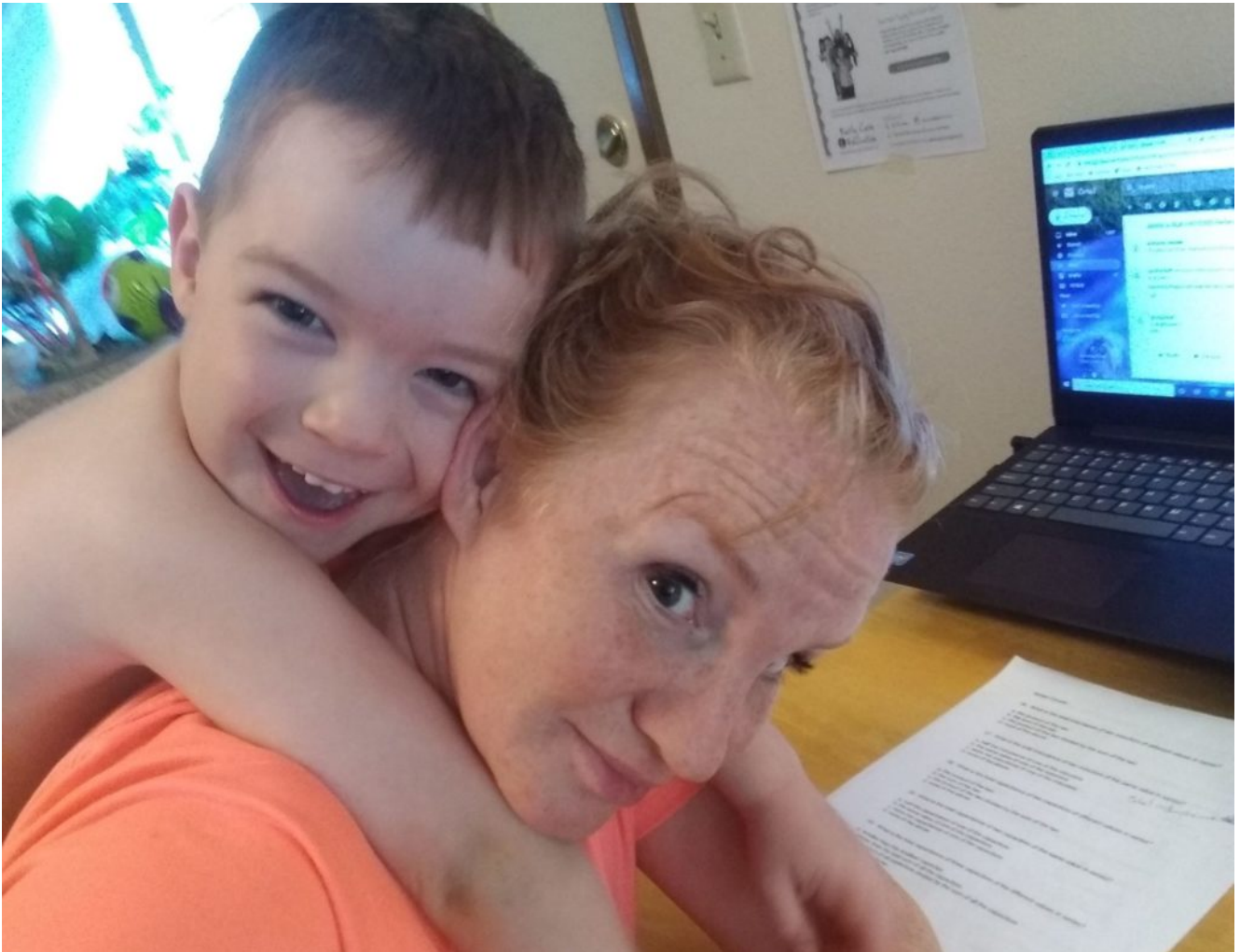


# College and quarantine ... with kids



Jessica Bull has been juggling her online studies with caring for her young son. *Photo courtesy of Jessica Bull.*

Being a college student during the COVID-19 pandemic can be tricky enough, but it becomes exponentially more challenging when you're also taking care of young children whose school or child care facility has been closed or moved online.

About a quarter of Clark College students have dependent children. Many of these parent students have found themselves trying to manage their own studies while also serving as teacher's aide for their children.

*Clark 24/7* interviewed some of these parent students to find out how they are coping. We also spoke with Michele Volk, director of the college's Child and Family Studies child care

center, which has remained open during the pandemic to serve parent students and their families. Their responses, edited for clarity and brevity, are in the links below.

*Note: These interviews were conducted in late 2020, when public schools in the region were still operating remotely. In the time since, some schools have partially re-opened.*

## **Child and Family Studies Q&A**

- Michele Volk: Child care during COVID

## **Parent student profiles**

- Jessica Bull: “Take extra care to reassure them.”
- Samantha Golden: “You can’t be 100 percent all the time.”
- Moses Kimeli: “Eventually, it’s getting easier.”
- Monserrat Soriano: “This is not the way it’s supposed to happen, but that’s all we got.”

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## **Student Parent Profile: Monserrat Soriano**



Montserrat Soriano's daughter, Melody, says goodbye to her through the window at Clark College's Child & Family Studies. *Photo courtesy of Monserrat Soriano.*

Montserrat Soriano is a full-time Clark College student on track to complete the Administrative Assistant and Management program in Spring 2021. She's also a single mom to daughter, Melody, 7, in first grade at Martin Luther King Elementary; and son, Emmett, 4, who attends the college's Child and Family Studies child care program. During the COVID-19 pandemic, both kids have attended CFS so that Soriano can study at home. Soriano and her children live with her mother, uncle and brother, but none can help with childcare.

*This story is part of a series of interviews with Clark College student parents about how they are balancing school, life, and work, during quarantine.*

**Q: How has CFS helped you focus on your schoolwork?**

**MS:** After my daughter completes two hours of online school via Zoom each day, I take both kids to the childcare center at Clark. Then I come home and do my schoolwork. I'm grateful that the state has paid for childcare during COVID. Fall quarter was the first quarter I've had childcare, because my daughter's previous childcare center shut down during COVID.

**Q: How are your children coping with doing remote school at**

**home?**

**MS:** When we pick up my daughter's school work packets at King Elementary, she doesn't understand why she can't be in school with her teacher and other kids. She asked me why she is in daycare instead of school.

**Q: What are some challenges you've faced during COVID?**

**MS:** I'm a first-generation college student. Sometimes it feels like I'm breaking through walls. When I'm working at home, my family sees me struggling. My mom wants to help with the kids, but she's working two jobs. We all need compassion right now. And grace! When I'm home with my kids, I want to distract myself. I've been sober for almost a year. My testimony is of struggle. Clark needs students like me. I am resilient.

Before COVID, my degree was part of a teach-out program [a process in which a program that is being discontinued teaches the students who are part-way through the degree program]. Then because of COVID, our labs were removed. It adds so much anxiety and pressure. It's been hard to stay motivated. With COVID, I can't plan. I don't know what my next step is. Sometimes I feel that I can't make it. I come into the childcare center crying. I leave crying. That's how I'm coping. I'm going week by week with the kids.

