Out of work, out of a house and nearly out of money, Nancy Silva faced desperate circumstances in order to take care of her three live-in children. The former small business owner landed at CCA, where she went back to school for the first time since age 14, earned her GED, received incredible support ... and was given something surprising when all was said and done.

Nancy Silva was living the good life, the American Dream, really.
She and her husband owned three local meat markets, the first one for about a decade, followed by two more. She traveled for leisure. She drove a Mercedes, a Nissan Maxima and when she wanted a new car, she got a loaded Armada with zero miles on the odometer.
The vehicles could be parked in her five-bedroom house in Aurora, where she lived with her four children.
Silva thought the dream scenario with her husband, the meat markets, the big house, cars and children might last forever, until it all came crashing down.
The money disappeared, largely by nefarious means. She went through a divorce, and gone, too, were the small businesses they had established. Everything in her life was falling apart.
People who once asked her to trim a pork loin now were asking her about her personal life and what she was going to do about the future. Silva wasn’t sure how to answer. She didn’t know.
“It was really sad,” Silva said. “I just didn’t believe what was happening.”

A friend offered to give her work delivering flowers but soon couldn’t afford to pay her.

Silva looked for other jobs but no one was hiring.

She felt embarrassed. She feared seeing people with whom she used to mingle.

But her motherly instincts were stronger.

“It took me about two years to realize that I needed major help and needed to do this for a reason. I needed to provide for my kids,” she recalled.

The five-bedroom house was gone. A one-bedroom apartment with her four children was the replacement digs. And even though family in California begged her to accept their offers of help, Silva believed that this situation was something she had to handle for herself.

Even so, she couldn’t afford babysitters. She needed money to pay for food for her family. At times, she didn’t have cash for rent or enough for electricity.

“I was struggling. I was really, really struggling,” she said. “And I was always stressed.”

Silva swallowed hard and went to the county’s Human Services division and applied for assistance, and received some relief, including food stamps. Landing in the welfare-to-work program Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) brought her to the Center for Workforce Development at Community College of Aurora.

Silva dropped out of school at age 14, so it had been more than two decades since she had stepped foot in a classroom. But the goal of TANF is to provide academic, career counseling, and work experience programs to gain job training and skills to transition off public support to employment.

The early transition was rough. Silva was told to pursue a General Educational Development (GED) degree. But even the teacher sometimes saw the value in everything we did.

“She is a very fun and likeable person,” said Crissy Deen, a case manager for Arapahoe County TANF. “Everyone that met her was really impressed by her.”

Silva shared her classes with many young adults that hadn’t experienced the major pitfalls that she had and perhaps weren’t as focused on success.

“The difference with Nancy is she saw the value in everything we did that others who were younger didn’t see. That made it different,” said Joyce Benson-Fox, director of CFWD. “It’s also different in Nancy’s case because she has four children and she was doing everything to make sure that she could take care of them, now and in the future.”

Arturo, Daniel, Edwin, and Daisy, three sons and a daughter, and her grandchild, Yuriancy, kept Silva motivated even when she had considerable difficulty with the Math portion of the GED testing. Pride in seeing Nancy expend so much energy for their benefit prompted encouraging words from her family that only helped her resolve. The CFWD staff added another dose of positivity during challenging times.

But Silva also was self-motivated. This was something for her. She thought about getting her GED “every day that went by.” Now, she was tasked at attempting to do just that along with other helpful training designed to allow individuals to be more self-reliant, better parents and more savvy consumers.

Silva may have been able to lead the Parenting class, which was a 30-hour training.

A work readiness session taught students how to dress in presentable fashion for interviews, how to conduct interviews, how to put together a resume and use e-mail. Silva always had been her own boss in the meat markets, so many of these skills were foreign.

Another set of eight lessons with Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed) focused on food preparation, teaches families with low incomes how to budget shop, check labels and be active physically. It also presented fast, healthy recipe ideas to the group.

“It was awkward,” Silva said of her overall experience. “I was the only 36-year-old sitting in a chair. There were all these teenagers – 17, 18 – and I was a more respectful person and they, in many cases, didn’t care about the teachers and wanted to do their own stuff,” Silva said. “But I had my little table in the corner, and I speak a lot of Spanish. So the people that knew that I spoke Spanish would sit on tables together, and I would help everybody.”

But even the teacher sometimes needs a hand. And when it came to passing the GED, Silva was more the frustrated student than mentor.

The first GED test she took was paid for within the TANF program. Silva failed.

The second attempt came and Silva paid the $30 fee out of her own pocket, despite the fact that she made only $560 a month on TANF.

