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Dr. Karen A. Stout:
A Transformational Leader

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After serving as Montgomery County Community College's President for more than 14 years, Dr. Karen A. Stout recently assumed the role of President and CEO of Achieving the Dream, Inc., a national, non-profit student success reform network that serves more than 200 community colleges and nearly four million students in 35 states.

by Alana J. Mauger ('97)

In his book, *Transforming Leadership: A New Pursuit of Happiness*, Presidential biographer and Pulitzer Prize recipient James MacGregor Burns coins the phrase "transformational leadership" to describe a set of principles by which "leaders and followers make each other advance to a higher level of morality and motivation."

Transformational leaders inspire others to change expectations, perceptions and motivations and to work together toward a common goal.

In 2000, Montgomery County Community College was searching for such a leader.

"More than 14 years ago, when we embarked on the process of finding Montgomery County Community College's fourth president, we sought a leader who would take the College into the 21st century," shared Michael J. D'Aniello ('78), current Board of Trustees chairman who was serving his first Board term at the time of the search.

"For me—as an alumnus with firsthand experience of how a community college can

change lives—the single most important goal was to find an individual whose character embodied our core mission: to provide the citizens of Montgomery County and all of our students access to the highest quality education at the most affordable tuition possible."

In January 2001, the College found that person in Dr. Karen A. Stout.

Shifting to the Community's Center

Talk to those who worked beside Dr. Stout—from the trustees, faculty and staff to students and alumni—and examples of transformation soon emerge: revitalized facilities, entrepreneurial business models, redesigned

curricula and streamlined student support services, all of which position the College to serve today's (and tomorrow's) students.

But before those things could happen, Dr. Stout had to boost the College's profile.

"When I arrived, the College was not well known in the community," reflected Stout.

As a result, she set out to make the College "famous" in Montgomery County.

"I have always thought that our College should take the form of the community, with programs aligned to transfer, workforce, civic and cultural needs. A key goal of the first strategic plan was to move the College to the community's center."

To learn about the community, Dr. Stout held dozens of listening sessions during her first year with as many stakeholders as possible: College employees, students, alumni, school district superintendents and principals, state legislators, municipal and county officials, and business and non-profit leaders.

Fourteen years later, Montgomery County Community College is not only recognized

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Photo by Sandi Yanisko

Photo by John Welsh



Student leaders led the signing of the “College Completion Challenge” pledge in 2011. From left, Dr. Karen A. Stout, President; Chris Jensen, Phi Theta Kappa President; Grace Pusey, West Campus Student Government Association President; Antonio Marrero, Central Campus Student Government Association President; and Michael J. D’Aniello, Board of Trustees Chair.

as a leader in the county, but throughout the region, state and country.

“Dr. Stout has helped [the College] to not be the ‘hidden gem’ in Montgomery County, but to be a bright and shining star in the field of education and the achievements of its graduates,” shared Rev. Patti Thomas ‘01, who had the opportunity to work with Dr. Stout both as a student and as current chair of the Alumni Board of Directors.

To be that “shining star,” the College needed to become part of an education pathway that

starts in elementary school and continues through graduate studies. Dr. Stout built relationships with regional K-12 leaders, and today, students from more than 40 high schools earn college credits through dual enrollment classes.

Under her leadership, the College also built strong transfer partnerships with dozens of four-year colleges and universities, like Lehigh, Saint Joseph’s and Bucknell, and forged its first international transfer partnership with Dongseo University in South Korea. A University Center framework, introduced in 2006, expanded

regional access to undergraduate and graduate degree programs offered by select college and university partners at Montgomery’s Central and West campuses.

During a press conference in 2013, Dr. Stout expressed the College’s commitment to building as many transfer pathways and opportunities for students as possible.

“We’re working to expand the way our students think about transferring—to look beyond what they ever thought was possible when they enrolled at a community college,” she said.

