

Oksana Tsarkova, '08

Given the mission of Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C®) it is not unusual for a student to begin classes in their early 30s. It is unusual, however, for a student to begin school at that age and not speak, read or write much English.

So begins the story of Oksana Tsarkova who, along with her husband, Serhiy, arrived in Cleveland during the summer of 2002 with their 8-year-old daughter, Anna. They received green cards by lottery and came to America from Lviv, Ukraine, to begin a new life. Staying with friends in Broadview Heights, they went to downtown Cleveland for instructions in English while Anna quickly learned the language in local public school.

Serhiy, now the owner of a trucking business, worked as a dishwasher to support the family. They moved to a tiny apartment and in the summer of 2003 a second daughter, Caroline, arrived. A bit more confident in her English skills, Oksana Tsarkova enrolled in English-as-a Second Language classes at the Western Campus in 2004.

Soon Tsarkova was taking accounting courses, enjoying the subject matter and doing very well in school. She earned her associate degree in accounting, graduating with honors in May 2008. After transferring all of her credits to Cleveland State University, she earned her bachelor's in accounting and business, again graduating with honors, two years later.

As a serious student and the mother of two girls, Tsarkova also made time to volunteer at a hospital and the tax clinic offered at the Western Campus. "Two of my teachers, Vicky Vorel and Linda Muren, encouraged me to work (in) the clinic," said Tsarkova. "It was a great experience giving me lots of practice. Vicky and Linda are great people, great teachers and great encouragers, not only to me, but also to all their students."

While attending CSU, Tsarkova began part-time work in February of 2009 at an accounting firm preparing corporate and individual tax returns and financial statements for various businesses and industries. She picked up a second job at a health-care consulting firm the next October. Both employers were very flexible and that made her work life much easier.

All of Tsarkova's hard work and studying have certainly paid off. She has taken and passed two parts of the CPA exam and has two more to go. Eventually she would like to open her own accounting firm. In addition, the Tsarkovas bought a home in Brecksville last November and have settled into the life they envisioned when they moved to the United States 10 years ago.

"For me, Tri-C was perfect from the beginning," Tsarkova said. "The school motto is 'Where Futures Begin.' For me and my family this is so true. "I met so many encouraging, nice people who always wanted to help. Tri-C is a great place for anyone's future to begin!"