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## **2022 Golden Acorn Employer of the Year Winner Announced Employer Appreciation and Workforce Development**

**For Immediate Release: NEW BRITAIN, CT – November 18, 2022**

The Charter Oak State College Foundation hosted its 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Employer Appreciation Breakfast on Wednesday, November 16, 2022 at the TPC River Highlands in Cromwell, Connecticut. Students and graduates of Charter Oak were given the opportunity to **invite their boss to breakfast** and to nominate them for the **Golden Acorn Employer of the Year Award**. President Ed Klonoski was honored for his **25 years of service** to Charter Oak State College and **Nancy Martone was awarded an Alumni Ambassador & Achievement Award**. Additionally, **Marissa Perez Cardona, was a guest speaker**, along with Charter Oak graduate, **Mervin Alexander** and his **nomination for Employer of the Year, Paul Foody of Waste Management**.

**Joyce Petrella, President of COSC Foundation (Calculus of Talent)** explained, “This is a significant event for our community as employers are recognized for valuing education, supporting student success, and for promoting and hiring our graduates! The nominations were very heartfelt and made the selection of just one **employer of the year** very difficult. However, a winner had to be named.”

The theme of this year’s breakfast was echoed in each of the presenters sentiments - transformation through higher education is a journey well worth taking!

### **EMPLOYER APPRECIATION AND AWARD WINNERS**

The **2022 Golden Acorn Employer of the Year** winner, is **Catherine Vanicky, Owner of the Honey Bear Learning Center in Stratford, CT**. She was nominated by Charter Oak State College student, Jacqueline Valle.

Catherine was nominated for many reasons, for her leadership style, her commitment to her staff, and especially because, as Valle, explained “she believed in and supported me in my education when I did not.” Catherine never let this Charter Oak student lose sight of the goal – credentials and degree completion. Valle will be graduating in June 2023 with her bachelor’s degree however, she has already received her directors’ credentials and an associate degree from Charter Oak.

### **THE CALL TO ACTION!**

The Foundation’s all-volunteer Board of Directors are committed to funding brighter futures and provided an opportunity for guests to help those in need. Joyce explained that, just this summer, the Foundation was moved by the overwhelming need of our students. The number of applications as well as the reality of the financial need was daunting and inspiring. It compelled the board to award more scholarships and set a bigger bolder goal, to raise more to give more!

Petrella implored, “Imagine the impact if we each gave a little – we could change many more lives for the better!” Donations to support the Foundation’s mission are still being accepted, to give online Today follow the link [[here](https://bit.ly/EABDonation2022)]! <https://bit.ly/EABDonation2022>.

## **NOMINATIONS FOR THE GOLDEN ACORN EMPLOYER OF THE YEAR 2022**

All employers that were nominated were recognized and honored. Charter Oak State College and the Foundation express appreciation to the following for supporting student success and career advancement:

**Maegan Adams**, Bristol Child Development Center  
Nominated by Renee Dailey, Charter Oak, Class of 2005,  
Joshua Cross and Jessica Braddock, Charter Oak students

**Chantel DiPronio**, Childport (Yale New Haven Hospital)  
Nominated by Ruth Kenneth, Charter Oak, Class of 2005

**Henry Torres**, DMHAS-SWCMHS  
Nominated by Juliet Atakora, Charter Oak student

**Nancy Walsh**, Educational Playcare  
Nominated by Michele Sinata, Charter Oak student

**Roseann Wilder**, Educational Playcare  
Nominated by Sarah Yineman, Charter Oak student

**Carol Work**, Grimes Center (Yale New Haven Hospital)  
Nominated by Alita Parker, Charter Oak, Class of 2022

**Melissa Monroe**, Hartford HealthCare  
Nominated by Matthew Lapane, Charter Oak, Class of 2022

**Milly Arciniega**, Hartford Parent University  
Nominated by Delmarys Serrano, Charter Oak, Class of 2014, and current student

**Graciela Rivera**, Hartford Public Library  
Nominated by Nancy Mendez, Charter Oak, Class of 2016

**Neeru Bhambree**, Hudson County Montessori School  
Nominated by Diana Euyoque, Charter Oak student

**Mikyle Byrd-Vaughn**, Lulac Head Start, Inc.  
Nominated by Vera Davis Woolfolk, Charter Oak student

**Christine Feliciano**, Pumpkin Patch Childcare and Learning Center  
Nominated by Laurie Glasser, Charter Oak, Class of 2019

