU through some friends who were enrolled in the online RN-BSN program.

“The one-year accelerated program was very demanding; between class time, clinical, online courses and studying, it left limited time to do other things outside of school. However, through the year, I learned how important it was to make the time and do things I enjoy, too.”

The University’s Accelerated Program is a 12-month BSN degree program designed for adults who have earned a bachelor’s degree (non-nursing) prior to acceptance and are interested in becoming a registered nurse. The

intense, full-time program prepares graduates for the National Council Licensure Examination for RNs (NCLEX-RN). Due to the rigorous nature of this program, outside employment is strongly discouraged.

Nitzsche, who earned her first bachelor’s degree in biology from Moravian College in 2014 and earned her EMT certification that same year, acknowledged the support of her TESU classmates.

“This journey to become a nurse would NOT have been possible without my wonderful classmates, who, even after graduation, continued to help ensure that we all were able to take and pass the NCLEX to become registered nurses, especially Katie [Bello] and Joe [Barton]; I will never forget my experiences or my classmates at TESU!

“Of course, I have to mention my mom, who has done everything in the world for me, from helping me apply to schools, to helping me with loans, to being there for late night and early morning phone calls when I just needed someone to talk to,” Nitzsche recalled. “And also to my boyfriend who worked so hard while I was in school to support me so I didn’t have to work and who deserves congrats for passing his national registry test and becoming a paramedic.”

Nitzsche lives in northern New Jersey. In her spare time, she loves to go to the beach and hike, kayak and swim. And, she added, “People may be surprised to know that I threw javelin in high school. It’s just not something that a lot of people do and, when people find out, they are usually shocked; I even own my own javelin.”

# CAREGIVER





## University Receives \$10,000 Grant from PNC Foundation

PROGRAM EXPANDS TEACHERS' CULTURAL COMPETENCY IN THE CLASSROOM

The Thomas Edison State University Foundation has received a \$10,000 grant from PNC Foundation to support culturally responsive classrooms in the Trenton and Carteret, N.J., public school districts. The support will help early childhood educators create classroom environments that celebrate and affirm their students' cultural identities.



The grant will support The John S. Watson Institute for Public Policy's N.J. Cultural Competency and English Language Learners (ELL) Institute and Mentoring Program at the University and was awarded in remembrance of the late William 'Bill' Schofield. Schofield was the former vice president and relationship manager of PNC Financial Services Group and Thomas Edison State University Foundation Board member.

"We are immensely grateful to the PNC Foundation for its ongoing support of this endeavor," said Ana I. Berdecia, senior fellow and director, Center for the Positive Development of Urban Children at The John S. Watson Institute for Public Policy. "The grant enables the ELL program to expand its 12-year evidence-based professional development model and extend its reach to a new cohort of 16 teachers."

Since 2007, the ELL program has provided professional development and mentoring to 277 early childhood/elementary teachers in 145 classrooms in 88 schools throughout New Jersey. The program helps to teach theory and best practices in cultural competency; first and second language acquisition and English learning strategies; model best practices through simulations and literacy moments; and equips teachers to use culture and language as tools for



Early childhood educators participate in The Art of Change simulation using building blocks during the 2017 N.J. Cultural Competency and English Language Learners (ELL) Institute and Mentoring Program at Thomas Edison State University. Participants (from left to right) Hargurjit Grewal, Saba Ahmed and Ritu Chauhan learn lessons they'll take back to their classrooms from ELL mentors Nilajah Abdullah and Dee Bailey.

**"THE GRANT ENABLES THE ELL PROGRAM TO EXPAND ITS 12-YEAR EVIDENCE-BASED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT MODEL AND EXTEND ITS REACH TO A NEW COHORT OF 16 TEACHERS."**

Ana I. Berdecia

developing children's positive cultural identity and self-esteem.

"Bill was a cherished colleague who gave so much of himself to the University and embodied PNC's corporate values of community commitment," said Linda Bowden, regional president of PNC Bank

New Jersey. "We can think of no better way to honor Bill's memory than by supporting the development of educators who are helping our future leaders embrace their cultural background and the world around them."





