

DECEMBER 2025



STUDENTS MEET FRONTIER

First look at campus life, programs, and success.



ACROSS THE ATLANTIC

A 3,800-mile journey toward opportunity and a new beginning.



FULL CIRCLE JOURNEY

Thomason's personal growth inspires her mission to serve students



PLANTING SEEDS FOR THE FUTURE

Frontier Community College hosted its Preview Day at the Workforce Development Center on Friday, November 14. The event offered local grade school and high school students an inside look at life at FCC, as faculty and staff highlighted academic programs, student clubs, and the wide range of services available on campus.

Carrie Halbert, Director of Student Engagement and Recruitment, shared, "We welcomed approximately 75 high school students and 85 eighth graders for a day of career exploration. Future students had the opportunity to connect with FCC faculty, staff, and current students while learning about a wide range of career pathways."

The day was divided into two sessions. The first group consisted of high school students from Fairfield Community High School, Edwards County High School, and Wayne City High School. Later, eighth-grade students from Center Street, Geff, and a local homeschool group arrived to explore campus and learn more about the opportunities available at Frontier.

"Faculty showcased their programs and classes through interactive, hands-on activities," Halbert said. "Highlights included practicing with a digital fire extinguisher trainer to introduce students



Grade school students explore Steve Hnetkovsky and Tom Windland's booth at FCC Preview Day.

to the Fire Science program, as well as blood and plasma separation demonstrations in the Medical Laboratory Technician (MLT) program. Students were highly engaged—asking thoughtful questions and actively participating throughout the sessions. I think many teachers were surprised by the level of hands-on learning and demonstrations offered during the event.”

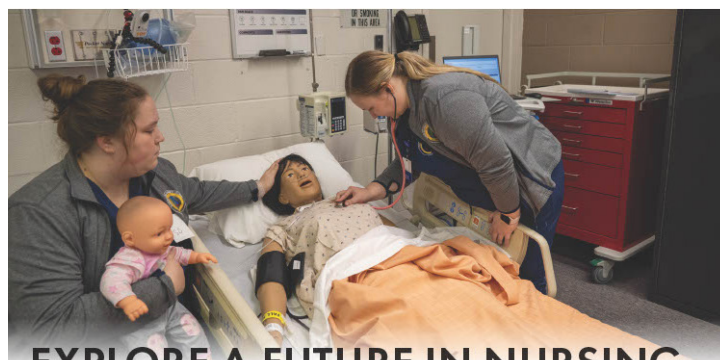
Students who attended received a bingo card and marked off different experiences, such as visiting the MLT table, taking a selfie with the Bobcat, and speaking with FCC President Dr. Sharmila Kakac. Halbert thanked everyone who participated and shared that next year's Preview Day will hopefully take place inside the new athletic facility currently under construction on campus.

from this year's event, FCC plans to host Preview Day again next fall—with hopes of holding it in the new gymnasium,” Halbert added.

Virtual nursing information sessions for 2026 are right around the corner. The first session of the new year will take place on Wednesday, January 21 at 6 p.m. and is open to both nursing and radiography students. The following session is scheduled for Thursday, February 26 at 2 p.m., designated for nursing students only. All times are Central.

The Zoom Meeting ID for these sessions is 567 828 7573.

All applicants must attend a nursing information session prior to submitting their application. For full details and additional dates, visit iecc.edu/nursinginfosessions.



EXPLORE A FUTURE IN NURSING

ILLINOIS EASTERN COMMUNITY COLLEGES NURSING INFORMATION SESSIONS

FRONTIER COMMUNITY COLLEGE FAIRFIELD, IL

To make application for the nursing program, please contact Julie Bullard at 618-847-9201, ext. 4520 and make an appointment for one of the following meetings:

Location: Cox Hall, Room 105

2025 Dates
Thursday, October 16, 10-11 a.m.
Tuesday, November 18, 3-4 p.m.
Tuesday, December 9, 2-3 p.m.

OLNEY CENTRAL COLLEGE OLNEY, IL

To make application for the nursing program, please contact Julie Bullard at 618-847-9201, ext. 4520 and make an appointment for one of the following meetings:

Location: Wattleworth Hall, Room 213

2025 Dates
Wednesday, October 8, 1-2 p.m.
Friday, November 14, 2-3 p.m.
Wednesday, December 10, 3-4 p.m.

VIRTUAL SESSIONS (NURSING & RADIOGRAPHY)

Zoom Meeting ID: 567 828 7573

2025 Dates
Wednesday, October 15, 2:00 p.m. (Nursing & Radiography)
Friday, December 5, 12:00 noon (Nursing & Radiography)

