Snapshots of the Class of 2012 – Their Successes and Why John Tyler Mattered

Commencement season is a time of year filled with laughter, exhilaration and possibilities. It marks an ending as our students conclude their time at John Tyler Community College and a beginning as they prepare to move into the next phase of their lives. During this time, we often hear about the graduating class as a whole and see photographs filled with a sea of caps and gowns. It’s easy to forget that behind each smile is an individual who took a very personal journey to get to this day, and that this day is just one snapshot of that graduate’s life.

Gina Cruz
Associate of Arts in Liberal Arts

When she talks about her experiences at John Tyler Community College, Gina Cruz gives a big smile and simply says, “I got my start here.” Whether or not she should go to college was never a question for Gina, who believes education is vital to getting a good job. When it was time to explore her options, she discovered Tyler was the right fit for her. John Tyler was close to home; had earned positive reviews from friends; and gave her the opportunity to start her college education, even though her grades in high school were not strong. Once at Tyler, Gina took advantage of every opportunity presented to her. She studied hard and pulled her grades up high enough to be selected for induction into the Phi Theta Kappa International Honor Society, an organization in which she’s very active. She became a tutor, was a member of the College’s 2012 General Assembly student delegation, and volunteered at numerous College events. She also found inspiration for her future career. After taking a developmental psychology class, Gina decided she wanted to work toward her doctorate in psychology, so that she can work in a school and help children. Gina says she’s nervously excited about graduating from Tyler, but she is looking forward to the future, which includes continuing her education at the University of Richmond this fall.
Shawn Fenner  
**Associate of Applied Science in Nursing**

Helping people is Shawn Fenner’s passion. So, after working for more than ten years as a writer and editor for a local newspaper, he decided to switch careers to become a nurse. Shawn says it is a career that, “will give me the chance to help people on some of the worst days of their lives.” Shawn researched his education options and chose the Nursing Program at John Tyler Community College, because he found it to be well-respected in the community. For him, the program has been challenging and eye-opening. The instructors, his classmates, and his clinical experiences have helped him learn the skills necessary to become a nurse and, at the same time, discover more about his own capabilities and interests. He calls one experience, in particular, “life-changing” – his clinical at the Children’s Hospital. Shawn says the time he spent there made him realize his dream job would involve working with children. For now though, Shawn is focused on completing his associate degree. He says, at one point, graduating seemed like a distant idea, but as it nears, that idea is taking shape. Shawn says at commencement, he’ll feel a mixture of relief and euphoria. And, while he plans to pause and enjoy the moment he walks across the stage, he realizes he’ll have to get ready for the next step. Shawn wants to enter the workforce and start working on his bachelor’s degree in nursing. He describes that scenario as the best of both worlds.

Amanda Maready  
**Associate of Science in General Studies**

Amanda Maready is animated when she talks about the impact John Tyler Community College has had on her life. When she started at John Tyler, Amanda was 17 years old and taking classes as a concurrent student. She was homeschooled, so sitting in a classroom and being taught by instructors who were not her mother was a new experience. She described those first days as “nerve-wracking”
but says the small class sizes and the personalized instruction and support she received from faculty, smoothed her transition into the world of college. Since that time, she’s learned a lot, both in and out of the classroom. In addition to eagerly tackling her courses, Amanda says she’s honed her study skills, has become a better manager of her time, and has become more sensitive to deadlines. She also immersed herself in college life by becoming a member of the Phi Theta Kappa International Honor Society, by participating in College events and trips, and by just being on campus. These experiences gave Amanda a new vision of her life. When she started at the College, her goal was to pursue a career as a dental hygienist. Now, thanks to the encouragement of her instructors, she’s decided to pursue dentistry. She’s been accepted to the Honors College at Old Dominion University, where she will study pre-dental. She wants to go to dental school at either Virginia Commonwealth University or East Carolina University and plans to join the Navy Dental Corp. Although her plans will take her to many different places, Amanda gets emotional when she talks about her strong ties to John Tyler, where she has met many wonderful people. “I will definitely be coming back. I can’t completely leave this place.”

Tamarssa Nicole Roberts
Associate of Applied Science in Business Management
Tamarssa Nicole Roberts is a juggler. She is a single mother, who works full-time and goes to school full-time. She’s also determined – determined to get her associate degree, determined to complete her bachelor’s degree, and determined to inspire her son. Tamarssa says, originally, her decision to continue her education was influenced by her employer, which required its workers to possess a certain amount of college credit. Tamarssa says John Tyler Community College ended up being a blessing because it was close to both her home and her job, and because she’s been able to complete most of her degree by taking online classes. She describes those courses as challenging, but says she’s thankful she had them as an option. Throughout this journey, Tamarssa says she realized that earning a degree would not only help her not only in her current job; it would help her, one day, fulfill her dream of owning her own event planning business. When asked about graduating, Tamrassa says it seems too good to be true, but she admits, she’s not slowing down. She’s already taking classes at Liberty University, and after this semester, will be just ten classes away from earning a bachelor’s degree in business administration. To those who wonder if they can handle the demands of college, Tamarrsa says she’s proof that you’re never too old to get an education. “Don’t sit back and do nothing. Take a class. Just try it.”
Jerann Robinson
Associate of Visual Arts, Visual Communications Specialization

At eight years old, Jerann Robinson discovered his love of drawing. As the years went by, that enjoyment grew, and he realized that technology could be part of the creative process. So, when he explored his college options, John Tyler Community College's Visual Arts Program was appealing. Jerann says the program, along with the College's proximity to his home, the recommendations he received from family who had attended classes at Tyler, and his high school counselor's suggestion that community college offered a more affordable education, led him to choose John Tyler. Jerann says the experience has opened doors for him, by giving him a vision for his life. He already knew that he liked to teach and work with children, something he discovered when he became a substitute teacher in Hopewell. But while at Tyler, he found he could take that interest in other directions. A business course sparked an idea, and with the skills learned in that class, Jerann developed a business plan that he hopes to one day turn into a youth center. Before he does that, however, he wants to earn a bachelor’s degree in teaching from William and Mary or Virginia Commonwealth University and get some real-world experience. He believes he will then be able to use all he’s learned and experienced to make his business plan a reality. He says that’s all thanks to John Tyler. “JTCC helped me come up with a business idea, helped me decide what I’m going to do with my graphic design skills, and helped me get to know myself better.”