

TRI-C®

# TIMES

## MANY ROADS LEAD TO TRI-C

Cuyahoga  
Community  
College



IN THIS ISSUE P6:  
THE COLLEGE'S PRESENCE GOES  
BEYOND ITS FOUR CAMPUSES

P16:  
FROM MILITARY SERVICE  
TO A CAREER IN  
CONSTRUCTION

P20:  
GLOBAL TRAVELS SHAPE  
TEACHING CAREER



# Keep Leveling Up

Better skills. Better job. **Better life.**

## Ready to take your ambition to the next level?

A College that won't slow you down, Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C®) will propel you forward with in-demand skills to make you stand out in the job market.

We can even help you launch and grow your own business.

Tri-C's short-term credentials, transfer degrees and job-ready programs will skill you up with the knowledge to make your next move.

So keep moving forward. Keep leveling up. Keep your eye on the prize. Keep after that dream.

Tri-C® Where futures begin<sup>SM</sup>

[tri-c.edu](http://tri-c.edu) | 216-987-6000



# PRESIDENT'S Message

## TO OUR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS:

Where is Tri-C?

Maybe that seems like a question with a self-evident answer. In our 60-plus years of operation, Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C®) has been an educational destination for more than 1 million people in Cuyahoga County and beyond. Our campuses are easy to find, and there is a good chance that you or someone you know has attended classes at one of them.

Tri-C is anchored by our four campuses in Cleveland, Highland Hills, Parma and Westlake. But even with this expansive footprint, our presence extends much farther.



**IN THIS WINTER 2024 ISSUE OF *TRI-C TIMES*, YOU'LL READ ABOUT THE MANY ROADS THAT LEAD TO TRI-C, FROM CITIES AND NEIGHBORHOODS ACROSS NORTHEAST OHIO.**

You'll learn about our Access Centers, educational hubs created to engage residents in underserved areas of our community. You'll also learn more about our workforce partnerships that provide training for employees at partner organizations, including Amazon, the Greater Cleveland RTA, the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District, Nestlé and Norman Noble Inc.

You'll discover our many community programs and partnerships, including Women in Transition and the Greater Cleveland Food Bank Community Resource Center, along with our outreach initiatives for middle and high school students.

Tri-C also has a robust Veteran and Military Connected Services program, which helped U.S. Navy veteran Randal Figueroa start on the path toward a college degree. You can read his story and learn more about our veterans' program in this issue's alumni feature.

The dedication of our faculty and staff allows us to reach students throughout the region. In this issue's faculty feature, you'll meet Bhavna Thakkar, an inspiring and passionate associate professor of psychology who brings — quite literally — a world of experience to her classroom.

Our locations, our programs and our people are all essential in making Tri-C a place where every student in every zip code can receive an education that leads to a stable career and a better life for themselves and their families. But the work is not done. It is our ongoing mission to continue finding new ways to provide educational access for all who seek it.

We are proud of where we are, but we are even more excited about where we're going.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "MABA". The signature is fluid and stylized, with a long horizontal line extending from the end.

Michael A. Baston, J.D., Ed.D.  
President, Cuyahoga Community College

# IN THIS ISSUE:

# 6

# MANY ROADS LEAD TO TRI-C

### EDITOR

Anthony Moujaes

### MANAGING EDITOR

Jarrold Zickefoose

### ASSISTANT EDITOR

Erik Cassano

### COPY EDITORS

Noelle Bye

Dylan Weese

### WRITERS

Noelle Bye

Erik Cassano

Anthony Moujaes

Jarrold Zickefoose

### ART DIRECTOR

Debbie Benz

### PHOTOGRAPHERS

Noelle Bye

McKinley Wiley

Cody York

### ILLUSTRATOR

Eric Wheeler

# 16



### TABLE of CONTENTS

President's Message .....	3
Upfront.....	5
Many Roads Lead to Tri-C.....	6
Serving Those Who Served .....	14
Alumni Profile: Randal Figueroa .....	16
Faculty Profile: Bhavna Thakkar .....	20
Decades of Success.....	24
Steadfast and Stalwart.....	25
One Last Thing.....	26

# 20



# WI

### FOLLOW TRI-C



Tri-C Times is published by Cuyahoga Community College's Integrated Communications department for its friends and constituents. Feedback and story ideas are welcome. Send correspondence to Tri-C Times, 2500 E. 22nd St., Cleveland, OH 44115; call 216-987-4322; or email editorial@tri-c.edu.

## READ THE COMMUNITY IMPACT REPORT

Tri-C's impact extends far beyond its campuses — it reaches almost every household in Cuyahoga County. The Community Impact Report details the College's social, cultural and economic impact on the region during the 2022-2023 academic year.

Find the report online at [tri-c.edu/communityimpactreport](https://tri-c.edu/communityimpactreport).



## SUPPORT FROM CUYAHOGA COUNTY VOTERS

Voters in Cuyahoga County gave Tri-C their resounding support once again by approving Issue 5 in November. The passage of the levy means the College can continue offering the lowest tuition in the state, along with technical education and workforce training programs.

# WINTER 2024

## TRI-C CELEBRATES NEARLY 2,200 FALL GRADUATES

The College celebrated the academic achievements of nearly 2,200 graduates during the Fall 2023 Commencement in December. Ahmie Yeung, a Lakewood resident graduating with a short-term certificate in Conflict Resolution and Peace Studies, served as the student speaker for the ceremony. Yeung encouraged her classmates to learn through life's discomforts and struggles.



