

CVCC

SPRING 2025
VOLUME 3

SOAR

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QUALITY ENHANCEMENT PLAN

Guiding students from registration to completing their first college semester. **46**



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COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to the Spring 2025 edition of SOAR Magazine! As you turn these pages, you'll discover a vibrant collection of stories that reflect Catawba Valley Community College's unwavering commitment to student growth, community engagement, and innovation. At the heart of this issue is our Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), which focuses on guiding students from registration through the completion of their first college semester. It's more than a strategy—it's a promise to equip every student with the tools they need to persist, progress, and succeed.

This issue showcases the many ways our students and faculty are leading with purpose and passion. You'll read about CVCC's participation in The Art of Profession exhibit at the Hickory Museum of Art, a cross-campus celebration of creativity in every discipline. We also mark the grand reopening of our ValleySim Healthcare Simulation Center—a state-of-the-art, reimagined space that now more than ever reflects the future of healthcare education.

CVCC remains committed to experiential learning that empowers students to apply their skills in meaningful, real-world contexts. From HVAC students giving back through hands-on service, to a second-year nursing cohort running 100 miles in 100 days, our stories reflect a college committed to excellence, impact, and transformation.

Thank you for being part of our journey—and for believing in the power of community, creativity, and commitment. Keep soaring!

Warmly,



Jenn Cobb
Executive Director
Red Hawk Communications



A LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Dr. Garrett D. Hinshaw

As I review this issue of SOAR Magazine, I am blown away by how much we have accomplished in just one year.

Our college embodies a spirit of teamwork—we recognize that our efforts extend beyond the confines of the classroom, leading to a demonstrated impact across the community. We've increased local job opportunities through programs like the Catawba Apprenticeship Network (CAN) and Professional Development courses. Our Red Hawk student-athletes broke a personal record, contributing over 1000 service hours to youth and community organizations across the region. And many CVCC instructors were selected to participate in statewide conferences or academic cohorts, sharing ideas and strengthening our network with the North Carolina Community College System.

We continue to be recognized as united and innovative in our efforts.

You all should be proud to be a part of a college that is seen as the regional leader in higher education. My hope is that, as you read these stories and discover the great accomplishments of faculty, students, and staff, you will walk away with a greater understanding of your own potential to make a positive impact on our ever-changing world.

Sincerely,



Dr. Garrett D. Hinshaw
President, Catawba Valley Community College

YEAR IN REVIEW

ART OF PROFESSION 6

TRAINING TOMORROW'S HEALTHCARE HEROES 8

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

HVAC GIVES BACK 14

RUNNING FOR A REASON 16

CAMPUS LEADER 18

LEVELING UP 19

RED HAWK ATHLETICS ACHIEVES NEW HEIGHTS 20

K-64 & TALENT DEVELOPMENT

BRINGING BROADBAND WITHIN REACH 24

CONNECTING CATAWBA 27

WEAVING A PATH OF HIS OWN 28

TEACHING & LEARNING

GIRL ON FIRE 32

RADIANT & RESILIENT 34

REWIRE NOT RETIRE 36

SOARING & GROWING 38

FOUNDATION

CYBER-SAFE 40

HEADLINE

QUALITY ENHANCEMENT PLAN 46

ALUMNI

SHERRY BUTLER 51

CANYON ECHERD 53

APRIL HARPER 55



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A photograph of a healthcare simulation center. In the foreground, a person with long brown hair is partially visible, wearing a black top. In the middle ground, a medical mannequin lies on a table, covered with a white sheet featuring a blue polka-dot pattern. The background shows a light blue curtain and a window with blinds. The overall scene is brightly lit and professional.

YEAR IN REVIEW

ART OF PROFESSION

A recap of the exhibition celebrating the creative process across all careers. **6**

TRAINING TOMORROW'S HEALTHCARE HEROES

Step inside CVCC's state-of-the-art healthcare simulation center. **8**

ART OF PROFESSION

Engaging the creative process in career development.

The Art of Profession was a celebration of the creative process, regardless of discipline and career pathway. The exhibition posed the question, 'How do you use the creative process in your everyday life?' Which was answered by students from Catawba Valley Community College, Caldwell Community College & Technical Institute, Lenoir-Rhyne University and Appalachian State University.

CVCC students showcased their talents in The Art of Profession exhibition, using a variety of mediums including photography, video, mixed media, graphic design, and metalworking. Among them was welding

student and SkillsUSA President Marcus Sigmon, who played a key role in the creation of an American flag displayed at the exhibit. Marcus contributed to the collaborative class project that utilized automated welding and cutting techniques. "The flag was made of 16-gauge carbon steel—the same material we use in the shop for practice," Marcus explained.

Marcus was no stranger to creative metalwork. "I took a summer course on using the plasma cutter and have made a lot of projects," he shared. His work includes a Challenger emblem he donated to the school,

custom Christmas gifts, and, most recently, a metal cross he donated to his church.

One of the biggest challenges in the project was programming the robotic welder. "We used the robot to create all fifty stars on the flag. We had to figure out how to program it to automatically cut out each star," he said. Welding isn't the class most students think of when it comes to participating in an art show, but that's exactly what The Art of Profession set out to highlight. "Most students at CVCC don't take welding to create art," Marcus noted. "I wanted people to see welding as more than just a production job—it's also a creative job. It really shows how flexible welding is. You're not just manufacturing parts; if you have the creativity and the means, you can make some truly beautiful pieces."

In his final semester at CVCC, Marcus reflected on his time in the welding workshop. "My experience at CVCC has been very positive. The instructors are always willing to help whenever you need it," he shared. "Here in the welding department, it feels like a close-knit community." His participation in The Art of Profession was a testament to his dedication to the craft and the strong connections he built along the way. "I've done some creative pieces, but nothing as big as the flag," Marcus said. "It was cool





to work with everybody on something that was going to be displayed and represent our department. Not only did it change my perspective on welding, but it also showed how teamwork can come together to create something meaningful.”

Seeing the impact of his work was especially rewarding. “It was really nice to have people ask me about the pieces,” he said. “I was pretty proud of it.”

Another metalworking piece in the show was hard to miss. A large sculpture spelling out ‘CVCC’ was in the center of the exhibition. The letters were crafted by CVCC Visual Art Director, Jeff Kiefer, with assistance from Visual Arts and Theatre Arts students. Each letter of ‘CVCC’ represented one of the schools on campus. The letters were colored according to the college’s branding: red for the School of Community Development and Public Services (CDPSE), gray for the School of Career and Technical Education (CTE), yellow for the School of General Education, and blue for the School of Health Education. The back of each letter was painted in its respective school’s color and included shelving to display physical representations of the programs and career pathways within each school.

Graphic design student, Nicole Morales,

assisted in painting the large ‘CVCC’ letters. The show was a collaborative effort across faculty, students, departments, and with other schools/colleges.

“The museum really wanted to showcase how creativity exists in every profession, and we really took that to heart,” said Dr. Kim Stinson, Department Head of Humanities in the School of General Education.

“It is sort of a given that the arts use the creative process, but there were discussions on how we could bring in programs like welding and electrical—programs that people do not traditionally think are creative—and show how they are creative.”

“THE MUSEUM REALLY WANTED TO SHOWCASE HOW CREATIVITY EXISTS IN EVERY PROFESSION, & WE REALLY TOOK THAT TO HEART.”

Stinson also emphasized the broader impact of arts education. “We hope that our students will, if they are taking music, theatre, or visual arts, go into that career path, but a lot of times they don’t. But they take a lot of transferable skills like critical thinking or

the creative process. These are things that they will take with them no matter what profession they go into.” Art and creativity play a role in all of our lives from the way we solve problems to the techniques we develop to do our professions.

CVCC fosters lifelong learning and recognizes creativity as an essential skill for its students. The college encourages students not only to embrace their creativity at CVCC but also to carry it beyond the classroom and into their careers.

The Art of Profession was on display from November 23, 2024, to February 2, 2025, in the Coe, Shuford, Windows, and engageHMA Galleries. This event provided a unique opportunity for students to showcase their work and reach a broader audience at the Hickory Museum of Art. It was not only a successful partnership but also a reminder to the community of the vital role creativity plays.

By highlighting the diverse ways students engage with creativity, The Art of Profession emphasized its significance in every career path. Exhibitions like this reinforce the importance of creativity in education, work, and the broader community, fostering innovation and self-expression. ■



VALLEYSIM

HEALTHCARE SIMULATION CENTER

CATAWBA VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE



TRAINING TOMORROW'S HEALTHCARE HEROES

CVCC's ValleySim Healthcare Simulation Center combines technology and teamwork to deliver real-world training that prepares students for the demands of modern healthcare.

Since its opening in 2011, the CVCC ValleySim Healthcare Simulation Center has provided thousands of students and healthcare professionals in the Catawba Valley with state-of-the-art training. ValleySim offers a team-based learning experience in a safe, judgment-free environment, equipping students with hands-on exposure to high-tech equipment and patient simulators.

This advanced training builds confidence and skill in ways that traditional classroom settings and clinical rotations simply cannot match. Many students wouldn't encounter these real-world scenarios until they were already in the field, making ValleySim an invaluable resource for healthcare education. ValleySim serves all healthcare students at CVCC, including those in respiratory therapy, dental hygiene, and medical office administration. The center is home to a diverse array of high-tech patient simulators, or manikins, which range in age and condition to present a variety of medical scenarios.

These AI-driven simulators respond to treatment in real time, answer student questions, and mimic actual patient reactions. Among them is Victoria, a birthing manikin capable of simulating various childbirth scenarios, offering students rare hands-on experience before they enter professional practice.

While AI-powered manikins add realism, human expertise is key. Instructors work behind the scenes—just like the Wizard of Oz—making CVCC instructors the Wizards of ValleySim. These seasoned healthcare professionals, many of whom have transitioned from clinical practice to education, use their experience to create immersive, high-quality training scenarios. They ensure that students receive the most comprehensive, cutting-edge instruction possible.

CVCC recently received a grant to support a new Simulation Coordinator position, further strengthening ValleySim's commitment to excellence. Brooke Kistler, Department Head of Nursing, highlighted that this role focuses on aligning the center with evidence-based practices and accreditation standards from

14



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YEAR IN REVIEW



the International Nursing Association for Clinical Simulation and Learning (INACSL). This ensures that students achieve optimal learning outcomes, and that technicians and operations managers work seamlessly to coordinate realistic, effective training experiences.

In Fall 2024, ValleySim underwent a significant transformation, unveiling a rebranded, hospital-inspired environment designed to elevate the learning experience. The Red Hawk Communications Team at CVCC spearheaded this rebranding initiative, creating a new logo, developing a cohesive visual identity for the simulation center, and installing engaging wall displays that enhance the atmosphere.

On September 11, 2024, the refreshed ValleySim Healthcare Simulation Center officially reopened its doors with a grand opening event. The evening featured lifelike healthcare demonstrations by students from CVCC's School of Health Education, guided

tours of the upgraded facility, and discussions on the professional clinical training available. The event also provided an opportunity to celebrate the vibrant and supportive healthcare education community at CVCC.

The mission of the ValleySim Healthcare Simulation Center is to enhance the quality of healthcare training and improve patient safety throughout the region. By integrating experiential learning and multidisciplinary collaboration, ValleySim is transforming healthcare education.