## Supporting His Alma Mater: Eric Pennington, BSBA '87

Eric Pennington credits his mother's commitment to excellence as the single most influential factor in encouraging him to pursue and complete his degree.

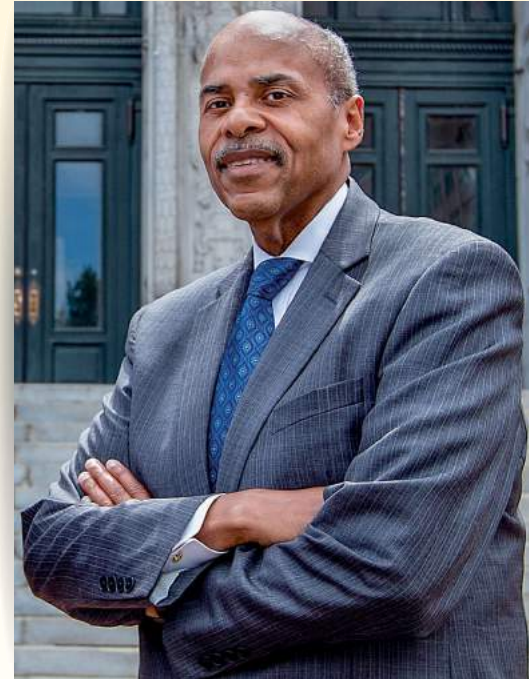
"Her commitment to social justice, world peace and humanism has shaped the manner in which I pursue civil rights on behalf of others," said Pennington, who is an attorney and partner in Pennington Law Group in South Orange, N.J.

Pennington, a 1987 graduate of the University's Bachelor of Science in Business Administration degree program, was initially attracted to the University because of the flexibility in scheduling and the myriad ways one could earn credit. What's more, his younger brother Scott served as a reliable source, having earned his degree from the University years prior.

by earning his law degree from Rutgers University School of Law in Newark, N.J., in 1992.

"I have wanted to be a lawyer my whole life," he recalled. "As a young boy, I believed that there was inequity in the world. At the time, I was most keenly aware of racial inequity. I wanted to represent people who I believed were not treated fairly. I wake up every day eager to get to work and grateful that I have a job that is rewarding. I hope that I continue to fulfill my early objective to balance and eliminate some of the injustices I saw as a child."

This driving force also fuels Pennington's passion for giving



Eric Pennington

**"THE UNIVERSITY WAS A LIFE SAVER FOR ME, AND I WANT TO HELP OTHERS HAVE THE SAME OPPORTUNITY. I HOPE MY DONATIONS PLAY A SMALL PART IN GIVING OTHERS A CHANCE TO ACHIEVE THEIR GOALS AND DREAMS."**

Eric Pennington

"I always tell others that their busy schedule is not an impediment to earning a degree," he explained. "The flexibility of scheduling and the various ways to earn credit makes earning a degree possible for everyone who has an interest in doing so."

Since completing his degree, Pennington used the opportunity as a springboard to further his education

back. For many years, Pennington has supported Thomas Edison State University for providing him and many others an opportunity to fulfill their dreams.

"Thomas Edison provides working adults with an opportunity to obtain a quality education, at a reasonable price, while maintaining a career and family," he said. "The University was a life

saver for me, and I want to help others have the same opportunity. I hope my donations play a small part in giving others a chance to achieve their goals and dreams."

Pennington lives in his hometown of Orange, N.J., and has a child who is a graduate student at Rutgers University. In addition, Pennington serves as business administrator for the city of Newark. Until recently, he served as the attorney for the city of Orange Township and taught civil rights law as an adjunct professor at Seton Hall University School of Law in Newark.





*The 27th Annual*  
**GRANDE BALL**

**CELEBRATING DR. MERODIE A. HANCOCK**



Thomas Edison State University Foundation held its 27th Annual Grande Ball at Grounds for Sculpture in Hamilton, N.J., on Oct. 13. The Foundation honored Dr. Merodie A. Hancock, fourth president of Thomas Edison State University, and celebrated her recent inauguration at the University's September Commencement ceremony. With close to 200 attendees, the formal affair raised more than \$140,000.

