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Ramapo College of New Jersey Launches Investigative Genetic Genealogy Center

*Center is the First in the Nation
to Offer Case Work, Research, and Hands-on Education in this Emerging Field*

MAHWAH, NEW JERSEY — Ramapo College of New Jersey, the State's public liberal arts college, today launched the Ramapo College Investigative Genetic Genealogy Center (IGG Center), the first Center of its kind to offer case work, research, and hands-on education in investigative genetic genealogy. The vision of the innovative new Center is to secure justice through the ethical and proficient use of investigative genetic genealogy to support the resolution of cases involving wrongful convictions, unidentified human remains, and violent crime. The first class of students in the Center's IGG Certificate Program will enroll in the Spring of 2023.

“The launch of our new IGG Center illustrates how, through forward-thinking and dynamic initiatives, Ramapo serves the public good. This Center doubles down on our mission to develop skilled ethical leaders who are civic minded and committed to learning through doing,” shared Cindy Jebb, president of Ramapo College.

The Ramapo IGG Center is led by two prominent leaders in the field – David Gurney, Ph.D., JD, and Cairenn Binder, MS. Dr. Gurney, an Assistant Professor of Law and Society at Ramapo College, was previously a Fellow with the Wrongful Conviction Clinic (now the Innocence Project of Arizona) at the University of Arizona. He holds a Certificate in Genealogical Studies from Boston University and is the president of the Investigative Genetic Genealogy Accreditation Board, which is developing standards for IGG. Additionally, he serves as a board member on the Association of Professional Genealogists Forensic Genealogy Special Interest Group.

Ms. Binder is the Director of the Investigative Genetic Genealogy Certificate Program at Ramapo College. She is a Founding Partner of Coast to Coast Genetic Genealogy Services and is also the Director of Education and Development for the DNA Doe Project. She has used IGG to provide investigative leads in a number of high-profile cases, including the identification of victims of John Wayne Gacy, Gary Ridgeway (the Green River Killer), and Keith Jesperson (the Happy Face Killer), among others.

“Since 2018, investigative genetic genealogy has emerged as an essential tool in securing justice,” said Dr. Gurney. “Over five hundred cases have been resolved with the help of IGG. With the new Center – the first of its kind – Ramapo will be at the forefront of ensuring that IGG is practiced proficiently and ethically, while also expanding the reach of IGG in exonerating the wrongfully convicted.”

Thanks to a generous private multi-year gift, Ramapo’s IGG Lab will be housed in the College’s new Peter P. Mercer Learning Commons, providing a secure location for the study and practice of IGG. This dedicated space will include teaching and learning stations, essential database and software subscriptions as well as operational support that will enable the Center to take on at least five cases per year while also supporting the IGG Center’s efforts to increase research and scholarship in the field.

President Jebb added, “With two of the premier leaders in this emerging field, we know that David and Cairenn will continue to do work that furthers our public purpose, incorporates the liberal arts, develops talented problem solvers, and attracts recognition. Thanks to the generous commitment of the College’s longtime supporters and leaders, Susan and Nick Vallario, the IGG Lab positions Ramapo to be the first lab of its kind by focusing exclusively on IGG and providing case work and research in addition to education.”

Combining traditional and genetic genealogy, IGG can provide leads in cases involving unidentified human remains and violent crime, where other methods have failed. As IGG is considered by more investigating agencies, there is a need for proficient and ethical IGG practitioners, pro bono IGG services for cash-strapped agencies, and expansion of IGG – particularly to the area of wrongful convictions. The IGG Center at Ramapo College will meet these needs and ensure that IGG remains a powerful tool for securing justice.

To fulfill its vision of ensuring that IGG is practiced ethically and proficiently, the IGG Center seeks to provide pro bono IGG work on cases involving wrongful conviction, unidentified human remains, and violent crime. Along with its dedicated case work, students enrolled in the IGG Workshop and IGG Certificate Program (scheduled to launch in the Spring, pending Board of Trustees approval) will gain practical, ethical experience through immersive work with real IGG

cases. These cases stem from partnerships from public agencies and non-profit organizations, who will benefit from the pro bono IGG services provided by IGG Center staff and students. Currently, Ramapo has established partnerships with the Bergen County Prosecutor's Office (NJ), The Innocence Project of Idaho, and the Loyola Project for the Innocent. Additional partnerships throughout the country are in negotiation.

"We are grateful for the faith that our partners are putting in the Center and our students. The opportunity that they will present through the cases referred to us will not only provide valuable practical experience to the students, but will demonstrate to them and to the public that the search for closure and justice is within our reach more than ever before," said Binder.

The IGG Center will also focus on research and expansion of IGG, particularly in engagement with the ongoing discussion about IGG's practical and ethical boundaries, and in seeking to expand the reach of IGG to bring justice to underrepresented populations.

In 2023, the Ramapo IGG Center will also host the World's first professional conference dedicated exclusively to IGG.

For more on the Ramapo IGG center, visit www.ramapo.edu/igg

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About Ramapo College

Ramapo College of New Jersey (RCNJ) develops ethical leaders who serve as change agents across all sectors. The College's unique interdisciplinary academic structure, its liberal arts core, its size (approximately 5,500 students), and its setting in the foothills of the Ramapo Mountains on the New Jersey/New York border provide an optimal environment for individualized, student-centered learning and leadership development. RCNJ's designation as "New Jersey's Public Liberal Arts College" by the State legislature is the foundation from which the College's commitment to an accessible and transformative undergraduate and graduate education is realized.

Graduation and retention rates of RCNJ students exceed national averages and, as just one of many markers of student success, the superior rates are made possible by the College's provision of impactful mentorship and student well-being supports, hands-on learning, and a range of opportunities for service and leadership development. Ramapo is ranked #1 among New Jersey public institutions by *College Choice* and is recognized as a top college in the country on the list of Best Disability Schools by *Great Value Colleges*. Further commendations include designation as a "Military Friendly College" in *Victory Media's Guide to Military Friendly*

Schools and as a leading college by *U.S. News & World Report*, *Kiplinger's*, *Princeton Review* and *Money Magazine*, among others.

Established in 1969, Ramapo College was named by *CondéNast Traveler* one of the 50 Most Beautiful College Campuses in America. The barrier-free campus occupies 300 acres and is home to 52 bachelor's degrees programs spanning the arts, business, data science, humanities, education, nursing, social work, social sciences, and the sciences. In addition, the College offers graduate programs leading to master's degrees in Accounting, Applied Mathematics, Business Administration, Contemporary Instructional Design, Computer Science, Creative Music Technology, Data Science, Educational Leadership, Nursing, Social Work and Special Education, as well as a Doctor of Nursing Practice. Every degree program is designed and delivered through the collaborative and interdisciplinary efforts of student-centered faculty scholars and staff who are committed to serving the public good through the delivery of an academically rigorous, inclusive, and transformative collegiate experience.

Distinguished as a Career Development College of Distinction by *CollegesofDistinction.com*, every student at Ramapo enrolls in the College's unique and award-winning Pathways Program, which equips and empowers students across the continuum of their student career to secure internships, pursue graduate/professional school, and/or enter/re-enter the job market. As a result, Ramapo College's over 40,000 alumni are confident, intellectually curious, self-aware, and humble people who are highly sought after and who make a positive impact at local, national, and global levels. As community leaders, engaged citizens, and professional colleagues, Ramapo College alumni serve as the change agents necessary to innovate, problem solve, and elevate the human condition in NJ and beyond.