Through the dedication of faculty and department heads, the center continues to provide effective, hands-on training that prepares students for real-world clinical challenges, ensuring that the next generation of healthcare professionals is well-equipped for success. As ValleySim continues to grow and innovate, it remains a cornerstone of healthcare education, drawing students and instructors alike to be part of this groundbreaking learning experience. ■



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HVAC GIVES BACK

CTE students gain hands-on experience while giving back to their community. **14**

RUNNING FOR A REASON

How CVCC nursing students found balance, focus, and connection through running. **16**

CAMPUS LEADER

Meet Rosendo Flores, a first-generation student and inspiring member of the Red Hawk family. **18**

LEVELING UP

The CVCC Red Hawk Esports program earns community recognition. **19**

RED HAWK ATHLETICS ACHIEVES NEW HEIGHTS

Student-athletes set record-breaking academic achievements in Fall 2024. **20**

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT



HVAC GIVES BACK

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

CTE students embark on real-world learning by sharing their time and talents with the community.

Catawba County is home to a dynamic community that fosters collaboration among a wide range of industries, all united by a shared commitment to empower and invest in student success. By continuing to work together, CVCC programs are discovering new ways to give back to the community.

The support of local partners spans a variety of curriculum programs, with the School of Career & Technical Education (CTE) standing out as a particularly partner-intensive area. Through CTE programs, students gain access to valuable learning opportunities like the Catawba Apprenticeship Network (CAN) or Work-Based Learning (WBL). These programs help students secure professional work that aligns with their studies, preparing them for real-world demands of their chosen industries.

Local businesses play a crucial role in embracing new programs and welcoming students seeking deeper, hands-on educational experience.

One notable area is the HVAC/R program, led by Department Head Ramie Robinson and lead instructor, Ron Hipps. HVAC/R is a multi-faceted, high demand field that combines textbook learning with hands-on experience. The school of CTE strives to ensure that students understand the value of their work. Each semester, program leaders seek opportunities for students to get out into the community and apply their skills outside of the classroom.

Last spring's project stood out from the rest. Momentum Tire, a CVCC Automotive Systems partner reached out to the college for referrals for industrial systems repair. Aden Cranford, Dean of CTE, and Shawn Mull, director of the Automotive Systems program, came together and suggested that HVAC students would be just right for the job.

The project took place at the company's newly acquired building on Highway 70. Tim Lail, the owner and operator of Momentum Tire, expressed appreciation for the students' willingness to assist and looked forward to the further strengthening of the relationship between Momentum Tire and the college in the future. "We are very glad to be a partner with Automotive Systems Technology at CVCC for several years," Lail said. "This partnership has been great for our business. We are excited to be expanding and hiring more people at Momentum, and

we plan on hiring more Automotive Systems Apprentices from CAN as well."

With faculty guidance, students removed the facility's existing units, took down several mini-splits, and reinstalled new equipment. By applying their technical skills outside of the classroom, students gained a deeper understanding of the value their work brings to the community. "Career and Technical Education isn't just about mastering skills—it's about applying them in real-world settings that make a difference. Service-learning projects bridge the gap between classroom instruction and industry needs, empowering students to grow as professionals while giving back to their communities. When students see their work impact the real world, they don't just learn a trade—they develop a purpose," shares Dean Cranford.

This is not the first time that the CVCC HVAC program has assisted community partners. One semester, the HVAC program received a call from a local resident who found himself unable to afford heating installation. This dilemma for one community member proved to be an opportunity for CVCC's students.

Using their classroom and technical knowledge, students visited the resident's home and successfully installed the HVAC equipment. It was a win-win scenario, where students gained field experience, and the resident's home had heat to last through the winter.

When asked about the experience with Momentum, students were just as enthusiastic about servicing a partner facility as they were about helping community residents.

"At CVCC, education is most impactful when rooted in real-world experience and strong community connections. Our students are empowered to take their learning beyond the classroom through apprenticeships and hands-on opportunities that prepare them for success," shared Ramie Robinson.

"We're more than a college in Hickory; we're a community of faculty and staff committed to service and partnership. When Momentum Tire, a valued partner in our automotive program, experienced an HVAC issue, our HVAC students stepped in to help. It was a win for students to gain real-world experience, and our CVCC partner received timely support." ■



RUNNING FOR A REASON

Last Spring, a group of students in the CVCC Nursing Program stretched beyond their limits and accomplished a challenge they never thought possible.

If you had to decide between resting at home after class or pushing yourself to stay on campus, which would you choose?

Isn't the answer simple? Not for a special group of nursing students. This second-year Nursing cohort proved their dedication to their field as they took on an after-class running challenge. Day by day, the students finished class, exchanged their uniforms for running shoes, and headed to the Tarlton Complex to run a mile or more—with the ultimate plan of running 100 miles within the 100 days before their Nursing pinning last Spring.

The idea for a running cohort came from classmate Lindsey Benfield. Lindsey, who has always been passionate about fitness, recognized that her classmates might enjoy some exercise after a long day of college seminars—and she knew that a running cohort would help keep everyone accountable. Lindsey and her classmates found the motivation to finish the semester strong while reaching their health and wellness goals alongside their academic achievements.

It was an ambitious challenge, especially for those who did not consider themselves to be experienced runners. But this tight-knit group kept themselves accountable, and even when it was tough, they encouraged each other to go farther and do more.

If students could not run with the cohort, they ran at home, their local gym, or in their neighborhoods.

When asked about the challenge and their experience, most students described the cohort as an outlet.

"It's been great for me," says Emily Fisher, a 2024 graduate of CVCC's Nursing program and member of the first running group. "I am a mom, I work, and I go to school full-time. Running is not something that I always want to do, but when I decide to get that mile in, I find myself working with a lot more energy. I use that energy to take care of my family and myself."

College can be a major stressor, and in addition to the long days of lectures and seminars, students often find it hard to stay active. Exercise

offers both physical as well as emotional benefits, making the practice of running a positive influence on students' mental health. Emily also shares that the running cohort has helped her fight back anxiety.

"I struggled with anxiety for years," she says. "I learned to manage during work and school, but now that I am running, I can physically tell a difference in my anxiety levels. If they're high, I go for a run. I always end up feeling better than before."

If college weren't demanding enough, the requirements of nursing clinicals can be outright draining. When students have no time for self-care, they find it difficult to find the energy they need to support their patients and work with medical staff. Running has allowed students to maintain the mental dexterity and positivity they need to complete a 12-hour shift.

Nursing is a competitive field, and exercise can be a challenge. However, this group of hard-working individuals makes every effort to move forward with a spirit of grace. To find a cohort so willing to support each other, both on the track and in the classroom, is unusual.

While a few students are quick to admit that running is not their preferred sport, everyone is content with their decision to try. "I am not the fastest runner," explains a student, "but whether I complete a mile in fourteen minutes or ten, I always have people who are cheering me on. The same experience correlates to nursing. No matter where I work or practice, I will have people who encourage me to give it my all."

A significant portion of these students have graduated and now work together. Because of their shared experience during college, these students have fostered relationships that will carry them through their next challenges. They may not be at Red Hawk Nation, but they know that they can work together in a professional environment with ongoing trust and commitment.

It all started with a simple idea: Respect your classmates, run as a team, and don't quit until you cross that finish line.

"When I value myself intrinsically," a student shares, "I am less uptight, calmer, and more confident. If you come to work dragging, it can be very hard to make it through a shift. But if you feel good physically and mentally, it is much easier to give back and fulfill your role."

It's not that they have to run. It's that they get to run, and by taking care of themselves, they are better equipped to take care of us. ■



CAMPUS LEADER

How a first-generation college student used his experiences to inspire future Red Hawks and make a lasting impact at CVCC.

If you have ever been on a student-led tour or participated in campus clubs, chances are you crossed paths with Rosendo Flores Arguero. During his time at the CVCC, Rosendo stood out as a dedicated student, embodying the values of the college with a commitment to excellence, meaningful engagement, valuing every interaction.

Rosendo's journey into student leadership began unexpectedly one weekday after finishing a class in the Workforce Solutions Complex. He noticed a campus tour stopped by the CNC Machining Lab.

The instructor wasn't present at that time, but that did not stop Rosendo from stepping up. He took the initiative to guide the visitors through the laboratory, showcasing the equipment and its capabilities. From that moment on, Rosendo became a student representative, sharing his perspective of the classroom, the curriculum, and the training that landed him a job with TechMet.

Rosendo's ability to articulate his knowledge and demonstrate proficiency in course material didn't go unnoticed. Rosendo's talents were recognized by a Student Access and Engagement staff member. Shortly after, he was invited to join the CVCC Student Tour Team.

Rosendo's dedication is reflected in his experience as a first-generation college student. He was raised in an environment where hard work was not just encouraged but necessary for success, he learned early on the value of persistence and determination.

"In 2013, I lived and studied in Mexico," Rosendo shares. When he entered elementary school in the United States, he was not only adjusting to a new culture but also navigating the high expectations set by teachers and peers. "Imagine this—you're in the third grade, and suddenly, you're learning the history of a completely different country! I didn't have anyone to break things down for me and teach me in a way I could understand. It would take me three times as long to learn a subject sometimes, but eventually, I would get it. I think that



having that work ethic instilled in me from such a young age was very important."

"Because of my learning experiences, I can understand that not everyone learns at the same pace. I can give myself grace and help others learn at a pace that meets their level and their language." For Rosendo, being a first-generation college student is very rewarding. It's a new journey, a shift in perspective. "My parents' ceiling became my foundation," he says. "My ceiling can be a foundation for future generations. Why not be an asset to younger people who might be going through the same experience I did when I first applied to college?"

Though CVCC may not be a large university, the college excels in providing the resources and support that guide students toward success. While attending CVCC, Rosendo took full advantage of academic assistance, office hours, and career resources available. "CVCC gives you the tools you need," he says. "But you have to be willing to pick them up and work with them."

In his time leading and serving with CVCC Student Tours, Rosendo inspired future students, revealing the potential opportunities awaiting them as future Red Hawks. His story is proof that with determination, resources, and a willingness to work hard, students can turn challenges into steppingstones for success. Now, as a proud CVCC graduate, Rosendo continues to be an inspiration—a reminder that the journey of a first-generation student can lead to exceptional possibilities. ■

LEVELING UP

CVCC Red Hawks' Esports program earns well-deserved recognition.

Last spring, CVCC Red Hawks' Esports program won NJCAA National Championships Call of Duty: Modern Warfare II, in which Red Hawks defeated Missouri State-West Plains by a score of 3-0, and Call of Duty: Modern Warfare III, in which the Red Hawks again beat Missouri State-West Plains by a score of 3-1.

The team has soared through another successful season, earning well-deserved recognition from The City of Hickory. On Thursday, May 30th, 2024, The City of Hickory honored the Catawba Valley Community College Red Hawk Esports team for winning back-to-back National Junior College Athletic Association Esports (NJCAA) national championships, with Hickory Mayor Hank Guess arriving on main campus that morning to make the official proclamation declaring the day as "CVCC Red Hawk Esports Day."

Since its establishment in July 2019, the Red Hawk Esports team has become one of the most popular athletic teams on campus—boasting 47 student athletes this past school year. Many student athletes, such as Call of Duty team captain Colin Robinson, have felt encouraged and inspired by the recognition of their accomplishments.

"Esports has changed my college experience," Robinson said. "I was on the first Esports team in 2019, and then took a year off from school, but coach Dalton reached back out to me and encouraged me to go to school again. To have the support of this coach and this team is more than I could ever ask for."

The success of the program continues to grow, highlighted by the recognition of its leader. In January 2025, Cody Dalton, leader of Catawba Valley Community College's Esports program, was named the Scholastic Esports Awards National Two-Year Director of the Year at a ceremony at The Ohio State University.