**Q: What's one particularly challenging story of taking remote classes while juggling parenting?**

**MS:** Last quarter I thought I was going to give up. When I was taking my final via Zoom, my three-year old burst in and shouted, "I have to poop, Mom!" My instructor heard him and gave me more time to complete my final. This is not the way it's supposed to happen, but that's all we got. We have to keep going. We have to keep our sanity.

**Q: How are you coping?**

**MS:** I attend Zoom counseling workshops with other parents, so I don't feel like I'm not alone. I learned to give myself some slack. Be gentle with myself as a parent. It's OK to cry in front of my children sometimes. This is not normal times. I'm trying to relax when I can, but I don't even know what that looks like.

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## **Child care during COVID: An interview with Child & Family Studies Director Michele Volk**



Michele Volk

When COVID-19 restrictions moved learning online for all K-12 and college students in the state in March 2020, Clark's Child and Family Studies (CFS) kept its doors open to fill a vital role of providing childcare to families of essential workers and Clark students, as well as providing jobs for Clark students.

Clark 24/7 interviewed CFS Director Michele Volk to find out how her team has been safely serving families during the pandemic. "It's been a journey," she said. "We've received such positive feedback from our student families about the difference it makes having a community there for their children. ... By caring for the children of Clark students, CFS is equipping our students to do their own schoolwork and be successful."

Throughout the months of pandemic lockdown, CFS remained open—and welcomed school-age learners, too. It's been a learning process for all involved, as the edited interview below proves.

**Q: Did CFS operate during spring term when pandemic restrictions first were enacted?**

**MV:** Yes. Throughout the pandemic we remained open for essential workers as defined by Washington State. We erred on the side of caution as guidance changed frequently.

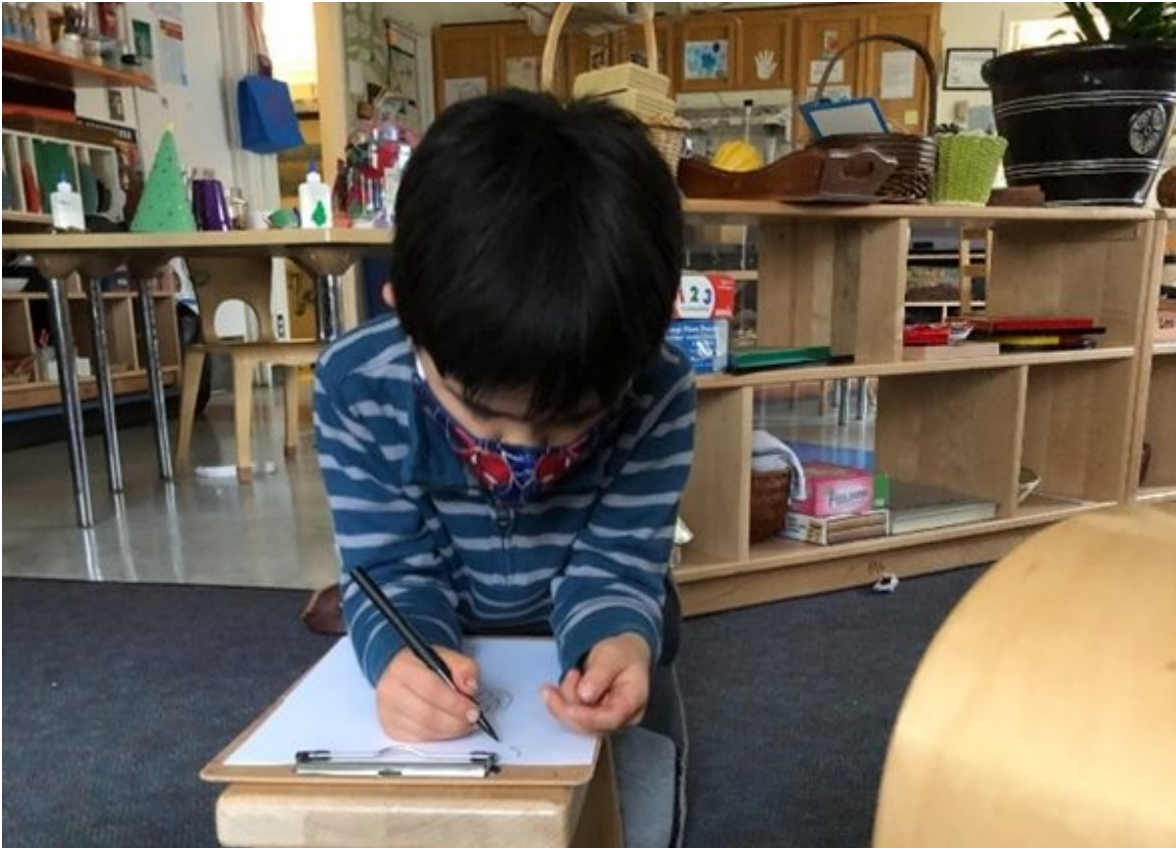
**Q: How has CFS adapted to continue operating during COVID restrictions?**

**MV:** CFS has adapted to COVID by continual monitoring of the recommendations, guidance and mandates of licensing, Washington Department of Health, CDC, Clark County, and Clark College. We are following safety protocols and best practices. Here are some of ways we adapted:

1. Added a school-age classroom fall term to accommodate Clark students whose children were at home doing school remotely
2. Decreased the total number of children in program
3. Reduced the number of classrooms in use from six to four
4. Decreased number of children in each classroom
5. Altered hours to stay within stable, consistent groups

because we cannot combine groups of children or staff

6. Doubled the square-footage COVID social-distancing space recommendation for each environment
7. Implemented drop-off and pick-up procedures: eight-foot distancing between families, mask wearing, temperature taking, health screening questions, and hand washing
8. Installed Plexiglass barriers, including between larger tables in the school-age classroom
9. Masks: All staff wear masks within six feet of another adult; children age 5 and older wear masks in the classroom
10. Increased the frequency of sanitizing commonly touched items and spaces
11. Pre-COVID group projects have been adapted to individualized sensory projects
12. Increased time children spend outside by extending outdoor teachers' schedule and going on more campus walks
13. Changed our typical self-service, family-style school meals to teachers serving children, using one-time serving utensils and dishware to limit our chef's exposure



**Q: How many children are attending CFS during the pandemic?**

**MV:** Pre-pandemic during fall quarter 2019, we had 128 children enrolled at CFS. In contrast, the 2020 numbers during the pandemic are a fraction of our earlier enrollment: summer break, 41 children; summer quarter, 47; fall quarter, 71; winter quarter, 69.

**Q: What have been some of the biggest challenges of operating CFS during COVID?**

**MV:** One challenge has been battling the emotional fatigue of the staff and families. Their stress levels have been high, yet they have continued to be present for the community. It's been difficult missing all in-person family gatherings, community meetings, and the in-person collaboration of a full program. It has been both challenging and touching to see how remote instruction has adapted for ECE lab and Family Life credit. People are finding unique ways to build relationships



through Zoom, examining practices, videotaping and sharing of resources to meet outcomes. Despite the decreased enrollment and ratios, stable classroom groups and increased costs, we are committed to keeping everyone employed and engaged.

