

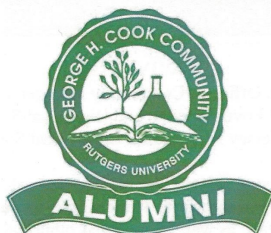


*Distinguished Alumni
Awards Luncheon
Sunday, April 30, 2023*

Hosted by:

Cook Community Alumni Association

Cook Community Alumni Association



At the June 2008 annual meeting of the Cook/CAES Alumni Association, the membership voted to adopt the title of Cook Community Alumni Association. This logo was also adopted and is intended to maintain a visual link to the former College of Agriculture, College of Agriculture and Environmental Science, Cook College, the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences and those students residing on the George H. Cook campus.

George H. Cook & Dennis M. Fenton Awards Committee Members

Co-Chair Dr. Linda Madison* CC '80, GSED '94, '02

Co-Chair Dr. Lee Schneider* CAES '70, GSNB '72, GSED '88

Joseph Charette* CC '77

Dr. Donald Heilman* CC '76, GSED '07, '12

Heather O'Rourke* CC '92, GSED '18

Kerry Kirk-Pflugh* CC '80

Dr. Mark Robson* CC '77, GSNB '79, '88, '95

Gary Sondermeyer* CC '79, GSNB '84

Dr. Brian Voynick* CC '78

Sue Wicks* CC '88

**indicates GH Cook Distinguished Alumni Award recipient*

-PROGRAM-

Welcome

Amanda Dougherty - President
Cook Community Alumni Association

Greetings

Executive Dean Laura Lawson

Buffet Luncheon

Introduction of Committee and Prior Awardees

Recognition of George Hammell Cook Distinguished Alumni Awardees

Dr. Vincent R. Caputo CC '89, GSNB '96
Terry Twitchell-DiCastro CC '92
David J. Singer CC '01

Recognition of Dennis M. Fenton Distinguished Graduate Alumni Awardees

Dr. Brian J. Schilling CC '92, GSNB '94, '09
Dr. Paul S. Wichansky CC '93, GSNB '99, '08



The George Hammell Cook Distinguished Alumni Award

The award, established in 1976, commemorates the life of George Hammell Cook (1818 - 1889) whose efforts helped to bring Land Grant College status to Rutgers and to create the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station. Dr. Cook's inquisitive and results-oriented spirit remains active in the ideals embodied by the Cook community which includes the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences and the George H. Cook campus.

This award is presented annually to an alumnus or to alumni whose outstanding accomplishments in professional or volunteer work reflects dignity and distinction on their alma mater. The George H. Cook Award is the highest honor presented by the Cook Community Alumni Association to undergraduate alumni.

Eligible alumni are those who earned an undergraduate degree from the School of Environmental & Biological Sciences, Cook College, C.A.E.S., the Rutgers College of Agriculture or alumnae of Douglass College or N.J.C. who earned a degree in agriculture or a related field during the years before Rutgers University embraced a coeducational policy.



The Dennis M. Fenton, GSNB '77

Distinguished Graduate Alumni Award

Established in 2003 this award honors Dennis M. Fenton, who is a recently retired executive vice-president of Amgen Inc. He is currently CEO of Fenton and Associates, Biotechnology Consulting and he remains a strong supporter of graduate education at the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences, formerly Cook College, Rutgers University. Successful candidates have demonstrated a significant impact in their field of study. The Dennis M. Fenton Award is the highest honor presented by the CCAA to advanced degree alumni.

Eligible alumni are graduates of Rutgers University's Graduate School New Brunswick who earned a Masters or Doctoral degree from a program or department currently or historically associated with the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences, Cook College, the College of Agriculture and Environmental Science or the Rutgers College of Agriculture.

Nominees are not required to have earned an undergraduate degree from the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences or any other unit of Rutgers University.

