

Daniel Boothe

A happy, blustery, wintry January day to you here in beautiful Muskegon, and welcome to JayTalk, talking all things Jayhawks, the official podcast of Muskegon Community College. I am Daniel Booth, alongside me, co-hosting the Operation Miss Samantha Corecki, as we come to you live from Winter Welcome Days broadcasting here in the Gerber Lounge at MCC's main campus. Coming up on the podcast today as it's winter welcome days, Samantha and I welcome our two newest staff members here at MCC as we sit down with our new Director of Equity, Mr. Derek King, and new Muskegon Community College Registrar April Shirey joins us as well as both will share their incredible journeys that ultimately brought them to Muskegon Community College. And we'll talk to some chiefs, no, not Travis Kelsey, but we will be talking with Chief Marketing and Communications Officer Kristen Tank, who has some really exciting enrollment news to share, as well as Chief Diversity Officer Mr. Ken James in the hot seat as well, talking about the upcoming MLK Unity Breakfast later this month. That is coming up later in the program. And we'll try to grab some students and who knows who else, but first, Samantha Atime. for another welcome as we welcome you as the new co-host of JTalk. This is your first rodeo, but on behalf of me and Sue Samanango, who is stepping down as co-host, welcome to the podcast, welcome to the team, and how are you feeling about the new gig?

Samantha Korecki

I'm super excited to be on this podcast. I'm hoping to bring a new element of fun. Not that the podcast wasn't fun already, but I'm excited to bring all kinds of different little games we can play with our guests and introduce all kinds of people that I come across at MCC as I am the photographer here. I get to be out on campus all the time meeting people and I would love to invite them to come talk to us on the podcast.

Daniel Boothe

Yeah, I'm really excited about that. And I also am really excited about the fact that, full disclosure, you were a student not too long Go tell us a little bit about your journey here to MCC.

Samantha Korecki

Right, so true. I just graduated from Calvin University about a year ago, so this is my first full-time job out of college, and I am loving it. I am really, I think, in tune with the students here, at least I would like to think that, because I'm... pretty close to their age and I see them all as just exciting new guests on our podcast and new friends to make while we're here.

Daniel Boothe

You started this summer, correct? This past summer of 2024.

Samantha Korecki

I did. It's been almost six months.

Daniel Boothe

It's amazing because you've accomplished so much in such a little amount of time. You've been such an amazing addition to the MCC family. But let me ask you, as you have started here at MCC, what is something that has kind of surprised you or what's your take on the school so far?

Samantha Korecki

I have just been blown away by how friendly everyone is here at MCC and how much each of our staff and faculty members care about the students and their success. Everything here is about student success and we want to put them in touch with the resources that are available to them, which as you'll hear from all the guests on our podcast, there are all kinds of resources and we're happy to help them.

Daniel Boothe

Well, Samantha, I am so excited to embark on this journey of JTalk with you as my new co-host. Are you ready?

Samantha Korecki

I'm ready.

Daniel Boothe

All right, three, two, one.

Samantha Korecki

Welcome to JTalk.

Daniel Boothe

You are listening to JTalk Live from Winter Welcome Days here at MCC. And sitting down at the table is the new Director of Equity, Mr. Derek King. Previously, King served as the Director for Athletic Inclusion at Grand Valley State University, Go Lakers, where he oversaw over 750 student athletes and athletic staff. Derek earned his bachelor's degree in business administration with an emphasis in human resources at Davenport University.

He's also a former college athlete. Derek played for Davenport University for two seasons. Derek earned his master's degree in business management from the University of Phoenix. And Derek is a true servant leader who has a passion for standing in the gap for marginalized communities. Mr. King, welcome to MCC and congratulations on the new job, man. Thank you. First question's out of the gate, Mr. King. What attracted you to this position in the 1st place, and what has been your experience here at MCC so far?

Derrick King

Well, what attracted me to the opportunity to be here at MCC was honestly to make an impact on a broader scale with a larger student population. And so, it's a community college. I know that there's more students than, of course, dealing with student athletes was great, but there's just more students here and the campus is larger in terms of the student body that I'm able to deal with. We're able to make a bigger impact here. So community's great. I'm still serving in my role and my purpose. And so, you know, those are the opportunities that you guys have given me and I'm grateful to be here.

Daniel Boothe

I want to talk a little bit about your upbringing. You have an incredible story from growing up in a household that was, there were some addiction issues there. You also experienced homelessness.

Derrick King

Yes.

Daniel Boothe

Can you take us back to that young Derrick King and talk us through the journey of how you were able to navigate yourself out of that kind of environment and find yourself getting a degree in higher education?

Derrick King

Yeah, so growing up, I was kind of considered the man of the house. And so, having a mom that, had some issues with, drugs and having a younger brother, having to lead the house a lot of times, I was able to see what my mom was doing and able to say, you learn lessons in a number of different ways, so you see what to do and what not to do. And that was something I didn't want to attach myself to. So, going to school, playing sports were a big part of my life, and they allowed me to grow in a space where I could turn into a better leader, right? As, of course, time went on, I gave myself opportunities by playing sports, learning how to be a better leader, how to lead by example, lead with my voice. And so the

opportunities there kind of presented themselves and I was able to continue to grow into the positive young man and then influence others. You know, I had a little brother, so I was able to kind of lead him and keep him on the right path. And then, you know, as time went on, I ended up having my own family and kids and such. And from my youth to where I am now. When I grew into a young man, leadership development was a big part of my process and my story. And I'd like to lead by example, character integrity, all those things played a huge role into how I wanted to be looked at and viewed. So, yeah, so, You learn what to do, you learn what not to do by watching others, and then you're able to kind of help other people pivot and shift to the credit of my mom. She's not doing any of those things anymore. Awesome. And she's doing pretty good in life, so yeah.

