



# Engage

College of DuPage—  
your community college  
Vol. 1, No. 3

## From COD to Chef

Raquel Black formulates  
the perfect recipe for success  
at Caribbean Corner





## A Message from the President

In this issue of *Engage*, we explore Career and Technical Education, also known as CTE. These programs provide students with core academic and technical job-specific skills to prepare them for a wide range of careers. As a result, students can master the fundamentals of a new profession or build on established skills.

According to the Illinois Community College Board, approximately two-thirds of all Illinois community college graduates last year earned a degree or certificate in a CTE field. These programs are for students of all ages, whether they are recent high school graduates, returning adults or veterans.

The importance of CTE cannot be stressed enough, and a key component to the curriculum is well-equipped lab spaces that provide hands-on learning. Immersive learning can be found in all corners of College of DuPage's campus and especially in the CTE programs. In this issue, we take a look at some of the impressive lab spaces found at the Technical Education Center and their benefits for students.

CTE focuses on developing partnerships with high schools and clear pathways for students to follow toward degrees and certifications. For students looking to continue their education, CTE also prepares them for transfer.

College of DuPage offers a wide array of CTE programs, ranging from Culinary Arts to Manufacturing and Cosmetology to Fire Science. This issue of *Engage* only scratches the surface of the breadth and depth of our CTE curriculum, which includes degrees and certificates in electronics, computers, early childhood education, health sciences and more areas too numerous to list.

I would like to personally invite you to campus to explore the many available CTE career options and learning spaces that College of DuPage offers.

—Ann Rondeau is president of College of DuPage.

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# For the Community...



The College's Culinary & Hospitality Center is home to the six-suite Inn at Water's Edge as well as the student-run Culinary Market.

## Make the Inn at Water's Edge Your Home Away from Home

Enjoy a weekend getaway at the Inn at Water's Edge. Discover the comforts of a world-class boutique hotel at an affordable price in one of six fully-appointed suites on College of DuPage's Glen Ellyn campus. The adjacent McAninch Arts Center makes it possible for area residents and out-of-town visitors to enjoy a show with an overnight stay.

Ranked the number one hotel in Glen Ellyn on Trip Advisor, the Inn is part of the College's Culinary & Hospitality Center, giving students a unique opportunity to learn the operations of a working hotel. Although the Inn is run by a professional team, students play key roles in the guest experience through internships and student worker opportunities.

"Our professional team assists students through guest interactions that they will face in a hotel environment," said James Mulyk, Interim Hospitality Coordinator. "This hands-on environment prepares the students to feel more empowered and comfortable before landing their first job in the hotel industry."

Nightly rates start at \$135 and include complimentary fitness center use and internet access, free parking, 24-hour coffee service, and a signature breakfast. Reservations can be made by calling (630) 942-6888.

## Dine on Student-Made Creations at the Culinary Market

Experience culinary creativity from College of DuPage students at the student-run Culinary Market.

Patrons can stop by the Culinary Market and enjoy breakfast and lunch items prepared by the Fast Casual class. Order savory food to go at the market counter or grab a table and enjoy it in the Wheat Café. The Culinary Market also sells items made by students that can be enjoyed at home. The menu changes daily and is tied to the curriculum of several classes.

"The Culinary Market is a unique opportunity for students as it offers them real-life experience in a safe learning environment," said Laura Lerdal, Culinary Market and Lab Coordinator. "The Market prepares students for the real world so when they start at a new job, they know how to do everything from ringing up an order to preparing and serving the food. It's great to be able to walk into a job and be ahead of the learning curve."

The Market, which is located in the Culinary & Hospitality Center, will be open on Tuesdays and Wednesdays beginning in late February. For more information, visit [cod.edu/culinarymarket](http://cod.edu/culinarymarket), call (630) 942-3809 or email [culinarymarket@cod.edu](mailto:culinarymarket@cod.edu).



The student-run Culinary Market offers breakfast and lunch items prepared by COD students. Patrons can purchase food to go at the market counter or grab a table and enjoy it in the Wheat Café.



Photos of Raquel Black by Tori Soper/special to College of DuPage



# From COD to Chef

## Raquel Black formulates the perfect recipe for success at Caribbean Corner

Raquel Black was climbing the corporate ladder. A 25-year health care industry veteran, she had a substantial salary, health benefits and a retirement plan. By all measures, she was extremely successful in the professional world.

But while working in corporate America, she found herself daydreaming about cooking.

Laying awake at night, Black would create new dishes and ingredient combinations as an idea began to take hold: going to culinary school and opening a place of her own. It was something she couldn't ignore and while she wasn't sure what the outcome would be, she knew she had to try—if not for her, for her late mother.