**Q: What are some highlights—some uplifting, heartwarming moments at CFS during COVID?**

**MV:** Hearing family stories has really touched my heart—knowing we have contributed to student retention and success. Having families grateful for our services so they can continue or return to work. Families have stopped by the front desk and expressed their gratitude for being able to either go to school or go to work to provide for their family during this time. Some have brought teachers and office staff flowers and treats.

**Q: Are there any positive elements to the children's experience?**

**MV:** It was heartwarming to see children coming back after time away—to see them reunite with their peers and teachers. Seeing children run to be together. School-age children have been reunited with their peers, with whom they attended toddlers' class or preschool.

With fewer children, it seems children are working longer on projects and working more together. The learning stories feel deeper, more connected. Teachers have more time to observe, document, and expand children's learning. Families have been connected in these moments and connected us to home. This has become a very connected community.



**Q: How has your staff stepped up to the plate throughout the pandemic?**

**MV:** Our staff are the true heroes. Throughout the pandemic, they have been present to care for others, even as their own worlds are impacted. The way the teachers, office staff, and ECE faculty have respectfully altered their own lives, dug into deeper practice, meeting children and families where they are, the commitment and collaboration with one another and to safely keep children at the heart of their work—that's inspiring!

**Q: How have Clark's CFS student employees made an impact during the pandemic?**

**MV:** For many of those families, that part-time position at CFS also allows the family to have some stability financially. Those same student employees provide continuity for our children in our classroom. The sense of the routine and continuity for everyone in the community has been exceptional. I believe these children are resilient because of the model of the adults—both their family members and staff—who surround them and keep those consistent routines. These adults revel in

the joy with the children. That's made the difference.

**Q: How many Clark students currently are employed at CFS?**

**MV:** It has ranged each term between 19 and 25. We are currently hiring for several positions in both classroom and office, for those who have interest.

**Q: How has the Clark community supported CFS through this challenging time?**

**MV:** I so appreciate the larger Clark College community and their contributions to making this successful: Emergency Management Team; Facilities Services and the custodial team; Culinary and the treats for our staff and families; the Office of Diversity Equity and Inclusion's equitable decision-making and connecting students to one another; Communications and Marketing for supporting our communications to parents; Instruction and the creativity they have shown; Student Affairs' weekly tips and resources. So many more.

**Q: Going forward, do you see some COVID precautions continuing with CFS?**

**MV:** Yes. Post-COVID we will continue with hand-washing, increased sanitizing, and face masks will continue as long as guidance recommends. Pre-COVID we already were doing many of the recommended safety precautions, but we increased the frequency. After COVID we will continue having families wash their hands in the office before entering the program. We plan to continue the sanitizing of the office spaces and commonly touched areas. Clark's Facilities staff have been helpful and responsive. We appreciate them.

**Q: Will CFS continue its school-age children classroom after public schools open their doors to in-person learning later this month?**

**MV:** Yes, we are working with families to make schedule

changes to their CFS attendance days to meet their public school-schedule needs. We made a commitment to our children and families for the full school year. They have experienced so much change, and we are here as one of their few support systems.

**Q: How do Clark students register to use CFS? Is there a waiting list? Are drop-ins welcome?**

**MV:** We have limited spaces available. Families can check availability in their child's age group by emailing [cfs@clark.edu](mailto:cfs@clark.edu) or calling 360-992-2393. If we have no current availability, the family will be asked if they would want to complete an interest form. We prioritize our student families when placing new families. We do not have drop-in care available but operate on stable and consistent groups for best practice in early learning.

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**Healthy Penguin Walkabout is back for third year**



Clark College welcomes the community to its third annual Healthy Penguin Walkabout on Saturday, June 2, on its main campus. This free, family-friendly event offers a wide range of opportunities for personal health assessments, wellness-related education, and healthy activities.

Activities run 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. and will take place both indoors and outside. Guests will begin their visit in Gaiser Hall, where they can register and receive an event passport as early as 9:30 a.m. Gaiser is most easily accessed from the Green 1 and Red 3 parking lots. Clark College is located at 1933 Fort Vancouver Way, Vancouver. Driving directions and parking maps are available at [www.clark.edu/maps](http://www.clark.edu/maps).

This year's event is organized and volunteer-staffed by Clark College faculty and students from the Business and Health

Sciences Unit, Clark College Athletics, and Child and Family Studies.

Free health assessments and learning activities include:

- Blood glucose levels
- Oral Health and Wellness
- Body mass index (BMI) and body fat percent
- Grip strength and balance
- Diabetes risk level
- Blood pressure and pulse
- Stress reduction strategies
- Sports skills challenge with Clark College athletes
- Children and families connecting with nature
- Medication safety
- See inside an ambulance

Stations on the walkabout will include children's activities, fun souvenirs, healthy snacks, a raffle for both adults and children, as well as additional prizes that include an annual membership to the college's Thompson Fitness Center. Children's activities include a "ninja warrior" obstacle course in the O'Connell Sports Center gymnasium. Guests are also invited to walk a half-mile "Penguin Pathway" through the college's beautiful, 90-acre campus and arboretum. Organizers are also collecting donations of non-perishable food and personal-hygiene items for the college's Penguin Pantry. Guests will receive one extra raffle ticket for every four pantry items they donate.

To learn more about the details of this event, visit [www.clark.edu/cc/walkabout](http://www.clark.edu/cc/walkabout).

This event is a part of the college's focus on inter-professional learning for Clark Business and Health Sciences students. "When healthcare disciplines work together, including business, healthcare is more efficient in terms of cost, resources, and time," said Dean of Business and Health

Sciences Brenda Walstead. “The event also increases engagement and learning among Clark College’s students, and provides the community with access to a wealth of information that can lead to healthier outcomes for all individuals.”

Anyone needing accommodation due to a disability in order to fully participate in this event should contact Clark College’s Disability Support Services Office at (360) 992-2314 or (360) 991-0901 (VP), prior to the event.

*Photo: Clark College/Jenny Shadley*

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## **Leaving a legacy: a farewell chat with Laurie Cornelius**

*To say that Laurie Cornelius has had an impact on Clark College’s Child and Family Studies program is a bit like saying that Dr. Seuss may have influenced children’s literature—you’ve definitely indulged in understatement. Cornelius, who retired fall quarter after 35 years at Clark, has served in just about every position the program has: first as a teacher of toddlers and preschoolers, then moving on to serve as parent education faculty, early childhood education faculty, lab coordinator, and, for the past 16 years, as director of the program. And while Cornelius is quick to point out that she never considered CFS “her” program, the fact remains that she was instrumental in making it the statewide model that it is today. The program currently serves three main functions: providing affordable, high-quality child care for Clark students and staff, as well as for the larger community; operating as a lab school for students in the college’s early childhood education program; and educating*

*parents. (All parents are automatically enrolled in a one-credit elective each quarter, which they pass by completing homework that covers everything from handling tantrums to encouraging scientific inquiry in toddlers.) Clark 24/7 sat down with Cornelius before she left to talk about how the program developed into its current form, including its nationally recognized outdoor play area, the 2011 opening of its beautiful Oliva Family Early Learning Center, and why it's important for kids to get really, really muddy.*



Laurie Cornelius speaks at the 2010 groundbreaking of the Oliva Family Early Learning Center.

