



**GREAT JOB,
GRADS!**

A graduation cap, gown and tassel: Nearly 5,000 student stories shared that ending at Cuyahoga Community College during the 2017-2018 academic year.

That population of graduates — the equivalent of a small city — set a new standard of success at Tri-C. It is the largest class to petition for associate degrees and certificates since the College opened its doors in 1963.

The surge continues the positive momentum that has been building with a renewed emphasis on access, equity and student success at the College. Tri-C's federally tracked graduation rate has quadrupled since Alex Johnson became president of the College five years ago.

Those gains reflect the College's mission to provide its students clearly marked maps to academic achievement. Newer programs such as the First Year Experience guide students toward graduation and, ultimately, career success.

"Our community grows stronger with each degree and certificate earned at Tri-C," Johnson said. "These graduates built the skills to take on meaningful careers in our region, where they will serve as a strong foundation for a better tomorrow."

The promise of a better tomorrow acts as a driving force behind everything at Tri-C. It's at the core of the College's mission to provide a high-quality, affordable education to those striving to do more for themselves and the community. The stories over the following pages showcase just a few of the outstanding graduates now ready to make a difference using lessons learned at Tri-C.



STORIES BY **Erik Cassano** AND **John Horton**
STUDENT PORTRAITS BY **Tamara London**

THE 'IT' FACTOR

RYAN JASANY MAKES A CHANGE FOR THE BETTER

Two years ago, Ryan Jasany held a newly minted education degree from Bowling Green State University. He worked in the field. He had a future in his sights. The trouble was, Jasany didn't really like the future he saw. The longer he worked in education, the more he became convinced it just wasn't for him. His older brother's career seemed much more interesting.

"I saw him working in IT; he liked what he was doing and it seemed like a good career to get into," Jasany said. Jasany had previously taken classes at Cuyahoga Community College and knew the College had an IT program. In the fall of 2016, he decided to dip his toe in the pool and register for a few IT courses. It didn't take long for him to get hooked.

In May, Jasany graduated from Tri-C with an Associate of Applied Business in IT Programming and Development. He also received a pair of certificates in mobile app development and web application development.

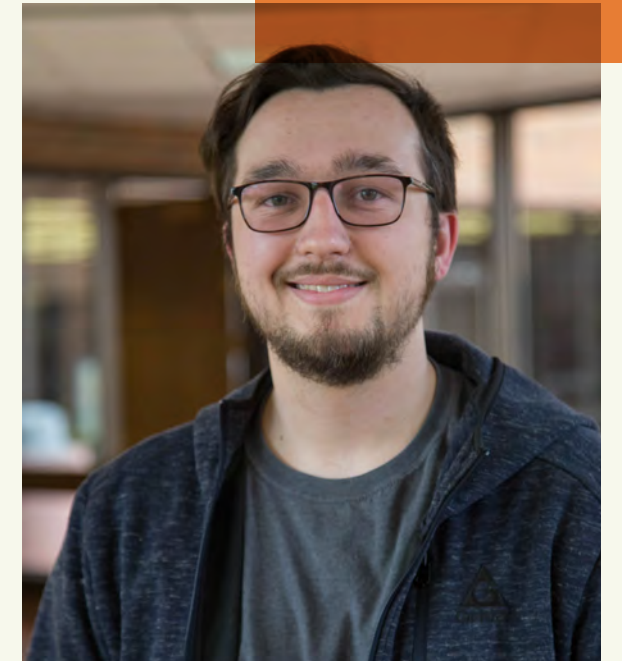
"After those first few classes, I knew I wanted to make a career of it," he said. "I loved the problem-solving aspect of it. It didn't feel like work, it felt like solving a puzzle." But Tri-C did more than open Jasany's

eyes to the world of IT. His professors and staff in the Career Center prepared him to find work in the industry.

"The professors challenge you, but they are also there to help you," Jasany said. "One of my professors stayed after class with me for an hour as I was getting ready to apply for an internship. He answered my questions and explained what to expect during the interview. It's very helpful to have someone willing to coach you like that."

