

# The VOYAGER



MAY 2025



## DREAMS BECOME REALITY

Nearly 600 celebrate Class of 2025 at FCC's Commencement Ceremony



## PINNING CEREMONY PRIDE

Future healthcare professionals celebrated in emotional pinning events.



## NEVER TOO LATE

From dropout to diploma: Crystal Brewer never gave up.



## A NIGHT TO REMEMBER: FCC'S 47TH ANNUAL COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY

With nearly 600 people filling the gym at Fairfield Community High School on Friday, May 9, the energy was electric as Frontier Community College proudly celebrated its 47th Annual Commencement Ceremony. The spotlight was on the Class of 2025—graduates who turned hard work, late nights, and big dreams into a milestone moment they'll never forget.

The processional and recessional were performed by the FCHS Ensemble, under the direction of FCHS music teacher Joshua Livesay. FCC President Dr. Jay Edgren delivered the welcome address and announced the recipient of the President's Award, which was presented to Laela Kohzadi.

Top Photo: Laela Kohzadi is being awarded the President's Award plaque by Dr. Jay Edgren, prior to the FCC Commencement Ceremony.

Middle Photo: Maddox McElravy receives his Electrical Distribution Systems certificate from Gary Carter, Illinois Eastern Community College Board Chairman.

Bottom Photo: An aerial view of FCC graduates with their family members and friends congregate in front of the FCHS east gym following the ceremony.

A native of West Frankfort, Illinois, Kohzadi made a lasting impact both on and off campus during her time at FCC. She played every position on the Bobcats Volleyball team and served as one of the team captains during the 2024 season. She also served as President of both Phi Theta Kappa and the FCC Student Senate. In addition, she was a TRiO ambassador, a member of the One Love Christian Club, and worked as a tutor on campus. In the spring of 2025, she served as a volunteer assistant volleyball coach at Jasper Grade School, northeast of Fairfield.

In her speech, Kohzadi spoke about overcoming challenges during her two years at FCC and how those experiences helped her grow as an individual. She encouraged the Class of 2025 to go out into the world, do great things, and—as she passionately put it— “go be awesome.”

Dr. Sharmila Kakac, Dean of Illinois Eastern Community Colleges, presented the candidates for degrees and certificates. Mr. Gary Carter, Chairman of the IECC Board of Trustees, officially conferred the degrees and certificates and presented the diplomas.

To close the ceremony, Dr. Edgren delivered a final charge to the graduates before they exited the gym to celebrate with friends and family in the lobby and out on the front lawn of FCHS—marking the end of one chapter and the beginning of another.





# FCC CELEBRATES FUTURE HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS WITH PINNING CEREMONIES

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Prior to Frontier Community College's graduation ceremony on Friday, May 9, at Fairfield Community High School, two separate pinning ceremonies were held.

The Medical Lab Technician (MLT) program hosted its ceremony at Bob Boyles Hall on FCC's campus. The event was well attended by friends and family members of the graduating students.

MLT instructor Julie Dehart gave the welcome, followed by a brief speech from Julia Wilburn, who was recognized as the program's top student. After her remarks, students were pinned by family members. A slideshow highlighting the group's journey throughout the school year was presented, and refreshments were served afterward.

Meanwhile, nursing students from the Illinois Eastern Community Colleges – OCC, Frontier Community College campus were honored during their pinning ceremony held at Willow Creek Venue, just south of Fairfield. Dr. Tracy Smith, head of the FCC Nursing Department, led the program alongside faculty and staff.

Nursing student, Alison Bunting, addressed the audience, followed by remarks from nursing instructor, Juliana James. A slideshow was shown, reflecting the students' time at FCC. Nursing student Madalyn Griswold also spoke, sharing details about a capstone project she completed with Tiffany Hughes and Angelica Dinwiddie focused on promoting germ prevention among local children. Each nursing student was pinned by a person of their choice.

