

Board of Trustees Candidate Statements

October 15, 2026

Monroe County Community College is posting statements as provided by candidates for the college's Board of Trustees. All nine candidates were invited to submit a statement, and each was given the same instructions. Because all candidates provided statements well before the final deadline, the college posted the statements on Oct. 15, 2026, four days earlier than anticipated. The college is not advocating on behalf of any candidate but for informational purposes to the public is providing the information as submitted by the candidates.

Kevin Dahm

Work Experience

- DTE Energy, 37 years (retired 2022): 23 years at Enrico Fermi II as an electrical engineer, senior reactor operator, and maintenance superintendent. 14 years in DTE Construction as project engineer on projects up to \$1 billion
- U.S. Navy veteran, 20 years (retired 2010)
- Adjunct Professor at MCCC since 2013
- Helped develop and accredit MCCC's nuclear engineering technology program
- VTS, 4 years, Director of Engineering specializing in Digital Twin technology and AI Engineering

Board Experience

- MCCC Technology Advisory Boards, member (2 boards)
- Oakland University Industrial Engineering Advisory Board, member (5 years)
- American Nuclear Society (MI/OH), past President, Vice President, and Treasurer
- Humane Society of Monroe County, past Vice President

I am running to make the college financially self-sufficient without relying on millages (tax increases) to operate.

I will make MCCC the BEST community college in Michigan, increase enrollment to previous high levels, and keep tuition low.

I will work with unions, industries, businesses, and students to ensure graduates gain current technology skills and succeed in their careers.

I will ensure MCCC's associate's programs dovetail with four-year universities, making MCCC a true 2+2 college.

I want our students and graduates to become our best advertising by sharing their experiences with the quality education they received.

An exceptional understanding of AI and its impact on careers is essential. I will help navigate the future through AI and technical excellence.

Penny Dorcey

I am a lifelong supporter of education and have proudly called Monroe County home for 35 years. For more than 30½ years, I served Monroe County Community College in Financial Aid, the Humanities and Social Sciences Division, the President's Office, and the Board of Trustees. Throughout my career, I have been committed to helping students achieve their educational goals and supporting the college's mission.

Education has always been important to me personally and professionally. I am the proud parent of four children and grandparent of eight grandchildren. I earned an Associate Degree from Monroe County Community College and a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Siena Heights University.

During my years at the college, I worked closely with the President and Board of Trustees, including coordinating and participating in trustee training programs facilitated by the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT). These experiences gave me valuable insight into board governance and the responsibilities of community college trustees.

I am seeking election to the Board of Trustees because I want to continue serving the college that has played such an important role in my life. I believe education strengthens our community and creates opportunities for success. My years of service have provided me with a strong understanding of the college's strengths, challenges, policies, budgeting processes, and governance responsibilities.

If elected, I will bring experience, dedication, and a collaborative, nonpartisan approach focused on the continued success of Monroe County Community College, its students, employees, and community.

Mark Ely

Born and raised in Monroe County, I am an alumnus of Monroe High School, Monroe County Community College, (Associate of Science) and Eastern Michigan University, (Bachelor of Business Administration with emphasis in sales and marketing) with graduate work completed at Central Michigan University.

For over 35 years, my career centered on corporate health care benefits and health care financing, being on the management teams of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan and Henry Ford Healthcare Corporation.

Currently, I sing baritone in a large men's choral society, "Measure for Measure", based in Ann Arbor Michigan.

Monroe County has several pockets of poverty within our various communities that our civic leaders are ignoring. The current national poverty rate is 10.2%, yet there are community pockets of poverty in our county as high as 26.1%. There is only one viable solution left in Monroe County, and that is Monroe County Community College (MCCC) to eliminate poverty.

What I hope to contribute...It is imperative a plan is created to approach the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS), employer groups and residents to place individuals into programs that best fit their skill levels to help elevate the individual's earning capacity. When this is fully achieved, households can be more productive, commerce can be heightened within the community and the overall status of living in Monroe County will lure other entities and residents making Monroe County a much better place to live.

John Gonta

My name is John Gonta. I am an Attorney here in Downtown Monroe and I have been licensed since 1991. I hold advanced degrees: Master of Arts and Master of Science, and a Juris Doctorate (law degree). I was the Recruiting Sergeant for 14 years here in Monroe for the Army National Guard, until the Monroe Armory was demolished. I was elected as Republican Precinct Delegate in 2024.

I am running for Monroe Community College Trustee because I believe there is a crisis in enrollment. In 2014, enrollment was over 4,500 students, today around 2,700 students. I understand the challenges presented in recruiting. I was awarded the Army Commendation Medal for my efforts as a Recruiting Sergeant. I believe I can make a difference in the policies passed by the Trustees to increase enrollment, freeze tuition and make our Community College flourish! I am ready to serve our Community College as Trustee.

Jeff La Roux

Introduction: I graduated from the University of Michigan, studying English, History, and Music. I have a degree in Educational Administration and was a school principal at three Monroe County schools for 19 years. I led an independent school on the Pacific Island of

Saipan where I was personally accountable to an elected school board. I taught English at Vilnius University, and am currently the Interim Director of the MCCC Symphonic Band. I host Brain League Trivia monthly, am the chair of the Leadership Committee at St. Paul's Church, am an election poll worker, and volunteer at MCOP.