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Timeline of Accomplishments

2001

Dr. Karen A. Stout becomes the fourth President.

2002

The College establishes its Alumni Hall of Fame and a comprehensive Honors Program.

2003

The College opens its Health Care Careers Suite at West Campus.

2004

Dr. Stout earns King of Prussia Chamber of Commerce's Herbert Middleton Award for Excellence in Community Service, Greater Valley Forge Transportation Management Authority's Community Leadership Award, and Blue Bell Rotary's Service Leadership Award.

2005

The College launches Study Abroad program in Florence, Italy.

Dr. Stout is elected as President of the PA Commission for Community Colleges Presidents' Leadership Group; is named Educator of the Year by the Human Relations Commission and the Tri-County YWCA; and is inducted into University of Delaware's Alumni Wall of Fame.

2006

An accelerated GED preparatory course is introduced in partnership with the Montgomery County Workforce Investment Board.

Human Services faculty develop a Partnership on Work Enrichment and Readiness (POWER) Program for people in mental health recovery.

Eight students participate in the first Alternative Spring Break.

The University Center framework is created for students to earn bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees through partnerships with select four-year colleges and universities.

North Hall (former Kiwi Shoe Polish factory) opens at West Campus.

The College hosts Fulbright Scholar-in Resident (as of 2015, hosted four scholars).

Dr. Stout is named American Student Association of Community Colleges' President of the Year and Tri-County Area Chamber of Commerce's Educator of the Year.

2007

Dr. Stout is a charter signatory of the American College & University President's Climate Commitment.

The College is named to the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll by the Corporation for National and Community Service (as of 2015, has been on the Honor Roll six times).

The Advanced Technology Center opens.

A pedestrian underpass opens at the West Campus, connecting North and South halls.

The College enters into a partnership with Bucknell University's Community College Scholars Program through the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation.

The College joins "Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count."

Dr. Stout is appointed to the PA Governor's Tuition Assistance Program Advisory Board and to the American Council on Education Commission for Women.

2008

Center for Digital Education names College as one of top technologically advanced community colleges nationally (as of 2015, has been in the top 10 every year).

The Mustangs Intercollegiate Athletics program is re-launched.

Dr. Stout is named Bel Air High School's Alumnae of the Year.

2009

Victory Media designates College a "Military-Friendly School" (as of 2015, earned designation five times).

The Fine Arts Center renovation is completed and Associate in Fine Arts degree program starts.

The College introduces Minority Male Mentoring Program (later expanded into the Minority Student Mentoring Initiative).

Dr. Stout is elected Vice Chair of the American Council on Education's Commission for Women; is appointed to the American Association of Community Colleges Commission on Emerging Trends, Technology and Research, and the National Association for Community College Entrepreneurship Board of Directors; and earns the International Club of the Lansdale Public Library's Mayor Michael DiNunzio Award for Excellence and Montgomery County's Woman of Distinction Award.

2010

The College receives a federal grant to start Upward Bound Program for at-risk high school youth in Norristown and Pottstown.

The College begins work on the Riverfront Academic and Heritage Center in partnership with the Schuylkill River Heritage Area on the site of the former PECO building in Pottstown.

Assistant Professor of Mathematics Barbara Lontz creates "Concepts of Numbers," a new curriculum that changes how developmental math is taught nationally.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children awards the Children's Center exemplary status for Engaging Diverse Families.

The Center for Entrepreneurial Studies and Business Incubator open at Central Campus.

A new Children's Center, Black Box Theater and music suites open at Central Campus.

A campus shuttle begins operating between Blue Bell and Pottstown.

2011

Achieving the Dream designates Montgomery as a Leader College for its work to improve student learning outcomes.

Second Nature presents Climate Leadership Award in 2011 and 2014.

The College joins the national "College Completion Challenge" and pledges to increase graduation rates by 50 percent by 2020.

The American Association of Community Colleges' Voluntary Framework of Accountability selects the College as a pilot site.