Since starting the program in 2019, Dalton has led it to six championships, including back-to-back NJCAA national titles in Call of Duty last year. In his acceptance speech, he recognized the 91 students he has coached, 53 of whom achieved All-Academic honors with a GPA of 3.5 or higher.

"They've put in a lot of work," Dalton said. "I know this [award] says Director of the Year, but this is about them. They did that. I did my best to put them on the right path and help them. This is as much about them as it is me. I am just proud to carry the two-year banner." This recognition reflects the growth and success of CVCC's Esports program under Dalton's leadership. ■



STUDENT ENGAGEMENT



RED HAWK ATHLETICS ACHIEVES NEW HEIGHTS

CVCC Red Hawks' Esports program earns well-deserved recognition.

Catawba Valley Community College's Red Hawk Athletics soared to new academic heights during the Fall 2024 Term, with all NJCAA athletic teams achieving a team GPA above 3.0 for the first time in program history. Of the 142 student-athletes at CVCC, 98 earned a GPA of 3.0 or higher. In addition, 65 student-athletes who achieved a GPA of 3.5 or higher earned a place on the Athletic Director's List.

Leading the charge was the women's basketball team, with an incredible 3.77 GPA, ensuring every team member a spot on the Athletic Director's List. Softball followed with a 3.49 GPA, baseball with a 3.17 GPA, and men's basketball with a 3.09 GPA.

"I cannot put into words how proud I am of our student-athletes and coaching staff," said CVCC Executive Director of Athletics Nick Schroeder. This academic achievement not only highlights the students' discipline and dedication but also reinforces Catawba Valley Community College's commitment to fostering success both on the field and in the classroom. ■

3.17 DEPARTMENT RECORD GPA	98 STUDENT ATHLETES EARNED A 3.0 GPA OR HIGHER
65	STUDENT ATHLETES MADE ATHLETIC DIRECTOR'S LIST (3.5 GPA OR HIGHER)
31	STUDENT ATHLETES WHO MADE A PERFECT 4.0 GPA FOR THE FALL



CATAWBA VALLEY
RED HAWKS
ATHLETICS



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RED HAWK ATHLETICS NEWS



BRINGING BROADBAND WITHIN REACH

Discover the partnership bringing fiber optic education and opportunity to Catawba County. **24**

CONNECTING CATAWBA

How K-64 connects employers, educators, and students across the community. **27**

WEAVING A PATH OF HIS OWN

Meet the student that found their passion and purpose with the CVFA. **28**



K-64 & TALENT DEVELOPMENT

BRINGING BROADBAND WITHIN REACH

A first-of-its-kind facility aims to close the broadband workforce gap through hands-on, career-focused education.

In October 2024, Catawba Valley Community College and Corning Incorporated officially opened the Corning Fiber Optic Training Center, a groundbreaking broadband training facility in CVCC's Corporate Development Center. This first-of-its-kind space offers hands-on education in fiber broadband network design, engineering, installation, and management. The new center, located at 973 Locust Street in Newton, presents a significant opportunity to develop the future broadband workforce while aligning with CVCC's mission of providing exceptional learning experiences and workforce development.

"Through targeted education and affordable workforce training, CVCC is making it possible for individuals from all backgrounds to obtain the skills necessary for high-demand jobs," said Dr. Garrett D. Hinshaw, President of CVCC. "This new collaboration between CVCC and Corning proves that when education and business work hand-in-hand, we can create pathways to prosperity for our entire region."

The telecommunications industry is at a pivotal moment, driven by the urgent need to connect the unconnected. However, a gap remains in the availability of a skilled workforce to deploy and maintain these networks. Corning and CVCC have taken proactive steps to grow the skilled workforce to meet this demand.

"We're starting the fiber optic technician course first because the demand is incredibly high. The fact that it's just a 40-hour class means someone who's unemployed or looking for a new opportunity can get quick, hands-on training for a great career. After months of preparing the space, we're excited to finally open the doors and kick off the program." shared Gary Muller, Executive Dean of Economic Development and Corporate Education.

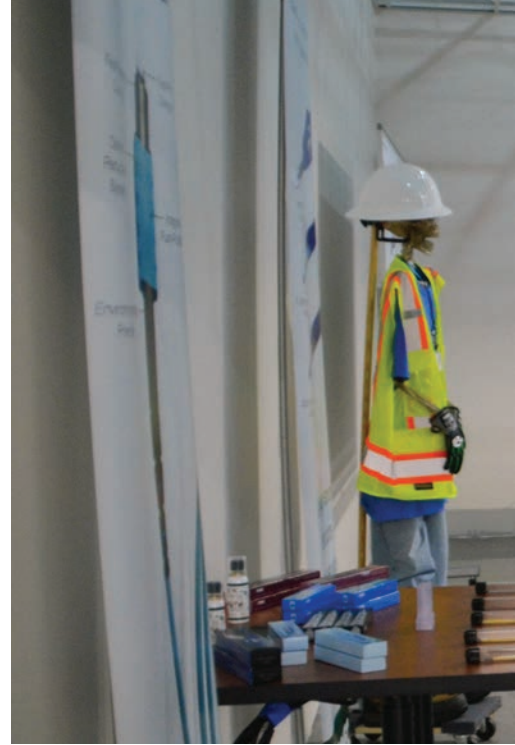
This partnership demonstrates the power of collaboration between educational institutions and local industry to develop a skilled workforce by supporting growth of the talent pipeline of the Hickory Metro service area. This initiative underscores

Corning's commitment to developing a trained workforce and CVCC's dedication to affordable, career-focused education.

"Helping to shape the future of the telecom industry through the development of a skilled workforce is a key priority for Corning," said Mike Bell, Senior Vice President and General Manager of Corning Optical Communications.

"Our collaboration with CVCC on this new training center spotlights our commitment to this mission. We're eager to leverage this unique opportunity to provide hands-on education, supporting growth in the Hickory Metro area's talent pipeline, and enhancing the capabilities of the forthcoming broadband workforce. Through initiatives like this, we strive to ensure the industry is ready to meet the growing demand for fiber broadband as public and private funding become available to connect the unconnected."

As public and private funding expands broadband infrastructure, initiatives like this ensure the industry is prepared to meet the






growing demand for fiber broadband. The partnership between CVCC and Corning exemplifies the power of collaboration in driving workforce innovation and economic growth.

For more than 170 years, Corning Incorporated has been a global leader in materials science, pioneering advancements in glass science, ceramic science, and optical physics. With a strong legacy of innovation, Corning has developed cutting-edge products that have transformed industries including optical communications, consumer electronics, display, automotive, solar, semiconductors, and life sciences.

As demand for broadband connectivity continues to grow, Corning remains committed to expanding the telecommunications workforce by equipping individuals with the necessary skills to deploy and maintain high-speed fiber broadband networks. ■



For more information about broadband network classes offered in the Corning Fiber Optic Training Center or any other classes offered at the CVCC Corporate Development Center, please contact Mr. Gary Muller at 828-327-7000, ext. 4672.



Scan this QR code to learn more about the Corning Fiber Optic Training Center.





Explore the world
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CONNECTING CATAWBA

K-64 launched Xplore64, collaborating with local employers to highlight careers available in Catawba County.

After years of development, K-64 has finally launched Xplore64. Xplore64 is a digital bridge between aspiring local talent, the employers that rely upon such talent, and the learning institutions that offer essential job preparation and training resources.

Exclusively for Catawba County employers and learning institutions, Xplore64 is a community-driven resource. Employers can create profiles to share company information and highlight available positions, while educational institutions can showcase their programs and offerings to prospective students. While Xplore64 is dedicated to local employers and schools, it's open to talent users from across the state, nation, and even internationally for career exploration.

Designed to enlighten and connect, the concept of Xplore64 was brought to life in June 2024. In collaboration with Xplore64, Abernethy Laurels, and Catawba County Schools' Camp Med, students interested in entering the healthcare industry were given an inside look at career opportunities with Abernethy Laurels.



Students participating in Camp Med were presented with the Xplore64 platform, where they created accounts and began exploring profiles, including Abernethy Laurels' on the site. The presentation highlighted healthcare careers in Catawba County, a leading industry in the region. Following the Xplore64 presentation, students took a field trip to Abernethy Laurels, where they were guided through an interactive and comprehensive tour of the facility. Students had the opportunity to engage with healthcare professionals and residents, learning about short- and long-term care, physical, occupational, and speech therapy, as well as assisted living and memory support services.

Abernethy Laurels has been an early participant in Xplore64. Ashley Jones, Healthcare Administrator at Abernethy Laurels, shared her experience working with the platform. Jones shared, "As a healthcare organization serving our community, we

are looking for great help and employment opportunities. At Abernethy Laurels, we want to entice the next generation of young leaders from the local school system. Xplore64 will serve as the bridge connecting us to the community and the upcoming generation of healthcare workers."

As Xplore64 continues to grow, it presents an invaluable opportunity for employers in Catawba County to connect with a new generation of talent and bridge the gap between education and employment. The platform offers employers a free and easy way to showcase their organizations, share job opportunities, and engage with potential future employees. By joining Xplore64, you'll be part of a collaborative effort to build a stronger, more dynamic workforce in our community.

Sign up today and start connecting with the talent that will shape the future of Catawba County at xplore64.com. ■



WEAVING A PATH OF HIS OWN

How one man traveled the world in search of a fresh start—and how the CVFA welcomed him home.

It's not every day that someone knocks on the doors of the Catawba Valley Furniture Academy with a special request. But when Maria and her father-in-law, Jose, approached the CVFA with questions about the quality of our furniture manufacturing training, they were pleasantly surprised.

One year ago, Jose moved to the United States in search of two things: better quality of life, and quality time with family. As a native Spanish speaker and a person living with a disability, he did not expect an easy path to finding a new job with a local company. But Jose is also full of faith and full of ambition—actively able to rise above the barriers that life brings him.

For most of his life, Jose has poured himself into the art of sewing. Born and raised in Nicaragua as the son of a hard-working family, Jose grew up understanding that a successful life requires effort and hard work. He is also no stranger to struggle—as a person living with a disability, he knew that he would have to work twice as hard to reach the level of his peers. He is an eloquent speaker who is talented in his craft and consistent in his technique, but even from a young age, he has faced discrimination—including his brief time attending university in Nicaragua.

“My level of writing was not too good,” Jose explained. “They didn't want me to continue at the school. But they did have an opportunity for me to join a workplace where they made accommodations for people with disabilities; they told me that I would be good in the manufacturing trades.”

Eager to rise to the challenge, Jose told the university that he would be willing to enter the manufacturing company and learn more about the type of work that he could accomplish there. He started in a Managua-based plant that focused on sewing and production of popular clothing brands: Wrangler, Levi's, Tommy Hilfiger, and Dockers.

It was at this plant that Jose felt a spark of inspiration. He might not be a strong writer, and he might not be fit for school, but he was a natural expert at sewing and needlework.

He soon realized that he could sew anything and everything required of him, but he had a special talent in creating pants or dress pants. In his home country, it is common practice for those who work in a medical profession (such as doctors or medical practitioners) to wear tailored uniforms. Many local professionals were clients of the Managua company. Word

got out that Jose could craft a perfect dress uniform for almost anyone of any size; soon, these doctors were personally approaching him with needs and requests. He took each job with pride, using perfect technique and expert vision to tailor each uniform to their special requirements.

For Jose, sewing wasn't just a career. It was a work of passion; a lifestyle. Jose worked at the company in Managua for forty-two years.

During those years, Jose and his wife, Yadira, also found time to raise a family. His son moved from Nicaragua to the United States, working for a company that needed his own talents and efforts. It was in the States that Jose's son also met his own wife, Maria.