Samantha Korecki

And does that, would you say that that experience helps you to connect more with your players that you've coached in basketball and students here?

Derrick King

Oh, for sure, for sure. One thing I believe in is hard work. I believe in effort. And I believe in not having the mentality of not having a quitter's mentality, right? We all see adversity in our lives. We all are going to, you know, encounter some adversity. There's going to be some barriers that we're going to have to overcome. And so my life had a lot of those things. So just not having the the mind to to to quit. You know, we talk about being tough. Tough is not always stature. It's not how big you are or how strong you are. It's your mental strength is where it lies. And I teach my players that, you know, I always tell them it takes no athletic talent or ability to work hard. right? Effort is free. And so we have to make sure that we are given effort in everything that we do from bell to bell, sun up to sundown.

Daniel Boothe

Awesome. All right, Derek, let's talk a little bit about DEI. Why are you passionate about it and why is it important? I know that sounds like the dumbest question ever in 2025. But still, what attracted you to DEI work in the 1st place and why is it still important to be pounding this drum even in 2025, when we feel like, boy, we should have gotten there already.

Derrick King

Right. Well, you know, it's a marathon, right? And so the thing that I think about in the DEI space is I want to make sure I'm the guy we talk about filling in the gap. And whether it's for student athletes, and people in general, you know, all underrepresented and marginalized communities, I want to make sure that they have a voice. not only do they have, the table

and a seat at the table, but there's a voice that they have at the table and that they're heard. So me being able to be an advocate to be able to help people who are in those underrepresented communities and marginalized populations have a voice. I want to make sure that I'm the person that can help and just be a part of that. I don't want to just stand on the sidelines. I don't believe in that.

Daniel Boothe

Yes, sir. Now, this is an audio medium, so people can't see you, but full disclosure, you are a person of color. Let me ask you this. Our president is a person of color. You're a person of color. How important is it for students of color to see people who look like them that are in positions of?

Derrick King

Leadership? because representation matters. Yes, sir. You know, it's difficult at times to want to be in a position, but if you don't know what it looks like, we'll give the example of Barack Obama or Michelle, right?

Daniel Boothe

Sure, yeah, right.

Derrick King

You know, I'm pretty sure young black men may have desired to want to be a president of the United States at some point. However, if we've never seen one, Those things matter. What do they see as? And they see most black men as athletes. So what do we want to do? Basketball player, football player. But there's other roles and places in life. There's doctors, lawyers, you know, president of the United States.

Daniel Boothe

Yes and amen.

Derrick King

So representation matters. And when you're able to see that in higher education, having even a faculty member, myself here in DEI, you know, John Selman in that space, that matters. And so and then my immediate boss, you know, is Ken James. And the opportunity to work for a black man, it did matter to me because being able to see like, okay, he understands things a little better from our events, that matters. So yes.

Samantha Korecki

Absolutely. And now just to pivot a little bit, what is a common misconception about DEI that you feel like you still have to educate people on? What's something you come across a lot?

Derrick King

That's a good question. I think that My common misconception is they think, most people might think the DEI is just, it's about race, right? And that's only a component of it, right? There's race, gender, sexual orientation, you know, there's all of these different pieces of DEI. It's diversity. You know, everybody, like if we look at this table right now, and if it's okay for me to fully disclose, you know, a white man.

Daniel Boothe

Model. Oh, yeah.

Derrick King

So we have a white man here. We have a white woman or Caucasian woman, which, you know, and then we have a black man. This is diverse, what we can see on the outside, right? We can see on the outside. We can't see the background of everyone. I don't know what a person's sexual orientation is. I don't know whether the diversity of thought or education. I don't know what your educational background is, but everybody has diverse backgrounds and things that they bring to the table. And the beautiful thing about that is when we put them all in one room, these backgrounds, from an employment standpoint, from an education standpoint, they matter because we all have something that we bring to the table and we can chip in, push, move the needle forward in DEI.

Daniel Boothe

Let's talk a little bit about the future and what do you see your role, your responsibilities? Whenever you start a new job, you really want to give yourself six months to settle into it, make mistakes, find out where the bathroom is, that kind of stuff. Right, exactly. Yeah, And that's very true. But when you dream big and you think about what you want to accomplish here at MCC, what is that dream?

Derrick King

So when I dream big and I think about what I want to accomplish, I think about what my skills, my talents are and what I bring to the table. And then I'm able to kind of view the lay of the land, like you said, six months or however long it might take. You know, this building is very confusing, but.

Samantha Korecki

Yes, it is. I'm with you on that one.

Derrick King

But I get to think about what I bring to the table, my skills, my allies, people that are going to advocate for DEI. Ken and John Selman have already done a great job at our strategic plan. And so knowing what the plan is, right, and then knowing how in the next couple of years, how we may have to shift that plan a little bit or advance the plan of equity and what that looks like. You know what I mean? So being able to know the lay of the land, create a plan, and then moving the needle forward in terms of not necessarily just having everything be so performative, right? We want to make sure that we're getting outcomes, if that makes sense. We can do as many activities, as many events as we want to.