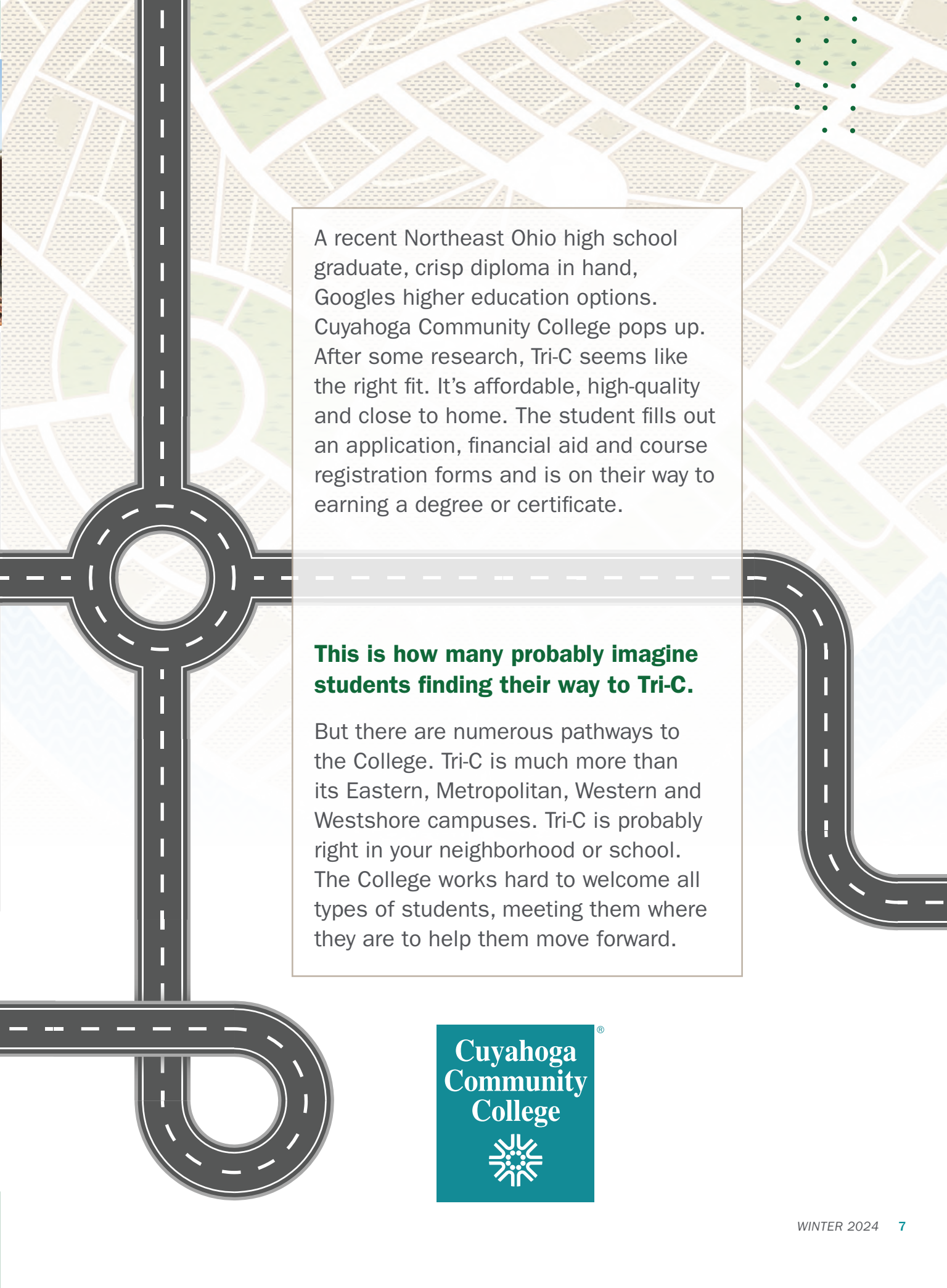


# MANY ROADS LEAD TO TRI-C

THE COLLEGE IS MORE THAN JUST ITS CAMPUSES

STORY BY Jarrod Zickefoose





A recent Northeast Ohio high school graduate, crisp diploma in hand, Googles higher education options. Cuyahoga Community College pops up. After some research, Tri-C seems like the right fit. It's affordable, high-quality and close to home. The student fills out an application, financial aid and course registration forms and is on their way to earning a degree or certificate.

**This is how many probably imagine students finding their way to Tri-C.**

But there are numerous pathways to the College. Tri-C is much more than its Eastern, Metropolitan, Western and Westshore campuses. Tri-C is probably right in your neighborhood or school. The College works hard to welcome all types of students, meeting them where they are to help them move forward.





## Access Centers

Tri-C Access Centers are a great example.

These intimate educational spaces might pass for corner stores in the neighborhood.

JaNice Marshall, Ed.D., vice president of Access and Community Connections at the College, said these centers exist for students who might not feel comfortable with campus life or who are not ready to apply to college. Think of the centers as micro Tri-Cs.

“Each of the Access Centers started by surveying the community,” Marshall said. “Who are they? What are their needs? Based on that, we work to offer programs that respond to these questions.”

Access Centers are partnered with Esperanza Inc., the MetroHealth System, University Settlement (Broadway-Slavic Village), Olivet Housing and Community Development Corporation (an arm of the Olivet Institutional Baptist Church) and the Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority. The centers are located at Esperanza Inc., the MetroHealth Medical Center, Olivet at University Hospitals Otis Moss Jr. Health Center and University Settlement.

At Esperanza, programming is offered to help women in transitional situations. Courses that develop or enhance basic digital skills are also available.

Students can find workforce training like Google and IT certifications at Olivet. At MetroHealth, programming in medical assisting and medical terminology is offered.