University Business magazine names Call Center as national Model of Efficiency.

College receives Greater Valley Forge Transportation Management Association's Sustainability Leadership Award and a platinum-level sustainability designation for the first of four times.

Dr. Stout earns the President's Award for Education from the Upper Merion Chamber of Commerce.

2012

At Central Campus, College Hall is renovated and Veterans Resource Center opens.

At West Campus, Phase II of the Riverfront Academic & Heritage Center is completed, and the University Center opens in the former the East Penn AAA building.

West Campus Career Services earns bronze (2012) and silver (2013) certifications from OUTforWORK for developing career resources for Lesbian, Gay, BiSexual, Transgender and Questioning students.

The College receives NJCAA's Region 19 Champion of Character Award.

Dr. Stout earns the Association of

Community Colleges Trustees' North East Region Chief Executive Officer Award and the University of Delaware's Presidential Citation Award.

2013

The Virtual Campus is introduced.

Dongseo University in South Korea becomes the first international transfer partner.

The College is one of 43 institutions selected to join the Gateway to College National Network.

The Mustangs' mascot is introduced.

The Culinary Arts Institute opens in Lansdale.

Dr. Stout earns Montgomery County Commission on Women and Families' Changing Lives Through Education Award.

2014

U.S. President Barack Obama invites Dr. Stout to the White House College Opportunity Summit on Jan. 16 to share the College's initiatives to help low-income and economically challenged students attain access to higher education.

The College receives Achieving the Dream's Leah Meyer Austin Award for ongoing work to improve access and success.

Dr. Stout serves as a panelist for U.S. News STEM Solutions National Leadership Conference.

College installs wind turbines and solar panels as part of Siemens Industries, Inc.'s Guaranteed Energy Savings Agreement.

Achieving the Dream Leader reaffirms the College's "Leader College" status.

Plans are developed to renovate the Physical Education Center into a comprehensive Health Science Center at Central Campus.

The College earns League of American Bicyclists' Bronze Bicycle Friendly University designation.

The College earns Star Award from GVF Foundation's Communities in Motion for its sustainability work.

2015

The College is named to Military Advanced Education's list of Top Colleges & Universities.

Dr. Stout receives Bethlehem Baptist Church's Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Peace and Justice Award, Phi Theta Kappa's Shirley B. Gordon Award of Distinction, Greater Valley Forge Transportation Management Association's Career Achievement Award and Andrew J. Paravis Award for Excellence in Government and Education from TriCounty Chamber of Commerce.

That strategy helped pave an impressive pathway for alumnus Antonio Marrero ('11), who transferred to Dickinson College on a full tuition honors scholarship and who is currently studying to become a doctor at Penn State's College of Medicine.

"Without [Dr. Stout] as a guide when I was starting my education, I know for sure I would not have kept my ambitions unbridled. I would have set my sights on something most people would agree was 'more realistic,'" he shared.

Dr. Stout also led the College to develop career pathways that are connected, specifically, to the community's workforce needs. Early in her tenure, amid a well-documented shortage of health care professionals, the College developed new programs in Radiography, Surgical Technology and Medical Assisting, which were housed at the West Campus in Pottstown to meet needs specific to the tri-county region.

She continued to elevate Montgomery's profile by encouraging student, faculty and staff

participation in community events and service activities, and she instituted the now-annual College-Wide Day of Service.

"I met Dr. Stout for the first time soon after she arrived at the College [when] we were assigned as partners to clean out a basement in a Habitat for Humanity house renovation project," shared Barbara Lontz, assistant professor of Mathematics. "I was impressed that a college president had no problem getting dirty and working for the good of the community in which we live."

One could also find Dr. Stout engaged with the arts community, and she set out to establish Montgomery as the community's destination for the fine and performing arts. Today, the College's Lively Arts Series and Fine Arts Galleries host more than 12,000 patrons annually, and its academic programs in Music, Dance and Theatre Arts—established during her tenure—continue to thrive.