Daniel Boothe

Right, but unless we're moving that needle, what's the point? Programming for the sake of programming doesn't work.

Derrick King

Exactly, and we want to make sure that we're getting actual outcomes. And I believe that Ken James and John Salman, they're doing a great job at saying, hey, look, this is where we were, this is where we are now, this is where we're going to be. and this is how we can get to those outcomes.

Daniel Boothe

Yeah, I think that's fantastic. And not to kiss up to the big man on campus, but that's one thing about Dr. Selman that I really am so appreciative of is that student success drives everything that he does and removing barriers that come in the way of kids getting the first class education here at MCZ. I mean, 100%. Makes it so great to work here. All right, Sam, time for our final game. Sam's got something for you.

Derrick King

We got a game.

Daniel Boothe

Yeah, here we go.

Samantha Korecki

Okay, Derek, it's time for our final four. Four quick questions you say, the first thing that comes to your mind. All right, I'm going to hit you real fast. Yes or no, quick questions. Michael Jordan and LeBron James, who is the greatest?

Derrick King

Michael Jordan.

Daniel Boothe

Yes, he is. Yes, he is.

Samantha Korecki

All right, #2. You played college basketball. Can you still dunk?

Derrick King

I can't dunk. No. And I kept the ball that I did dunk with the twice, two times in my life.

Samantha Korecki

It's an accomplishment, dude. It's fantastic. I can't dunk. Full disclosure, I'm 5 foot 4 and I cannot dunk.

Daniel Boothe

Okay, you wouldn't know it by looking at me, but I can't either.

Samantha Korecki

All right, number three. Something that pleasantly or unpleasantly surprised you about MCC when you got here.

Derrick King

This building. It was.

Samantha Korecki

Fair enough.

Derrick King

Pleasant and unpleasant, I guess, at the same time.

Daniel Boothe

Let's start with unpleasant.

Derrick King

Unpleasant, yeah.

Daniel Boothe

Real quick, this isn't my interview, but when I interviewed for my position, I was 20 minutes late for my interview. I showed up 20 minutes early, and I was 20 minutes late pouring sweat because I was running around the door.

Derrick King

Trying to figure out where he is.

Daniel Boothe

Trying to find 2109.

Samantha Korecki

Right, and to go right off of that for my interview, Daniel was waiting for me here in the lobby to tell me where to go.

Daniel Boothe

I knew.

Samantha Korecki

Which I so appreciated.

Daniel Boothe

Hey, Derek, on behalf of everyone here at Muskegon Community College, welcome to the team. We are so honored and blessed to have you. Go get them. We're all rooting for you. Best of luck this year.

Derrick King

Appreciate it. Thank you. Thanks for having me. And I hope you guys have an excellent day.

Samantha Korecki

Welcome back to JTalk Live from MCC's Winter Welcome Days. Today, we welcome to the table Ms. April Shirey, who we are so very lucky to have here at MCC. Ms. Shirey comes to the lakeshore from Grand Rapids Community College and Aquinas College, where she served as a professor of geography and conservation management. She holds a Master's of Science degree from Western Michigan in geography, as well as a Bachelor's of Science

degree in geography from Aquinas. Now she joins us at MCC's new registrar. Please welcome to the podcast Miss April Shirey.

April Shirey

Thanks for having me.

Samantha Korecki

April, congratulations on the new gig. You got the big job now. How does it feel?

April Shirey

It feels pretty good. It was very exciting. It was something that I wasn't necessarily expecting to happen, but I'm super excited that it is.

Samantha Korecki

Right. How so?

April Shirey

Well, I. It kind of came as like a surprise. I got a call from Muskegon Community College after I interviewed for a professor position. And they said, we loved what you had to say about community colleges and how excited you were about students. Would you be interested in interviewing for another position? And I said, Absolutely, depending on what the position is, what do you feel about that? Because I loved teaching. I mean, I still love teaching. It's an amazing experience all the time, connecting with students. But they sent me the position for the registrar, and I was like, I'm okay. I don't know if I'm qualified for this. You know, how you do if you're in any position.

Samantha Korecki

Of course.

April Shirey

And I applied. And I went through the interview process, and I apparently had all of these components. that they were looking for and I was super excited when they called and offered me.

Daniel Boothe

Yeah, tell us about that moment when you ring, ring, ring, and it's Christine Anderson and she's like, congratulations.

April Shirey

Was surprised because I'm like, no way. you go through every interview and you are your worst critic, right? So you end the interview and you're like, that was the worst interview I've ever had in my life. Like every time. And then you get called back for round two and you're like, no way. They want to talk to me for round two. And you go through that and you're like, oh, there's no way they're calling me. And then you get the call and it is so exciting and it is so amazing. And your life's about to change. Yeah, you're building this completely different future than you expected. And that's awesome because it keeps everything exciting and it keeps everything new. And I am a lifelong learner always. And if I can learn something new in life, in this position, then I'm excited to do something.

Daniel Boothe

Well, congratulations. And then welcome to MCC. Tell us, you're brand new here, only a couple months, about a month and a half. And what's your experience been like so far?

April Shirey

I don't think I have ever been so welcomed in a job, ever. by the people, by the community in general. The feeling that you get when you walk through the doors of MCC is unlike anywhere I've ever experienced. I have been trying to explain that to people that are like, oh, you're driving to Muskegon every day. How does that feel? I'm like, you have no idea. It's so amazing to walk in those doors every day and be greeted by colleagues, be greeted by students that you haven't even met yet. It's just an incredible experience. So I 100% think that This is one of the most welcoming places I've ever been a part of.