In total, Silva figures she spent $200 in order to keep putting pencil to paper on that GED exam.

Silva didn’t even scream or yell when Deen informed her she had finally passed on Dec. 13, 2012 after eight months of trial and error.

Silva simply went to the board to check her scores and fell into a state of shock.

“I was relieved of stress,” she said.

And one of the first things she did was go home and show her children that she passed.

The employees at the workforce center may have been just as happy, given the close bond that had been forged with Silva, who helped out in the CFWD office in her spare time.

“They pushed me so far and they helped me so much,” Silva related. “Even (Eric) Crow, the teacher, I would always say, ‘I can’t do this. I
New hires, alterations greet campus after break

President Dr. Betsy Oudenhoven announced numerous organizational changes on the eve of spring classes.

Among the moves:
• The Academic and Community ESL programs moved from Chris Ward's supervision to Academic Affairs. Chris Tombari remains the chair of those programs and will report to Ted Snow, dean of Liberal Arts.
• College Communications moved from the President's office to report to Chris Ward. Ward's title changed from executive director of Grants and Planning to vice president of Institutional Effectiveness.
• In addition, Xeturah Woodley completed her Ph.D. and has resigned as vice president for Academic Affairs to pursue a faculty position.
• Janet Brandau and Elena Sandoval-Lucero, who have served the last six months in interim vice president's roles in Student Success and Academic Affairs, respectively, were promoted via direct appointments.
• Foundation Board President Mike Quirk announced the hiring of Gene Sobczak as CCAF executive director. And Catherine Truax assumed the duties of director of Institutional Research and Effectiveness, effective Feb. 6.
• Numerous faculty and staff positions occurred during the winter break, as well. Among those hires are:
  • Dr. Emilia Penkova-Pearson. Business faculty: Dr. Penkova-Pearson began teaching for CCA in January 2013 as an adjunct instructor in Economics and Finance. She joined CCA full time in January as instructor and faculty coordinator. Emilia will be teaching Economics, Managerial Finance, and Business Statistics, and will act as the faculty coordinator for Economics and the quantitative Business courses.
  • Arthur Vaughn Jr., Business faculty: Vaughn Jr began teaching for CCA in January 2013 as an adjunct instructor in Business and Management. A year later, he joined the college as a full-time faculty instructor and faculty coordinator. Vaughn Jr. will continue to teach Business and Management classes and will act as the faculty coordinator for adjunct instructors in those disciplines.
  • Beatrice Salazar, Student Success coach: Salazar is a native of Colorado and a first-generation college student. She earned a Bachelor's of Arts in Sociology and Psychology from the University of Colorado-Denver. She worked in UCD's Financial Aid Office before a seven-year stop as Metropolitan State College in that same office.
  • Robyn Jackson, TRiO Student Support Services advisor: TRiO is one of two cohort-based retention programs housed in the Student Success Center. Jackson will provide academic, career, and personal advising to her caseload of TRiO students with an emphasis on college completion and transfer.
  • Monique Broussard, School of Liberal Arts success coach: Broussard will focus her efforts on working with Liberal Arts faculty to develop pathways to student completion of the associate of arts degrees with designation, as well as helping the college identify students who may be candidates for degrees with designation.
  • Rebecca Watson, administrative assistant, Liberal Arts: Watson holds a bachelor's degree in Psychology from Virginia Commonwealth University and joins CCA having a strong background in administrative leadership and support. She most recently worked at the Colorado Center for Reproductive Medicine.
  • Stacy Brown, Outreach and Orientation coordinator: Brown will work in the Office of Outreach and Recruitment. She was a high school teacher for four years and has student affairs experience working in financial aid at Phoenix College.

Silva

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don't know math.' He'd say, 'You did it yesterday, just remember that.' They pushed me every day and treated me with respect and always told me that nothing's impossible. I'm very thankful and happy for everyone that works at CCA.'

That support system for Silva included not only Deen, Benson-Fox and Crow, but Nathan Crow, assistant director of CFWD, Barbara Guion, program assistant, and Danielle McCarthy, an adjunct instructor, among others.

Yet, as it turned out, those weren't the only folks who noticed the degree of vigor and professionalism that Silva brought to her TANF experience.

SNAP-Ed educator Marilyn Whatley was teaching her first group class about a year ago at CCA. The eight-week series includes a series of 60- to 90-minute classes that include optional lessons on eating smart and staying active during pregnancy, feeding a new baby, feeding a baby solid foods and feeding young children in addition to their overall hands-on assistance dealing with overall health and budgeting.

Nancy Silva begins her new job in late February. “She has the kind of personality that would connect well with students,” a co-worker said.

