

Radio Journalist Marla Diamond, LC'92, Chronicles the Streets of New York; Honored as a Distinguished Alumna in 2009

Radio journalist **Marla Diamond** (LC'92) has been a mainstay on the WCBS Newsradio 880 staff since 1997.



In 2009, the Livingston Alumni Association honored Diamond as a Distinguished Alumna.

Diamond joined WCBS as its New Jersey correspondent and currently covers New York City for the station.

Diamond's radio career started at New Brunswick's WCTC-AM 1450, where she served as a street reporter and anchor. She later served as morning anchor of WCTC's sister station WMGQ-FM 98.3.

Bruce Johnson remembered Diamond coming to him as a college student seeking a radio news internship.

"She seemed beyond her years as a college student, and I was struck by her immediately," Johnson said in a 2009 interview for LAA's tribute to Diamond.. "She ... just did everything exceedingly well," said Johnson, then the news and sports director for Greater Media New Jersey, which included WCTC, WMGQ and four other radio stations.



In another interview, Tim Scheld, director of news and programming at WCBS Newsradio, calls Diamond one of the station's "best street reporters."

"She's not afraid to get down and dirty. She's not afraid what alley she's going to walk in," Scheld said.

"She knows how to tell a story, and there aren't that many people left in this world and in this business that can tell the story the way that the street reporters at CBS do."

For about a year, Diamond worked as media director for a hospital but, as she writes on her WCBS profile page, found that radio was indeed her calling, and successfully "begged for my job back."

"I have had the privilege to be a part of some of the city's biggest breaking news stories," Diamond writes. "I am often brought to tears by New Yorkers' random acts of kindness and courage. But I really enjoy the offbeat, the people

who give this city its pulse and craziness.”

Diamond has won numerous awards in her career at WCBS, including the Art Athens Award for General Excellence in radio reporting.

Watch the LAA’s interview and video tribute to Diamond (2 minutes, 24 seconds), embedded on this page, or open in a new window.

Follow Marla Diamond on Twitter.

Photos of Marla Diamond: (top) Courtesy of Diamond; (bottom) From the 1992 Livingston College yearbook, Diversity: A Style of Our Own, Volume Two.

Distinguished Alumna Francoise Jacobsohn, LC’79, Is an Advocate for Women and Workers

Francoise Jacobsohn (LC’79) has been an advocate for women and workers since the 1970s.



In 2009, the Livingston Alumni Association (LAA) honored her as a Livingston College Distinguished Alumna.

As of 2023, Jacobsohn is the Court Compliance Officer with Sheet Metal Workers’ International Association Local Union No. 28 in New York City. In this role, she is responsible for ensuring that Local 28, and contractors employing its members, comply with a court order mandating workplaces free from discrimination.

She also has served as a member of the New York City Mayor’s Commission on Construction Opportunity, established in March 2005, to ensure that women and minorities gain access to work in the construction trades.

Jacobsohn previously served as the Project Manager at two organizations – Equal Rights Advocates and Equality Works – seeking to expand opportunities for women. Equality Works is Legal Momentum’s Economic Justice Program focusing on expanding women’s participation in high-paying non-traditional employment.



Jacobsohn is a former president of the National Organization for Women-New York City (NOW-NYC). She also has worked on an institutional and community-building project for public education in Upper Manhattan.

At France's Political Science Institute, Jacobsohn taught a class on "Women, the Law and Public Opinion." She also worked for a European nonprofit focused on violence against women at the workplace, and helped set up one of the early battered women's shelters in New Jersey in the late 1970s.

"My everyday life is talking to women on the ground, finding out what needs to be done and figuring out how to get it done, and that is completely Livingston," Jacobsohn said in a 2009 interview. "You need to know who the people are, what people are doing on the ground, what are they thinking, what are their needs, what do they want. And if you don't ask there, then the policy you get is not going to really look like what you want it to look like."

She earned a bachelor's degree in social work from Rutgers' Livingston College in 1979, and a master of public administration degree in 2003 from Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs.

Watch the LAA's interview and video tribute to Jacobsohn (2 minutes, 9 seconds), embedded on this page, or open in a new window.