Daniel Boothe

Awesome.

Samantha Korecki

That's incredible to hear. Now, so for those that might not know what a registrar does, they might think, oh, it has something to do with registering. What are some of your main job responsibilities? What can you clear up for us?

April Shirey

There is a lot of reporting, a lot of following up with missing components or missing parts of... registration or maybe missing addresses or missing grades or how do we register or there's something missing or a transcript or a lot of that type of stuff. Then also making sure that there's policies that are obviously put in place for the college. So making sure that those policy components are being followed and compliance. And that's what I've

gotten so far anyways, but I am pretty newsful. So I'm sure if you ask me that question in another month, I might be able to answer it differently.

Daniel Boothe

I want to switch focus to Shairi, because you have a pretty amazing story, and I will let you tell it. But I want you to take us all the way back to the day that you were fired as the general manager of a restaurant in California. And can you walk us through how you made it from there to Grand Rapids? And why? Because people are usually going the other way.

April Shirey

Not in California. He's actually in Michigan.

Daniel Boothe

Okay.

April Shirey

So, but I am from California. So let me start there.

Daniel Boothe

Okay, perfect.

April Shirey

So when I was 20 years old, I decided it would be a really great idea to move across the country with my boyfriend before my prefrontal cortex was developed. And I got into a car and we drove across and we ended up in Grand Rapids, Michigan, which is where he was from. And we broke up six months later because if you're not really established in an area, that's what happens. But I had met a lot of people and I started working at a restaurant in downtown Grand Rapids and I really enjoyed it and I quickly became the general manager there. Now I moved on from there. I was hired by another establishment and became their general manager. And then they opened another establishment and I became the general manager there. From there, I was asked to a forced resignation, right? You need to resign. We're not aligning anymore, which was very true. I was, I had a really hard time being in the bar and venue restaurant industry. I was having a really hard time watching people drink so much. And so I was having a hard time just watching friends and people that I had gotten to know really well come in every day. And so for me, my job performance was being affected by that. And I know that personally. And I was being affected by that personally.

Daniel Boothe

But your heart wasn't in it anywhere.

April Shirey

Exactly. After you do that for 13 years and you watch it for 13 years, some people can keep doing it. I couldn't. So it was probably the greatest gift that anybody has ever given me because I didn't have any idea what I was going to do. I started working in the event production industry, so large-scale event production. And I really liked that, but I also decided I needed to also carve my own path. And I went back to school at Grand Rapids Community College as a continuing education student, because when you're over 30, they call you a continuing education student. So I had no idea what I was going to do. I was just taking classes. That is another, I'm going to say another really wonderful thing about MCC that I've noticed is the guidance that students are getting here is pretty incredible. I didn't have a lot of guidance when I first started back at community college. It was just like, oh, I'll take this class, this class is good, but I didn't, I think I was spending a lot more money than I needed to. It ended up that I... took a few geography classes online and I was contacted by the professor. He was like, you really seem to like this geography thing. And I was like, I really do. And I had just got done reading this amazing book called Half the Sky and it really inspired me and I decided to pursue geography a little bit further. And I met my mentor, who was the professor at the time. And he's still my mentor to this day. He's an incredible, incredible human being. Big giant Italian guy. Okay, yeah, I can relate. So from there, he advised me I should continue on. We did, he was really great. We did a lot of stuff in community colleges. I did a lot of research actually about food insecurities in community college. I helped with the pantry initiative at GRCC. I helped with the snack stations that ended up around GRCC. I presented to the board about food insecurities. I presented at conferences about food insecurities. And from there, I was accepted to Aquinas to continue my education. And I majored in geography. I also concentrated in the technologies, so GIS, cartography, remote sensing. I really enjoyed it. I decided, well, why not? Let's apply for PhD or the master's and go from there. So I applied to State and I applied to Western. I was awarded full rides to both. Ayo, I know, and state was a straight to PhD program, Western was for my master's. I decided to go for the master's just because I wasn't 100% sure how much longer I wanted to go to school at the time, and now I'm like, I should have just gone for a PhD, but I went back for the master's. I loved Western. It was an incredible school. The community there was really great, especially the geography community. I met some amazing people, again, amazing professors, and graduated from Western during the height of COVID, if that gives you an idea. So that research was challenging, but made it through. And then I actually had my daughter. So I kind of took a break from everything and was a mom for a tiny bit. And then I received a call from Aquinas College. And they said, your old professor is retiring. How would you feel

about coming here and working with us because we're awesome and making no money? And I was like, well, I was like, that sounds awesome because I love you guys. And I went back and I started teaching the technologies at Aquinas, so cartography and GIS (Geographic Information Systems). Thank you, and then I also was teaching World Regional Geography, which I really enjoyed. GRCC called me. I said, Hey, how would you like to teach these couple online classes and then possibly start a GIS class here? And I said, That would be amazing! So we created a GIS class at GRCC that I was teaching as well. And then... And here we are.

Daniel Boothe

Here we are.

Samantha Korecki

And here we are.

Daniel Boothe

What a story.

April Shirey

Yeah.

Daniel Boothe

That wasn't a bad community. Aquinas and GRCC are pretty much right around the corner from each other, are they?

April Shirey

Oh yeah, right down the road. Right downtown and then right on the, yeah, right in East Grand Rapids. It wasn't at all. There were a couple times where it was a pretty quick back and forth, but both colleges were very willing to work with me.