2026 Dates
Wed., January 21, 6:00 p.m. (Nursing & Radiography)
Thursday, February 26, 2:00 p.m. (Nursing only)

LINCOLN TRAIL COLLEGE ROBINSON, IL

To make application for the nursing program, please contact Michelle Woods at 618-546-2335, ext. 1130 and make an appointment for one of the following meetings:

Location: Williams Hall, Room 110

2025 Dates
Tuesday, October 7, 2-3 p.m.
Tuesday, November 18, 10-11 a.m.
Wednesday, December 3, 1-2 p.m.

WABASH VALLEY COLLEGE MT. CARMEL, IL

To make application for the nursing program, please contact Michelle Woods at 618-263-5105, ext. 3431 and make an appointment for one of the following meetings:

Location: Science Building, Room 58

2025 Dates
Thursday, October 16, 11 a.m.-12 p.m.
Monday, November 3, 2-3 p.m.
Friday, December 5, 8-9 a.m.



ROOTED IN IRELAND, RISING IN ILLINOIS

The Electrical Distribution Systems program at Frontier Community College has always drawn a dedicated and diverse group of students—both from Wayne County and beyond. Among these future linemen, one student's story stands out: Roan Durmus of Olney, Illinois, who was born in Dublin, Ireland, and is embracing every opportunity the program offers, proving that determination truly crosses borders.

Reflecting on his childhood overseas, Durmus shared, "It was amazing. Moving here was a big change, to say the least—coming from the other side of the world. They drive on the opposite side of the road, and everything feels just a bit different. But I really like it here, compared to over there."

Durmus' path to Olney began with a chance connection his mother and stepfather made as teenagers on vacation in Florida.

"My stepdad and mom met when they were both 16. My mom was living in Ireland at the time but was visiting Florida, and my stepdad—who lived in Olney—was also vacationing there. They hung out throughout their trip and kept in touch as pen pals since there was no social media back then.

"Life happened and they eventually lost contact. Then, about six years ago, my mom got a random text from a guy asking if she was the person he remembered from that long-ago vacation. They caught up quickly—talking, video chatting on Messenger—and things just took off. We came here to visit, and I really liked it. He visited us in Ireland, and they decided they wanted to live together. We had to choose between him moving to Ireland or us moving to Olney. That's what we chose. A lot of factors went into it."

The straight-line distance between Dublin and Olney is roughly 3,800 miles—a long journey that came with significant challenges for Durmus and his family, both during the immigration process and after settling in Illinois.

"My stepdad had lived in Olney his whole life, and he supported us through the entire immigration process. It was incredibly expensive and really difficult. We had to take tests on U.S. history and constitutional amendments—we had to learn all of that before moving here. At first, it was tough because I didn't know anything.

"It was a lengthy process. Back in 2019, we came here for a vacation to see if my family and I would like it. We really did. We went from the capital city of Dublin—where you can imagine



Roan Durmus, a student in Frontier Community College's Electrical Distribution Systems program, stands near the utility poles behind Workforce Development Center.



A student in FCC's EDS program practices line work on a utility pole.

how packed everything is—to the rural parts of America. It was a big change, but I love it.”

Once in Illinois, Durmus also had a unique decision to make regarding school placement.

“Because of when my birthday falls, I had already completed one year of high school in Ireland. They gave me the choice of entering middle school as an 8th grader or starting high school as a freshman. I chose 8th grade because I didn’t know anyone yet, and I thought it would be better to make friends and build relationships in middle school before going into high school.”

As graduation approached and he began thinking seriously about his future, Durmus set his sights on becoming an electrical lineman—a decision he says was made easier thanks to the guidance and support of instructor Dustin Wiggins.

“I wanted a job that paid well but didn’t require a two- or four-year degree. That’s when I realized line work was something I really wanted to do. It took me about a year after high school to figure it out, because it’s such a big decision—what you’ll be doing for the rest of your life and what you’re willing to dedicate so much time to. I love being outdoors. I don’t enjoy office spaces, so this felt right.”

Durmus credits Wiggins for helping him grow from a complete beginner into someone who now feels confident in the field.

“I’ve learned so much because of my incredible teacher, Dustin Wiggins. I came here not knowing anything, and now I’m comfortable climbing poles and working up high. We’ve learned everything about electrical distribution, and once the weather turns, we’ll dive into the more challenging work.

“In Ireland, the weather is really rough. We’re surrounded by the ocean, so it’s always raining and cloudy. Coming here to the States, it can hit 90 degrees in the summertime—that’s been a big change.”

When asked where he’s seen the most growth—and what he’s still working to improve—Durmus doesn’t hesitate.

“Definitely my climbing technique. That’s what I’m focusing on and working to get better at every day. The only way to improve is to get on the pole, make mistakes, and keep going. Dustin always tells us, if you’re going to mess up, mess up here in class—not out in the field or on a job site with live wires.”



Roan Durmus gives a thumbs-up, sharing his enthusiasm for the EDS program.

Looking ahead, Durmus already has a clear vision for his future after earning his EDS certificate.

"I'm definitely going to go to the first place that hires me," he said. "I want to start an apprenticeship, get some experience under my belt, and then join a union after a few years."

Even as he builds a new life and career in the United States, Durmus still makes it a priority to stay connected to his roots in Ireland.

"I try to go back once a year—in the summer or winter. This coming year, I'm planning a summer trip. I like to pop over whenever I can. My whole family is over there, so you can imagine what that's like. But we stay in touch—texts, calls, letters. They send packages over, and we send packages back."

For more information on Frontier Community College's Electrical Distribution Systems program, call 618-842-3711 or visit iecc.edu/fcc/eds.



TRIO TO TRIUMPH: HOW SUPPORT BECAME PURPOSE

Years ago, Jaeda Thomason walked the halls of Frontier Community College as a student—unsure of where life would lead, but shaped by the mentors, classmates, and opportunities she found on campus. Today, her journey has come full circle. After gaining new experiences and discovering a passion for helping others, Jaeda has returned to Frontier—this time as a TRIO SSS academic advisor. Her story is one of coming home, giving back, and investing in the same college that once invested in her.



Jaeda Thomason answers a high school student's question during FCC's Preview Day on Friday, November 14.

Jaeda shared, "I started at FCC in 2019 as a senior fresh out of high school. I had dreams and aspirations but no plan for how I was going to get there. I had a lot of personal goals: live on my own, get out of Fairfield, do something after high school. So, I started classes at FCC. I did not want to join the army to pay for school, so I started bugging FCC advisors Kara Blanton and Eric Resor about scholarships, grants, and how to get involved on campus. They recommended that I apply to join TRIO and look into work-study jobs."

"Soon after, I was accepted into TRIO and hired at the Bobcat Den. Annie Lankford, my TRIO counselor, helped me with so much. She helped me find a way to pay for what I could not. I was able to get a job, I had someone

there to remind me of all my achievements, someone who would push me to do even more and reach even higher."

Thomason said TRIO quickly became the support system she desperately needed as a young student navigating both academics and personal struggles.

"It was comforting—I needed a safety net," she explained. "College was my adventure and my responsibility, and to a young student, failure is daunting and self-sabotage a real threat. So it was a relief to have a TRIO counselor who could be more personal with me and help me with not only my academics but the mess that was my personal life as an 18-year-old. I would not have gotten a bachelor's without TRIO, because I would not have visited the Evansville campuses on my own dime or time.

"TRIO allowed me to experience things I did not get the chance to see in rural Illinois. It allowed me to visit campuses to decide where I wanted to get my college degree. I chose the University of Southern Indiana. Without TRIO, I would never have been able to find a way to pay for school on my own. Before TRIO, I always wanted to go to college in Atlanta. When I graduated and realized the financial bill was on me, I had a change of plans. TRIO taught me there is always a way to achieve your goal if you are willing to search for it. I learned anything is possible, but you only get what you work for. So you must work hard to get what you want. There is only a time limit on your goals if you set one."



Thomason is an accomplished local artist. Her paintings, *The Red Woman* (left) and *Ambition* (right), currently hang in her West Hall office, along with several other original works.

Now serving as a TRIO advisor, Thomason sees firsthand the challenges students face today—and the difference the program can make.

“We have a few that struggle with confidence and fitting in. Maybe they feel like they don’t belong because they may need extra help, or they lack confidence, or they are not able to participate in events as much as others,” she said. “TRIO helps our students bridge gaps in confidence, knowledge, and opportunities. This could be helping them get a job, providing secondary tutoring, developing time management skills, or even teaching life skills like checking their vehicle’s engine oil levels.

It feels natural to help people. I want to make other people’s days brighter, and I am grateful for TRIO helping me to facilitate that desire. There’s nothing like the relief on a student’s face when I help them overcome an obstacle—like helping them finish their homework or just listening to them talk about their bad day.”

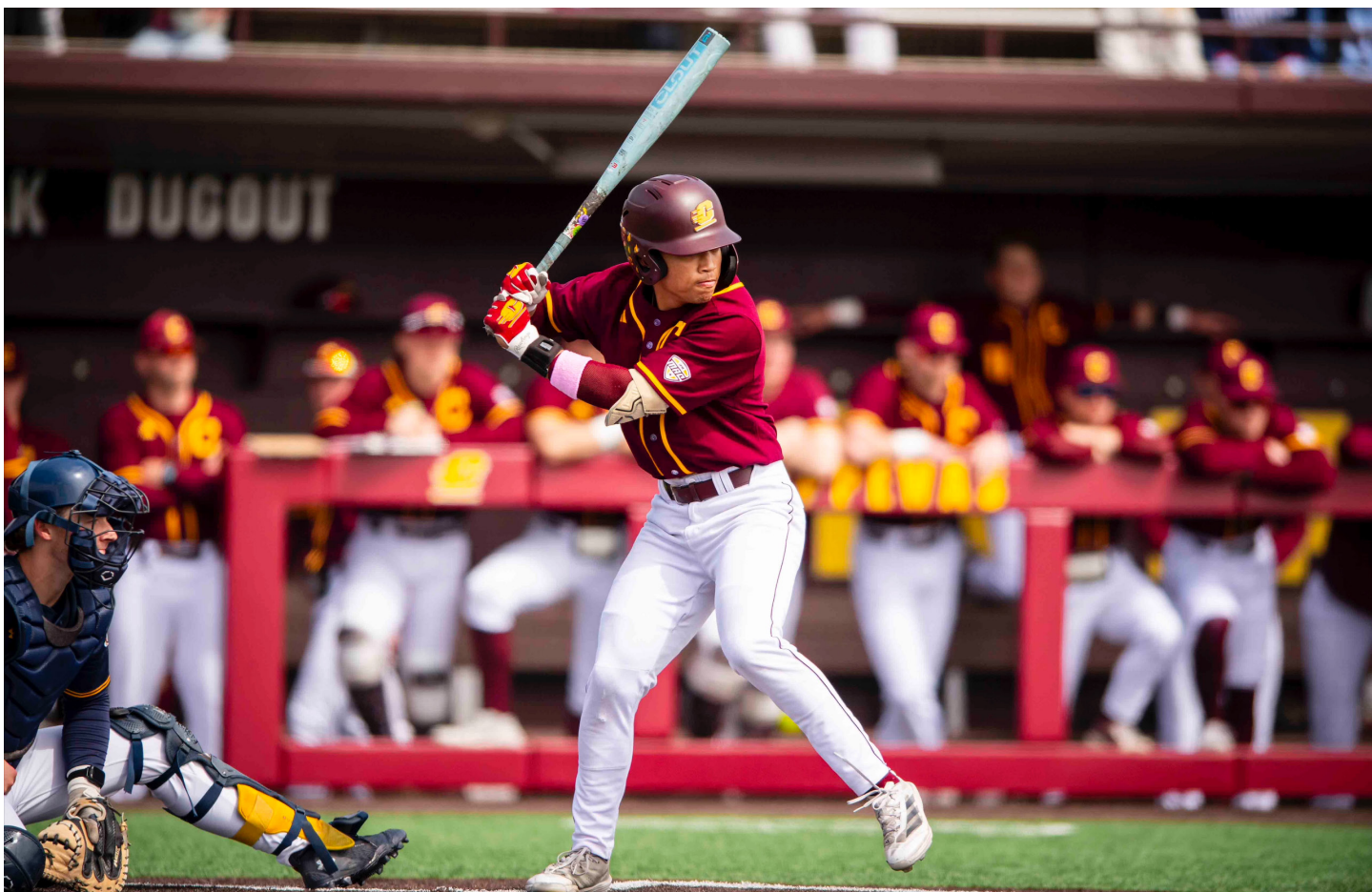
Reflecting back on her days as an FCC student and where she is now, Thomason added, “TRIO asked nothing of me and gave me access to a fountain of knowledge. It allowed me the opportunity to improve myself and my life, and it made my educational journey just a little bit easier knowing I had my advisor in my corner.”

For questions or more information, visit iecc.edu/trioss. You can also email Thomason at thomasonj8@iecc.edu or call 618-842-3711.



Put success under the tree - give the gift of education.

Frontier Community College | 2 Frontier Drive | Fairfield, Illinois | 618-842-3711 | iecc.edu/fcc



WRIGHT AT THE HEART OF THE GAME

Frontier Community College has earned a reputation for developing talent that rises to the next level, and Central Michigan University senior Aydin Wright stands as a powerful example of that success. Once a steady presence behind the plate for the Bobcats, Wright carried his game to CMU and turned heads across the Mid-American Conference last season with clutch hitting, defensive command, and a calm presence in pressure moments. He quickly established himself as one of the Chippewas' most reliable players.

