

Kalamazoo Valley Community College **Alumni**

NEWSLETTER

Fall 2013



NOVIOLET BULAWAYO '03
Associate of Arts



Director's Welcome



Kalamazoo Valley Community College is an exciting place to be these days as the academic year is now underway and our students are filled with an abundance of energy and enthusiasm. Additionally, there is much excitement about the plans that have just been announced for a new and innovative health-focused

campus to be located in downtown Kalamazoo.

We recently had the pleasure of hosting a book reading and signing at the Texas Township Campus by author and Kalamazoo Valley alumna NoViolet Bulawayo, who you can read more about in this newsletter. Her book "We Need New Names" has been included on Oprah Winfrey's list of "Nine Must-Read Books for June 2013" and it was also on the short list for the Booker Man Prize for fiction, Britain's premier literary award.

This past spring Alumni+ and our Dental Hygiene program hosted a very successful reunion, bringing DHY alumni back to campus for the first time ever to reunite and network with one another. Other reunions are in the planning stages so keep a keen eye out for further news on that front.

Please keep sending us your success stories that we can share, and continue to recommend Kalamazoo Valley to others as you have in the past. We take great pride in you and your success.

Steve Doherty
Director of Development



Alumni John Pinkster

John Pinkster hasn't moved far from where he was born and raised on Barney Road in Kalamazoo, but he has traveled an admirable distance in his professional journey.

The Kalamazoo Christian High School graduate attended Western Michigan University for a couple of years before enrolling in an EMT program at Kalamazoo Valley. He says it provided him with "a different take on education." He had only planned to take a paramedic course, but finished his AAS, continuing to work during paramedic school as a mobility transport associate.

He soon switched to providing care as a paramedic. Next, John was a field training instructor for several years before becoming a field supervisor. Last year he was promoted to director of south operations.

He returned to Kalamazoo Valley last summer to gain certification as an instructor coordinator, allowing him to teach paramedic courses. "I just seem to keep coming back to Kalamazoo Valley," he said. His future goals include taking the state exam to obtain his Instructor Coordinator License and completing his bachelor's degree in business administration.

Still ruminating over the first class when he and fellow classmates practiced IV skills on each other, John remains impressed by the level of students coming out of Kalamazoo Valley. In his role as Director, John continues to look to Kalamazoo Valley alumni as a source of well-educated and career-ready EMS personnel. He also says he will encourage his children to explore the excellent educational opportunities Kalamazoo Valley has to offer.

ALUMNI+ Newsletter

Editor

Karen Visser

Managing Editor

Dawn Kemp

Design + Photography

Thomas Wrench

Board of Trustees

Derl D. Oberlin

Mary T. Gustas

Anna Whitten

A. Christian Schauer

Susan L. Miller

Jeffrey E. Patton

T. Kenneth Young

Marilyn Schlack

Alumni+ Newsletter is published three times each year: fall, winter and summer.

Questions about Kalamazoo Valley Alumni+ or this publication may be directed to the Alumni Relations Coordinator at: **269.488.4314** or at alumni@kvcc.edu

Kalamazoo Valley Community College
6767 West O Avenue
PO Box 4070
Kalamazoo, MI 49003-4070



Tell your story and listen to others.
facebook.com/KVCCAlumni

College Updates

More updates available at www.kvcc.edu/news and at [f /KVCCAlumni](https://www.facebook.com/KVCCAlumni)

SACK LUNCH FILM SERIES

The Racial Healing Initiative of the Southwest Michigan Black Heritage Society is teaming up with Kalamazoo Valley's Arcadia Campus Committee for Cultural Understanding to present a free series of film segments from "Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making Us Sick?"

This series, accompanied by facilitated discussion, will be shown in the Mary Jane Stryker Theater at the Kalamazoo Valley Museum on the third Wednesdays of November, January, February and March from noon to 1 p.m. Bring your lunch. Beverages and cookies will be provided.

The film segments and facilitated discussion will examine the root causes of the alarming socioeconomic and racial inequities in health.

FRIDAY NIGHT HIGHLIGHTS

Kalamazoo Valley Community College's Center for New Media and the Kalamazoo Valley Museum in downtown Kalamazoo have announced their Friday night entertainment lineup.

At the Center for New Media, new art exhibits open on Art Hop nights in November and December. Exhibits remain on display for the entire month and opening night receptions run from 5:30–8:00 p.m.

Friday Night Highlights at the Kalamazoo Valley Museum include movies, concerts, Art Hops, special events, and laser light shows in the planetarium.

Visit kalamazoomuseum.org for a complete schedule.



NOVIOLET REFLECTS ON KALAMAZOO VALLEY

South African emigrant and famed author NoViolet Bulawayo is a Kalamazoo Valley alumna. Originally, she planned to study law, but discovered her passion for writing at Kalamazoo Valley.

