



manhattan commons

The Newsletter of Borough of Manhattan Community College | Summer/Fall 2011

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The One-on-One Solution

A community college education offers rich and varied rewards. Students graduate with a sense of mastery and achievement, not to mention academic skills—and for many, community college provides a path to senior college, graduate studies and a fulfilling career.

But the sobering fact is that many community college students don't graduate. According to Gloria Crisp, writing in *The Review of Higher Education*, community college students "are 10 to 18 percent more likely to drop out than students who attend four-year institutions."

The good news, however, is that retention rates are rising—especially at BMCC—and mentoring is a key driver of that trend.

It stands to reason: Acclimating to college life can be challenging. "For many minority students in the community college, the time, energy, and ability necessary to participate in [mentoring] programs are limited due to the many responsibilities and barriers that put them at risk, such as family, work, lack of support, and lack of transportation," writes Myron L. Cope in *Community College Review*.

Mentoring programs address that need by enhancing student success, "and [making] new students feel more connected to their institution," says Carisa Chappell in a recent *Community College Times* article. A mentoring relationship can help a student find his or her balance and integrate into academic life.

The truth of this is evident right here at BMCC, where peer and faculty mentoring programs have had a significant impact on student success. "With a mentor, you work with someone who actually believes in you and wants you to fulfill your full academic potential," BMCC student Gary Waiyaki noted in the college's inaugural edition of *Marks of Excellence*.

While the fact remains that retention is still a concern, mentoring has already made a tangible difference in the academic experience of innumerable community college students—here at BMCC and nationwide.

I have no doubt that it will continue to yield even greater benefits going forward.

ANTONIO PÉREZ, PRESIDENT
BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN
COMMUNITY COLLEGE
THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK



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ITEMS OF INTEREST TO THE BMCC COMMUNITY



Lisa Bloodgood

BMCC's First Udall Scholar

The Morris K. Udall and Stewart L. Udall Foundation just awarded science major Lisa Bloodgood a \$5,000 scholarship for her studies in phytoremediation—using plants to clean toxins from soil and water.

Over 95% of the 510 Udall applicants were from 4-year colleges. "I believe I'm the first Udall Scholar from BMCC,"

says Bloodgood, who guides a student garden project at PS 123, an elementary school in Brooklyn, and started a sustainability club at BMCC to focus attention on a greener campus.

"At BMCC, I feel I'm very lucky," says Bloodgood, who plans to transfer to SUNY's College of Environmental Science and Forestry at Syracuse, and continue investigating the use of plants and microbes to

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restore damaged ecosystems. “I am committed to this idea,” she says, “and want nothing more than to make it spread, like wildflowers.”

<http://www.bmcc.cuny.edu/news/news.jsp?id=5668>

Concerto for Pringles and Drywall

Last fall, an evaluator for the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival attended BMCC’s production of *Woyzeck*, nominating sound designer and BMCC theatre major Donghyuk Chang for northeast regional awards.

Chang not only produced the music for *Woyzeck*, he invented and built the instruments on which it was played. And at the Kennedy Center festival at Fitchburg State College in Massachusetts, he received First Prize for Achievement in Innovation and Technology, regaling judges with jazzy, percussive riffs on an array of ingenious instruments—a xylophone made from drywall, horns fashioned from cardboard tubes, a rice-filled maraca created from a Pringles canister, and others.

<http://www.bmcc.cuny.edu/news/news.jsp?id=5581>

Christine Quinn Speaks at 46th Commencement

BMCC’s 46th annual commencement ceremony was held in the Jacob Javits Convention Center in Manhattan on June 6 with the College’s largest class to date—3,297 graduates crossed the stage



Donghyuk Chang

to receive Associate degrees in 28 majors. The Commencement Address was delivered by NYC Council Speaker Christine Quinn, who was key in creating the Safe Housing Act, led the fight against hate crimes and school bullying, and steered the City Council’s decision designating \$129 million to rebuild BMCC’s Fiterman Hall, damaged in 9/11. “We’re lucky to have her on our side,” said President Pérez, who also honored BMCC Foundation Board member Jack Owens with the Presidential

Medal, and welcomed surprise guest NY Senator Charles Schumer. Student Government President John Marshall talked



NYC Council Speaker Christine Quinn

of the “stormy moments” students endured to reach this day, and Valedictorian Lorraine Singletary movingly described her journey from high school dropout and young mother, to college graduate with a 4.0 GPA.