In his opening remarks, Dr. Michael Toscani, chair of the Thomas Edison State University Foundation Board of Directors, officially welcomed Hancock saying, "I speak on behalf of the entire University family when I say - we are

truly honored and are thrilled to have you leading this amazing institution."

Frank Clyburn, chair of the Thomas Edison State University Board of Trustees, served on the search committee that brought Hancock to the University and introduced her that evening. "She has the ideal professional background and outstanding experience that we were looking for. But even more compelling than this professional experience is her deep commitment to students - and to their success in achieving their educational goals," Clyburn said.

During the evening's program, Hancock spoke about her passion for serving

adult students and "ensuring that a degree is not simply an empty promise, but a life-changing reality." In addition, former student trustee Frances Parrales, BA '12, MSM '15, shared her journey as a TESU student who earned two degrees and who now supports the University she credits with giving her so much. Parrales invited guests to contribute to the TESU Scholarship Fund, as she does, to support future students with their journey.

The Thomas Edison State University Foundation is grateful to the 2018 Gala Committee and all the generous sponsors, program advertisers, attendees and donors who supported the event and helped make it a success.



**SPONSORS OF THE 2018 GRANDE BALL**

NJM Insurance Group, PSEG, Wells Fargo (Platinum Sponsors); The Bank of Princeton, Capital Health, PNC (Gold Sponsors); Stark & Stark, Investors Bank (Silver Sponsors); St. Francis Medical Center (Bronze Sponsor); AllianceBernstein and RWJBarnabas University Hospital Hamilton (Dessert Reception Sponsors).





**Dr. Merodie A. Hancock**

*President, Thomas Edison State University*



Dr. Merodie A. Hancock currently serves as the fourth president of Thomas Edison State University. She assumed office on March 5, 2018, following an extensive national search.

Hancock has dedicated her career to expanding access to higher education for nontraditional students and has extensive experience serving the education needs of minority student populations, veterans and active-duty members of the military.

She is a nationally recognized leader in the administration and delivery of innovative education programs for adult students. Known for her ability to assess opportunities quickly and set a course for positive change, Hancock has led the successful reinvigoration of several institutions as vice president and president.

Access, success and completion are three words that comprise Hancock's educational philosophy. Through decades of meaningful interaction with adult students, she knows empirically that education is the nexus through which one's capability is harnessed for positive personal and professional growth and societal impact.

Hancock holds a PhD in urban services and education administration from Old Dominion University, an MBA from Claremont Graduate University and a Bachelor of Arts degree in economics from Scripps College.





# Kith and Kindred Spirits

FOR GABRIELLE JUBA FROST, BSBA '17, MBA '18, TENA





**ACTIVITY AND COURAGE ARE LIKELY INHERITED TRAITS.**



# Kith and Kindred Spirits

# E

nlisting in the U.S. Marine Corps immediately after high school, Gabrielle Juba Frost became a member of the United States Marine Band and immediately adapted to its rigorous culture.

“We were performing both locally and internationally on major holidays like Memorial Day, Veteran’s Day and Thanksgiving,” said Frost, a 2017 Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (BSBA) and 2018 Master of Business Administration (MBA) program alum.

Frost said she was nonetheless able to pursue her college degree amid training, flight cancellations, performing as a clarinet player and unpredictable schedules. “The way the University is structured allowed me to complete my assignments

**“I EARNED MY MASTER’S DEGREE IN A 10-MONTH TIMEFRAME WHILE WORKING FULL TIME BECAUSE I WAS SO MOTIVATED.”**

Gabrielle Juba Frost

have had an enduring influence on Frost’s trajectory. “My mom and grandma instilled in me a love for learning and showed me that it’s never too late to further your education,” she noted. “I found that Thomas Edison State University was the best possible choice for me and they showed me the way.”