**Tell me about how you first came to this program.**

I walked in as a parent, pregnant, 40 years ago. I was a visitor to see what an infant-parent class looked like. Later on down the road, I had my twins, and some of the lactating



moms here donated breast milk. I started working here as a teacher in 1980.

When I became director in 1999, I knew it wasn't "my" program. I inherited this program on the foundational efforts of so many outstanding people who preceded me. I tell the staff all the time that we don't own the program, that we're temporary keepers of the program, and how we are with each other in the course of every day, be it with children or with each other, will be the culture of the program that we hand off to others in the future. And that's the heart and soul of a program.

I think it's a myth to think that one person is responsible for innovative and creative work, because if you are going to build vision for a program, it has to be shared with others and others have to own it. It can't be just one person. I believe firmly in that. A lot of my work and some of the success and achievement that I can feel good about, that I would say are my legacy work here, it couldn't have existed without a whole community of people embracing the idea and contributing to it. Whenever you have people contributing to something, it always becomes much richer and thoughtful than it could have been in the beginning with just one person thinking about it.

**Keeping that in mind, though, what are the innovations at CFS that you feel most personally attached to, that you would consider your "legacy" work?**



Not putting them in order, but ... the first is, when I was teaching, I realized that people thought of childcare as separate from education. In our world, it becomes preschool or childcare. Preschool is valued. We would have students say, "I want to be a preschool *teacher*, not a childcare *worker*." That's the value judgment being placed. When with all of the brain research showing what children need, with 90 percent of their brain development in the first five years, it's really clear that children need programs and environments that are nurturing and investigative at the same time. That means you combine it—in our field, we often call it "educare"—so their needs are being met and attended to.

So we had three separate programs at the time. We had our PRIDE [early intervention] program, we had our Parent Education Department, and we had Childcare Services. They were all separate. Most of the families in Parent Ed, the bulk of them were stay-at-home moms, and they were mostly highly educated, not very diverse, and seeking out a quality preschool program. It was a parent co-op founded post-World War II and had a high parent involvement and sense of community.

The Childcare side of the house was also the ECE [Early Childhood Education] lab school, and that was for student childcare services and training for students getting their degree in ECE. It had no family involvement, no connection with the family. The parents basically just arrived and dropped off, there were no programs, no gatherings, nothing.

In the Early Intervention program, they had a separate classroom for children with identified delays or disabilities, with individual therapy appointment that weren't in natural environments.

So they were all different. And so at that time, I was frustrated with this separation of childcare and preschool, and started thinking about what it would look like if we integrated all of these programs. So in the year 2000, we started to do the work to integrate. And I used to have lunch meetings—I used to call them my Hot Tomato Meetings, because I wasn't sure if I was going to survive them! [Laughs.] People were angry with the concept of integration. We had parents from Parent Ed who said, "We're not going to watch Childcare children. We're going to get head lice from them." There were biases. It was the tension between at-home and working families—somehow one's better than the other—it was that kind of tension. The reality was that, with us doing lots of talking and sorting it out—and some parents left, but most stayed—we came up with a model that was integrated.

And given the trends and research that has happened since that time, we realize that we were spot-on. You know, that we were really leading and advancing the work forward. The state board did a report recommending that the Parent Ed model in the state broaden to more diverse populations. That's exactly what we did. So I take pride in that we created a program that put this model forward. In the old model, if a parent in the Parent Ed program got divorced and had to go to work, they had to move their child. So now that doesn't happen. A family's circumstances can change, and the child doesn't have to leave. Our model allows for flexibility and options for families. I think that has been invaluable.

The concept, or the value, was universal access. I used a phrase—in fact, we put it up in the Haag Lounge when we were working on it—"Is everybody safe and warm inside?" My goal was to make sure that was happening. [Planning and Effectiveness Research, Reporting, and Data Professional] Susan Maxwell helped us do an anonymous survey a few years ago, and we were looking demographics like single parent, first generation in college. We looked at race, culture, ethnicity, all of that,

with these basic questions about feeling welcome, and there was no distinction in the answers between groups. We were doing real well. The relationships were being made.

I'm not saying we have a perfect world. We're certainly working on it. But I do take pride in the fact that we do see children and families as being special, and recognize the beauty of who they are when they come through our doors.

Whether you're a student parent, a faculty/staff parent, or a community parent—if you've been a parent—you know we have the most important treasure of each and every family up here. And if we are going to have them housed here within the confines of a fence, then we have to make sure that the environment is investigative and nurturing so those kiddos can thrive.

People often will enter the program and be here a little bit, and they're trying to figure it out. They're saying, "This place is different." And they don't know why. They can't quite put their finger on it. We speak of the environment as being a third teacher. And when we speak to that, it is both the emotional environment and the physical environment. We work really hard at being thoughtful about how we set up our environments.

Another legacy is definitely the outdoors. And that's a passion I have. That's the personal piece of me that was really, really important to me. It wasn't a conscious starting down that road. We had built this building over here and there was no money for a playground. And so we started researching. And the place we started is where everybody starts: toy equipment catalogs. You ask, "How many kids can get on this? What kinds of things can they do?"



Laurie Cornelius at an Arbor Day tree planting at Child & Family Studies.

I grew up in Seattle but I grew up with a really rich outdoor experience with my parents. All seasons, we were out camping. And then in college I had the wonderful opportunity to work up at Mt. Rainier with Ranger naturalists and do campfire programs with families.

So I realized that if children are going to be in childcare for long hours, they needed more than a playground. They needed more than recess. They needed a *rich environment*. So we dumped the playground idea. We kept elements of it, and we said, "Well, what did we like to do? What are our play memories?" They were all outdoors. They were all playing hide-and-peek—if you play hide-and-peek, are there bushes and places to hide? If you played in barns, are there straw bales? If you played at the beach, where's the water? If you camped, where are the woods, where are the rocks, where is the driftwood?

And so that birthed a whole new concept of how we designed outdoor play spaces. This was the early to mid-90s. So that brought on challenges, because we were licensed, and licensors did not want rocks, logs—didn't see that as being a safe environment. The world is very litigious. In fact, I think Head Start had sent out an article on safety saying to saw the branches off of trees so children couldn't climb them.

So I ended up, through my advocacy work and the development of this space, speaking to the State Convention of Licensors on the importance of risk in outdoor play and the need to change the WACs [Washington Administrative Codes]. It was really risky for me, because I was putting up slides of things from our program that kids weren't allowed to do, and saying they needed to do it. So it really was pretty scary for me to do. But I did it, and lo and behold, things started changing. And now you can find rocks and driftwood and trees in many play areas around the state. That's one of the legacies that I feel has been invaluable.

I really hammered on it. I was in City Council, school districts, all over the place, because I believe we need to change how we view our outdoor environments for kids. Right now they're postage-stamp grass lots. And we need the woods. Kids need green spaces, they need flatlands.

