

TRI-C CELEBRATES

more than **3,000**

Student Success Stories

AT SPRING COMMENCEMENT

Degrees and certificates awarded represent the achievement of dreams.

Cuyahoga Community College celebrated the academic achievements of 3,124 petitioning graduates at its commencement ceremony on May 18. The second-largest class in Tri-C history, this total reflects the College's unwavering dedication to student success.

"Through their commitment and hard work, these graduates are poised to take on meaningful careers in our region or continue their education at other universities," said Alex Johnson, president of Cuyahoga Community College. "Their bright futures reflect our community's continued investment in affordable higher education."

The student speaker at commencement, Doraja Lake, was chosen by classmates to share her story at the ceremony. Lake, who earned an Associate of Arts degree, said the inner strength gained at the College "changed the script" of her life. Lake intends to transfer to The Ohio State University in the fall to pursue a career in bariatric medicine. She is the first in her family to earn a college degree.

Read Lake's and other graduates' success stories from the Class of 2017 on the following pages or visit www.tri-c.edu/commencement/graduatestories.html.

A TRI-C STORY

Made for the Movies

Chris Leszkowicz earns degree and lands job on film being shot in Cleveland

Chris Leszkowicz looked at his life three years ago and saw a guy clocking long shifts as a restaurant kitchen manager. Despite the title on his nametag, the job fell short of his dreams.

So he turned to Cuyahoga Community College and started work on his Hollywood ending.

The aspiring cinematographer graduated in May with an Associate of Applied Business in Media Arts and Filmmaking. He immediately put his degree to use after landing a job on the set of *White Boy Rick*, a crime drama starring Matthew McConaughey.

The 23-year-old spent this past spring on the crew shooting scenes around Cleveland. "I still can't believe I was part of something like that," he said.

The Brecksville resident decided in 2014 to follow his love of movies and focus on a career in the film industry. Leszkowicz enrolled at Tri-C and began taking classes in cinematography at Metropolitan Campus.

He quickly found a home in the Student Production Office, where he received hands-on training working behind the camera.

Leszkowicz said his experience working on *White Boy Rick* made him realize how much he learned at the College. He said the training helped him build the skills demanded by studios shooting in Northeast Ohio.

"If it wasn't for this program, I would have been lost on that set," he said.



Chris Leszkowicz

The new graduate now becomes part of the workforce needed to support the region's fast-growing film industry. Tri-C has been developing training programs in cooperation with the Greater Cleveland Film Commission.

Leszkowicz said he hopes to be hired to work on another local film set this summer. He's also involved in several freelance projects.

"I'm excited about the future," Leszkowicz said. "Tri-C put me in a position to succeed."

"The professors here go out of their way to help you. They do whatever they can as far as connecting you with job opportunities or transferring to a four-year school."

JATHIKAA PUSHPARAJAH said Tri-C provided her the structure and encouragement needed to graduate with an Associate of Applied Science in Criminal Justice. The 24-year-old from Cleveland Heights said she found focus at the College.



HEALTHY *Change*

Tri-C degree puts Doraja Lake on path to a career in bariatric medicine

Doraja Lake clutched the steering wheel and focused on the highway while holding back tears. Disappointments littered her life. She thought of her failed marriage, her health problems and her unmet goals.

Then a voice sounded out from the passenger seat: “Mom, what’s going on with you?” asked her high school-aged son, Robert.

Lake opened up and shared how she felt useless. Robert listened and then offered advice. “You always talked about wanting to be a doctor,” he told his mother. “You should go back to school and do it. It’s not too late.”

That car-ride conversation in 2015 brought Lake to Cuyahoga Community College and turned her life around.

The 39-year-old Willoughby resident graduated from Tri-C in May with academic honors and an Associate of Arts degree.

Lake’s classmates selected her to serve as student speaker at Spring Commencement to tell her story of perseverance.

In the fall, she will begin classes at The Ohio State University to work toward a career in bariatric medicine.

“The world can beat you up sometimes,” Lake said. “I went through a period where I didn’t see any success and I fell into a negative pattern. Tri-C pulled me out of that, gave me



Doraja Lake

confidence and made me believe. It changed the script of my life.”

The rewrite involved both mind and body. Lake linked many of her health problems — diabetes, high blood pressure, heart issues — with being overweight. So she revised her diet and began a rigorous exercise routine. To date, she has lost 90 pounds.