The Career Center assisted Jasany in developing his resume-writing and interviewing skills and connected him with networking events and career fairs. After nearly a year, the hard work paid off — Jasany secured an internship with MTD Products in Valley City, where he worked from May to November 2017.

Jasany, now 23, left MTD to take a full-time position with Inforce Technologies in Cleveland, where he presently works.



"Tri-C helped me get my current job as well," he said. "My class took a bus trip last year to several IT companies, including Inforce. Through that, I got to meet some developers and make some connections. When I applied for my job here, I already knew some people, and it made the process a lot smoother."

In the span of just two years, Jasany went from searching to successful — and he credits Tri-C for giving him the support to make it all happen.

“IT'S THE ENVIRONMENT TRI-C PROVIDES. I WAS SURROUNDED BY SO MANY PEOPLE WHO WERE IN A SIMILAR SITUATION TO MINE, INTERESTED IN IT AND TRYING TO MAKE IT INTO A NEW CAREER.”

IT WAS LIKE A BIG SUPPORT GROUP, AND IT SHOWED ME THAT I COULD DO THIS. I WAS ABLE TO PUSH MYSELF FORWARD.”



LEADING BY EXAMPLE

CHERELDA BELL EARNS TWO DEGREES WHILE TEACHING HER DAUGHTERS ABOUT PERSEVERANCE

Success can be contagious. Just ask Cherelda Bell.

The mother of three spent six long years working toward commencement at Cuyahoga Community College. She studied nights. She studied weekends. She studied whenever she found a rare free moment.

And as Bell pushed herself to achieve academically, she watched as her daughters — Ja'Meria, 14; Ja'Sha, 10; and Ja'Zonna, 9 — did the same.

"Tri-C didn't just help me," the 34-year-old Cleveland resident said. "It helped my whole family."

Bell graduated from the College in May with two degrees, an Associate of Applied Science in Nursing and an Associate of Arts. She intends to continue her education at Cleveland State University through the RN-to-BSN program between Tri-C and CSU.

That future once seemed unattainable. Bell struggled in her first attempt at college in 2004 and 2005, failing more classes than she passed. She left school and entered the workforce to support her first child.

Years quickly passed as daily demands dominated Bell's time. When she paused long enough to examine her life, she saw little prospect of career advancement, higher earnings or a better future.

To change that, Bell signed up for one course — Beginning Algebra — at Tri-C's Eastern Campus. "I owed it to myself, to my daughters, to give it another try," she said.

Bell rebuilt her GPA class by class, semester by semester. She gradually increased her course load over the next few years and enrolled as a full-time student after being laid off from her job in 2015.



Student resources such as the TRIO program taught Bell how to make the most of her second chance. She involved herself on campus, too, participating in student government and Black American Council.

Multiple scholarships followed as Bell achieved in the classroom. That led to her selection as a Mandel Scholar and Eastern Campus Student of the Year.

As Bell poured herself into her studies, she said that her daughters followed her example. Homework sessions became a family affair. Academics turned into a household priority. Success became the norm.

“ I DIDN'T DO ALL OF THIS JUST FOR MYSELF. BEING A MOTHER MEANS BEING A ROLE MODEL. I'M DEVELOPING MY GIRLS. I WANTED THEM TO SEE WHAT IS POSSIBLE IF YOU KEEP WORKING AND MOVING FORWARD. ”

DANIEL MURRAY TRAINS HIS BODY AND MIND TO EARN A DEGREE AT TRI-C

Determination. Toughness. A refusal to quit.

Daniel Murray used those traits to mold himself into a kickboxing champion in his native Ireland. He leaned on the same attributes to earn an Associate of Science degree in Sport and Exercise Studies at Tri-C.

"Success starts from within," Murray said. "I vowed to outwork everyone to make myself a kickboxing champion. That's the same mentality I brought to my studies."

That attitude took time to forge, though. Murray began his adult life running an appliance repair business in Ireland. Customer calls kept him busy fixing washers, dryers and anything else that broke. The on-the-go lifestyle left him little time to exercise or eat right.

One day, he looked in the mirror and saw a man 80 pounds heavier than he remembered.

