

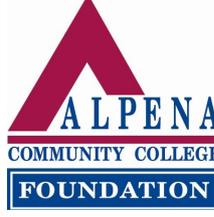
ACC News You Should Know



John M. Grant Frontrunner Award Winners



Besser Award Recipients Build Bright Futures



Saluting Scholarship Donors & Recipients



Graduation: The Movie

ACC Frontrunners Lead the Way for Nontraditional Students



Cindy Tchorzynski



Jacob Braman

Community colleges welcome students in all stages of life, which makes campus one of the most diverse places in the area. While Alpena Community College gets its fair share of students who, like students at four-year universities, have just graduated from high school, ACC also has a large number of “nontraditional students”, who have spent at least five years after high school doing things like working or raising children before seeking higher education. These students bring a very valuable perspective to education that often differs from the perspective of traditional students.

Presented annually to a graduating male and female student who have each demonstrated unusual dedication in pursuit of higher education, the John M. Grant Frontrunner Award salutes “non-traditional” students who deal not only with the usual challenges of college studies, but also juggle home, family, and work responsibilities as well. There isn’t time for the usual “college experience” for these students, but they are enthusiastic about learning and bring with them a wealth of personal expertise and strength, which they gladly share to enhance the learning of others. These “frontrunners” often lead the way on campus and illustrate the value of education, having chosen to make sacrifices to pursue it, and in the process of becoming educated men and women, they have transformed their lives.

This year’s recipients of the John M. Grant Frontrunner Awards are Cynthia Tchorzynski and Jacob Braman.

When Tchorzynski graduated from Atlanta High School in 1992, she said she had, “my diploma in one hand and my seven-month-old son in the other.” Attending college wasn’t something she considered, but a number of years later when an employer encouraged her to take classes at ACC, she gave it some thought and decided to take a chance.

Tchorzynski’s college journey began in the spring of 1998, when she enrolled as a full-time student at ACC while still working 30 hours a week and raising her son.

“His bedtime was the start of my study time,” she said.

After three semesters and 40 credit hours completed at ACC, Tchorzynski was presented with an offer she couldn’t refuse: a full-time job that would provide financial stability for her family. By this time, Tchorzynski was totally committed to school and her dream of attaining a teaching certificate. But as so many nontraditional college students know, dreams don’t pay the rent or put food on the table. School would have to wait.

“I worked ten years and left the organization in 2011 with a small pension. It was five years later while working at my current full-time job at LafargeHolcim that I decided to revisit my idea of getting a degree.”

Tchorzynski contacted the college to see what her options were and learned that the 40 credit hours she had earned more than 15 years earlier could still be used towards an associate degree.

“The time lost with my son, the late nights of studying and earning good grades was not done for nothing. I (reenrolled) in the fall of 2016 and completed in the summer of 2019, earning another twenty-five credits,” Tchorzynski said, noting that she started college the first time when her son was a young child and finally finished with her daughter, Shelby Seaver, who is graduating alongside her mother this spring.

Tchorzynski said her associate degree was more about accomplishing something she started than chasing a dream.

“I went back to college the second time to complete what I thought I couldn’t do. I did not earn a teaching degree but earned so much more. I earned self-respect for myself.”

Jacob Braman's long college journey has been marked by war, injury, and a family emergency. Now, however, it is also marked by recognition as a John M. Grant Frontrunner.

Like many of today's young adults, Jacob's life and world outlook has been affected by that sunny Tuesday morning in September, 2001, when life as we knew it changed. Then a typical college student, Jacob was making plans for the future when tragedy struck in New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington D. C. For him, though, 9/11 is not just a day to remember where he was when he heard the news America was under attack.

"Following the terror attacks on September 11th, 2001, I withdrew from college to join the U.S. Army, where I served for over five years as an Infantryman in the 101st Airborne Division," Braman explained. "After my active duty obligation expired, I served in the U.S. Army Reserves as a human intelligence collector for nine years until I was injured in my civilian job as a communications tower climber."

The injuries Braman sustained ended his career in the U.S. Army Reserves and left him unable to perform the physically intense manual labor to which he was accustomed—and which paid his bills. Faced with the challenge of continuing to provide for his family, which includes his wife and four children, Braman decided to return to college to get a degree.

"Shortly after I began attending classes, my wife and I discovered that we were pregnant with our fourth child. With a full-time course load and an infant son at home, my time and attention were in high demand. At three-weeks-old, our youngest son was diagnosed with pyloric stenosis and had to undergo emergency surgery. My ACC instructors at the time were very understanding of the need for my absence and made certain that I was able to keep up with the required coursework."

Braman is enrolled in the Alpena Community College/Northwood University 3 + 1 cooperative, which allows ACC students the opportunity to attend classes in Alpena for three years and Northwood for one year to obtain a Bachelor of Business Administration degree.

A future accountant, Braman is appreciative of the recognition of his instructors that the Frontrunner Award signifies.

"I am honored beyond words to have been nominated for the John M. Grant Front Runner Award, and I am thankful for the truly enriching experience my education at ACC has provided."

Besser Award Building Block to Bright Futures

One of the best things about a community college is that allows students to be as involved in campus life as they want. Some students are there to take a class or two at a time, while other students seem to use the college as a replacement for family, spending so much time on campus engaged with other students and staff that they start to become an integral part of the college itself.

Kennedy Chmura and Todd Graham chose the latter route at Alpena Community College, and ACC is a better place because of it. The college is acknowledging the contributions of these two outstanding graduating Lumberjacks by choosing them as the winners of the Anna and Jesse Besser Award, which honors the male and female graduating student who have made outstanding contributions to the life of the college through scholarship, leadership and expression of responsibility in solving social problems. Chmura and Graham will each receive a citation and a \$500 stipend.