Frost noted that the University’s accounting curriculum prepared her for a civilian career.

“The BSBA degree in accounting track taught me the basic skills that I needed in order to be successful. I went into my current job with a baseline knowledge of accounting principles and my employer was able to quickly teach me the specifics about the firm’s procedures and specific software.”

course work where we would all log in to participate in a discussion, a lecture or project presentation at the same time,” she said. “These assignments were very useful in my higher-level courses. I was able to brainstorm with my classmates and see things from multiple perspectives. The mentors helped us grasp the topics and often posted supplemental online resources, videos or lectures that helped to reinforce them.”

Career goals and GI Bill benefit constraints meant that Frost would be working through the University’s MBA program at a rapid pace.

“I earned my master’s degree in a 10-month timeframe while working full time because I was so motivated. I had already used nine months’ worth of GI Bill benefits in finishing my bachelor’s degree, and I knew the sooner I could finish my master’s degree, the better. I could then pursue my objective of enrolling in a Doctorate of Business Administration program.”

At one point, she was taking two master’s courses per term while working full time as a sales representative for a flooring company. In her more recent role at a CPA firm, she finds that her schedule is still closely hinged to deadlines.

“I work on a number of things, from audits to payroll and bookkeeping projects, to fraud cases, tax returns

**“I WAS ABLE TO BRAINSTORM WITH MY CLASSMATES AND SEE THINGS FROM MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES. THE MENTORS HELPED US GRASP THE TOPICS AND OFTEN POSTED SUPPLEMENTAL ONLINE RESOURCES, VIDEOS OR LECTURES THAT HELPED TO REINFORCE THEM.”**

Gabrielle Juba Frost

ahead of schedule and my mentors worked with me whenever necessary.”

Her mother, Cassandra Juba, BA ’11, and grandmother, Martha Noel-Stier, ASM ’84, BSBA ’11, who both walked across the stage during the University’s 2011 Commencement,

Frost also noted that her Discussion Board assignments helped her feel connected to her courses and fellow students.

“There was a major connection for us facilitated by our online exchanges. We also participated in synchronous



and administrative items. I wanted to complete my degree before tax season hit and our workloads increased. It was not easy, but it definitely was worth it.”

Frost has now met all requirements to sit for the CPA exam in her home state of North Carolina. “I would love to also earn my CFE (Certified Fraud Examiner) license as I have a passion for forensic accounting,” she said.

Outside of work, Frost oversees FrostyKnits, an online Etsy shop featuring handmade knitted items that she also sells at a local farmer’s

market. A vegan food enthusiast, she also enjoys paddle boarding as often as possible.

Frost met her husband, Ed, while they were both still serving in the military. Ed is enrolled in the University’s BA degree in Criminal Justice program and currently serves as the deputy sheriff for Craven County, New Bern, N.C. Adding to the extended family, Frost’s sister also lives with the couple. “My sister, Caroline Juba, lives with us, and I joke that we’re running a zoo. Between us, we have a Boxer named Bane, a Golden

Retriever mix named Hercules, two Russian Blue cats named Death Stroke and Rumpelstiltskin, and we also care for an outside stray cat named Sylvester.”

“One of our favorite things is playing host for our military buddies. We live near two bases in North Carolina and can have as many as nine people over for breakfast on a Sunday morning. We have a guest bedroom, a couch and spare air mattresses that get a lot of use,” she said. “The bond of military brothers and sisters is one that is impossible to break.”

Gabrielle Juba Frost (center) during her BSBA '17 graduation with her grandmother, Martha Noel-Stier, ASM '84, BSBA '11, and mother, Cassandra Juba, BA '11.





# THE 2018 Commencement IS ONE FOR THE BOOKS

UNIVERSITY INAUGURATES ITS FOURTH PRESIDENT DURING  
46TH ANNUAL COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY AND  
CELEBRATES GRADUATES OF ITS FIRST DOCTORAL PROGRAM.

**T**homas Edison State University had plenty of cause for celebration during its 46th Annual Commencement, on Saturday, Sept. 29, at the CURE Insurance Arena in Trenton, N.J.