Whatley remembered seeing some glazed eyes and some rolled necks during the curriculum, but never from Silva. The latter was always attentive, and, unlike many others, always present - both physically and mentally.

"She really wanted to learn, and then she would try to make the changes we talked about," Whatley said.

Late in 2013, Whatley was approached to offer up any possible candidates that could replicate her own job in the SNAP-Ed program. And despite seeing dozens of students, Silva was the only one that came to mind, according to Whatley.

"She has such a great way about her, I thought she would be an excellent educator," Whatley explained, adding, "She has the kind of personality that would connect well with students."

So Silva was offered a job Jan. 2 working 30 hours per week. It first would require a training course in Fort Collins, then a follow-up training. But by the end of February, Silva will be traversing Arapahoe County and imparting the knowledge she's learned and shared hardships with students.

"She's a mom, so the things with children, she can relate. She has teenagers. She's been there. She's a single mom working hard. So she can relate to the group," Whatley said.

The end goal would be that Silva is hired on a full-time basis. But baby steps first.

"It's stressful but I'm really happy that they gave me this opportunity and recommended me," Silva said. "I'm 100 percent sure I will like the job helping low-income people eat healthy. It helped me."

Silva isn't the only one moving in the right direction. Her children are straight-A students. Silva could deal with the lifestyle changes foisted upon her by life's circumstances. But she said it was difficult for the kids, who went from having everything to the bare minimum.

All along she counseled them that nobody was better than them, rich or poor.

Now with the heartbeat of the past seemingly in the rear-view mirror, the opportunity to climb out of a hole and become more self-reliant makes it all the more satisfying.

"I see a future. I'm going to be stable," Silva said. "I see myself in a house again. I see my kids in a better place, a better apartment or house. I don't know, I just feel every day that goes by that I'm doing something better for me and for my children."
University of Colorado Professor Colleen Goode said she’s always been impressed with CCA Director of Health Sciences Jennifer VanderMeer’s ability to advocate on behalf of her nursing students and the creativity with which she prepares them for CU’s School of Nursing as the second component of the Integrated Nursing Pathway program.

On Feb. 22, that level of respect will become common knowledge.

Goode, who teaches in CU’s master’s student program and chairs that college’s doctoral committees, nominated VanderMeer for a Nightingale Award for Excellence in Human Caring.

VanderMeer, director of Health Sciences at CCA, will have an opportunity to become a regional finalist at the Feb. 8 ceremony at the Doubletree Hotel in Denver. The recognition banquet is the 22nd overall, presented by the Central Colorado Area Health Education Center.

Goode was the lead nominator, but VanderMeer also received written support from CCA Nursing Advising Specialist Gina Iannelli and two former students, Daniel Gay and Ivona Ault.

VanderMeer was nominated as a leader and educator as well as an advocate.

“I just thought of her right away,” Goode said. “I just have so much respect and appreciation for what she does for her students and our students. She’s just a fantastic teacher and really keeps the students focused and online. She works very, very hard, that’s my perception, and she seems to get things done by thinking of ideas of things that can be done in the classroom to get students to better assimilate knowledge.”

Goode and VanderMeer have worked the last three years at CCA co-teaching HPR (also known as Pathway to Professional Nursing), the very first class in the INP.

“I see these students who start in our class and they come in with a pretty limited knowledge of nursing and they leave that class and enter (CU) with some really great concepts about what patient-centered care is, their communications skills are enhanced, and they have the beginning knowledge of the rules and responsibilities of an excellent nurse,” Goode said. “I just see this transformation from when we start through two semesters.”

The fourth INP cohort will transition to CU this spring, where it will finish the final two years of the Bachelor of Science program.

The applicant process for Cohort number five begins March 1.

But first things first: VanderMeer and nearly 100 other nursing educators and practitioners will vie for the coveted Nightingale honors.

“It’s always big if there’s positive visibility for our school and our students because the end result is two things: opportunity for students, number one, and creating a successful pathway, because a lot of them need that little extra, which this program is partly designed to provide. It’s also big for nursing because nursing needs not just ethnic diversity but the diversity of viewpoints and attitudes and people’s background. And we bring that,” VanderMeer said. “Our students bring such a great perspective.”

VanderMeer has an obvious respect for Goode, who was a founding partner of the INP. Thus, the fact that Goode wanted to recognize her advocacy on behalf of students and her innovation in the classroom struck a chord.

“To be nominated by Dr. Goode was profound because she’s such a well respected individual nationally in nursing,” VanderMeer said. “She sits on national boards. She’s a former chief nursing officer. She teaches doctoral faculty. That’s a huge honor.”