BMCC President Antonio Pérez Honored at Puerto Rican Day Parade

The 2011 Educational Leadership Award was presented to BMCC President, Dr. Antonio Pérez at this year’s National Puerto Rican Day Parade, in New York City.

Twelve education leaders, including college presidents and school principals were recognized. “[This] parade is the largest celebration of Puerto Rican pride and culture around the globe,” said Parade President, Madelyn Lugo.

FOUNDATION NEWS: Annual Gala

Building Lives

BMCC’s 23rd Annual Gala raised \$480,000 to benefit the BMCC Foundation Scholarship Fund and was held at The Lighthouse at Chelsea Piers. Two special Honorees were recognized; the Hunter Roberts Construction Group, and Francesco Vanni d’Archirafi, CEO of Global Transaction Services, Citibank. The Student Speaker was science major Rebecca Panko, and Master of Ceremonies was CBS national news correspondent, Jim Axelrod. ♦ The Gala’s theme, “Building Lives,” reflected the efforts of Hunter Roberts Construction Group, which broke ground last October on BMCC’s new Fiterman Hall. “Hunter Roberts’ hard-working, talented men and women are not just building a building,” said BMCC President Antonio Pérez, “they’re building a stronger future for New York City, and for many generations of BMCC students to come.”

<http://www.bmcc.cuny.edu/news/news.jsp?id=5674>



Hunter Roberts CEO, James McKenna



BMCC Foundation Chair, Elizabeth Butson



Rebecca Panko



How to Find Yourself

BMCC Student *Ruth Allen* reunites with her family through a Critical Thinking project.

“**W**hen I had been looking for her forever,” says Dorothy Walsh King of her long-lost niece, BMCC student Ruth Allen. Allen’s mother was Dorothy’s sister, Christine Jordan—who struggled with substance abuse, left 10-year-old Ruth with a friend, and eventually succumbed to a drug overdose.

Fast-forward almost 25 years, and Ruth Allen is a Liberal Arts major at BMCC, completing a project in her Critical Thinking class led by Professor David Seiple.

“The assignment was to use problem solving and logical thinking to create a critical self history,” says Seiple. “First, the students identify a tension in their lives... then they logically work out points of the dilemma, choose the best solution, and resolve it.”

Ruth Allen identified finding her mother’s family as the problem she hoped to solve. “I’d gotten a very distorted version of how they felt about me,” she says. “But the project was so task-oriented, it helped me deal with that emotional part.”

As it turns out, Ruth’s aunts and uncles had long been search-

ing online for their missing niece, and once Ruth completed an “Action Step” for her BMCC class project—placing an ad on www.ancestry.com—they found each other.

It had been a long road, to that point. Ruth had worked in an animal shelter, gotten married, divorced, and had two daughters. She earned her GED in 2007, entered BMCC in 2009, and maintains a 3.8 GPA.

After graduating, she plans to major in Human Resource Management at Baruch College—goals she can now share with her extended family. Ruth’s Uncle Richard manages The Blind Pig, a spacious pub in the East Village where the family gathered recently, sharing memories of Christine Jordan, and giving Ruth perspective on the mother she lost.

“Without that class, I never would have taken the steps to find my family.”

“She took me to see *A Hard Day’s Night*, in the Bronx,” Richard says. “I was like four years old.” Dorothy adds, “She used to make us French toast,” and Carol Lynn recalls, “She showed me my first 45 record—the Everly Brothers. I can still see her little portable player.”