"I grew up in a family that loved to cook, from my grandmother to my mother," she said of her childhood spent in the Dominican Republic and Miami. "I used to peel garlic, and I fried my first chicken when I was 12 and a half, following every step that I saw my mom do. It's always been so enjoyable."

Black's mom had always wanted to open a restaurant of her own. However, because of circumstances, lack of funds, lack of knowledge—and a little bit of fear—she held back.

Black knew she could make both her dreams and her mother's dreams come true.

At the age of 42, she walked into College of DuPage and enrolled in the Culinary Arts certificate program.

"I felt so old the day I registered for classes," Black said with a laugh. "One student registering for classes told me they were born in 1988 and I almost fell over! What was I doing here? Was I too old to be doing this? I panicked."

"However, on my first day of classes, I felt right at home. The instructors were nice but rigorous, which is exactly what I needed."

Black's love for cooking only flourished while enrolled in the Culinary Arts program. She also realized that if she ever wanted to open a place of her own, it was now or never. Armed with increased confidence in her skill sets, she walked into her boss's office and quit, believing in her gut that if she made good food and provided good service, these would be the keys to success.

"I had to pick my hard," she said. "Which hard did I want? Did I want the hard of staying the same and knowing I wasn't fulfilled anymore? Or did I want the hard of working through all the obstacles and get to something great?"

Black picked wisely.

Caribbean Corner, specializing in Cuban, Puerto Rican and Dominican cuisine, opened for lunch on Sept. 26, 2014, in downtown Downers Grove. A menu of homemade sandwiches, soups and sides soon expanded to dinner and in 2016, Caribbean Corner moved to a larger space that now seats 35 customers inside and 20 outside on a patio.

Today, she and her husband spend more than 11 hours each day at the restaurant—Black as head chef and her husband leading the front of house.

"The food is not 100 percent traditional, as I've put my own unique twist on each dish," she said. "I call it Latin with a flair."

My dishes are very flavorful—

you can taste the onions, peppers, cilantro and garlic. My favorite is Ropa Vieja, a Cuban dish which I offer at dinner. It's braised flank steak that is simmered in tomatoes, white wine and seasonings, and it goes well with black beans and rice."

Black also added healthier options, including a new kale bowl that has gained popularity with her customers.

"You can top it off with one of our proteins, couscous, black beans, onions, cumin, lemon, avocado, dates



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**"On my first day of classes, I felt right at home. The instructors were nice but rigorous, which is exactly what I needed."**

—COD alumna and restaurateur Raquel Black

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“I used to peel garlic, and I fried my first chicken when I was 12 and a half, following every step that I saw my mom do. It’s always been so enjoyable.”

and tomatoes. You still get the Caribbean flavors but a healthier version,” she said.

While Black fulfills her dream cooking unique and flavorful dishes, owning and running a restaurant doesn’t come without its challenges.

“Every day is a new struggle and some days I want to pull my hair out, whether it’s managing a catering order while still serving our customers, a broken piece of equipment, a vendor order discrepancy, running out of an ingredient—and the list goes on and on,” she said. “Every day is chaotic. But you will always have a struggle. It’s how you overcome that struggle that makes or breaks you.”

Black recalls getting a call to cater a 300-person wedding during Caribbean Corner’s first year. While initially considering backing out, COD Baking and Pastry Arts Instructor Donna Wagner encouraged her.

“I called Donna and told her there was no way I could do that big of a catering order. But she immediately cut me off and said I was ready for something like this and that she would even help me plan it out, and she did. I relied on her for her expertise.”

Black and Wagner are now lifelong friends, with Wagner employed as Caribbean Corner’s pastry chef. Black remembers Wagner urging her to enter a cake decorating competition as a student, despite Black having little to no experience in baking.



**“Raquel was a student who always showed a passion while creating in the kitchen. Her dedication and commitment to her education and industry is why she is so successful.”**

**—COD Culinary Arts Program Coordinator  
Tim Meyers**

“The night before the competition, I was rolling out fondant and it kept breaking. I called Donna in tears. She told me to come over to her house, but she was very clear she wouldn’t help me but would guide me. She taught me that it’s OK to fail. That’s how you learn and that’s what eventually makes you great.”

Such lessons have stayed with Black, who credits a lot of her success to Wagner and the Culinary Arts program at College of DuPage.

“The Culinary Arts program grew my knowledge of cooking and the industry exponentially. I wouldn’t be here today without the faculty support I was given,” she said.

Culinary Arts Program Coordinator Tim Meyers praised Black as an exemplary learner.

“Raquel was a student who always showed a passion while creating in the kitchen,” he said. “Her dedication and

commitment to her education and industry is why she is so successful.”

