Snapshots of the Class of 2013 – 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.

Read about some of our graduates below, and visit www.jtcc.edu/commencementmediakit to watch a video in which they talk about their experiences at John Tyler Community College, share what it’s like to be graduating, and offer advice to those just starting college.

Christopher Deloglos
Associate of Science in Engineering

Christopher Deloglos is curious by nature. He likes to know how things work, so he loves science, and he says that’s probably what got him interested in engineering. Christopher, who was home schooled, began taking classes at John Tyler Community College while finishing his high school work. When he completed high school early, he decided to continue at Tyler. He was just 15 at the time, and he liked Tyler’s proximity to his home. Christopher says he soon felt connected to the College thanks to his professors and to other students who offered advice and pushed him to succeed. His academic achievements earned him a membership in the Beta Omicron Omicron Chapter of the Phi Theta Kappa honor society as well as a Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) scholarship. Christopher says the variety of classes and people at Tyler have made his first college experiences great ones. Even as he excitedly prepares for graduation day at Tyler, he’s looking ahead to the next step – Virginia Commonwealth University, where he plans to double major in engineering and business administration. After that, he’d like to earn a master’s degree and possibly a doctorate. His dream job? To manage a Fortune 500 engineering company.
Chad Doebler
Associate of Applied Science in Nursing
Chad Doebler’s life is going in a new direction, and he couldn’t be more thrilled. Chad is becoming a nurse, and he is anxious to be out in the field, full-time, helping others. As a member of the Class of 2013, he soon will be. Chad admits that he wasn’t always this excited about his career. Before deciding to pursue a career in health care, he worked in engineering and in software. He found neither satisfying. So, he sat down with his wife, talked about options, and honed in on nursing. Chad said he chose to attend John Tyler Community College because its Nursing Program had an excellent reputation in the community and because of economics – Tyler was simply more affordable. He laughs when he talks about the challenges of being a father, husband and full-time nursing student while working part time at a hospital. “It takes organization,” says Chad. It also takes emotional toughness. “Nursing is tough. This program is not stress free and neither is the career.” If you understand that, Chad says, then you can succeed – especially when you have a supportive family and you have dedicated faculty who provide you with the instruction needed to get ready for the real world. As he talks about graduating from John Tyler, his grin gets even bigger. “It feels awesome,” he exclaims. “You know what’s most gratifying? One of my professors told me that I’m now a peer!” So, what’s next for Chad? He is going to start a new job in the progressive care unit at Bon Secours St. Francis Health System, and in the fall, he plans to start working on his bachelor’s degree in nursing.

Andrew Hart
Associate of Arts in Liberal Arts, International Studies Specialization
Andrew Hart didn’t set out to achieve a first, but he’s proud that he has, and he hopes what he’s done will inspire others. Andrew is one of two students in the Class of 2013 who will become the first to graduate with an associate degree from John Tyler Community College before graduating from high school. Andrew says his journey was a merging of two plans. Because he is one of four children, his parents wanted him to attend a two-year college to save money. Andrew, however, wanted to go to college with his friends. So, he began looking for ways to earn college credits early. Through a combination of classes – dual enrollment, concurrent and AP, he was able to earn the credits needed to graduate with a Liberal Arts degree with a specialization in international studies. At times, juggling high school and college was difficult, but Andrew says he learned to overcome the challenges by managing his time well. What may surprise many is that Andrew also was able to schedule time to be a tutor at John Tyler, to volunteer at the school where his father works, to participate in honor societies, and to have fun with his friends. Andrew says the experience has been wonderful because it’s given him the opportunity to
find out what college is like, and it’s helped him prepare for what next. “I am proud of what I’ve done. I’ve worked really hard,” says Andrew. “I hope others realize they can do something just like this, even if it is in an unconventional way.” Andrew also says graduation is a way for him to say thank you to all those who supported him along the way – his family, the professors and staff at John Tyler, and the staff from his high school. After graduating from Tyler in May, Andrew will celebrate his graduation from Clover Hill High School in June, and then enjoy a vacation. By fall, he will be back at school. He will attend Virginia Commonwealth University and would like to double major in political science/international relations and homeland security. He’s then thinking about working on a master’s degree. His ultimate goal is to work for the State Department.