Why you are running for the MCCC Board of Trustees: I am running for the Board because I have a deep commitment to MCCC. I studied academically at MCCC and am currently a member of the Symphonic Band and a member of the Orchestra. Education is important to me and was my career. I will bring experience as a principal, university teacher, and board member to the MCCC Board of Trustees and will make sound decisions for the students, faculty, college, and our community.

If Elected: If elected, I hope to connect with our community, sharing the positive initiatives at MCCC, rebuilding trust, and encouraging more relevant community connections between the college, local businesses, and local universities. As a Monroe taxpayer, I understand the importance of good financial stewardship.

Jamie O'Brien

Intro: Have led teams of engineers since 1985, with decades of experience securing research grants. Currently working with the Engineering School to build an energy management lab. Skills required for a grid that uses a mix of energy sources today. I don't bring hopes and dreams as the other candidates do. I bring a working knowledge of how to start funding the institution without the endless taxation of Monroe residents.

Why: We deserve more than what we have in the Board of Trustees. They let issues fester instead of resolving them. +40 years of management has come with +30 years of sitting on Boards to resolve issues, including:

- 1) 911 review of building codes hosted by Underwriters Laboratories
- 2) Contributions to the Americans with Disabilities Act with George Bush 41, working with the California Architects Office
- 3) Chair of several American National Standards Institute (ANSI) Building and plumbing codes.
- 4) Chair of the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) for hybrid vehicle controls and hydraulic hybrid transmissions.

Hopes: Bring product development and research to the institution with an emphasis on the strong, skilled trades all true research requires.

Dr. Cora Payne

I have a Doctor of Education in Community College Leadership (DCCL) from Ferris State University, and 24 years of experience working in a Community College at various levels,

including 3 years with the Board of Trustees. I also developed the continuing education schedule and events calendar at the largest campus, and was responsible for the daily operations of various campuses as the Administrator in Charge. I was Executive Dean over Instruction at my last campus, served as Co-Chair of the College's Curriculum Committee, and served on the Program Review Committee.

Why Vote for Dr. Cora Payne for MCCC Trustee:

- ✓ Doctor of Education in Community College Leadership
- ✓ 24 Years of work experience at a Community College
- ✓ Executive Dean (Instruction) with leadership experience at five campuses
- ✓ Co-Chair of the District's Curriculum Committee – 3 years; Member for 6 years
- ✓ Direct experience working with a nine-member Board of Trustees

My Priorities:

- Responsible Stewardship of College Resources
- Strategic Planning for Long-Term Success
- Student Success and Academic Excellence
- Workforce Training Aligned with Employer Needs
- Affordable and Accessible Education

I am running for the Board of Trustees at MCCC so that I can give back and contribute my experience and working knowledge of community colleges to the students and community that I live in.

A Commitment to Our Community:

"I believe Monroe County Community College should remain a pathway to opportunity for students, families, and employers. I will bring experience, integrity, and thoughtful leadership to every decision."

Keith Rossi

I've seen firsthand the transformative role the college plays in the lives of local families. I'm a hospitality general/operating manager with 30+ years of leadership experience. I believe in fiscal responsibility and leading teams with dignity and care- values I believe are at the heart of a great education. I'm a graduate of MCCC and a former foster parent for 6 years. I'm a member of the Greater Monroe Lions Club,

Endorsements:

Michigan Education Association members, representing all 3 faculty, staff, and maintenance associations at MCCC.

UA Local 671 Plumbers and Pipefitters

Democratic Municipals Board

Monroe/Lenawee AFL-CIO

Why I'm running: I'm committed to protecting MCCC's independence and defending academic freedom, so faculty and curriculum are guided by educators, not political pressure. I support expanding access to an education that prepares every student for a successful future.

When elected:

Expanding dual enrollment - so more students are earning real college credit before they graduate, at no added cost to their families.

Strengthening pathways outward - Building out vocational and technical programs that lead to real careers, while also improving transfer outcomes for students headed to four-year degrees, so every student has a viable path

Protecting and expanding tuition-free access to MCCC - through the "Michigan Reconnect" and the "Community College Guarantee", because affordability is what turns "college is possible" into "college is happening" for families in our community.

A healthy and thriving institution depends on community support. A strong college and a strong community rise together.

Mary Kay Thayer

Re-election to the MCCC Board of Directors

Born in Pittsburgh in 1946, I have been married to my husband, Jack, for 61 years. We have two daughters, five grandchildren, and four great-grandsons.

My professional and public service experience includes serving as a Monroe County Commissioner, Bedford Township Trustee, and Bedford Park Commissioner. I am also the retired CEO of Thayer Consulting Engineering, Inc.

Why Are You Running for Re-Election:

I have no agenda, except for continuing to make decisions designed to keep our students successful, to complete their education, and then hold a job of economic value.

I will continue lobbying Lansing and Washington DC for the needs of our students. I believe we must continue to provide access to Student Success and Retention. We save lives. Due to many state grants, many of our students attend MCCC with no tuition costs. Keck Market and the Foundation at MCCC not only provide groceries, but also transportation, emergency money, and lodging, if needed.

I have been blessed to serve on the Monroe County Board of Trustees for over 35 years. During that time, I have been a Delegate to the Michigan Community College Association. I

am also the Michigan Coordinator to the American Community College Association. When I attend these presentations, I send emails and then provide hard copies to my fellow board members. I have attended MCCA and ACCT Trustee education and fully understand that community colleges function as a Policy Board, not an Administration Board.