“Imagine you want to come back to school. You don't really know where to get started. You don't know who to really turn to. You don't have the confidence to just show up at a Tri-C campus,” Marshall said. “And yet, here you have Cuyahoga Community College with a partner you are familiar with in your own neighborhood.”

During the 2022-2023 academic year, 310 students enrolled in 10 Access Center courses.

**“EACH OF THE ACCESS CENTERS STARTED BY SURVEYING THE COMMUNITY. WHO ARE THEY? WHAT ARE THEIR NEEDS? BASED ON THAT, WE WORK TO OFFER PROGRAMS THAT RESPOND TO THESE QUESTIONS.”**

— JaNice Marshall, Ed.D.,  
Vice President of Access and  
Community Connections





## Workforce Partnerships

In some cases, a pathway to Tri-C begins where you work. Amazon employees can learn new skills and advance their careers by earning certificates or degrees at Tri-C — at no cost — through the Amazon Career Choice program.

The Amazon Career Choice program pays full tuition in advance for Amazon workers who register for classes at Tri-C and other partner institutions across the United States. Amazon workers can enroll in any credit program at the College, which offers more than 1,000 courses in 200-plus career and technical programs.

The partnership between Amazon and Tri-C allows employees to pursue education and upskilling opportunities, such as industry certifications leading to in-demand jobs, foundational skills in English language proficiency and high school and GED diplomas.

“The Amazon Career Choice program fits nicely with the College’s mission to provide high-quality, accessible and affordable educational opportunities that promote individual development and improve the overall quality of life,” Marshall said.



Career Choice is available to hourly workers employed by Amazon for at least 90 days.

Tri-C also has workforce partnerships that offer training and upskilling to employees of Cargill, Cleveland-Cliffs Inc., the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (GCRTA), the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District, Nestlé and Norman Noble Inc.

Tri-C training options for GCRTA employees range from leadership sessions offered through Tri-C’s Corporate College® to commercial driver’s license (CDL) refresher courses run by the Transportation Innovation Center. Most sessions take place at RTA locations.



**“THE AMAZON CAREER CHOICE PROGRAM FITS NICELY WITH THE COLLEGE’S MISSION TO PROVIDE HIGH-QUALITY, ACCESSIBLE AND AFFORDABLE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES THAT PROMOTE INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT AND IMPROVE THE OVERALL QUALITY OF LIFE.”**

— JaNice Marshall



## Women in Transition

Empowering women since 1978, the Women in Transition (WIT) program is a no-cost, noncredit, six-week course offered through Tri-C. The curriculum is designed to help women move their lives forward as they build personalized academic and professional development plans. In addition, participants network and strengthen their support systems.



“It gives participants exposure to the academic and workforce programs that are available at the institution. They complete a vision board, so they have a road map for their futures,” Marshall said.

WIT also holds two graduations each year to award certificates of completion.

“It really is their opportunity to be celebrated both individually and collectively as women,” Marshall said.

During the 2022-2023 academic year, 161 women graduated from the program, and 29 continued their education by enrolling at Tri-C.

**“IT GIVES PARTICIPANTS EXPOSURE TO THE ACADEMIC AND WORKFORCE PROGRAMS THAT ARE AVAILABLE AT THE INSTITUTION. THEY COMPLETE A VISION BOARD, SO THEY HAVE A ROAD MAP FOR THEIR FUTURES.”**

— JaNice Marshall





## Community Partners

Tri-C also partners with municipal governments and school systems to provide programming tailored to residents' needs and open doors to the College. Existing community partners are Maple Heights, East Cleveland and Warrensville Heights.

In Maple Heights, Tri-C launched a Workforce Success course for high school students, followed by additional programming directed by the needs of the community. It brings Tri-C to the student — traditional and nontraditional — offering a seamless pathway for those who want to continue at the College.

In addition to coursework for high school students, Tri-C offers courses for adults in Maple Heights.

“For nearly a decade, there has been a strong connection and partnership between Tri-C, the city of Maple Heights and the Maple Heights City Schools to provide opportunities for our youth and adults as they prepare for college and the workforce,” said Charlie Keenan, Maple Heights City Schools superintendent.

“These strategies have helped create increased economic opportunities for our residents and their families, which have made a strong impact on our community.”

Tri-C also works with community nonprofits.

The Greater Cleveland Food Bank Community Resource Center opened in November in the food bank's former distribution building on South Waterloo Road. Tri-C has space there where it runs a computer lab, hosting digital literacy classes and information sessions with employers. It also introduces food bank clients to the College more broadly.

Tiffany Scuggs, the food bank's vice president of Community Access and executive director of the Community Resource Center, said the partnership with Tri-C was a no-brainer.

The two organizations have a longstanding relationship. The food bank used to run pantries on Tri-C campuses and help students find resources. The resource center partnership was a natural extension of this relationship, Scuggs said.

“We started a conversation about Tri-C and the resource center about two years ago,” she said. “This was based on listening to our community. Tri-C was a requested service from our community.”

“I think Tri-C has a program for all. I see Tri-C as the connection — not just to degrees but to workforce opportunities and certifications — so our population can be better positioned overall.”

Scuggs shared an anonymous comment from a recent visitor to the Community Resource Center: “As we move so quickly through life, we don't always know all the available resources. I had the chance to meet a nice lady from Tri-C and learn about the WIT program and other services. In addition to getting food, I now have a chance to better my life for myself and my children.”