Maria and her husband, Omar, have five children. They have resided in North Carolina for eleven years. When the family heard that Jose and Yadira wanted to move to the United States, they reached out to connections in hopes that they could find leads for job recruitment. It proved to be a much more difficult task than they imagined, even after Jose and Yadira moved to the States. Jose and Yadira have lived in North Carolina for a year now. In that time, Maria, Emily, and other family members visited several jobsites

in hopes that they could hire Jose—or at least provide a means of skills training. Over and over, Jose and Maria knocked on doors only to be told that there was no place for him to work.

“At the time, it felt impossible,” Jose said. “But I also know that nothing is impossible with God.”

Full of his faith and self-confidence, Jose pushed forward. He kept hope that he would, eventually, find a place where his talents and his work would be beneficial.

One day, the search ended. Maria’s sister, who works in social services for the region, was tabling at a career fair where CVFA was also present. She walked up to the CVFA table and spoke with Rusty Beam, Director of Business Services at CVCC and instructor of many Academy classes. After learning about the program, Maria’s sister contacted Yadira and Jose and told them about the Catawba Valley Furniture Academy, because they seemed open to students of all backgrounds and talents.

“All he’s ever wanted to do is sew,” Maria explained. “That’s always been his life. CVFA gave him the chance to be here and accommodate him no matter what. They treated us like family as soon as we came in.”

“The support that all of our family shows him is wonderful,” said Emily, Jose’s granddaughter. “I am grateful that my mom was there to help him out—no one gave up on him, we are a ‘networking’ family. It can be difficult for my grandfather to reach his goals, but we have all learned not to focus on what’s wrong; we’ve focused on ways that we can encourage each other to go farther.”

Soon after, Maria and Jose walked up to the front doors of the CVFA and asked Rusty if

there were any opportunities for Jose and Yadira to come and train with the other students on the shop floor.

Rusty and the course instructor, Clint McCorkle, welcomed them in. From that point forward, Jose has been encouraged to train and to share his talents with the other classmates who attend the Furniture Academy courses every weekday.

McCorkle remembered clearly the steps it took to accommodate Jose and his disability. “He came in the first night and I knew we would make changes,” McCorkle said. “I tried placing him on a few machines to see if one we had could accommodate him. I went to watch his work, and noticed how his foot could not naturally lay flat on the pedal. That evening I went directly to the hardware store purchased magnets that we could add to the pedal.”

“CVFA GAVE HIM THE CHANCE TO BE HERE AND ACCOMMODATE HIM NO MATTER WHAT.”

The adjustment was beneficial. By stacking the extra layers of magnets, Jose was able to sew and practice just like the other students who attended courses on the Academy floor.

Instructors also do as much as they can to translate the curriculum for ESL students. At first, Jose and Yadira were nervous that they would not be able to communicate effectively with their classmates—however, they were pleasantly surprised to find that most of the trainees, particularly women, are Spanish-speaking individuals. This made the learning environment much more welcoming for Jose and his family, as well as all of the

other Spanish-speaking students who come to the Academy ready to learn.

“I was a little nervous [about starting the CVFA] because of the language barrier,” said Yadira. “I didn’t know if I would understand the people around us. But, I feel comfortable having my family here to translate and help. I can gain a better understanding out of any confusing situation and have answers to my questions.”

“The instructors translate as needed, and teachers do as much as they can to help us learn our discipline,” Maria added.

Instructors like Rusty and Clint want to make the Academy floor a comfortable place to learn. Training is adaptive to student needs—Academy instructors are patient with their students, even going the extra mile to teach students that learn by physically “doing” the work rather than just listening to a lecture.

And Jose’s gift of sewing has been a blessing to his classmates, as well. Since he started the course on July 22nd, 2024 he has managed to hand-make a new pair of pants—buttons and special sizing included—for one of the other CVFA students.

“I’m hoping to learn as much as I can [at the CVFA] from the trade,” Jose concluded. He has a strong idea of the expectations of local furniture manufacturers and factories and hopes to boost his credentials to meet those skill expectations. “I want to learn the techniques of the trade locally so that I can put to work what I’ve adapted to. My greatest hope is that, some day, I will find work here. We spent this year looking everywhere for an open door—and the first person to open those doors for us was Rusty.” ■



TEACHING & LEARNING

A student with dark hair and glasses is focused on soldering a circuit board in a workshop. The background is filled with various tools and equipment, including a drill press and a workbench. The student is wearing a dark grey t-shirt and safety glasses. The workshop environment is well-lit and organized.

GIRL ON FIRE

How one CVCC student discovered their calling in firefighting. **32**

RADIANT & RESILIENT

A CVCC alumna returns—this time as an instructor, mentor, and inspiration. **34**

REWIRE NOT RETIRE

Meet the couple rewriting retirement by pursuing passion and purpose after corporate life. **36**

SOARING & GROWING

Perseverance and determination led one student to success at CVCC. **38**



GIRL ON FIRE

How Elizabeth Dyson Tackled The CVCC Fire Academy and Found Her Calling

From stocking shelves to battling flames, Elizabeth's journey was anything but typical. As a young girl, she knew she was different, never afraid to get her hands dirty unlike many of her peers. She always had a passion for helping others and once dreamed of becoming a missionary. But after much reflection and prayer, she realized her path was leading elsewhere.

A chance encounter at the grocery store where Elizabeth worked changed everything. Two firefighters walked in and mentioned how short-staffed they had been since the COVID-19 pandemic. At first, she thought of her brother for the job. But after months of prayer and conversations with loved ones, she began to see firefighting as a calling of its own. She had full faith that God would guide her to the right path.

By late summer 2023, Elizabeth visited CVCC, learning about the fire academy and soon enrolling in the program that same day. She began in August, becoming the only woman in a class of 21 cadets. She was well aware that firefighting was a male-dominated field, but she was ready to take on the challenge. The Fire Academy is an intense three-month program designed to test both mental and physical endurance. Many of her fellow cadets were former military members or had prior physical training experience. "It was really hard," Elizabeth admits. "Both physically and mentally." With no other women in the program to relate to, she faced the rigorous training alone. Days began before sunrise, and the summer heat was relentless. On one training day, the real-feel temperature hit 103°F.

Before she even started the academy, the City of Hickory expressed interest in hiring Elizabeth, offering to cover her tuition and guarantee employment upon successful completion. But getting through the academy was no easy feat. One of her biggest challenges was learning to throw a ladder, a crucial skill for firefighters. The 24-foot extension ladder, weighing about 70 pounds, had to be lifted and raised correctly. Elizabeth struggled, her failed attempts playing out in front of her male peers and instructors. At one point, the ladder struck her face, leaving her bleeding. But she refused to give up. Drawing strength from her faith and trusting that God had a purpose in the process, she kept showing up and giving her best, eventually succeeding. "Just because you don't get it the first time doesn't mean you won't get it ever," she says.

“ DON'T LET THE FACT THAT YOU'RE A GIRL BE A HINDERANCE OR EXPECT SPECIAL PRIVILEGES BECAUSE OF IT. ”

As the only woman in the class, Elizabeth often felt she had to prove herself more than her male counterparts. "If it took me longer to get something right, I would have to come back ten times stronger," she says. "If the guys failed, it was brushed off, but if I failed, it felt like it lingered longer." Her faith gave her the resilience to keep going, even when the going got tough.

Elizabeth broke barriers at the fire academy, graduating that October. The academy originally had 21 cadets at the start of the



SCHOOL OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT & PUBLIC SERVICES EDUCATION

program but went down to 17 cadets by graduation. In November 2023, Elizabeth entered Hickory's rookie academy, a condensed but equally challenging version of the Fire Academy. At first, she was cautious and intimidated by the process, but she quickly found a new family among her fellow firefighters. Her first real-life fire response was unforgettable. "Our driver told me, 'I know this is like the Super Bowl for you, but you need to calm down. This is still someone's home,'" she recalls. The reality of the job hit her at that moment. Fires are devastating, and every call is about more than just the thrill of the work.

Firefighting is undeniably a male-dominated industry, as Elizabeth is one of three women firefighters in the City of Hickory. She embodies the resilience and strength required for the job, embracing failure as part of the learning process. As an engineer on City of Hickory Ladder 2 once told her, "A firetruck is a toolbox on wheels." Elizabeth has built

her career by combining natural curiosity, support from her loved ones, the skills she's gained through training, and trust in God to guide her path.

Though she has yet to rescue a cat from a tree, Elizabeth remains dedicated to perfecting her craft. In addition to working full-time as a firefighter, she is enrolled in CVCC's EMT program and hopes to earn advanced technical rescue certifications.

At her core, Elizabeth is passionate about helping others, a value rooted in her faith. As a female firefighter, she hopes to inspire the next generation of women in the field. "Don't let the fact that you're a girl be a hindrance or expect special privileges because of it," she says. "If you're willing to put in the effort, no matter how hard it is, you will succeed."

Her advice to young girls? "Don't view your differences as weaknesses." She has lived by

this philosophy, proving that perseverance and determination can break any barrier.

From a grocery store worker with an uncertain future to a firefighter blazing a trail for other women, her story is one of courage and determination. By pushing past the challenges and embracing her own strength, Elizabeth has not only secured a place for herself in firefighting but has also paved the way for others to follow. ■



RADIANT & RESILIENT

Meet Morgan Moore, a CVCC graduate who has returned to campus as an instructor in the program where her journey began.

Like many in healthcare, Morgan Moore was drawn to the field through personal experience. As a teenager, she witnessed her mother's frequent hospital visits, sparking her interest in a career where she could make a difference. The healthcare industry offers a wide range of career paths, from nursing and medical technology to behind-the-scenes roles in IT.

Morgan began her journey by completing CNA courses and clinicals, but she quickly realized that long-term care wasn't the right fit for her. Determined to find a role where she could still help others, she researched different healthcare careers and discovered radiography. This field allowed her to interact with patients while playing a vital role in their medical journey, giving her the opportunity to provide important care and support without the long-term responsibilities of caregiving.

After completing two years of prerequisite courses at CVCC, Morgan applied to the radiography program. Once accepted, she knew she was exactly where she was meant to be. CVCC's radiography program spans five semesters, combining classroom instruction, laboratory training, and hands-on clinical experience. Graduates of the program are well-prepared to take their board exams and launch successful careers as radiologic technologists.

Many students gain experience in the field as student technologists before transitioning into full-time radiologic technologist roles after graduation and certification.

