

PRESIDENT'S REPORT TO THE COLLEGE COUNCIL
November 29, 2012

At the Faculty Senate meeting held on November 8, we observed a moment of silence for Professor Angela Sammarco's husband, Andrew Sammarco, whose life was tragically lost during Hurricane Sandy. I would ask that we also observe a moment of silence for other members of the CSI family who perished in the storm: CSI student John Filipowicz, Jr. and his father John, CSI alumna Marie Colborne, and former CSI student Artur Kasprzak.

Due to the dedicated efforts of our staff, the College was able to resume operations in a remarkably short period of time following the hurricane. However, the devastation it caused and the suffering it continues to inflict is still very much in our thoughts and prayers.

In my communication to the College community shortly after the storm, I commented that "the most trying and difficult circumstances bring out the very best in people."

Mary Beth Melendez, a graduate student in our Master's in Mental Health Counseling program, truly epitomizes our selfless resolve. She has become one of the many faces of CSI representing our institution's strong connection and tireless commitment to Staten Island.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, Mary Beth and a few of her friends rushed to the storm-ravaged areas of Staten Island to bring some food to a classmate. Upon seeing a desperate need for their assistance, they soon became a makeshift distribution center, working in tandem with the National Guard and the New York City Fire Department.

For those of you who are not aware, Mary Beth is blind.

She appeared on a broadcast with Anderson Cooper during CNN's coverage of Staten Island's devastation, in which she eloquently stated that "maybe the blessing is I can't see their broken homes, but I can see their broken hearts."

It is this humanity and compassion for our fellow students, staff, faculty, and for our community that defines the College of Staten Island family.

CSI quickly mobilized numerous comprehensive efforts on behalf of the disaster victims.

In addition to Mary Beth Melendez, other students such as Christian Spears, who started Staten Island Friends Together to help victims with cleanup and recovery, made exemplary contributions.

The Hurricane Sandy Emergency Relief Fund was immediately established, and through your generosity, a significant amount of financial assistance has already been distributed to faculty and staff suffering hardship.

Through the College's Petrie Student Emergency Grant Fund, we have provided financial assistance to over 100 students in need. The Petrie Foundation has pledged an additional \$50,000 to the College to further help students impacted by Hurricane Sandy.

The College immediately established a database of student, staff, and faculty volunteers. More than 100 volunteers have contributed over 1,000 hours of assistance to the Staten Island community.

The College assisted All Hands Volunteers, a non-profit organization that provides extensive clean-up and other assistance to disaster-affected communities across the globe, in finding a base of operations on Staten Island. Much of our volunteer efforts have been coordinated with this humanitarian organization.

CSI staff came together and initiated Sandy's Closet and Pantry, distributing much-needed food, clothing, and supplies to disaster victims, gathered from collection bins set up in buildings throughout the campus.

The College and the Staten Island Small Business Development Center facilitated the implementation of a dedicated location on campus for the United States Small Business Administration to quickly establish a Business Recovery Center to assist business owners needing disaster assistance for losses caused by the hurricane.

The College established a Ride Share Program for its faculty, staff, and students in response to the extreme fuel shortage and the extensive disruption of public transportation.

And there are countless other acts of charity, philanthropy, and humanity - some of them organized, some spontaneous - taking place as well. Bonnie and I have personally witnessed this incredible outpouring of human compassion through our volunteer work in the most severely damaged areas in Staten Island.

When I speak at various community events around the Borough, I always make it a point to mention that I view the College as a part of Staten Island, not apart from Staten Island. Through our collective efforts these past few weeks, the bond between College and community has never been stronger.

Thankfully, most of us have recovered from the hurricane. However, individuals from devastated areas will clearly be unable to attain any real sense of normalcy in their lives for some time. In the spirit of this holiday season, let us continue to bring out the best in each other and reach out to help those who may still be in need.

Thank you.

William J. Fritz, PhD
Interim President