

50 years and counting, WCCF makes a difference

By ELYSE KLAYMAN
and RUTH SUZMAN

Wellington Mackey had an unlikely route to law school. It began in what he describes as the “shantytown slums” of New Providence Island in the Bahamas, through periods of homelessness as a new immigrant to the United States, on to Westchester Community College, then Yale College and today — law school. Last month, as Mackey delivered a heartfelt thank you at the 50th anniversary celebration of the Westchester Community College Foundation, the hundreds of supporters in the room beamed as though they were at their own child’s graduation.

In a way, they were. With its dedicated individual donors, private foundations and enduring public support, the WCCF has raised more than \$100 million for student scholarships and additional support for the institution in its 50-year history. Thanks to this generosity, Mackey is not alone. To date, more than 18,500 students have re-

ceived scholarships totaling more than \$25 million, and many have gone on to continue their education at schools throughout the SUNY system, and indeed, at many of the most competitive public and private universities in the country.

In addition to providing more than \$2 million for student scholarships each year, the WCCF funds many other programs at the college, including the Volunteer Corps, the Native Plant Center and an endowed faculty chair program. With the support of the foundation, Westchester Community College has been able to double the size of its library and create the \$40 million Gateway Center, home to SUNY’s largest English as a Second Language program, a fashion design and technology degree program and a business management degree program.

Mackey was a student who took full advantage of all the community college has to offer. He qualified for the Honor’s College at WCC, participated in a study abroad program at Cam-



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WCC student Wellington Mackey with Dr. Belinda Miles, president of Westchester Community College.

bridge University in England, and capped this off by being awarded the nationally acclaimed Jack Kent Cook Scholarship — the most prestigious

community college scholarship in the country. Empowered and prepared by his coursework at WCC, Mackey continued on to complete a rigorous undergraduate course of study at Yale, and now continues his studies at Yale Law School.

“Opportunity was both alive and vivacious and moved across the campus,” said Mackey about his experience at WCC. “If you were not paying attention, you might miss it, just like you might easily overlook a natural ecosystem. It was organic, it was fruitful and, most importantly, it was available to any conscientious student without discrimination. There were only two caveats: you had to want it and, once you had it, you had to work hard to maintain it.” Mackey wanted it, he maintained it, and the community of donors, staff and volunteers who comprise the WCCF were honored to be a part of his journey.

This event, in which the foundation celebrated its 50th year of service to

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the Westchester Community College community, was also the kickoff to the Pathways Campaign for Student Success — an ambitious effort to raise \$50 million in philanthropic support for the institution, in advance of the college celebrating its 75th anniversary in 2021.

As those of us in the room celebrated Mackey’s incredible journey, we also redoubled our commitment to supporting the nearly 30,000 students who attend WCC. They come directly from area high schools, transfer from other colleges, and return from military service; they are English language learners, adults returning to school to learn new skills and improve their professional opportunities. Students at WCC continue through from their associate degree to earn a bachelor’s degree at a four-year institution, or they go directly into the workforce.

Many WCC graduates stay right here in Westchester County and are critical contributors to our county’s well-being. Mackey’s journey is just

one of many, and each student’s success is measured differently. No matter where one comes from in terms of family experience or demographics or academic preparedness, all students are welcome into Westchester Community College’s “ecosystem of opportunity,” supported with excellence while learning there, and carefully guided forward toward their academic and professional goals.

We are proud to be part of the leadership of the WCCF, proud to play our small part in supporting this institution which in turn supports so many in our community. It is equal parts humbling and inspiring, an incredibly meaningful place to get involved. We invite you, our neighbors, to join us in getting to know WCC — the campus, the students, the programs, events and opportunities that abound there.

Here’s to the next 50 years!

Elyse Klayman and Ruth Suzman, both residents of Scarsdale, serve on the WCC Foundation board of directors.