Upon earning her degree, Morgan accepted a position at an orthopedic clinic. Radiography students typically explore three areas of radiography: orthopedics, hospital

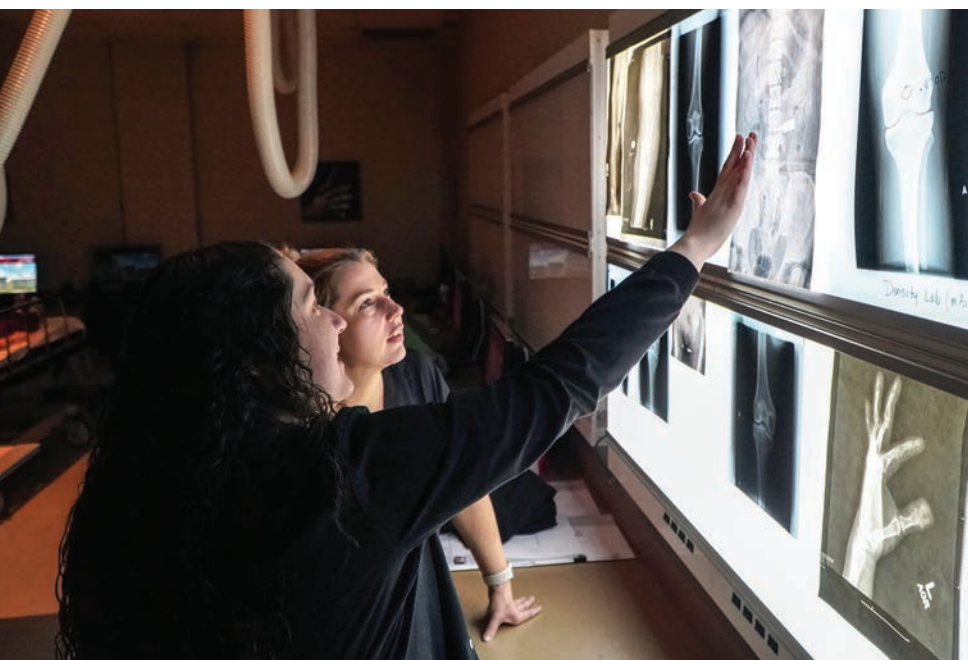


radiography, and specialized imaging centers. For Morgan, orthopedics was the perfect fit, allowing her to combine her technical skills with patient interaction in a dynamic environment. The variety in this field challenged her to build on the protocols she learned at CVCC, requiring her to create additional imaging views to help orthopedic doctors assess patients from multiple angles. Each doctor had their own preferred protocols and specific imaging requirements, which pushed Morgan to adapt and refine her skills to meet their needs.

After six years in an orthopedic office, Morgan was presented with an exciting new opportunity—a full-time instructor position at CVCC.

"As a student, I always expressed my interest in becoming a teacher one day," Morgan shared. Over the years, CVCC had reached out to her about part-time teaching roles, but she knew she could only commit to a full-time position. Then, one day, she received a call from Scott Vandevander, head of the radiography department. "What do you always say?" he asked. Morgan replied, "It has to be full-time." He responded, "Well, there's a full-time position opening soon."

Although she hadn't expected to start teaching full-time this early in her career, Morgan decided to apply, knowing that the experience itself would be valuable.





In September 2024, she officially joined CVCC as a full-time instructor. She had previously assisted as the clinical coordinator for CT program in a part-time role, but this time, she was leading the classroom. During the fall semester, she shadowed faculty members to learn the ropes, and by spring, she was stepping into her own classroom, ready to guide the next generation of radiography students.

Adjusting to her new role as an instructor has been a learning experience for Morgan, including getting used to hearing “Mrs. Moore” in the classroom. While she is still developing her teaching style, one thing was clear from the start. She wanted to incorporate the lessons and techniques that shaped her own education at CVCC.

After passing her board exams as a student, much of the technical knowledge faded into the background. Now, as she teaches and plans lessons, she finds herself revisiting her old notes and bringing long-forgotten concepts back to life. “She brings a freshness; she gets us up and excited with experiments. She brings fun into our classroom,” shared Radiology student Karen Sherrill.

Having been in her students’ shoes not too long ago, Morgan gets it. She knows firsthand how overwhelming the journey to the board exams can be. The mountain of information



can feel overwhelming, but Morgan reassures them that they have spent two years soaking up the material. Even when they doubt themselves, the knowledge is there, tucked away and ready to surface when needed, whether they are tackling a physics problem or relaying health and safety specifics.

“AS A STUDENT, I ALWAYS EXPRESSED MY INTEREST IN BECOMING A TEACHER ONE DAY.”

Morgan’s words of encouragement don’t go unnoticed. She puts in extra time to support her students, ensuring they grasp key concepts before moving forward. Radiology student Nate Mills shared, “She is really driven to make sure we understand our work and will stay after class to help us and make sure we understand before moving on.”

Her dedication fosters a positive learning environment, exceeding student expectations. “I am grateful for Mrs. Moore; she is so patient and takes her time to listen and help when you need it, and she is super good at math,” said Radiology student Sara Sherrill. Given the complex math and physics involved in studying radiology, Morgan’s patience and expertise make a meaningful difference in her students’ success.

SCHOOL OF HEALTH EDUCATION

Morgan’s dedication to learning began long before she became an instructor. As a student at CVCC, she received the President’s Award, which recognizes students who demonstrate leadership, community service, and scholarly potential. The recipient is chosen by the college president, Dr. Hinshaw.

Her journey as a student continues as she refines her approach to teaching Radiology while also pursuing a bachelor’s degree in health science through Western Governors University’s online program.

Morgan embodies the hard work and dedication that define what it means to be a Red Hawk. Supported by her instructors during her time at CVCC, she is now giving back by guiding and supporting the next generation of Radiology students.

Her commitment to the profession is undeniable, but it’s the people in her life who truly drive her. Despite facing tremendous loss, including the passing of both of her parents, with her father passing just two months before she began the program, Morgan has shown incredible resilience. She aspires to make her parents proud, though they unfortunately never saw her reach this point in her journey.

Morgan credits much of her strength to her close-knit support system, which includes her husband, brother, and friends whom she considers family. Today, she is motivated not only by her career but also by her role as a mother to a young son and another on the way. With her family by her side, Morgan continues to thrive, always striving to better herself for the sake of those she loves and the difference she is making in the lives of others. ■



REWIRE NOT RETIRE

How Jennifer and Eric Schumacher are navigating the college journey after an impressive corporate career.

“Be Brave.” Jennifer Schumacher’s new life motto after stepping away from the corporate world, tossing the 9-to-5 routine and facing a new challenge—returning to college.

With bachelor’s degrees in business and finance and 30+ years in the corporate world, Eric and Jennifer Schumacher retired from their job to pursue bucket list items including traveling across Canada, Europe, and Northern Africa. After their travels, it was time for them to tackle another item from their bucket list: making an impact.

While they loved their work, the Schumacher’s wanted to make an impact beyond the corporate world. Both Eric and Jennifer had creative passions during their time in the corporate world. Eric had always practiced photography and screen printing during his

free time and Jennifer wanted to expand her knowledge of graphic design.

“Creativity is not something that was expected in my profession. But with my knowledge and ambition for the craft, I found a way to pursue the more creative side of the field I was part of for more than thirty years,” Jennifer shared.

By May 2023, they were ready to take action. Jennifer felt drawn to the creative field, realizing that graphic design concepts complemented her corporate experience.

“I welded the two and realized that I could utilize both those [business and finance] skills,” she said.

The Schumachers decided to explore Catawba Valley Community College (CVCC) after reading about the curriculum and career

opportunities in the Graphic Design program. Jennifer reached out to Dr. Hope Carroll, Director of Graphic Design and Business Programs, to schedule a campus visit and learn more about the program.

Dr. Carroll welcomed Jennifer into the Graphic Design lab, showcasing the creative spaces, academic projects, and pathways to achieving her goals at CVCC. She also encouraged Jennifer and Eric to attend the Spring 2023 Open House.

The timing was perfect for Eric, too. While touring the Graphic Design department, he met Joe Young, Director of the Photographic Technology program. From that moment, the Schumachers felt right at home at CVCC.

During the Open House, Jennifer participated in hands-on activities, including button-making. As she designed her button, she carefully selected the words: Be Brave.

Dr. Carroll noticed the motto and asked, “What do you need to be brave for?”

“I had to be brave in that moment,” Jennifer explained. She had just upended her old routine, left her job, and embraced a new challenge—returning to college as a non-traditional student. “That’s my new life motto,” she said.

After attending the Open House, both Jennifer and Eric felt a renewed sense of belonging in the college environment. They explored CVCC’s Fine Arts programs, leading

Jennifer to enroll in the Graphic Design program and Eric to join the Photographic Technology program.

That fall, they officially became full-time, non-traditional students.

Returning to college as adult learners was daunting. After years in the professional world, the Schumachers weren't sure if they would fit in with their fellow Red Hawks or how they would be received by younger classmates. However, they quickly found that the class dynamics and instructional support exceeded their expectations.

The couple also brought a fresh perspective to the classroom—not only sharing their corporate experience with students but also engaging in meaningful, open-minded discussions with instructors.

“Community college is a really great place to find the sort of start that Jennifer and Eric were looking for,” Dr. Carroll explains. “Community college is mixed. The focus is on building skills, and there's a lot of different technologies you have to learn.”

The Schumachers embraced these learning opportunities, mastering Adobe InDesign, Photoshop, and Illustrator while gaining hands-on experience through their coursework.

And they didn't stop there.

Jennifer proudly represented CVCC in the 2024 SkillsUSA Championships. She traveled to the state conference in Greensboro, NC, where her CVCC team won Gold for “Promotional Bulletin Board.” They

then advanced to the SkillsUSA National Championships in Atlanta, GA, where they once again secured Gold for their outstanding work.

“ WE LOOKED FOR THESE DEGREES BECAUSE THEY WERE BOTH SOMETHING WE COULD DO INDEPENDENTLY AND THEN COLLABORATE ON TOGETHER. ”

Meanwhile, Eric represented CVCC at Imaging USA, a conference hosted by the Professional Photographers of America. He was selected as part of a small group of students who traveled to Kentucky for the event.

The Schumachers also took the initiative to give back by volunteering at CVCC's Open House. They assisted Dr. Carroll and Joe Young, sharing their journey with prospective students. Exactly one year after their own Open House experience, they found themselves on the other side—advocating for the same opportunities that had changed their lives.

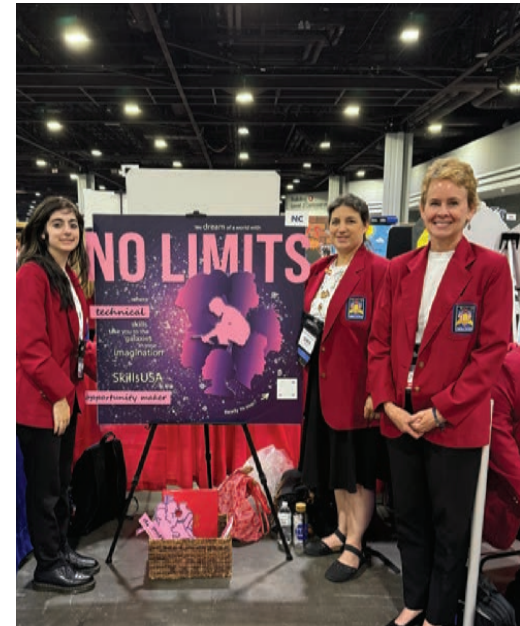
“Something that attracted us to these degrees is flexibility,” Jennifer adds. “We wanted something we could do independently but also collaborate on together.”

Once they complete their degrees, the Schumachers plan to work as freelance creatives, balancing work, travel, and professional connections.

“We wanted to blend both of our degrees

together and be a team,” Eric says. “That was our goal.”

For Eric and Jennifer, retirement wasn't about slowing down—it was about rewiring, not retiring. They've proven that it's never too late to learn, grow, and pursue new passions. ■



SOARING & GROWING

How A Young Woman's Dream is Being Realized Through Access to Education

Gaby moved to the United States from her home country of Mexico when she was just seventeen years old. A bright student with an ambitious personality, she challenged herself to enter the local American high school and stay on track to go to college. She wanted to do her best—she wanted to embrace the fresh start that life had presented to her.

When Gaby entered the local high school in her new town, she worked hard on her English language studies as well as the high school credits required during her senior year. However, her teachers and school counselors suggested that Gaby repeat the final year of high school—even though she was on track to finish in time at her high school in Mexico.