"I said, 'That's not me,'" Murray said. "So I got on it to make a change."

He discovered kickboxing and pounded his body into shape at the gym. In 2015, he won a title from the World Organization of Martial Arts Athletes during the World Martial Arts Games XV in Cardiff, Wales.

The transformation from a hefty repairman to chiseled champion convinced Murray to seek a career as a trainer.

Murray enrolled in Tri-C's Sport and Exercise Studies (SES)



program in 2016 soon after moving to Cleveland with his wife, who grew up in the area. The two met while she was in Ireland on a college study-abroad program.

He attacked his studies with the same ferocity he brought to the ring, compiling a flawless 4.0 GPA at the College. His grades earned him an invitation to join the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society chapter at Eastern Campus.

This past semester, SES Program Manager Chris Faciana arranged for Murray to intern at SPIRE Institute — an official U.S. Olympic and Paralympic training center located in Ashtabula County.

“IT'S ALL ABOUT BUILDING PEOPLE UP. I LOVE TO SEE PEOPLE'S PROGRESS. SOME PEOPLE WANT TO JUMP HIGHER, GET STRONGER OR RUN FASTER. I LIKE BEING ABLE TO HELP THEM DO THAT.”

Murray plans to start his own personal training business and possibly open a gym. Additional education may be in his future, too, as he may pursue a bachelor's degree in sports science from a four-year institution.

None of that would have been possible without Tri-C, said Murray, who is the first in his family to earn a college degree.

"Tri-C had everything I needed," Murray said. "It's a place I'll recommend for the rest of my life."



DESTINY HANZEL GRADUATES FROM TRI-C'S AUTOMOTIVE TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM WITH A DEGREE AND A JOB



MOTORING INTO A CAREER

Destiny Hanzel heard all the reasons why she couldn't be an automotive technician. She isn't big enough or strong enough to work on large vehicles. She'll feel out of place working in a field occupied nearly entirely by men.

She's heard every word of it, and she doesn't care. In fact, it makes her want to follow her dream all the more.

"A LOT OF PEOPLE TOLD ME I COULDN'T. THEY SAID 'YOU'RE A GIRL, HOW ARE YOU GOING TO LIFT A BIG TRUCK TIRE?' I DIDN'T TAKE IT PERSONALLY, BUT I VIEWED IT AS A CHALLENGE. I WANT TO SHOW PEOPLE I CAN DO IT."

Hanzel graduated from Tri-C in May with an Associate of Applied Science degree in Automotive Technology. She left as a General Motors-certified automotive technician after completing GM's Automotive Service Educational Program (ASEP) at the College.

A job at the Medina Auto Mall awaited Hanzel after commencement. She interned at the dealership as part of the Tri-C program.

"Every program in college should be like this one," Hanzel said. "Everyone in here has a path to a job. It's laid out for you."

The 20-year-old Valley City resident has been around cars since childhood. Her father, Bernie Hanzel, owns and operates an auto body shop in Medina County. Hanzel credits him as her primary source of inspiration.

But even so, Hanzel didn't follow her dad's path exactly. Instead of auto body repair, she focused under the hood on the technologically advanced, computer-driven engines that power today's vehicles.

She spent her final two years of high school in the auto tech program at the Medina County Career Center and enrolled at Tri-C after receiving her diploma from Buckeye High School.

Hanzel said the academic advising and support she received through the College's Degree in Three program helped keep her motoring toward graduation. Scholarships through the College and other sources will allow her to graduate debt-free.

"I had an idea what Tri-C could do for my life, but it did so much more than I ever expected," Hanzel said. "This is the place to come if you have a goal and dream. The people here will help you succeed."

OVERCOMING ADVERSITY FORMER FOSTER YOUTH NATASHA DAVIS FINDS SUPPORT TO SUCCEED AT TRI-C

Natasha Davis beat the odds. Four years after aging out of foster care, Davis graduated from Cuyahoga Community College in May with an Associate of Arts degree. Statistics show that less than 10 percent of former foster youth graduate college.