**Marie Monahan**, Saint Mary's Hospital  
Nominated by Melody Davis, Charter Oak student

**Lauren Boyd**, Veteran's Health Administration, Portland  
Nominated by Kwame Asamoah, Charter Oak, Class of 2022

**Paul Foody**, Waste Management  
Nominated by Mervin Alexander, Charter Oak, Class of 2018

## **BREAKFAST HIGHLIGHTS!**

### **HONORING PRESIDENT KLONOSKI AND HIS 25 YEARS OF SERVICE TO CHARTER OAK STATE COLLEGE**

Charter Oak State College's president is celebrating 25 years of service as the College is turning 50! Ed Klonoski joined Charter Oak at the turn of the century and embarked on a mission that would bring this College engine online and into the future.

Ed was thanked for his vision and commitment to higher education during his time at Charter Oak as he took the College from "degree aggregator" to a 100% online College with a diverse talent pool from across the country. Charter Oak State College was ahead of its time in 1973 with a vision to create a pathway for women returning to the workforce and needing credentials, and President Klonoski remains at the forefront of student and workforce needs.

Klonoski's vision was critical in 2020 as Charter Oak proved that it was the educational engine that could (and did) during the COVID-19 pandemic! The staff were prepared ahead of the stay-at-home orders to work from home and seamlessly transitioned to remote workers for the required time. Charter Oak students stayed the course and continued to earn degrees and credentials.

Ed's vision and willingness to reach beyond traditional to serve our non-traditional student, for keeping ahead of the trends, and for leading Connecticut's all-online public college into this century, President Ed Klonoski was nominated by Carol Hall, Director of Alumni & Donor Relations for the Employer of the Year! Klonoski was honored to be recognized. He quickly assured the other nominees that he would not be winning, and jokingly added, he even paid for his own breakfast!

### **ALUMNI AMBASSADOR & ACHIEVEMENT AWARD**

As a workforce college 18,000 graduates strong, celebrating 50 years of helping students achieve success, Klonoski and Hall paused to recognize one notable Alumna on her retirement from the workforce.

**Nancy Martone, Charter Oak State College Class of 1996**, was presented with an **Alumni Ambassador & Achievement Award**, for her 30-year career in the health care industry, for her leadership, support to her community, and also for the passion she displayed in referring students to Charter Oak!

A proud graduate, Nancy is proof that higher education credentials and degree completion are imperative factors for personal and professional achievement. Nancy was already in the workforce when her boss encouraged her to complete her degree and expand her knowledge around leadership. She had a wide range of training and college credits but no degree. She was also starting her family and working a full-time job, these alone made degree completion seem too big of a challenge. Nevertheless, her mother (and others) recommended Charter Oak!

After earning her B.S from Charter Oak State College she earned her Masters' Degree in Organizational Communication and holds a Senior Professional Human Resources certification.

Notably, Nancy began her 30-year career in the health care industry as a respiratory therapist. She then used a combination of learning and perseverance as she grew professionally. Her positions

spanned the healthcare industry including Quality and Risk, Care Management, Patient Relations and eventually Human Resources and Healthcare Operations. Half of her career, over 15 years, was spent in leadership roles. She is now the Vice President and Chief Administrative Officer for the Hospital for Speak Care in New Britain, Connecticut.

Nancy also had a family and raised her children during these years, she served her community, and refers many students to Charter Oak State College!

Nancy is an Alum Ambassador with a career we can all admire and be proud of. It is our pleasure to present Nancy Martone the Alumni Ambassador Achievement Award!

## **THE GUEST SPEAKERS**

**The program** included heartfelt stories of transformation, perseverance, passion, and triumph.

**Marissa Perez Cardona** is committed to empowering the next generation by supporting college and career advancement opportunities for all. She provided the audience with a mesmerizing story of one child's beginnings that could have ended very differently.

Marissa was the first one in her family to achieve a college degree, graduating from the University of New Haven with a BA in Communications. She felt driven to find a career that would allow her to give back to her community and to help others achieve success. As the wife to Miguel Cardona, US Secretary of Education, she is passionate about empowering the next generation and encouraged all those in attendance to actively support others on their journey.