Daniel Boothe

Sure. I came here from Grand Valley State University where I worked before this, and so I know that commute of 96 oh so well. How are you enjoying that commute? Let me tell you, it gets better when it's not winter.

April Shirey

I was going to say, I feel like the few times I did it during the summer for interviews, it was great. I was just like, oh, this is beautiful.

Daniel Boothe

Listen to a podcast.

April Shirey

It's beautiful in the summer. Listen to some music. It's amazing.

Daniel Boothe

Now you're holding on for dear life as semi-trucks are passing you at 100 miles an hour.

April Shirey

I feel like I was, my finger was numb when I got here today. I was just like gripping the steering wheel like, oh. But you know what? I got a new car, so the Subaru is doing pretty well.

Daniel Boothe

Oh yeah, Those are the best. Okay, try to derail you, please.

Samantha Korecki

No, that's all right. So back on track here, I guess. So we at MCC place a lot of emphasis on adult learners and people coming back and giving college a second try or a first try. And you've obviously had such a great success story. What advice would you give to others who might be listening that are in a similar position?

April Shirey

Find A mentor. It was, I can't even explain how valuable that ended up being. And it can be anybody. It can be somebody in the major you're interested in. It can be somebody in a counseling department. It can be somebody in a role like mine. Find somebody that can help guide you, especially if you're a first generation like I was. I had zero idea what that college, you know, what it meant. Like, what are the steps that I have to take? What the heck is fast by? Like, you know, I mean, all of these things. Find somebody that you can work with. And that person can change. It can start with a counseling department. And then maybe you decide, oh, wait, I really like this. I really like English. So maybe you find somebody in the English department that can help you from there. But it's such a valuable resource to have somebody that understands what's going on within a college setting. And don't worry, it's all going to be okay. Because as an adult learner, you have so much going on at all points in time. There is not a point where it is not going to be hectic or crazy. But the best part about community college is getting those core credits done, figuring out what you want to do. If it's just this, that's okay too. If it's just MCC, that's amazing. Just get there

and get to the end because I promise you the end will come. It might be five years and that is all right. But you can get there if it's one class at a time, if it's two classes at a time. But just keep going. That would be my advice.

Daniel Boothe

Okay, April, we have a game we're going to play here with you in one second. But before we do that, I want to just ask quickly, obviously you have a tenacious work ethic. You don't start a job and become the general manager really quickly unless you're doing something right. You're showing up, you're putting in the hours and you're putting in the work. You don't just get jobs at Aquinas and GRCC unless you're putting in the hours and you're taking everything seriously. Where does that work ethic and where does that drive come from that fires your fire in your belly? What does that come from?

April Shirey

That's actually my charming personality. I'm just kidding. No, I, but also that. No, I, it, I watched my mom and my dad work from nothing to get to the positions they were in. My mom didn't have a college degree. She was so busy. She was raising me. I mean, as parents do, because that's what you do, because you love your kids and you want to be there for them. But she started it, the bottom of where she ended up. And she retired at the top with every license that you could hold in her position. And she did that from the ground up, like answering phones in an office to being the compliance officer for the entire office. And I mean, so sought after that she retired recently and they begged her to come down one day a week. So now she's working one day a week again.

Daniel Boothe

That's amazing.

April Shirey

And my dad too, he passed away a couple years ago, but when he was alive, it was the same thing. He started just working on golf courses. That's what he did. He was watering greens. And then he started working to help design certain aspects of them. And then he became, got really interested in different things. He became a superintendent. And it just, I mean, it was watching both of them just pursue what they loved. And then my stepdad too, I mean, he owned his own business his entire career. He was a custom cabinet maker and he was all self-taught and he was incredibly sought after in California. Let's just put it that way.

Daniel Boothe

That is incredibly inspiring. So what I'm hearing is Dr. Selman better look out because you're coming for his job.

April Shirey

I don't know about that. He's pretty awesome. I mean, he is.

Daniel Boothe

He is. I joke.

April Shirey

He's an Ohio statement.

Daniel Boothe

I'm not sure.

Samantha Korecki

Yeah. That's a tough one.

Daniel Boothe

All right, here we go.

Samantha Korecki

All right, so now I've got four questions for you. I'm going to, it's going to be rapid fire. You just say the first thing that comes to mind. You are a California girl. What do you think of the snow here in Michigan? Love it or hate it? Why?

April Shirey

Oh, hate it. Why? It's cold. Are you kidding me? It is so cold. I don't mind the snow. I take that back. I don't mind the snow. I don't like the gray.

Daniel Boothe

Yeah, vitamin D supplements. You have to take vitamin, the little vitamin D pills. I pop like 3 days.

April Shirey

It's super depressing.

Samantha Korecki

We're medicating here. It's that bad.

Daniel Boothe

And you're not like we are. You're fun and you like to laugh. Yeah, totally.

April Shirey

I would much rather be happy.

Daniel Boothe

I know. My first year here, I was like, I can't take it. I can't. I'm sorry. I have a habit of budding in and like talking about myself, so forgive me.

April Shirey

So it's not necessarily the snow, it's the gray. So by February, I'm kind of like, is this summer going to go away?

Samantha Korecki

Yeah. No, I've always been in Michigan and I also don't like the snow or the cold or the gray. So I'm with you. Number 2, Pacific Ocean or Lake Michigan on a summer's day.

April Shirey

Pacific Ocean.