**“FOR NEARLY A DECADE, THERE HAS BEEN A STRONG CONNECTION AND PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN TRI-C, THE CITY OF MAPLE HEIGHTS AND THE MAPLE HEIGHTS CITY SCHOOLS TO PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR OUR YOUTH AND ADULTS AS THEY PREPARE FOR COLLEGE AND THE WORKFORCE.”**

— Charles Keenan, Superintendent of Maple Heights City Schools

## Student Outreach

These are just a few of the alternative pathways to Tri-C, and there are many, many others. Creative arts programs and camps welcome students to the College year-round. Community education programs open the College's doors to adults and often take the classroom into the neighborhood. Robust programming for middle school and high school students includes:

- College Credit Plus
- High Tech Academy
- Mandel Youth Humanities Academy
- Tech Prep
- MC2 STEM High School
- Youth Technology Academy
- Say Yes Scholars
- TRIO Educational Talent Search
- TRIO Upward Bound Math and Science

Visit [tri-c.edu/pathways](http://tri-c.edu/pathways) for more information.



CollegeCredit  
PLUS



JACK, JOSEPH AND MORTON MANDEL  
YOUTH HUMANITIES ACADEMY



## New Initiatives

In addition to existing pathways, the College is always exploring new ways to reach the community. To this end, two new positions were created in 2023. Eric Gordon was brought on as the College's new senior vice president of Student Development and Education Pipeline, and India Pierce Lee was hired as the College's executive vice president and chief strategy officer.

Pierce Lee, who had served as a senior vice president at the Cleveland Foundation since 2006, is using her deep connections in nonprofit and community development to extend the reach of Tri-C programs. For example, many of these organizations can use the kind of services the Access Centers or the WIT program offer. Pierce Lee is making sure the College is there for them.

"I'm a connect-the-dots person," she said.

Gordon, who was the CEO of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District for 12 years before joining Tri-C, is working to keep the College relevant to younger students by positioning Tri-C for the future of higher education.



"I am placing a bet that this 60-year-old, storied institution with a proud, deep history is also the place that can be nimble enough to predict the next 60 years of what education is going to look like," he said.

He brings a fresh eye to the College's outreach efforts to K-12 students with a keen sense of what those students will need from higher education.

"Our world is moving to a space where work is much more able to fit around the individual than the individual having to fit around the work." Education, he said, needs to do the same thing.

Students come to the College from all walks of life and with all kinds of needs. In many cases, however, the College comes to them or is already there. If you keep your eyes open, you don't have to look far to find a pathway to Tri-C.

**"I AM PLACING A BET THAT THIS 60-YEAR-OLD STORIED INSTITUTION WITH A PROUD, DEEP HISTORY IS ALSO THE PLACE THAT CAN BE NIMBLE ENOUGH TO PREDICT THE NEXT 60 YEARS OF WHAT EDUCATION IS GOING TO LOOK LIKE."**

— Eric Gordon, Senior Vice President of Student Development and Education Pipeline





★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

# SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

---

---

**TRI-C'S VETERAN AND MILITARY CONNECTED SERVICES OFFER COMPREHENSIVE RESOURCES AND SUPPORT FOR VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES.**

STORY BY **Erik Cassano**  
PHOTOS BY **Noelle Bye**

When many members of the U.S. military exit the Armed Forces, some find themselves at a crossroads, unsure of which route to take.

They've devoted four years or more to serving their country. During that time, the military governed every aspect of their lives — what they learned, the jobs they held and where they lived.

From that environment, they must transition into a civilian lifestyle, charting their own course. Like other incoming students, veterans need to have future goals and a transition plan, but many are unsure where to start.

To seek direction, many ex-military members turn to community colleges like Tri-C. And when they turn to Tri-C, the College's Veteran and Military Connected Services program is there to provide veterans, as well as their spouses and children, with resources and support.

"We're here for all veterans and their families," said Marjorie Morrison, the Collegewide director of the Veteran and Military Connected Services program. "Veterans who are newly separated from the military comprise a large part of the 400 students we assist each school year, but we also assist veterans who have been out for a while. We also assist a lot of family members, especially as veterans share their benefits with their dependents."

The program operates three full-time centers at the Eastern, Metropolitan and Western campuses, a part-time satellite center at the Westshore Campus and an office at the Brunswick University Center. The staff builds relationships with veterans on campus and helps each navigate their unique challenges to meet their educational goals.

"It's a case-management approach," Morrison said. "We work with the students as individuals and connect them with the appropriate resources."

In many cases, student veterans need help accessing and using their military benefits from the G.I. Bill, which provides tuition, housing and other benefits. In addition, some need to be connected to wraparound services, including food and mental health resources, available at Tri-C and in the community.

**"MANY TIMES, THE BIGGEST SUPPORT COMES FROM FELLOW STUDENT VETERANS WHO SHARE MANY OF THE SAME EXPERIENCES."**

— Marjorie Morrison, Collegewide Director of Veteran and Military Connected Services

"Many students don't know what is available to them," Morrison said. "Tri-C's website has a lot of resources available to veterans, and we will sit down with them and walk them through the online steps to help them access all the benefits they're entitled to."



Once a veteran is enrolled, the program provides tutoring in a wide range of subjects. The centers also include veterans-only lounges, which students can use for study sessions or just to take a break and spend time with fellow student veterans during the day.

"Many times, the biggest support comes from fellow student veterans who share many of the same experiences," she said. "In addition to the resources we provide, we also strive to give our students a sense of belonging in a community."

"Veterans aren't traditional students. They are a bit older, and they might already have a family. Bringing them together in a community setting is vital to making them feel supported."

By providing comprehensive support and encouragement through every step of their Tri-C journey, Morrison said the veteran services program keeps Tri-C's student veterans focused on the end goal of graduating and beginning a fulfilling career.

