

2023  
Sauk Valley  
Community  
College  
REPORT  
TO THE  
COMMUNITY





## Letter from the President

Dr. David Hellmich, President

### MISSION

Sauk Valley Community College is dedicated to teaching and scholarship while engaging the community in lifelong learning, public service, and economic development.

Sauk Valley Community College is proud to be your community college. SVCC's faculty and staff are dedicated to improving the lives of our students and enriching our communities.

Our strategic plan renews the college's commitment to make the Sauk Valley a great place to live, a great place to work and to raise a family, and a great place to retire. The Impact Program is a cornerstone of this strategic plan.

Sauk Valley Community College's Impact Program provides every young person in the Sauk Valley with the opportunity to earn their tuition at SVCC, and the Impact Program is the largest driver of economic development the Sauk Valley has ever known. When the Impact Program is fully implemented in two short years, high school students throughout the Sauk Valley will be volunteering thousands of hours of community service annually (learning about their communities and the importance of service; giving nonprofits the help they desperately need). High school graduates throughout the Sauk Valley will earn their tuition at SVCC so they can get their transfer and technical degrees while accruing little-to-no debt, landing a great job in the Sauk Valley, paying taxes in the Sauk Valley, buying homes and raising families in the Sauk Valley, and being the next generation of leaders in the Sauk Valley.

The Impact Program is a reality now! More than 800 high school students are enrolled, already volunteering thousands of hours, and the Sauk Valley College Foundation has raised more than half of its goal of \$10 million to endow the Impact Program forever.

The Impact Program is but a part of SVCC's commitment to making the Sauk Valley a collection of thriving, economically developed, exceptional communities. As you learn more about the last year in the pages of this Report to the Community, we hope you share our appreciation for the many efforts of our students, faculty, staff, and community partners who made this another incredible year.

We are always looking for additional opportunities to expand and improve our partnerships. Just give us a shout, and we will respond!

Sincerely,  
Dr. David Hellmich  
President



## Letter from the Chair

Bob Thompson



Dear Friends of Sauk Valley Community College,

Thank you for taking the time to review our annual report and to recognize the accomplishments of our students. We are proud to be your community college with course offerings that serve our entire community.

Sauk Valley Community College will continue its focus on our university-bound students who will earn associate degrees in Arts, Science, Engineering Science, and Fine Arts. At the same time, SVCC is offering earned tuition (yes, tuition at no cost) through our Impact Program that launched two years ago for incoming high school freshmen.

We will continue to meet the workforce needs of our district through corporate partnership and programming that serve our career-minded students. Encompassing all of this will be our visible outreach to our community to let you know that your community college is accessible and inclusive.

Truly, it must be a near certainty that every family in the Sauk Valley has been touched by our community college in a positive way. It is our honor to be here for you and your family. Whether you know someone thinking of advancing their life through a transfer degree or a career certificate - learning computer skills or simply how to operate their smartphone, we are here for you.

You are always welcome at Sauk Valley Community College!

Sincerely,  
Bob Thompson  
Chair, SVCC Board of Trustees

### Board of Trustees 2022-2023

Bob Thompson, Dixon, Chair  
Brian Duncan, Polo, Vice Chair  
Margaret Tyne, Polo, Secretary  
Lisa Wiersema, Chadwick  
Kate Boyle, Sterling  
Sam Ramirez, Sterling  
Danelle Burrs, Dixon  
Chloe Coil, Student Trustee



# A Year of New Opportunities

Sauk Valley Community College continues to evolve and adapt to community needs, and the 2022-23 school year was no exception. New partnerships allowed for expansion in opportunities both on campus and beyond.

## ON CAMPUS

### Agricultural Avenues

The SVCC Ag department planted acres of sunflowers and pumpkins across campus to diversify the program's curriculum and production experience for students. The hands-on learning that these fields provided enhanced student knowledge beyond traditional local crop production methods.