Photos of Francoise Jacobsohn: (top) Courtesy of Jacobsohn; (bottom) From the 1980 Livingston College yearbook, The Rock, Volume IV. (This yearbook included photos of graduates from both 1979 and 1980.)

Lynne M. Kellermann Memorial (Honors Program) Award

Twenty-five Livingston College students were honored from 1987 to 2010 with the Lynne M. Kellermann Memorial Award, "presented annually to an outstanding senior in the four-year college honors program of Livingston College, Rutgers University," as listed below.

There were two honorees each in 1991, 1992, and 1997. No honorees were listed for 1990 or 1994.


















Kellermann held three degrees from Rutgers: a bachelor's degree (University College-New Brunswick, 1975), and master's and doctorate degrees from the Graduate School of Education (1978 and 1985).

From the 2007 Livingston College Commencement Convocation program: *Lynne M. Kellermann began her career at Livingston College as a secretary and earned her B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. in English at Rutgers University while working in various capacities. She taught in the writing program at Livingston and eventually became director of the college's Honors program, a position she held*

until her untimely death in 1986. Lynne was intensely interested in students and had a wonderful sense of humor; everywhere she went on campus, students followed. This award is presented to the Honors Program senior who best exemplifies her warmth, indomitable spirit, and exceptional dedication to the program.

The years in the list below link to the Livingston College yearbook page where each student is pictured. / * Photo not available.

1987: Liza M. Kirschenbaum	1996: Gary P. Katz *	2003: Jaclyn A. Barnes
1988: Naila W. Mahmood *	1997: Connie Angela Liauw	2004: Valentine Ortiz-Meyer
1989: Maritza D. Berdote *	1997: Ian Ross Fried	2005: Caroline Grace Livingston
1991: Nilofer Ahmed Khalak	1998: David G. Gribben	2006: Jenna Sabatini
1991: Julie Ann Traxler	1999: Beth Anne Williams	2007: Charla Bullock
1992: John J. Kottler	2000: Gregory Joseph	2008: Ata A. Akiner *
1992: Jill C. Morrison	Michael Godfrey	2009: Ha Kyung Kim *
1993: Tanya M. Manning *	2001: Cheryll Ann Abuedo	2010: Joshua E. Slavin *
1995: Lisa Renee Brockenbrough *	2002: Rhonda A. Elhosseiny	

Liza M. Kirschenbaum, LC'87	Nilofer Ahmed Khalak, LC'91	Julie Ann Traxler, LC'91	John J. Kottler, LC'92	Jill C. Morrison, LC'92
				
Connie Angela Liauw, LC'97	Ian Ross Fried, LC'97	David G. Gribben, LC'98	Beth Anne Williams, LC'99	Gregory J.M. Godfrey, LC'00
				
Cheryll Ann Abuedo, LC'01	Rhonda A. Elhosseiny, LC'02	Jaclyn A. Barnes, LC'03	Valentine Ortiz-Meyer, LC'04	Caroline Grace Livingston, LC'05
				
Jenna Sabatini, LC'06	Charla Bullock, LC'07			
				

[Awards to Livingston College Students](#)

On the following pages, we chronicle some of the awards presented to students by the Livingston College administration and the Livingston College Parents Association. These include:

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Association. These include:

- Academic Achievement Award
- Contributions and Service Award (Dean's Award)
- Kellermann (Honors Program) Award
- Parents Association Award

Originally posted August 6, 2016

Revised August 12, 2018

Academic Achievement Award

From 1986 to 2008 the Livingston College administration recognized students "for outstanding academic achievement by a graduating student of Livingston College – Rutgers University." In 2009 and 2010 the Livingston College Dean's Award honored the graduating student with the highest grade-point average of any student who had attended Livingston College for his or her complete four years.

The years in the list below link to the Livingston College yearbook page where each student is pictured.



