"Veterans are very desired as employees because they already have the work ethic and discipline instilled in them from their time in the military," Morrison said. "Our job is to enable, empower and educate our students so they can take those positive attributes into the world of work and be an asset for whichever company hires them."

For more information, visit [tri-c.edu/veterans](https://tri-c.edu/veterans).

# CONS







# TRUCTING A CAREER

**AFTER LEAVING THE U.S. NAVY, RANDAL FIGUEROA SPENT NEARLY 10 YEARS SEARCHING FOR A CAREER. THEN HE ENROLLED AT TRI-C, WHERE HE FOUND THE RESOURCES AND SUPPORT TO TAKE HIS NEXT STEPS.**

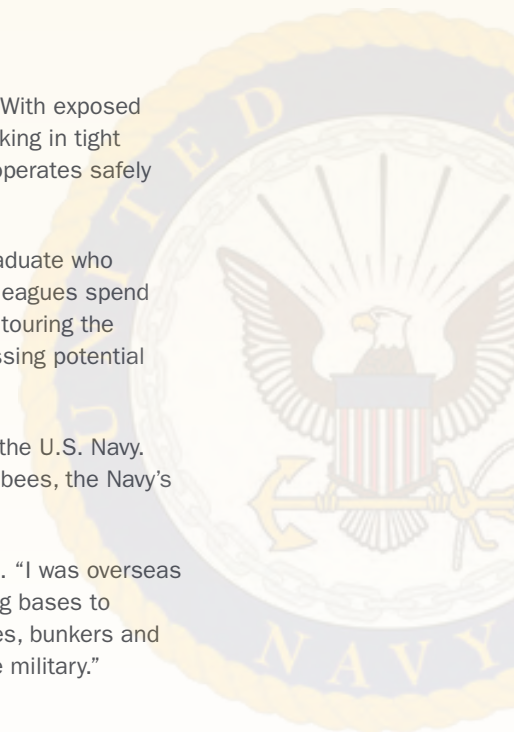
STORY BY [Erik Cassano](#)  
PHOTOS BY [Cody York](#)

Construction sites can be dangerous if they're not managed properly. With exposed wires overhead, unfinished floors underfoot and dozens of people working in tight spaces, a great deal of oversight is needed to make sure everything operates safely and smoothly.

It's the type of oversight provided by Randal Figueroa, a 2018 Tri-C graduate who now works as a safety manager for Turner Construction. While his colleagues spend their days with tools in hand, you're much more likely to see Figueroa touring the construction site with his phone out, taking pictures and notes, assessing potential hazards and finding ways to correct them.

For Figueroa, 37, it's a career that has its roots in his time serving in the U.S. Navy. During his enlistment from 2004 to 2007, Figueroa served in the Seabees, the Navy's construction battalions.

"I worked on a lot of construction jobs in the Seabees," Figueroa said. "I was overseas in Greece, Spain and Afghanistan, working on everything from repairing bases to building concrete runways for aircraft and erecting heavy timber bridges, bunkers and shelters. I got a very thorough introduction to construction work in the military."



In 2007, Figueroa and his then-girlfriend became parents. With a daughter to support, he left behind the frequent moves and potential deployments that often define life in the Navy to return to civilian life in Cleveland. But he didn't make an immediate or seamless transition from a military construction career to a civilian construction career.

"I worked a lot of odd jobs — nothing I'd consider a career," he said. "For a time, I did apartment maintenance, I worked in loan modifications for a bank and also did some security work. In the process, I left Cleveland again and moved to Las Vegas for about five years."

Figueroa and his family moved back to Cleveland in 2014. He was approaching his 30s and had been out of the military for seven years but still didn't have a steady career. He began to think about what he wanted his future to look like.

"I knew a lot about construction. I wanted a career that would be 'recession-proof,' so to speak, and construction fit that mold," he said. "People always need something built."

But Figueroa lacked the college education to pursue a career in construction management. He had enlisted in the Navy immediately after graduating from John Marshall High School in 2004 and had taken no postsecondary courses since leaving the military. So, he enrolled at Tri-C in 2016.

"I knew I could begin my college career at Tri-C," he said. "It's affordable, and the class schedules are flexible — which I needed because I had to work full time while I was in school. I also knew Tri-C had services to help veterans in college."

**"I KNEW A LOT ABOUT CONSTRUCTION. I WANTED A CAREER THAT WOULD BE 'RECESSION-PROOF,' SO TO SPEAK, AND CONSTRUCTION FIT THAT MOLD. PEOPLE ALWAYS NEED SOMETHING BUILT."**

— Randal Figueroa





## A NEW PATH

Like many two-year colleges, Tri-C helps veterans set up their college education by assisting with G.I. Bill benefits and applying for a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), among other essential services.

But as Figueroa navigated his first year at Tri-C, he discovered it has much more to offer veterans. The College's Veteran and Military Connected Services office has the resources to assist with every step of a veteran's journey at Tri-C.

"As I got into my second and third semesters at Tri-C, I started utilizing a lot more of what was available in Veteran Services," he said. "I started developing relationships with the people here. They helped me do a deep dive into my veterans benefits to make sure I was getting the most out of the G.I. Bill. Later, I started using tutoring services to help with math. I really became a part of the veteran community here."

In the classroom, Figueroa found even more support from his instructors in the Construction Engineering Technology program as he balanced full-time work, school and family.

"I'd like to say it was a completely smooth ride through college for me," he said. "But there were bumps along the way. I was struggling with being a full-time worker and a full-time student. One day, I discovered I hadn't taken some prerequisites for the upcoming semester, and it was getting kind of discouraging."