**It's interesting because there's a whole movement now toward "adventure playgrounds" that favor natural play features instead of the old swing sets and slides.**

Right. There is a huge movement to start doing that kind of work. At the time, I think we were doing some very cutting-edge work with our play space, because not very many had done it. The University of Quebec published an article right around the same time we were opening on three play spaces in the United States that should be used as models for designing school spaces for Canada. We were one of them. I was very proud of that as well. Since that time, we've done tours, fly-ins. We've had national conferences in Portland, and one international conference, and our site has always been chosen to be one of three sites in the Portland-Vancouver area for touring. So we take a lot of pride in the environments and the work that we prepare.

So changing the WACs and creating the play space were huge. What we did was we used plants in the design of the outdoor

space to have different focuses of play, so that when kids go outside—if they're going to be in a huge group of kids and do everything in a room, we've got to get them out of that environment where they can be with one or two kids and have places to hide, we've got places to crawl into, we've got places of discovery.

[Recently retired Grounds Manager] Skip Jimerson has been such a partner in crime with me, oh my gosh. Because he loves it; he gets childhood. I'll never forget when I told him, "We want a mud kitchen." He said, "You want a *what?*" And I said, "We want logs and we want dirt, and we want kids to be able to play in the mud, make mud pies, drive trucks through the mud. We'll clean 'em up afterward. We want our kids to get muddy here." And he was totally into it, he just laughed.



Laurie Cornelius, *center*, with Clark College Foundation President/CEO Lisa Gibert and former CFS parent Jan Oliva at the opening of the Oliva Family Early Learning Center.

And the Oliva Family Early Learning Center—I also see that as a legacy. Because in early learning, getting that type of building just is almost impossible, because there's no money. Our field is devalued because of the image of babysitting and childcare. Often you'll hear—and this is a huge

challenge—people say, “Don’t advise people to go into childcare, because it’s low wages.” And yet it’s the most important job on earth, given the scope of a developing child. It is just critical because children can’t catch up if they’re not having opportunity while their brains are developing. And it’s been proven. By third grade, we’ve got kids going in with as much as a 2,000-word discrepancy in vocabulary. You’ve got children who have been read to and traveled and been to OMSI—and children who have never held a book. It’s just horrible.

So I would say those are the areas I’m most proud of. Those, and always—and this is probably the most important one—the attention to relationships within the program. That’s that culture of caring. And it’s a balance, because we’re in a bureaucracy, so we have all the rules and WACs and codes we have to follow. I always try to make sure that there is some caring to go along with that, so I try to think aloud. I try to explain my thoughts, and if I’m not sure of the answer I’ll just say, “Well, I’ve got to think it through. I’m gonna need a little more time.”

**You’ve talked a bit about how CFS has changed over the years. How have you seen Clark as a whole change?**

Oh, goodness. It’s a huge change, huge. When I started, before Gaiser got remodeled, there was a room maybe a third of the size of what Gaiser Student Center is now, and a small stage, and every single employee could fit on a folding chair in there on Opening Day, and you knew everybody. And maybe there would be three or four new hires, no more than that. Then, as the college grew, they started having to open a sliding wall that opened up into where Student Services offices were. And then pretty soon it got too big for *that*. There were employee directories with photos, so you could always see what a person looked like. Now there are so many employees that you just don’t know them. It’s just gotten so big. So that’s one big change.



I remember when email came in. And the campus was all set up for email except for us. The VP of Administrative Services at the time said, "Well, they're up there with the children; they don't need email." And I complained. And his response to me was, "You can walk down to Foster every day and pick up your email."

Children, young kids in our society—they're pushed to the edges. They're not embraced. On every campus, the childcare program is always on the edge. If we really were elevating and seeing the importance of how we as a community are raising kids, the childcare program should be in the middle of a circle instead of on the edge. Though now that the STEM Building is being built, we won't be as much on the edge here.

**I know my son's loved watching the building go up—the Oliva Center's windows look straight out onto it.**



Child & Family Studies children perform and display artwork during Clark College's annual Sakura Festival.

Oh yeah, it's been great curriculum. But to go back to what I was saying about how we view kids—I mean, I'm speaking broadly of our society. You can't be loud in a restaurant. You can't cry on planes, evidently, given the news of late. There's just a lot of intolerance of children. And I used to be of the

opinion that that was how Clark viewed our children. Not anymore. I think that Clark has clearly demonstrated an exception to the rule. The reason I say that is that we now have so many areas of the campus that think of us and call us and connect with us. It's amazing, the collaborations and richness of what some of the different departments are bringing to this program. We get our clay from the art department. The kids play down in the fountain. They're part of the Sakura Festival every year. We're part of the Seventh Generation powwow every year. Student Services always invites the children to attend different performances. We partner with the Japanese department and they have exchange students who spend time with us. We have collaborated in the past with the library; the kids have had story times down there. One year in the summer, there was a collaboration with PE fitness classes. They found that when they brought the kids down to play games with the adults, there was more laughter and movement in their class than just simply exercising—it was playful.

So I appreciate that. Fundraisers like our car wash and art show—we get great support from the campus, wonderful feedback. We want to do more of those collaborations and partnerships, both on and off campus.

**More than a quarter of our student body at this point has dependent children. In a way, Clark's commitment to this program is part of our commitment to them, and part of our commitment to social equity.**

We try to keep a balance—I'd say 70 percent student parents. It fluctuates a bit. In that student population, we see high numbers of what have been identified as risk populations for retention. So one of the things, just before leaving, was Susan Maxwell was instrumental in helping us to create a way to track our student parents' success rates. We're doing that across the state with all childcare programs. We are going to be looking at retention and strategies with these populations. We also believe—and we don't know this yet, it will have to be

a research question—but we really want to know what our retention rate is. Because we're so close to the families and we work with retention in supporting their children, and I want to see what the retention rate comparison is.

We have large numbers of students here who are first-generation in college. Our Family Life faculty do an amazing job of supporting student parents in school. And student families have stress. They have life happen to them. And by us having that option to have parent involvement, we can design specific involvement that will support them in whatever stress they are facing.

It happens here all the time. The support that this program can provide students is just amazing. They come in to withdraw their kids because they're dropping out, and they'll be sobbing. Maybe it's something at home, maybe it's the workload, maybe it's trauma from their past that's creating stress. And we bring them in and sit them down and connect them to resources—and they stay in school. Nobody dropping off or picking up their kid is going to see those stories. But they are here, lots and lots and lots of them.

It's about supporting families—supporting them to be successful in a career path, but you're also supporting them to start a journey of parenting and preparation for the K-12 system. And if we're sending children who are healthy and excited about learning and ready to learn—who are open to inquiry, open to investigation—then we're breaking cycles. We're gaining an opportunity for a future Clarker to be successful here at the college.

We have third-generation families here in the program. We have students who work for us who were children here. We have grandchildren here of people who went to Clark. There's a rich history, and lots of new families who are entering through our door all the time.