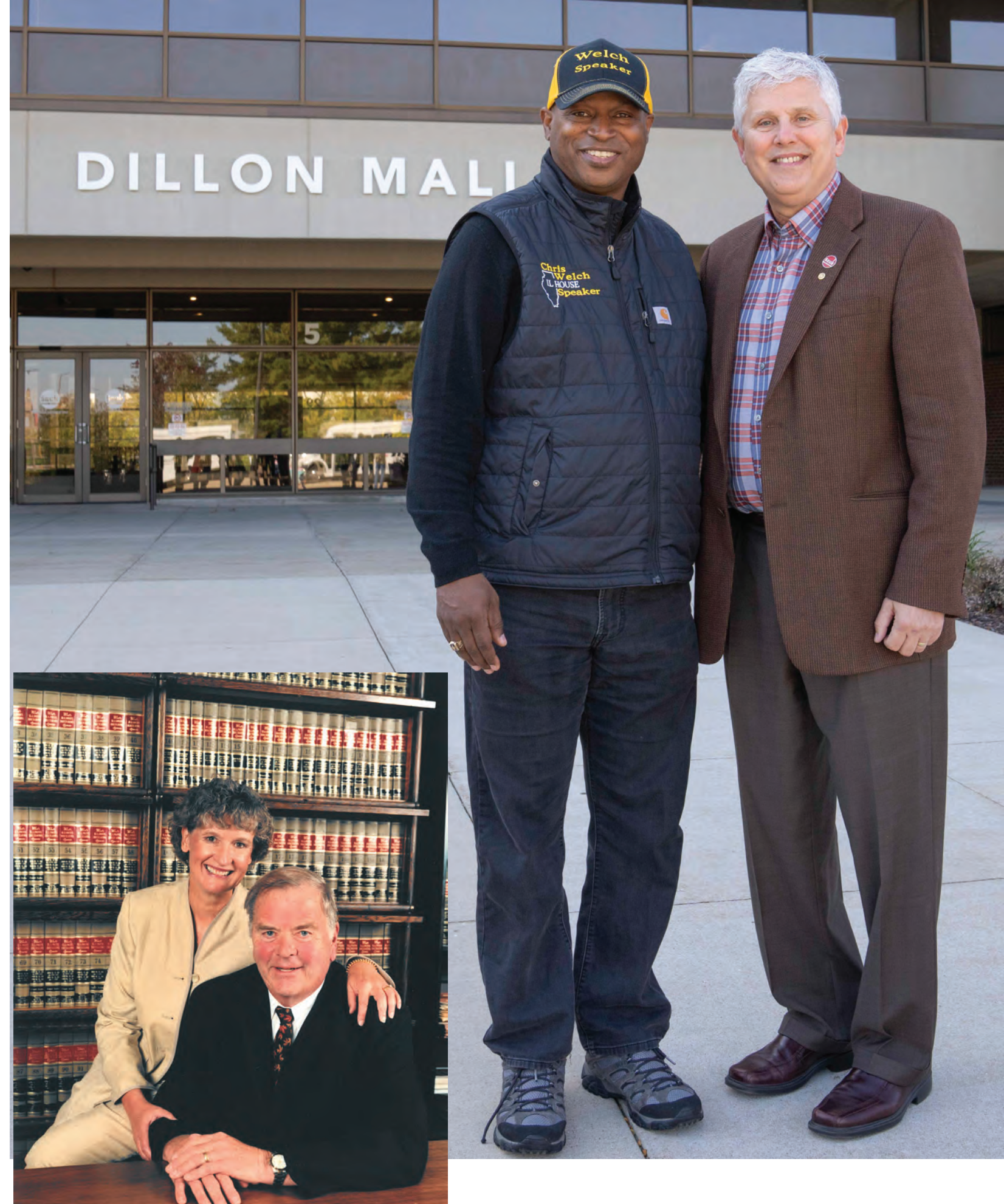
Sunflower and pumpkin crops were not only educational, but also enjoyed by Skyhawks and the community alike, including Chris Welch, Speaker of the Illinois House of Representatives. During Speaker Welch's visit to SVCC campus in October he toured campus and the fields, while watching drones and tractors in action, seeing first hand what our students experience in class.

### Law Library

In the fall of 2022, SVCC received a collection of Illinois law books dating back over 150 years. This collection was generously gifted by Henry S. Dixon and Linda A. Giesen in celebration of Henry's retirement from law practice.

Since 1866, the Dixon family has served the law and the Sauk Valley community. To honor the history of the law practice, Henry and Linda gifted the Dixon Family Law Library to SVCC. This extraordinary collection contains books from the 1860's to present day and provides a history of Illinois law for the past 156 years. The firm bears a long reputation of public service to our local area and spanned five generations of Dixons to practice law in their hometown.

A private gathering was held to honor the library and the generosity of Dixon and Giesen. The collection is stored on campus for public viewing.





