Snapshots of the Class of 2014

Renato Arenas
Associate of Science in Business Administration

When he graduated from high school Chesterfield County in 2009, Renato Arenas couldn’t afford college, so he took a job as a mechanic. A year later, realizing he wanted a different career, he re-evaluated his life. He thought about how hard he worked in high school and the good grades he earned there and decided it was time to continue his education. Renato says John Tyler Community College was the perfect choice because tuition is affordable, the College is close to home, and it offers a great education. He had completed most of the requirements for the General Studies degree program when a trip to Peru to visit family prompted a change in his plans. During the trip, Renato got to observe his aunt as she worked in a business where she was part of a team. That encounter was eye-opening. “I realized I was really into critical thinking and problem solving and that I wanted that in my career” says Renato. So, when he returned home, he switched majors and moved into Tyler’s Business Administration transfer program. Renato says he’s grateful for his time at John Tyler because it’s given him an education that will help him succeed at a four-year institution and in the workforce. He says it’s also allowed him to meet new people and to participate in a variety of activities. He represented John Tyler as part of a student delegation to the General Assembly, and he will be the student speaker at commencement. When asked how it feels to be graduating, Renato expresses mixed emotions. “I’m excited to be completely done with it, but I know it’s just a stepping stone to the next thing,” he says. “I’m really grateful for John Tyler. I’m always going to keep it in my heart.” And, what’s Renato’s next step? He plans to transfer to a four-year college or university to complete his bachelor’s degree before going into international business. His long-range goal is to earn a master’s degree and to one day manage his own team.

Leslie and Emma Prigge
Associate of Applied Arts in Visual Arts, Photography and Film Specialization

Leslie Prigge and her daughter, Emma, share much in common. They both love art and want to pursue careers in photography. They are best friends who push and inspire each other. They know each other so well that they finish each other’s sentences. And, they’re each about to earn an Associate of Applied Arts in Visual Arts with a Photography and Film Specialization from
John Tyler Community College. When the two decided to go to college, they began exploring options. For Leslie, time was of the essence because her husband is in the military, and she knew she had two years before his next assignment would take them to a new post. So, she and Emma visited the education center at Fort Lee looking for answers. There, they discovered John Tyler Community College and its two-year degree in visual arts, and they signed up for classes using G.I. Bill benefits. The two immediately immersed themselves in the program, which allowed them to explore many forms or art — not just photography. They learned the intricacies of their cameras and discovered the nuances that go into creating an awe-inspiring photograph — all skills they will need for their careers. Emma plans to become a nature photographer, educating people about the beauty of wildlife and plants through photographs. Leslie hopes to use what she’s learned to capture the quirky and fun personalities of pets. As they reflect on their time at Tyler and look ahead to the future, they talk about the excitement they feel about what’s next. When asked how they feel about their accomplishments, emotions rise to the surface as Emma proudly points out that graduating from Tyler means so much more to her mother. That’s because Leslie didn’t graduate from high school. In 2008, about a year before Emma graduated high school, Leslie earned her GED. Because of that, she and her daughter were able to go to Tyler together. “This time, I’ll actually get to achieve a bigger goal of finishing college and walking across the stage,” says Leslie. “And, I’ll also get to do it with my daughter. That makes it so much better.”