As for the future of Caribbean Corner, Black thinks they hit their sweet spot. Ideally, she would like to focus more on catering, but for now, she is content and focused on her customers.

“I strive for an atmosphere where everyone is on a first-name basis and I know what they like,” she said. “I like having that rapport with customers because that’s what I like about a business where I’m a customer. I want them to feel at home with us.”





***Clockwise from the top:*** Raquel Black prepares food for the lunch rush at Caribbean Corner; Black with her mentor, COD Baking and Pastry Arts instructor Donna Wagner; a kale bowl with chicken, one of many flavorful dishes offered at Caribbean Corner; and a family photo of Black (left) eating a homemade meal with her mother, Odette Resek (right), and best friend Mercedes Ruiz-Salazar.





Photos of Casey Emerich by Corey Minkanic/special to College of DuPage



# ‘Practice What You Teach’

## Practical skills drive professor’s passion for learning

Casey Emerich takes a practical approach to education—whether teaching in the classroom, developing new courses or spending a day on the job at an area business to put her skills to the test.

“You have to practice what you teach,” said the assistant professor and coordinator of College of DuPage’s Office Technology Information program, known as OFTI for short. “My COD experience has been phenomenal. It has allowed me to learn more, to teach more and to grow more.”

Emerich joined the OFTI faculty in 2013. Before coming to COD, the Illinois State University graduate taught business courses at West Aurora High School, where she introduced students to skills that not only shaped her career but also, hopefully someday, theirs.

“I’ve always been drawn to the career and technical education area, as early as middle school,” said Emerich. “CTE courses seemed like a break from my English or science classes, which I enjoyed. But I remember with business, computer or technology courses, even consumer education, those courses taught practical, useful skills—and it was obtaining those skills that helped me be more efficient and effective in other areas.”

Office Technology Information’s three associate degrees and six certificates offer valuable training for people pursuing a career that provides administrative support to any type of business or organization, from education and health care to government and retail trade, manufacturing and construction.

Emerich’s students come from all walks of life. They may be recent high school graduates exploring their future. Some are parents entering or re-entering the workforce after raising a family or caring for loved ones. Others are professionals looking to expand their office skills or community members who need to master software programs on their new computer.

Ever-changing technology and a diverse group of students fuel Emerich’s excitement for the OFTI program. OFTI classes are offered in a variety of formats—classroom, hybrid, online—and times, both day and evening, to fit with busy schedules.

“I recently had a student in my OFTI 1200: MS Office for Professional Staff course who was living in Mexico City. He wanted to learn more about Microsoft Office and was looking specifically for an online class. We were able to provide that opportunity for him, which is our strength,” said Emerich, whose students also include COD faculty and staff. Recently, one of Emerich’s former students, who was looking for a career change,

landed her dream job as a junior accountant in Chicago after a recruiter found her LinkedIn profile, an online resume she created for one of her OFTI classes.

Emerich’s ultimate goal is to help others achieve their goals.

“OFTI is more relevant than ever because we all have more responsibilities. We are expected to do more and to know more. Success in our program may or may not be completing a degree, but taking a class and learning the skills that are going to help each of us be successful,” said Emerich. “Every job is unique, every company is unique, every position is unique, so part of our curriculum is adapting to that environment.”



Casey Emerich (right) connects with students like Assunta Sultan, whether meeting one-on-one, teaching in the classroom, sharing job opportunities, tracking LinkedIn achievements or inviting OFTI graduates to serve on the program’s advisory board.

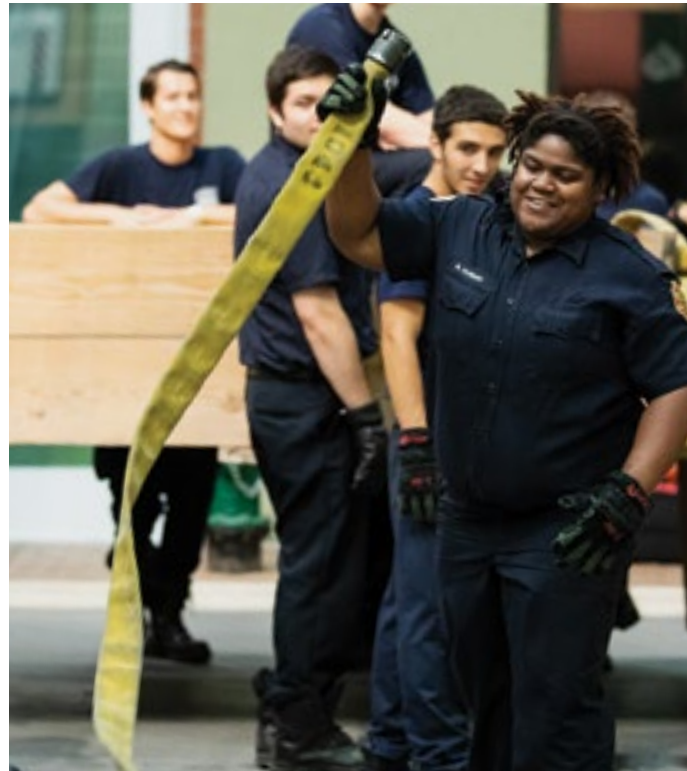
## Did you know?