During the ceremony, the University inaugurated its fourth president, Merodie A. Hancock, PhD, and celebrated 10 new graduates of its inaugural Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree program.

New Jersey Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-NJ 12th District), BA, Class of 1985, served as keynote speaker. "I am thrilled that this is my alma mater. Today, is both a commencement and the inauguration

of President Merodie Hancock," said Watson Coleman, who is also the daughter of John S. Watson after whom the University's John S. Watson School of Public Service and The John S. Watson Institute for Public Policy are named. "There is no doubt in my mind that Dr. Hancock represents the kind of energy, compassion, understanding, experience, leadership and readiness to take this University to its next level."

Watson Coleman has served as the U.S. representative for New

Jersey's 12th congressional district since 2015 and has served eight consecutive terms in the New Jersey General Assembly. She is the first black woman elected to Congress from the state. Inspired by her public-spirited father, she continues a family legacy of tirelessly advocating for underserved populations along with driving reforms for prisoners re-entering society. In addition to earning her Bachelor of Arts degree from the University,



New Jersey Congresswoman and TESU alumna Bonnie Watson Coleman, BA '85, applauds as Dr. Merodie A. Hancock addresses Thomas Edison State University's graduates during her inauguration and the institution's 46th Annual Commencement Ceremony on Sept. 29 at the CURE Insurance Arena in Trenton, N.J.





Watson Coleman has received honorary doctorate degrees from The College of New Jersey, Rider University and Stockton University.

The University's Class of 2018 included 2,464 graduates, 424 of whom attended the ceremony with 5,406 of their family members and guests. The graduates who attended came from 36 U.S. states, including California and Hawaii as well as Canada and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

"I am honored to serve as Thomas Edison State University's fourth president," said Hancock, who decorated each graduate with an honorary TESU medallion as they crossed the stage. "In particular I would like to express my appreciation for two gentleman who have individually and collectively accomplished so much in the world of nontraditional education: Dr. James Hall, founding president emeritus of

SUNY Empire State College, and Dr. George Pruitt, president emeritus of Thomas Edison State University. Most importantly, I want to acknowledge our graduates. This joint inauguration and graduation ceremony is most fittingly a 'commencement.' Today marks a wonderful new beginning. For some of you that beginning may be showing yourself and family members that a university degree is indeed achievable. For others, you may be using your undergraduate or graduate degrees to progress your professional, civic or personal lives. Regardless of your goals, this commencement, this new beginning, is opening doors of opportunity to a future you can't even yet imagine. Opening doors and creating opportunities are the reasons I'm so excited to be the University's fourth president."

*(continued on next page)*



Inaugural Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) cohort graduates (left to right) Linda Johnson, Celeste Ann Bethom and Vi-Anne Antrum.





Hancock came to the University already a recognized leader in the administration and delivery of innovative education programs for adult students. She has continued to dedicate her career to serving underrepresented populations, including active-duty and veteran service members. Prior to her election as the University's new president, she served as president of the State University of New York (SUNY) Empire State College, where she was responsible for the operation of the school's 35 locations throughout New York, its worldwide online programs and eight international sites.

Pruitt served as the institution's president for 35 years prior to Hancock assuming the role.

In honor of Hancock's inauguration, the University's Board of Trustees approved a \$500 tuition scholarship voucher for all graduates. Recipients have the option of using the voucher to continue their education or pass it along to someone they feel will benefit from the opportunity to attend the University.

For alum Frank L. Parker, walking across the commencement stage symbolized his triumph over a regret that had troubled him for years.

"As I got older, I realized there was a void that I could never fill because I never completed my bachelor's degree," said Parker, BA '18, a U.S. Navy veteran and recipient of the University's Military Scholarship. "It was something that stuck with me my whole life. When my youngest was born, I realized I



needed to set an example and finally fill that void. I'm 52 years old and it's been a long journey." Parker said his new career as a paralegal specialist with the U.S. Department of Justice supporting military veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress would not have been possible without his BA degree in Psychology.