The INP model is in the process of being replicated at Community College of Denver, which, despite a separate memorandum of understanding with CU, will implement many of the best practices learned by CCA, introduce identical curriculum and the same dual advising model to ensure that quality is repeated.

About 30 students comprised the most recent CCA cohort.

“Part of what we teach in our HPR courses is advocacy and being leaders in the profession,” VanderMeer said. “I tell them all the time that our goal is that you are the future change agents and the leaders in nursing. And we want to empower you for that now.”

Speakers from the Student Nurses Association and Colorado Nursing Association will visit class to talk to students about being active leaders right up front. The prod- ding has obviously worked. Two members of CCA’s last cohort already are part of the CU Student Nursing Board, so that they can be in leadership roles from the jump and a voice for their colleagues.

Another positive outcome from this innovative nursing program revolves around the ethnic and socio-economic makeup of these INP cohorts. Many of the students are first-time college students or hail from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The INP has helped solve what had been a problem in the composition of nursing staffs in the field. “It’s changing the diversity of the College of Nursing,” Goode said.
Gene Sobczak began his new position as Executive Director of the CCA Foundation on Jan. 6. Sobczak came to CCA with substantial executive experience, including positions as CEO of the Colorado Symphony Association and Arvada Center for the Arts and Humanities.

Sobczak since has been called by CCA Foundation Board President Mike Quirk “somebody who can make a difference for years to come.” And while Sobczak still is settling into his new position, he answered questions about his new job, some of his early impressions, and core principles during a sit-down interview.

What did you identify as this job’s greatest appeal when you were offered and accepted this position?

“It’s working with CCAs student population.

“The city of Aurora and the composition of the surrounding population are similar to Paterson, N.J., where I was born and raised. I’ve always had an affinity with communities that represent a rich mosaic of culture and socioeconomic diversity.

“I’m a first-generation American. Both of my parents were World War II refugees. I also am a first-generation college graduate. So, there is much at CCA that resonates with me.

“Through my experiences in non-profit management, I’ve been fulfilled by my work. When I think about the CCA Foundation and the impact it has had on the college for over 30 years, I see this new appointment as a wonderful alignment of personal and professional interests.”

So in other words your personal and professional missions intersected at CCA?

“I am a byproduct of the American dream. As an ESL kid, I’m very much committed to the promise of that dream and what better way to realize it than through education?

“The depth and scope of programming here at CCA addresses real needs in the current economy. At the same time, Aurora is poised to become the biggest city in Colorado. What role is this college going to play in the growth of the city?”

What do you see as your mandates, other than effecting change? Is it increasing partnerships with community business? Helping get buildings built? What do you think your marching orders are coming into this?

“An immediate mandate is to ensure that the mission of the Foundation is maintained and its relationship with the college strengthened through the funding of scholarships, programs, department chairs and capital projects. The Foundation has played a critical role in the development and advancement of this college, beginning with the very construction of our CentreTech campus.

“Looking ahead, it appears that the expansion of scholarship opportunities will be a high priority for the Foundation. One of the first questions I asked arriving here is, ‘Are we meeting the needs of our students? Are we fulfilling all of the requests we receive for scholarships and financial aid?’ And the answer was no.

“Related to this is the promotion of the college itself as well as its many programs to a wider community. My arts background certainly led me to appreciate the strength of CCAs arts programming - whether it’s commercial, fine arts, film, theater or music. How can the Foundation increase awareness of the school’s academic offerings - not just for fundraising but for enrollment purposes, too - and make people aware of the caliber of students that take courses here.

“I think the Foundation can play a critical role, as well, in networking amongst business interests, elected officials and other community stakeholders on behalf of the college. Ultimately what’s most important is to be in line with the college’s goals and priorities for its students and to provide the greatest support we can in the realization of those goals.”

You bring to CCA an impressive background as an executive in the Denver metro area. How have those experiences in Arvada or with the Colorado Symphony prepared you for what you think you now face at CCA?

“My experiences in operations, finance and facility management, marketing, communications, and, of course, fundraising, and as a change agent in the private, public and nonprofit sectors, all have contributed to my interest in and fondness for understanding how business organisms survive and thrive within their respective environments.

“As far as fundraising is concerned, being able to articulate your institution’s vision and then ensuring that that vision is expressed with outcomes is absolutely critical. However, this messaging has to be complemented with the strength of back-end operations.

“Everybody always asks if fundraising difficult? The fact is it isn’t when you have these pieces and they fit together. Because all you’re doing is matching what your organization does best with what people want to see happen in their community. More significantly, the work is actually quite fulfilling.”

Do you envision your relationship with the Foundation Board moving forward as a collaborative effort?

