

PRESS PACKET: AUGUST 1 – 31, 2025

‘Interested in life’: Woman of Distinction Melissa Cooney is lawyer, mentor, traveler, philanthropist

<https://www.shawlocal.com/northwest-herald/2025/08/04/interested-in-life-woman-of-distinction-melissa-cooney-is-lawyer-mentor-traveler-philanthropist/>

For Melissa Cooney, life is about learning – from her work at a university that opened the door to multiple degrees, to her love of travel and her dedication to helping the next generation with scholarship and mentorship support in the community.

“She has definitely embraced being a lifelong learner,” said Amy Hernon, executive director for The Community Foundation of McHenry County. Cooney and her family have deep roots with the nonprofit organization and remain active today.

Cooney is among 10 honorees of the 2025 Women of Distinction Awards. Bestowed by the Northwest Herald, the recognition highlights women in McHenry County, nominated by their peers, friends and loved ones, who provide leadership in their fields of expertise, serve as role models and mentors, advocate positive social change or give back to their community through time, talent and resources.

Cooney grew up in what she calls the “city” part of Woodstock, living on the same block as both of her grandparents. She remembers how as a child, she’d visit their houses, dropping in for a meal, some fresh-baked bread or homemade doughnuts.

Her parents and grandparents were noted founding members of local organizations and groups. From an early age, she saw the importance of civic life and supporting the community. One of those supports was for The Community Foundation of McHenry County. Her mother, Karlen Cooney, helped establish a family fund, her brother served as an executive director for the organization and Cooney herself established a scholarship that supports a young person, active with community service, continuing their education. Hernon said Cooney’s scholarship is yet another example of how she sees the fundamental importance to education.

“She’s dedicated to our community and with her support, wants everyone to be lifelong learners,” Hernon said. “She seeks the power in knowledge.”

Hernon said Cooney was a founding member of the Women In Philanthropy Committee, formed by The Community Foundation of McHenry County to help women take a more active role when it comes to philanthropy.

“I think her impact is far beyond what any of us will ever know,” Hernon said.

Jessica Rizza, director of philanthropy for The Community Foundation of McHenry County, met Cooney when she served as a mentor for the Education 2 Empowerment scholarship and mentorship program through McHenry County College. Rizza said she saw how Cooney’s mentorship had a great impact.

Cooney's own path to education is an example that studies aren't necessarily linear. After graduating from Marian Central Catholic High School in Woodstock, Cooney started college but things weren't going as planned. She decided to find a job and landed a role working in the romance languages department office at Kent State University, supporting faculty teaching Spanish, French, Italian and Portuguese.

After some time working at the school, she learned she was eligible to take classes and seized on the opportunity to work on her bachelor's degree, taking an 8 a.m. class before work, fitting in a class at lunch and attending evening classes too. After earning her bachelor's degree, she decided to continue her studies and obtained her master's degree.

"I always say I was interested in life," Cooney said.

She was in her 40s when she decided to leave Kent State and enroll in law school back in Illinois. Her father, Judge James Cooney, encouraged her to consider law school. She enrolled as a full-time student at the University of Illinois Law School. Her father died before she completed her law studies.

After law school, she returned to Woodstock and joined the firm Zukowski Rogers Flood & McArdle in McHenry County, working in divorce law estate planning. She made time to serve the community outside of work. In the legal field, she served as president of the McHenry County Bar Association and provided pro bono legal work for various nonprofits.

Today, Cooney remains active serving on the board of directors for the Land Conservancy of McHenry County and the Friends of McHenry County College Foundation Board of Directors.

In addition to her community work, she finds great joy in traveling and has said yes to trips with family and friends to far-off lands, taking in the time to learn and enjoy the beauty of the world and different cultures.

"I think that travel, it changes you," Cooney said. "It changes the way you view the news. It changes the way you view the world."

In recent years Cooney has enjoyed trips to New Zealand, mainland China, Morocco and across Europe. She travels on tours and with friends and family. She said Paris is among her favorite cities.

"I always want to go to Paris," she added. "I like to travel as much as I can."