For more information about Frontier Community College's MLT program, go to [iecc.edu/fcc/mlt](http://iecc.edu/fcc/mlt). For more information about FCC's nursing program, go to [iecc.edu/nursing](http://iecc.edu/nursing).



Top Photo: Juliana James speaks at the IECC-OCC, FCC nursing pinning ceremony.

Middle Photo: MLT students are getting ready to recite the oath.

Bottom Photo: Nursing students listen intently to Juliana give her speech.





## THE COURAGE TO FINISH: CRYSTAL'S PATH TO HER GED

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Lawrenceville, Illinois, resident Crystal Brewer walked away from high school not knowing the decision would weigh on her for years. Life got busy—family, work, and responsibilities piled on—but deep down, there was always that unfinished chapter. Nearly twenty years later, with grit and determination, she earned her GED.

Her journey isn't just about getting a diploma—it's about reclaiming her voice, her worth, and her future. Because education isn't about when you start—it's about having the courage to finish.

"I dropped out of high school at 17 years old. I became a wife and a mom shortly after and started my life. As life happened, it became hard to get a good job without a diploma. So, in my early twenties, I pursued getting my GED. Well, that was a lot harder than I thought it would be. I had passed all but the math course."

Life continued to move for Brewer as she and her family relocated across the state. She started a new job, moved up the ladder, and felt content. Still, the pressure of not finishing her GED lingered in the back of her mind. Fast forward to July 2024, when one phone call reignited that goal.



Matthew Metz (left) and Crystal Brewer (right)

“My cousin called and said, ‘Hey, reach out to my teacher friend, Mr. Matthew Metz. There’s a new adult education program you may be interested in.’ I thought about it, talked it over with my family, and decided—why not see what it is?”

Brewer sent an email to Metz, and just like that, she was on her way to achieving a life-changing milestone. She started in September and finished in mid-December. Metz said that when he heard about the Alternative Methods of Credentialing (AMOC) pathway, he immediately knew Brewer would be an excellent candidate.

“She made the effort to reach out to me directly to ask about the program. She took the necessary steps to provide the proper documentation so we could determine her eligibility. Crystal had previously taken GED classes and had passed all of her tests—except math. After reviewing her transcript, Crystal

committed to completing both of her required math classes before the end of the semester. She was motivated by a desire to find better job opportunities to support her family.

Even while working full-time, being a mom, and buying a new house, Crystal consistently joined weekly Google Meet sessions, asked questions when needed, and gave her best effort,” said Metz.

Students who have earned 13.5 or more high school credits, are at least 18.5 years old, and test at an ASE 5 reading level or higher (equivalent to 9th–10th grade reading levels), are eligible to take i-Pathways modules through i-Pathways.org with IECC’s Adult Education program. This allows them to bypass the GED testing process and work toward achieving their Illinois High School Diploma.

Angel Maguire, Project Director of Adult Education, says they’ve seen remarkable results from the AMOC (Alternative Methods of Credentialing) pathway since its implementation through the Illinois Eastern Community Colleges Board.

“From July 1, 2024, to now, we’ve had 45 AMOC completers and 20 traditional GED completers. That number has doubled the total graduates in the IECC Adult Education Program—and we still have a couple of months to go.