This was discouraging news. Gaby knew that she was capable of more than others expected of her. Because she didn't want to have to repeat courses and because she knew that she was ready for the next step regardless of what she had been told, Gaby dropped out of high school.

She spent the next few months teaching herself English and finding the right educational institution that would support her efforts towards her high school diploma.

Gaby found that support at Catawba Valley Community College.

CVCC is comprised of 4 distinct Schools—General Education, Health Education, Career

& Technical Education, and Community Development & Public Services Education. At the School of General Education, students like Gaby can benefit from earning course credits towards their Associate in Science or Associate in Arts degrees. The School of General Education is also home to our Career & College Readiness (CCR) programs, serving students who wish to take ESL or enroll in High School Equivalency to earn their GED. When Gaby learned about the opportunities provided through CCR programs, she felt inspired and encouraged to pick back up where she left off: finishing high school.

**“ I REALIZED THAT I
COULD BE THAT PERSON
WHO HELPS SO MANY
PEOPLE WHO CANNOT
SPEAK ENGLISH. ”**

Gaby recognized that becoming fluent in the English language would allow her to build a greater sense of community in the Catawba Valley region. It would also give her the interpersonal skills she needed to fulfil her dream of one day opening her own business. Taking ESL at CVCC was the first step on her path.

“When I was in the ESL classes,” Gaby says, “the teachers were so kind and helpful. They said that I should also go for the GED because my English was already improving. So, while I

was enrolled in ESL, I also moved forward by taking the GED classes. All of it helped me to want to go farther.”

During her time in the GED program, Gaby held a particular interest in her U.S. Social Studies class. At that point in time, Gaby was not yet a United States citizen—so she used her class time to gain as much knowledge and insight as possible about the citizenship process.

“That class encouraged me to become a U.S. citizen too,” Gaby recalls. “The teacher was so helpful because she convinced me to take the tests I needed to complete my programs of study. I also wanted to learn and earn a certificate beyond my GED studies—so my teacher connected me with the notary public continuing education program at CVCC.”

“I wanted to become a notary public because I saw it as an opportunity to open my own business. I have two kids, and I wanted to work from my house—that meant I could open my own business so that I could work by my own hours.”

Most anyone who spoke with Gaby learned about her dream of moving beyond a notary public and into the field of accounting. After her teacher's recommendations, Gaby had the motivation she needed to complete her exams—the ESL certification, the GED, and even the requirements which would lead her to passing the U.S. Citizenship test.



Her next step? Completing the notary public course at CVCC.

Notary public is one of CVCC's short-term continuing education courses. Like most students, Gaby took this course to meet the requirements of becoming a candidate for Notary Public commission.

Since completing the notary public course, Gaby now plans to enter the CVCC Business & Accounting degree program. Earning a degree in Business & Accounting would set Gaby up to build her educational credentials at the university level, or even better, to start planning the business of her dreams.

Although Gaby has not yet completed the Business & Accounting program at CVCC, she is proud of accomplishing her goals thus far. Her growth from being a native Spanish speaker who was discouraged from finishing high school into a confident, determined U.S. citizen who is a caretaker for both her community and her own family should serve as an inspiration to us all.

Her experience—and her mission—hinges on her plans to improve the quality and scope of notary public (or similar) services within our region.

"I am in this business because I am a Latina Mexican woman," she says. "I see all of the families who grew up in a similar situation as I did. Most are Spanish-speaking only. I realized that I could be that person who helps so many people who cannot speak English." ■



CVCC FOUNDATION



**TOGETHER
WE SOAR**

CYBER-SAFE

How the CVCC Foundation, Inc. and CVCC's curriculum program are the driving force of regional cyber security education.

"In today's increasingly hazardous digital environment, it is more important than ever to equip our students with the essential knowledge and skills required of the workforce," states Aden Cranford, Dean of the School of Career and Technical Education at CVCC.

The college has spent much time and energy into launching—or enhancing—access to Cyber Security education. It has taken the support of organizations such as the CVCC Foundation, Inc. and the guidance of CVCC Cybersecurity or IT programs to train in these essential workplace skills. CVCC is proud to join the future of professional cyber security training through two avenues: developing The Valley Datacenter Academy sponsored by Microsoft and receiving the designation as a Center of Academic Excellence in Cyber Defense.

Last year, the CVCC Foundation, Inc. recognized the benefits of these cyber-focused programs and discussed our prospects of connecting with companies who could improve our training methods.

The Foundation didn't have to look far. Around this time, Microsoft declared it would place a datacenter near our region; if the facility opened, it would need technicians who could ensure the datacenters were running and operating smoothly. Microsoft representatives had researched CVCC's CyberSecurity & IT programs and reached out to the Foundation with the prospect of transforming a CVCC facility into The Valley Datacenter Academy sponsored by Microsoft.

Microsoft Datacenter Academies are training facilities which instruct local students in the professional qualities of a datacenter technician. Microsoft Datacenters open in locations which are typically considered





safe from natural disasters. They are the central infrastructures which store data and power the Microsoft Cloud.

Microsoft Datacenter Technicians will facilitate the proper management of their local Microsoft Datacenter. The work and knowledge of technicians “play a vital role in ensuring the efficient and secure operation of critical systems that store and manage digital information,” according to a blog from Microsoft.

In early 2024, a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) was established between Microsoft and Catawba Valley Community College to designate CVCC as the location for The Valley Datacenter Academy sponsored by Microsoft.

The Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) stated that CVCC will receive funds which support our Information Technology curriculum program and the college’s Cybersecurity Center of Excellence. Microsoft has also generously provided a grant for K-64 and Talent Development projects that support the educational prospects of our local workforce.

According to the Microsoft Academy Lab runbook (2022), the ‘mock lab’ is essentially “creating a datacenter within a classroom to enhance

datacenter curriculum and better prepare students for datacenter environments.” The Valley Datacenter Academy sponsored by Microsoft.

The Valley Datacenter Academy sponsored by Microsoft would contain a mix of servers, storage devices, and networking equipment. The Lab runbook (2022) also explains that “since the donated equipment comes directly from Microsoft datacenters, students will receive real-live exposure to hyper cloud hardware” inside the training facility.

CVCC will collaborate with teams at Microsoft to follow ‘mock lab’ guidelines, transforming one of our existing campus facilities into a qualified Datacenter Academy and simulated datacenter environment. The College and the CVCC Foundation, Inc. look forward to collaborating with the Microsoft Workforce Development team to complete the ‘mock lab’ and establish a high-tech, efficient Datacenter Academy for future technicians of our Microsoft Datacenters.

But that’s not where our highlights end. In August of 2024, CVCC also received the news that the National Security Agency (NSA) and National Centers of Academic Excellence in Cyber Security (NCAE-C) had officially designated the College as a Center of Academic Excellence in

Cyber Defense (CAE-CD), now through the academic year 2029.

Ultimately, the NCAE-C promotes and supports academic programs of higher learning which help produce the nation's cyber workforce.

The CAE-CD designation is presented to regionally accredited academic institutions which offer cybersecurity-related degrees or certificates. The designation represents the highest standard of university cybersecurity programs. Colleges must complete an intensive application process that requires a CAE-CD Program of Study Validation followed by the continued pursuit of the designation. CVCC was required to meet established, comprehensive, and rigorous criteria.

As Dean Cranford describes our designation as a "Center of Academic Excellence in Cyber Defense affirms that the quality and rigor of our Cybersecurity curriculum not only meets national standards but also demonstrates our commitment to academic excellence in preparing the next generation of cybersecurity professionals."

“ I COULD NOT BE MORE EXCITED FOR THE STUDENTS AND STAFF OF OUR CYBERSECURITY PROGRAM. ”

CVCC is now an honored member of the CAE in Cybersecurity Community. CVCC will also be listed as a CAE-CD on the CAE Institution Map.

"I could not be more excited for the students and staff of our Cybersecurity program," says Dr. Garrett Hinshaw, President of Catawba Valley Community College. "This designation by the National Security Agency firmly establishes CVCC as a leading educational institution for strengthening the talent pipeline in cutting-edge fields like cybersecurity."

Hinshaw concludes by saying that CVCC is dedicated to integrating essential cyber resiliency best practices both in the classroom and throughout the region.

CVCC is proud of the accomplishments of the CVCC Foundation, Inc., the CVCC Cybersecurity & IT programs, and the entire sector of K-64 & Talent Development. Because of their efforts, CVCC has become a landing ground for aspiring technicians and cyber security professionals from across the region. ■



**CATAWBA
VALLEY**
COMMUNITY COLLEGE
FOUNDATION

LET'S KEEP MOVING OUR COMMUNITY FORWARD!

Our college has been a community cornerstone for over 60 years. By giving to the CVCC Foundation, you are supporting the future of education, the growth of the workforce, and the livelihood of Catawba Valley. Let's reach new heights together—Donate Now!



Scan for more information.

HEADLINE

READY. SET.
SOAR!

CATAWBA VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE holds a collective vision to improve student success, persist in academic excellence, and increase student retention rates. Based on these goals, the College has developed a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) serving as a framework for guiding students from the registration process to the completion of their first semester of college.





CENTER

 **CATAWBA
VALLEY**
COMMUNITY COLLEGE



QUALITY ENHANCEMENT PLAN

At the start of the 2024-2025 academic year, CVCC adopted a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) to drive fulfillment of accreditation requirements and improve academic programs.

Every ten years, Catawba Valley Community College undergoes the accreditation process with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). This process plays a vital role in shaping the student experience by ensuring that CVCC meets federal standards and remains eligible for essential resources like federal financial aid through FAFSA.

Many CVCC students rely on this support to access higher education, making accreditation a direct benefit to them. It also

provides reassurance to students, parents, and the community that CVCC maintains high academic standards. Thanks to the dedication of faculty and staff, students can trust that they are receiving a quality education that prepares them for future success.

At the start of the 2024-2025 academic year, CVCC adopted a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) to drive fulfillment of accreditation requirements and improve academic programs. Adopting and implementing the

QEP is a rigorous process, as it is designed to carry the college through the next decade until the next accreditation process begins. What Is the Quality Enhancement Plan?

The CVCC QEP is an intentional approach to fostering student success. Three key programs—New Student Orientation, redesigned first-semester courses, and Guided Pathways—serve as the Key Initiatives of the QEP and are commonly known around campus as Ready, Set, Soar.

In the Ready phase, students build connections and become familiar with college resources. New Student Orientation helps them connect with key campus personnel, receive technology training, and develop a sense of belonging in Red Hawk Nation.

The Set phase focuses on strengthening academic skills and exploring careers. First-semester courses such as College Transfer Success and World of Work have been



enhanced to better prepare students for career and transfer planning.

In the Soar phase, students set clear academic and career goals. Guided Pathways provide easy-to-follow plans with support from Enrollment Managers to help students stay on track toward graduation or employment. The development of the QEP is one step in the process towards accreditation. In September 2024, CVCC hosted an on-site accreditation team comprised of representatives from different sectors of higher education across multiple states in the Southeast.

The on-site team was on campus for a week connecting with CVCC's QEP committee but also interacted with students and faculty across campus. Red Hawk Nation shined this week. The on-site team was impressed with the hospitality they received from staff and faculty and noted how friendly everyone was on campus that they interacted with.

How will the QEP benefit our students?

CVCC strives to offer new students a well-rounded, supportive introduction to college life. This investment not only aims to enhance the students' academic journey but also ensures a smoother, more successful transition as they begin their college experience.

The QEP is already in action, as CVCC hosted a New Student Orientation this spring for students beginning their academic journey mid-year. Traditionally a fall event, offering an orientation in the spring provides incoming students with a welcoming and informative start to their semester. While these resources are available to students at all times, orientation serves as a key opportunity to introduce these tools and help students feel welcomed and prepared.