Leader to retire from Leadership Greater McHenry County; Northwest Herald; 8/6/25

<https://www.shawlocal.com/northwest-herald/2025/08/05/leader-to-retire-from-leadership-greater-mchenry-county/>

Marcy Piekos, the longtime executive director of Leadership Greater McHenry County, is stepping down from her role next year.

Piekos, who graduated from LGMC in 2008, has served as the executive director for 15 years, according to a news release from the organization.

Piekos, who was honored by the Northwest Herald last year with its Women of Distinction award, has “empowered hundreds of alumni through immersive leadership development,” according to the release.

The highlights from Piekos’ tenure include the launch of the College Nonprofit Leadership Intern Program, which “thrived for five years and provided transformative early-career experiences,” according to the release.

The LGMC Youth Program also began under Piekos’ leadership and is entering its ninth year. The organization’s core program, which enrolls 32 McHenry County leaders each year, has more than 650 alumni, according to the release.

Piekos also enriched the curriculum that her friend and mentor Frannie Glosson started. Many nonprofits in the area benefit from Piekos’ and Glosson’s Leadership and Learning Academy.

“The Academy offers sessions in strategic planning, board development, and effective communication, to profit and nonprofit organizations,” according to Piekos’ LGMC biography.

Before being the executive director at LGMC, Piekos worked for 33 years at United Airlines, 17 of which she spent on leadership and educational programming for crews with a focus on safety.

Piekos went through the LGMC program herself while serving on the Woodstock School District 200 board.

“After 15 years of leading, learning, and loving this remarkable community, I reflect on my upcoming retirement with profound gratitude. It has been my privilege to serve alongside passionate changemakers, honor meaningful milestones, and help shape a legacy rooted in the collective wisdom of the LGMC community. As I turn the page to the next chapter, my heart remains closely tied to LGMC’s continued growth. I look forward to delivering the Core Program through graduation and staying engaged as an active alum for years to come. And in this red-hot minute I am complete,” Piekos said in the release.

The organization celebrated its 20th anniversary last fall, and in April it was announced that LGMC was moving into the Old Courthouse on the historic Woodstock Square.

Piekos will formally retire early next year and she will support the incoming LGMC classes through graduation. The LGMC board will start searching for Piekos’ successor this month.

McHenry County College camp plants seeds for the future; The Fabricator; 8/4/25

<https://www.thefabricator.com/thefabricator/article/finishing/mchenry-county-college-camp-plants-seeds-for-the-future>

Students attending the Colorful Finishes SparkForce Manufacturing Camp at McHenry County College in July may not have known it, but they were sitting in one of the most modern manufacturing education facilities in the nation.

MCC unveiled the \$29.6 million Foglia Center for Advanced Technology and Innovation just last year. With 45,000 sq. ft. of learning space, the facility boasts several large laboratories for welding, CNC machining, metrology, heating and cooling, and other industrial applications. In addition to multiple classrooms, it also offers three computer labs and an incubator for startup businesses.

“Manufacturing is one of our largest industries here in the county,” said Tressman Goode, coordinator of community enrichment programs for MCC, who helped facilitate a whopping 130 camps at the college this summer. “We want to make sure they understand this is an opportunity. When you’re out of high school, come to MCC. This is what you can do for your future.”

During the Colorful Finishes camp—one of three SparkForce camps held at MCC this summer—about 10 students in grades 6 to 9 delved into some of the intricacies of industrial finishing, like pretreatment. In addition to talking about different chemicals used in pretreatment, students did activities like dipping pennies in soap, rinsing them with water, coating them in phosphates, and then drying them.

“They’ve got through the entire pretreatment process, so in each step, they have gotten an activity to see how that is applied to the real world,” said class instructor Cheri Collins, an analytical chemist who dropped her graphic design aspirations in college after taking a chemistry course just to fill a degree requirement. “I just love it. With the curriculum, I love that we’re teaching them about the coating and finishing process, but then we also have the different activities to show that. I think it gives them exposure to the different parts of industry and what they could get a job doing in the future.”

Twelve-year-old student Faith Radeni came in with a head start in knowledge—her mother and grandmother are microbiologists who work with chemical coaters regularly—but managed to learn a lot anyway in the coating, welding, and maker-space 3D printing camps she took this summer.