“Certainly. I recently met with Mike Quirk and during our conversation Mike went on this unplanned, extended testimonial on the importance of the college to the community. And I just sat back and smiled. I mean, he doesn’t have to convert me. I’m on board right now.

“But he was just speaking with such conviction and when he finished, he said, ‘I’m sorry. I got on my soapbox. I’m going to get off it now.’ And I responded, ‘No, get back on the soapbox. I told him, ‘This is inspiring. This is why we’re here.’

“I also recently met with (longtime Foundation Board member and local businessman) Jim Lewien and I said, ‘Jim, you’ve been here 30 years. Why?’ And he shared with me his dad always saying that if you want to help a person, help a person get an education. He told me those words really have informed his entire life and moving forward.

“So when you hear these sort of inspirational and aspirational statements coming from these Board members, it’s like, ‘OK, folks want to see this happen, and I’m now in charge with the responsibility of making it happen.’ But I’m so appreciative that I don’t have to look for that inspiration on the Board. It’s there.”
CCA forges on into the future
Extensive planning a cornerstone

There is much to do at Community College of Aurora as 2014 begins, but with that laundry list of objectives and goals that are on the cusp of becoming official policies and procedures comes exciting opportunities for growth and improvement.

“This is really the perfect storm of good things happening now,” Vice President of Administration Richard Maestas said. “There’s the strategic plan, the academic master plan, a facilities master plan, and a technology master plan all coming together at the same time, so we’ll be as updated as we can possibly get.”

What that means for Dr. Betsy Oudenhoven as college president and Gene Sobczak as Foundation executive director is that they can go out into the community with the latest possible information to present to current and hopefully future community partners.

Their dialogue can incorporate the facts gleaned from these revamped master plans, and, in turn, crystallize the needs while selling to external stakeholders how their participation can specifically bolster the college’s efforts.

“That will really help us,” Maestas said.

These simultaneous strategic plans amount to, in essence, a college audit, which identifies for the college where it is now, where it wants to go, and how it will get there.

The written provisions start with new vision and mission statements then trickle down from there into the various strategic plans of attack. The emphasis to these new guiding elements, while still in the draft stages, appear headed towards an aspirational statement where CCA desires “to be the college where every student succeeds.”

Terms such as quality, excellence, diversity, transfer preparation, and workforce development likely will define how these successes can and will be attained.

“The great thing about this college is we deliver quality. We have great faculty. We have great staff. We do a great job in service to our students,” Oudenhoven explained at the January All-College Forum. “So quality and excellence are important. It’s also important to acknowledge the transfer function, and, also in our career and technical programs, the desire to leave here and get jobs. So how are we doing that? Are we preparing them for workforce and employment?”

The five strategic goals most closely scrutinized to date cover a wide swathe of areas.

Aside from increasing student retention, completion, transfer, and perhaps employment, some of the points of emphasis moving forward figure to focus on improving student learning through instructional and non-instructional efforts and assessment, maximizing enrollment, optimizing fiscal technological and physical resources, and increasing community partnerships, engagement and service.

Enrollment also will be singled out so to include its own strategic plan aligned with the overall strategic direction of the college. Maximizing enrollment to underserved populations, such as Latinos, military/veterans, and concurrent enrollment students transitioning from high school to college represents just part of that picture.

“One of the things that came through loud and clear in the environmental scan of community groups is Aurora is growing, and if you listen to (Aurora) Mayor Steve Hogan, he’s just waiting for the day that Aurora is larger than Denver,” Oudenhoven said. “There’s really a sense of, ‘We’re a big city ourselves and not just a suburb of Denver’, so one of the things that’s happening is we should be reflecting the diversity of the community and as Aurora grows, so should CCA.

“We are the only public institution of higher education in Aurora and the expectation of our community is we’ll keep up,” Oudenhoven added. “There’s incredible support out there to do it. This college has a great reputation and lots of people who want to partner with us to help support us. But optimizing enrollment isn’t just about growth but intentional growth. Who are we serving? Who are we not serving? What academic programs do we need? Where are we seeing growth or not? What kind of issues should be driving our marketing and communications in the community?”

At the heart of the entire endeavor is student learning. Some of the tangible ways to ensure that the college is helping foster success in that area should come in the form of course and program assessment, including in developmental education; by encouraging additional faculty professional development, strengthening academic support services and growing immersive and game-based learning.

A commitment to better serve a technologically savvy generation of students is part of the broader vision. as is maximizing current campus space while exploring physical expansion for the college outside of CentreTech and Lowry into the southern and eastern part of CCA’s district.