College of DuPage partners with the workNet DuPage Career Center dedicated to helping people get back to work and maintaining a skilled workforce for DuPage County. Office Technology Information is an approved program for students who qualify for federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) grants.

Students in the OFTI program have three degree options: Administrative Assistant, Associate in Applied Science; Administrative Assistant and Meeting/Event Planning, Associate in Applied Science; and Executive Assistant, Associate in Applied Science.

OFTI certificates include Administrative Assistant, Administrative Assistant and Meeting/Event Planning, Executive Assistant, Medical Office, Office Technology Information Essentials, and Word Specialist.

# Practice



## COD's Fire Science program prepares students for career success with hands-on training

Patrick Mullally and Maddy Peterson traveled two very different roads before deciding to pursue careers in the fire and emergency medical services industry.

Mullally considered a variety of fields after graduating from high school but had difficulty settling on one. He enrolled at College of DuPage to pursue an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) certificate, which he earned in one semester. He has since completed the Paramedic Transition course and plans to apply for paramedic school in the near future.

"COD helped me by introducing me to the field in general," he said. "I really didn't know much about how any of this works prior to coming here."

Peterson, who earned her EMT license and Pediatric Education for Prehospital Provider (PEPP) certificate for pediatric assessment, naturally gravitated toward the field. She said her passion for being involved in emergency situations guided her career choice.

"I have always been one to run toward a scream," she said. "It's rewarding to show up to a chaotic scene and know that you are giving people hope just by your presence."

*Above left and center: Cadets perform drills at COD's Fire Academy, an intensive 16-week training program for fire department members. Above right: COD alumna Maddy Peterson is both a full-time paramedic through Metro Paramedic Services for the Elmhurst Fire Department and a part-time firefighter/paramedic for the Glen Ellyn Fire Department. (Photos by Tori Soper/special to College of DuPage)*



# Makes Professionals



COD's Fire Science program offers degrees in Fire Science Technology and EMS, as well as Firefighter, EMT and Paramedic certificates. The associate degree in Fire Science Technology has received national recognition through the Fire and Emergency Services Higher Education Program, which recognizes COD's adoption of standardized core courses and commitment to fire and emergency medical services (EMS) professional development.

EMS/Fire Science Manager Dan Krakora and EMT Instructor and Coordinator Joe Gilles spoke about the importance of making resources available to students in terms of career preparation beyond the fire industry.

"A lot of other programs don't go to that higher level in terms of facilities and making sure that students are well-prepared," said Gilles. Krakora added that "there is a misconception in the general public that EMT training is only for those who want to enter the fire or EMS professions. But we also have a large population of students who go into nursing, radiology or even medical school."

Despite the contrast in Mullally and Peterson's paths prior to entering COD's Fire Science program, similarities can be found in the benefits they have experienced. Both are now professionals working at local emergency service organizations.

After completing the Trauma Assessment, Pediatric Assessment and Paramedic Transition courses at COD, Peterson went on to excel in Good Samaritan Hospital's paramedic program. She now is a full-time paramedic through Metro Paramedic Services for the Elmhurst Fire Department and is also a part-time firefighter/paramedic for the Glen Ellyn Fire Department. Mullally began working as an EMT for Elite Ambulance in Naperville just months after earning his certificate.

Both attributed their career success to the hands-on experience they received through COD's program.

"It's fantastic, because that's how I learn best," Mullally said. "We actually got to perform what we were learning in class."

Peterson specifically touted the effectiveness of resources such as the College's Fire Academy, an intensive 16-week training program for fire department members, and a full-scale indoor street scene for real-world exercises.

"The street scene gave us the ability to use a large space proficiently, as we were able to go through several different scenario rotations without having the 'stand and wait' aspect," she said. "The Fire Academy was some of the most fun I've had and gave me a strong foundation to be the firefighter and paramedic I am today."



Photos of Sam Kaufman by Tori Soper/special to College of DuPage



# Form and Function

## Westchester native Sam Kaufman pursues both professional and personal goals in Manufacturing

College of DuPage student Sam Kaufman has heard the question before: Do you want to go into manufacturing and engineering, or would you rather go into art?