"Dr. Stout embraced the idea of allowing

student performing groups to grow into an established part of our college community—not simply as an artistic outlet, but also as a fundamental part of what the College values in its curriculum," explained Michael Whistler, assistant professor of Theatre Arts and faculty advisor to the student Drama Club.

Focusing on Student Access and Success

Each of the College's three strategic plans developed during Dr. Stout's tenure starts with the same key goal: improve student access and success. Those aren't buzzwords; student access and success became woven into the institutional culture, and members of the College community began connecting their daily work with the top strategic priority.

"We have a responsibility to do everything

Launched in 2010, the campus shuttle provides transportation for students between West and Central campuses, and now from the Ambler train station to the Culinary Arts Institute in Lansdale, enabling students to take the courses they need for completion.

Photo by John Welsh



we can to help students leave with a degree or credential that supports transfer or moves into a career that pays a life sustaining wage,” explained Stout.

An Achieving the Dream Leader College, Montgomery is recognized nationally for many of its programs and initiatives designed to improve access and success. Examples include a Minority Student Mentoring Initiative, financial literacy education, reimagined student entry and advising processes, educational planning tools, peer mentoring, and a new approach to developmental education, to name only a few.

Many of those initiatives resulted from Dr. Stout's frequent engagement with students. She added student representation to all college-wide committees and held “Wraps with the President” every fall and spring semester, during which she invited students to share their ideas and concerns with her over lunch. She also worked with Student Government leaders to tackle issues on their annual Top 10 lists.

“Dr. Stout is well respected and loved by students,” shared Grace Bako, president of the West Campus Student Government Association. “I have learned that being a leader is not about the position, but about being passionate about what you do and, at the same time, respecting the people you work with.”

On any given day, one could find Dr. Stout directly supporting students: cheering for the Mustangs athletics teams, attending music and dance performances, participating in GED graduation and Phi Theta Kappa induction ceremonies, stopping by classroom presentations, and even trading places with students during an annual “President for a Day” program.

She also hosted more than 500 episodes of “Montgomery County Community College On The Air,” a weekly radio program produced by Communication students at the Central Campus.

“Working on ‘MCCC On The Air’ with Dr. Stout gave me real world experience and helped me learn the ins and outs of producing interesting and relevant radio programming,” recalled alumnus Patrick McCabe ('05), who continued to work in radio, and now publishing, after earning a bachelor's degree from Chestnut Hill College. “Thank you to Dr. Stout and MCCC for such a great experience!”

Faculty, too, benefited from Dr. Stout's passion for student success.

“Dr. Stout was very open to the faculty and our thoughts because she knew that we were working with the students every day,” shared Jill

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Photo by Dawn Deppi



Photo by Alana J. Mauger



Photo by Mike Irby

Top: Student speaker Antonio Marrero meets Second Lady of the United States Dr. Jill Biden and College President Karen A. Stout prior to the graduation ceremony. Dr. Biden served as the commencement speaker in 2011.

Middle: Students Grace Bako and Jeff Chermesky switched roles with Dr. Stout and became “President for the Day.” They followed her schedule as president, while she attended their classes and activities.

Bottom: Throughout her 14-year tenure, Dr. Stout was actively engaged with students through campus activities and as a mentor, always encouraging them to achieve their goals.

Beccaris-Pescatore, assistant professor of Economics and a graduate of the College's Leadership Academy that was developed and facilitated by Dr. Stout. "Her work ethic, honesty and candor were so appreciated. It made me want to do more for the College and the students. She made me want to be a better teacher and leader."

Barbara Lontz, whose "Concepts of Numbers" curriculum is changing the way developmental math is taught at community colleges across the country, agrees.

"Faculty were encouraged and supported to think outside of the box and to work on projects, both individually and in groups, to create and develop new strategies with the goal of improving student outcomes," she said.