Samantha Korecki

Yeah.

April Shirey

100%. I was actually, when I moved to Michigan, afraid to get in Lake Michigan. And people are like, what's wrong with you? Like, there's nothing in there that's going to eat you like the Pacific Ocean. But I grew up going, you know, before high school every day we used to go and swim in the ocean. So it was like, yeah, right.

Daniel Boothe

Where were you in Southern California?

April Shirey

Central Coast.

Daniel Boothe

Okay.

April Shirey

So yeah, right in between LA and San Francisco. Yeah. Interesting.

Samantha Korecki

All right.

April Shirey

And I do love the lake too. Any water in general, really, I'm okay with.

Samantha Korecki

Fair enough. Better than, yeah, for sure.

April Shirey

Better than cold water.

Samantha Korecki

And now #3, you studied geography. So you obviously love nature. What is the most spectacular place on earth that you've visited?

April Shirey

My gosh, that is such a hard question. I can't rapid fire this one. Okay. I've been to the Austrian Alps. Oh my gosh. Those are incredible. Though I'm huge, Yosemite Arches National Park, all of everything has its own. like Beauty, the Adirondacks in upstate New York. It just, there's so many wonderful places. Canada has some incredible, the Bruce Peninsula in Canada is beautiful. There's some incredible rock formations there. It's hard to pick just one. Yeah, fair enough. A billion places in Germany. You know, but natural wonders, yeah, the Alps are pretty, I'd say, in the top that I've seen in person.

Samantha Korecki

Good choice. I have not been to the Alps, but it is high on my list.

April Shirey

It's not funny though, we're back at the snow again.

Samantha Korecki

I know, look at that.

April Shirey

All right. But they have sun every day.

Samantha Korecki

They do.

April Shirey

Yes.

Samantha Korecki

That's helpful. All right, last off here. Since moving here to Michigan, what is your favorite thing to do on a day off?

April Shirey

Oh my gosh. okay, now that I have a child, it's a little bit different. But I'd say anything outside. Actually, even in the winter, too. Like, I would much rather be outside than indoors all the time.

Daniel Boothe

Have you been to the Muskegon Luge yet?

April Shirey

No, but I, okay, see, because I wasn't like super familiar with Muskegon until I started working here. But I see the billboard when I pass it.

Daniel Boothe

It's a gem.

Samantha Korecki

We're famous for the luge.

Daniel Boothe

Yeah, so it has like, imagine like an ice skating bike trail. Okay. So I confession.

April Shirey

I've never been on ice skates.

Daniel Boothe

Oh, wow. Ever. There's also fire.

Samantha Korecki

We got to get you on ice skates.

Daniel Boothe

Yeah, there's fire pits, there's ice here. You can snowshoe and then you can snowshoe all the way out into the woods in like the dead of night.

Samantha Korecki

You can cross country ski out there too.

Daniel Boothe

And then overlook Lake Michigan.

April Shirey

It's a little terrifying. I have them, so I'm ready. Okay, I can bring my own. I feel like I should bring them to the parking lot sometimes.

Samantha Korecki

Yeah.

April Shirey

Snowshoe into my office.

Samantha Korecki

Not a bad idea.

Daniel Boothe

April Shirey, you are the new Muskegon Community College registrar. On behalf of the podcast, on behalf of everyone here at the college, welcome to MCC. We're so glad you're here.

April Shirey

Thank you for having me.

Daniel Boothe

Will, sitting down at the table, is the first student to sign up for our new commercial. His name is Bradley Mosquetta. He is a musician. And if I may be so bold, sir, you kind of drip cool. Oh, man.

Bradley

I appreciate that. No lie. I'm glad to be here. I had to show up for all these smiling faces here, bro. I mean, As soon as I got here, bro, I was greeted with a smile and I met like 5 people, so I had to show up.

Daniel Boothe

Oh, no kidding. That's fantastic to hear. Well, that makes you really, really happy, really happy. So where do you come from? What brought you here to MCC?

Bradley

I come from Muskegon, man. I've been here my whole life. So I've originated here. And what really brings me here is my search for perfecting my sound. I'm trying to really, really connect and emphasize in the community.

Daniel Boothe

So you want to go into music? Is that what you're passionate about doing?

Bradley

I'm not here for music right now. I'm studying business. I'm trying to monetize the music.

Daniel Boothe

Oh, fantastic. That is a great way to go about doing the arts is to find out how to run a business first because you are an LLC as an artist. You know what I mean? And then Learning how to manage your own business of yourself is a really smart way to go.

Bradley

Thanks to the resources at MCC. Like I was just telling people, the guy that I just signed up with to do this, that I was just in the music studio. I was just in the covert secret music studio behind the scenes.

Daniel Boothe

Oh, over in the art music. That's where we do this podcast.

Bradley

Oh, that's crazy, man. Yeah, I was behind the scenes. That was crazy.

Daniel Boothe

It's first class, man.

Bradley

It is. It's first class. Everything that I've seen that's official replicated that studio.

Daniel Boothe

I'm like, wow. You know what? And here's the great news about MCC is that it's there for you. It's free and it's just like, and they want you to use it. You know what I mean? They're like, they're not protective about that thing. They're like, please come and use this. Please come and play.

Bradley

Exactly, man. So yeah. It's really inviting and I'm so glad to be in a promoting environment that promotes positivity and consistency and growth. I'm actually at a loss for words because I haven't been doing this in so long. I've been just doing indie music, sitting at the table recording people. And I've gone as far as Chicago to Detroit because of my skills. And it's gotten to a point where I've been nullified in the mind. And that's another reason why I'm here. So I can talk to people again.