“I don’t see them as being mutually exclusive,” the 23-year-old Westchester native said with a smile. “You can do both. Knowledge gained from engineering and manufacturing classes can be applied to art, and knowledge from art classes can be applied to technological fields.”

As a University of Illinois senior, Kaufman was a teaching assistant for a Renaissance Engineering class. This made a big impression on him as he discussed Renaissance thinkers, particularly Leonardo da Vinci, adept at combining form and function to produce master works in multiple fields.

“One of the purposes of the class was to get students to think about and understand that engineering is not just a set of goals and processes, but that it can be a form of art,” Kaufman said.

After earning a bachelor’s degree in Materials Science and Engineering in 2017, he enrolled at COD and began taking classes in manufacturing and welding.

His career goal is to start a company in the smart manufacturing industry and make a contribution to what he believes is the wave of the future—automation, data and IoT (Internet of Things) technology. He wanted the skills to make anything, allowing him to go from the drawing board to a finished prototype as quickly and with as little friction as possible.

Kaufman, who is into sculpting, painting and drawing, also wanted to gain hands-on experience with skills that are useful and broadly applicable.

“I wanted to learn how to weld, so I looked around and COD stood out because it offered a full curriculum to choose from and a wide range of processes,” he said.

He then turned his attention to working with all the different machines in COD’s Manufacturing

Technology labs, which impressed the program’s coordinator, Associate Professor Jim Filipek.

“Sam displays a willingness to learn along with great ‘soft’ skills like being on time, using class time efficiently and asking intelligent questions,” he said.

Kaufman’s urge to create and experiment is innate, and he credits his mother’s encouragement to make things using materials at hand. When he was 3 or 4, he put together a small airplane using felt that he stitched together and stuffed with cotton padding. He remembered that the only help he required was asking his mom to thread the needle for him.

“The plane resembled the way a child would draw an airplane, with a thick body and bulbous wings,” he recalled.

From there he carved sticks into various items in his backyard and worked with many different kinds of materials, including tubs of LEGO® pieces, Play-Doh® and Shrinky Dinks®, which are polystyrene sheets that change shape when heated.

Ceramics and philosophy classes in high school at the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy in Aurora got him thinking about the longevity of objects, their forms and their relation to nature. Transience versus permanence became an important theme in his education.

“How can we take what we already understand to create things that improve

our world, that move society forward?” said Kaufman. “These days in manufacturing, it’s a matter of learning not to oppose the machines but to work with them, to better enable the machines with human input.”

Kaufman has no immediate plans to graduate, instead looking for classes that may be most useful.

“I want to branch out into using more tools and materials,” he said. “All forms of knowledge tend to feed off each other and work together. As I spend time listening to and watching tradesmen, I learn from them and realize that what they are doing really is art.”



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**“Knowledge gained from engineering and manufacturing classes can be applied to art, and knowledge from art classes can be applied to technological fields.”**

—COD student Sam Kaufman

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# The Value of Immersive Learning

## COD's Technical Education Center provides hands-on experience

It's been said, "Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn." At College of DuPage's Technical Education Center, hands-on, immersive learning experiences are the rule rather than the exception.

Opened in 2009, the nearly 180,000-square-foot TEC houses the College's Architecture, Automotive Service Technology, Computer-Aided Design, Construction Management, Electro-Mechanical Technology, Electronics Technology, Horticulture, HVACR, Interior Design, Manufacturing Technology and Welding programs. Each program provides opportunities for learning that expand beyond the traditional classroom, and Kris Fay, Dean of Business and Technology, believes these experiences are essential academic components.

"We want our graduates to excel in the workforce, and this requires lab spaces with the same equipment used by industry professionals," she said. "As a result, students learn the skills that employers are seeking in today's job market."

COD Automotive student Ben Pohl found himself unhappy in his career after working a series of office jobs. Having earned a bachelor's degree in Recreational Therapy followed by a master's degree in Public Administration, he decided to make a change and pursue his lifelong passion for mechanical objects and cars. COD was a convenient, close-to-home and affordable option.

The immersive learning experiences at COD made all the difference to the Carol Stream resident when it came to learning and preparing for his career.

"I am a hands-on learner, plain and simple," he said. "There is no substitute to actually being shown in real life how something works. For example, in our manual transmissions class, the instructor taught us about transmissions and then we took one apart and

put it back together again. The real-world opportunities in the Automotive program really sped up the learning curve for me."