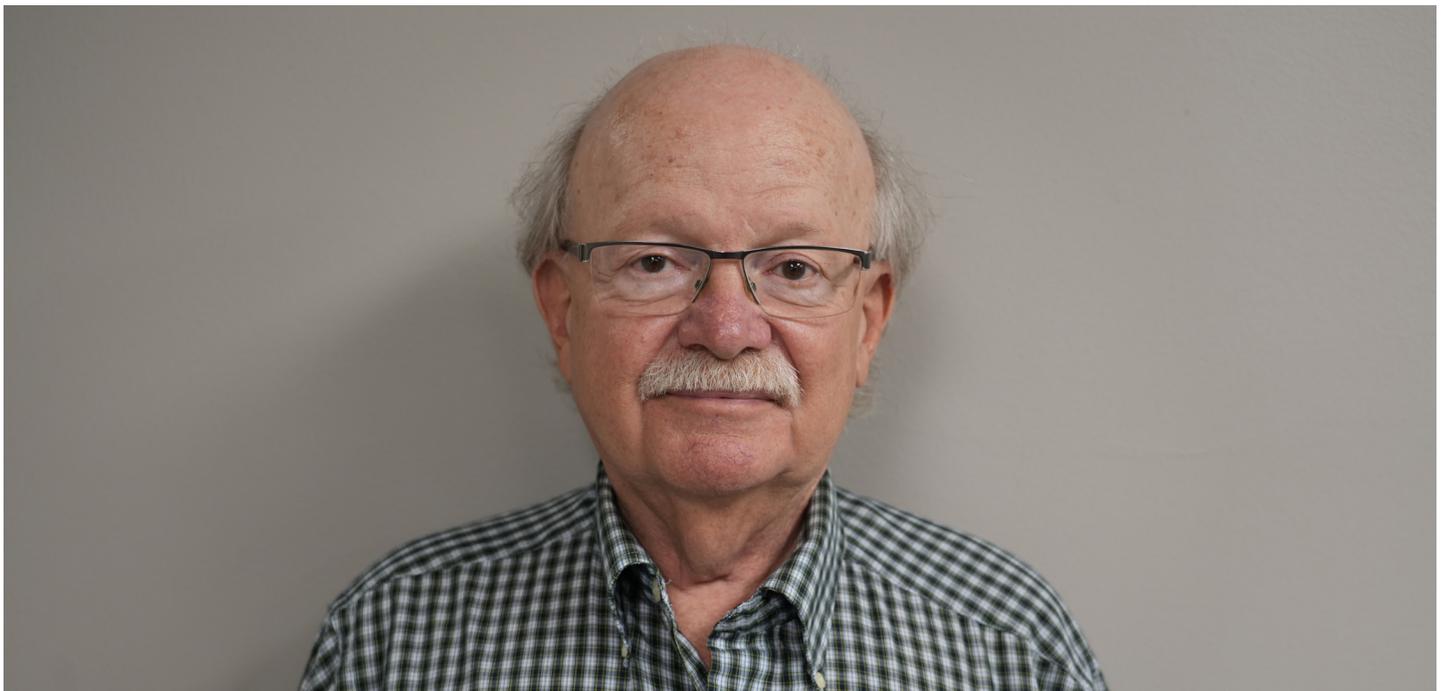
This number is rising quickly because the word is out: if a student entered their junior year or later in high school, they may be eligible for the AMOC process. Some can complete it in just weeks—or even days—and then enroll in one of the IECC schools or move forward in their careers.

This method has been HUGE for our students. It's incredibly heartwarming to see students—some who have struggled with testing and been in the program for years—finally see the light at the end of the tunnel. We're very thankful to ICCB and the Regional Offices of Education #12 and #20 for partnering with us to provide this amazing pathway for our community members."

Crystal Brewer says she could not have achieved this milestone without the strong support system around her.

"I could not have gained this huge accomplishment without the support from my husband, my son, my cousin, my mother, and most importantly, Mr. Metz.

In closing, my words of encouragement are simple: It is never too late in life to achieve the unachievable."



## **A LEGACY IN THE STARS AND THE CLASSROOM**

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Tuesday, May 6, was more than just the end of finals for one instructor in particular—it marked the close of a remarkable chapter in local education.

In a quiet classroom at Frontier Community College, adjunct instructor Ken Harris handed out the final exam of his 32-year teaching career. After more than three decades of inspiring students and sharing his passion for learning, Harris bid farewell to the college where he built a legacy that extended well beyond textbooks and lectures. When he announced his retirement on Facebook, an outpouring of congratulations and well-wishes from colleagues, staff, and former students underscored just how far his influence had reached.