**What advice do you have for whoever comes in to your position? [Ed note: At the time of this interview, Cornelius's successor had not yet been named. Michele Volk is now the Director of Child & Family Studies.]**



Oh, I've got pages and pages and pages of single-spaced writing already! [Laughs.] About the history, about the values. You know, it isn't about staying the same. That goes back to the very beginning comments about how we are with each other. Every person who comes in the door here, even if they're here for just a short period of time, they're bringing something into the space and into our world, and we want to value that, we want to value their voice. So when a new person comes in and joins our staff, they're bringing a beautiful dimension of who they are and what they can bring to our community. And we really believe in sharing the strengths and talents and joys between each other and with our children and families. Different teachers bring different passions and interests to the program. We all do that. The outdoors was definitely mine. We have a beautiful performance that we do every year, and that was Sarah Theberge's gift. And Michelle Mallory's bringing in the development of the art studio, the development of the library. You see the passion, you see the gifts, and they bring that into the program and it gets expressed. So the new director will come in and will have interests and passions and things that she or he will bring to the program, and it will thrive, and it will be wonderful.

That's another reason why it's always good to have some change. Also, you don't pay attention to things you don't like to do. That can create gaps. I'm not savvy with technology—I get by, but I don't Facebook. We need somebody who can bring people up to speed. I bought iPad Air2's for every classroom.

They're for electronic assessment—that's the future, we need to be looking at the way we do our assessment of children and screening, we absolutely have to do it—and I don't want to have anything to do with it! [Laughs.] That's for the next generation.

**So what comes next for you?**

I've told everybody I'm taking one year off. I've had many approaches about consulting work, but I need a break from the early learning community for a year to reassess and then I'll decide what I can and can't do.

My oldest grandkid is in kindergarten, and the two youngest are both one—they're four months apart. So I will definitely be spending time with them, and I'll be traveling and gardening and working out and probably doing a fair amount of cleaning and tossing things out. I'll be—oh! The kitchen! You were asking about legacy earlier. I'm really proud of getting our food program running, so our children can have hot, nutritious lunches made with healthy ingredients. Gosh, how did I forget that?

**Well, 35 years—you can do an awful lot in that time, it seems like.**

Yeah. [Laughs.] Yeah, I guess so.

*Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley*

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## **The Roots of Friendship Grow**

# Stronger



The Women's Ensemble gets ready to perform at the 2015 Clark College Sakura Festival.



John Kageyama, *far left*, presented a check to the Clark College Foundation in the names of the Clark

College Facilities Services staff in honor of their work to keep his shirofugen cherry trees thriving.

On an unseasonably warm April day, John Kageyama, president of America Kotobuki Electronics, stood on Clark College's main campus below one of the 100 shirofugen cherry trees he had donated to the City of Vancouver 25 years earlier. After a quarter-century, those trees had grown from fragile saplings to stately landmarks whose blossoms fell to the ground like pale pink snow.

"Thank you for taking such good care of these sakura," Kageyama said to the crowd assembled to celebrate the college's annual Sakura Festival on April 16. He noted that shirofugen trees require careful maintenance to flourish. "I never expected the trees to be so beautiful and so big."

This year's event marked not only the 25th anniversary of the trees' planting on Clark's campus, but also the 10th anniversary of the festival itself, which is held by the college in partnership with the City of Vancouver and the Vancouver Rotary Club.



Korbin Hair, 5, stands atop a rock in the Japanese Friendship Garden during the 2015 Sakura Festival while

his parents, Michael and Judy, stand nearby.

“Each year as these trees blossom, they signal new hopes, new beginnings, and the joyful arrival of spring,” said President Robert K. Knight during his opening remarks. “At the same time, because their blooming season is so brief—only about two weeks—they remind us to enjoy each day and to live life to the fullest.”

The trees are also a symbol of international friendship, and their blossoming has become occasion to celebrate the 20-year sister-city relationship between Vancouver and Joyo, Japan. Many guests were on hand to celebrate that relationship, including Portland Consul General for Japan Hiroshi Furusawa, Vancouver City Councilmembers Alisha Topper and Larry Smith, SEH America Inc. Executive Vice President Tatsuo Ito, Vancouver City Manager Eric Homes, former Vancouver mayor Bruce Hagensen, former Vancouver City Manager Pat McDonnell, and Clark College Trustees Jack Burkman, Royce Pollard, and Rekah Strong.

“We Japanese have had a special affinity for sakura for more than 10 centuries,” said Consul General Furusawa. “Thank you for your warm friendship and strong stewardship of these trees.”

Indeed, Kageyama ended his own remarks by announcing a donation of \$1,000 to the Clark College Foundation in the names of the college’s Facilities Services staff members as a way to thank them for their work keeping the trees healthy. He also announced a donation to the Dr. Chihiro I Kanagawa Scholarship, which allows one student from Japan to study at Clark each year.





“Taking political science classes here has given me the opportunity to form my own ideas about Japanese politics,” said Dr. Kanagawa Scholarship recipient Erina Yamazaki during the 2015 Sakura Festival.

Clad in a traditional formal kimono, this year’s scholarship recipient, Erina Yamazaki, spoke movingly about her experiences both at Clark and in her home province of Fukushima. That region of Japan was devastated in 2011 by a tsunami and resulting nuclear power plant failure. While Yamazaki’s home was not affected by the disaster, she remembered it as a “traumatic event” that nevertheless strengthened her faith in international friendship.

“I saw many countries and companies from around the world donated food and money to Japan,” she said. “The feeling that we are supported by so many people from all over the world gives us the motivation to start new things.”

The opening ceremony included performances by flautist LeeAnn McKenna and Yukiko Vossen on the *koto*, a traditional Japanese stringed instrument, as well as by the Clark College Women’s Ensemble.



Children from Clark's Child & Family Studies program show off their sakura-themed artwork during the 2015 Sakura Festival.

Afterward, entertainment included a traditional dance performance by the Clark College Japanese Club, a drum performance by Portland Taiko, and a presentation of sakura-themed art by children from Clark's Child & Family Studies program. The family-friendly event included lots of free activities and cookies from the Clark College Bakery.

Tax accountant Michael Hair was taking a well-deserved break with his family at the festival after the end of tax season. His elder son, Alex, 9, had the day off from school anyway, and he and Michael were carefully folding origami paper into cranes and frogs. Michael's wife, Judy, and younger son, Korbin, 5, sat a few tables away watching the taiko drummers perform.



Members of Portland Taiko  
Drum perform during the 2015  
Sakura Festival.

Michael Hair began taking Japanese classes at Clark last year. "I've always enjoyed other cultures," he said. "It's a full life going to school, going to work, and taking care of a family. But I read something a while back that really stuck with me. It basically said, if there's something you've always wanted to do, go do it; don't wait. So I came here and I actually really enjoy the classes."

Meanwhile, Alex was dancing to the taiko drums in his chair, clearly a fan of the festival. "My favorites are the drums and the origami," he said. "I like the way the drums make me feel like someone's beating on my heart. And I like the origami because it helps me calm down again after the drums."

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**Exceptional Faculty Award  
spotlight: The accidental  
professor**



We've all heard the cliché that kids say the darndest things. But people rarely point out its corollary: So do adults. As an Early Childhood Education professor, Sarah Theberge says she is often just as surprised by what her students express in the classroom as she is by what children in the college's Child & Family Studies program say on the playground.

