

Why I

'Remember where you came from'

By Judith Kelliher

Honorably

In 1987, after being discharged from the U.S. Navy, 23-year-old Douglas Theobald enrolled at Holyoke Community College to study accounting. Although he stayed for just three semesters, he says the experience transformed him in a way that still resonates 30 years later.

"HCC was instrumental in my development after the military by introducing college life to me," he recently said. "It gave me confidence that I could acclimate myself to the academic environment of college at an older age. It also showed me the value of good teaching and a good education."

Coming in, he had a game plan to earn a bachelor's degree in 3½ years and stuck to it, pushing himself along and then transferring early from HCC to Bryant College (now Bryant University) where he graduated with a degree in accounting two years later.

Today, Theobald is president of the Springfield-based certified public accounting firm The MP Group (formerly Moriarty & Primack). As the boss, he has a big say in how the firm allocates its charitable donations. Over the years, the company has been a generous sponsor for HCC Foundation events that raise money for student scholarships, such as the annual golf tournament and the Alumni Awards Dinner.

More than that, though, he has helped create opportunities within the company for the development of future accountants.

While M&P has offered internships to juniors and seniors at local colleges and universities over the years, in 2017, for the first time, those accounting internships were opened to community college students, who Theobald lauds as "hungry to learn with a strong work ethic and more adaptable to the workforce."

"I thought, why not offer a way for community college students to gain exposure to public accounting and to an office setting?" he said. "Ideally, they will learn the administrative side, which supports all the professional staff.



Douglas Theobald '88 during a visit to campus last year as a guest speaker.

The lifeblood of a firm is when you can bring in new people because obviously they bring in fresh perspectives and ways of thinking about things."

Enter Christine Langford. The 55-year-old expects to graduate this spring with an associate degree from HCC (she currently holds a 4.0 GPA). She has been working as an intern at The MP Group since July 2017. Four hours a day, five days a week, she assists the receptionist with answering telephones, delivers incoming mail and handles all outgoing mail, assembles tax paperwork after the accountants have completed the client's tax returns and submits the final packet to the partner or principle for final review.

She understands these are entry-level responsibilities. But at this stage in the reinvention of her career, what she gains in observing the thick of the operations of an accounting firm will help reach her goal of working full time as an accountant.

"I love going to work each day," she said.

Michele Cabral, former HCC interim dean of Business and Technology, said this type of experience will be invaluable to Langford and community college students like her.

"It is very rare for any student from HCC to receive this type of opportunity," she said. "Most CPA firms won't talk to students until they are at least in their junior years."

Theobald, who lives in West Springfield, Mass., gives back in other ways as well. He has been a frequent guest speaker on campus. Last spring, as a member of an alumni panel, he told business students that they should never be embarrassed to list HCC on their resumes.

"Stay humble," he said. "Remember where you came from. Show me on that resume what you are all about. If you went to HCC, don't hide it. Put on there that you worked through college. Be proud of that."

"When you go out there into the world," he said, in conclusion, "don't leave HCC behind."

He didn't. 