

# VOYAGER

The



APRIL 2026



## FRONTIER BEGINS HERE

Frontier at 50: A legacy built from the ground up.



## WORKFORCE TRAINING

Community colleges power workforce training, opportunity, and career success.



## CAREER PATH SUCCESS

Troyer brings compassionate mental health care to the community.



## FROM VISION TO FRONTIER

April is recognized nationwide as National Community College Month—and in 2026, Frontier Community College is celebrating a milestone 50 years since its founding in 1976. As part of that celebration, the college welcomed its first president, Richard Mason, back to campus on Thursday, March 26. Mason reflected on life before Frontier and the journey of building a college from the ground up.

Before his time at Frontier, Mason taught and coached at Cisne Middle School from 1959 to 1968. During those years, he met his wife, Shirley, and the couple began raising their family. He later accepted a position in Stillman Valley, Illinois, before returning to southeastern Illinois to pursue further education. In the spring of 1970, Mason completed an internship at Eastern Illinois University, earning a specialist degree that prepared him for leadership roles as a principal or superintendent.

That internship proved to be a turning point. Mason began working out of the district office in Olney, where he was first introduced to the community college system and its impact. At the time, Lincoln Trail College had just been established, while Wabash Valley College and Olney Central College were already serving the region.

Mason and his family moved to Olney in the early 1970s, where he met Dr. James Spencer and began discussing a role as a Continued Education Dean. Spencer challenged Mason early on with a defining question:

“How are you going to generate quarter-hours?”

After careful thought, Mason proposed a solution that would shape the future of community college outreach—offering courses directly in local high schools across the district.

“I wanted to offer college courses off campus,” Mason recalled. “Composition, history, physical education—we took everything to the schools.”

Mason spent years building relationships with area high schools, all of which welcomed the opportunity. This innovative approach expanded access to higher education and laid the groundwork for what would become Frontier.



Richard Mason reflects on his early years leading Frontier Community College as its first president.

Recognizing Mason’s vision and leadership, Dr. Spencer approached him with a new challenge: establishing a college in Fairfield.

“He told me, ‘I want you to move to Fairfield and operate everything from there,’” Mason said.

At the time, the area where Frontier now stands was largely undeveloped. With strong support from the City of Fairfield and the surrounding community—both financially and through advocacy—construction began. The first building, where Student Services is at today (was not officially called Student Services back then), filled almost immediately, prompting early conversations about expansion.

Mason also highlighted the contributions of Ted Davis, a trusted colleague who joined him from Olney. Davis served in multiple roles, including librarian, and helped manage the distribution of textbooks across the district—often transporting them from one location to another to meet student needs.

When it came time to name the new college, inspiration struck during a simple conversation.

“We were talking about being something new,” Mason said. “And Ted said, ‘sounds like a frontier.’ That was it—it represented a beginning.”

Despite the excitement of launching a new institution, challenges quickly followed. One of the most significant involved how student credit hours were reported and distributed across the district. Early on, many students marked other campuses—especially Olney Central—on their registration forms, which meant Frontier was not receiving its fair share of state funding tied to enrollment.



Dr. Sharmila Kakac listens as Mr. Mason shares reflections on Frontier's early years.

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“It became a fight,” Mason said. “We were generating the hours, but not receiving the credit for them.”

Through persistence and advocacy, Frontier eventually secured recognition for its enrollment and funding.

In those early years, Mason noted that GED courses were among the most beneficial offerings. Many adults in the community sought high school equivalency, while others enrolled in credit courses—sometimes even before finishing high school.

“From the beginning, we were making a real difference in people’s lives,” Mason said.

During Mason’s tenure, Frontier did not yet have athletics, but he always believed they would one day become part of campus life. That vision is now reality, with Bobcat athletics continuing to grow and the addition of men’s and women’s basketball planned for 2027 alongside the completion of a new gymnasium.

Today, Mason still calls Fairfield home. At 89 years young this April, he remains active and engaged with the college he helped build. Outside of Frontier, he maintains a daily routine of walking two miles—six days a week.

His legacy lives on not only in the campus itself, but in the countless lives impacted by the opportunities Frontier Community College continues to provide.