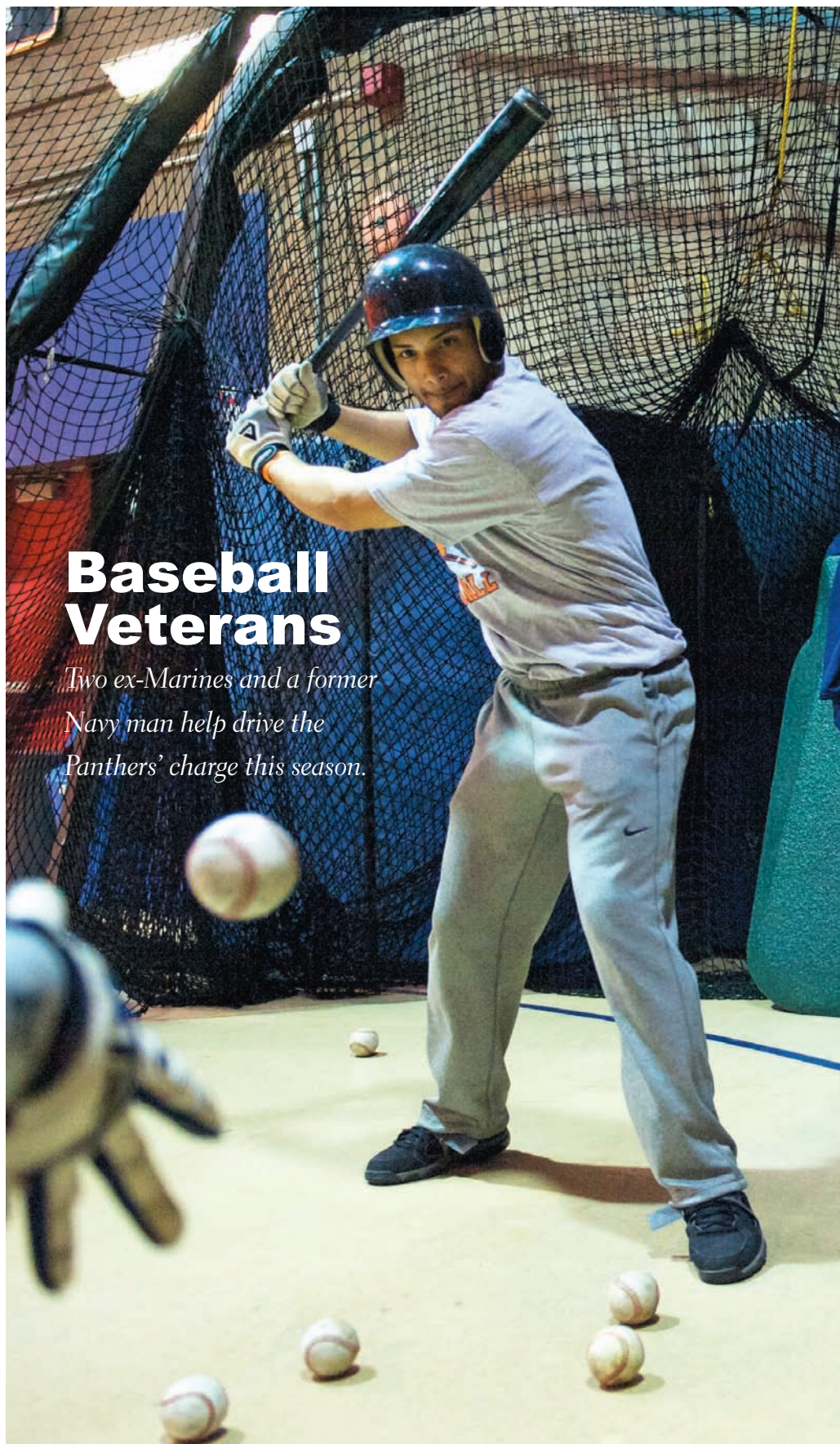
“Without that class at BMCC, the Critical Thinking class,” says Ruth, “I never would have taken the steps to find my family. It helped me to go outside myself, and be objective. It helped me address different questions, and find answers I needed.”

<http://www.bmcc.cuny.edu/news/news.jsp?id=5574>



Baseball Veterans

Two ex-Marines and a former Navy man help drive the Panthers' charge this season.



M

artin Lydon attended BMCC in 2005, but left for four years in the Marines, working as a mechanic, serving deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan. After completing his service, he returned to BMCC as a Liberal Arts major—and one of three military veterans on the college's baseball team.

Lydon—who pitches and plays right field—is doing well in his courses, and plans someday to be a gym teacher. “Being in the military helped me become more focused,” he says, “in the classroom and on the ball field.”

Teammate Michael Gervasi enlisted in 2007 and was

stationed in Japan, working as a boiler technician and diesel engine mechanic. He completed his service in Washington State, and is now a business major at BMCC. “A year before I got out of the Navy, I researched colleges and was impressed by BMCC’s great reputation and reviews,” he said. “Plus it had a baseball team.”

In his first at-bat, Gervasi got the Panthers’ first hit of the season and scored their first run. “To make it in the military, you have to multitask,” he says. “Committing to play baseball and be a student can be a challenge, but my military experience has definitely helped me.” Eventually he plans to earn a bachelor’s degree in sports manage-

ment, working “as a general manager, coach or even an agent.”