Cook Community Alumni Association Officers



President Amanda Dougherty CC '08, GSED '09
Treasurer Marc Kollar CC '95
Secretary Ted Wendin SEBS '11

**Laura Lawson, Executive Dean of
Agriculture and Natural Resources**

Special thanks to:
**Brian McGonigle, Manager of Alumni and Community
Engagement**

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Cook Community Alumni Association
@CookAlumni



2023 George Hammell Cook **Distinguished Alumni Award Winner**



Dr. Vincent R. Caputo

Dr. Vincent Caputo was appointed Superintendent of Schools in the Metuchen School District in December 2011 and began his tenure on January 3, 2012. He successfully led his district through the challenges of COVID. Other professional accomplishments include the implementation of a districtwide Mental Health Initiative, successful \$80 million referendum to improve student learning outcomes, including full day Kindergarten and expansion of learning spaces. Edgar Middle School was named a National Blue Ribbon school and Moss Elementary was named a State School of Character.

Prior to serving in Metuchen, Dr. Caputo worked for the Clark School District as the Assistant Superintendent / Director of Curriculum and Instruction. He also served as the Supervisor of Math and Science and Assistant Principal in the Cranford School District. He began his career in education in the Secaucus School District, where he taught high school science and coached softball and basketball.

Dr. Caputo earned his BS in Biochemistry from Cook College in 1989 and his MS in Food Science in 1996. In addition, Dr. Caputo earned his MA from Montclair State University in Administration and Supervision and his Doctorate from St. Peter's University in Educational Leadership. He currently serves as an adjunct professor in Educational Leadership at St. Peter's University.

Remaining active in the educational community and at Rutgers, Dr. Caputo participates annually in the Knight of Networking and serves as a mentor with R Scarlet Knight Network. He continues to teach and mentor new leaders through his work with NJASCD, NJPSA, and NJASA. He lives in Cranford with his wife and two children.

2023 George Hammell Cook **Distinguished Alumni Award Winner**



Terry Twitchell-DiCastro

Terry is proud to have received her degree from Cook College in Environmental Communications and has spent the last 30 years creating once in a lifetime experiences for students around the globe.

After being selected to participate in the Disney College Program her senior year at Cook, Terry quickly discovered the career path for her. It was in this Cook Co-op program that Terry received her world class customer service and leadership training that would shape the work she would do throughout her career,

After graduating from Cook in 1992, Terry spent almost a decade as a Disney cast member in Orlando, Florida where she was given the opportunity to contribute in a variety of diverse travel industry roles. Terry is most proud of the role she played in the development and growth of the Disney Youth Programs. She was selected as part of a pilot team assembled to create and expand many of the learning experiences for students in the Disney parks. It was in this role Terry would bring her passion for travel and learning together to make an impact on thousands of students from around the globe.

A successful tenure at Disney led Terry to an opportunity at WorldStrides, the leader in educational travel. She spent the next 20 years working in a variety of leadership roles creating life-changing travel experiences for over 400,000 students a year. During her time at WorldStrides, Terry was instrumental in the development of experiential science programs in Costa Rica, Iceland, Hawaii, Alaska, the Galapagos Islands, California, Boston, and the Florida Keys.

Terry now works exclusively for Bob Rogers Travel specializing in student and youth Performing Arts Travel, which has allowed her to incorporate her love for the arts into her passion for educational travel.

Terry is passionate about making a difference and is someone who has poured her heart into making life-changing moments happen for students. Terry's mission has always been to give students the opportunity to learn outside the classroom allowing them to see themselves and the world in new ways. Terry credits much of her success to the various people and programs at Cook and Rutgers that exposed her to the idea of nontraditional learning.

2023 George Hammell Cook **Distinguished Alumni Award Winner**



David J. Singer

David Singer is an attorney and principal of Porzio, Bromberg & Newman, P.C. He is a member of the firm's Environmental Practice Group. His practice focuses on environmental transactions, litigation and compliance matters, the sale and purchase of commercial real estate, land use, and general civil litigation.