"I'm just surprised over and over again by how many things I hadn't thought of," Theberge says as she stands on that playground surrounded by running children. "The way that students approach the things we talk about reminds me that there's no one right answer to so much of what we're studying. I really do see us as 'co-learners' who are all learning together—and I'm learning right along with them. It's one of my favorite parts of teaching."

It's also one of the things students mentioned repeatedly in nominating Theberge for Clark College's prestigious Exceptional Faculty Award, which Theberge received for the

2013-14 year. The award was announced at Clark's 2014 Commencement ceremony and officially bestowed at the college's Opening Day festivities on September 10.

"She is honest, she is real, she is not only a teacher but an inspiration and a friend to all her students," wrote one nominator. "She brings passion to her work with children and with her students, and ignites the passion in all of us."

Students also mention Theberge's empathy and her strong commitment to serving as an academic advisor to students in the ECE program. When Theberge explains how she became a professor, it becomes clear why she is able to connect so strongly with her students and empathize with the challenges they face: After all, she faced them too.

Theberge never set out to become a professor. "It was the farthest thing from my mind," she says, laughing. Rather, her initial ambition was much more basic: She needed a job.

"I was a single parent without any college background or schooling, and a friend of mine had a childcare center," Theberge says. "I just thought it was a place where I could have my kids there and still work. But from the very first day, I fell in love with it."

A friend encouraged her to enroll in Clark's ECE program. "I said, 'Oh no. We don't do college in my family,'" Theberge recalls. "She literally took me by the hand and dragged me to Clark. And I've never left."

In 1992, Theberge graduated with honors from Clark with an Associate of Applied Science degree in ECE. She went on to complete both a bachelor's and master's program from Pacific Oaks College while working in Clark's CFS program, first as a program aide and then as an adjunct faculty member. Her roles and responsibilities continued to expand over the years, and in 2000 she was granted tenure at Clark. Throughout the years, she has continued to attend conferences and workshops to keep

up-to-date on current teaching practices in her field. She also presents her own research at conferences; currently she has been delving into the complex issues surrounding children's concepts of gender identity. Additionally, she serves on the board of directors for YWCA Clark County and has been instrumental in creating a library at CFS to help promote children's literacy.

It's a long way from the young single mother who just wanted a job. "That's why I love advising," Theberge says. "I hear similar stories to mine from students—people looking for opportunity, looking for help in making their passion a reality. It's just so rewarding to sit with that and to walk alongside them on their journey."

Learn more about the other 2013-14 Exceptional Faculty Award recipients.

*Photo: Clark College/Jenny Shadley*

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## **Under the Caps**



Jaime Taylor and Susan Baker

Susan Baker and Jaime Taylor had to arrive at the Sleep Country Amphitheater before 6 p.m. to get their spots near the head of the line of graduates waiting for the Clark College commencement ceremony's 7 p.m. start. But for both women, the wait for this moment was much longer than an hour.

"I started this journey in 1995," said Baker, who works as a teacher in the college's Child & Family Studies department. "And then I had children, and I had to put things on hold for a while, but now here I am!"

Taylor—who, like Baker, was graduating with honors with an Associate of Applied Science degree in Early Childhood Education (ECE)—told a similar story. "It was kind of my time," she explained about her choice to enroll at Clark, where she worked in Baker's classroom as part of her studies. "My kids had gone to school and it was time for me to do something for myself."



Judith Gomez

All along the line, there were tales of dreams deferred. Judith Gomez—also among the ECE contingent at the head of the line—first began taking classes in Clark’s non-credit English as a Second Language program 16 years ago, soon after she moved to Vancouver from her native Mexico. At the time, she spoke no English, but she was determined to go to college. She had to drop out twice when she had children, but eventually she was able to improve her English skills to the point that she could take for-credit classes.

“English isn’t my first language, so for me, doing papers was double the work,” she said, beaming under her blue mortarboard cap, from which dangled the golden tassel and insignia of Phi Theta Kappa, the honor society for two-year colleges. “But I was determined, and my teachers were amazing, so supportive.”

Gomez, who also works in Child & Family Studies as an early-intervention specialist, said she hoped her children—ages 19, 14, and 10—would follow in her footsteps to pursue college educations. “In ECE, we call it ‘modeling,’” she said. “You



model the right behavior, and the children see it and learn. My children are so excited already. They're all talking about going to college."

Kevin Ross was also hoping to being role model. "I am the first one from my whole family to graduate from college," he said as he waited to receive his Associate in Applied Technology in degree in Supervisory Management. "We're talking parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins. It feels good—it feels *great*. It gives my family members something to see. ... I have a little brother. I want to set an example for him, to show him that you can succeed, no matter where you come from or what's happened in your life."



Juliab Dutkel, Carlos Cervantes, Gregory Michael, and Kevin Ross

For Ross, life has not always been peaceful. He first started thinking about attending Clark when he was incarcerated at Larch Corrections Center. He got to know Clark College President Bob Knight, who regularly visits the center to play basketball with inmates. "As I approached my time to come out [of Larch], Bob started asking me, 'What are you going to do next? You should come to Clark,'" Ross recalled. "So I went to Clark. It's offered me an alternate route toward success."

Ross said he plans to transfer to WSU Vancouver to pursue a bachelor's degree in business. He will not be the first former inmate to do so—in fact, Clark College has long run an educational program within Larch, and on the Friday following commencement, a ceremony within the correctional facility's walls would celebrate the 34 inmates who earned their High School Equivalencies during this academic year.

Standing next to Kevin Ross was Carlos Cervantes, whose cap sat atop a long mane of curly gray hair. Cervantes came to Clark when the housing-market crash put an end to his career as a Realtor. He was graduating with a degree in Paralegal, despite having suffered financial hardships after losing his job.

“I was really struggling, but I got scholarships,” Cervantes said. “The Clark College Foundation made my education possible.”



Katie Brilz and Lacey Mac-Rhyann

For other graduates, this commencement wasn't a dream deferred—rather, it was a dream accelerated. Lacey Mac-Rhyann had decorated her cap with the slogan “17 with my AST.” Mac-Rhyann was one of the 235 graduates who participated in Running Start, a Washington State program that allows students

to take college classes while still enrolled in high school. "It was the most phenomenal thing," she said of the program. "It didn't just give me college credit—it gave me college experience."

Ana Lai, who had decorated her cap with pictures of scientific equipment and the logo of University of Washington, also appreciated being part of Running Start. "It gave me a head start," said the Ft. Vancouver High student, who plans to become a mechanical engineer. "I did the calculus and physics sequences, and I loved it."



Ana Lai

Alecsander Thompson, who attended Evergreen High School, said he appreciated the serious atmosphere he experienced at Clark through Running Start. "In high school, you don't pay to get an education," he said. "In college, people are there because they want to learn."

Thompson was standing next to his friend Mark Hamilton, also a Running Start student from Evergreen, and who like Thompson plans on transferring to Portland State University's criminal justice program. Another thing the two young men had in common was that they originally chose Running Start in part because Clark's schedule offered them the flexibility to work full-

time while attending school.