“I didn’t know anything about powder painting—it was really cool,” said Radeni, who wants to work at mission control for NASA one day. “I knew welding existed, but I didn’t know what it was, so I learned a lot about that. Anything’s possible in this space. It’s really cool.”

Goode said that what keeps him enthusiastic about all the camps is “knowing that here in McHenry County, we’re giving students this opportunity to experience something that they don’t get in their schools and seeing them realize, ‘Hey this might be something I might be actually interested in doing.’”

“There were some people who never welded in their life, and you’re realizing, wow, they just found out they have a talent, a skill, they never knew they had.”

How much do northern Illinois community college presidents make?; Northwest Herald; 8/12/25

<https://www.shawlocal.com/news/2025/08/12/how-much-do-northern-illinois-community-college-presidents-make/>

As community colleges take on an evolving role in recent years, Shaw Local News Network is providing details on the compensation of presidents who lead 10 of these publicly funded schools in northern Illinois.

Some of the highest-paid community college leaders in the state include Joliet Junior College President Clyne Namuo and McHenry County College President Clinton Gabbard, based on their latest contracts and salary data from the Illinois Community College Board.

Community colleges have been in the spotlight this year after Gov. JB Pritzker proposed allowing these institutions to offer four-year degree programs beyond the two-year degree programs they have historically offered.

In Pritzker's State of the State speech in February, he called community colleges "one of the jewels of the Illinois education system," which have seen increasing student enrollment in recent years.

Pritzker proposed that those schools offer four-year degree programs for "in-demand career paths" such as nursing, advanced manufacturing, early childhood education and beyond.

"With lower tuition rates and a greater presence across the state, especially in rural areas, community colleges provide the flexibility and affordability students need. This is a consumer-driven, student-centered proposal that will help fill the needs of regional employers in high-need sectors and create a pathway to stable, quality jobs for more Illinoisans," Pritzker said.

On June 30, Pritzker also signed bills to improve college affordability and access for high school students.

In examining the latest contracts for presidents at 10 schools in northern Illinois, Shaw Local News Network has found that Namuo had a higher number of vacation days per year than most other presidents.

Presidents at colleges such as Kankakee Community College, Kishwaukee College, McHenry County College and Moraine Valley Community have between 20 and 30 days of vacation.

Namuo has 40 days of vacation, with an option to "buy back" up to 80 hours of vacation each year.

And Kankakee Community College President Michael Boyd has an interesting perk among those presidents – a monthly membership to Kankakee Country Club reimbursed by the college.

Last year, concerns about Namuo's salary and vacation time were raised by one of the members of Joliet Junior College's Board of Trustees. The contract was approved by a 5-2 vote.

Namuo's contract included a base salary of \$325,000, an almost \$39,000 increase to his annual pay at the time.

Before the 5-2 vote, JJC Trustee Maureen Broderick said she was concerned about "overspending" at the college.

"Especially in these inflationary times, when a lot of taxpayers, students and constituents are living paycheck to paycheck," Broderick said.

She also said community college presidents typically receive 20 days of "use or lose it" vacation.

But Namuo's contract was supported by Broderick's rival on the board, JJC Trustee Alicia Morales, who called it "very fair."

“[Namuo] has a higher level of education. Lots of experience. He has already proven his skills and abilities. OK, if other people want to make that salary, they can go back to school, get a Ph.D. and apply for a presidential job,” Morales said.

A snapshot of community colleges

1. Joliet Junior College

President: Clyne Namuo

Paid: \$325,000 – 4% increase in second year, 3% increase in third year

Contract length: July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2028

Extra benefits:

- One-time \$5,000 retention bonus
- 40 days of vacation annually
- “Buy back” of up to 80 hours of vacation each year in June
- “Buy back” of an additional 40 hours of vacation in June 2025

Years of service: 2022 to present

Size of campuses:

- Main campus: 1215 Houbolt Road, Joliet – 368 acres
- City Center campus: 235 N. Chicago St., Joliet
- Romeoville campus: 1125 W. Romeo Road, Romeoville
- Morris Education Center: 725 School St., Morris

Student enrollment:

- Fall 2023: 9,863
- Fall 2024: 14,414

2. McHenry County College

President: Clinton Gabbard

Paid: \$323,702 with a 3% raise each year

Contract length: Four years. This is Gabbard’s seventh contract extension.