Team captain and starting catcher Edwin Marrero enlisted in the Marines at 17, and saw duty in California, Japan, Iraq and Thailand before enrolling at BMCC. “It seemed to be the perfect place to get back to where I left off—especially for someone like myself who’d been out of school for so long,” says Marrero, who was just named the CUNY Athletic Conference/Hospital for Special Surgery Co-Scholar-Athlete of the Month, and after graduation, plans to attend Long Island University and major in physical therapy. Meanwhile, in his first game this season he posted two hits, drove in two runs and scored once. The stats tell the story: As of this writing, he’s batting .400 on the season with four RBIs—and a 3.7 GPA.

“Being in the military helped me become more focused in the classroom and on the ball field.”

☞ <http://www.bmcc.cuny.edu/news/news.jsp?id=5623>



Edwin Marrero,
Michael Gervasi and
Martin Lydon



The Art of Visual Storytelling

Illustration and narrative unite in one art class taught by graphic novelist Robin Enrico.

Adjunct professor Robin Enrico teaches Art 175, Introduction to the Graphic Narrative. “It’s kind of like creative writing,” he says, “but you have to draw instead of just do prose.”

Enrico’s students often start with autobiographical writing, then go beyond that—as he did in his new comics series, *Jam in the Band*, which features an internationally touring women’s rock band. “I can invent characters and scenarios,” he says, “by going

beyond memoir. It gives me such a larger toolbox to work with.”

Enrico’s student, Rob Gizis credits the class for giving him “that extra push” to start his short comic novel, *A Bridge to Mummy Island*. “I didn’t think I could come up with a plot line, but once in class,” he says, “I really liked coming up with a story, as far as going from the ‘a’ to the ‘b’.”

Enrico, she says, “taught me some basic methods about easy communication with the reader. I needed to get more creative with the visual, while being efficient in the narrative.”

Enrico creates a community in class, where all these leaps can be made. During a student’s first project, he says, “I’ll just kind of monitor you; I’ll guide you through this process, and if at the end you realize you liked it, then I can say, ‘Okay, this was good—let’s do the next one’.”

<http://www.bmcc.cuny.edu/news/news.jsp?id=5621>

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FACULTY HIGHLIGHT: Elizabeth Wissinger

From Glamazons to Mellon Fellow

Why are models so tall, so thin, so white—all of a type? Elizabeth Wissinger, BMCC Associate Professor of Sociology, has found that history points toward some answers. ♦ “In the 1920s,” she says, “industrial production had an impact. The idealized body of the flapper was very mechanical. The muscles were very clean-lined, and the ideal arrangement of bodies in space was all in a row, making the same movement, synchronized.” ♦ Wissinger earned a Ph.D. in Sociology at the CUNY Graduate Center with a certificate in Women’s Studies—specializing in cultural studies and techno-scientific feminism, which looks at the ways models “seem roboticized...they’re muscular, they’re futuristic looking, they’re looking like cyborgs.” Her dissertation resulted in a book contract with NYU Press, and *The Modeling Life, Fashioning our*

Attention from Gibson Girls to Glamazons is scheduled for publication in Fall, 2011. ♦ Wissinger also received a Mellon-funded Science Studies fellowship for the academic year Fall 2011 to Spring 2012, for her scholarly accomplishments and research objectives—building a rich resource for her Introduction to Sociology students, who grapple with new concepts of culture, power, and where they fit into the mix. “I find it incredibly enriching to see students make those connections,” Wissinger says, “and kind of pull the veil away from their eyes...it’s great to be part of that.”

<http://www.bmcc.cuny.edu/news/news.jsp?id=5565>





Diversity and Data: A Win/Win Proposition

Alum Juan Proaño gives non-profits the tech tools for social change.

BMCC alum Juan Proaño understands that communication goes nowhere without the technology to direct it. In 2001, the Democratic National Party hired Plus Three, the small firm he co-founded, to create Demzilla, a database built in response to the Republican Party's Voter Vault—and the race for a constituency was forever changed. Demzilla enabled the Democrats to raise more than \$85 million online in 2004—surpassing, for the first time in campaign history, the Republican National

Committee's fundraising efforts.