Oudenhoven said that since she’s taken on the president’s role, it’s meant more time for her speaking to the community and that “it’s become clear to me that we have so many partnerships in so many ways.”

Ensuring that those relationships are nurtured and made mutually beneficial so that the entire area can prosper is tantamount, whether that’s through local business, government or elsewhere.

“One of the things we were told quite bluntly is that we need to be at the table,” Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness Chris Ward said. “CCAs a big institution and people need us to participate.”
A group of 70 soldiers from the Colorado National Guard, comprised of Army and Air Force, ran its Search and Evacuation, and Fatality/Rescue components through training exercises Jan. 11-12 on the Lowry campus. The weekend-long exercise was necessary due, in part, to a 33 percent turnover in personnel. Many other soldiers were brushing up on their skills. Among the maneuvers practiced were ropes and knots training to make pulleys for mechanical advantage; the use of underground spaces and confined attic rescue at the Center for Simulation; mask-fit testing at the Disaster Management Institute; introductory education to hazardous materials equipment; and more.
The family that stays together, plays together.

For most of their formative years, the Gill children – five in all, separated by only six years – operated under that particular mantra, either alone, or accompanied by cousins.

They didn’t go to parties or spend nights at other people’s houses.

It was family time, much of the time.

“We’re all really into video games,” said Jasmine, the third daughter born to Valerie (Gill) Nesbitt. “So we played Game Boys, and we have all the video-game systems ever made. We used to all play the Pokemon card game, watch movies, and now that we all have laptops, at a certain point, we’d be on our laptops listening to music. We’re all into Korean dramas and K-pop music, so we basically entertained ourselves in the house. As we got older, our mom let us off the leash a little bit, so we rode our bikes together to get exercise. We’d go to parks with our cousins. And our uncle would take us to the mountains.

“So we did a lot of family stuff.”

It should come as no surprise then that Jasmine and the rest of her siblings -- Deanna, Brianna, Malissa, and Lianne – all ended up at Community College of Aurora.

But that was more of a happy accident than planning.

And while three of the Gill kids arrived on campus for concurrent enrollment (including Hinkley High School student Lianne presently), the circumstances that brought them to CCA demonstrated their individuality, and showed the college’s ability to service learners with different goals.

Only the overriding edict seemingly was the same.

“For my five girls, the option was that they had to go to college,” said Nesbitt, who recently remarried. “I told them, ‘Find what you like, find a degree in it, and get a degree in that.’”

Deanna, the eldest child, currently attends the University of Colorado and came to CCA after her first major didn’t work out at Johnson and Wales University.

“I knew if I took a break from school, I wasn’t going to go back, so it was kind of to keep me going so I could decide what I wanted to do major-wise and what school I wanted to transfer to,” she said.

Deanna spent 21/2 years at CCA and earned her associate degree in General
Studies.
She’s currently majoring in Japanese at CU.
“I ended up taking care of everything except for my science courses, which I’m now taking at CU, as far as the freshman and sophomore requirements,” she explained.

Brianna, the second oldest, and Malissa, Jasmine’s twin, currently are attending Colorado State University after accumulating 30 credit hours at CCA as part of concurrent enrollment their junior and senior years at Hinkley High School in Aurora.
“It was to keep them challenged,” their mother said.

Both sisters were CSU Alliance Scholars. Briana currently is in Italy, studying abroad.

Briana’s time at CCA didn’t extensively reduce her time at CU, given that her transfer credits towards Math were accepted but others weren’t given her specialized degree in Interior Design.

But the time was nonetheless beneficial as a means to get acclimated to college life, her mother said.

Jasmine had been accepted to Colorado Heights University in Denver but lacked the funding to live on campus and pay for the private tuition. A Mile High United Way scholarship eased that burden at CCA, where she is taking core courses before transferring to Metro State.

Jasmine plans on studying Event Planning and Entertainment Management.

Lianne will be the only Gill child to earn her high school diploma at the same time she receives her associate degree. She intends on attending either CU or UCLA.

“It’s good for her,” Deanna said.
“When I was in high school, it really wasn’t an option. I think it happened my senior year. But she’s the smartest of all of us, academic-wise. And she’s good with time management, and her doing the CCA classes and high school, she can balance it well.”

In essence, all of the Gill girls tailored their CCA experience towards what they wanted to ultimately do academically.

“I would advocate concurrent enrollment as a tool and as that stepping stone into a four-year (institution),” said Nesbitt, a substitute teacher, after-school grants site coordinator within Aurora Public Schools. “And if you go to CCA for your core classes, it’s a great savings. It’s a great option for kids today for the simple fact that for four years, even if you’re in state, they are charging way too much and creating a workforce that is heavily in debt. I don’t agree with that concept. It’s a debt they can never really repay.”