One of Figueroa's professors, Trent Gages, Ph.D., sat down with him and mapped out a plan to get him back on track.

"He was the one who really helped me figure out how to dig out of that hole and complete my studies," Figueroa said. "I really can't say enough about him and about all the professors I had."

When a position with Turner Construction opened up, Gages encouraged Figueroa to take it, even though he hadn't graduated yet.

It was a crucial foot in the door for Figueroa and a big reason why he is a manager there today.

"When the safety management position became available, I already had some seniority at the company, so they were able to promote me," he said. "I wasn't just a rookie coming in the door — I had some knowledge of the company."

## GIVING BACK

Figueroa graduated from Tri-C in 2018 with an Associate of Applied Science in Construction Engineering. He transferred to Kent State University, where he graduated with a bachelor's degree in Construction Management in 2020. But that wasn't the end of his involvement with Tri-C.

"I've tried to find ways to give back," Figueroa said. "In 2019, shortly after I graduated, I was invited to be a speaker at a veteran services seminar at the Metro Campus. It was in the new Alex B. Johnson Campus Center, which I actually worked on for Turner Construction while I was still a student here. I talked about my time transitioning out of the military, just relaying my story to people who might be in the same situation I had been in a few years earlier."



From working on military construction projects as a Seabee to working on civilian construction projects as a safety manager, Figueroa has come full circle. And he credits Tri-C and its veteran services program as an integral part of closing that circle.

"Tri-C is a huge reason I'm in my current position," he said. "I'm grateful for all the support they have given to me and countless other veterans each year."



STORY AND PHOTOS BY Noelle Bye



# CROSSING OCEANS *and* BARRIERS

**A NATIVE OF INDIA AND WORLD TRAVELER, BHAVNA THAKKAR RELATES TO STUDENTS FROM ALL CULTURES.**

Bhavna Thakkar inspires a lively classroom.

Throughout her vivacious lectures, students furiously scribble notes and eagerly raise up their hands to ask clarifying questions. The associate professor of psychology is more than happy to engage, elaborating on, for example, how the pituitary gland and hypothalamus relate to psychology — her field of expertise and passion. Over the last 36 years, Thakkar has taught in 19 different fields of psychology.

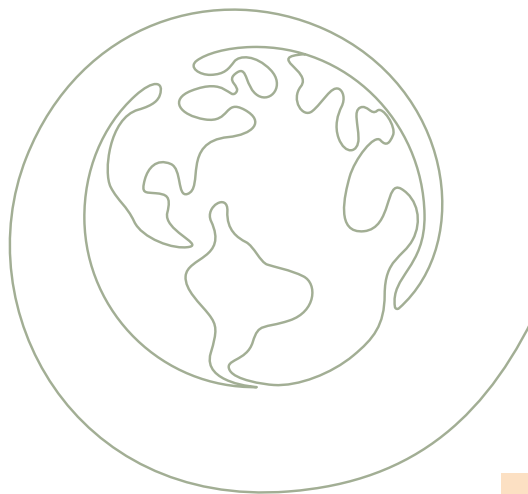
“As a high school student, I was always fascinated by human behavior,” she said. “Why are people the way they are? Why are we attracted to some, and why do we label others? These types of questions attracted me to psychology.”

Along with her fascination with the human psyche, Thakkar has an affinity for world travel, taking her to Australia, China, Nepal, Japan and Greece. She also speaks 11 languages, which helps her relate to students from various cultures.

“Learning different languages has definitely increased my ability to connect with people,” she said. “I can also respect that people who do not know English are no less capable. When I get students from different parts of the world attempting to speak in class, I wait for them to draft a sentence correctly. And once they do, I love to see that victory in their eyes.”

**“AS A HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT, I WAS ALWAYS FASCINATED BY HUMAN BEHAVIOR. WHY ARE PEOPLE THE WAY THEY ARE? WHY ARE WE ATTRACTED TO SOME, AND WHY DO WE LABEL OTHERS? THESE TYPES OF QUESTIONS ATTRACTED ME TO PSYCHOLOGY.”**

— Bhavna Thakkar



**“TRI-C IS SPECIAL TO ME FOR SEVERAL REASONS. IT ALLOWS FOR EQUAL OPPORTUNITY. THE COLLEGE HAS ALWAYS SUPPORTED AND ENCOURAGED ITS FACULTY MEMBERS AND STUDENTS.”**

— Bhavna Thakkar



But before traveling the world and ultimately moving to the U.S., Thakkar began life in India. The oldest of four in a middle-class Hindu family, her love of psychology began with her mother, who was a child psychologist.

“Seeing her in our everyday lives — living life with a conviction, always being there for us and not thinking twice before sacrificing — were traits that convinced me psychology would make me more reflective,” Thakkar said.

Her classroom acumen may have come from her father, who instilled a love of education in his children.

“As an attorney, he was convinced that the only thing that stays with you is your education and insisted that we complete at least a master’s degree,” she said. “He spent time every evening helping us with our homework. Every weekend was a library visit, where he would ask us to read something besides our coursework. As motivation, he would then take us out to lunch. Now, I cannot spend a day without reading or researching. I am also transferring this to my students.”

Her education began with the Cambridge School system in India, which she attended from kindergarten to her Ph.D. She graduated at the top of her class at the University of Mumbai, earning her bachelor’s in psychology and her master’s in personality psychology. She completed her coursework for her Ph.D. in neuropsychology at the University of Mumbai and continued her dissertation under the supervision of the University of California, Berkeley, after moving to the U.S. in 1987.

At that time, she also began her teaching career at Baldwin Wallace University before joining Tri-C in 2003 as an adjunct professor at the Western Campus.

