

Sustainability in everything Julia Farwell does

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Julia Farwell gets ready for a hug from CMC Campus Dean and Vice President Heather Exby at graduation on the Spring Valley campus while Kevin Hillerman looks on. Farwell was named outstanding Bachelor's graduate during the ceremony.

E P Kosmicki

SPRING VALLEY — When it comes to sustainability, there may not be another Colorado Mountain College student who has done more to make a difference than Julia Farwell. Her five-year journey ended with a Bachelor of Arts in sustainability studies at Saturday's commencement ceremony at the Spring Valley campus.

More than 1,000 graduates are receiving degrees and certificates from Colorado Mountain College May 2-6, at 10 different graduation ceremonies held throughout the CMC district. Graduates from Aspen to Glenwood Springs could choose to participate in ceremonies at the college's Spring Valley campus.

After growing up in Danville, Illinois, about 120 miles south of Chicago, Farwell earned a bachelor's degree in anthropology from the University of Illinois and moved to Carbondale in 1996. For 16 years, she worked in the area's hospitality industry, including management.

"I decided I wanted to do something more meaningful with my life," she said, so in 2012 she worked for Osage Gardens and took a sustainable agriculture class at Sustainable Settings. It was at Sustainable Settings where she met CMC sustainability students and Adrian Fielder, then instructional chair of sustainability studies and director of the college's Lappala Center in Carbondale.

Those experiences piqued her interest in the field of sustainability and two years later she took her first class in the program: Leadership, Ethics and Social Responsibility.

"I was hooked," she said.

Another factor that pushed her toward sustainability was growing up playing in the woods in her backyard in Danville.

"My mom instilled a respect for nature in me," Farwell said.

Farwell originally wanted to get a certificate in sustainability from CMC, but her counselor urged her to seek a bachelor's degree.

"So I took one to three classes a semester," she said. "That's why it took as long as it did. But it was really rewarding. CMC staff and faculty are really caring; they are passionate about helping students with whatever it is they need to be able to succeed."

Farwell had an internship at EverGreen ZeroWaste and joined the Carbondale Environmental Board. She initiated several sustainability efforts for the Town of Carbondale including expanding waste diversion options at annual waste-disposal days and helped the town adopt an Ecological Bill of Rights. She also brought source-separated glass recycling to South Canyon's recycling facility.

She volunteered for numerous activities that helped to change how the Spring Valley campus embraces sustainable practices. She organized zero-waste events at CMC, convinced staff to install healthy food vending machines, and helped establish composting at the Spring Valley and Glenwood Springs campuses. That led to similar changes at Morgridge Commons in downtown Glenwood Springs. Those changes helped the college divert the waste it sends to landfills.

In naming Farwell this year's Outstanding Bachelor's Student at the Spring Valley campus, program staff have noted that she "embodies sustainability in everything she does."

Along with her classes, Farwell has worked part-time since 2017 for the City of Aspen's Environmental Health and Sustainability Department. Her boss is Liz O'Connell Chapman, also an adjunct faculty member in the college's sustainability studies program.

With her degree, Farwell said she has future plans to spend a year with the AmeriCorps program and seek her master's degree in communication.

"I want to combine communication with sustainability so I can engage diverse groups of people with sustainable initiatives more effectively," Farwell said. She has already signed up for some communication and new media classes for fall semester.

Farwell praised O'Connell Chapman, as well as Johann Aberger, associate professor of outdoor education, and Adrian Fielder, now Spring Valley assistant dean of instruction, for helping guide and motivate her toward completing her degree. She also praised Kevin Hillmer-Pegram, Spring Valley's full time sustainability professor, for his efforts in making "real life" projects part of his courses.

"The program is very experiential, very hands-on, so you don't have to wait until you graduate before you put what you learn to use," Farwell said. "The small classes and the student interaction were great, too. I've really enjoyed this journey. It's been such a joy."