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Graduates find new direction at CMC Steamboat

Mike McKibbin
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Matt Stensland/File

Colorado Mountain College graduates thank their friends and family during the 2017 graduation ceremony at the Steamboat Grand Resort Hotel.

STEAMBOAT SPRINGS — A single mother of two children who lost most of the mobility of her arm found a new direction at Colorado Mountain College Steamboat Springs and is receiving her degree at the local campus's commencement ceremonies Saturday.

Also at the ceremony, the student speaker is focusing on how CMC put "the community in community college." Another 2018 graduate recalls a NASA honor as "the time of my life."

Grad transforms grief into helping others

Sherry Perez Kinsel is receiving her associate of arts in social work, with a 3.5 GPA. A nontraditional student and single mother of two children, she injured an arm in a work-related accident when she was a butcher. While she was attending CMC, her grandmother, aunt and mother passed away.

"I want to be a crisis counselor because I'm really good at helping people," she said. "I wanted to do what I could to help others get their lives in order."

Coming from a low-income family, Perez Kinsel, 44, is also a graduate of the Routt to Work program that focuses on building the self-sufficiency of Routt County residents. She said that the program and Amy Phillips, coordinator of the TRIO programs at CMC Steamboat Springs, helped Perez Kinsel to "find my courage and value within myself to go back to work and do what I want to do."

The federally funded TRIO programs help students from families that typically earn less than \$36,000 per year and/or are the first in their family to graduate from college. Perez Kinsel plans to seek a bachelor of science in social work through distance learning at Metropolitan State University in Denver.

'Close-knit college'

Amber Kuligowski is earning an associate of arts in communication and is the today's student commencement speaker. Born in Steamboat Springs, she grew up in the Hershey, Pennsylvania, area.

After high school graduation, Kuligowski, 19, sought out Colorado colleges but was looking for

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an affordable option for out-of-state students.

"And I knew this was a really close-knit community and college," she said.

Kuligowski was a senior resident assistant for Hill Hall, the campus residential hall, as well as a conference assistant last summer.

The theme of her commencement speech is how the people at CMC "really put the community in community college," she said.

After graduation, Kuligowski — who is engaged to be married — plans to start her "dream job" as office manager for the Sk8 Church in Steamboat Springs, where she interned while taking classes. That included helping to mentor at-risk youth and participating in several youth mission trips. Sk8 Church is a nonprofit that offers a place for youth in a safe, sober environment.

Affordable start includes NASA program

Today, Justin Olson receives his associate of general studies in engineering, with a 3.9 GPA. Olson, along with another CMC student, Dallas Capozza, traveled to NASA's Johnson Space Center in February through the NASA Community College Aerospace Scholars program.

After a five-week, online program, they spent four days with NASA engineers and others to learn more about careers in science and engineering. Students also formed teams to establish fictional Mars exploration companies and developed and tested a prototype Mars rover.

"It was the time of my life," Olson said.

He grew up in a Chicago suburb, graduated from high school and worked in a distribution center. That's where he was motivated to seek an engineering degree.

"They were looking for ways to increase efficiency and I started looking into things like energy efficiency," he said.

As a first-generation, low-income student, Olson was looking for an affordable option, and learned that CMC was one of the few colleges to offer an associate degree in engineering. At CMC he served as the 2017-18 vice president of the Steamboat chapter of Phi Theta Kappa, the international academic honor society for community college students.

After he graduates from CMC, Olson is planning to seek bachelor's and master's degrees in engineering.

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68° F Fair
Wind 0 mph North

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU
73° F	75° F	71° F	75° F	74° F

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