## JUNE 2025 UPCOMING EVENTS

- 1 Red, White, & Blue Senior All-Star Volleyball Tri-Match hosted by FCC Volleyball Team at Center Street School.  
2:30 p.m.; 3:45 p.m.; 5 p.m.
- 2 First Day of Summer Classes
- 2 FCC Bobcats Hitting/Pitching Camp 1 P.M.
- 4 FCC Kids Camp - Origami I 9-11 A.M.
- 4 FCC Kids Camp - Origami II 1-3 P.M.
- 10 FCC Prospect Baseball Camp 10 A.M.
- 17 FCC Kids Camp - Canvas I 9 A.M. - 12 P.M.
- 17 FCC Kids Camp - Canvas II 1-3 P.M.
- 17 IECC Board of Trustees Meeting at LTC 6:15 P.M.
- 18 FCC Kids Camp - Sign Language 9-11 A.M.
- 19 Juneteenth - Campus Closed
- 27 Midterm - Summer Semester

\*This schedule is tentative and can be changed anytime.

\*\*Schedule can be found online at [iecc.edu/fcc/community/calendar-events](http://iecc.edu/fcc/community/calendar-events)

\*\*\*To register or need more information for FCC Summer Kids Camps, go to [iecc.edu/summercamps](http://iecc.edu/summercamps).

Teaching, as it turns out, was in his blood.

"I came from a family of teachers," Harris said. "My father, my older brother, my sister, and my younger brother. That was something in the family, and I fell naturally into it."

His journey with Frontier Community College began in 1992, thanks to a newspaper advertisement that invited anyone with a hobby or skill to consider starting a class. Harris, a longtime astronomy enthusiast, reached out to the college—and the rest was history.

"I started teaching one astronomy class at night every semester," he recalled. "I did that until 2010, when the lab was added, then I began teaching both."

After retiring from Fairfield Community High School in 2014, where he served for 37 years, Harris was approached by Frontier to expand his teaching role. With a master's degree in guidance counseling and a diverse academic background, he was a natural fit.

"They said, 'We've got some classes we think you can teach.' I ended up teaching social science, physical science, environmental biology—five classes every semester, and a couple more during the summer."

"My favorite moments have always been when I see a student show a deep interest in a subject—more than just going through the motions," Harris said. "When it's a field they're truly passionate about and want to pursue as a career, that's what makes my day. I have one student who's really into astronomy. She wants to become an astrophysicist because she loves math and science. I believe she'll do it—she's got what it takes. I'm excited to follow her journey."

Students like that are the reason I love teaching—those who know exactly what they want to do and are eager to get there. Being able to guide them, even just a little, is incredibly rewarding."

He also recalled two major highlights during his time at Frontier: the total solar eclipses in 2017 and 2024.

“In 2017, I drove down to Eddyville, Illinois, to a truck stop just to get a full view of the eclipse. There were about 300 people there, and it was an amazing experience,” he said. “In 2024, we had a nationally known speaker come to Fairfield, and I helped arrange that event. I also gave programs for various local groups—explaining what to expect, how to prepare, and what to avoid. That kept me busy last year, and it was incredibly fulfilling to share that excitement with the community.”

Harris set up telescopes near Mason Hall. People from Pennsylvania, Oregon, Texas and other states were in attendance for the 2024 solar eclipse.

Over his 32 years at Frontier Community College, Harris has witnessed significant changes—both on campus and within the classroom.

“About every ten years, I update the textbooks for each of my classes,” he explained. “It’s staggered across subjects, but every time I adopt new material, I learn about the latest developments in the field. It helps keep me current.”

Harris also credited the college for its consistent support. “Frontier has been great about helping me get equipment to enhance my teaching. I’ll be passing that along now,” he said. “The college has really appreciated what I’ve done, and I’ve felt that support. I’ve stepped in to cover for others when they retired or moved on, and I’ve filled some important gaps. Now, they’ll need to find someone—or probably more than one person—to take on all the roles I’ve handled. It’s not going to be easy.”

As he wraps up his teaching career, Harris hopes his students remember more than just the lessons—they remember the experience.