With a 47-year tenure that began during the

institution's early Conshohocken days, Dr. Lee Bender, professor of Economics, reflects on Dr. Stout's leadership.

"The College has become a national leader in academic excellence among community colleges. Dr. Stout actively engaged the faculty, staff and students to move the College forward to rebuild and strengthen our already solid academic programs and our support for students," he shared. "New and revised courses and programs, and improved administrative processes with clearer pathways to transfer or to employment have benefited thousands of students."

Dr. Bender cites another important student benefit facilitated by Dr. Stout: the return of on-campus child care.

"Dr. Stout clearly understood the necessity of

providing educational opportunities for young parents, who otherwise would be unable to attend college. [She] conceived the greatly-expanded Children's Center, now a permanent part of our [Central] Campus and college life," he shared.

Another critical and now permanent part of the College's identity are integrated Student Success Centers, which allow students to receive academic advising, counseling, job placement support and transfer evaluation in a central and prominent location at each campus. The Student Success Centers serve as visible reminders of the College's strategic focus on student access, success and completion. Because these hallmarks defined Dr. Stout's presidency at Montgomery, the Central Campus center now bears a new name: The Karen A. Stout Student Success Center.

Dr. Stout is an ardent supporter of the arts. Under her direction, the Fine Arts Center renovation at Central Campus was completed in 2009, and the Associate in Fine Arts degree program was started. Today, the College's Fine Arts Galleries and Lively Arts Series host more than 12,000 patrons annually.

Photo by Lou Liguori





The Culinary Arts Institute opened the doors to its 15,000 square-foot, state-of-the-art facility in Lansdale in 2013 to support career opportunities in the food service industry.

Building for the Future

The redesigned Student Success Center and expanded Children's Center are just two of the many impressive physical transformations completed through a comprehensive facilities master planning process, led by Dr. Stout.

In 2007, the College opened a state-of-the-art Advanced Technology Center—its first new Central Campus classroom building since 1972. A major renovation and expansion of the Fine Arts Center—formerly the Art Barn—and a complete overhaul of Parkhouse Hall and College Hall soon followed.

In Pottstown, the College's West Campus grew from one building to four. The expansion is helping to anchor revitalization efforts in the Pottstown Borough, especially since North Hall, the University Center and the Schuylkill Riverfront Academic and Heritage Center are repurposed historic landmarks.

The Culinary Arts Institute opened in Lansdale in 2013 to support growing career opportunities in the food service industry. A Virtual Campus, which provides critical wrap-around services like advising, career services, disability services and tutoring for online students, was also introduced that year.

"What were once very utilitarian campuses

have been magically—through an abundance of hard work by Dr. Stout and many others—transformed into beautiful, technologically advanced campuses with numerous welcoming student, faculty and staff spaces. You want to come here... and to stay!" shared Dr. Bender.

That welcoming vibe Dr. Bender describes is the real impetus driving the College's physical transformation. It's not about the buildings; rather, it's about the teaching and learning—both face-to-face and virtual, inside the classroom and out—that makes the biggest student impact.

The College is positioned to continue Dr. Stout's work in these areas, guided by a comprehensive strategic plan through 2016 and a facilities master plan through 2022.

"The College is poised to build new partnerships, new programs, new markets and new ways to reach those markets. We are working to develop new programs in high demand areas like health sciences and STEM, and these new programs will be strengthened by new facilities that are now funded and nearly ready to begin building," said Dr. Stout.

In fact, in early June, the College broke ground on phase III renovations to its Sustainability and Innovation Hub in Pottstown and will soon begin the expansion and transformation of its Physical Education Center into a state-of-the-art Health Sciences Center in Blue Bell.

The College is also in the early stages of de-

veloping new offerings for adult students whose employment goals are re-entry, job updating or career transitioning. Other initiatives include growing and supporting the College's Latino population, building Virtual Campus offerings, and growing dual enrollment and accelerated learning opportunities.