Her book, "We Need New Names," was on Oprah Winfrey's list of "Nine Must-Read Books for June 2013" and named to the short list for the Booker Man Prize for fiction. The book tells the story of Darling, an African girl who flees to the U.S. from the slums of her homeland.

Bulawayo graduated from Kalamazoo Valley in 2003 and earned a Masters of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from Cornell University, where she was a Truman Capote Fellow. She is now a Wallace Stegner Fellow at Stanford University. She won the 2011 Caine Prize for African Writing, was shortlisted for the 2009 SA PEN Studzinski Award, and longlisted for the 2013 Guardian First Book Award. Her work has appeared in The Telegraph, Callaloo, The Boston Review, Newsweek, The Warwick Review, and in anthologies in Zimbabwe and the UK.

Bonita Bates, director of Kalamazoo Valley's Transfer Resource program, remembers when Bulawayo was a FOCUS student. "She was humble, sweet, kind and studious," Bates said, "I asked her 11 years ago to write a poem. I've kept it in my office all these years."

Bulawayo recently hosted a book reading at Kalamazoo Valley. The event drew a crowd of more than 100. Bulawayo said she's grateful to the instructors who encouraged her to write. "I realized that I was very passionate about writing and reading and I also received encouragement from my instructors," she said of Kalamazoo Valley.

"It really means a lot to me," Bulawayo said. "Kalamazoo Valley is where I took my first creative writing class and many others after that -- the place that essentially gave me permission to pursue writing. These many years later, I am still grateful to the mentors there who took me seriously. I have been to many schools in my academic career, but Kalamazoo Valley remains for me the most important because of the formative experience I got there. I am who I am because of KVCC," she said.

Students work as interns on the new health-focused

'WHAT AN H

Student interns have played an important role in helping to develop Kalamazoo Valley Community College's new health-focused campus. In May, Kalamazoo Valley Community College (Kalamazoo Valley) announced a partnership with Bronson Healthcare (Bronson), and Kalamazoo Community Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (KCMHSAS) to develop a campus focused on wellness and food sustainability.

Bronson Healthcare donated 13.3 acres of unused land for the new campus. The property, near Bronson Methodist Hospital, includes 8.4 acres along Crosstown Parkway east of the City of Kalamazoo's Crosstown Center, 3.6 acres between Walnut and Dutton Streets, and 1.3 acres north of Crosstown Parkway and south of Dutton Street. Three facilities are planned, including a new Kalamazoo Valley location for food production and distribution, a center for health careers and culinary programs, and a new psychiatric clinic for KCMHSAS.

Even before the location was selected, four student interns were busy conducting research to assist the project organizers. Robbie DePalma created a fundraising database and researched the Federal Food Safety Modernization Act. Intern Melody Woods worked to identify existing urban gardens and map out accessibility to fresh food.

Kalamazoo College senior Stesha Marcon is an intern who has been researching green care and therapeutic horticulture. In addition, intern Natasha Turcotte is working on a presentation for Bronson about the existing orchards and farms within a 50-mile radius. Her work will be used to help develop partnerships with other organizations with a commitment to healthy eating.

Kalamazoo Valley Community College President Marilyn Schlack said it made perfect sense to involve students and solicit their input about this new, innovative initiative. "We know that the health-focused campus will make a positive impact on the lives of our students, their families, and the greater Kalamazoo community for decades," Schlack said. "We're pleased that our students are already so supportive of the idea and that our interns have been able to gain valuable experience by assisting the steering committee with research."

Marcon came to Kalamazoo from Albany, California. The International Studies major said her research ties in with her minor of Environmental Studies. She explained that therapeutic horticulture refers to the purposeful use of plants and plant-related activities to promote health and wellness, a concept that she thoroughly supports.



Robbie DePalma
Kalamazoo Valley Alumnus



Melody Woods
Kalamazoo Valley Alumna

ocused campus in Kalamazoo

HONOR'

"It fits in with my personal interests," Marcon said of her research. For her final project at Kalamazoo College, she plans to write a comprehensive report about the topic.

Woods has visited community gardens to help figure out how to reach the underserved with fresh, local produce. She is also communicating with area churches that operate food pantries to learn more about the community's nutritional needs. "I love it," Woods said of her work on the project. "I've been able to do something I really enjoy. I really enjoy the community, meeting new people and organizations. Everything I've learned, I'm trying to pass on."

Woods graduated from Kalamazoo Valley last spring and is now a fulltime student at Western Michigan University. "I live in the neighborhood where the new campus is going to be," she said. "We're really excited to have Kalamazoo Valley coming. It will be interesting to see how the dynamics change. I'm just interested to see how it plays out."