Extra benefits:

Accrue 16.67 hours of vacation leave each month for an annual accrual of 200 hours or 25 days

\$500 monthly vehicle allowance

Dollar-for-dollar match on an annuity

Home internet reimbursement

No incentive bonus

Years of service: 2016 to present

Campus size:

Main campus – 8900 Route 14, Crystal Lake

Catalyst campus and University Center – 222 E. Church St., Woodstock

Student enrollment:

2023-24: 13,282

2024-25: 13,303

3. College of DuPage

President: Muddassir Siddiqi

Paid: \$300,000

Contract length: July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2028

Extra benefits:

- College-owned phone and other technology equipment
- College-owned vehicle
- College credit card with board review of expenses
- \$10,000 for expenses incurred in relocation of personal property

Years of service: Beginning July 1, 2025

Campus size:

Main campus: 273 acres at 425 Fawell Blvd., Glen Ellyn

Four satellite centers:

301 S. Swift Road, Addison

500 Kuhn Road, Carol Stream

1223 Rickert Drive, Naperville

650 Pasquinelli Drive, Westmont

Student enrollment:

- Fall 2023: 23,216
- Fall 2024: 26,224

4. Waubensee Community College

President: Brian Knetl

Paid: \$283,250

Contract length: March 20, 2024 to January 30, 2026

Extra benefits:

- \$12,000 annual tax-sheltered annuity
- \$5,000 max reimbursement for physical fitness
- \$500 a month vehicle reimbursement allowance

Years of service: 2023 to present

Campus size:

Main campus: 243 acres at Route 47, Waubensee Drive, Sugar Grove

Aurora Downtown: 18 S. River St.

Aurora Fox Valley: 2060 Ogden Ave.

Plano: 100 Waubensee Drive

Student enrollment:

Fall 2023: 8,324

Fall 2024: 8,550

5. Elgin Community College

President: Peggy Heinrich

Paid: \$281,021

Contract length: Three years; ends 2028

Extra benefits:

Covered for all costs associated with professional development, including registration, tuition, travel and subsistence, and other directly related expenses

Biweekly housing allowance of \$711.54 (\$18,500 annually)

Biweekly stipend of \$288.46 (\$7,500 annually) to cover nonreimbursable business expenses

Provided a cellphone, computer and printer

Years of service: Heinrich has been employed at the college since 2007. She began her position as interim president last year after the previous president, David Sam, retired.

Campus size:

Main campus: 1700 Spartan Drive, Elgin

ECC for emergency services: 815 E. Plank Road, Burlington

Education and Work Center: 6704 Barrington Road, Hanover Park

Streamwood Village Hall: 301 E. Irving Park Road, Streamwood

Student enrollment:

2023-24: 13,863

2024-25: 15,160

6. Moraine Valley Community College

President: Pamela Haney

Paid: \$250,000

Contract length: July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2026

Extra benefits:

- \$10,000 tax-sheltered annuity
- Vehicle leased/owned by college, all costs paid by college
- 21 days of vacation each year

Years of service: 2023 to present

Campus size:

307 acres at 9000 College Pkwy., Palos Hills

Student enrollment:

- 2024: 17,956
- 2025: 19,280 (as of June 16)

7. Kishwaukee College

President: Laurie Borowicz

Paid: \$234,660. Borowicz received a 5% increase for the 2025-26 school year. The Board of Trustees will vote on future raise amounts.

