Dr. Fanelli, for your brave efforts, my congratulations and best wishes. May you continue to hold, as Justice Brennan did, a sparkling vision of the importance of freedom of inquiry to our nation and world.

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg

At a special ceremony at the United States Supreme Court in Washington, D.C. on January 23, Nassau Community College President Dr. Sean A. Fanelli received the prestigious William J. Brennan, Jr. Award. Presented by the Thomas Jefferson Center for the Protection of Free Expression, the William J. Brennan, Jr. Award honors the legacy of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Brennan’s devotion to the principles of free expression. The award, which is only given when a recipient is deemed worthy, recognizes those with a similar commitment. Such commitment might be shown by a single act or a lifetime of activity to enhance the liberties of free speech and press.

Dr. Fanelli is the first college president ever to receive the William J. Brennan, Jr. Award—all previous award recipients have been lawyers. His name was placed on a plaque for display in Justice Brennan’s United States Supreme Court chambers. Speaking at the award ceremony, Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg said, “Justice Brennan loved mercy and did justice for some 34 years on this Court. He retained throughout his full life a genuine fondness for people. He would have applauded Dr. Fanelli’s caring, courageous endeavors to preserve and advance academic freedom. Dr. Fanelli, for your brave efforts, my congratulations and best wishes. May you continue to hold, as Justice Brennan did, a sparkling vision of the importance of freedom of inquiry to our nation and world.”

As president of Nassau Community College since 1982, Dr. Fanelli has served not only as a strong educational leader, but also an eloquent and courageous defender of academic and intellectual freedom. In the third year of his presidency, Fanelli refused to heed massive public pressure from many in the Catholic community to cancel a college production of the controversial but award-winning play Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You by Christopher Durang. While conceding, “as a Catholic, I personally find the play offensive,” he maintained that “cancellation would have a chilling effect upon academic freedom and freedom of speech as well.” Fanelli also fought a four-year court battle adamantly defending the College’s refusal to disclose teaching materials used in a course entitled “Human Sexuality.” The effort to obtain the materials led to a later attempt by critics outside the college to control the content of the course, to which Fanelli responded, “the concept of persons not in the College community deciding what the content of a course should be sets a dangerous precedent. It’s just not appropriate to have an entity external to the college process come in and tell you how to construct a curriculum.”

Presenting the award to Dr. Fanelli was Robert M. O’Neil, director of the Thomas Jefferson Center and past president of the University of Virginia. The Thomas Jefferson Center, located in Charlottesville, Virginia, is a nonprofit, nonpartisan institution engaged in research, education, and intervention on behalf of the individual right of free expression.

William Domroe, Chairperson of the Board of Trustees of Nassau Community College, said, “To receive such a prestigious award at the U.S. Supreme Court was a momentous occasion and one of the highlights of Dr. Fanelli’s career. His award is proudly shared by the entire College community, as well as the residents of Nassau County.”
Thomas Casserly, Financial Aid, was elected as a Member at Large, Community College Representative to the State University of New York Financial Aid Professionals (SUNYFAP) Executive Council. His two-year term begins in April.


Prof. Marcia McNair, English, recently presented an overview of African-American writing with an emphasis on early slave narratives, the cultural rebirth of the Harlem Renaissance, and contemporary trends at Peninsula Public Library in Lawrence, NY.

Dr. Tom O’Brien and Dr. Kumkum Prabhakar, Biology, recently published an article entitled “Implementing Modified Pedagogy to Teach Biology” in the Metropolitan Association of College and University Biologist’s winter 2001 issue of IN VIVO. Prof. O’Brien also published the article “Helping Students Develop Thinking Skills Using Environmental Topics” in the Empire State Association of Two-Year Colleges’ Biologist Fall 2000 Journal.

Prof. Judy Pestronk, Art, displayed bronze medals in a traveling exhibition with the American Medallic Association’s AMSA 2000, first at QCC Art Gallery, City University, and then at Iola and Milwaukee. She showed small sculptures at an invitational exhibit at the Donnell Library in NYC; presented a lecture on the influence of Greek architecture at the Long Beach Library; and received the Chaim Gross Award for alabaster carving at the Salmagundi Gallery in NYC.

Prof. Patti Tana, English, won first prize in the Long Island Poetry Collective Poetry Contest with her poem “Fools Rush In.”

Mikki Vicoli, Information Services, was recognized by Wilton as the Eastern US Team Enrollment Winner of the Year for the year 2000 for her cake decorating classes. She teaches creative cake decorating at NCC and in the Bellmore school district.
Tuskegee Airmen Celebrate Black History Month at NCC

During the month of February, the Nassau Community College Black History Month Committee presented a series of programs and events as a tribute to the black experience. One such program was a discussion by five of the original Tuskegee Airmen, the first African-American group permitted to fly in the United States Air Force. Even though African-Americans have been involved in all wars throughout America’s history, they oftentimes were not given full credit and recognition for services rendered, and in most cases were isolated in all-African-American units. At the outbreak of World War II, black leaders and the black press increased their protest of the separate and significantly inferior access to training, facilities and preparation afforded to blacks in the military.

In their presentation, the former airmen spoke about their personal experiences in military and civilian life during the World War II years. They explained how they and others wanted to be patriotic and good soldiers, yet still had to face rampant discrimination and segregation. Because of their dedication and success, however, the federal government was forced to reassess its segregated military policy when the war ended. Eventually, President Truman was compelled to issue two executive orders that effectively paved the way for the integration of the Air Force.

The students, faculty and members of the community who attended the discussion by the Tuskegee airmen were motivated by their stories and inspired by their commitment to their country in the face of discrimination. The airmen also stressed the importance of education in the continuing effort to overcome racial and economic barriers.
Nassau Community College Presents The 30th Annual Folk Festival

TUESDAY-THURSDAY — APRIL 3, 4, 5
8:00 PM - 12:00 AM

Scheduled acts include: Janis Ian, Oscar Brand, Dave Van Ronk (Blues), Harlem Blues & Jazz Band, C.J. Chenier (Zydeco), Moti Deren (Cuban Jewish), Eliza Carthy (British), Spider Nick & the Mad Dogs (Ska-L.I.), Johnnie Whelan (Irish)

The NCC Folk Festival and daytime activities are free and the public is invited. All programs will be held in the Nassau Community College Center Building. They are sponsored by Nassau Concerts and the NCC Faculty/Student Association. For further information and schedule of the performers, please contact Phyllis Kurland at (516) 572-7153.