An Alaska native, Chmura is a newly minted registered nurse, who is the outgoing president of the Alpena Community College Student Nurses Association (SNA). Under her leadership, the SNA undertook a number of fundraisers and educational events to benefit and highlight ACC's outstanding nursing program. A notable outreach event Chmura led the SNA in producing was the Teddy Bear Picnic, during which firefighters, policemen, and search-and-rescue personnel assisted ACC nursing students in educating area children and families in basic medical care and safety. Active in the *Healthy Futures Start Here* project to transform Van Lare Hall into a state-of-the-art medical care education facility, Chmura did many interviews to help spread the word for the groundbreaking ceremony, during which she gave a speech, and helped raise money for the project on Giving Tuesday.

Chmura will be transferring to a four-year university and will work as a nurse while earning a bachelor's degree. Her future goals include going to medical school to become a plastic and reconstructive craniofacial surgeon.

In reflecting on her journey at ACC, Chmura feels a great sense of accomplishment.

"I am proud to be a graduating registered nurse from Alpena Community College. Nothing else brings me more joy than to look back over the past three years that I have been a student here and see not only the impact that I had on this school and community, but the impact that it had on me as well."

Like Chmura, Graham also has much about which to be proud.

Graham, who is graduating with two associate degrees, is a non-



Kennedy Chmura



Todd Graham

traditional student who will continue his education at Saginaw Valley State University in the fall as a psychology major and creative writing minor. Turning his life around following a sentence of 50 months in prison for embezzlement, Graham returned to college after a thirty-year hiatus. With barely a cent to his name when he came to Alpena two-and-a-half years ago, Graham knew education was his key to a better life, so he enrolled at ACC, pursued financial aid opportunities with the Alpena Community College Foundation, and went on to carry a 4.0 grade point average throughout his studies at the college. In addition to a stellar academic record, Graham was a member of Sigma Zeta Math and Science Honor Society and the Nu Omicron chapter of Phi Theta Kappa Academic Honor Society, in which he served as the media officer and was a two-time All Michigan Academic Team member. Graham founded the club ACC Takes Pride and acted as the group's secretary and treasurer. He was a member of the Student Leadership Commission, Language Society, and the ACC Players Club, serving as the latter's president. Interested in politics, Graham was also the media officer in Educated Voters at Alpena Community College.

After having only called Alpena home for less than three years, Graham says the town has a permanent place in his heart.

"I feel Alpena has adopted me, and I desire to keep Alpena home. After completing my master's degree, I will return to Alpena to work as a therapist and strive towards my goal of publication of my writing projects, which include a series of children's books, poetry, and a science fiction novel trilogy."

Alpena Community College has benefited tremendously from the contributions of both Chmura and Graham during their time on campus and looks forward to what they accomplish in the future.



ACC Foundation Honors Scholarship Donors & Recipients

For decades, the Alpena Community College Foundation has held an annual celebration bringing together scholarship donors and student recipients. It's a special time when those who were awarded scholarships can connect with the people who believe in the students enough to invest in their education. The event is marked with thought-provoking words from a guest speaker that may include a current scholarship recipient or ACC alumnus. It's a meaningful event donors and students look forward to each year.

Because COVID-19 made such a gathering unsafe to hold, the ACC Foundation is honoring scholarship recipients and donors in a different way this year. We hope you'll enjoy hearing from selected scholarship recipients as they put into words just what it means to them to receive the gift of education from donors. The ripple effect from generosity like this positively affects not only the families of the scholarship recipients, but the community as a whole.



[Click picture to view scholarship thank you video.](#)

We've also included scholarship recipient Todd Graham's speech, which would have been delivered at this year's scholarship luncheon. Todd shares just how much the investment in his education by donors improved his life and will give him the momentum to earn the tools to improve the lives of others by paying the gift given to him forward.



[Click picture to view Todd Graham's speech.](#)



Commencement: The Movie

Alpena Community College's commencement ceremony is the pinnacle of a week of special honors and celebration. Typically, there is the nursing department's pinning ceremony to look forward to, the art department's community exhibition, ACC Foundation's scholarship luncheon, and awards that are determined before the big night at Park Arena, where students graduating with certificates and associate degrees gather to be recognized for their accomplishments.

This year, however, is different. In what will certainly be one of Alpena Community College's most memorable commencement ceremonies, this year's celebration will be significant in that nobody will attend the ceremony. Because the COVID-19 pandemic makes public

gatherings unsafe, Alpena Community College has produced a virtual graduation ceremony, with all the traditional elements of commencement that make the event so special. Participating in the 2020 Alpena Community College Commencement is:

- ACC President Dr. Donald MacMaster
- Wendy Brooks, Community of Christ minister
- ACC Board of Trustees President John Briggs
- Michael Kelley, ACC instructor, with the commencement address
- Student speaker Kennedy Chmura
- ACC Foundation Executive Director Brenda Herman announcing the 2020 Distinguished Graduate Award
- Jesse & Anna Besser Awards and John M. Grant Frontrunner Awards recipients
- ACC Vice-President of Instruction Deborah Bayer

While we wish we were gathered together to celebrate and mark our students' auspicious accomplishments, celebrating separately is the safest way to ensure we will all have bright futures.



[Click the picture, above, to view the 2020 ACC Commencement.](#)

Thank you to ACC Communications Technician Jess Haselhuhn, who worked tirelessly to produce a virtual commencement ceremony that honors the hard work of our students, faculty, and staff this year.

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