Contract length: Three years, expires 2028

Extra benefits:

8% of salary to retirement system

\$10,000 annual vehicle allowance

Business-related and professional development expenses covered

30 vacation days

Years of service: 2016 to present

Campus size:

120 acres at 21193 Malta Road, Malta

Student enrollment:

2023-24: 3,591

2024-25: 3,872

8. Illinois Valley Community College

President: Tracy Morris

Paid: \$212,687

Contract length: Three years, expires 2026

Extra benefits:

Bonus of 2% on top of salary if you reach 900 credit hours enrolled total

8% retirement contribution

All expenses for entertainment, lodging, food, phone calls, etc., are reimbursed

Mileage reimbursement at the Internal Revenue Service mileage rate

Years of service: 2023 to present

Campus size:

Main campus – 815 N. Orlando Smith Road, Oglesby

Ottawa Center – 321 W. Main St., Ottawa

Student enrollment:

2023-24: 3,887

2024-25: 4,031

9. Kankakee Community College

President: Michael Boyd

Paid: \$211,120, increases every year

Contract length: July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2029

Extra benefits:

- \$1,000 per month car allowance
- Monthly membership paid by the college for the Kankakee Country Club
- Cellphone and laptop computer for college business
- 20 days of vacation each year

Years of service: 2019 to present

Campus size:

178 acres at 100 College Drive, Kankakee

Student enrollment:

Fiscal year 2024: 5,686

Fiscal year 2025: 6,065

10. Sauk Valley Community College

President: Dave Hellmich

Paid: \$210,115.

Contract length: Three years, ends 2026

Extra benefits:

8% of salary goes into the retirement system

Two vacation days per month with no limit

\$700 per month allowance for vehicle expenses

Two sick days per month

Years of service: 2015 to present

Campus size:

165 acres at 173 Route 2, Dixon

Student enrollment:

2023-24: 2,402

2024-25: 2,552

Suburban community college presidents among the highest paid in the state; Daily Herald; 8/24/25

<https://www.dailyherald.com/20250824/education/suburban-community-college-presidents-among-the-highest-paid-in-the-state/>

Suburban community college presidents are among the highest paid in the 39-member Illinois Community College System.

Topping the list are Harper College President Avis Proctor, Oakton College President Joianne Smith, College of Lake County President Lori Suddick and McHenry County College President Clinton Gabbard, based on their latest contracts and salary data from the Illinois Community College Board.

Statewide, the salaries for district executive officers range from \$169,950 to \$377,825. A community college president's salary in Illinois is on average \$246,642, according to ICCB's 2024 annual salary report.

Illinois ranks 24th among the best states for community colleges, according to a recent WalletHub study comparing 653 community colleges across 18 key factors — including in-state tuition and fees, student-faculty ratio, and graduation rates.

Community colleges, historically offering two-year degree programs, certifications and credentials, play a key role in helping fill the needs of regional employers in high-demand sectors and have seen increased student enrollment in recent years.

Their leaders have been instrumental in helping to grow that enrollment, build partnerships with higher education institutions, and secure funding for initiatives that aid student retention and advancement toward bachelor's degree pathways and future jobs.

Leaders at several suburban colleges, including Harper, have pushed for state legislation that would allow them to offer four-year bachelor's degrees in select fields, such as nursing, advanced manufacturing and early childhood education.

Harper College in Palatine ranks highest in presidential compensation, with Proctor making a base salary of \$370,542 annually. Following close behind is Oakton College in Des Plaines, where Smith makes \$341,107 yearly; College of Lake County in Grayslake, where Suddick makes \$331,035; and McHenry County College in Crystal Lake, where Gabbard makes \$323,702.

That's not counting retirement contributions, life and health insurance benefits and other job perks, which can include college-owned vehicles, credit cards, and equipment such as laptops and phones, housing allowances, stipends and other compensation.

Here's a look at the salaries and perks of these college presidents and other stats:

Harper College

Harper College President Avis Proctor speaking at a May 2025 event in Palatine. Proctor is among the highest-paid community college presidents in the state. Paul Valade/pvalade@daillyherald.com

President: Avis Proctor

Pay: \$370,542

Contract length: July 1, 2022-June 30, 2026

Extra benefits:

- College-owned phone and other technology equipment
- College credit card with board review of expenses
- \$1,000 per month toward vehicle lease

Years of service: Proctor assumed her role in July 2019. She previously had 25 years of experience working as a mathematics educator and academic administrator.

Student enrollment: Fall 2023 — 13,069; Fall 2024 — 13,988

Oakton College

Oakton College President Joianne Smith is among the highest-paid community college presidents in the state. Joe Lewnard/jlewnard@dailyherald.com

President: Joianne L. Smith, Ph.D.

