

Margaret Downs

Tri-C Alumna Finds Business is Booming Following Voice Writing Certification At Tri-C


Margaret Downs, a 2011 Tri-C alumna, was named a Community Champion in the small business category at a recent College-sponsored Advisory Committee Appreciation Breakfast. She is the owner of Premier Visual Voice, a business she runs from her Concord Township home that, in some respects, was inspired by her time at Tri-C.

Premier Visual Voice employs 10 people — a few of whom are also Tri-C grads — who voice-write, or caption, webinars, conferences, classroom lectures, government meetings and even quarterly financial updates for a Fortune 500 company. Employees can generally work from home, and the clients can be located anywhere in the United States.

Voice-writing is a stand-in term for the clunkier Communication Access Realtime Translation, or CART. In addition to the applications listed above, it also serves the hearing-impaired community, as talk is translated in real time into a written transcript that can be viewed online.

Downs attended a business college, worked in sales and pursued other entrepreneurial ventures until failing vision limited her ability to drive. She plotted her next move, and in 2009, she enrolled at Cuyahoga Community College after learning about its transcription certificate program. She is now working toward an associate degree. “My listening skills are great because my vision is not. The course was available online so I could work from home. It just fit,” she said.

Voice-writing is conducted at a



Margaret Downs accepts the 2016 Community Champion Award, Small Business category from Alex Johnson, president of Tri-C. This award celebrates Downs' business, Premier Visual Voice, and its positive impact on students and the community.



L to R: faculty members Jen Krueger, Laurie Moniz and Kelly Moranz (also the project manager for the program) surround Margaret Downs. At the far right, Tri-C graduate Jean Cregan, who now works for Premier Visual Voice.

computer, talking into a microphone connected to software. The software translates spoken word into text on the screen, complete with appropriate punctuation and paragraph breaks. While there are sometimes small errors, the new technology is nothing like the old closed captioning, which would show up on television decades ago. The software and training get the practitioner started, but Downs stresses that practice really does lead to perfection.

Six months into the Tri-C program, Downs knew the work engaged her mind, and she wanted to take it on long term. She decided to start her own voice-writing business, especially as it's a growing field. "It takes a lot of work, a lot of time, and you have to be 100 percent in the moment when you are getting started," she said. She would routinely devote four hours a day to practice early on. "The more you practice, the faster you get, and you can listen and anticipate what is coming. It is all done on the fly. You need to be diligent and driven."

Downs knew she had found her niche, and the success of her business is proof positive. She now sits on one of Tri-C's community advisory boards, and she has made it a point to hire or offer internships to Tri-C students when the opportunity arises. Case in point: At the recent Advisory Committee Appreciation Breakfast where her company recognized Tri-C graduate Jean Cregan was captioning her alma mater's event. Downs said her experience with the staff and faculty of the CART and Captioning program was outstanding, and her involvement with the advisory board is aimed at facilitating internships and helping students be better prepared.

CAPTIONING AND COURT REPORTING PROGRAM

Kelly Moranz, manager of the Captioning and Court Reporting program at Cuyahoga Community College, said students who enter this challenging program will have life-changing results once they complete their course of study. The facts back her up. (See page 5 for more about Kelly Moranz.)

A national shortage of court reporters and captioners, at a time when communication technology is exploding, means that a demand exists for qualified individuals in the field. According to a survey conducted for the National Court Reporters Association, 5,500 jobs will be available in the next five years.

Two skill-based tracks, two great outcomes:

Steno Writing: Leverage typing and texting skills into a great-paying job.

Stenography (also known as machine writing) uses a stenography machine — a specialized typewriter connected to a computer — to record speech. Real-time stenography uses software that translates those steno keystrokes into text on a computer screen. At Tri-C, steno students learn to use DigitalCat Computer-Access Realtime Translation software.

Voice Writing: Apply listening and talking talents for a great-paying job.

Voice writing is speaking into a microphone or mask connected to software that translates your spoken words into text. This uses speech-recognition technology. Students "train" a program to recognize their voice and shortened voice codes — such as "kronq" for correct me if I am wrong. The software translates the speech to text and displays it on a monitor. At Tri-C, voice-writing students learn to use Dragon speech-recognition software along with Eclipse computer-access real-time translation software.

Other opportunities:

- Steno and voice tracks are available in certificate or associate degree programs.

- Classes are held at the Western Campus, online or a combination of both. The online option permits students to complete the program without ever taking a class on campus.
- Salary potential can range from \$45,000 to start to more than \$100,000 as you gain experience.
- The program has a high employment rate for graduates.
- Campus steno machine scholarship opportunities and Earn While You Learn mentorship stipends are available for qualifying students.

Employment Opportunities for Steno and Voice Writers include:

- Official court reporter
- Freelance reporter
- CART (Computer Access Realtime Translation) provider, also known as voice writer
- Broadcast captioner
- Convention reporter
- Webcaster
- Scopist (transcript editor)
- Medical transcriptionist
- Legal transcriptionist

Accreditation and Affiliations:

Associate of Applied Business degree:

approved by The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. Cuyahoga Community College credits are transferable to other colleges and educational institutions.

NCRA certification: certified by the National Court Reporters Association in accordance with its general requirements and minimum standards.

Associations:

- National Court Reporters Association, NCRA (ncraonline.org)
- National Verbatim Reporters Association, NVRA (nvra.org)
- Ohio Court Reporters Association, OCRA (ocraonline.org)

For more information, visit tri-c.edu/CCR or call 216-987-5214.