David has spent most of his life in New Jersey, including attending Cook College, Rutgers University for his undergraduate degree earned in 2001. While at Rutgers University, he was an active leader in his community by serving as Chair of the Student Affairs Committee of the Rutgers University Senate and accompanying the President of Rutgers University to Washington, D.C., to lobby for increased student aid.

While attending Vermont Law School, the nation's top institution for environmental law, David was a member and Co-Chair of the Vermont Law School ABA Negotiations competition board, a member of the Environmental Moot Court Board, and a Dean's Fellow. He clerked for both the United States Attorney's Office for the Western District of Virginia and the United States Environmental Protection Agency, Region III.

David, who was inducted as a Loyal Son of Rutgers in 2013, continues his active involvement with Rutgers University by serving in various leadership roles, including as a Board member and past-President of the Cook Community Alumni Association and Board member of the Rutgers Alumni Association. David also assists students through Rutgers Student Legal Services.

David worked with the University Foundation to establish the CCAA Endowed Scholarship. He worked with Helyar House to incorporate their alumni group and fund under the CCAA umbrella to help strengthen both organizations. Dave developed stronger ties between the CCAA and the Rutgers Gardens, which included funding for gardens interns, and also increased the CCAA's philanthropy by obtaining board support to provide funding to complete the permanent structure for the Cook Farm Market at Rutgers Gardens. This infrastructure improvement provides a weather barrier, which allows the facility more time to provide a source of fresh produce for the surrounding community, and a venue for small vendors.

2023 Dennis M. Fenton
Distinguished Graduate Alumni Award Winner



Dr. Brian J. Schilling

Dr. Brian Schilling is Director of Rutgers Cooperative Extension and Senior Associate Director of the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station (NJAES). He provides executive leadership in advancement of Rutgers University’s cooperative extension mission to improve the lives of New Jersey residents and their communities through the delivery of science-based educational outreach within the state’s 21 counties.

Schilling holds an academic appointment as Extension Specialist of Agricultural Policy in the Department of Agricultural, Food and Resource Economics at the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences (SEBS), Rutgers University. During his 29 years at the School and NJAES, much of Schilling’s research has been focused on New Jersey farm viability, farmland preservation, and agricultural economic development at the urban-rural fringe. Throughout his career Schilling has worked closely with the agricultural and food industries and has served on many industry and government task forces and working groups. He currently serves as past-chair of the Association of Northeast Extension Directors. He is a past-president of the New Jersey Agricultural Society and serves on the State Agriculture Development Committee. He holds a BS from Cook College in 1992 in resource management, an MS in agricultural economics in 1994, and Ph.D. in planning and public policy in 2009, all from Rutgers University.

2023 Dennis M. Fenton **Distinguished Graduate Alumni Award Winner**



Dr. Paul S. Wichansky

Dr. Paul Wichansky is a leading motivational speaker, author, and disability advocate who has shared his story with over a million young people, parents, educators, and other professionals over the past 40 plus years. His programs inspire confidence, personal growth, and opportunity as he recalls anecdotes and insights that have motivated him to triumph over cerebral palsy and hearing loss. Starting his speaking career at age 10, his experiences harness the power of love, perseverance, and a “never say never” attitude.

Doctors told his parents that their toddler would never walk. Paul never gave up on his dream. He learned to walk and has achieved goals others have thought impossible. He credits his parents and sister and their love and support, as well as all the friends he has made on his journey.

Dr. Wichansky graduated from Cook College in 1993 majoring in Meteorology. He continued to study meteorology at the Graduate School of New Brunswick and earned his MS in 1999 and Ph.D. in 2008.

His book, *Yes I Can*, published in 2022, is filled with wonderful, uplifting messages about building self-confidence, realizing potential, and changing the world for the better. He has inspired countless others to adopt his positive attitude to transform challenges into opportunities to harness untapped potential.