Today, Plus Three's mission—using social media and Web-based technology to promote social change remains strong. "We're a minority- and woman-owned business," says Proaño. "We employ about 30% Latinos—in an industry where less than 2% of the tech work-force is Latino. We're engaging Hispanic and African American populations, women, and the LGBT community."

The company provides online tools to nonprofit, advocacy and political organizations including the Green Spaces Alliance, Emily's List and the NAACP, and Proaño has shared his expertise at the Democratic National Convention's Latino Leadership Conference, as well as BMCC's Spanish Heritage Month and recent Success Conference. He was named one of the Top 100 Hispanic Entrepreneurs by *Hispanic Trends* magazine, and Plus Three was recognized as one of the top 100 fastest growing Hispanic businesses for three years in a row.

Proaño worked in a Tribeca sporting goods store when he was a student at BMCC, graduating in 1997 with an Associate degree in Liberal Arts. "I was inspired by the diverse student and faculty community, and classes that provided a foundation to understand some of the challenges in starting a company," he says. "Plus I graduated having paid for my classes myself, without having accrued the large debt you'd typically see in a 4-year college—and that gave me more options, when I graduated."

“

I was inspired by the diverse student and faculty community, and classes that provided a foundation to understand some of the challenges in starting a company.

”

ALUMNI HIGHLIGHT: Gregory Gong

“When I was a kid,” says Gregory Gong, “my father bought a computer, and we would stay up late at night adding RAM and taking it apart.” Gong, who grew up in Brooklyn, graduated from BMCC in 2003 with an A.A.S. in Computer Information Systems, and transferred to Pace University, completing a B.S. in Technology Systems in 2005. “I worked 30 hours a week while I was in school full time,” he says — and the combination of work ethic and educational gains even-



tually paid off. After starting in the mailroom at Goldman Sachs, he worked in several Wall Street firms, putting financial and trading applications in place, and was Director of Technology in an asset management company. Along the way, his responsibilities ranged from monitoring firewalls, to negotiating contracts and maintaining servers. “Even in a really bad market,” he says, “if your skills are up to par, you’ll get hired.” He’s now a project manager in an investment firm, updating their network systems. “I wasn’t as good a student as I could have been, in high school,” Gong admits. “But at BMCC, I found my subject area and got the support I needed to really take off with it.”

Request for Success

BMCC Alumni – send us your success stories! Write Barry Rosen, Executive Director of Public Affairs, at brosen@bmcc.cuny.edu