DePalma, who graduated from Kalamazoo Valley with a degree in accounting, is now a student at WMU. He is also enthusiastic about the new campus. "I wanted to be a part of the project for the experience," he said. In addition to the health-focused campus internship, DePalma has been an



Watch the video at www.kvcc.edu/videos

intern in the Hydraulics Systems Division at Parker Hannifin. He assisted with the new campus project by tracking expenses. "I've gained experience that I'll take with me anywhere in the workforce."

Designs will be developed over the next several months and construction of the \$42 million campus is expected to begin in the spring of 2014 with initial course offerings becoming available during 2015.



Stesha Marcon
K College Student



Natasha Turcotte
Kalamazoo Valley Student

Profile in Excellence

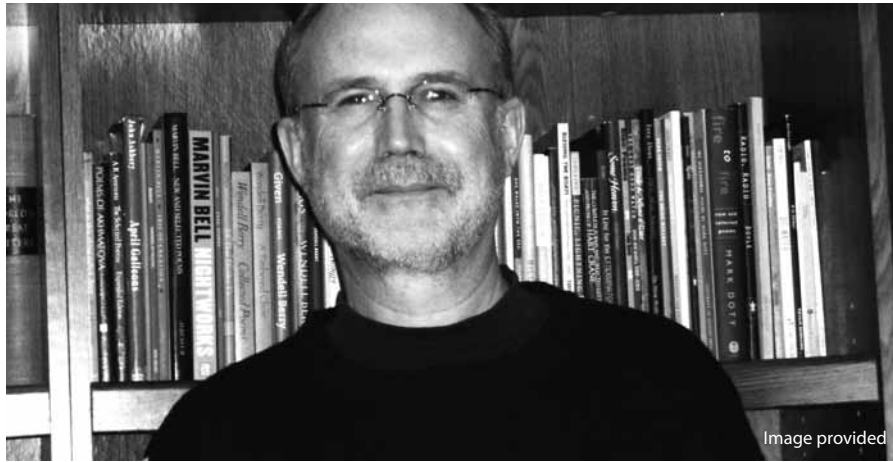


Image provided

CATCHING UP WITH ROB HAIGHT

Kalamazoo Valley is rich with prolific and talented writers. Several alumni have gone on to publish books that have gained national recognition. Many of the college's English instructors are also widely recognized for their writing ability. "We have a particularly strong English department at this school and I'm proud to be a part of it," said English instructor Rob Haight.

Haight is marking his 25th year at Kalamazoo Valley. "Feeding Wild Birds," Haight's third and most recent book, is a collection of nature poems organized by season. Haight said he is disciplined with his craft. "The challenge for me is generating the first new writing. If I'm in the right place, I write. I have to create enough spaces in my life that will allow me to practice it regularly."

He also thinks it's essential for writers to collaborate. "Writing communities tend to be proactive for everyone concerned," Haight said. "Many of our students have gone on to do great things."

He lists NoViolet Bulawayo, Winter Goebel, and Anne Champion as some of the most successful Kalamazoo Valley alumni writers in recent years. Haight loves building and maintaining relationships with students. "For me, this is a really wonderful job because I like people and I like all aspects of teaching," he said. "I really enjoy interacting with people."

Haight offers students simple advice. "Go to class," he advises. "That's the biggest difference between success and failure. If you're present for your life, you're going to be a lot more aware than if you're going through the motions. That's the big difference in how people perform."

Haight describes "Feeding Wild Birds" as a spiritual book. Childhood memories are interspersed with nature scenes so descript that the reader can almost hear frosty leaves crunching under foot. The book is available through Mayapple Press, www.mayapplepress.com.

VISITING WRITERS

English instructor Rob Haight developed the Visiting Writers series to give students and the community a chance to meet professional writers and listen to their work. During each of the visits, the authors present craft talks from 10 to 10:45 a.m. and read from their work from 2:15 to 3 p.m. in the Student Commons Theater at Texas Township.

Kalamazoo Valley alumna Anne Champion will visit the college on Nov. 26. She received the Academy of American Poet's Prize and was a Pushcart Prize nominee. She teaches writing and literature in Boston.

Caitlin Horrocks will make a Feb. 13, 2014 appearance at the college. Her writing appears in *The New Yorker*, *The Best American Short Stories*, *The PEN/O. Henry Prize Stories*, *The Pushcart Prize XXXV*, *The Paris Review*, *Tin House*, and elsewhere. She is an associate professor of writing at Grand Valley State University and fiction editor of *The Kenyon Review*.

On March 24 and 25, San Francisco-based activist and journalist Rebecca Solnit will be the Visiting Writer. Solnit has written 13 books and numerous essays. Her new book, "The Faraway Nearby," will be read across campus before her visit. It explores the way people are connected by stories, empathy and imagination.