Of course, the College—and all of higher education—will face challenges. Enrollment pressures, completion rates and student success tracking are all top-of-mind issues. But the biggest challenge will likely be keeping college affordable while preserving both access and excellence.

"Preserving affordability while preserving academic excellence will be at the heart of the challenges going forward, as public funding will most likely remain strained," suggested Stout. "This will require the College to continue to be entrepreneurial and nimble even at the risk of taking on efforts that might seem to 'business like' to some traditionalists but are important for maintaining relevancy of our programs."

"I believe you can remain true to the liberal arts and general education core while also remaining workforce relevant. In fact, the best colleges will figure out an innovative way to do both and thrive in this duality of purpose," she added.

Once again, Dr. Stout's vision and leadership have laid the groundwork for what she calls a "culture of philanthropy." The College's Foundation is wrapping up "Futures Rising," its first comprehensive campaign to support student scholarships, which has exceeded its initial \$6 million, then \$9 million goal.

"Establishing a culture of philanthropy, where donors think of the community college as a first option for charitable giving, is important for the future viability of the College in maintaining affordable access for all students," said Stout.

Along with the College's work to improve student success, the "Futures Rising" campaign is among Dr. Stout's proudest accomplishments during her tenure.

"Every private gift to this fund is a vote of confidence in the College as well as in the potential of the hundreds of thousands of students we serve. The campaign sets the stage for future success in the next private fundraising effort and it has raised awareness of the excellence of the College within our community," she explained.

Dr. Stout cast her own vote of confidence with two "Futures Rising" contributions: a Phi



Dr. Stout hosted more than 500 episodes of "Montgomery County Community College On the Air" — a weekly radio show produced by Communication students at Central Campus.

Photo by Sandi Yanisko

I have worked harder at my job at [MCCC] than I have at anything in my life, and because of her talents and the community it inspires, I have become a stronger teacher, artist and a more confident man who knows what he can do in the face of challenge. I consider her one of my great mentors, and it has been my great joy to work with her for as long as I have," he shared.

For Rev. Patti Thomas it's her encouragement.

"She has been a great supporter of my journey—having started at MCCC as a 40+ woman learning to live with

disabilities, to achieving excellence in my education and transferring to Lancaster Theological Seminary where I earned my Master's of Divinity. [Dr. Stout] was ready and willing to encourage me in my seminary education as well as my role as Associate Pastor and now Pastor in a local church setting," she explained.

For Jill Beccaris-Pescatore, it's her thoughtfulness.

"Dr. Stout always took time to ask me about running, [and] she made a real connection with me as a new faculty member. When I ran my first Boston Marathon, the year of the bombing, she tweeted and emailed me with great concern on behalf of herself and the entire College community. I was so touched at such an emotional time," she reflected.

For Antonio Marrero, it's her drive to be the best.

"Her leadership pushed MCCC from being 'another community college in Pennsylvania' into becoming a national player in higher education. When people see how my alma mater is gaining national attention, they are both surprised and impressed. Because of this, her impact has made it easier for me to break the stigma that a community college education is a handicap when I am competing for higher stakes," he said.

In addition to renaming the Central Campus Student Success Center, Montgomery County Community College has commemorated Dr. Stout's legacy in a variety of other ways.

One of the Foundation's hallmark events—the Leading Women Symposium and Golf Experience—now bears her name. The annual Karen A. Stout Leading Women Symposium and Golf Experience, held each spring, raises funds for women's scholarships and programming while facilitating valuable networking opportunities for its participants.

At Commencement, the Board of Trustees presented Dr. Stout with an honorary associate's degree in letters, making her an official alumna of the College. The Board also named her President emeritus effective July 1, 2015.

Starting a New Chapter

Both Dr. Stout and Montgomery County Community College have embarked on the next chapter of their journeys.

Today the College is in the capable hands of Dr. James Links, who retired from his post as Bucks County Community College's President in 2012. Links will serve as interim President over the next year while the College's Board of Trustees leads a national presidential search.

