



RAMAPO COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY
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Ramapo College Dedicates Topken World Language Lab

Funding for state-of-the-art facility is gift from Mahwah couple

MAHWAH, N.J. -- Ramapo College of New Jersey recently celebrated the opening of the Topken World Language Lab in the Salameno School of Humanities and Global Studies. The state-of-the-art language lab was made possible by a generous gift from William and Marina Topken '87 to the Ramapo College Foundation. Dozens of students, faculty, staff and friends of the College attended the ceremony, which included a demonstration of the lab's resources.

"Language conveys thought and is indispensable in what we do as a liberal arts college," said Ramapo President Peter P. Mercer. "It is vital to our curriculum; without it, we cannot function efficiently. I am most grateful to Marina and Bill, longtime generous supporters of the College, for helping to bring this capital project to fruition as well as establish an endowment for language tutors."

Susan Hangen, Dean of the Salameno School of Humanities and Global Studies (SSHGS), related that the new lab will provide students access to state-of-the-art language software, an increased number of language tutor hours, and a specially-designed space for optimum language learning.

"Language learning is the heart of a liberal arts education," said Hangen. "This lab will have a significant impact for all of our students in an increasingly global world."

She added that the new facility's design—with circular work spaces--will emphasize group interaction. In addition, SSHGS will be adding Chinese to its language offerings. She also said the College is looking to relaunch Japanese, German and Arabic language studies into its curriculum.

“The very generous gift from the Topkens is consistent with our mission and demonstrates a commitment to international, intercultural and experiential learning for our students,” Hangen added.

“The Topkens’ commitment to assist our students who academically achieve and have financial need is most amazing. They have established several endowed scholarships to support students in the teacher education program as well as in both the ungraduated and graduate nursing programs,” explained Institutional Advancement Vice President Cathleen Davey. “Marina’s and Bill’s commitment goes well beyond their personal philanthropy. Both have volunteered for more than 25 years to raise scholarship funds through their leadership with The Friends of Ramapo. During this time, Marina has served as Friends’ president and Bill as treasurer, the group has awarded more than 150 scholarships, 25 of which have been full scholarships.”

Marina, an American Studies 1987 graduate of the College, taught and translated German at several language institutions in the area and tutored children in under-served schools in Paterson, New Jersey. She frequently returns to Ramapo to participate in the German language “happy hours” offered for students and staff throughout the school year.

“Education has always been of great interest to me. When our children were teenagers, I will never forget the day eagerly I registered to take a course in French Language at Ramapo College. More courses in French language, literature and culture followed, and my respect and enthusiasm grew for inspiring, unforgettable professors as well as for students from all walks of life and from many countries, wanting to get ahead,” said Marina, adding that she and Bill wanted to “help and incentivize those wishing to learn and be educated.”

“Learning and teaching languages is the conduit to better understanding people and their cultures,” she said, explaining their desire to fund the Topken World Language Laboratory. “It is my way of giving back for the great experience Ramapo College gave me.”

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Ramapo College of New Jersey is the state’s premier public liberal arts college. Ranked among the top colleges in the region by College Choice and recognized by, among others, U.S. News & World Report, Princeton Review, Colleges of Distinction and also designated by Victory Media as a “Military Friendly College,” Ramapo College is committed to academic excellence through interdisciplinary and experiential learning, and international and intercultural understanding.

Established in 1969, Ramapo College offers bachelor's degrees in the arts, business, humanities, social sciences and the sciences, as well as in professional studies, which include business, education, nursing and social work. In addition, the College offers courses leading to teacher certification at the elementary and secondary levels, and offers graduate programs leading to degrees in Accounting, Business Administration, Educational Technology, Educational Leadership, Nursing, Social Work and Special Education.