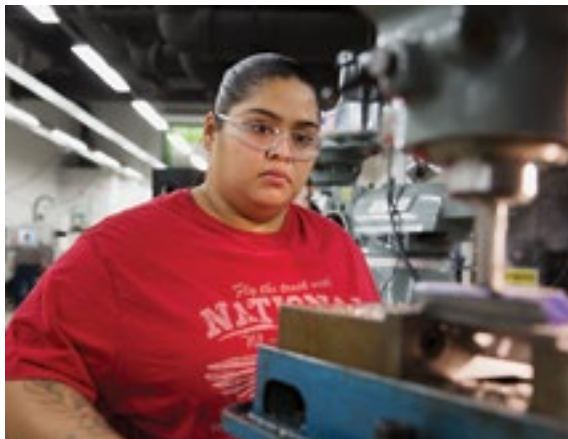
Enabling these types of experiences are the state-of-the-art labs and facilities in the TEC. The Automotive Service Technology program alone occupies more than 29,000 square feet of space that includes a 34-bay shop outfitted with cutting-edge equipment such as specialized electronics trainers and a transmission simulator.

According to Program Coordinator Matt Shanahan, experiential learning is built into the curriculum with the aim of preparing students to enter the workforce with crucial real-world experience.

"Each class offers a hands-on component," he said. "The curriculum is constructed in a way that builds to a service class, in which students work on cars using everything they've learned throughout the program. This not only helps them to get practical experience in their chosen field, it also helps to keep students engaged in the learning process."

The Manufacturing Technology program lab features a host of contemporary equipment, including five HAAS CNC machining centers, a HAAS five-axis machining center, a Milltronics machining center, four HAAS turning centers, two Mitsui surface grinders and a Mitutoyo coordinate measuring machine, as well as a full complement of metrology, design/drafting and metallurgical equipment.

Impressed after a tour of the facilities, Manufacturing Technology student Paul Marra relocated from Las Vegas to Bolingbrook to attend COD, where he is pursuing his associate degree in Manufacturing Technology with a plan to earn a bachelor's degree at Northern Illinois University.



Manufacturing Technology students gain crucial hands-on experience working in College of DuPage's state-of-the-art manufacturing lab.

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COD Automotive Technology Professor Tom Robertson (left) guides students on how to access wiring diagrams and service information to understand vehicle lighting system operations.



Student Carolyn Gange conducts pond and waterfall maintenance in one of the Horticulture program's outdoor labs.







*Clockwise from top left:* An Automotive Technology student uses a Consulab lighting system trainer to practice diagnosing electrical faults, while a student in the Welding program (above right) leans into the work. HVACR Instructor Jim Rickleff (below, left) helps a student operate the HVACR Lab's student-built AC Training System.





Now in his second year in COD's program, Marra is pleased with his experiences, particularly those in the lab developing his skills.

"You learn so much better when you interact with something physically," he said. "When you adapt to something and repeat the process, it forms a habit which you won't forget, much like riding a bike."

Designed for people interested in entering the field or upgrading their skills, COD's Welding program offers a variety of skill levels in oxyacetylene, arc, MIG, TIG, and plasma welding/cutting processes, using both manual and semi-automatic applications, as well as theory and blueprint reading.

Having previously earned a bachelor's degree in Fine Art from Louisiana State University with an emphasis on 2-D printmaking, Meredith Esposito reevaluated her career and decided to pursue an interest in welding at COD.

"The Welding program has been fantastic," she said. "Every day, students are in the lab welding and being taught how to use other field-related tools like the wire wheels, angle grinders, nibbler, shears, notchers and more."

Preparing for entry into the \$82 billion horticulture industry, students in COD's Horticulture program receive hands-on learning in the College's greenhouse and on equipment including hydroponic systems and aeroponic towers. A range of topics covered includes horticulture, business, landscape construction, landscape design, floral design, plant propagation, soils and fertilizers, diseases, insects, hydroponics, greenhouse production, small engine repair, and sustainable urban agriculture. In addition, floral design students perfect their skills creating arrangements for campus events and, last spring, students built a pond-less waterfall and retaining wall in the landscape lab.

Carolyn Gange decided to follow her passion for flowers and design after spending 11 years working for McDonald's Corporation, where she managed regional marketing and led the global Happy Meal business and U.S. McCafé brand. She enrolled in the Horticulture program at COD and plans to graduate with an associate degree in Horticulture and a certificate in Landscape Design, after which she hopes to launch her own landscape design firm.

Gange praises the College's cutting-edge facilities and the opportunities to learn beyond the classroom.

"Often, there is a need in the community for gardening or design help, and students are encouraged

to work directly with community members and provide these services," she said. "A fellow student and I created a master landscape design for the Congregation Beth Shalom in Naperville, and the design was installed this past summer."