“Tri-C is special to me for several reasons,” she said. “It allows for equal opportunity. The College has always supported and encouraged its faculty members and students.”

She was given the opportunity to teach psychology courses at Corporate College® West, an extension of the Westshore Campus, in 2010.

“It opened up a whole new opportunity to teach psychology to a different part of Cuyahoga County,” Thakkar said. “My years at Corporate College were very fulfilling because we were able to not only get students to class but also do cookouts for the students. We then started offering Saturday and evening classes, which all filled.”

She became a full-time faculty member in 2013 while teaching at Corporate College. In 2018, she moved to Westshore’s Liberal Arts and Technology building.

She compares the Westshore Campus to a dessert: “sweet in every which way,” Thakkar said.

“With this administration, I can just walk into their offices, and they always give a patient hearing,” she said. “These experiences give me the edge to go out of my way for my students because I realize that it takes a lot for them to come up to you and ask for help.”

Thakkar is involved with many initiatives, including the Curriculum and Degree Requirements Committee, Student Success, Learning for Life, and student and faculty mentoring.

Westshore Campus President Scott Latiolais and Claire McMahon, academic dean at Westshore, recently recommended Thakkar for the Mandel Leadership training program.

Outside of Tri-C, she is a member of the American Psychological Association, the Ohio Psychological Association, the Indian Psychological Association, the University of Mumbai’s board of directors and the International Baccalaureate program directors.

Thakkar was also involved in research at Baldwin Wallace in developmental psychology, studying how attitudes change with age. At Stanford University, she conducted research on how laughter improves immunity.

“I always tell my students on the first day of class that I want them to fall in love with psychology,” Thakkar said. “My obvious goal is that students learn the basic principles, theories and application of psychology. But my intrinsic goal is that they learn to be responsible citizens, accountable employees and affectionate parents.”



# DECADES OF

# SUCCESS

STORY BY Anthony Moujaes

PHOTOS BY McKinley Wiley



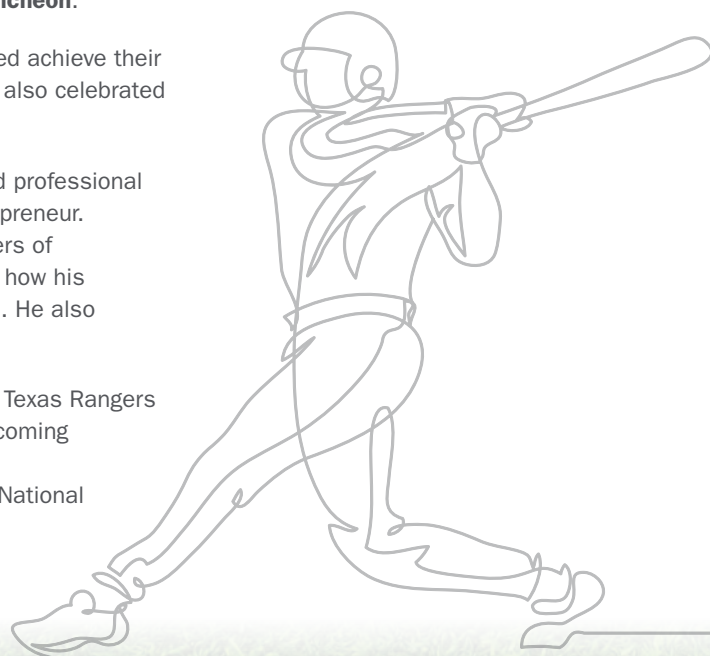
**MLB LEGEND AND BUSINESS MOGUL ALEX RODRIGUEZ HELPED RAISE \$1.1 MILLION TO BENEFIT STUDENTS WHEN HE HEADLINED THE PRESIDENTIAL SCHOLARSHIP LUNCHEON AS THE TRI-C FOUNDATION CELEBRATED ITS 50TH ANNIVERSARY.**

Baseball legend, World Series champion and CEO Alex Rodriguez shared stories of perseverance as he helped the Cuyahoga Community College Foundation raise funds for students during its annual **Presidential Scholarship Luncheon**.

In addition to bringing in \$1.1 million to help Tri-C students in need achieve their academic goals, the Sept. 27 luncheon, presented by PNC Bank, also celebrated the Foundation's 50th anniversary.