1986: Migdalia Baerga
1986: Patrick J. Deneen *
1987: Victoria Chapman
1987: Liza M. Kirschenbaum
1988: Frank T. Skwar *
1989: Raymond N. Gonzales *
1990: Belinda C. Borrelli *
1991: Bianca G. Nebab
1992: Christos A. Christou *
1993: Allison Paige Marks *
1994: Garrett T. Caples *

1995: Irena N. Rakoczy *
1996: Michael Carlin Hora
1997: Silvia Oloveira Andrade
1998: David G. Gribben
1999: Matthew Lawrence Bell
2000: Richard A. Ferrara
2001: Joseph Paul Mersinger

2002: Julie Lynn Ciemnolonski
 2003: Jaclyn A. Barnes
 2003: Sarah M. Lilley *
 2004: Stacy E. Blackwell †

2004: Christopher Giglio
 2005: Nicole M. Lewis
 2006: Jenna Sabatini
 2007: Annie Agrawal
 2007: Emily Perry † *
 2007: Laura Louise Wootton †
 2008: Christianne M. Cain *
 2008: Dunxu Hu † *
 2009: Michael D. Offin ^ *
 2010: Kumaol Mengesha ^ *

† Outstanding Transfer Student, Academic Achievement Award / ^ Livingston College Dean's Award / * Photo not available

Migdalia Baerga, LC'86 	Victoria Chapman, LC'87 	Liza M. Kirschenbaum, LC'87 	Bianca G. Nebab, LC'91 	Michael Carlin Hora, LC'96 
Silvia Oloveira Andrade, LC'97 	David G. Gribben, LC'98 	Matthew Lawrence Bell, LC'99 	Richard A. Ferrara, LC'00 	Joseph Paul Mersinger, LC'01 
Julie Lynn Ciemnolonski, LC'02 	Jaclyn A. Barnes, LC'03 	Stacy E. Blackwell, LC'04 	Christopher Giglio, LC'04 	Nicole M. Lewis, LC'05 
Jenna Sabatini, LC'06 	Annie Agrawal, LC'07 	Laura Louise Wootton, LC'07 		

Musician Mark Helias, LC'74, Is an

Innovative Bassist and Composer; Honored as a Distinguished Alumnus in 2006

Mark Helias, a renowned bassist and composer, has been making innovative music since the mid-1970s.



He graduated from Rutgers University's Livingston College in 1974, and in 1976 earned a master's degree from the Yale School of Music.

In 2006, the Livingston Alumni Association honored Helias as a Livingston College Distinguished Alumnus.

Helias has recorded multiple albums as a lead musician since 1985 and dozens more with cooperative bands and other artists. His 2015 album *The Signal Maker*, with Helias on double bass, Tom Rainey on drums and Tony Malaby on saxophone, is the seventh he recorded as part of the trio Open Loose.

He continues performing and recording with BassDrumBone, a three-decade collaboration with Gerry Hemingway and Ray Anderson. Helias performs solo bass concerts and can also be heard in the duo The Marks Brothers with fellow bassist Mark Dresser.

Helias has also composed music for short film and two feature films by director Jay Anania. In addition to his many performances on records and CDs, Helias has produced recordings for other artists. He has taught at Sarah Lawrence College, The New School, and The School for Improvised Music.


Helias epitomizes Livingston's early reputation as a jazz music hotbed. Reflecting on his undergraduate education, Helias said: "I came away with a broader idea of how music worked, and I think it really informed my whole career in a sense, because that's the way I've approached being a composer and being an improviser and being a teacher."

Helias, a native of New Brunswick, New Jersey, lives in Manhattan.

Watch a short (1 minute, 39 seconds) video saluting Mark Helias in 2006 (embedded on this page), or open the video in a new window.


Pictured: Mark Helias at the 2006 Livingston College Distinguished Alumni Awards.

Distinguished Alumnus Avery Brooks, LC'73, 'Star Trek' and 'Spenser' Actor, Is Dedicated to African-American Issues

Actor, director and singer **Avery Brooks**, a tenured professor of Theater Arts at Rutgers University's Mason Gross School of the Arts (MGSA), is best known to TV audiences for his roles as Commodore/Captain Benjamin Lafayette Sisko on *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, and Hawk on *Spenser: For Hire* and its spinoff, *A Man Called Hawk*. 

In 2006, the Livingston Alumni Association of Rutgers University honored Brooks as a Livingston College Distinguished Alumnus. Brooks graduated from Livingston College in 1973, and in 1976 earned a master of fine arts (MFA) degree from MGSA, the first African-American to earn a Rutgers MFA in acting and directing. Brooks appeared in plays presented at Livingston College, including *Short Eyes* and *Streamers*. He also served as the script coordinator for Livingston Theatre's *Dark Symphony*.