Daniel Boothe

So take me to that decision of like, what was that aha moment of like, you know what, I need to get an education.

Bradley

When I seen there was a reconnect program for 21 and up, and I was still currently 20, I'm sitting in Chicago on a lone trip. recording people. And I'm like, wow. this has gotten me so far. This has gotten me this far. But when I come home, I'm going to be home. And that's all. What can I do when I get home? And this is the perfect choice to cultivate my skills, my social skills, and even my audio engineering skills. I feel like I've just come to the perfect spot.

Daniel Boothe

Awesome. Is this your first semester?

Bradley

Yeah. Second day.

Daniel Boothe

Second day.

Bradley

Yeah.

Daniel Boothe

Bradley, on behalf of everyone here at Muskegon Community College, welcome to MCC. We got your back, man. I wish you all the success in the world.

Bradley

Thank you, bro. Real life.

Daniel Boothe

Awesome. Awesome.

Bradley

Great to meet you.

Daniel Boothe

Great to meet you as well. Jay Talk rolling along here at Winter Welcome Days. I am Daniel Booth. Alongside me is Samantha Karecki, co-hosting the operation. And look who is sitting down at the table. It is the Chief Diversity Officer here at Muskegon Community College, the best dressed man on campus, Mr. Ken James himself. Ken, how are you doing? Welcome to JayTen.

Ken James

Well, thank you for having me here, and I get an applause. Wow, It's not often I get to sit across two of my favorite Jayhawks. So, Daniel Samantha, thanks for the sit-down.

Daniel Boothe

That means a lot to me. That means a lot to me. So, sir, we have already we interviewed your new employee. the director of equity, Mr. Derek King. We interviewed him a little bit before you, but I want to ask you some of the similar questions that we asked him because it's so important. So first and foremost, can you tell the people at home or who are listening to this podcast exactly what you do?

Ken James

Absolutely, absolutely. So my team, and it's two of us, me and Derek, bring the lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion into four key stakeholder groups that the college touches. First and foremost is our students. We want to attract and retain students. Secondly, faculty and staff. Are we culturally competent so that we can create a culture of belonging to retain those students? Thirdly, and this is a unique part about our department, is we represent the community through the lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion. So when you think Southern Oceana County, Western Newaygo County, all of Muskegon County, and North Ottawa County, we represent the college through the lens of DEI in those areas. And then 4th but not least, we provide services to the business community. And when I say business, that's for-profit, non-profit, government, healthcare, and education. We have services that relate to attracting and retaining a workforce that we can implement through creative programming.

Daniel Boothe

The year is 2025. I asked Derek King this, and so forgive the stupidity of the question because it sounds stupid that here we are in 2025 and we're still talking about this. obviously we're not there yet, right? And so why the need for diversity, equity, inclusion here in the higher education space? Why do we continue to need to pound the drum and educate people about these issues?

Ken James

Well, one, I don't think there's anything as a dumb question. So, but to answer that question, you hear that Samantha?

Daniel Boothe

Can you hear that?

Ken James

So, we, you know, we advanced diversity and inclusion. The long-term goal, and it is a journey, not a destination, is to create a culture where people feel like they belong. So what has happened, and I'm glad you asked the question, is a lot of people have a different interpretation. of what diversity, equity, inclusion mean. For Muskegon Community College, it's education for all. We want everyone to be able to succeed no matter where they come from or how they got here. But I will add, most people when they hear diversity and conclusion, they think of color, you know, race, brown, you know, a different thing, you know, it's that. But it's more than that, socioeconomic. urban, inner-city rural. No matter

what happens when you get here, returning citizens, returning veterans, we want to make sure we have education for all. So this is the place where we want to create that culture of belonging. Easier said than done, but that's why we advance diversity and inclusion so we can have education for all.

Daniel Boothe

So when you look at Muskegon Community College, and I want to ask you, working for Dr. John Selman, who puts student success at the forefront of everything that our college does, let me ask you point blank, How are we doing? How are we doing as an institution and where is there room to grow?

Ken James

Absolutely. That's a great question. And I'm one, the glass is always half full with me. Do we have successes? The answer is yes. But do we have opportunities to even greater impact? The answer is yes. So if you look at even right now, we're kicking off our winter semester. Our enrollment numbers are up. And our enrollment numbers up that represent some of those groups we talked about, students of color, students from lower economic backgrounds, rural students, those are trending up. But we're only successful if they stay and they complete. So that's what we have. So we have them here. Let's continue to create the culture where everyone can stay and succeed. Education for all.

Samantha Korecki

So in this education sector, what would you say is the most common misconception that you come across when it comes to DEI?

Ken James

And again, I think it's just because it means something different for everyone, but understanding that there is a place for all of us here. And that's the thing. It's just sitting down having conversations. It never hurts to have a conversation and to remember, We have our lived experiences and I never discount anyone's lived experiences. But we can come to the same setting, in this case, Muskegon Community College, look at the same thing and have a different interpretation. But let's talk about how we interpret that, what we saw, and how we can co-exist moving forward. That's the action.

Samantha Korecki

Absolutely. And I know that you guys are always looking to have events surrounding DEI and things going on campus.

Daniel Boothe

Oh, you stole my question.

Samantha Korecki

Am I correct to know that what you're doing with these events and your presence here on campus is more to foster?