The University has awarded approximately 61,750 degrees to more than 56,230 graduates since it began providing distinctive undergraduate and graduate education for self-directed adults through flexible, high-quality, collegiate learning and assessment opportunities in 1972.



Frank L. Parker, BA '18







# Forging His Path

## George Coley, AAS '13, BSAST '15

As a single father and high school dropout, George Coley assumed he lost the opportunity to advance his education. Until a job as a janitor changed everything.

“Working at the Technical Center over the years, I’ve met a lot of people,” he explained. “When I started as a janitor, I would often clean one man’s cubicle, and he would ask me what I was reading since I could be found with my nose in books. At the time, I was studying for my Novell Certified Administrator (CNA) certificate, and he asked that he be first to know when I completed it. Over time, I forgot about that conversation until he saw me again weeks later, and I was reminded to tell him that I had finished.”

Coley found out that the gentleman was actually a division manager who immediately forwarded his resume to a government contact at the William J. Hughes Technical Center in Atlantic City, N.J., who offered him a job the very same day as a junior programmer.

“The woman I interviewed with told me not to get comfortable,” he explained. “She said, ‘This is just a stepping stone for you.’”

**“I KNEW I ALREADY HAD ABOUT A YEAR OF COLLEGE UNDER MY BELT, SO FINDING OUT THAT I COULD TRANSFER MY CREDITS AND FINISH A DEGREE WITH THE UNIVERSITY WAS LIFE CHANGING...”**

George Coley

This was a long way from Coley’s humble upbringing as one of eight children raised by a single mother, Mary, who worked hard to give her children a better life.

After dropping out of high school in ninth grade, Coley opted to earn his General Equivalency Diploma (GED)

some years later. As he prepared for the test, he was encouraged to consider furthering his education, eventually enrolling at Atlantic Cape Community College in Mays Landing, N.J.

“When I started at Atlantic Cape, I didn’t have much money,” he said. “One day, representatives were in the student center signing people up to be Blackjack and Craps dealers for the summer at the casinos in Atlantic City. Initially, I turned the opportunity down to focus on school, but later reconsidered and began working at Bally’s Casino in order to make some extra money.”

For Coley, the summer work turned into an eight-year job he committed to, leaving school in order to support himself and a growing family of his own.

“While I was working at the casino, I met my daughter’s mother,” Coley explained. “I wound up being granted full custody of my daughter and raised her as a single father.”

Looking for an opportunity with a bit more balance, Coley worked as a barber for the next few years before the necessity of a job with benefits became apparent. His sister, who worked for the Teamsters, told him about a job opening at the Technical Center for a janitor.

“I needed a job with benefits to support myself and my young child, so I moved on to my role at the Technical Center,” he explained. “It was a stable paycheck, 40 hours a week, that could provide what I needed for myself and for my daughter.”

While at the Technical Center, Coley desired to finish his college degree, but wasn’t sure where to turn. A colleague who recently graduated, suggested Thomas Edison State University, and

Coley determined that this could be the answer to his long-held dream.

“I knew I already had about a year of college under my belt, so finding out that I could transfer my credits and finish a degree with the University was life changing,” he said. “Though, what lit the fire for me most was telling my daughter, who was getting ready to graduate from high school that she needed to go to college so she could begin a good career. She looked at me

**“MY DEGREE PROGRAMS GAVE ME THE FLEXIBILITY TO LEARN AT THE TIMES THAT WERE CONVENIENT FOR ME. I COULD FIT STUDY TIME INTO MANY DIFFERENT POCKETS. IT WAS ALSO A NONTRADITIONAL WAY OF DOING THINGS THAT CAUSED ME TO WORK SMARTER AND HARDER. ”**

George Coley

and said, ‘Dad, you don’t have a degree and you have a career, why should I?’”

With this, Coley committed to finishing his education, earning his Associate in Applied Science and Technology degree in Applied Computer Studies in 2013 and his Bachelor of Science in Applied Science and Technology degree in Information Technology in 2015.