“You kind of cut out sleeping after a while,” laughed Hamilton.



Timothy Witcher, Alecsander Thompson, Mark Hamilton, and English instructor Kate Scrivener.

As the bagpipes began to sound, the graduates quickly adjusted caps and gowns in preparation for their procession. This was the moment that would make all of it—the sleeplessness, the studying, the doubts and fears—worthwhile. Near the front of the line, Susan Baker got ready to complete the journey she’d begun almost 20 years earlier.

“You know, when you’re a mom, you spend so much time telling your kids that you’re proud of them,” she said. “It’s pretty cool to be hearing my kids tell me they’re proud of me.”

*Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley. More photos of graduates are available in the college’s Flickr album.*

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# Trees and Technology



President Bob Knight receives Clark's Tree Campus USA award from Ben Thompson of the Washington Department of Natural Resources.

On April 9, Clark College celebrated both the natural and digital worlds at its annual Arbor Day event, as it added two new trees to the campus's beautiful arboretum and unveiled a new, student-designed website that uses digital technology to catalog that arboretum. The new online map allows visitors to instantly access descriptions of most trees on campus through their mobile devices.

"This website is a great testament to the value of service learning here at Clark," said Computer Technology Department Chair Robert Hughes at the ceremony, which took place under sunny skies just south of the Chimes Tower. "It showcases the talent of our students, the value of our instruction, and a great part of Clark's visual landscape."

The mobile-friendly online map is the product of work done by students in instructor Gus Torres's spring 2013 Web Design II

class. The students worked with the college's Campus Tree Advisory Committee to identify trees in the campus's extensive arboretum, which includes such notable trees as a six-decade-old Scarlet Oak and 100 Shirofugen blossoming cherry trees donated to the campus by Japanese businessman John Kageyama in 1990. Students then GPS-tagged each listed tree and added it to the map with information about its genus and species. Additional students contributed to the project in subsequent quarters. Hughes was one of the faculty members who helped support the project, along with Torres, Computer Graphics Technology professor Kristl Plinz, and Computer Technology instructor Bruce Elgort.



The online map documents Clark's extensive arboretum.

The event also featured the official bestowing on Clark of Tree Campus USA designation by the Arbor Day Foundation for the fourth year in a row. Tree Campus USA colleges must meet rigorous standards in five separate areas to earn this designation. The award was presented by a Washington State Department of Natural Resources Urban Forestry Specialist Ben Thompson and received by Clark College President Robert K. Knight.

"It's very exciting that Clark College has such enthusiasm for urban forestry," said Thompson, who noted that Clark was helping Vancouver earn a "trifecta" by being a Tree City USA with both a Tree Line USA and a Tree Campus USA. He also noted that Clark's arboretum might benefit students in unsuspected

ways.

“I don’t think it’s a coincidence that so many colleges are located on beautiful campuses filled with trees,” he said. “It puts us at ease, at rest. It makes us ready for learning.”

Clark College Bob Knight agreed. “If our students feel comfortable and our faculty feel comfortable, then it opens up their minds and creativity more,” he said, adding that the new arboretum map was a perfect example of that. “It’s exactly what we want to encourage here at Clark College.”



Children from Clark’s Child & Family Studies program get help on their tree-themed scavenger hunt from, *left to right*, Dean of STEM Dr. Peter Williams, President Bob Knight, and Campus Tree Committee members Tim Carper and Melissa Favara.

Other speakers at the event included Dean of STEM Dr. Peter Williams and Zahid Chaudry, GIS Program Manager of the U.S. Forest Service Region 6. Additionally, two trees were added to the campus arboretum: an Eastern Hemlock and an Eastern White Pine. These are the official state trees of Pennsylvania and Maine, respectively, and are part of an effort by the college to include all 50 state trees in the campus arboretum; with

these two additions, the arboretum contains 39 state trees.

Also present were two classrooms of children from Clark's Child & Family Studies program, who participated in a tree-themed scavenger hunt and received "seed bombs" filled with seeds of indigenous plants.

*Photo: Clark College/Hannah Erickson*

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## A Lesson They Can Wear



It's the first sunny day the children in Terry Hays's classroom in Clark College's Child & Family Studies program have seen for a while, and the classroom's staff need a few moments to gather everyone on the carpeted area normally



reserved for Story Time. But as Haya speaks, the children settle down to listen.

“All right, friends,” she says. “Let’s sit down. I would like to welcome Michiyo to our classroom. Can you say, ‘*Konnichi wa?*’”

“*Konnichi wa,*” chorus the children, ages 3 to 5. Japanese professor Michiyo Okuhara beams at them.

“*Konnichi wa!* Hello there!” she says. “My name is Michiyo, and I’m going to show you some traditional kimono from Japan.” With that, Okuhara pulls a vibrantly patterned kimono from a bag, and the children gasp.

Okuhara doesn’t just show off the kimono: With the help of volunteers from Clark’s Japanese Club, she fits many of the children with pint-sized kimonos from her collection. She explains that this activity is in preparation for Clark’s annual Sakura Festival on April 17, where the children will appear in the finale of a kimono fashion show.



Professor Michiyo Okuhara shows how to wrap a kimono.

While the kimono demonstration is new, the partnership between Haya and Okuhara goes back seven years, when Okuhara’s own son was a child in Haya’s classroom. At the time, Clark College had just begun holding a celebration of the campus’s 100 shirofugen cherry trees, a living symbol of friendship between the people of Vancouver and Japan. Haya invited Okuhara to

visit her classroom to share stories about sakura celebrations in Okuhara's native Japan. From that beginning has developed a rich partnership; today, with the help of the Rotary Club of Vancouver, children in the CFS program participate in an artwork exchange with children in a preschool in Vancouver's sister city of Joyo, Japan. CFS children also attend Sakura each year, learning about Japanese culture.

"I'm always looking for ways to involve our children in the community on campus," says Hays. "It's a wonderful resource for us. We track the [shirofugen] trees each year, visiting them during each season. When they blossom, we have a picnic down there. And having Michiyo visit each year and share her experience, that's a great way for our children to learn about another part of the world."



Teira Harbeson, *left*, and Abigail Sloan, *right*, help a fellow member of the Japanese Club adjust her kimono.

It isn't only the children who are learning: Japanese Club member Teira Harbeson says that visiting the classroom is giving her a taste of what may be in store for her one day. "I want to become a teacher myself," says the 21-year-old sophomore, who says her interest in Japan was reinforced when she traveled there with Okuhara last year through Clark's Study Abroad program. "I want to travel to Japan and teach

English there, and while this is a different age group, it still gives me some experience.”

Japanese Club member Abigail Sloan adds that she wished she'd had opportunities to experience other cultures at such an early age. “I think it opens things up for them,” says the 15-year-old Mountain View High student, who attends Clark through Running Start. “The world is becoming more and more globalized, and it's really good for citizens to get exposure to other cultures early on.”

The time has come for the children to take off their kimono and go play outside. As they wait to have their obi untied, one girl fingers the pink flowers on her kimono thoughtfully. Then she looks up at a visitor and says, “I want to know about Japan. I want to know *lots* more!”

*Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley*