

# MCRPA DIGEST

September 2025

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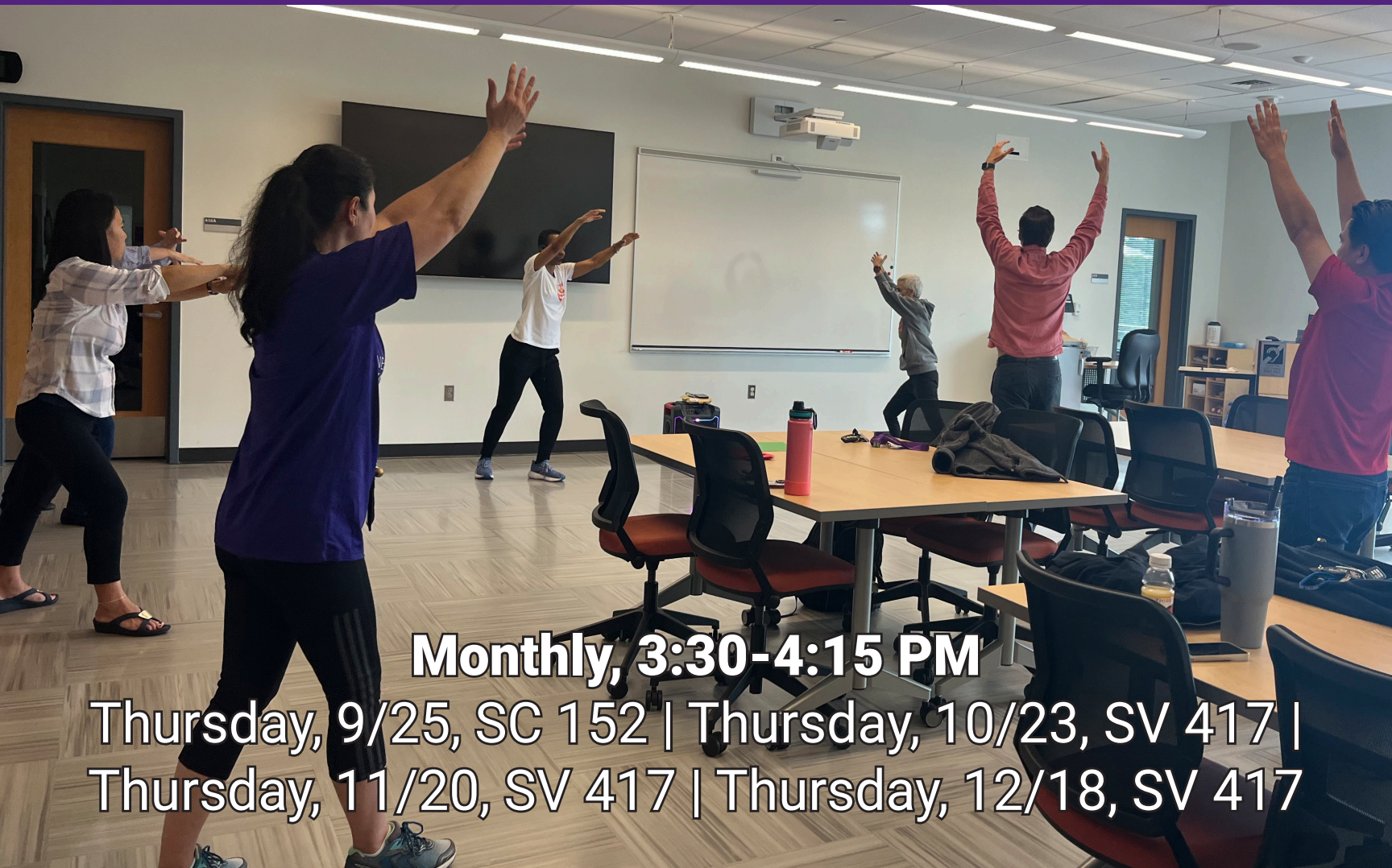
Celebrating Our  
10th Annual MCRPA Retreat

Artwork designed by Paul Miller  
*AI enhanced*

COMMUNITY



# MC Wellness, AANHPI Heritage Planning Committee, & MCRPA Present: TaijiFit



Monthly, 3:30-4:15 PM

Thursday, 9/25, SC 152 | Thursday, 10/23, SV 417 |  
Thursday, 11/20, SV 417 | Thursday, 12/18, SV 417

TaijiFit is a mind/body “exercise” that combines the best of traditional Taiji (Tai Chi) and QiGong movements, combined with modern music and easy instruction. It’s a workout appropriate for any age or fitness level that has you experiencing the FLOW (Tai Chi done smoothly, continuously and effortlessly connecting Body, Mind and Spirit) whether it’s your first class or 100th. There are no routines to learn, or set choreography to remember. You’ll discover how to use TaijiFit for better balance, pain reduction and heart health. It’s more than just an exercise. It is also a moving meditation, a shield against disease, and a beautiful sensual dance that can make you sweat and smile at the same time.

\*\*\*Employees **MUST** [register for MC Wellness](#) to attend wellness classes.\*\*\*

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# Fall 2025 Events

- Professional Development Workshop, September 18, Germantown Campus, BE 151/152, 10:00 AM-12:00 PM
- Social Happy Hour, Uncle Julio's Rio, September 25, 5:00-7:00 PM
- Maryland Renaissance Festival, September 27, 2:00 PM meeting time, Festival opens 10:00 AM-7:00 PM
- Leadership Unscripted, October 8, 12:00-1:00 PM, Virtual
- Summers Farm Firepit, October 25, 5:30 PM, Fireworks at 7:30 PM
- Friendsgiving Potluck and Trivia, November 13, 12:00-2:00 PM, Rockville Campus, MK 122

Be on the lookout for e-mail with event announcement. Don't forget to join our Facebook Group and check the Teams Site to get the latest information.



# President's Corner: What a Year We've Built Together

As we begin the fall semester, I'm filled with gratitude, and I'll admit, a bit of awe. FY25 was one of vision, resilience, and joyful connection. And nothing exemplifies that better than our 10th Annual MCRPA Retreat.

Held on May 29th, this milestone gathering was a day that was a full-hearted celebration of who we are and what we stand for. With the theme "Celebrating Connections through Music, Movement, Food, and Travel," we came together to reflect, recharge, and recognize the impact we're making at Montgomery College and beyond. From the moment La'Keisha Ciprian took the stage as our keynote speaker, reminding us that "joy can be both resistance and renewal," we knew we were in for something special. The day was packed with inspiring sessions, five external speakers generously offered their time and talent, and ten of our own MCRPA members (some of whom co-presented) shared insights, practices, and passions with their peers. Every session was a gift. And it wasn't just fun, it was impactful. With a 42% response rate on the evaluation, we heard from a strong sample of voices and perspectives. The results were overwhelmingly positive.

- 100% of respondents said the retreat was a meaningful use of their time.
- 96% said they felt a sense of belonging during the retreat.
- 100% said the sessions they attended were engaging and relevant.
- Every single respondent said they would recommend the retreat to a colleague.

The written comments went even deeper:

*"This retreat gave me back my sense of belonging."*  
*"One of the best professional development experiences I've ever had."*  
*"The retreat was full of warmth, great ideas, and connection."*  
*"This is what every department should model."*  
*"Thank you for creating this space, it reminded me why I stay."*

And that last quote struck a chord.

Throughout the year, many members have quietly,



and sometimes not so quietly, expressed that while they welcome innovation and believe in progress, the way some changes have unfolded has been difficult to reconcile. It's not the change itself that's demoralizing, it's the lack of communication, the absence of transparency, and the feeling that decisions are being made without input, accountability, or alignment with our shared values. Too often, people feel left in the dark or left behind.

But MCRPA continues to be a space where the College's values live in real time. Where equity, inclusion, integrity, and respect aren't just concepts in a document, but behaviors that are modeled, shared, and experienced. Over and over again, members have said they stay at MC because of this community. Because in MCRPA, they find belonging. They find each other. And they find purpose. This is where people uplift one another, collaborate generously, and lead from wherever they stand.

This retreat, and this entire year, reminded us that we are not alone. We may not control institutional decisions, but we do hold power: the power to connect, the power to support one another, and the power to lead with integrity. MCRPA is proof of what's possible when community comes first.

Thank you for being part of this community. Whether you planned an event, presented a session, joined us for a social hour, or simply stayed engaged by reading this message, you made a difference. We're already looking ahead, and we want your voice to help shape what's next. Join a committee, share your ideas, and continue showing up. Because it matters. You matter.

With deep gratitude and continued hope,  
Christine Crefton  
MCRPA President



# Say Hello to Your FY26 MCRPA Leadership Team



As we begin a new fiscal year, we're proud to introduce the FY26 MCRPA Leadership Team, a dynamic group of colleagues committed to professional growth, community building, and creating space for all employees at Montgomery College.

This year marks Christine Crefton's final year as President, and she's leading with a focus on rebuilding and preparing for a sustainable future. If you're interested in serving as MCRPA President next year, please reach out, we're happy to answer questions and support your journey into leadership.

Dr. Crefton is joined by Dr. Paul Miller as Vice President, and our dedicated Secretaries, Ramon

Valenzuela and Carla Ammerman, who provide invaluable support to MCRPA operations.

We also welcome a mix of experienced and new committee leaders who bring fresh energy and deep commitment to their roles:

- Kimberly Bloch-Rincan serves as Chair of the Professional Development Committee, with Daniel Umana stepping in as Vice Chair. Daniel, a proud Montgomery College alum and first-generation college graduate, is the Digital Learning Center Manager at the Rockville Campus. With a background as a K-12 teacher and Dean of Students, he now leads digital literacy

and AI initiatives that empower students to use technology for academic and career success.

- Nichole Land and Maria Martinez are Co-Chairs of the Community Engagement & Events Committee, joined by Adria Nichols as Vice Chair. Adria is a Graduation Technician and a Master's candidate in Marriage and Family Therapy, specializing in childhood trauma. With expertise in psychology, secondary education, and life balance coaching, she brings a strong passion for mental health, self-care, and student support.
- John Amoroso continues to lead the Membership, Marketing & Communications Committee as Chair, with Nghi Nguyen as Vice Chair. Their leadership ensures MCRPA's communications, outreach, and member experience remain strong and engaging.

### Why Join an MCRPA Committee?

MCRPA was founded more than 14 years ago by employees, for employees. Today, that legacy continues through our volunteer-driven committees, which help bring our mission to life. Whether you're looking to grow professionally, meet new colleagues, or make an impact across the College, there's a place for you.

### Here's what our committees do:

- Professional Development Committee: Creates meaningful learning and growth opportunities to help MC employees strengthen leadership skills, expand their knowledge, and build successful careers.
- Community Engagement & Events Committee: Organizes social events and community service opportunities that help members connect with one another and make a difference beyond campus.
- Membership, Marketing & Communications Committee: Manages our digital presence, social media, and member communications ensuring MCRPA stays visible, welcoming, and accessible.

Each committee welcomes new members and fresh ideas. Committee meetings are open to all MCRPA members, so come visit and see what we're all about. For dates and details, reach out to the committee chair or contact [mcrpa@montgomerycollege.edu](mailto:mcrpa@montgomerycollege.edu).

Together, we're shaping the future of MCRPA. Come be part of it!





# A Decade+ of Connection: The 10th Annual MCRPA Retreat



On May 29, 2025, Montgomery College employees gathered for a powerful day of reflection, restoration, and realignment at the 10th Annual MCRPA Retreat, a signature event that marked not just a milestone in MCRPA's history, but a defining moment of connection in a year filled with change.

Held at the Mannakee building on the Rockville campus, the retreat embodied its theme, "Celebrating Connections through Music, Movement, Food, and Travel," with every session intentionally curated to honor the full humanity of our community. Attendees were greeted with vibrant music, breakfast bites, and a program that guided them through a day of inspiring, engaging experiences.

But this wasn't just a retreat. It was a declaration.

A declaration that joy, belonging, and purpose still have a home at Montgomery College, even in times of tension and transition.

## A Keynote Rooted in Resilience

The day opened with an unforgettable keynote from La'Keisha Ciprian, whose message, "Joy as Resistance and Renewal," reminded us that reclaiming joy is not frivolous, it's essential. La'Keisha shared

personal stories of navigating burnout, loss, and transformation, offering tools for grounding ourselves in clarity and community. With warmth, vulnerability, and practical strategies, she challenged participants to define joy for themselves and to protect it fiercely.

Her words lingered long after the applause ended: "You deserve to feel joy, not just on weekends, not just on vacation. You deserve it in the middle of the work week, in the middle of a transition, in the middle of a meeting."

## Powerful Sessions from Within and Beyond

The MCRPA 10th Annual Retreat offered a thoughtful progression of 12 unique sessions that reflected the organization's commitment to holistic professional development. Participants were encouraged to explore new ideas, reflect on personal growth, and reconnect with each other through three themed tracks: Purposeful Pathways, Creative Corners, and Experience & Energize.

**Purposeful Pathways:** Focused on reflection, leadership, career development, and personal growth.

**Creative Corners:** Hands-on workshops that en-



couraged creativity, expression, and play. **Experience & Energize:** Embodied experiences with music, movement, and interactive learning.

These tracks supported sessions focused on leadership and self-reflection, hands-on creative exploration, and active movement or demonstration, respectively. The retreat featured ten Montgomery College presenters, members and colleagues from across campuses and departments, alongside five dynamic external speakers, each offering sessions that blended personal insight with professional growth.

The retreat opened with three distinct sessions designed to nourish both body and mind. A live culinary demonstration by Alana Sugar offered practical tips for preparing quick, energizing meals. Simultaneously, Jennifer Baugh led a reflective ses-



sion on identifying the personal and professional "ingredients" that promote well-being, while Paul Miller's session focused on strategies to boost mental clarity and performance through healthy habits and mindfulness.

The second round of sessions continued this blend of internal and external exploration. Kelly Groff of Visit Montgomery encouraged participants to rediscover the richness of their local community through hidden gems across the county. In parallel, LaTonya Pinkard facilitated a journaling session centered on self-discovery, and Angela Lanier guided participants in designing quilt squares to reflect pivotal life moments, creating a meaningful visual narrative.

The third session block featured deeply creative and musical expressions. In the Ignite Hub, Carla Ammerman and Erik Swanson led a session where attendees designed album covers inspired by the music that shaped their lives. Vincent Briley and Elizabeth Schlackman brought participants together in a choral experience, promoting healing and unity through group singing. Katina Stapleton, an external speaker and educator, offered a reflective look at music across generations, inviting attendees to share and analyze the songs that influenced their identities.

The final session block focused on play, movement, and forward momentum. Christine Crefton, Lisa Dobbins, and Nghi Nguyen created a joyful, screen-



free zone that encouraged participants to reset through doodling, origami, and nostalgic games. Gizelle Merced followed with a calming Tai Ji session, offering breathwork and stress relief for all experience levels. Meanwhile, Jackie Williams closed the day with a session on how to overcome personal and professional obstacles, helping attendees chart purposeful paths forward.

This structure reflected MCRPA's intentionality in planning a retreat that goes beyond lectures or icebreakers. It created space for varied ways of learning and leading, and it honored the whole professional, their passions, strengths, and aspirations. While the retreat was undeniably fun, it was never frivolous. Each session was carefully aligned with MCRPA's commitment to holistic professional development, belonging, and well-being. It honored the idea that growth doesn't only happen behind a desk, it happens when we move, share, create, and connect.

**Real Feedback, Real Impact**

We don't just guess how impactful the retreat was, we asked. And attendees answered. Nearly half completed the post-retreat evaluation, and their feedback shows that MCRPA's mission is resonating deeply. Every single respondent said the retreat was a meaningful use of their time, and all would recommend it to a colleague. An overwhelming majority also reported feeling a sense of connection and belonging. While the sessions themselves were praised for being engaging and relevant, it was the emotional impact that stood out most. One attend-

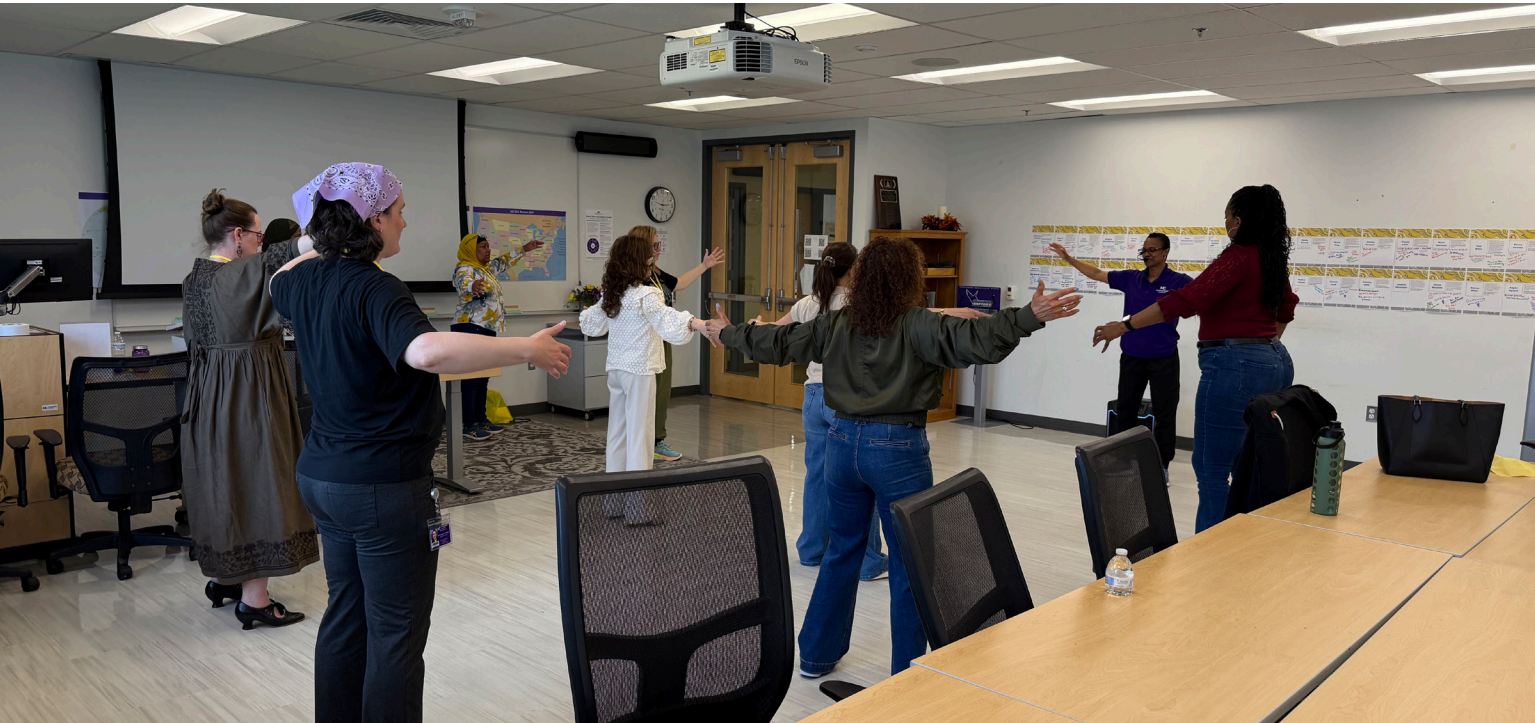


ee wrote, "This retreat gave me back my sense of belonging." Another shared, "It felt healing, honest, and filled with love." Others emphasized how rare this kind of professional development feels: "One of the best professional development experiences I've ever had," and "This space reminded me why I stay." When a learning experience doesn't just inform but affirms, it matters.

Participants left not only with artifacts of a day well spent but also with new ideas, stronger networks, and a renewed sense of purpose. MCRPA's 10th Annual Retreat was a celebration of how we grow when we make space for each other and ourselves.

**Looking Ahead**

As we celebrated ten years of retreats, we're also planting seeds for the next ten. If you've ever wondered whether you belong here, the answer is yes. You do.



The retreat proved what many already knew: MCRPA is more than a professional association, it's a movement. One rooted in empathy, inclusion, growth, and joy. If you're ready to be part of that movement, there's a place for you. Join a committee. Present a session. Share your ideas. Or simply come as you are.

Whether you joined us in person, participated virtually, worked behind the scenes, or cheered us on from afar, thank you. Your presence made a difference. And if you missed it, we hope you'll join us next time. Until then, here are a few ways to stay connected:

**A Playlist that Moves Us**

In line with the theme, music flowed throughout the day, from energizing arrivals to curated playlists that reflected participants' journeys. Want to keep the vibe going? Check out our shared [MCRPA Playlist](#).

**A Gallery That Reflects Us**

Throughout the retreat, moments of joy, reflection, and connection were captured, each image a snapshot of the energy we shared. Want to revisit the experience? Browse our shared [MCRPA photo gallery](#).

**A Retreat That Reaches Further**

Couldn't attend in person or want to revisit a favorite session? Four of our virtual offerings are available for the next month, accessible anytime, from anywhere:

- [Nourishing Your Mind for Peak Performance](#) presented by Dr. Paul Miller
- [Visit Montgomery Maryland's Cultural Capital](#) presented by Kelly Groff
- [Soundtrack of Time: Music Across Generations](#) presented by Dr. Katina Rae Stapleton
- [Tapping the Power Within: Getting Out of the Stuck Zone](#) presented by Jacquelyn Williams

**With Gratitude**

This milestone retreat was made possible by the leadership of the Professional Development Committee, led by Kimberly Bloch-Rincan and Anna Donohoe, and by the extraordinary efforts of our planning committee: John Amoroso, Jennifer Baugh, Peter Chamberlain, Dr. Christine Crefton, Megan Cooperman, Anna Donohoe, Tracey Little, Nghi Nguyen, Dr. Tykesha Reed, Elizabeth Schlackman, and Jacquelyn Williams. Special thanks to MC Wellness for providing breakfast and external speakers and HRSTM for providing a nourishing lunch and for supporting the retreat from start to finish.

Their dedication, and the generosity of our presenters and participants, helped create something truly special: a day of connection, creativity, and community. It reminded us that professional development can be transformational when it is human-centered, intentional, and rooted in care.



# Trivia Night at Kabuto: Celebrating Connection After the Retreat



After a full day of learning, reflection, and connection, MCRPA members came together to keep the celebration going at Kabuto for Happy Hour & Trivia Night. Hosted by Dr. Paul Miller, the early evening blended laughter, teamwork, and a little friendly competition, making it the perfect capstone to our retreat.

Sixteen members joined us directly after the retreat, proving that connection doesn't end when the sessions do. Attendees enjoyed half-priced sushi, refreshing beverages, and the chance to team up in groups of 4–6 to test their knowledge with trivia questions inspired by our retreat theme: *Celebrating Connection Through Music, Movement, Food, and Travel*.

From music buffs to foodies to world travelers, everyone had a chance to shine. The winning team earned complimentary happy hour treats courtesy of our event hosts, along with well-deserved bragging rights. Even those who didn't walk away with



prizes left with smiles, stories, and plenty of good memories.

It was an event filled with camaraderie, creativity, and just the right amount of competition, a reminder that MCRPA is not just about professional development, but about building friendships and celebrating community together.

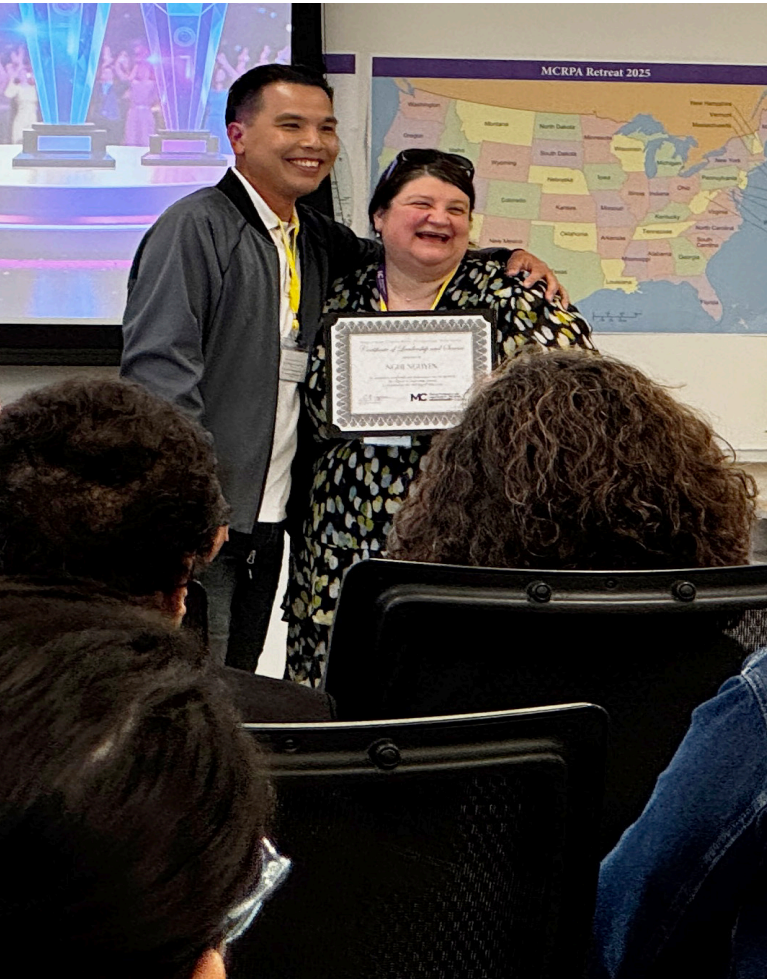
# Honoring Excellence: 2025 MCRPA Retreat Awards



One of the most meaningful moments of the 10th Annual MCRPA Retreat was pausing to recognize the colleagues whose leadership, service, and spirit have left an indelible mark on our community. This year's awardees embody the best of what MCRPA stands for, dedication, creativity, resilience, and heart.

**Professional Development Recognition**  
*Presented to Anna Donohoe, Vice Chair of the Professional Development Committee*  
For two years, Anna's calm leadership, consistency, and quiet strength have guided the Professional Development Committee with care, helping to shape the professional growth of our members in meaningful and lasting ways.

**The Cornerstone Leadership Award**  
*Presented to Dr. Paul Miller, Vice President*  
Paul was recognized as the steady foundation of MCRPA this year, a behind-the-scenes leader whose wisdom, humility, and consistent support ensured challenges were met with solutions and strength—his impact may not always be visible, but it is everywhere.







Today, we honor the exceptional individuals who exemplify leadership and service within our organization. Their dedication strengthens our community and inspires us all.



**The Legacy of Leadership Award**  
Presented to Nghi Nguyen, Vice Chair of Membership and Marketing  
Nghi's enduring service has been part of MCRPA's very DNA since its beginning; through his creativity, time, and heart, he has built a lasting legacy of connection and community that continues to inspire us all.

**The Rising Star Award**  
Presented to Nichole Land, Vice Chair and now Co-Chair of Community Engagement & Events  
Nichole's growth into leadership has been marked by her willingness to step up with energy and responsibility, embodying the rising spirit and future engagement that will carry MCRPA forward.

Together, these awardees remind us that leadership comes in many forms, whether it's a steady hand, a quiet guide, a lasting legacy, or a rising new voice. Congratulations to Paul, Anna, Nghi, and Nichole for their well-deserved honors!

## Celebrating Excellence and Recognition Across MCRPA



Recognition is one of the most powerful ways we build community at Montgomery College. This spring, our members were celebrated in multiple spaces, receiving prestigious College awards, national honors, and even digital badges that highlight workforce-ready skills. Together, these recognitions reflect the heart of MCRPA: service, growth, and the shared pursuit of excellence.

- College-Wide Awards**  
At the Bold Transformation: A Celebration of Excellence on May 21, several MCRPA members received the Outstanding Staff and Faculty Awards:
- John Amoroso (Performance)
  - Anna Donohoe (Performance)
  - Colleen King (Teaching or Counseling/Advising, PT Faculty)
  - Nichole Land (Performance)
  - Elizabeth Schlackman (Innovation)

This award honors employees who demonstrate outstanding service and sustained contributions to their departments, campuses, the College, and the community.

- Other MCRPA members were also honored:
- Dr. Paul Miller and Dr. Elysse Meredith received NISOD Excellence Awards.
  - Anna Donohoe and Dr. Christine Crefton were recognized with the 2025 Excellence in Equity

Award, highlighting their leadership in advancing equity and inclusion.

**Microcredential Recognition**  
Also on May 21, Montgomery College hosted its Microcredential Recognition Event for Employees, where many MCRPA members were celebrated for earning digital badges across a variety of pathways. These included the Antiracist Badge, the Innovation Badge, the Leadership Badge (through LDI), and the OER Advocate, OER Learning Architect, and OER Creator badges.

Collectively, these achievements demonstrate a deep commitment to lifelong learning. Notably, Dr. Paul Miller became the first employee to complete the full Open Educational Resources Excellence Microcredential by earning all three OER-related badges in the pathway.

### What are Microcredentials?

They are portable, skill-based digital badges that validate specific competencies tied to workforce and academic pathways. They are free to employees and students, designed using Universal Design for Learning principles, and can be shared on resumes, email signatures, or professional networks like LinkedIn. From communication and leadership to innovation and OER expertise, these badges



demonstrate skills that matter both inside and outside the College. Learn more here: [Microcredentials at MC](#).

**Recognition at Every Level**

Beyond these major awards, recognition is happening throughout the year. In FY25 alone, 20 MCRPA members received Quarterly Recognition Awards in Q4, with many others honored in earlier quarters. These awards celebrate exceptional service, teamwork, and dedication, and each recipient receives a certificate and a one-time award of \$400.

The first nomination deadline for FY26 is October 1, 2025. Any employee may nominate a colleague, making this one of the most accessible and meaningful ways to uplift peers. Details on how to nominate are available here: [Staff Awards and Recognition](#).

**Why It Matters**

Recognition is more than applause, it is the act of noticing, naming, and celebrating the contributions that sustain our College community. Whether through formal awards, digital credentials, or quar-

terly recognitions, these moments remind us that our work has impact.

As we move into a new academic year, let’s continue to lift each other up. Nominate a colleague, celebrate a badge earned, or simply thank someone for their contributions. Together, we create a culture where excellence is not only achieved but honored.



# 5 Weeks of Fun: Wrapping Up the Year Together



This spring, MCRPA invited members to close out the academic year with 5 Weeks of Fun, an annual series of weekly events designed to keep us connected, inspired, and energized leading up to our Annual Retreat. Each week offered a unique way to learn, recharge, or simply enjoy being together, reminding us of the many ways community and growth can take shape.

**Week 1: National Poetry Month Celebration (April 29)** - A warm, creative Zoom gathering where poems, reflections, and games brought out the poet in all of us.

**Week 2: Asian Culture Crafts – Origami (May 7)** - In celebration of AANHPI Heritage Month, members gathered to fold paper flowers, relax, and learn the art of origami.

**Week 3: Sparking Joy at Work (May 13)** - As part of Professional Development, this session helped colleagues rediscover real, everyday joy at work, even in the midst of burnout.

**Week 4: End of Year Social Hour (May 21)** - An off-campus event at Yard House in Rio Washingtonian, filled with laughter, conversation, and connection.



**Week 5: 10th Annual Retreat (May 29)** - The capstone event brought together 58 employees for a milestone celebration of music, movement, food, and travel, and reminded us what MCRPA is all about.

Together, these five weeks reflected the heart of MCRPA, mixing learning, culture, wellness, and community to finish the year strong.



# Coming This Fall: Leadership, Connection, and Community

As the crisp fall air arrives, MCRPA is gearing up for a new season of learning, laughter, and connection. From hands-on leadership labs to cozy community gatherings, our fall lineup has something for everyone, and a few surprises along the way.

## Leadership Tools Lab: Engage, Reflect, Apply – Take Action for FY26

Got a workplace challenge? Let's solve it—together. Join us on Thursday, September 18, 2025 (10:00 am-12:00 pm, Germantown Campus BE 151/152) for an interactive workshop led by Richard Forrest (Center for Teaching & Learning) and Daniel Umana (Digital Learning Center). This lab introduces practical strategies from CTL's Leadership Development Institute and MC Management programs, no prior training required. Just bring a real challenge you're facing, and leave with fresh insights, new tools, and connections with colleagues.

## Explore & Connect: Maryland Renaissance Festival Outing

On Saturday, September 27, 2025, MCRPA members will gather for a cultural adventure at the Maryland Renaissance Festival. Meet up at 2 pm or connect via text with coordinator Elysse Meredith. Costumes optional, fun guaranteed, secure your tickets early before they sell out! <https://rennfest.com/tickets/>

## Leadership Unscripted with Susan Madden

On Wednesday, October 8, 2025 (11:00 am-Noon, virtual), join us for an unscripted conversation with Susan Madden. This one-hour session offers candid insights on leadership, resilience, and navigating the complexities of professional life. Come with questions, curiosity, and an open mind.

## Fall Social at Summers Farm

On Friday, October 24, 2025, we'll head to Summers Farm in Frederick, MD for a fall night under the stars. Come for the whole day and enjoy the firepit at 5:30, stay for fireworks at 7:30, and savor autumn snacks in good company. RSVP early and plan to bundle up! More information on purchasing your



tickets to the farm can be found on the [Summer Farm website](#).

## Friendsgiving Potluck

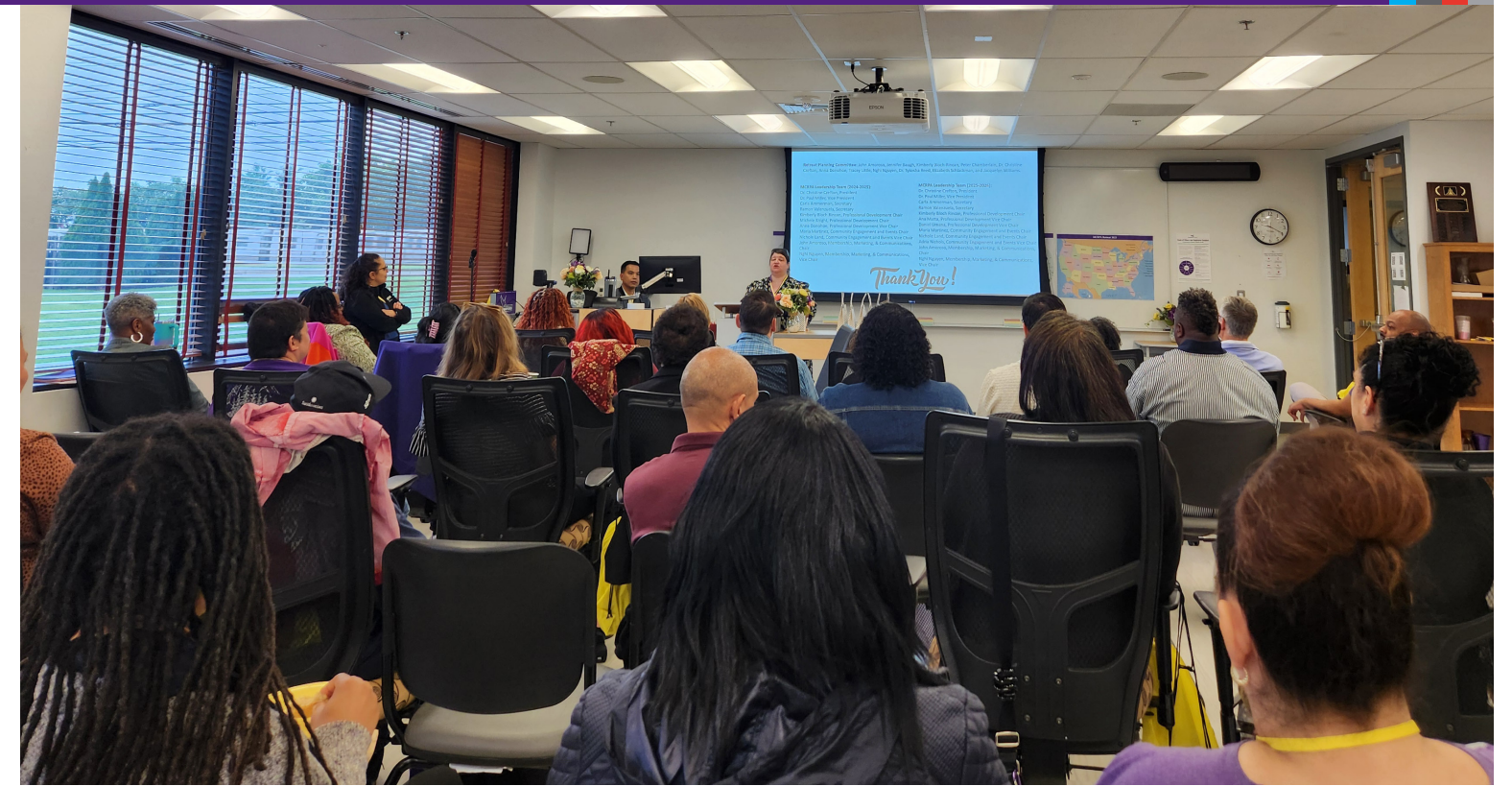
On Thursday, November 13, 2025 (12–2 pm, MK 122), MCRPA will host a Friendsgiving celebration. This potluck is a chance to share food, gratitude, and laughter with colleagues before the holiday season kicks in. Organized by Maria Martinez, Nichole Land, and the Community Engagement and Events team, it's sure to be a warm and delicious way to close out the semester.

## Plus... Wellness on the Horizon

A monthly Tai Ji pop-up event is in the works, offering a chance to pause, breathe, and recharge. Stay tuned for details as this new wellness tradition takes shape.

Whether you're looking to grow your leadership toolkit, celebrate community, or simply enjoy the season with colleagues, fall with MCRPA promises connection and renewal. Mark your calendars, you won't want to miss out.

# Listening to Our Members: 2025 Annual Membership Survey Results



Each year, the MCRPA survey helps us better understand what matters most to our members and how we can strengthen our community. The 2025 results paint a powerful picture of connection, growth, and opportunity with a 30% response rate.

## Why Members Join and Stay

Members cited networking, professional development, and a sense of belonging as the top reasons for being part of MCRPA. Many described MCRPA as a rare space to connect with colleagues outside of their departments, build friendships, and feel supported in their growth.

## One member summed it up:

*"Being part of MCRPA has reminded me how important it is to have spaces within the College that prioritize connection, professional growth, and mutual support. I've found meaning not just in the events, but in the relationships and conversations that happen around them."*

## Personal and Professional Growth

Survey responses highlighted the transformative impact of involvement:

- Members gained leadership skills and courage

to pursue new opportunities.

- Many reported increased confidence and clarity in their professional goals.
- Several described how MCRPA helped them step out of their comfort zones, present workshops, and even join leadership teams.

## As one member wrote:

*"I've grown tremendously through MCRPA, from just being invited to the retreat about 3 years ago to now being a member of the leadership team. This group has been a great enhancement to my experience at Montgomery College, and I am so glad that I've joined."*

## Participation and Barriers

While participation levels vary, many members attend multiple events each year. Those who were unable to attend often cited scheduling conflicts, workload, or location barriers. Some also expressed a desire for more virtual or low-cost options to make participation easier.

## What Members Want Next

Members offered thoughtful suggestions for future programming, including:



- Creative social events like board game nights, storytelling circles, or even a Cat Café outing.
- Community service opportunities such as stream cleanups or charity drives to expand MCRPA's impact beyond the College.
- Professional growth offerings like mentoring, workplace advocacy workshops, leadership networking with other institutions, and training in emerging workplace tools.
- Travel and culture events from local excursions to Broadway trips, camping, or even more long distance and international travel for those adventurous enough to commit.

### Strengthening Communication

Most members prefer to hear from MCRPA through email and Teams, but there's also interest in a future LinkedIn group for professional networking. Several noted that the Teams space could be more valuable with features like event reminders, discussion forums, and resource sharing.

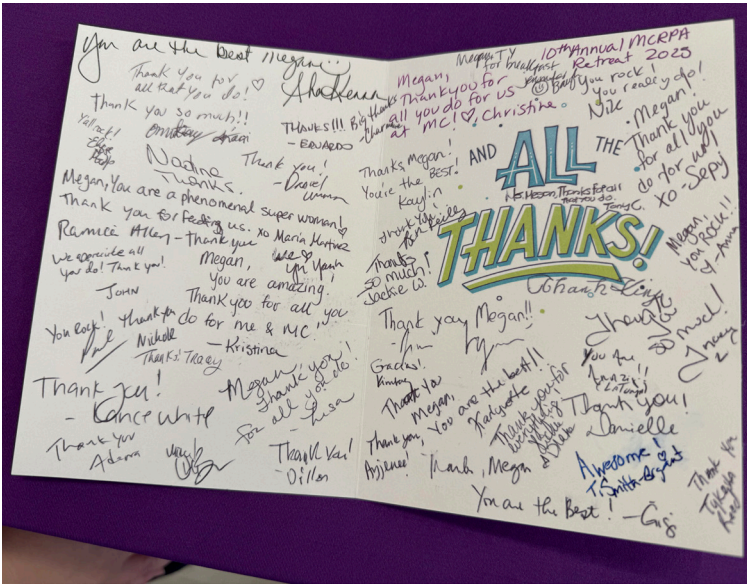
### A Lasting Impact

The additional comments section underscored how deeply members value MCRPA's role in fostering belonging at the College:

- *"This organization is the best example of how the College supports goal #2 in the strategic plan: Cultivate a sense of belonging for everyone."*
- *"I love the synergy at MCRPA events; it is absolutely intoxicating."*
- *"MCRPA allows me to connect with colleagues across campuses that I might never meet otherwise."*
- *"The professional development offerings have directly supported my career growth at Montgomery College."*
- *"I feel like MCRPA gives me a voice and space to share my ideas without judgment."*
- *"MCRPA is a welcoming environment and particularly helpful for employees who first join the organization."*

### The Bottom Line

The survey results affirm that MCRPA is more than just an association. It is a place where employees can learn, connect, and thrive. Going forward, we'll use this feedback to continue building programs that are meaningful, inclusive, and responsive to your needs.



## Summer Highlights with MCRPA



This summer, MCRPA members balanced purpose and play through gatherings that strengthened our community and renewed our energy for the year ahead.

### Pop-Up Karaoke Celebration

We also made time to simply celebrate. At our summer pop-up karaoke event, members sang their hearts out, shared laughter, and built connections through music and fun. These casual moments of joy remind us that belonging grows not only in professional spaces, but also in the friendships formed when we let loose together.



### Professional Development: Learning to See

At the start of the summer, Erik Swanson led a powerful professional development opportunity, Learning to See. This two-day immersive art class helped participants demystify drawing and explore how the principles of artistic observation apply to leadership. With hands-on activities, visual demonstrations, and no prior artistic experience required, members discovered new ways to observe, reflect, and lead with creativity.

### Annual Leadership Retreat

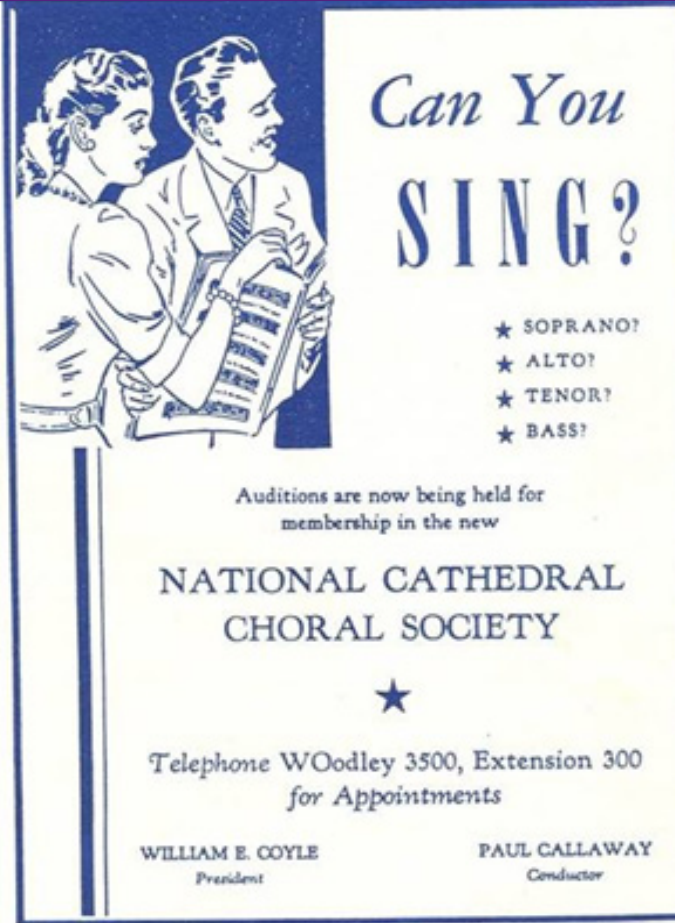
In June, our leadership team came together for the FY26 Annual Retreat to reflect on the past year,

review membership survey results, and set new goals. The day was filled with team-building activities, thoughtful reflection, and committee work sessions. Guided by our theme of *Community Starts Here*, leaders committed to "leveling up" by clarifying intentions, embracing growth, and planning initiatives that will sustain MCRPA's impact across the College.

Together, these experiences reflect what MCRPA does best, blending professional growth with authentic connection, and preparing us to step into the new year with energy and purpose.



# Our “Ode to Joy” Encore – Summer 2025 by Vincent Briley



This past May, I was honored to co-present with Elizabeth Schlackman at the 10th annual MCPRA retreat, which featured a truly inspiring breakout session, Our “Ode To Joy” Experience the Health & Happiness Benefits of Group Singing.

Focused on the profound benefits of singing together, the workshop explored how this simple act can reduce stress, lift our mood, and foster a stronger sense of community. Participants learned basic vocal techniques and the science behind the benefits of choral singing.

The session, inspired by the spirit of Beethoven’s masterpiece, was a resounding success, and I am excited to share a graceful outcome from our time together. After the workshop, I was motivated to audition and was accepted to sing with the prestigious Cathedral Choral Society for the 2025–2026 season!

I am incredibly honored to add this new choral experience to my years of performing with the Cleveland Orchestra Chorus, Opera Columbus, The Sing-

ing Men of Ohio, and the Raise Chorale.

This is a strong testament to the impact of professional development opportunities offered by MCPRA. The experience not only emphasizes personal fulfillment from exploring a new passion but also demonstrates how a simple shared song can forge lasting connections and inspire us to find our own “joy.”

I encourage everyone to continue seeking moments of inspiration and community in both their personal and professional lives.

Please visit the [Cathedral Choral Society website](#) to learn more about the 2025-2026 season!

# MC Tennis: Love of the Game, Set, Match



Did you know Montgomery College has a dedicated tennis group for employees and students? If you didn’t, now the secret is out! Three MCPRA members (Huong Nguyen, Jeremi Lecuyer, and Nghi Nguyen) are active participants in the group.

Organized by our enthusiastic MC Raptors (employees), the tennis group has grown from just a handful of players to more than 15. They meet after work for fun matches filled with energy, laughter, and a healthy dose of competition, because what would tennis be without it?

The tennis group began as Tuesday TRIO Tennis, founded in honor of Dr. Antonio “Tango” Thomas, who introduced Albert and Huong to the sport with the goal of giving TRIO students an opportunity to learn tennis as a way to relax and recharge for their academic work. Even after his passing, the tradition has carried on, and today several students, employees, and friends join in on the tennis fun.

The tennis group is open to all employees and students, and anyone is welcome to join at any time.





“Whether it’s singles, doubles, King of the Hill, or Canadian doubles, there’s always a game going on,” said Huong. “What makes it even more special is our dedication, we play in just about any condition, from scorching summer heat to chilly fall evenings, and even through light drizzle, our love for the game keeps us coming back to the courts. The fun usually lasts until the sun goes down and it’s too dark to see the ball anymore.”

Through these matches, employees and students have been able to build connections on and off the court, all while getting in some healthy exercise after work.

“I love our little hangout after work,” said Nghi. “A great chance for all of us to release some stress, unless you hear match point and it’s for the other team.” He joked with laughter.

Perhaps the best part of the tennis group is all the laughs, even when the score is 4 to 0, because in tennis, the match is not over until the very last point. Over the past few months, faculty members Albert

Kapikian and Michael Chase dominated the courts, racking up an impressive streak of 30 consecutive set wins.

That streak finally came to an end when Jie Chen, a former MC student, and Farhad Razavi, a non-MC employee, pulled off a huge upset by defeating Albert and Michael’s team to snap their winning run.

“It’s not just about competition, it’s about camaraderie, stress relief, and staying active together. Everyone brings their own energy and style, making every match fun and memorable,” said Huong.

The tennis group is always open to new faces. Sometimes, members will spot community players practicing on the nearby courts and invite them to join. More often than not, these players happily take part in the fun.

Being part of the tennis group is about more than just competition, it is also an excellent way to meet new people.



“I think having the students be part of the group has been great,” said Nghi. “We get to see who are not only competitors in the classes but also on the tennis courts.”

Often, you might recognize a name from an email but never have the chance to meet the person behind it. Through this group, players not only connect on the courts but also build friendships that extend beyond the game.

Huong and Albert form a strong doubles team, known for their teamwork and strategic play on the court. Their main rivals are Nghi and Jeremi, who never shy away from a competitive match.

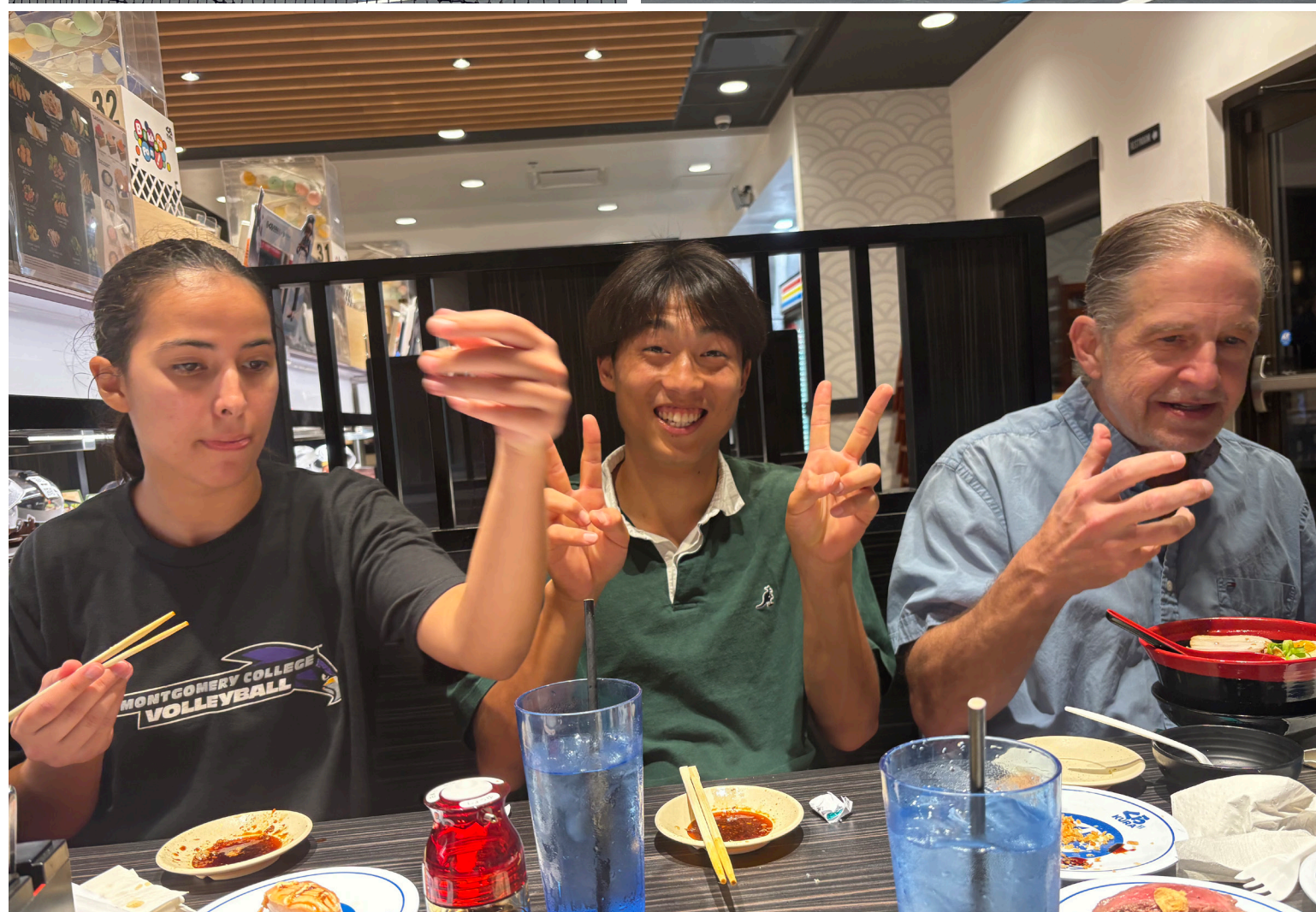
If you are new to tennis, you are more than welcome to join the group after work. They play on the Rockville Campus tennis courts starting around 5:15 p.m. and often continue until 7:00 p.m.

After an evening of friendly, calorie-burning matches, the group sometimes extends the fun by going out to dinner together.

“It’s a great way to unwind and connect with colleagues outside the classroom and office,” said Huong.







# About MCRPA

MCRPA was established in 2011 as an employee resources group. We collectively seek out opportunities to learn and grow as individuals and as burgeoning professionals. Our members are enthusiastic supporters of Montgomery College's mission and community. If you have a desire to get involved and participate in hands-on personal and professional development activities, networking, and community service, you are a perfect fit for MCRPA.

Each MCRPA member plays an important role in our structure. Because our activities directly result from our members' shared interests, we encourage our members to engage with MCRPA programming. Members determine the intensity and time commitment of their involvement. We realize that members have other commitments, both personal and professional. Explore our committees, events, membership and leadership team. MCRPA always welcomes suggestions for new roles and/or committees.

<https://www.montgomerycollege.edu/offices/mcrpa/>





# MC MONTGOMERY COLLEGE