Taking immersive learning to the next level, the HVACR program lab features a range of high-tech trainers, including a hydronic boiler trainer, electrical/electronic trainers and six walk-in cooler trainers—all with the unique distinction of being built primarily by COD students.

"They get an opportunity to install and operate emerging technologies so that they can be prepared for our community's workforce," said HVACR Program Coordinator Bob Clark. "The HVACR industry is evolving at an exponential rate and people are retiring faster than they can be replaced. It is important that

we make the most out of every class and experience the students have in our program. We want the world to know that COD is serious about HVACR education. Our students and our lab are our testament."

Wheaton resident Phil Reed enrolled at COD fresh out of high school in 2003. He went on to graduate magna cum laude with a Bachelor of Arts in Historic Preservation and Community Planning and Art History from the College of Charleston in Charleston, S.C. He returned to COD in 2012 and has since earned the Stationary

Operators Certificate and associate degrees in Facility Management and Facility Maintenance Mechanic.

Working as the Maintenance Supervisor at Cantigny Park in Wheaton, Reed is now pursuing his Service Technician degree at COD.

"What really stands out about the program is the culmination of great instructors and a state-of-the-art training facility that has created a reputation in Chicagoland for knowledgeable, well-trained and professional technicians," he said. "Because of this reputation, there are always job opportunities available for students who are motivated to start their careers."

Reed said that COD provided invaluable skills that empowered him to move forward in his career.

"My experiences in the lab have given me the skills to respond to any call with the confidence that is required to troubleshoot the equipment and make a repair. The hands-on experience keeps me coming back to COD year after year."



HVACR Instructor Mario Valle (left) works with a student on a boiler burner control system.

# Exceeding Expectations

## Alumni take advantage of extraordinary opportunities for nontraditional careers

Prior to attending College of DuPage, Welding program alumna Maggie Guzman began taking apart old bikes and building new ones as a relaxing, yet challenging, hobby.

“I’ve always wanted to weld and it seemed everyone and their moms welded,” Guzman said. “The hobby moved into numerous projects that became more intricate and involved in different mediums, including metal work. Then the jeep obsession kicked in full blast and all I wanted to do was make custom parts and racks and whatever I could come up with for my jeeps.”

Even after enrolling in COD’s Welding program, Guzman took one class at a time in order to have fun. Eventually, her passion for the craft became much more than a leisure activity.

“When I first started taking welding, I was saying to myself, ‘I will just do it as a hobby whenever I have the money, and if I do so long enough, I can apply all those classes toward something,’” she said.

Cosmetology alumnus Jason Kelly had already worked in the hair industry for 12 years before attending COD. However, he was impressed with the value of the Cosmetology program and knew that it would help advance his career while providing the flexibility for him to continue working.

“Becoming licensed was the next step to take my career to the next level,” Kelly said. “The affordability of COD’s program was great and I could still work my current job and go to class at night.”

COD Career Services Manager Steve Gustis said major employment growth currently is being seen in service industries like cosmetology and welding and detailed how his staff helps prepare students for successful careers. He also spoke about how gender expectations for these fields are becoming more diverse.

“The Career Services Center thrives on working with students to meet their employment needs and our goal is to ensure that every student is workforce ready,” Gustis said. “Students in nontraditional career fields,

such as a woman in welding or a man in cosmetology, do not face as many challenges as they once did in finding employment because there is often a high demand for gender diversity in the workforce.”

Having completed the Welding certificate, Guzman is now with the UA Local 525 Plumbers, Pipefitters and Service Technicians union in Nevada and is thoroughly enjoying her work. She also completed several of her Sense certifications and worked with the leader of a local bike club who opened a custom and modification bicycle chop shop.

Kelly, who completed his Cosmetology certificate, is now state-licensed and working at SalonCentric in Naperville, a company owned and operated by L’Oréal. His future career plans include working in both salon and manufacturer settings.

As COD students, Guzman and Kelly each accomplished impressive achievements that opened doors for opportunities.

Guzman received several COD Foundation scholarships to help fund her studies.

“Here I was debating which class I should take or if I should even take a class the following

semester,” she said. “In under a week, I had enough to take four classes with books for the whole semester and had some left over for the semester after. It was the sign I was asking for that validated my decision to go back to school.”

Kelly competed in the SkillsUSA state competition in 2017 and 2018, finishing in first place in the Esthetics and Cosmetology category this year. He later went on to compete in the national championship, which he said was an amazing experience.

Guzman and Kelly gave similar advice to those considering attending COD as the next step in improving career opportunities.

“Stop denying yourself and just go out there and do whatever it takes to do whatever it is you want to do,” said Guzman. Kelly added, “Do it! COD is a great school with wonderful educators.”

