



For Immediate Release

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**Ohio Association of Community Colleges Honors 2025 Excellence Award Recipients**

*Annual awards celebrate outstanding leadership, advocacy, and service to Ohio's community colleges*

COLUMBUS – The Ohio Association of Community Colleges has selected three Ohioans as recipients of OACC's 2025 Excellence Awards, which honor exceptional contributions to community college leadership and advocacy across the state.

“The OACC Excellence Awards serve as a wonderful opportunity to recognize and honor the tremendous support that our Association and member colleges receive from our trustees, alumni, and dedicated advocates,” said OACC President and CEO Avi Zaffini. “Much of what we have accomplished over the years would not have been possible without the continued efforts of these individuals.”

This year's honorees are Daniel Smith, Distinguished Alumnus Award; Helen Forbes Fields, Maureen C. Grady Award for Special Achievement; and Tina Husted, Terry M. Thomas Friend of Community Colleges Award.

The recipients were recognized at the Association's annual conference on November 13 at Columbus State Community College. This year's conference featured a wide variety of sessions on education topics, from “Growing the future STEM Biotech and Agriculture Workforce” to “The Nuts & Bolts of Running a Cooperative Education Program.”

Smith, a graduate of Lorain County Community College (LCCC), was chosen for the Distinguished Alumnus Award, presented to a community college graduate who has demonstrated exceptional commitment to their local community and higher education. The award has been presented annually since 1995. Smith, informed by a high school guidance counselor that he was not “college material,” began his higher-ed career at LCCC and used it as a launching pad to earn a bachelor's degree and MBA from the University of Toledo and a Ph.D. in business at the University of Pittsburgh. Today, Smith is a nationally recognized marketing professor at Indiana University's Kelley School of Business and Dean Emeritus, and President and CEO Emeritus at the Indiana University Foundation.

Other Distinguished Alumnus Award nominees included Carl Allamby, a Cuyahoga Community College graduate; Thomas Daniels, an Owens Community College graduate; Brian Faust, a Clark State College graduate; Nicholas Pratt, a Rhodes State Community College graduate; and Timothy Young, a Central Ohio Technical College graduate.

Fields, president and CEO of the YWCA of Greater Cleveland and chairperson of the Cuyahoga Community College Board of Trustees, received the Maureen C. Grady Award for Special Achievement, first presented to its namesake in 1994, recognizing extraordinary leadership and service among community college trustees. Fields, a four-term board chair known for her professionalism, empathy, and steadfast commitment to student success, was commended for helping oversee Tri-C's return to campus after the COVID-19 epidemic. After more than three decades as a practicing attorney, Fields broadened her impact through her leadership as Vice President of Community Impact at United Way, President and CEO of the YWCA of Greater Cleveland, and as a Cleveland Museum of Art trustee. Known for her vision, wisdom, and compassion, Fields was also singled out for her prowess in leading a national presidential search, her efforts fostering a spirit of collaboration at the school and advancing initiatives that had a positive impact on students, faculty, and staff.

Husted, wife of U.S. Sen. Jon Husted, received the Terry M. Thomas Friend of Community Colleges Award, which honors individuals who have significantly advanced the cause of community college education in Ohio on a statewide level. Husted was praised for using her artistic skills as a painter to raise critical scholarship funds for North Central State College through the sale of limited-edition reproductions of two original paintings of Cedar Point. She was also acknowledged for raising the profile of community colleges in Ohio by building partnerships with Cedar Point and Cedar Fair Charities to connect education with Ohio's cultural landmarks. In addition, she was recognized for leveraging her roles as a licensed real estate broker, nationally ranked master's athlete, and owner of ART Squared—a business blending art, coaching, and physical therapy for runners—in her efforts to mentor students and athletes across Ohio.

Other Terry M. Thomas Friend of Community Colleges Award nominees included John A. Brown, chair of the Clark State Foundation, and Don Plotts, Marion Technical College Board member for more than a decade, including board chair from 2016 to 2018.

“This year's honorees are an inspiration to Ohio's community college network,” Zaffini said. “Their dedication, leadership, and advocacy help our colleges fulfill their most important goal which is supporting every student on their path to success. We are grateful for their contributions and proud to celebrate their impact.”

About the Ohio Association of Community Colleges:

The Ohio Association of Community Colleges (OACC) represents the presidents and trustees of Ohio's 22 public two-year institutions, advancing community colleges through policy advocacy, professional development, and strategic leadership. Serving nearly 250,000 Ohioans annually, community colleges connect students to in-demand careers and are the top workforce partner for Ohio employers, with more than 1,000 employer partnerships. The OACC champions a classroom-to-career pipeline, advocating for student opportunity and success, fostering collaboration, and promoting the transformative impact of community colleges on students, businesses, and communities across Ohio.

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