Since his days as a janitor and, later a junior programmer, Coley has physically remained at the Technical Center where he has been employed for the last 14 years.

Today, Coley works as a technical specialist for Enroute Computer Solutions in Egg Harbor Township, N.J. Enroute is a government subcontractor for the Technical Center that works directly with the FAA to support its information technology programs and special projects.

“In my role, we handle the second-level support for the National Airspace System (NAS),” he explained.





George Coley, AAS '13, BSAST '15, at left, speaks with Steve Souder, section manager, Integration and Interoperability Facility, William J. Huges Technical Center.

“We’re currently assigned to the NAS system at the E12F (Integration and Interoperability Facility) at the Technical Center where we support the Air National Guard’s base of operations at the Atlantic City International Airport. This second-level support includes hardware and software modifications on its systems as well as user administration, hardware and software replacement.”

Without his dedication and focus, Coley admits he’d find it hard to be where he is today.

“My education has really catapulted my career,” he said. “My degree programs gave me the flexibility to learn at the times that were convenient for me. I could fit study time into many different pockets. It was also a nontraditional way of doing things that caused me to work smarter and harder. I think Thomas

Edison himself said it best, ‘Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time.’”

Coley lives in southern New Jersey and has two adult daughters, Charm and Ebony. Off the clock, Coley enjoys learning new technologies and writing music, specifically gospel, R&B, soul and jazz.



# class notes

## ❖ Reanna Fulton

AAS '04, BA '05

Reanna Fulton was named director of technology for the West Islip School District in Long Island, N.Y.



## ❖ Rachel Hall-Schlachta

BA '78, MSM '06

Rachel Hall-Schlachta received a U.S. patent for CHIP3, a microchip for pets that can be synced to a phone or tablet and offers immediate detection for a lost pet.

## ❖ Gregory Knight

BA '14

Gregory Knight holds the designation of CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™ after passing the CFP® Certification Examination. Knight founded his own firm, Engage Advising, a fee-only financial planning firm in Oakland, Calif. He is a member of the Financial Planning Association and the XY Planning Network.

## ❖ Maria Jones

MSM '10

Maria Jones was named “Defensive Driving Instructor of the Year” by the National Safety Council (NSC) out of 6,000 instructors worldwide. Retiring in April 2018, after nearly 55 years in state service, Jones launched her own NSC certified driver training “center” under the auspices of her firm, JEM Associates Consulting Services. Available to government and public sector, JEM’s instructors travel anywhere in New Jersey to deliver the training to the customer; courses are offered in “Spanish only” for students who may need it; and, as a personal tribute, Jones offers training free to members of the military, law enforcement, fire, EMTs or other first responders.



## ❖ Luis LaRotta

BSAST '06

Luis LaRotta was admitted to the Master of Business Administration program at Baylor University in Waco, Texas.

## ❖ Emma Burr Nyberg

BA '17

Emma Burr Nyberg earned a Master of Human Resource Management degree from Monash University in Melbourne, Australia. While working on her degree, Nyberg had the opportunity to take one semester of the program at the University of Santiago in Chile. Fluent in several languages, Nyberg is focusing her career goals on international event planning and, possibly, international sales and marketing.



## ❖ Jason Napolitano

BA '12

Jason Napolitano completed a master’s degree in comparative theology in 2016 at Loyola Marymount in Los Angeles, Calif. He recently published the book *If You Can Worry, You Can Meditate*, and is the founder and president of *CosmicEye.org*, a nonprofit publishing and community outreach organization.



## ❖ Dr. Ryan O’Neil

BSAST '05

Dr. Ryan O’Neil defended his doctoral dissertation in the Systems Engineering & Operations Research department at George Mason University in Fairfax, Va., in November 2018. His research examines exact hybrid optimization approaches to real-time solution of routing problems for single-vehicle pickup and delivery problems. By day, O’Neil is director of Decision Engineering at Grubhub, where his team works on forecasting, scheduling and real-time routing and dispatch systems for dynamic meal delivery.