Deanna called CCA “a good stepping stone, especially if you don’t understand the basics, like in reading, writing and math. It’s good because it’s a small class. You can have one-on-one time with the teacher, catch up on what you need and perfect what you haven’t perfected. So I think it’s good to start at a community college.”

Currently, Jasmine and Lianne share a Macroeconomics course at CCA. The two didn’t bump into each other often last year but now it’s not only nice to share time with someone with whom she’s spent countless hours with willingly so many times in their lives but get the added bonus of sharing a textbook.

“They’re expensive,” Jasmine said with a laugh.

Jasmine admitted that while she originally wanted the “big college experience” Deanna received from the start, and that she’s had some stressful times given her accommodations for a disability, she’s been able to get into a comfort zone through the Student Success Center.
It’s become her place to hang out and be around people she enjoys.

“They gave me a place, because I’m used to belonging to something,” she explained. “All of my sisters, we all grew up together and always belonged to something and had someone to hang out with. So when I came here, even though my sisters came through here, not many people knew them. So when I came here, it was basically going to college that no one in my family was at, and so I had to find somewhere I felt comfortable, that I could go to and ask for help.”

Deanna believes that the fact that she and her four sisters all figure to become college graduates within a short period of time can influence a younger generation. Jasmine, Lianne and their mom all have a direct conduit to young students by working and/or volunteering at East Middle School in Aurora.

“We’re all in a position where we have younger relatives and by some of us working in our middle school we grew up in, we can set these examples for these kids to live a better life and become better people and not have to struggle in life,” Deanna explained.

“Education is the way to go. Even though loans may (stink), it’ll be a lot better than trying to work 9 to 5 getting paid a minimum wage.”

Jasmine Gill poses in front of the Student Centre in mid-January.
Dr. Kimberly Ennico, deputy on the New Horizons project that will fly by Pluto in July 2015 and then outward into a far distant zone of millions of small, icy bodies called the Kuiper Belt, has been announced as this spring’s featured speaker for the Sherlin Lecture Series in Astronomy and Space Sciences.

The New Horizons project is expected to provide the first ever close up view of Pluto and Dr. Ennico is one of the program leaders.

This edition of the bi-annual Sherlin Lecture will take place April 11 at 7 p.m. The event is free and open to the public at the Fine Arts Forum on the CentreTech campus.

Dr. Ennico has been a staff scientist for NASA at its research center in Moffett Field, Calif., since 2000. She previously worked at Steward Observatory at the University of Arizona in Tucson.

Her research interests are wide-ranging: space telescopes, rapid space mission development, infrared detectors, infrared optics, radiation detectors, spectrometers, astrobiology, lunar science, near earth objects, spectrometers, astrobiology, and STEM training.

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Current, full-time Colorado Film School students participated in a pair of script competitions.

Entries to the Stanley Film Festival 2014 Script Competition are to be completed, including post-production, by April 4 and not exceed 20 minutes or 20 pages. Initial scripts were due to CFS Founding Director Frederic Lahey by Jan. 27.

Each project must be made in Prod II, 16mmHD or Prod III classes or potentially as an in Prod II, 16mmHD or Prod III class level EQ budget, Art Direction class and class budget help.

The winner will receive a $2,500 production stipend, plus a class level EQ budget, Art Direction class, and class budget help.

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The Colorado Film School periodically holds open auditions and actors willing to work on student projects are welcome to attend. Actors of all ages and levels are welcome. Student directors are looking for a wide variety of roles for upcoming projects and some roles may receive compensation.

Audition times must be requested through the CFS Headshot Database and will be held on Feb. 8-9 at CFS.

If a database account is needed with CFS, a follow the Film School’s Facebook page or its auditions Facebook Group “Gaelins Casting” for the announcement of when you are able to sign up for open auditions.

Actors should be prepared to complete a two to three minute monologue and bring a hard copy of headshots.

Please call 303-340-7321 with any questions.

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Staff and faculty are urged to attend a Feb. 14 conference entitled, “Immerison Excursion,” which will touch upon the key design elements, results and lessons learned during immersive and game-based learning projects throughout CCCS schools over the last 18 months. CCA is the conference host at the Lowry Conference Center. The event will run 8:15 a.m. through 5 p.m.

CCA received $1.3 million in additional resources for these projects and have $1.3 million in pending requests in addition to ongoing projects funded through $2.3 million in outside resources secured in previous years.