All events are free and open to the public. For more information, rhaight@kvcc.edu.



A YEAR OF TRANSFORMATION

Kalamazoo Valley alumna Alyssa Stommen began struggling with her weight as a 10-year-old, after her mother died in a tragic car accident. Last year, the 23-year-old spent a year participating in the Extreme Weight Loss television show. Her experience began in May 2012 and ended with her hometown reveal at the State Theatre in downtown Kalamazoo on May 15, 2013. The two-hour-long episode about her year-long experience aired on August 6, 2013. She lost more than 200 pounds, but, more importantly, she changed her outlook and her attitude.

"I went through a lot of healing this past year," Stommen said. "I was able to grieve essentially and it was amazing." She said a new therapist, fitness trainer Chris Powell, his wife Heidi and a few others associated with the show were a huge support. Stommen said she began to overeat to protect herself from the pain associated with the loss of her mother. She now has a nutritionally-based approach to food and strategies for coping with stress and disappointment.

"The things I've gained emotionally are bigger than the weight loss," Stommen said. "I've been able to grieve. I've gained confidence, self-esteem, and the motivation to keep moving forward. I really am a new person from the inside out." She now sees food as a simple fuel for life, rather than as a coping mechanism.

Stommen's new motto is, "Confess, reassess and recommit." She admits that she's not perfect and is now quick to ask for help when she deviates from her plan to take good care of herself with diet, exercise and emotional support. She became friends with Season 2 weight loss participant Jacqui McCoy. The four months that Stommen spent living in Florida with McCoy were life changing. "She's the one who helped me learn to love myself," Stommen said. "I'm forever grateful to her for that."

Not only has she been able to fully grieve her mother's death, but Stommen has also learned to battle her eating disorder. To remind herself of all that she's accomplished, Stommen recently got a tattoo. The simple message "life" graces her wrist. "It's there to remind me that this year did happen," Stommen said. "I changed my life forever and I learned that sometimes you just can't do it alone."

Stommen, a 2008 Plainwell High School graduate, earned an Associate of Arts transfer degree with a business emphasis from Kalamazoo Valley. She worked as an Expressways tutor for a year-and-a-half and loved every minute of her time at Kalamazoo Valley. "I had a great experience at Kalamazoo Valley," Stommen said. "I absolutely loved it. You are not just a seat number here. There's such a sense of community here."

Stommen is now saving money for skin reduction surgery and is considering her options before she furthers her studies. She may move to Texas to be near family members, including a 13-year-old cousin and her mother's sister. She's considering becoming an ultrasound sonographer, perhaps specializing in cardiovascular care. She also wants to work with others who have struggled with their weight, maybe as a nutritional counselor.

"I want to do something that makes a difference," she said. "If I can open up about what I went through and have it help someone, it's worth it."

Special Announcements



Kalamazoo Valley Online Job Board

View and apply for jobs on the nation's largest entry-level job board, create your resume with a resume builder, build, update and forward your online career portfolios to potential employers, view career events, get employment advice and job search tips, and view videos and more at www.collegecentral.com/kvcc

Winter 2014 Commencement is December 15

Join us as we welcome Kalamazoo Valley's newest alumni during the commencement ceremony at 4 p.m. on December 15 in Miller Auditorium at Western Michigan University.

KALAMAZOO CAREERFAIR

Real Careers. Real People.
kalamazoo.careerfair.com

WEDNESDAY / MARCH 19, 2014
2-7 pm / Kalamazoo Valley Community College

HIGHLIGHTS



Over 70
Participating
Employers



Dynamic
Breakout
Sessions



Professional
Networking
Opportunities

LOCATION

FREE PARKING

Student Commons,
Texas Township Campus
Kalamazoo Valley
Community College

For more information visit: kalamazoo.careerfair.com

Find out the latest and start connecting [#KzooCareerFair](https://twitter.com/KzooCareerFair)

Sponsored by **KalamazooVALLEY**TM



KALAMAZOO LITERACY COUNCIL NEEDS ALUMNI VOLUNTEERS

A staggering 13% of Kalamazoo's adult population—31,000 adults—are functionally illiterate. Join the project, become a tutor and change someone's life, and yours, for the better.

Every time someone becomes a tutor for the KLC, Kalamazoo County gets closer to becoming 100 percent literate.

So, let's get started. Take a look at the Tutor Orientation schedule and find a time that's convenient for you. It's the first and most important step in your commitment to making Kalamazoo a better place, now and in the future.

Located at Kalamazoo Valley Community College.

For details go to kalamazooliteracy.org
or email alumni@kvcc.edu.

