In fall 2012, the Douglass Engineering Living Learning Community welcomed its first cohort of 30 first-year SoE women students. Since then, more than 250 alumnae have benefited from the innovative community’s focus on leadership development, academic mentoring, and preparation for post-graduate success. From the start, former SoE dean Thomas Farris and then-Douglass College dean Jacqueline Litt shared a vision for creating a dynamic, inclusive living-learning community where women engineering students could thrive. “An important goal of ours was to increase the number of women studying engineering,” says Farris, who stepped down as dean in June. “With the living-learning community, we’ve sent a powerful message of support to women at the School of Engineering.” Litt recounts they shared an additional priority of “growing a cohort of alumnae who...”
would continue their special ties to Douglass and SoE and serve as mentors to students.”

Brian ENG’80 and Stacey DC’80 Reilly, who in 2016 endowed the community — which was renamed the Reilly Douglass Engineering Living-Learning Community (RDELLC) in their honor — identify two other benefits. “The obvious benefit is the tremendous retention rate associated with the women who have gone through the program,” says Brian Reilly. “The second is less direct, but equally important. RDELLC provides an inspiration for the young women coming out of high school who are considering STEM careers, as they know RDELLC is an environment in which they can thrive.”

A Positive Impact

The couple’s support of RDELLC has expanded the opportunities for RDELLC students to make a positive impact both at Rutgers and the wider world.

“All students need support and encouragement when it comes to a technically oriented degree program — especially one as challenging as a Rutgers engineering degree,” says Stacey Reilly. “RDELLC provides that with its collaborative environment in which the students not only support each other but also receive targeted mentoring and advice along the way.”

Over the past ten years, Helen Buettner, professor and chair of the Department of Chemical and Biochemical Engineering, taught the RDELLC Intro to Engineering course and saw firsthand how RDELLC has positively impacted students.

“The striking thing to me is how prominent RDELLC women are in student life, how many leadership positions they hold in student organizations, their success along varied career paths — and perhaps most important — the enduring networks of connections that nucleated with RDELLC and then extended well beyond it to support other women in the school as well,” Buettner says.

Targeted Programming

RDELLC students benefit from many opportunities for hands-on learning, mentoring, interaction with alumni representatives from SoE and Douglass Residential College (DRC), and programming centered on their professional development and academic achievement.

Moving forward, Kimberly Cook-Chennault, associate dean of diversity, equity, and inclusion and mechanical and aerospace engineering associate professor, will be teaching the Intro to Engineering course.

“ collegial spirit. The Introduction to Engineering course for RDELLC students involves hands-on projects, lectures, and sessions with engineering faculty from each department to provide information for choosing a major.

Each element in this community is integral to students’ development as members of the STEM community and to their journey in womanhood. Skills are developed. Networks are built. Friendships are forged. These things stay with RDELLC students for life.”

— LYDIA PRENDERGAST, DOUGLASS WOMEN IN SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING PROGRAM DIRECTOR AND ASSOCIATE DEAN

Kimberly Cook-Chennault, associate dean of diversity, equity, and inclusion and associate professor of mechanical and aerospace engineering teaches the Intro to Engineering RDELLC courses.

I was attracted to RDELLC’s promise of a women’s community, and safe space.”

KAORI MOYE, ENG’22

PHOTOGRAPH: BILL CARDONI

PHOTOGRAPHS: DEBORAH FEINGOLD; ILLUSTRATION: WANLEE PRACHYAPANAPRAL/ISTOCK

“RDELLC for Life”
WOMEN OF RDELLC
WORKING, LEADING, AND SUCCEEDING IN EXCITING CAREERS

Katherine Lau, BME'16
SENIOR REGULATORY AFFAIRS ASSOCIATE, DEXTON DICKINSON

“Support given to women in engineering makes a huge difference. If anything, it taught me that women need to stick together and be open to opportunities to help each other climb the ladder of life. I hope RDELLC will continue to expand its community to more women in the next ten years.”

Amanda Chin, MSE’16
CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT MANAGER, SHERWIN WILLIAMS

“A strong support system of women engineers in a male-dominated field is integral to how we progress in society. Not only do I have a seat at the table, I’m also among my peers. I wouldn’t be in the position I’m in without the women I met in RDELLC and DHC, who are truly my best friends.”

Tiffany Kingsley Caccia, BME'16
NUCLEAR SHoot test SUPERVISOR, NAVAL NUClear ordnancE, NORFOLK NAVAL SHIPYARD

“I wouldn’t be where I am today without being a part of RDELLC. The connections and opportunities provided me with networking connections, internships, and the experience to acquire the job I have today. I’ve maintained mentor connections and some of my closest friends were a result of being part of the RDELLC program.”

Sara Wengrovski, CEE’17, ’19
DATA CENTER PROFESSIONAL, META (FORMERLY FACEBOOK)

“The RDELLC program built up my confidence to succeed in a male-dominated industry, equipped me with leadership and mentorship experience, and technical expertise. I’m excited to see RDELLC continue to produce empowered, intelligent, and thoughtful women.”

LEAD: Laura Gamberoni, Katherine Lau, and Tatiana Crespo are among the 40 inaugural RDELLC students in 2011. RIGHT: First-year students Danielle Egger, Rachel Chmielek, Paloma Hidalgo, and Karina Zinskas value the close-knit community RDELLC offers.

program director and associate dean Lydia Prendergast was instrumental in developing the course, notes, “Each element in RDELLC is integral to students’ development. Skills are developed, networks are built, friendships are forged. These things stay with students for life.”

Recognizing that women were underrepresented in engineering, electrical and computer engineering major Kaori Moya, a member of the RDELLC Class of 2022 who is now working with Lockheed Martin’s rotary and mission systems department, was attracted by RDELLC’s promise of a women’s community, safe space, and alumnae network. She readily advises incoming RDELLC members to use all the resources provided by DHC — from a regular de-stress program that combats burn-out to help in funding professional organization memberships, such as the National Society for Black Engineers (NSBE).

The Next Ten Years:
A Promising Future

It is anticipated that over the next ten years, alternative learning communities, and RDELLC, will be established, while Parris expects that its Intro to Engineering course will become a model for building out engineering exploration for other engineering students.

Brian Kelly puts it this way: “Our hope would be that RDELLC continues to be a positive, nourishing, collaborative environment in which Douglas women engineers can continue to thrive and achieve their academic and life goals.”

FASCINATING SUPPORTERS OF WOMEN ENGINEERS
Brian Kelly (BSEE’86) and his wife, Stacey (CC/89) share a passion to give women engineers the support and mentoring they need to succeed. By generously endowing the Rolly Douglas Engineering Learning Community in 2016, they demonstrated that all women students have an opportunity to flourish in a supportive, collaborative environment. A retired senior vice president at Bectel and past chair and current member of the ASEE Industry Advisory Board, Rolly received the Distinguished Award for Service and Lifetime Achievement at the 2022 Media of Excellence dinner.