## ❖ John Orr

BSBA '10

John Orr, executive director, Art-Reach of Philadelphia, was named a TIAA “Difference Maker 100” in the national competition. The 100 honorees represent a wide range of nonprofit organizations from across the United States focused on social impact issues, health and wellness, education and technology, arts and culture, and the environment. TIAA teamed up with Oath and RYOT Studio to create and produce the TIAA Difference Maker 100 program. Art-Reach, a Philadelphia nonprofit organization, is driven by the belief that disability is a product of design rather than diagnosis and that good design creates a more accessible world.



## ❖ Courtenay Reece

BA '11

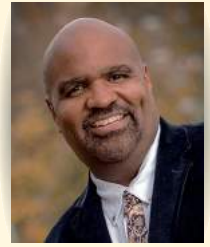
Courtenay Reece, head librarian in Millville, N.J., was instrumental in securing grants and donations to update and expand the more than 50-year-old Millville Public Library in Millville.



## ❖ Dr. Bryan Terry

MSHRM '12

Dr. Bryan Terry has been appointed as inaugural vice chancellor for enrollment management at Arkansas State University in Jonesboro, Ark.



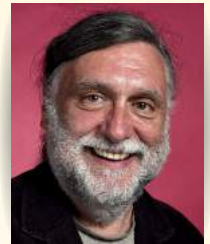
## ❖ Colleen (Layman) Scholl BSAST '99

Colleen (Layman) Scholl spoke at the Western Energy Institute's Women in Energy Symposium in November 2018 on the topic, "Empowering Women to Succeed in the Energy Industry." Scholl addressed the issue that the energy industry remains one of the least gender diverse market sectors in the world's economy. According to the 2017 U.S. Energy and Employment Report, women represented only 22 to 34 percent of the U.S. workforce in the various energy related industries. Scholl shared her story having worked in the power industry for more than 25 years. Scholl is a senior vice president with HDR Engineering, Inc., an architecture and engineering firm headquartered in Omaha, Neb. Scholl also serves as an officer (secretary) on the Lean In Energy Board of Directors.



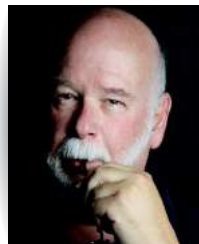
## ❖ Dr. J. A. Stephen Viggiano BA '82

Dr. J. A. Stephen Viggiano presented "Calculation of Scalars in Neugebauer-Like Models. II: Final Scalar Function is Copula" at the IS&T Color Imaging Conference held in Vancouver, British Columbia, in November. In the paper, also published in the September-October, 2018, issue of the *Journal of Imaging Science and Technology*, a concept from probability theory is applied in a novel way to provide more accurate and efficient profiling of color printers. Viggiano is assistant professor of Photographic Science at Rochester (N.Y.) Institute of Technology.



## ❖ Bernie Siben BA '00

Bernie Siben, CPSM, has joined Chaparral Professional Land Surveying, Inc., in Austin, Texas, as director of Marketing and Business Development. Siben worked in the architecture/engineering/construction industry for 40 years, with 35 of those years in progressively more responsible marketing positions ranging from coordinator to corporate director and owner/principal consultant of his own firm. At Chaparral, Siben is responsible for the firm's marketing and business development processes and activities, and provides input on a variety of strategic issues.



### ALUMNI AMBASSADOR

To learn more about the Alumni Ambassador program at Thomas Edison State University, please visit [www.tesu.edu/ambassador](http://www.tesu.edu/ambassador).

To connect with the Office of Alumni Affairs and fellow TESU alumni, join the conversation on social media:

**Alumni Facebook Group:** [www.tesu.edu/FacebookGroup](http://www.tesu.edu/FacebookGroup)

**Student and Alumni LinkedIn Group:** [www.tesu.edu/LinkedInGroup](http://www.tesu.edu/LinkedInGroup)

**Alumnifire:** [tesu.alumnifire.com](http://tesu.alumnifire.com)

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Simalua A. Pisia-Lemau, MALS '17

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