For many students, New Student Orientation is their first time on CVCC's campus. Chasity Hatfield remembers the experience as

both exciting and overwhelming. "It was overwhelming, but everyone was nice," she recalls. Thanks to orientation, she felt prepared. "I knew where to go if I needed tutoring, where to find books in the library, and where to get my textbooks at the campus store. I was ready, but I still had to figure out where my classes were."

Laura Couch also found orientation insightful, particularly when it came to navigating online learning. "I was ready because I knew how to access Blackboard," she says. "That was one of the hardest parts, just all the online stuff I knew I would have to do."

From campus safety to technology and academic resources, New Student Orientation provides essential tools for a successful start at CVCC. And according to students, one of their favorite parts of the experience? The snacks!

For students in transfer pathways, CVCC offers ACA 122 - College Transfer Success, a course designed to set them up for a smooth transition to a four-year institution. Ideally taken in their first semester, this course equips students with essential strategies to develop clear academic and career goals. Through in-depth research on career exploration, transfer institutions, and academic planning, students gain the knowledge they need to make informed decisions and successfully navigate their time at CVCC.

For Jules Taylor, the path after CVCC was already in motion. "I already had a plan for what I was going to do after CVCC, but the ACA class helped me put it all together," she says. "It made things clearer, like where I'm going and what scholarships I can apply for."

HEADLINE

Chasity Hatfield had a similar experience. She first learned about college transfer pathways from her high school counselor, who introduced her to the courses preferred by NC State. “I told her I hoped to go to NC State, and she showed me the classes that NC State likes. So, when I took ACA 122 here at CVCC, I talked to my counselor about transferring. They built my course schedule

around that pathway and helped me get into the C3 program,” she explains.

NC State’s C3 program is just one of many transfer pathways available to CVCC students. With resources like ACA 122 and strong transfer partnerships across North Carolina, students are not just preparing for the next step—they are setting themselves up for long-term success.




What is the lasting impact of the QEP?

The College’s ultimate goal is for the benefits of its Quality Enhancement Plan to seamlessly integrate into the campus culture within a few semesters. While the

data analysis for the project will conclude for SACSCOC purposes, CVCC will continue to track campus-wide improvement data. This new approach to academic programming is designed to continuously enhance the campus environment, helping CVCC attract learners of all ages, interests, and goals.

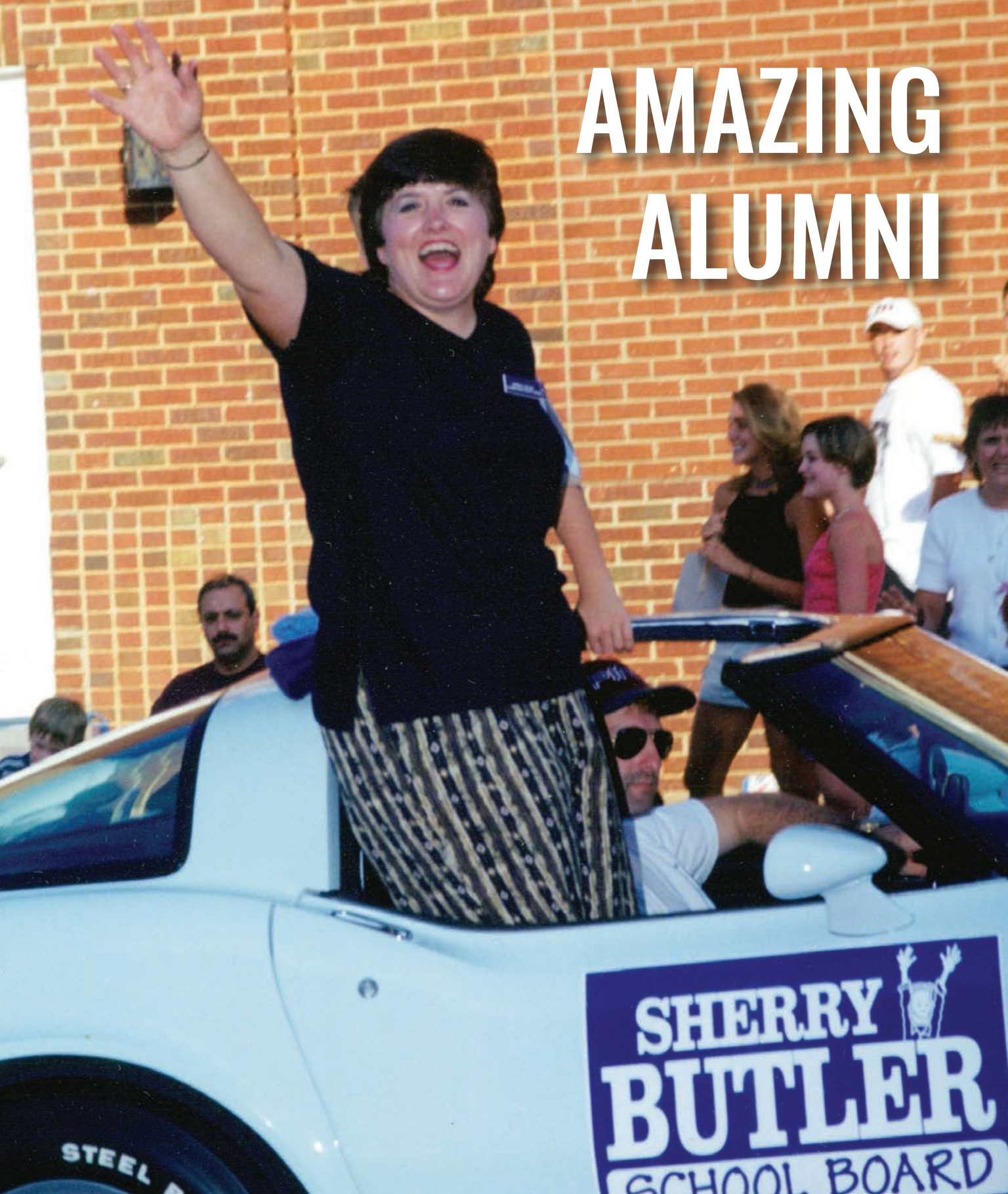
Everyone who strives to take the next step in their professional journey deserves equal access to quality higher education. No matter what brings students to CVCC, they are welcomed, inspired, and encouraged by the vibrant campus community to get ready, be set, and soar! ■



-  New Student Orientation
-  First-Semester Courses
-  Guided Pathways



AMAZING ALUMNI



SHERRY BUTLER

Change-Maker for Catawba County

If you have lived in the Catawba County area for a long time, chances are you have read about or met the wonderful Sherry Butler.

You might have seen her featured on the PBS short "Faces of Hickory" (2018), where she discussed the role of the arts in Catawba County. You might have also seen her on The Catawba Chronicles: A Podcast About The Amazing People, Businesses, and History of Catawba County, which published the feature episode "Sherry Butler: A Passionate Advocate for Education and Community in Catawba County" (2023). Your children might have benefitted from the resources available through the Sherry Butler Kids in Need Fund.

Sherry is a bright light with a servant's heart, not only contributing to the arts and culture of Catawba County, but also using her voice to speak up for the benefit of the families and children who call this place home. She is an advocate for the creative arts. In her role as Executive Director of The Green Room Community Theatre in Newton, NC, she raised over \$4 million in a capital campaign to build what is now the Old Post Office Playhouse.

Sherry's involvement with the College began when her dad who had ended his career in the U.S. Marine Corps, enrolled in CVCC to pursue a degree in Electromechanic Technology. Sherry was in high school while her dad attended CVCC. She learned about the program and took great interest in those courses, especially the career possibilities that would be available to her after she earned the degree. She applied to CVCC her senior year of high school and was accepted into

the Electromechanical Technology program. If this degree program were offered today, Electromechanical Technology would fit in the School of Career & Technical Education. Sherry explains the curriculum consisted of training in hydraulics, pneumatics, and electronics.

The program had a smaller class size, but Sherry remembers having a strong set of classmates who were just as dedicated to the field as she was. "It was a good group of people," Sherry says. "If anyone was having a problem understanding something, we helped each other out. We were blessed with excellent instructors and people who really cared about teaching."

“ I NEVER SET OUT TO BE IN POLITICS; I JUST SAW A NEED FOR CHILDREN IN OUR AREA, AND CHOSE TO STEP UP AND BE A VOICE. ”

The campus dynamics were quite different than they are today. Sherry and her classmates, for example, only ventured out of the Engineering Building for electives. Everyone was looking to get their degree so that they could eventually grow into their career. When students weren't in their building learning and studying, they were off campus working local jobs. Barely older than a teenager, Sherry found a way to make an income and pay her way through college.

"I went to school with a couple of young men who utilized the G.I. Bill," Sherry says. "One man in particular worked a third shift job and



come to class the next day—to me, he had it the hardest of any of us." Sherry graduated with her Electromechanical Technology degree in 1980—exactly two years after her dad completed the same program. And Sherry's sister, who is five years younger than her, also graduated from CVCC with an Electromechanical Technology degree.

Sherry went to work shortly after receiving her degree. She spent over a decade of her career working for companies such as Duke Energy and a local copier technology company.

She continued with this copier company until her husband, who also worked for Duke Energy, received a promotion that required relocation to a Duke Energy plant in South Carolina. Sherry left her job to support her family with the move. "By that point, our oldest son was getting ready to start Kindergarten," Sherry says. "We decided I would not seek a job until we got him situated in school."

As the family grew, she realized that she truly enjoyed the opportunities she received to stay home and spend quality time with her children. Sherry raised both of her sons in this South Carolina town for a few years, and then the family returned to Catawba County.

Her husband wanted to support her—and worked hard so that Sherry could remain a stay-at-home mom.

It was during this time that Sherry found her passion for public service and advocacy.

During her oldest son's fourth grade year, the school saw rapid growth. The institution and the school board chose to accommodate this growth through the addition of mobile units and changes to infrastructure. The construction on school property resulted in changes of the water source. The water was not of the best consistency or taste—yet it was the only drinking water available to students and teachers on school grounds.

Sherry didn't want her child or any of the students or the school water sources to be impacted by the consistency of the water, so she stepped up to the plate. She made arrangements to network and speak with other parents, advocate for clear water, and create a better learning environment for students. She gathered the support to run for president of the school PTO. This service position launched Sherry into a meaningful career in local politics.

Sherry represented PTO in school board meetings and in front of the Catawba County Board of Commissioners, advocating for cleaner drinking water and safer conditions for all. She was successful at leading her PTO team and convincing the county boards to address the drinking water situation.

After this, the school board asked Sherry to become one of the co-chairs of the Bond Campaign. She attended PTO meetings across Catawba County, advocating for each school district and the needs of students who belonged to those districts.

The bonds passed, and three years later, in late 2000, her sons' school received a new building that was ready for move-in. Sherry



continued to be an active representative for the local school systems, and as her network grew, she received a different opportunity to join the school board.

"I thought, you know, I think I can do that job," Sherry states. "I put my name in that hat and they selected me to be a board member."

"I never set out to be in politics," she continues. "I just saw a need for children in our area, and I chose to step up and be a voice. That's really all I had planned for."

Sherry continued to serve on the school board for 17 years. When the time came to reach the end of her last term, she learned of an opening on the Board of Catawba County Commissioners.

She then ran for the Board of Commissioners and won twice, guiding our school systems and local funding opportunities for eight years.