In 1993, Rutgers University named Brooks to its Hall of Distinguished Alumni.

Known for his dedication to African-American issues, Brooks has served as artistic director for the National Black Arts Festival. 

At various times since 1988 he has portrayed Paul Robeson (Rutgers College, 1919), the famous singer, actor and civil rights activist, in the plays *Paul Robeson* and *Are You Now or Have You Ever Been?*, both on and off-Broadway.

In a 1997 interview at Oberlin College, Brooks, paraphrasing Frederick Douglass, said: "I will keep telling this story as long as I have breath. ... [Robeson was] a man who had a great heart, great courage, enormous intellect, and deep caring for humankind."

Brooks has worked extensively with the Smithsonian Institution's program in African-American culture. He was nominated for an American Cable Entertainment Award for his performance in Showtime's TV production of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. He has performed with the Shakespeare Theatre Company, and he sang the title role in the American Musical Theater Festival production of the Anthony Davis opera *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X*.

His movies include the 1998 Academy Award-nominated *American History X*, and the 2001 action film *15 Minutes*, which co-starred Robert De Niro.

Brooks has hosted several documentaries and served as narrator in such features as the IMAX film *Africa's Elephant Kingdom*.

In 2009 Brooks released the album *Here*, featuring jazz and blues covers, as well as spoken word tracks.


Brooks was born October 2, 1948, in Evansville, Indiana.

He is married to Vicki Lenora Brooks, who has served as an assistant dean at Rutgers. They live in Princeton, New Jersey, and have three adult children.

Watch the LAA's video tribute to Avery Brooks (1 minute, 28 seconds), embedded on this page, or open in a new window.

Photos: (Top) Avery Brooks at the 2006 Livingston College Distinguished Alumni Awards; (Bottom) Speaking at the 1992 Livingston College commencement, from the yearbook, A Style of Our Own.


[Distinguished Alumna Liza Kirschenbaum, LC'87, Gives Children a Voice in the Courts](#)

Liza Kirschenbaum, a 1987 graduate of Livingston College at Rutgers University, has touched the lives of thousands of children as the founding state director of Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of New Jersey. CASA supports the many abused and neglected children working their way through the state's foster care system. 

In 2006, the Livingston Alumni Association honored Kirschenbaum as a Distinguished Alumna. As of June 2017, Kirschenbaum serves as CASA of New Jersey's associate director.

She earned her Juris Doctorate from New York University School of Law after graduating summa cum laude from Livingston.

Kirschenbaum additionally has served on the Advisory Board of Foster and Adoptive Family Services of New Jersey, the New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect and the Task Force Protection Sub-Committee.

As a student, Kirschenbaum received the Livingston College Academic Achievement Award and the Lynne M. Kellermann Memorial (Honors Program) Award. 


Watch the LAA's video tribute to Liza Kirschenbaum (1 minute, 39 seconds),

embedded on this page, or open in a new window.

Follow Liza Kirschenbaum on Twitter.

Photos: (Top) Liza Kirschenbaum at the 2006 Livingston College Distinguished Alumni Awards; (Bottom) From the 1987 Livingston College yearbook, In Quest of Excellence.


[With His Brother, Distinguished Alumnus Gregg Spiridellis, LC'93, Has Made the Internet Laugh Out Loud Since 2000](#)

“Recovering” from four years in investment banking, **Gregg Spiridellis**, and his brother Evan in 1999 set out to create what they called a “brave new world of entertainment” with the founding of their production company JibJab Media Inc. 

In 2006 the Livingston Alumni Association honored Gregg Spiridellis, a 1993 graduate of Livingston College and Rutgers Business School at Rutgers University, with the Seth Dvorin Distinguished Young Alumni Award.

Gregg and Evan Spiridellis started their company in 1999 from a garage in Brooklyn, New York. In February 2000 they created their first viral video hit with an interactive video of the Founding Fathers rapping about the Declaration of Independence.

After the dot-com crash, the brothers expanded their business by creating gag gifts, worked on animation projects for clients, and a children’s book with rap superstar LL Cool J.

