A Legacy of Creativity and Innovation

by Jill Thompson

One of Hartford College for Women’s most beloved teachers, Associate Professor of English Jeanne R. Bonaca, retired this spring after a 22-year career at HCW. Bonaca is highly regarded by students and colleagues alike for her creative approach to teaching and for making learning more interactive and experience-based for those fortunate enough to have sat in her classroom.

“My own life, particularly my teaching life, has been transformed by Hartford College for Women,” Bonaca said. “My philosophy of teaching and learning and innovations in the classroom have been formed and transformed by what I have learned here at HCW from the students, faculty, and staff.”

During the HCW Commencement ceremony on May 19, Bonaca was named HCW’s Professor of the Year by the College’s Class of 2002. In addition, her long service and dedication to the University were recognized in a proclamation from Hartford Mayor Eddie Perez and the city’s Court of Common Council, which proclaimed May 19, 2002, as “Jeanne R. Bonaca Day” in Hartford.

After the Commencement exercises, Bonaca was honored at a special reception held at the Dean’s House on the HCW campus. The event featured toasts and tributes from many of Bonaca’s former students, including Marilyn Brown ’89, who is currently working on her Ph.D. at the University of Hawaii. Brown, whose appearance was a delightful surprise to the honoree, spoke of Bonaca’s role in encouraging her to set her sights high.

Miriam Butterworth, an honorary trustee and former interim president of HCW, spoke of Bonaca’s special relationship with her husband, the late Oliver Butterworth, a beloved, longtime professor of English at the College. Bonaca considered Oliver Butterworth to be her mentor, and after his death in 1990, Bonaca continued the tradition he started of publishing collections of students’ creative writings. At the reception on May 19, Miriam Butterworth presented Bonaca with a colorful poster featuring the covers of some of the student writing collections she had published. The images of the covers were displayed in a quilt-like pattern, together with quotes from some of Bonaca’s current and former students and colleagues.

“Your wonderful nurturing spirit and your contagious enthusiasm have touched me in so many ways,” read one of the quotes on the poster. Another said, “You have opened my mind and challenged me to think differently.”

Bonaca has taught a wide range of courses in literature, creative writing, and composition, and she has developed a variety of interdisciplinary courses. Whatever the subject, her passion for finding creative ways to engage students is at the heart of her teaching philosophy.

“By making classroom learning more interactive, student-guided, and experience-based, Jeanne’s classes are interactive communities of individuals striving to learn and helping their colleagues to learn,” said Susan Lennon, director of HCW.

HCW’s nontraditional students have been extremely receptive to Bonaca’s teaching style. “People will blossom if you let them know that who they are is valuable,” Bonaca said. Her insights have not only enabled students to develop their own voices but also helped HCW and the University in their quests to meet the changing needs of today’s students.

In recognition of Bonaca’s innovative teaching style and its impact on students, HCW has established the Jeanne R. Bonaca Faculty Creativity Award. The award will be given each year to a part-time or full-time faculty member at HCW who has shown continued on page 36