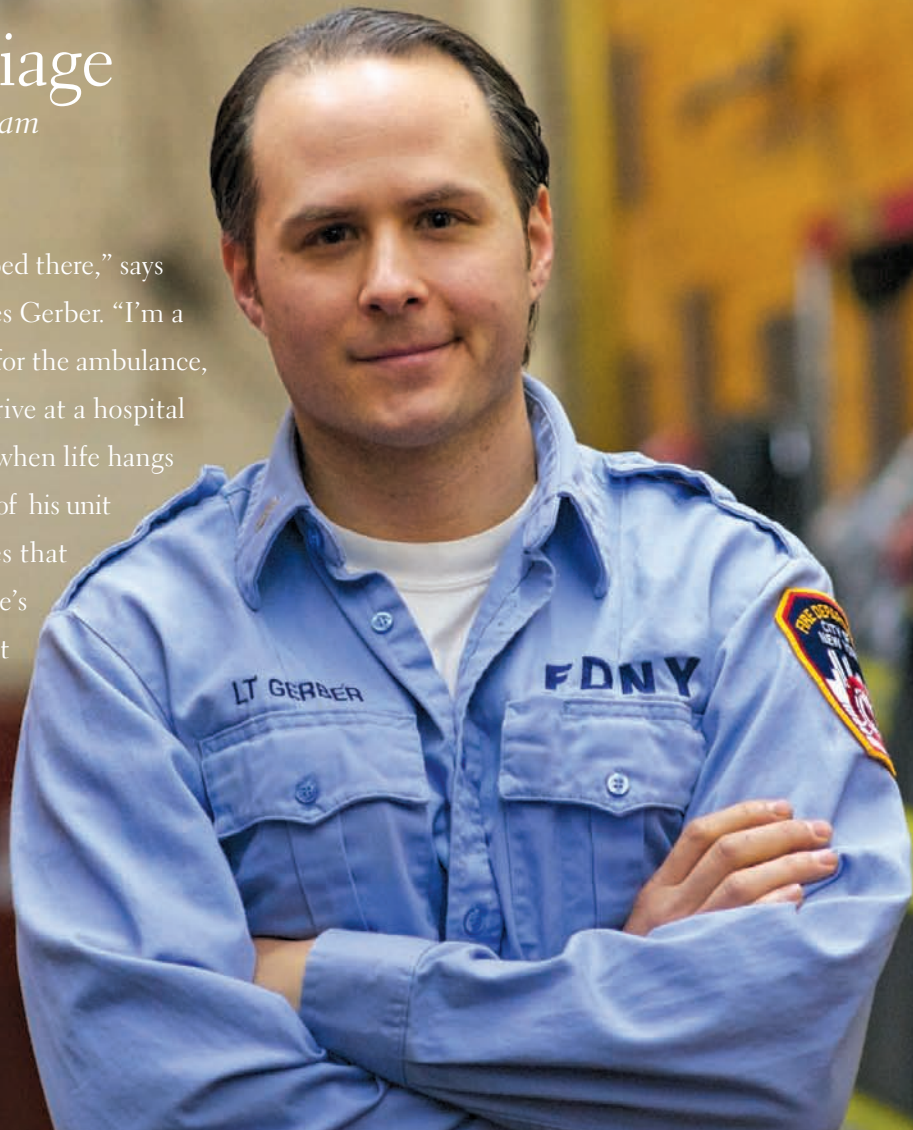
Keep in Touch

with the BMCC alumni office at www.bmcc.cuny.edu/

From Five Alarms, to Triage

For firefighter James Gerber, BMCC's Nursing program is part of the continuum of saving lives.

“I’ve crawled under cars to extricate people who were trapped there,” says Nursing major—and NYC firefighter—Lieutenant James Gerber. “I’m a certified EMT, I’ve been to the scene, ‘packaged’ people for the ambulance, and now I want to be part of the next step, when patients arrive at a hospital or trauma facility.” ♦ Both careers mean applying protocol when life hangs in the balance. “We work eight 24-hour shifts a month,” he says of his unit at Ladder 131, Engine 279 in Red Hook, Brooklyn, and notes that a nurse’s 12-hour shifts would fit well with that schedule. ♦ He’s also aware of the history behind emergency response, having just received third place in the David A. Garfinkel Essay Competition sponsored by The Historical Society of the Courts of the State of New York, for his paper on the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire—which forever changed U.S. labor laws and fire safety. ♦ Till he retires from the Fire Department, he’ll work in hospital scrubs some days, fire-resistant uniform on others. “In both jobs,” Gerber says, “reliance on your fellow workers is important. They become your second family.”



CommonsCalendar

Events and performances for the coming months

Tribeca Dance

• **Dusan Tynek Dance Theatre.** Don’t miss the annual NYC performance of new work and exciting musical collaboration in a modern dance performance by this Brooklyn-based, *NY Times* top-rated troupe. Oct. 27-29; Nov. 3-5: Go to www.tribecapac.org for times and ticket price.

Tribeca Spotlight

• **NYCity Slickers.** High-energy, Big Apple Bluegrass band of five gifted musicians and three gorgeous gal singers blends traditional bluegrass, zydeco, delta blues and country pop. Oct. 21 @ 8 p.m., \$15.

Family Series

• **Laura Ingalls Wilder: Growing**



The Life and Adventures of Santa Claus

Up on the Prairie. Pioneering spirit and family bonds drive the search for that little house on the prairie in this ArtsPower National Touring Co. Production. Ages 7-12. Nov. 5 @ 1:30 p.m., \$25; 10 Club Members \$14.

musical inspired by *The Wizard of Oz* tells the story of Dora, a Latino teen who explores her Hispanic roots and the meaning of home, as she enters a magical world. Ages 6-10. Nov. 20 @ 3 p.m., \$25; 10 Club Members \$14.

• **The Yellow Brick Road.** A new



Big Apple Bluegrass

• **The Life and Adventures of Santa Claus.** Side-splitting jokes, inventive puppets and enchanting songs bring Jack Frost, Santa Claus, reindeer and other beloved characters to life, in this Big Wooden Horse Theatre Co. Production. Ages 5-10. Dec. 3 @ 1:30 p.m., \$25; 10 Club Members \$14.



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CommonsCalendar: All events are presented by the BMCC Tribeca Performing Arts Center (www.tribecapac.org). For tickets call: 212-220-1460.