**Mervin Alexander, Charter Oak Class of 2018**, kicked off the program by delivering a passionate message about encouraging his cousin, a single working mother, to attend Charter Oak State College to complete her degree. He shared that **Tamara was awarded a full scholarship by the Women in Transition Program** and persevered through many long days and sleepless nights to finish her degree. Mervin shared that his cousin could not be with us today because of her job. However, she (and he) was very thankful to the foundation and generous donors who made it possible for Tamara to finish her degree. He also assured them that their generosity in supporting higher education has transformative powers not only on the students ...but he explained, "it also had a very motivating and positive impact on Tamara's daughter." The generational impact is priceless!

Mervin then went on to explain the reason for his passion surrounding Charter Oak State College, and the confidence (and promotion) he gained from completing his degree. He shared that the support and guidance he received from his boss, Paul Foody, of Waste Management, helped him to be triumphant. "I was inspired daily by my boss, by his upbeat nature, and the positive manner in which he led our team. Plus, Paul was positively engaged with me and supported my degree completion pursuit – for these reasons and more, I have committed myself to do better and to reach for more!"

**Vice President of Strategic Business Solutions at Waste Management, Paul Foody** explained why he supported the COSC Foundation. "Because of Mervin's passion for his alma mater and because of his dedication to our team, I was happy to attend this breakfast last year. As I learned of the transformative impact, I was more than happy to support the Foundation." Paul went on to

explain that his father was like many of the non-traditional students who attend Charter Oak. Early in his childhood he can remember going to the library so his father could do schoolwork, and he remembers attending his father's college graduation! These memories inspired Paul to make education a priority. He is proud of his company, Waste Management, for the support given to their employees and shared that in 2022, the company committed to funding 100% of employees higher education tuition.

### **The Call to Action!**

**Joyce Petrella, Managing Partner of Calculus of Talent**, and newly elected president of the **Charter Oak State College Foundation** is passionate about the mission of the Foundation. "It is a natural fit with my personal values and professional work as I have focused on creating an educated workforce for the betterment of businesses, and our communities."

The Foundation Board members are all volunteers committed to funding brighter futures. Joyce explained that, just this summer, the Foundation was moved by the overwhelming need of our students. The number of applications as well as the reality of the financial need was daunting and inspiring. It compelled the board to award more scholarships and set a bigger bolder goal, to raise more to give more!

Petrella implored, "Imagine the impact if we each gave a little – we could change many more lives for the better!"

Donations to support the Foundation's mission are still being accepted. To support the mission of providing more students scholarship awards, please give TODAY by following the link <https://bit.ly/EABDonation2022>.

### **ABOUT CHARTER OAK STATE COLLEGE AND THE COSC FOUNDATION**

**Charter Oak State College** ([www.CharterOak.edu](http://www.CharterOak.edu)) is Connecticut's online public college, offering associate and bachelor's degrees in high-demand fields including Health Information Management, Nursing, Criminal Justice, Early Childhood Education, Social Work and Business Administration. The College offers master's degrees in Health Informatics, Health Care Administration and Organizational Effectiveness and Leadership. Charter Oak is accredited by the New England Commission of Higher Education and governed by Connecticut's Board of Regents for Higher Education.

**The Charter Oak State College Foundation** ([www.CharterOak.edu/Foundation](http://www.CharterOak.edu/Foundation)), established in 1977, is a non-profit tax-exempt 501(c)3 organization dedicated to supporting flexible and comprehensive degree completion opportunities for adults and technology innovations through the work of Charter Oak State College. The Foundation is a vehicle for accepting private gifts, donations, and bequests. Governed by an all-volunteer Board of Directors, the leadership provides direction for development activities and stewardship of the Foundation's assets. The Board is committed to assisting students meet their educational and career aspirations - ***Creating Brighter Futures, One Degree at a Time.***

To learn more contact Carol Hall, Executive Director, at [chall@charteroak.edu](mailto:chall@charteroak.edu), or 860-515-3889.

**EAB Event Photos are available on the Charter Oak State College Foundation Facebook Page.**  
<https://www.facebook.com/Charter-Oak-State-College-Foundation-110578583738401>