# HOW FCC IS PREPARING WORKERS FOR WHAT'S NEXT

In today's workforce, skilled workers are needed more than ever. Community colleges play a vital role in preparing nurses, welders, technicians, and first responders—the very people who keep our communities strong. As new technologies continue to emerge, the workforce is constantly evolving. With April recognized as National Community College Month, community colleges stand out as both the smartest first step and the strongest next step toward a future filled with opportunity.

Dr. Sharmila Kakac, President of Frontier Community College and Vice Chancellor of Business & Industry, says community colleges are uniquely positioned to adapt their programs to meet the ever-changing needs of local industries and employers.

“Community colleges are in the best position to do that. If a business comes to us and says they need specific training for their employees, we can pull that together very quickly. Much of the training we provide is customized. For example, we recently offered a blueprint reading course for a client using their actual prints. Instead of a generic blueprint class, the instruction was tailored specifically to their needs. That's where we truly shine as training providers.

Not only do we offer traditional 8- and 16-week classes, but we also provide short-term training—whether it's a one-day session or a one-week course—focused on immediate workforce needs. If an employer has a specific piece of equipment or a specialized skill requirement, we can develop



The Albion and Allendale Firefighting Fundamentals (BOF Mod A) class recently trained at the FCC Live Burn Center, honing their hands-on firefighting skills.

targeted training around it. Manufacturing, for example, is a major employer, and many of those roles require problem-solving skills and specialized training and providing customized training to meet those needs is where we as community colleges can make a real impact.”

Community colleges serve a wide range of students—from those still in high school taking dual credit courses to recent graduates beginning their academic journey. Kakac also emphasized the importance of community colleges for non-traditional students, including adult learners and individuals looking to change careers.

“For example people who may have worked in the manufacturing industry for many years, like the Champion Lab employees, may decide they don't want to remain in

manufacturing, and a community college like Frontier can help them pivot. Whether it's a six-month certificate, a one-year program, or a two-year degree, these options provide a clear path forward. When one door closes, another opens. Community colleges offer accessible, goal-focused programs that lead to tangible success. In a relatively short amount of time—six months, a year, or two years—students can earn a certificate or credential that helps them transition into a new career.

We also offer workforce training through stackable certificates. Students can complete a short-term certificate, return to work, and then continue building additional credentials over time. These stackable pathways provide flexibility that you typically wouldn't find in a traditional four-year program.”

Locally and across the country, countless individuals have built successful careers after starting at a community college. Kakac notes that strong partnerships between community colleges and local businesses play a key role in strengthening workforce readiness and improving job placement outcomes—especially as new areas like artificial intelligence continue to grow.

“Everything we do in our B&I division is driven by what businesses need. We operate at the intersection of academics and workforce training. We leverage our academic expertise to create practical short-term training that we offer to employers. On the flip side, we bring back valuable insights from employers about emerging trends and workforce demands.

For example, many businesses are now asking for training in artificial intelligence—whether it's learning how to use AI tools, improving efficiency through AI applications, or understanding effective prompting. We play a role between the academic and workforce sides, helping to make sure that programs remain relevant and aligned with real-world needs.

Ultimately, our goal is to help individuals achieve sustainable employment while strengthening the workforce. We sit right in the middle—carrying information forward and bringing it back—to make that happen.”

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## **FCC ALUM MIKAYLA TROYER JOINS FMH BEHAVIORAL HEALTH TEAM**

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Back on January 28, Fairfield Memorial Hospital announced the addition of Mikayla Troyer, PMHNP, to its Mental and Behavioral Health team. Troyer joins FMH as a Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner, expanding access to comprehensive behavioral health services for patients across the region.

Troyer earned her Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner degree from Northern Kentucky University. She also holds an Associate Degree in Nursing from Frontier Community College and a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Chamberlain University.

## MAY 2026

1	Baseball @ Vincennes	2:00
8	Last Day of Spring Classes	
11 - 14	Final Exams	
15	Last Day of Spring Semester	
15	FCC Graduation @ FCHS	7:00
18	First Day of Intersession Classes	
19	IECC Board of Trustees Meeting @ Lincoln Trail	6:15
25	Memorial Day - Campus Closed	
27	Intersession Midterm	

## JUNE 2026

3	Last Day to Withdraw from Intersession Courses	
5	Last Day of Intersession	
8	First Day of Summer Classes	
16	IECC Board of Trustees Meeting @ OCC	6:15
19	Juneteenth - Campus Closed	

Prior to becoming a provider, Troyer served as a Registered Nurse at Fairfield Memorial Hospital's Horizon Healthcare Mental Health Clinic, where she gained hands-on experience caring for patients with a wide range of psychiatric needs. Her clinical background includes outpatient behavioral health services across multiple regional clinics, providing care to patients ages five and older.