In total, Sherry has spent 25 years serving in local politics. One could describe her impact as improving the quality of life in Catawba County—mostly within the educational systems. "Providing those opportunities [for improvement] makes it possible for more people to help themselves," she describes.

Education gives people a leg-up and lends them a hand. "I believe that education is the thing that gives everybody a chance. It is what can break down those barriers and give people a chance to achieve things. That's how we have a better community and better quality of life."

Sherry continues to be a committed advocate of Catawba Valley Community College: serving as Board Chair on the CVCC Board of Trustees, reappointed for 2024-2025 by the North Carolina legislature. She also served on the Catawba County Board of Commissioners, where she helped our community advance the educational opportunities available to students of all ages and grade levels; participated on the Catawba County Board of Health; and extended her involvement with the arts by working for more than 15 years as the Executive Director for The Green Room Community Theatre. When she retired, The Green Room renamed the facility's Black Box Theatre after her.

"I love Catawba County," Sherry concludes. "I am proud that my sons and grandkids work [and live] in Catawba County. I want this to be a better place for people to have a family—and any way that I can contribute to making that happen is a pleasure and an honor." ■

CANYON ECHERD

ALUMNI

Lead by Example

"I want to be successful," says Canyon Echerd, a lifelong Alexander County resident and recent CVCC alum. "I wanted to graduate with something substantial and find a way to get ahead in my career field."

There are plenty of students who hold this ambition, but not everyone can fulfill it—much less exceed their goals. Canyon Echerd is one of those people. He was a strong high school student and heavily involved in activities at Alexander Central High School (ACHS), but he yearned for something more—a new challenge and a reason to develop new skills.

He found such a place in the CVCC Career and College Promise (CCP) program.

The concept of CCP, which permits high school-level students to take college-level courses, was not presented to Echerd until he met with CVCC instructor Ramie Robinson.

“ I WANTED TO GRADUATE WITH SOMETHING SUBSTANTIAL AND FIND A WAY TO GET AHEAD IN MY CAREER FIELD. ”

Robinson is director of both the Electrical Systems and Computer Integrated Machining Technology at CVCC. Through CCP, Robinson also instructs these programs direct to high schools in Catawba and Alexander Counties. He was introduced to Echerd through connections at ACHS, and as soon as the two discussed academic and career goals, Robinson encouraged Echerd to enroll in the CCP electrical systems class the following Fall.

Junior year approached fast. As a hands-on learner, Echerd knew he wanted to pursue the trades. He also held an interest in the types of work opportunities that came with a degree in Electrical Systems Technology. After reviewing the CCP curriculum at ACHS, reviewing the statistics of the field, and considering the credentials he would need for licensure, he decided that this was a path he wanted to pursue until graduation.

For the next two years of high school, Echerd's ambitions took off in the best of ways. He enrolled in online courses when available, drove from ACHS to the CVCC Main Campus to attend in-person electrical systems classes, and maintained the energy to spend his summers working at a local electrical company.

Echerd also got involved with campus organizations, like CVCC's SkillsUSA Chapter. Through this program, he was introduced to scholarship opportunities that could supplement his college education.

"One day, Mr. Robinson approached me at the Skills conference my senior year of high school and mentioned the possibility of receiving a SkillsUSA scholarship," Echerd recalls. "The only catch was that you had to be a high school competitor to qualify—and I was. Mr. Robinson told me to stay with the SkillsUSA program and encouraged me to apply for the scholarship." If selected, Echerd would use the scholarship to fund the tuition and fees of his first year as a college student at CVCC.

While waiting for the scholarship results, Echerd finished his time at Alexander Central High School. He graduated with both a high

school diploma and an Electrical Systems diploma. The accomplishment encouraged him to reach higher and move faster towards his goals, and he enrolled as a first year electrical systems student at CVCC the following Fall.

"Thanks to that SkillsUSA scholarship, I received \$1300 towards my first semester of education at CVCC, and then I received that amount again the next semester," says Echerd.

He also used his early start in the electrical systems program to buy time for another degree: Industrial Systems Technology. He attended CVCC for both programs, taking classes and keeping his job with the local electrical company.



ALUMNI

In May 2024, Echerd proudly graduated from CVCC with an Associate in Electrical Systems and an Associate in Industrial Systems. He also carried his SkillsUSA participation through the end of his second year at CVCC, taking home “Silver: Industrial Motor Control” at the 2024 SkillsUSA State Competition.

“Within the electrical background, even industrial systems, there is some bookwork,” he shares, “but for the most part, I get to see my work in the field and understand how it all works. The labs at CVCC and the Workforce Solutions Complex are high-tech and quite realistic. Because I knew the proper

tools, how to use the tools, and how to use the equipment, it wasn’t a total shock to transition into the professional field.”

Thanks to his employer, Echerd kept his position at the electrical company and continued to apply his skills in plumbing, mechanical systems, wastewater treatment, and more. He felt that working and networking in the diverse sphere of commercial services, especially in regions such as Charlotte, proves that he made the right choice for a lucrative, fulfilling career.

“I migrated into the electrical side of wastewater treatment because it brings something new every day,” he shares. “When I first started with [this] company, they threw any [service need] at me and I would give it a go—but the municipal side of electrical systems is what truly piqued my interest.”

Echerd looks forward to more growth opportunities at his current job, and he is excited for the day that he can sit for the official electrical license exam. While he hones his craft, builds self-confidence, and gathers a strong network of clientele and colleagues, his final goal is to establish his own electrical company.

“Most people our age are going for a four-year college experience,” he says. “That’s great—that’s something I looked into—but I’m glad that I stayed with the trades.” ■





APRIL HARPER

Creating Community

If you're a current student at CVCC, or if you attended the college in the last few years, you might know Ms. April Harper, Enrollment Manager for the School of Health Education.

April's work, and her passion for that work, has always centered around the community. Her skilled professionalism, combined with an effervescent positivity, allows her to spread light among the students she serves. And though she remains an integral team member of Red Hawk Nation, her story branches far beyond the campus of Catawba Valley.

While April was still in high school, she loved learning and loved to challenge her ambitions. She became a high-achieving athlete on her high school basketball team. Basketball became her community; day in and day out, she drifted from an academic mindset to one of competitive plays and practice.

Her talents on the court were noticed by many, including athletic representatives from

Montreat College. When her senior year rolled around, April decided to accept an offer for an athletic scholarship at Montreat College. She would play on their basketball team and gain the financial support she needed to pursue her college degree.

A perfect plan, right? Except for April, the scholarship created a major division of personal talents and personal goals.

April had always been a hard-working student. She loved the classroom. She loved the community of the student body, spending much of her early high school years involved with clubs, organizations, and service projects. She recognized when she needed assistance with her studies and was always unafraid to ask for help. Best of all, she was good at creating a community inside the academic world.

When it came down to it, April felt "iffy" about the prospect of trading her love for education for a 4-year commitment to the

basketball court. Just before she graduated high school, April was approached by Red Hawk Women's Basketball Coach Tisha England about the prospect of attending CVCC. "You can come here and take general education courses," Coach England told her, "and if you still want to transfer to earn your bachelor's degree after graduating from CVCC, we'll make sure that happens."

The words were just enough to point April in the right direction, shifting her focus from basketball to her true self. She had just gained the freedom to return to her academic values. "I basically had the opportunity to [attend CVCC] and finish what I started in the first place," April concludes.

Upon graduating high school, April applied to CVCC intending to enroll in the Cosmetology program. She held interest in the subject and the flexibility of the career field. She could also use the time to knock out the easier general education courses, as Coach England had suggested, in case she wanted to pursue a four-year degree down the road.

That year, the Cosmetology program was in high demand. April did not apply soon enough to be accepted. She still pressed on, however, enrolling in CVCC's Associate in Arts degree program and working to complete her general education courses.

Even in college, April's joyful spirit and dedication to learning did not go unnoticed. One of her instructors, Mrs. Anna Shields, opened doors for April by suggesting that she join the college honors society, Phi Theta Kappa (PTK). April took the idea and ran with it, not only becoming a member of PTK, but also taking up officer positions, joining the Student Leadership Academy and encouraging others to join her on several off-campus service projects.

"We wanted to change the trajectory of what student advocacy meant across campus

and the community," April recalls. "Through Phi Theta Kappa, we developed a 'Commit to Complete' singing day, where all students had to pledge to graduate with an associate's degree. I just wanted to be a student advocate, helping out my peers and friends." PTK also worked with President Hinshaw to create a PTK student scholarship, based on work and academic merit. The college approved the scholarship funds, which means that more people could benefit from the work that April and her teammates accomplished.

April continued to use her time at the college wisely. She worked as a Mentor and Master Tutor for local elementary students; she remained involved with Phi Theta Kappa, the Student Leadership Academy, and CVCC's chapter of Circle K International, a globally recognized collegiate service organization. She also spent much time investing in her education by connecting with the Learning Assistance Center and tutoring center.

Once again, April had cultivated a bright community of learners and leaders. The combination of frequent meetings with Ms. Shields, investing in community service engagements, and helping with student organizations worked in April's favor. By the end of her time at CVCC, she decided to transfer to North Carolina State University (NCSU) to pursue a degree in educational advising and leadership.

At that time, the college transfer process looked different than it does now, and April acquired more general education courses which were necessary to earn the full bachelor's degree credits at NCSU. She also managed her time outside of campus in work-study positions, part-time jobs, and, as always, embedding time to utilize the university's academic resources.

She graduated with her bachelor's degree ready to be a driving force in the world of college advising. For the next two years,

she worked at NSCU as a college advisor and Americorps service member. After this, she joined the Admissions team at Stanley Community College, located in Albermarle, North Carolina, and quickly acclimated to the community college system.

“ I BELIEVE MY WORK IS ABOUT BEING ABLE TO GIVE STUDENTS THE ENCOURAGEMENT THEY NEED... ”

Within just seven months of starting her position at Stanley, she rose to become the Director of Admissions.

"If it weren't for Stanley," she says, "I wouldn't be where I am today."

April, with her ambitious can-do spirit, continued to find new opportunities to strengthen her professional skills. She also worked at Rowan-Cabarrus Community College, located in Salisbury, North Carolina, as a Career Coach. In graduated from Appalachian State University with a Master's Degree in Higher Education & Concentration in Community College and

University Leadership. Four and a half years later, when home called stronger than ever, April reconsidered applying to work at the Admissions Department for Catawba Valley Community College. That year, she hit the jackpot. A new position had opened on the team, and April more than exceeded the necessary credentials. By the next academic year, April moved back to the Hickory area as an employee of Catawba Valley Community College. She received a warm and well-deserved welcome back from Red Hawk Nation.

April's background—both as a former Red Hawk and a successful professional advisor—gives her a deep appreciation for the backgrounds and experiences of the students who walk through her doors.

"I always say I am my student," April explains. "I am from [Catawba County], I went to school here, and I am excited to see how CVCC is transitioning with new resources for the college campus and for our alumni. I believe my work is about being able to give students the encouragement they need and showing them the open-door opportunities I would have only dreamed about when I first attended college." ■



CATAWBA VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

ALUMNI

ASSOCIATION

**Hey CVCC graduates (Degree, Diploma, or Certificate),
are you a member of the CVCC Alumni Association?**

The CVCC Alumni Association is a tight network of more than 30,000 alumni! Stay connected with our newsletter and receive invitations to exclusive events for all Red Hawk Nation graduates. You are a part of our history. Now, be a part of our future.



Join today!

VISIT: cvcc.edu/alumni or scan the code.



Jennifer Jones, Chief Development Officer & Executive Director for the CVCC Foundation
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