"It has been a rough road," the 22-year-old from Cleveland said, "but I always tried to stay positive and focus on moving forward. I was lucky, too — a lot of people helped me get where I am today."

She found some of her biggest supporters at Tri-C's Western Campus.

Davis enrolled at the College in 2015, two years after graduating early from Cleveland's C.A.S.T.L.E. High School. She struggled through her first classes while trying to build self-confidence.

Tri-C paired Davis with a mentor — Beverly Croom-Reynolds, a financial aid advisor at Western Campus — through its Reach Scholars program in 2016.

Just like that, everything changed.

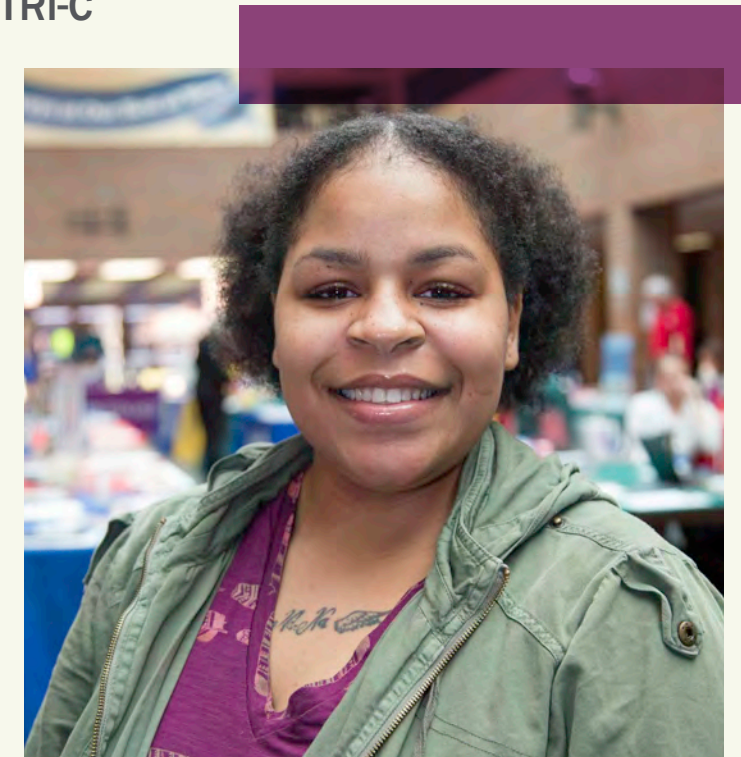
"SHE BELIEVED IN ME WHEN I DIDN'T THINK I WAS SMART ENOUGH FOR COLLEGE. SHE MADE ME THINK I COULD DO THIS. SHE TOLD ME THAT I COULD SUCCEED AND GRADUATE."

NOBODY HAD EVER DONE THAT BEFORE."

That same year, Davis found herself in College Composition II with assistant professor Kirsten Yates-Konzen. A writing assignment during fall semester asked students to explore their genealogy. It turned into a life-changing project.

Yates-Konzen encouraged Davis to explore her difficult past and embrace it. While doing the assignment, Davis researched the history of the foster care system and explored her own files with the county's Division of Children and Family Services.

"Before, I didn't feel comfortable about things," Davis said. "This made me accept and appreciate the things I went through. It truly made me a stronger woman."



Davis now dedicates herself to advocating for children traveling the path she walked. The woman who was once afraid to speak of her past now freely shares her story to educate others.

She traveled to Washington, D.C., and Columbus last year to discuss foster care with federal and state officials. Davis also volunteers with the county to help young adults aging out of the foster system.

Davis served as a student ambassador at Tri-C and worked with international students at the College to help them overcome language barriers. She currently works part time in the counseling office at Western Campus.

Her many honors at Tri-C include being named Western Campus Student of the Year in 2017 and receiving the College's Community Champion Award and a Stokes Legacy Award.

Davis intends to transfer to Cleveland State University in the fall to begin working toward a bachelor's degree in social work. She said she wants to see foster youth receive the support they deserve.

"We need a better system to help these children succeed," Davis said. "I want to be part of finding that solution. I want to be a positive force."