They quickly followed it with an even bigger hit featuring George Bush and Al Gore in a rap battle for the 2000 presidential election. The video was one of the web’s first broad-based hits and landed on Fox’s MadTV, ABC News, CNN, and a host of other national media outlets. 

After the Spiridellis brothers moved to Los Angeles to do additional work for clients, they kept pouring their resources into original short programming for .

In 2004 their investment paid off when JibJab exploded in popularity with the release of an election parody video, *This Land*. The video starred animated versions of George W. Bush and John Kerry battling and belittling each other.

The video, animated by Evan and written by Gregg, rocketed around the world from inbox to inbox after the brothers emailed a link to the 130,000 people on their fan newsletter. By the end of the 2004 election, JibJab's election videos (including the follow-up *Good To Be in DC!*) were viewed more than 80 million times online on every continent, including Antarctica, and even on the International Space Station.

The media frenzy that followed put the brothers in front of millions of people watching The Tonight Show, CNN, FOX, CNBC and the Today show.

ABC World News Tonight even named the brothers "People of the Year" in 2004.

As of 2015, according to an article from *Response* magazine, JibJab had more than 1.5 million paid subscribers, 100 million site visitors per year, and an expanding staff of 85. The company is based in Marina del Rey, California.

Gregg Spiridellis, chief executive officer of JibJab, is a native of Marlboro, New Jersey, and is married with three children, according to the same *Response* profile.

Follow Gregg Spiridellis on Twitter.

Watch the LAA's video tribute to Gregg Spiridellis (1 minute, 42 seconds), embedded on this page, or open in a new window.

Photos: (Top) Gregg Spiridellis at the 2006 Livingston College Distinguished Alumni Awards; (Bottom) From the 1993 Livingston College yearbook, Diversity: A Higher Form of Education.

[Distinguished Alumna Karen Rogers, LC'92, Is a Television Meteorologist and Journalist in Philadelphia](#)

Karen Rogers Lee, known professionally as **Karen Rogers**, is the weekday traffic and weather anchor for *Action News Mornings* on Philadelphia's WPVI-TV (6ABC).




Rogers, a 1992 honors graduate of Livingston College at Rutgers University, was honored by the Livingston Alumni Association in 2004 as the first recipient of the Seth Dvorin Distinguished Young Alumni Award.

In addition to being valedictorian of her communication class, she was the

class speaker at her commencement convocation and is listed in "Who's Who Among American Colleges and Universities." Rogers spoke again at Livingston College's Commencement, as the invited speaker in 2005.

Rogers is a meteorologist who earned her seal of approval from the American Meteorological Society. She holds a certificate in Broadcast Meteorology from Mississippi State University following three years of studies in atmospheric sciences and geosciences. Rogers was a 1992-93 Rotary International Scholar and studied at the Graduate Centre for Journalism Studies at the University of Wales.

 Rogers joined 6ABC in 1996 as a reporter and producer for *AM/Philadelphia*. Rogers quickly joined the AccuWeather team and found her true passion in weather forecasting.

She had previously worked at WHSP-TV in Vineland, New Jersey, where she was a host and producer of a weekly public affairs program and the monthly show Congressional Reports. Rogers also anchored daily news cut-ins and filed feature reports for WHSP-TV. Prior to WHSP-TV, she was a features reporter for several cable stations in southern New Jersey.

Rogers co-hosts *FYI Philly*, a weekly entertainment show on 6ABC. She also has co-hosted many special events broadcasts for the station, including Philly on Wheels, the Philadelphia Home Show and the Miss America Preview Special. Rogers also has reported for the 6ABC/Boscov's Thanksgiving Day Parade, the 4th of July Parade, the Philadelphia Flower Show and the First Union Bike Race.

In addition to her work at 6ABC, Rogers is active in supporting young people. A first runner-up to Miss New Jersey in 1994, she often hosts or judges local pageants. Rogers has also been active in the fight against child abuse, and has taught elementary school students empowerment skills for reporting and preventing abuse.

Follow Karen Rogers on Twitter.

Photos: (Top) Courtesy of 6ABC; (Bottom) Rogers speaks to her fellow graduates at the Livingston College 1992 Commencement, as pictured in the yearbook, Diversity: A Style of Our Own.