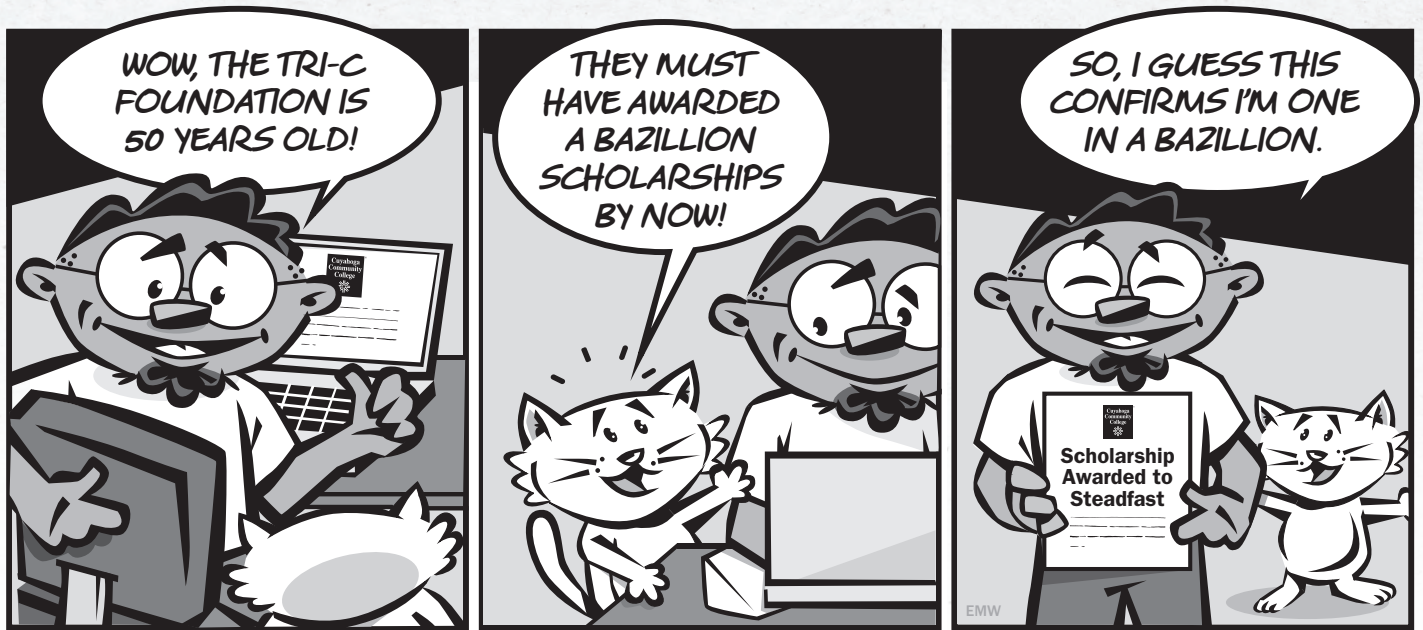
Rodriguez spoke to a captivated audience about his personal and professional success and the lessons he has learned as an athlete and entrepreneur. During a separate session with Tri-C student-athletes and members of the Hispanic Council and Student Government, Rodriguez shared how his experiences as a star athlete paved his path to entrepreneurship. He also discussed the importance of financial literacy in both worlds.

One of baseball's most prolific players with the Seattle Mariners, Texas Rangers and New York Yankees, Rodriguez didn't mince words about overcoming adversity. In one example, "A-Rod" acknowledged that his use of performance-enhancing substances is the reason he isn't in the National Hall of Fame, underscoring his insights on how his life lessons helped him become a better person.





# THE ADVENTURES OF STEADFAST & STALWART



COMIC STRIP BY **Eric Wheeler**

Rodriguez is best known for his accolades as a 14-time MLB All-Star and winning the 2009 World Series with the New York Yankees. During his 25-year playing career, he hit 696 home runs and more grand slams than any MLB player in history.

He was also named American League MVP three times and earned two Gold Glove Awards, given to players for their individual defensive performances.

Off the field, Rodriguez has embarked on several business ventures, which included founding A-Rod Corp, Newport Property Construction and Monument Capital Management. He is also part owner of the NBA's Minnesota Timberwolves and the WNBA's Lynx.

Since its inception in 1992, the Presidential Scholarship Luncheon has raised more than \$24 million to help students with financial needs pursue higher education.

Scholarship growth and philanthropy have been essential throughout the Tri-C Foundation's 50-year history. The Foundation now has more than 200 established funds to help ensure access and financial support for students in need.





## SUPPORTING THE ENTREPRENEURIAL DREAM

**WHETHER ENTREPRENEURS WANT TO BE PART OF THE GIG ECONOMY OR START OR GROW A BUSINESS, THE CENTER FOR ENTREPRENEURS AT CORPORATE COLLEGE® CAN STEER THEM TOWARD SUCCESS.**



BY **Ronna McNair**

Today's workforce is rapidly changing. Workers are looking for meaningful work that aligns with their beliefs and passions. They also value autonomy, open communication and the opportunity to expand their skills. For many workers, that flexibility takes shape in the gig economy or through business ownership.

To support those growing segments of workers, Tri-C recently launched the Center for Entrepreneurs at Corporate College®.

The mission of the Center for Entrepreneurs is simple: to educate, empower and assist individuals pursuing their dreams of business ownership by connecting them with the resources to reach their goals.

The Center for Entrepreneurs helps individuals grow their businesses through a series of courses, workshops and a dedicated studio space for podcasts:

- Hands-on courses along four tracks help budding entrepreneurs at any stage, from defining an idea to expanding their business operations.
- A Workshop Series for Entrepreneurs features business owners sharing their expertise on topics covering professional development, mentoring programs and networking opportunities.
- A state-of-the-art podcast studio with multiple sets gives entrepreneurs the chance to educate listeners and showcase their creativity through audio or video podcasts.

Collaboration is a key component of success for every entrepreneur throughout their business's life cycle, so we aim to provide continuous support to established and aspiring business owners. Learn more at [corporatecollege.com/entrepreneur](https://corporatecollege.com/entrepreneur).

Tri-C opened up the conversation around the gig workforce and entrepreneurship in a recent report, *The Gig Workforce Isn't Just Delivering Dinner*. Read the report at [tri-c.edu/gigreport](https://tri-c.edu/gigreport).



# Tri-C Day

Wednesday, April 10

*Building Bright Futures*

Support Student Success  
and Celebrate Tri-C Pride

[tri-c.edu/tricday](https://tri-c.edu/tricday)



**JACK, JOSEPH AND MORTON MANDEL  
YOUTH HUMANITIES ACADEMY**

**The Academy is limited  
to only 30 students!  
Will you be one of them?**



Enrich your learning, prepare for college and get paid through this nine-week summer humanities program.

More information at  
[tri-c.edu/YHA](https://tri-c.edu/YHA)



**Now accepting  
inquisitive students  
for Summer 2024**