### Student Care

Student support is top of mind at SVCC, and this goes beyond the classroom. Access to TimelyCare and the Calm app was added in late 2022 to expand existing counseling services offered to students.

TimelyCare is an all-in-one telehealth provider created for universities and colleges. The company focuses on the unique needs of students to customize a complete care solution, so campus is a place where they thrive. Services include emotional support (TalkNow), scheduled counseling, and psychiatry. All providers are verified as well as trained on TimelyMD practices and modules.

Calm is a multifaceted meditation, sleep, and relaxation app featuring a variety of offerings that encourage everything from mindfulness to movement. Calm features meditations, stories, music, soundscapes, and more to aid users in becoming more mindful and relaxed.

Both services are free of charge to SVCC students. Through these services, the college aims to support students in reaching their academic, career and personal goals.

### AND BEYOND

The expansion of partnerships with neighboring universities will allow our students new resources and outlooks for continuing education.

SVCC entered into a partnership with Western Illinois University (WIU) in September. This agreement initiates a degree plan that allows students to pursue a Bachelor of Science (B.S.) degree in Elementary Education at WIU, upon completion of the Associate of Arts (A.A.) degree at SVCC.

In March, the college entered into the Augustana Next program. This agreement allows students enrolling at SVCC, with the intention of completing an associate of arts program, to apply to Augustana University, located in Rock Island, at the same time. These students are dual enrolled at SVCC and Augustana, having access to academic resources on both campuses.



April brought along the signing of the Saluki Step Ahead program, which enables students who graduate with an associate degree from SVCC to complete their Southern Illinois University bachelor's degrees online in a number of areas of study, allowing students to earn their bachelor's right here in the Sauk Valley.





## POLICE ACADEMY

As part of the college’s mission, SVCC aims to provide access to education. As such, SVCC saw a need for a more convenient training location for local law enforcement agencies and felt the college could respond to the industry’s need by starting the SVCC Police Academy.

The first Basic Law Enforcement class graduated from the program on April 14, 2023. Recruits and their guests gathered at Centennial Auditorium to mark the completion of the first class of Basic Law Enforcement at SVCC. The class consisted of 21 recruits from across Illinois who started in January 2023. Each recruit was first hired by a department before enrolling in the SVCC Police Academy to complete the Basic Law Enforcement course.

Additionally, SVCC provides degrees in Criminal Justice, as well as state-of-the-art police simulation training.



“What an amazing group of individuals! We could not have asked for a better group to represent our first academy class. With their dedication to community, respect and professionalism, they will certainly leave here and accomplish great things,” said Police Academy Director, Jason LaMendola.

## Growing the 815

The Illinois Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at SVCC saw incredible successes over the past year. The team at the SBDC advised over 200 new clients for a total of 1,126 advising hours. Within that time frame, they helped start 19 new businesses, created 36 new jobs, retained 22 existing jobs, and generated \$1.38M in economic impact in the Sauk Valley.

Two success stories particularly stick out: **Luchadores Mexican Grill** and **Autism Center of Sauk Valley**.

Luchadores Mexican Grill was started by Luis and Francesca Casas, and their desire to bring traditional Mexican food to Harmon, Illinois. They began as a pop-up food stand which turned into a food trailer at various local events, before opening their restaurant in May 2023. The Mexican Wrestling themed restaurant invited food truck friends to their grand opening, because they believe in supporting other small businesses and helping the community thrive. The SBDC was present from the beginning providing resources, market research, and finance options for the Casas. “[The SBDC] is a true friend to family-based start-ups and small business entrepreneurs,” said the Casas.

Additionally in May 2023 the Autism Center of Sauk Valley opened its doors in Dixon, Illinois. Owner, Sarah Lewis, is a Board Certified Behavior Analyst who works with individuals diagnosed with autism, intellectual disabilities, fragile X, down syndrome, ADHD, OCD, anxiety, and depression. The Autism Center of Sauk Valley was approved by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Illinois, allowing the center’s patients access to therapy under insurance coverage. The SBDC was able to help Lewis with an action plan including compliances, regulations, tax accounts, and hiring and training processes for new employees. The Autism Center of Sauk Valley provides much needed local access to services without having to travel outside of the Sauk Valley area.

The no-cost advising and consulting services of the SBDC are offered in a variety of modalities to allow for flexibility for their clients. Whether you need assistance applying for a business loan or are interested in starting a new business, growing an existing one, or even reviewing an existing plan to help streamline expenses or find new revenue streams, the SBDC team is ready to assist you!



# Celebrating our Skyhawks

In May 2023, families and friends gathered in the SVCC gymnasium and proudly cheered on SVCC’s amazing students and the accomplishments they worked so hard to achieve.

During commencement, words of wisdom were shared from administration, alumni, and soon-to-be alumni — 2023 Student Commencement Speakers, **Blerina Mimini** and **Olivia Costner**.

Mimini, who transferred to Northern Illinois University, shared, “As a child of a first-generation Albanian immigrant family in this great country, I have come to love the freedoms and opportunities that are given to us, which is something that we should embrace and appreciate.” She summarized her time at SVCC with, “everyone welcomed me with open arms....The experiences and lessons I have learned here are ones I will carry with me for the rest of my life.”

“I am here today with all of you, earning my associate degree, before earning my high school diploma,” started Costner before explaining her journey through The Academy. Costner, who received her associate degree and high school diploma in May 2023, transferred to Western Illinois University to pursue accounting. “Coming to Sauk Valley Community College has been the best decision I have ever made. I have grown as a student, as a friend, and as a person.”

Commencement is always a special time of the year to celebrate, not only the current graduating class, but also our returning alumni. This year, the Sauk Valley Community College Alumni Association recognized two outstanding alumni.

**Diana Merdian** was chosen as the Alumni Achievement Award recipient. She graduated from SVCC in 2007 with a liberal arts degree. Diana works tirelessly to get community engagement and build referral systems within our communities to grow many programs. Diana, along with leadership from the Regional Office of Education, created a family support program (Nexus) to offer support to families navigating community systems and reducing chronic stress in the home in the three-county area. The program aims to eliminate barriers to families. She is a first-generation college student, a former TRIO student, and a student with a disability. She has dedicated her life to serving the community that has given her so much.

The Distinguished Alumni award was bestowed to **Roberto Carmona**. Roberto graduated from SVCC in 1985 with an associate in arts. Roberto credits SVCC for providing the tools, educational environment, and academic support needed to succeed academically and professionally.

As President of Carmona Strategic Solutions (CSS), Roberto has helped a variety of businesses and organizations develop strategic priorities.

His company currently serves as a consultant for the State of Illinois’ Capital Development Board (CDB) where they developed an outreach program to increase the number of minority, women, and veteran owned enterprises and tradespersons participating in the CDB. Roberto is a nationally recognized thought leader and requested speaker in leadership development, and strategy.

Additionally, one other notable alumni celebration stood out this year. **Eli Murray**, 2013 alumnus, visited campus to discuss his award winning work in journalism. Eli is the recipient of a 2022 Pulitzer Prize in Investigative Journalism for his work at the Tampa Bay Times. He collaborated on a piece entitled “Poisoned”, which tells the captivating story of highly toxic hazards inside Florida’s only battery recycling plant. The exposé shed light on the harmful working conditions and forced the implementation of safety measures to adequately protect workers and nearby residents. Eli has since joined the New York Times to continue his profession in journalism.



# A Lasting Impact

The SVCC Impact Program continues to grow, exceeding milestones and goals that were previously only hopes and aspirations. The Sauk Valley College Foundation Board of Directors and external community leaders developed an earned-tuition program that will open doors of access to higher education for thousands of prospective students. The program was based on national promise program models but made unique to the Sauk Valley with specific regional needs in mind.

The initial year of the program served as a pilot program for students in Prophetstown and Fulton, thanks to a generous anonymous donor. The program saw a 67% completion rate within the first year and prepared to open sign-up to the entire college district in Spring 2022.

September 1, 2022 marked the end of the first sign up period for the entirety of the college's district.

- 764 students signed up
- Over 170 non-profit organizations participated in offering volunteer opportunities to Impact students during the 2022-2023 Impact year
- Impact students volunteered 13,663 hours from June 1, 2022 - May 31, 2023



**KEEP UP-TO-DATE**  
with the SVCC Impact Program!  
Follow [@svccimpact](https://twitter.com/svccimpact) on social media or visit [svcc.edu/impact](https://svcc.edu/impact).





# Sauk Valley



173 IL Route 2 • Dixon, IL 61021  
svcc.edu

*Sauk Valley Community College is dedicated to teaching and scholarship  
while engaging the community in lifelong learning, public service,  
and economic development.*