That life-altering experience convinced her to pursue a career in bariatric medicine. “I know what losing



“There are boundless opportunities at a community college if students are willing to take them. Tri-C has so many programs for anything you would want to do.”

BRUCE HYDE graduated wearing various pins and medals reflecting the academic accolades he accumulated on his way to an Associate of Applied Science degree in Information Technology. He plans to continue his studies at the College while working toward a bachelor’s degree at Tiffin University through a partnership between the schools.

weight did for me,” Lake said. “Now I want to help other people get their lives back.”

Lake poured herself into her studies, too. She attended Tri-C’s Eastern Campus and took advantage of online classes given a hectic schedule that includes a full-time job as an insurance agent and raising two sons — Robert, 19, and Anden, 9.

She typically studied late into the night and throughout the weekend to keep up with classwork. The work paid off. Her GPA topped 3.7.

That’s the success she envisioned for herself when she first enrolled at Tri-C in 1997, a year after graduating from Euclid High School. She left

following one semester after getting pregnant and devoting herself to home and family.

Returning after so many years challenged Lake: “It was hard,” she said. “But I made a promise to my sons, to myself, not to quit.”

Lake’s grades earned her membership in the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society and she became active in Tri-C’s Black American Council. Away from campus, she launched a mentoring program at her Euclid church and began an assistance service for the elderly and homebound.

All of the success comes from strength built at Tri-C, Lake said. She’s

the first person in her family to earn a college degree.

Lake wasn’t the only family member graduating this past spring, however. Her son Robert received his diploma from Eastlake North High School the day before Tri-C’s commencement. He also has been accepted to Ohio State for next fall.

“I think back to a few years ago and can’t believe this all happening now,” Lake said. “My life has changed so drastically, and I owe so much of that to Tri-C.”



“Tri-C has really helped me make this transition to a new career.”

SARA HUGHES worked a decade in the insurance field before opting for a change. The 35-year-old from Fairview Park turned to Tri-C and in May graduated with an associate degree through the College’s Electroneurodiagnostic Technology program

PERFECT *Harmony*

Tri-C degree leads to prestigious Berklee College of Music for Claire Mulvaney

Claire Mulvaney was in elementary school when her parents encouraged her to take up piano. She had a different idea: “Guitar was for me,” Mulvaney said.

The decision turned out to be a good one.

Mulvaney, now 20, graduated from Cuyahoga Community College in May

with an Associate of Arts degree. Tri-C served as a steppingstone to the Berklee College of Music, where she will study guitar and voice beginning this fall.

The Aurora resident said it has been her longtime dream to attend Berklee. “It has always been an intimidating goal,” she said. “I hear you either sink or swim.”

The College’s matriculation agreement with Berklee will allow

her to find out. She said she probably would not have made it to Berklee without Tri-C and the money she saved given the school’s affordable tuition.

Mulvaney said she discovered what the College offered when her rock band, Toxic Lemons, competed in the Tri-C High School Rock Off. She met with Steve Enos — director of jazz studies and Metropolitan Campus music faculty coordinator — and was off and running.

Her time at Tri-C included opportunities to learn from high-caliber musicians such as Terence Blanchard, Dominick Farinacci and

The Manhattan Transfer through master classes at the Gill and Tommy LiPuma Center for Creative Arts.

“I’ve been really impressed,” she said of her experience at Tri-C.

The guitarist and vocalist has performed at Cleveland Classical Guitar Society recitals and regional venues. She is dipping her toes in jazz now, too, and has played at Blu Jazz, Bop Stop and Take 5 Rhythm and Jazz.

When she’s not doing that, she is singing in her church choir, practicing or working at Aurora School of Music.

“Pretty much all I do is music,” she said. But still no piano.



Claire Mulvaney



Meagan Sabo

TURNING NEAR *Tragedy Into a Degree*

Family dog being hit by car led Meagan Sabo to Tri-C's Veterinary Technology program

career in veterinary medicine. She graduated from Cuyahoga Community College in May with an Associate of Applied Science in Veterinary Technology.

"When I saw everyone working on Bella at the animal hospital, I knew right then that this is what I want to do," said Sabo, 25, of Parma. "It gave me my direction."

Graduation day followed more than six years of taking classes part-time at Tri-C's Western Campus in Parma. Sabo enrolled at Tri-C in 2011 after online research led her to the College's Veterinary Technology program.