“I hope they realize that teaching takes a lot of patience,” he said. “I learned that early on as a special education teacher at the high school level. You need patience every single day. But I also hope they saw that learning can be fun. That’s part of the process—enjoying the class, the subject, and having a good time while still learning something meaningful.”

He smiled, recalling former students who’ve stopped him years later just to say, “I enjoyed your class.”

“That means a lot.”

When asked what advice he’d give to new instructors or students starting out in college, Harris emphasized the importance of connection.



Many students gather to check out Harris’ telescopes during the 2024 Solar Eclipse.



Ken Harris teaching his astronomy class in Mason Hall back in October 2024.

“Get to know the people who work here. Having a strong support system makes all the difference. We’ve got an incredible staff—faculty, secretaries, everyone—and they’ll go out of their way to help you. That kind of support makes it all the difference in the world.”

As for retirement, Harris is ready to hit the road.

“I’m going to travel,” he said with enthusiasm. “My wife and I go to Florida every year, but now we’re planning some trips out west—to Grand Teton, Yellowstone, and Zion National Parks. It might take more than one trip, but we’re going to make it happen.”

Of course, Harris hasn’t stopped looking to the skies. He remains an active member of the Evansville Astronomical Society (EAS) and is always excited to share what’s happening in the universe.

“We’ve got some great meteor showers coming up. Saturn will be in opposition in September, but right now it’s a bit odd—you don’t see the big ring system, just a thin line

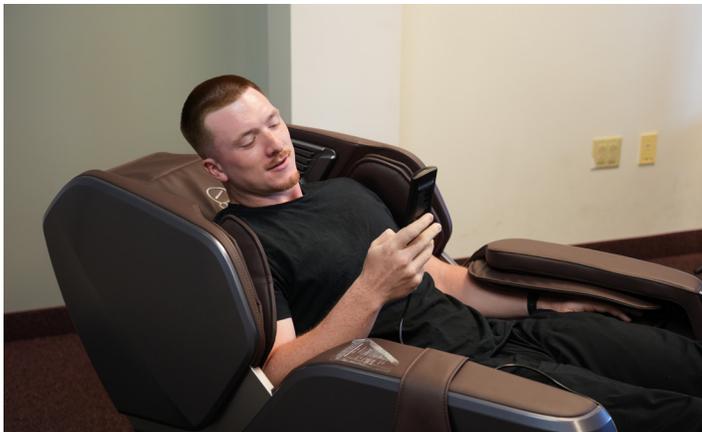
across it. The rings will reappear in a few months. Jupiter is visible in the western sky for now, but it’ll disappear for a bit and then return as a morning object. By late September or early October, it’ll be back as an evening object.”

For those interested in stargazing or learning more, Harris encourages a visit to the EAS’s facility.

“We’re at the Wahnsiedler Observatory in Lynnville Park, Indiana. Anyone interested can look us up at [evansvilleastro.org](http://evansvilleastro.org). We host open houses and monthly meetings—it’s a great way to get involved.”

As Ken Harris closes the door on his teaching career, he leaves behind more than just lesson plans and lab equipment—he leaves a legacy of curiosity, kindness, and commitment to lifelong learning. Whether guiding students through the wonders of astronomy or encouraging them to chase their dreams, Harris made a lasting impact on every classroom he stepped into. Though he may be trading his gradebook for a travel map, his influence will continue to shine—much like the stars he so often taught about.

# FCC IN PICTURES



**1** Ian Olivier-Beaulieu relaxes in the massage chair in Learning Commons.

**3** Linda Monge addresses the crowd during the Phi Theta Kappa Induction Ceremony on Sunday, April 27.

**5** Nursing students and faculty participate in the candlelight ceremony during the pinning ceremony on Friday, May 9.

**2** MLT students are enjoying pizza outside Mason Hall.

**4** Myles Levi is proud to say that Frontier Community College is his best decision ever.

**6** Trent Bliss, Alek Couch, and a group of students are excited to be graduating from Frontier.