Pay: \$341,107 (includes 8% contribution to State University Retirement System)

Contract length: July 1, 2024-June 30, 2027

Extra benefits:

- An additional benefit allowance in the amount of 9.5% (\$32,405) for the purchase of permanent life insurance, long-term care insurance, long-term disability insurance, tax-sheltered annuities, or contribution to a deferred-compensation plan.
- College-owned vehicle

Years of service: Smith assumed the presidency July 1, 2015. Smith had served 13 years as Oakton's dean of students and vice president for student affairs.

Student enrollment: Fall 2023 — 7,032; Fall 2024 — 8,437

College of Lake County

In a celebration of College of Lake County's 55th anniversary, President Lori Suddick spoke to community members and local partners about the college's impact and accomplishments during the 2024 State of the College event. Suddick is among the highest-paid community college presidents in the state.

Courtesy of College of Lake County, 2024

President: Lori M. Suddick

Pay: \$331,035

Contract length: July 1, 2025-June 30, 2029

Extra benefits:

- Automobile allowance of \$1,350 per month
- Allowance of personal cellphone for college business
- Home security system allowance

Years of service: 2018 to present

Student enrollment: Fall 2023 — 12,149; Fall 2024 — 12,297

McHenry County College

Clinton Gabbard, president of McHenry County College, is among the highest-paid community college presidents in the state. Courtesy of McHenry County College

President: Clinton Gabbard

Pay: \$323,702, with a 3% raise each year

Contract length: Four years. This is Gabbard's seventh contract extension.

Extra benefits:

- \$500 monthly vehicle allowance
- Dollar-for-dollar match on an annuity
- Home internet reimbursement

Years of service: 2016 to present

Student enrollment: Fall 2023 — 13,282; Fall 2024 — 13,303

College of DuPage

Muddassir Siddiqi, the new president of College of DuPage, is among the highest-paid community college presidents in the state.

President: Muddassir Siddiqi

Pay: \$300,000

Contract length: July 1, 2025-June 30, 2028

Extra benefits:

- College-owned phone and other technology equipment
- College-owned vehicle
- College credit card with board review of expenses
- \$10,000 for expenses incurred in relocation of personal property

Years of service: Siddiqi became president of College of DuPage on July 1, after more than two decades in higher education and the corporate sector.

Student enrollment: Fall 2023 — 23,216; Fall 2024 — 26,224

Waubonsee Community College

Brian Knetl

President: Brian Knetl

Pay: \$283,250

Contract length: March 20, 2024-Jan. 30, 2026

Extra benefits:

- \$12,000 annual tax-sheltered annuity
- \$5,000 max reimbursement for physical fitness
- \$500 a month vehicle reimbursement allowance

Years of service: 2023 to present

Student enrollment: Fall 2023 — 8,324; Fall 2024 — 8,550

Elgin Community College

Peggy Heinrich, who became president of Elgin Community College earlier this year, is among the highest-paid community college presidents in the state. Rick West/rwest@dailyherald.com

President: Peggy Heinrich

Pay: \$281,021

Contract length: Three years; ends 2028

Extra benefits:

- Covered for all costs associated with professional development, including registration, tuition, travel and subsistence, and other directly related expenses
- Biweekly housing allowance of \$711.54 (\$18,500 annually)
- Biweekly stipend of \$288.46 (\$7,500 annually) to cover nonreimbursable business expenses
- Provided a cellphone, computer and printer

Years of service: Heinrich has been at ECC since 2007. In January, she became the ninth president and the first woman to lead the college in its 75-year history.

Student enrollment: Fall 2023 — 13,863; Fall 2024 — 15,160

Shaw Local News Network contributed to this report.

Spreading Climate Science Across the Curriculum; Community College Journal; August/September 2025

[Community College Journal - August/September 2025](#)

Education to Empowerment scholarship; The Woodstock Independent; 8/29/25

<https://www.thewoodstockindependent.com/2025/08/education-to-empowerment-scholarship/>

Ana Otero of Woodstock is one of 10 recipients of the McHenry County College 2025 Education to Empowerment scholarships. E2E scholarships began in 2013 with 100 [...article restricted by paywall]