

An interview with a college president

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Campus News

Do you ever ask yourself, “Why are the Holidays so stressful?”

Is the chilly weather? The fact that it’s the cold season? The rush to buy gifts? Or standing in line for the perfect gift, then getting to the cash register and finding out the last one was just sold?

So what could it be? It could be any one of these things, or something entirely different. Luckily the stress and excitement are what draws everyone together during the holidays.

Strange to say right? To think that the stress and panic of baking food for the holidays or buying Christmas gifts last minute causes that, but it does! It is a constant reminder that we are human. In the tumultuous state of everything, the most important thing we can do for ourselves is to slow down, and think about what we are grateful for during the holidays! Whether it was your first Christmas with your family or the splendor of cooking, and so on, what really resonates with us as a society are the memories we make through these experiences.

In 2020, we should capture and bask in these occasions, and always consider the grander sensation each moment and recollection brings to us.

In this interview, Christina Royal, Ph.D., Holyoke Community College’s President, has given me great insight into what the Holidays and the New Year are from her perspective.

DS: Diamond Smith

CR: Christina Royal

DS: What a pleasure it is to speak with you! We have goals

and exciting situations for this year we are anticipating. Like many of us, what are you looking forward to 2020?

CR: There are so many ways I’m looking forward to 2020. I start my fourth year as President of HCC in January. HCC will be spending the year preparing for our 75th anniversary (which begins in 2021). Our new Vice President of Administration & Finance, Narayan Sampath, begins January 2nd. And we will hold a grand opening for our new campus center. And there was federal legislation passed (called the FUTURE Act) which will lead to the simplification of the FAFSA form, and that will make it easier in the future for HCC students to apply for federal financial aid.

I also look forward to strengthening my pickleball game (I just started playing the sport this past summer) and visiting my brother this year (who lives in San Francisco, Calif.).

DS: I am sure so many students will be so excited to know these types of things are in effect on campus. You had men-

‘For my 47th birthday year my goal is 4700 random acts of kindness.’

tioned playing pickleball, which sounds like a fun and active game! As adults, we seem to normalize the stress of rushing around for the holiday season, including getting ready for New Years’. How do you stay positive during the hustle and bustle of everything?

CR: The holiday season can feel hectic for a lot of people, but I like the energy and excitement of the holidays. For my

47th birthday this year, I started a challenge to accomplish 4700 random acts of kindness for the next year. During this holiday season, I have enjoyed finding simple ways to help others, such as expressing gratitude or keeping a positive attitude during a stressful time for people working in retail.

In general, I try to remember the saying: “Be kind for everyone you meet is fighting a battle that you know nothing about.” It’s so true. I can make the moment better or worse for each person. I want to make it better for everyone with whom I interact.

DS: That is so powerful! That is the type of mindset everyone should have this year. Speaking of positivity, who do you like to spend time with during the holiday season? Who gives you comfort and joy?

CR: I travel to New York to spend time with my family. My mother and younger sister both live in the greater Albany area, and I also have several extended family members there too.

DS: Sounds wonderful, I have a big family too so I can totally relate! What would you say, is one of your most favorite holiday traditions?

CR: As a child, we celebrated



Dr. Christina Royal

Christmas and I would love to imagine where Santa was in the world, and estimate when he would arrive at our place. This was before they had the “Santa Trackers.” I was in awe at how he could travel the globe in a single night, across all time zones. It was magical – thinking about a person that could accomplish such a great feat, and whose life purpose was to spread joy and help people believe in the spirit of the holidays.

DS: Aw! I love that! It is so important to keep a grasp on memories that give us peace and joy. Speaking of which, could you tell me your funniest childhood memories of the holiday season?

CR: One of my favorite childhood memories was when I got a bike for Christmas (I think I was five or six years old). In those days, bikes came in boxes and my father had to assemble it. I wanted to cut my hair, but my mother wanted me to keep it longer. So, this particular Christmas, I hid in the giant box that my bike came in and

(cont.)

cut my own hair. I guess I didn't stop to think that eventually I would have to get out of the box and my mom would see my new haircut. Needless to say, she wasn't happy, but everyone else found it funny.

DS: That is priceless! In your opinion, what is the true meaning of the Holidays and the New Year?

CR: The holidays can have different meanings for different people. For me, the holidays is a

reminder about the importance of connecting with family and friends and helping those less fortunate. The New Year is about renewal, a time to start fresh, dream big, and further our journeys to be the best versions of ourselves. I love to reflect on and take inventory of the current year and set big intentions for the next year.

DS: Amazing, I completely agree! Lastly, do you have any tips for students and faculty on how to start the New Year off in a great and productive way, before the new term?

CR: Students, faculty, and staff work incredibly hard during the academic semester. The best way for everyone to recharge is to re-connect. Re-connect with family, friends, and yourselves. Be generous to

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others and kind with yourselves. By giving yourself space to re-charge, you will return to school ready to engage in an-

other academic semester.

In the midst of all of our running around and panic during the holidays and this New Year, we should always stop and find ourselves in the moment. It won't only give us peace, it will continuously manifest into something truly beautiful if we take time and take it in. Remember, this 2020 focus on yourself through positivity, renewal, and betterment, and always lend a helping hand to anyone who is in need. You never know- one day you may need that helping hand.

Happy New Year!