In her role as a PMHNP, Troyer evaluates both new and established patients, develops individualized treatment plans, manages medications, conducts psychotherapy sessions, and performs GeneSight testing when appropriate. She also collaborates closely with therapists and care teams to support optimal patient outcomes, while emphasizing patient education and safety planning as part of her holistic approach to care.

Troyer credits Frontier Community College with helping build the foundation for her success in nursing and mental health.

"Frontier Community College provided a strong and practical foundation that significantly shaped my professional approach to nursing," Troyer said. "The program emphasized critical thinking, patient-centered care, and clinical skills, which prepared me for advancing my BSN and ultimately becoming a Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner. Starting my nursing journey at FCC allowed me to build confidence in my abilities while also developing a strong work ethic and sense of accountability."

During her time as a student at Frontier, Troyer said the communication and assessment skills she developed continue to play a key role in her career.

"The communication and assessment skills I developed at FCC are ones I utilize every day in my role as a PMHNP," she said. "FCC emphasized therapeutic communication, patient safety, and attention to detail—skills that are essential in mental health care. I also learned the importance of thorough assessment and trusting clinical judgment, which directly translates to psychiatric evaluations and treatment planning. The strong focus on professionalism and ethical practice continues to guide my work today."

Frontier Community College's nursing program is well known for its hands-on learning environment and strong faculty support. Troyer noted that this experience helped prepare her for the real-world demands of working in behavioral health settings.

"The hands-on learning environment at FCC helped bridge the gap between theory and practice," she said. "Clinical experiences pushed me to think on my feet, prioritize care, and adapt to different patient needs. The faculty support I received made a huge difference. Instructors were approachable, invested, and genuinely wanted students to succeed. That encouragement helped me feel prepared to handle challenging situations and complex patient care."

Troyer added that Frontier played a key role in building her confidence both clinically and professionally.

"Frontier Community College helped me develop confidence by creating an environment where learning was encouraged and growth was supported," she said. "Faculty fostered a culture where questions were welcomed and mistakes were treated as learning opportunities. Being trusted with increasing responsibility during clinicals helped me recognize my strengths and capabilities. That confidence carried forward as I continued my education and stepped into the role of a nurse practitioner."

Troyer also offered advice to current and future nursing students at Frontier.

"My advice would be to fully embrace the learning opportunities at Frontier Community College and trust that this foundation truly matters," she said. "Stay engaged, remain curious, and be open to where your nursing career can take you. Frontier can be the first step toward advancing your future. Build strong study habits and professional relationships early, because they will serve you throughout your career. If advanced practice or mental health care is your goal, know that the path may be challenging—but taking that first step is what leads to a successful future."

**Ignite Curiosity This Summer!**

IGNITE CURIOSITY  
IECC SUMMER CAMPS

- Theater & Media Production
- Forensic Science & Healthcare
- Art, Drawing, Painting & Origami
- Cell Towers & Smart-phones
- STEM & Robotics
- Sign Language & Mandarin Chinese
- Culinary Arts
- Cosmetology & Personal Styling

*Explore. Discover. Learn Together.*

ILLINOIS EASTERN COMMUNITY COLLEGES



# COX PRESENTS 109TH SCHOLARSHIP TO NURSING STUDENTS

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Pictured front row: Taylor Postin, Nursing Student; Jerry Cox; Kate Fopay, Nursing Student. Back row: Julie Bullard, Program Advisor – Allied Health; Brianna Trowbridge, Nursing Instructor; Andy Flemer, Chief Executive Officer at Fairfield Memorial Hospital; Tracy Hicks, Department Head of Nursing/Instructor; Casey Atteberry, Nursing Student; John Paul, Nursing Student; Brittney Wiggins, Nursing Student; Brittany Rose, Nursing Instructor; David Savage, Frontier Community College Foundation Member; Hollie Barrett, Chief Nursing Officer at Fairfield Memorial Hospital; Dr. Sharmila Kakac, President of Frontier Community College and Vice Chancellor of Business & Industry; Luke Harl, Frontier Community College Foundation President.