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The Colorado Combined Campaign raised $7,707 for various charitable organizations through the generosity of 38 CCA employees. The two-prize winners emerging from that fund-raising challenge were Greg Moore, who gets a half-day of administrative leave, and Stephanie Lawton, who receives a free lunch with CCA President Dr. Betsy Oudenhoven.

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The lighting portion of the Energy Performance Contract began in earnest at both Lowry and CentreTech campuses in January. Lamps were installed to reduce wattage but maintain the same lumen output and kelvin rating as the lamps that were removed. Based on the current schedule, the improvements will continue through March.

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Students, staff, and faculty are asked to save the date for CCA’s spring theatre production entitled, “Almost, Maine: A Real Romantic Comedy by John Cariani. The play will run March 13-15 and 20-22 at 7:30 p.m. at the Larry D. Carter Theater in the Fine Arts Building at CentreTech. General admission is $10; for students, $5. The first 30 CCA students to pick up tickets each performance are free (sponsored by Student Life).

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Once again this tax season, CCA is partnering with Denver-based Piton Foundation to help hard-working families become more financially secure by providing free tax preparation through the Tax Help Colorado program. Student- and staff-run tax help dates will occur every Saturday between Feb. 22 and March 22 from 9 a.m.-3 p.m. at Lowry.

Tax Help Colorado has a presence on 18 college campuses and operates 27 free tax sites statewide. More than 30 percent of Colorado families are eligible to participate in the program, which was created to help alleviate the financial burden of tax prep on families that are striving to achieve financial stability.

For more info, please dial 211-111 or visit www.piton.org/cit.

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Campus Visit Day & College Goal Sunday will take place on Feb. 9 at Community College of Aurora. The event is free and open to the public.

It will be a day replete with activities for students and families interested in obtaining information on higher education policies, programs and procedures.

The schedule will run as follows: 11:00-2:00 pm – Campus Visit Day: Visit with Staff and Faculty from the Community College of Aurora to learn more about what CCA can offer you. This is an opportunity to learn more about programs, financial aid, experience a campus tour, observe a college class, and learn how to get started at CCA.

2:00-4:00 pm – College Goal Sunday: Sit down with a financial aid advisor and get personalized advising. Also get help filling out your 2014-2015 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Bring your 2013 tax forms (any student under the age of 24 will need their parents tax forms). There will also be advising offered in Spanish.

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Revised dates for 2014 All-College Forums have been modified. The new dates are Feb. 13, April 10, June 12, October 9, and December 11 at the CentreTech Rotunda. At Lowry in the Bergren Room, sessions will take place on March 12, May 14, July 9, September 10, and Nov. 12.

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An interesting meeting for a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender student club organization will be held Feb. 6 on the Lowry campus West quad at 5 p.m. in the Student Life Office (Room 110).

According to Rachel Blue Ankney, one of the club’s organizers, there has never been this type of organization to this date. She said the direction and “agenda” of the club/organization will be determined by interested students.

Staff and faculty are asked to join the conversation or help by sharing the handout with classes, in office areas and common spaces on both campuses. Please e-mail Ankney at Rachel.Ankney@ccaurora.edu to get a .pdf of the flyer.

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Numerous events are being held during February to celebrate Black History Month.

One of the most intriguing: a presentation by Dr. Jonathan King on the “Albany Movement During the King Years, 1960-65” at the Student Centre Rotunda on Feb. 25 from Noon-2 p.m. Dr. Jonathan King will give first-hand accounts of the fight to end segregation in the early 1960s and the lessons he learned from MLK, who was a frequent visitor in his home when he was a child.

Please check the news and events calendar under the News and Events pull- down menu on the front of CCA’s website for more month-long activities and their descriptions.

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Anita Mansouri (Nursing) and Emily Serfa (American Sign Language Interpreter) have been selected as CCA’s two representatives on the Phi Theta Kappa All-Colorado Academic Team, the Colorado Community College System announced.

The pair will be honored at a March 12 ceremony at the Grand Ballroom of the Denver Athletic Club on March 12.
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Clockwise from left: Desiree Mayberry and Theresa Hailey, president and vice president of the Black Student Alliance, share a conversation during a Jan. 24 breakfast to celebrate the life of Dr. Martin Luther King. Assistant to the President Tami Morrissey unexpectedly celebrated her birthday by being serenaded by a singing telegram in the President’s Office conference room; CCA President Dr. Betsy Oudenhoven debuts on “Aurora News Weekly” with co-anchors Amanda Turner (center) and Wendy Brockman for the show during the week of Jan. 6; Pony Anderson, director of the Center for Simulation and Disaster Management Institute, shows off a plaque presented to her by the 8th Civil Support Team for her critical work with military entities in enhancing training by presenting real-world settings in safe training spaces at Lowry.