Meanwhile, as President and CEO of Achieving the Dream, Inc., community colleges from across the country are benefitting from Dr. Stout's sincere passion for student success.

"No other sector of higher education has a reform network that allows colleges to experiment and incubate and bring to scale new ideas. This is the power of Achieving the Dream," she shared.

Dr. Stout is beginning her tenure at Achieving the Dream, headquartered in Silver Spring, Md., the same way she did at Montgomery: by listening.

"My vision for Achieving the Dream will emerge as I listen to the leaders of colleges, inside and outside the network, speak about challenges they face in moving their colleges

Theta Kappa Challenge Fund, which helps qualifying, Pell-eligible students pay half of the honor society membership fee, and an Endowed Scholarship Fund awarded annually to a student pursuing a career in Communication.

Celebrating a Legacy

Dr. Stout's legacy at Montgomery County Community College is vast, and her impact—on both the institution and on individuals in the College community—will reach far into the future.

What is her biggest impact? It depends on whom you ask.

For Michael D'Aniello, it's her unwavering commitment to the community college mission.

"Dr. Stout's biggest impact, which she shared throughout her tenure, is her understanding and appreciation that community college students need and deserve the best education, in the finest facility, delivered to the broadest student base," he reflected.

For Michael Whistler, it's her inspiring leadership.

"Dr. Stout is tireless, focused, generous, excitable, visionary, unafraid of challenge and joyful.

forward in this important completion work. I want to co-design, with my colleagues, this next generation of reform work," she explained.

Dr. Stout plans to develop Achieving the Dream's capacity to help colleges across the country improve their completion rates in a way that is customized, allowing them to leverage their strengths and address their most pressing needs.

"I want our highest performing community colleges to get support to continue to build capacity. I also want to get our most under-resourced colleges in our most under-resourced communities into this network. All of our nation's community colleges are on this journey. All of us are facing obstacles. All of us have important lessons to share with one another. And we all need help no

matter how far along we might be."

While Dr. Stout will have a greater impact on a larger number of students in her new role, she will miss the daily and direct interaction with students that was such an important part of her presidency at Montgomery.

"I will miss the students the most. I will miss their energy, their curiosity and their spirit," she admitted. "When I am around the students, I feel a deep affirmation of the value of this work, and I feel grateful that I have had this wonderful opportunity to help them reach their potential."

"Community college students are very special," she continued. "You see that when you meet with them in groups or see them in action as athletes, artists, advocates for causes and as student leaders. They come from so many backgrounds, yet

they immediately are able to get past any differences and mobilize toward a shared goal. I learn something in every student interaction."

One of those former students, Antonio Marrero, offers a unique perspective on the changes ahead.

"Although Dr. Stout is leaving [Montgomery County Community College], she is not leaving our family. She is going somewhere in which she will have an even greater impact on community college education," he shared. "We, as Mustangs, don't stop running until the herd behind us has it better. We will continue doing what [makes] this college great—and that is studying, working together, helping our own and championing our shared experience wherever we go." ■



To encourage students to join Phi Theta Kappa, the international honor society for two-year colleges, College President Karen A. Stout pledged \$30,000 to establish a Phi Theta Kappa Annual Challenge Fund. The fund will pay half the cost of a membership, while challenging students to match the remaining cost. Students must be eligible for Pell Grant funding, maintain a 3.5 GPA and complete at least 12 credits. Dr. Stout (center) stands with officers from Montgomery County Community College's Alpha Kappa Zeta chapter of Phi Theta Kappa. Student officers include (from left) Reginald Harris, secretary; Michelle Sikora, vice president of service; Jennifer Cutler, vice president of scholarship; Mamata Tharima, president; Raymond Straughter, vice president of fellowship; Thomas DeLucia, secretary; and Wilfredo Montijo, vice president of leadership.

Photo by John Welsh



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