Ken James

We're on that journey toward belonging, and we want to impact a positive culture. And you talked about events. I'm very excited. This Friday, which is the 17th of January, we will be having our 28th annual Martin Luther King Day Unity Day Breakfast. And as of today, it's sold out.

Daniel Boothe

Oh, wow.

Ken James

650 people, Van **** Convention Center this Friday, 8 A.m. and we're looking forward to hearing from you, Amish Alcindor, who will be talking about unity post-election.

Daniel Boothe

Yeah, we have our tickets. We'll be there.

Ken James

We'll be there.

Daniel Boothe

Fantastic. That is that is. What an accomplishment. That's fantastic. Can you tell us a little bit about the speaker?

Ken James

Absolutely. Yamiche Alcindor is a new, excuse me, is a Washington, D.C. correspondent, and she covers politics. And she is the daughter of Haitian immigrants. So what her prompt is, she's going to talk about her lens as a D.C. correspondent in the political realm, but how can we unify post the election? So she's going to give our take on that. But also after she speaks, we have a local panel, a very brief panel discussion of local leaders, where we're going to We talk about advancing unity here locally on the Lakeshore. Awesome.

Samantha Korecki

Right.

Daniel Boothe

Well, thank you so much, Ken James, sitting under the table. We are so proud of you and way to go. And we'll see you on Friday for the Martin Luther King Breakfast on the Lakeshore.

Ken James

All right.

Daniel Boothe

Did I say that right?

Ken James

Yeah, Martin Luther King Day Unity Breakfast.

Daniel Boothe

Unity Breakfast.

Ken James

There it is.

Daniel Boothe

There you have it.

Samantha Korecki

We will see you at the Unity Breakfast.

Daniel Boothe

Looking forward to it. We have everyone here. Keep up the good work. It's important work and you're the man for it. So we're happy.

Ken James

Thank you. All right. Go Jazz.

Daniel Boothe

Sitting down at the table now, ladies and gentlemen, is Muskegon Community College's Chief Marketing and Communications Officer, Miss Kristen Tank. Miss Tank, a warm winter welcome days to you.

Samantha Korecki

Welcome to the podcast, Kristen.

Kristin Tank

Thanks. I'm glad to be here.

Daniel Boothe

Kristen, the last time we talked, it was at Expo, but this has the same feel to it, doesn't it? It's this real excitement to have all the student energy back in the hallways and filling up the classrooms. Tell us a little bit about winter welcome days. What are students seeing here?

Kristin Tank

Well, winter welcome days started yesterday. and we have had an amazing turnout. Students can't wait to get free pizza and free wings, of course. That is our lead attractor. And then also we have plenty of community partners here, different credit unions and all of our different organizations that help us out and support our students. We have our internal organizations as well, like our free tutoring center and others.

Daniel Boothe

All right, we got some big news, some big breaking news, ladies and gentlemen. And Ms. Tank, you have it. Talking enrollment numbers, Ms. Tank, what can you share with us?

Kristin Tank

Yeah, I can tell you that the parking lots are full. In fact, the first day of class, our students were a little frantic because they had to switch to the Stevenson Center parking lot because the main parking lot was full. We have 458 additional students this year, this winter that we didn't have last year. Yeah, actually an increase of 13%. So we are super excited.

Daniel Boothe

I want to pause you right there. 13% is unprecedented. It is not normally you see like a one to two percentage swing. So 13% That is a huge, huge jump.

Kristin Tank

Absolutely. We have nearly 4,000 students.

Daniel Boothe

Well, congratulations. I know there's a number of thank yous and attaboys to go around, but certainly marketing and communicating the value of MCC plays a major part in those numbers. What is the message? What is the message, Ms. Tank, that we are trying to communicate to our community about what MCC has to offer.

Kristin Tank

Well, I think the most important part is that we know every individual has something really special inside of them, and we want to help them bring it out here at Muskegon Community College. That's probably the most important thing we want to get across.

Samantha Korecki

Absolutely. Now, is there a statistic in that data that jumps out at you as like the most impressive or something that you're most proud of in our enrollment numbers this semester?

Kristin Tank

Yeah, I think the thing that I'm most proud of is that our students are taking a lot of credits. They're not just coming here. A lot of them are part-time and they need to be part-time because they have busy lives. They have kids that they're raising and jobs that they're doing. But we do have a 13% increase in the number of credit hours that students are taking. And that tells us they're engaged and they're excited.

Samantha Korecki

Astounding. That's incredible. Now, even to switch gears here, now you're a part of one of the student clubs here at MCC, and there are so many ways for students to get involved. Can you tell us a little bit about our clubs and organizations here at MCC?

Kristin Tank

Sure. What's great about it is we have about 24 different clubs on campus, a staff or faculty advisor for each of the clubs. But the students that really make the clubs great. They are here right now at each of these booths, manning the booths and letting people know about their clubs. We have a brand new club called the Cozy Collective that just started where students will be learning to macrame and crochet. Oh yeah.

Samantha Korecki

I've already hit up the Cozy Collective table. I was there this morning.

Kristin Tank

Yes. Yeah, that's awesome. But really anything that students are interested in, we have a club that they can connect with.

Samantha Korecki

Kristen Tank, you are the Chief Marketing and Communications Officer here at MCC.
Thanks. Thank you so much for being on the program.

Kristin Tank

Thank you. Thank you. It's great to be here.

Samantha Korecki

You're listening to JayTalk.