Jerry Cox has once again demonstrated his remarkable generosity by presenting his 109th scholarship, continuing his investment in the future of nursing students at Illinois Eastern Community Colleges, Olney Central College, and Frontier Community College. Through his ongoing support, Cox has helped open doors for countless students, investing not only in their education but also in the long-term health and well-being of the community.

Fairfield Memorial Hospital has expressed strong interest in partnering with Cox to connect students with potential employment opportunities, creating valuable career pathways while supporting the region's growing need for healthcare professionals. What began as a small contribution in honor of his mother, Clemence Elizabeth Cox, has grown into a lasting investment—providing financial support, fostering connections with local healthcare leaders, and inspiring students as they prepare to enter the nursing profession.

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## **BUILDING A WINNER: MCCUE HITS 100 WINS AT FRONTIER**

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Back on Tuesday, April 7, at FNB Field on the campus of Frontier Community College, the Bobcats baseball team not only earned a come-from-behind 8-6 victory over Lincoln Trail, but also celebrated a major milestone—head coach Matt McCue’s 100th win at the helm.

Since arriving at Frontier in October 2022, McCue has helped elevate the Bobcats into one of the top programs in NJCAA Region 24 and the Great Rivers Athletic Conference. Entering the season, McCue and his staff knew the milestone was within reach with a strong campaign. With more than 25 wins already this season, that goal became a reality.

“We had done the math on how far away I was from 100 at the beginning of the year,” McCue said. “I told a lot of people I’m just happy to be at one place long enough to get 100 wins somewhere.”

Reaching the milestone at home made the moment even more meaningful, but for McCue, it was about more than just the number.

“It was nice to win it here at home,” McCue said. “There’s so many people that go into every win. I was thinking a lot about past players. I was getting congratulations from so many people, and I’m thankful for everyone who has poured into me—and the people we’ve poured into.”

Being able to share that experience at home with so many of them, along with faculty and staff, made it really special."

McCue added that players from each of his previous seasons reached out, along with friends from his hometown, making the moment even more rewarding.

He also expressed gratitude for the continued support from the community.

"The community has been amazing," McCue said. "We preach to our players that this is a two-way street in a small town. People want to be part of what's going on—not just attend games, but truly support it. Whether it's sponsorships, following scores, building relationships with players and coaches, or coming to games, it creates a special atmosphere. It brings a real sense of pride and connection. I can't say enough about how welcoming this community has been over my three and a half years."



Coach Matt McCue speaks about his players during the First Pitch Dinner held earlier this year at Fairfield First Christian Church.

As the Bobcats head into the final stretch of the regular season with postseason play approaching, McCue is focused on finishing strong.

"We're in a good place right now," he said. "We're hoping to get some guys back soon and continue to put things together. We've had a good year so far, but we've got some tough tests coming up. A lot of the teams we're playing are playing better baseball now than they were earlier in the season, so we need to be at our best. Hopefully we can do that and earn the best seed heading into the playoffs."

For the latest updates and news in Bobcat athletics, go to [fccbobcats.com](http://fccbobcats.com).

**FRONTIER COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
48TH ANNUAL COMMENCEMENT  
FRIDAY, MAY 15, 2026 - 7 P.M.  
FAIRFIELD COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL**

**A SALUTE TO THE CLASS OF 2026 - WHERE HARD WORK MEETS BRIGHT FUTURES**

[iecc.edu/fcc](http://iecc.edu/fcc) | 618-842-3711

# FCC IN PICTURES



**1** Annika Van Heemst smiles as the semester winds down.

**2** FCC Phi Theta Kappa members served pizza to families during the Easter Egg Hunt held on March 30.

**3** Construction crews are taking advantage of the warm spring weather to make progress on the new athletic facility..

**4** A student takes notes on his laptop during Mrs. Speir's class in West Hall.

**5** A kindergarten student enjoys a hands-on learning experience in the nursing wing at Cox Hall as Tracy Hicks watches.

**6** A striking rooster made an appearance on campus on March 18, quickly becoming the talk of the day..