Sabo embraced campus life and immersed herself in activities through groups such as the Active Minds Club, Japanese Culture Club and the Veterinary Technicians Club.

She said her experience at Tri-C helped her grow comfortable meeting new people. Sabo has Asperger's Syndrome, a mild form of autism that sometimes translates into awkwardness in social settings.

"I thought I'd just come to class and leave," Sabo said. "But there was so much going on, I started doing things.

College really helped me open up to people."

Sabo thrived in the classroom, too, and spent the past semester interning with a local veterinarian and a veterinary lab to gain hands-on experience. She learned she enjoys working with exotic animals such as reptiles, snakes and birds.

She is already talking with several local veterinarian offices about a job after graduation. The Veterinary Technician National Examination also awaits so she can earn her professional credentials.

"I'm looking at getting my dream job," Sabo said, "and it's because of the people and classes at Tri-C."

The gray-and-white blur of fur darted past Meagan Sabo the moment she opened the front door. Bella bolted into the yard with every ounce of puppy energy in her 13-pound body. The dog reached the street in a blink.

Then came the moment Sabo can never forget: "I heard a sickening thud," she remembers. "Then I saw Bella under the wheels of a car."

What happened next saved the dog and changed Sabo's life.

Watching caregivers at a nearby animal hospital nurse Bella back to health convinced Sabo to pursue a



"I will always be appreciative of my time at Tri-C. College Credit Plus has been such an amazing opportunity. My advice to a high school student would be to seriously consider the CCP option because it can really help you in the long run."

ALEX LENHART earned two associate degrees from Tri-C before graduating from Rocky River High School thanks to the College Credit Plus program. He will enter Case Western Reserve University in the fall as a junior.



Morelle McCane

A CAREER *Reboot*

Tri-C helps Shaoib Khan build a new future in information technology

Shaoib Khan began working for his family's business after graduating high school. But as he approached his 30s, the Cleveland resident wondered if managing a local gas station franchise was the life he wanted.

After much handwringing, he decided he needed to make a change and enrolled at Cuyahoga Community College to study information technology. He graduated from Tri-C in May with an Associate of Arts degree.

"I took a leap of faith," said Khan, now 31. "It was rough, but I made it through."

It wasn't easy. Doctors discovered a mass in Khan's brain soon after he

enrolled at Tri-C in the fall of 2014. It proved benign, but the situation left him nerve-racked as he returned to the classroom.

Khan said strong support from professors, counselors and tutors kept him motivated. He juggled classes, two jobs and doctor's appointments as he worked toward his degree at Westshore Campus in Westlake.

He credited Martin Walsh, assistant professor of information technology, for helping him recognize a talent for math that he applied to his IT studies.

Khan said his time at the College solidified his future while making him a more energetic and positive



Shaoib Khan

person. He intends to begin classes at Cleveland State University in the fall to pursue a bachelor's degree. He is excited about his future job prospects.

"My experience overall was great," Khan said. "Now there's something in my heart, and I want to keep going."



BUILDING *Business Muscle*

Morelle McCane opens fitness company after finding strength at Tri-C

Morelle McCane found her entrepreneurial spirit at Cuyahoga Community College.

The 21-year-old Cleveland resident opened a mobile fitness company called MoFitt The Movement based on her lessons at Tri-C. She said the College gave her the knowledge and confidence to step into the world of business.

McCane crossed the commencement stage in May after earning an Associate of Applied Business degree.

"Tri-C opened my eyes to what is possible," McCane said. "I never thought I'd open my own business until I came here."

The idea for MoFitt grew out of McCane's time working at a preschool. She said she discovered that youngsters learned better after getting up and moving. Much of her work with MoFitt involves children, though she works with people of all ages.

The company specializes in developing fun and creative routines to encourage exercise. McCane said MoFitt's mission is to help clients build a healthy body and healthy mind while developing an active lifestyle.

McCane brings a knockout resume to the business, too: The accomplished boxer won a Cleveland Area Golden Gloves championship in 2015.

"Tri-C has provided me with a great start. There have been a lot of opportunities to improve myself. There are opportunities I probably would not have had in my home country. I'm very glad I decided to come here."

ADEKUNLE POPOOLA enrolled at Tri-C soon after immigrating to Cleveland from Nigeria in 2014. The 21-year-old earned an Associate of Arts degree in May and intends to return to the College this fall to pursue an Associate of Applied Science in Nursing.