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**“The affordability of COD’s program was great and I could still work my current job and go to class at night.”**

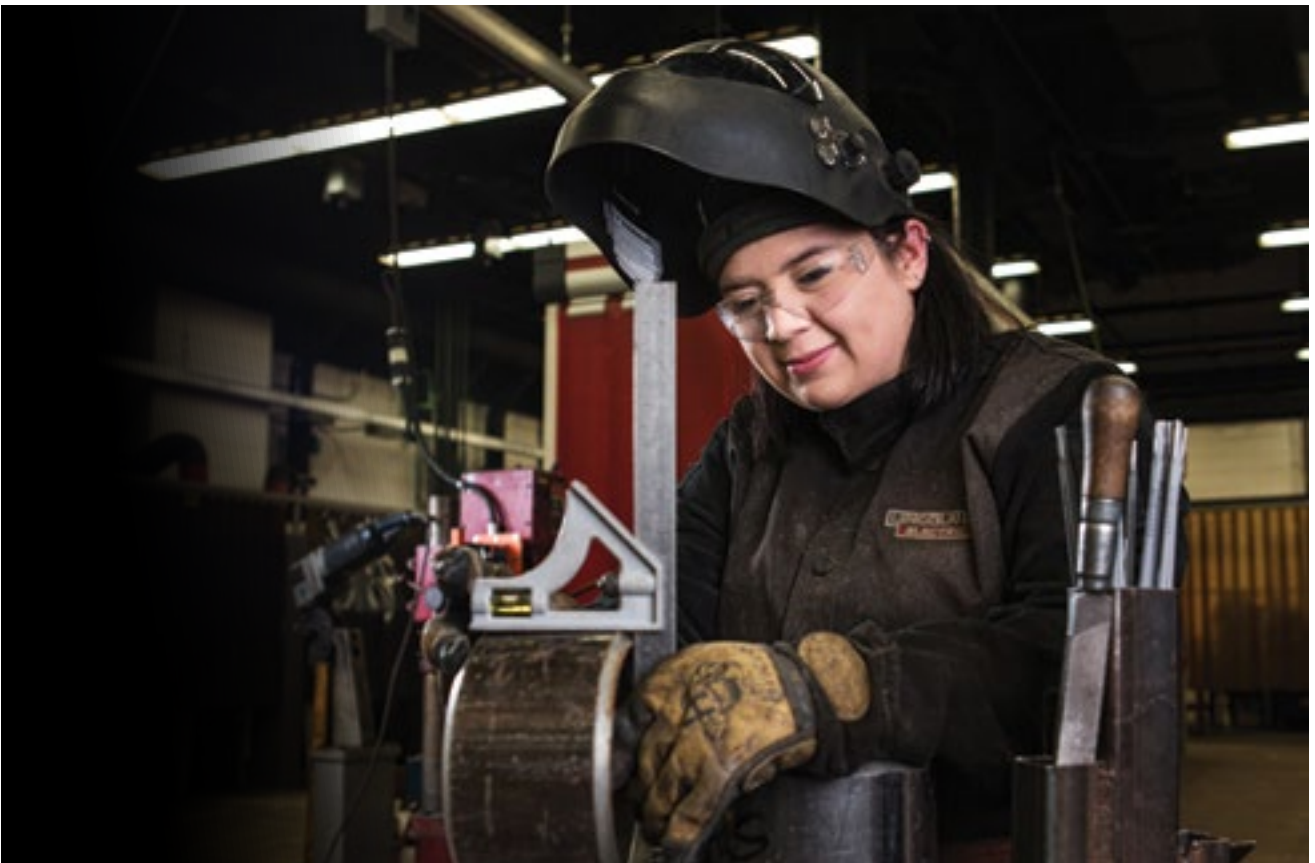
**—Cosmetology alumnus Jason Kelly**

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Jason Kelly, a graduate of COD's Cosmetology program, is a store manager at SalonCentric in Naperville, a company owned and operated by L'Oréal. (Photo by Diane Smutny/special to College of DuPage)



Having earned a Welding certificate at COD, Maggie Guzman is a welder with the UA Local 525 Plumbers, Pipefitters and Service Technicians union in Nevada. (Photo by Tori Soper/special to College of DuPage)

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## Engage

**VOL. 1, NO. 3** Published November 2018 by the Office of Marketing and Creative Services at College of DuPage

Direct all comments and questions to the editor at [kleeman@cod.edu](mailto:kleeman@cod.edu).

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College of DuPage graduate Maddy Peterson is a full-time paramedic through Metro Paramedic Services for the Elmhurst Fire Department and a part-time firefighter/paramedic for the Glen Ellyn Fire Department. See page 8 to read more about COD's Fire Science program.