Emily McGee
Associate of General Studies

Emily McGee knows that in order to succeed in fashion, you must challenge conventional thinking and get creative. That’s just the kind of attitude she adopted when she decided to try to graduate from college and high school simultaneously. Emily says soon after she started high school, she discovered that she wanted more. So, she sat down with her mother, and together, they designed a plan that would allow Emily to earn an associate degree while completing high school. Emily eventually ended up at John Tyler Community College, where she says she found great professors and a diverse atmosphere. She also discovered the College’s flexible class schedule, which she says helped make it possible for her to balance high school and college courses. Emily says at times the workload was stressful, and she admits she had less free time with her friends. But she says that is okay with her because her education is her main focus. Now that graduation is approaching, Emily says she’s able to take a deep breath. “I’m really excited,” she laughs. “I haven’t had a free summer in three years.” Emily also is proud to be one of two students who are marking a first for John Tyler. They will be the first to graduate with an associate degree from Tyler before graduating high school. In June, Emily will graduate from James River High School, and in the fall, she will start classes at Virginia Commonwealth University. There, she will pursue a degree in fashion merchandising. She says graduating now with her associate degree now will allow her to turn her attention to her passion – the fashion business. She hopes it will also mean that she’ll have more time to explore internships and study abroad opportunities that will give her a leg up in a competitive industry. When asked what she would like to do with her education, Emily says she could see herself owning a boutique and creating her own clothing designs. But, that dream could change. With a twinkle in her eye, Emily says, anything is possible. “I want to experience life and see where it takes me.”
Julianna Morgan  
**Associate of Science in General Studies**  
A lot can change in three years. That’s what Julianna Morgan discovered during her time at John Tyler Community College. Julianna says when she started taking classes at Tyler three years ago she was a very different person. At the time, she was a 27-year old single mother with a one-year old son. She says she lacked confidence and was not sure she could succeed. She doubted herself academically, in part because she had dropped out of high school. But, after getting her GED and becoming a mother, she felt she needed more for herself and for her little boy. So, she gathered her courage, drove to John Tyler Community College, enrolled, and began her college career. Julianna admits the first day of class was tough and full of anxiety, but, she says, that quickly changed thanks to the encouragement she received from the College’s faculty and staff. She began to overcome her fears and doubts, and soon, she discovered something she didn’t expect – a love for history. Once ignited, that passion blossomed. She jumped at the chance to be part of the College’s History Club and has held positions as its vice president and president. She also got involved in Student Council and volunteered and participated in a number of College activities. She says while at Tyler, she’s made new connections, enjoyed the College’s sense of diversity, and gained confidence in her abilities. She also excelled academically, and in 2013, earned a coveted spot on the Top Ten All-Virginia Academic Team, a recognition that showcases the best community college students in the Commonwealth as ranked by USA Today, The Phi Theta Kappa honor society, and the American Association of Community Colleges. Julianna describes graduating from John Tyler as a proud and emotional time. And, although she’s looking forward to celebrating this achievement, she’s also looking ahead to her next goal - a bachelor’s degree in history from Virginia Commonwealth University. After that, she hopes to continue her education in history by earning a master’s and eventually a doctorate degree.

Donna Simmons  
**Associate of Applied Science in Human Services, Pre-Social Work Specialization**  
For Donna Simmons, the road to a college education has taken some unexpected detours. Donna started going to college immediately after high school, but she says she just didn’t have the focus she needed. Instead, she turned her attention toward raising a family and working. But, throughout the years, she never stopped thinking about going back to school. With the encouragement of her husband, she decided to enroll at John Tyler Community College. Sadly, just as she was starting her college career, her husband passed away. The loss was painful, but Donna says she knew her husband wanted her to achieve her dreams so she continued on her path to a college degree. At first, she thought she’d pursue a degree in accounting, but after a few classes, Donna said she realized the career didn’t fit her
personality. After realizing she had a passion for helping people, Donna changed direction and enrolled in John Tyler Community College’s Pre-Nursing curriculum. She was accepted into the College’s Nursing Program, where she began the challenge of trying to juggle nursing classes with being a single mother of three and working full time. She used her personal and vacation time from work to attend class, but she fell a few points shy of making it through one of her classes. Donna says she was disappointed by the set-back, but she was not willing to give up. She did some research and worked with the College’s counselors and discovered the Human Services program. She quickly got involved in all facets of the program by volunteering her time with various organizations, interning at the YWCA, taking on the role of president for the College’s Human Services Club, participating in Student Council, and representing Tyler at a Student Leadership Conference. She says John Tyler has made all of this possible through its caring faculty, who bring many perspectives to the classroom, and its helpful staff, who understand the challenges faced by the College’s diverse student population. She says her upcoming graduation is bittersweet. She’s ecstatic to have reached this milestone, but she is sad to leave John Tyler. Even so, Donna says she knows she needs to keep moving forward. Her next step is to earn a bachelor’s degree in human services, which she plans to do through an online program offered by Bluefield College.

**Thomas Wise**  
**Associate of Science in Business Administration**  
Thomas Wise refuses to be part of a negative statistic, and he’s worked hard to make sure that doesn’t happen. Thomas grew up in the foster care system, and he knows that far too often, children in that system don’t graduate from high school and even fewer finish college. But, Thomas was determined to beat the odds, and he is. In May, he will finish his associate degree, becoming the first student in the John Tyler Community College Great Expectations program to graduate. Great Expectations is a program that provides much-needed support to youth who are aging out of the foster care system. This support comes in many forms. Sometimes it’s helping a student navigate the financial aid or class scheduling process, and sometimes it’s helping a student find transportation or a place to live. The support also comes in the form of a mentor, who offers encouragement, advice, and when necessary, a little nudge to get back on track. Thomas says the support he received through Great Expectations has been critical to his success, especially when he realized he might want to change his degree focus. Originally, Thomas planned to go into engineering. He found the program to be challenging and the material and instructors to be interesting. But, then came a surprise. He got a job as a retail merchandiser, and he discovered he loved the work. Thomas says he had been shy in high school, so he was amazed to learn that he enjoyed sales and customer service work. His mentor encouraged him along the way, and with her help, he transitioned out of the Engineering program and into Business Administration. She’s also helped him plan for his next academic steps – a bachelor’s degree at Virginia Commonwealth University.