A native of Griffith, Indiana, Wright played four years of high school baseball at Thornwood High School on Chicago's south side. But how did a Thunderbird find his way to Fairfield, Illinois, and become a Bobcat?

"What led me to choose Frontier was the opportunity," Wright said. "As a city kid, I was obviously shocked at first, but I didn't care for the big campus life or flashy facilities. I just wanted a chance to become a better person and player."

Two years at the community college level can pass quickly, but for Wright, that time was filled with growth and preparation.

"FCC gave me the foundation I needed as a student-athlete to come to CMU and know how to handle everything," he said. "I was very well prepared by my professors and coaches."

JANUARY 2026 EVENTS

- 5 Campuses Open
- 7 Faculty Workshop
- 8-9 Registration, Testing
- 12 First Day of Classes
- 19 Campuses Closed, Martin Luther King Jr. Day

FEBRUARY 2026 EVENTS

- 16 Campuses Closed, President's Day

To view the academic calendar, visit iecc.edu/fcc and select the Academic tab. For the calendar of events, click on the Community tab. Be sure to check both pages regularly for updates and important information.



CMU catcher Aydin Wright stays locked in behind the plate during a game this season.

FCC Bobcats Baseball Coach Matt McCue says Wright made a lasting impact—one that is still felt on campus and on the field today.

“Aydin was the model of a consistent player. You always knew what you were going to get with him. He displayed great work ethic on the field, in the weight room, and in the classroom. He left a mark on this program that can still be seen today, along with so many others from his class. It’s no surprise at all to see the success he’s had during his time at Central Michigan.”

During his time as a Bobcat, Wright made a major impact at the plate, hitting .370 with three home runs, 55 RBIs, a .477 on-base percentage, a .478 slugging percentage, and 20 stolen bases. His excellence extended beyond the field as he earned National Junior College Athletic Association Academic All-American honors twice.

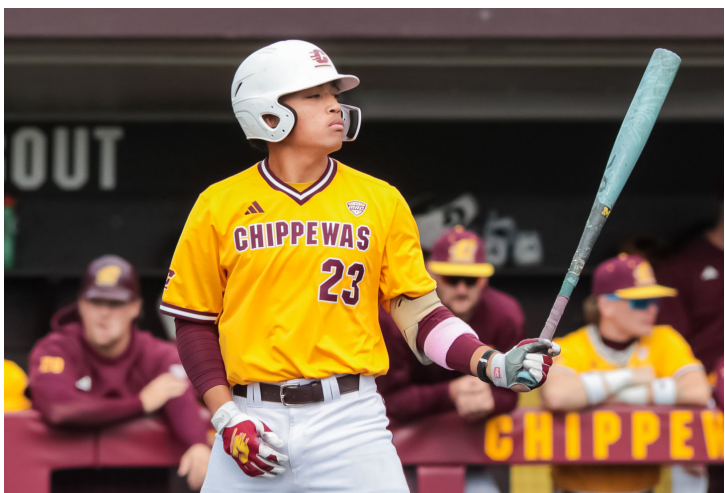
Sometimes, it only takes one standout performance in front of the right people.

“One good game in front of the right people,” Wright said. “All it takes is for one coach to like you, and I was fortunate that it was CMU. A phone call later, I was on a visit and could already envision it as my future home.”

Located in Mount Pleasant, Michigan — a city of more than 21,000 — Central Michigan University spans nearly 500 acres and enrolls approximately 14,000 students. While the jump from a small community college to a large university can be overwhelming, Wright found that the biggest adjustment wasn’t the size of the campus, but the change in team dynamics.

“The biggest adjustment for me was the team chemistry,” he explained. “At FCC, we stayed at Bobcat Crossing right next to the field and saw each other all day long. At CMU, it’s a bigger city, and without practice, I could go days without seeing my teammates.”

What didn’t change in Wright’s transition to NCAA Division I was his ability to perform — in fact, he elevated his game. He led the Chippewas with a .345 batting average and a .429 on-base percentage,



Aydin Wright steps into the box for the Central Michigan Chippewas.

hit .367 in Mid-American Conference play, and started 38 games, including 37 behind the plate. He finished near the top of the team in several key categories, tying for third in hits (51) and multi-hit games (15), adding 12 doubles, and throwing out a team-high 17 would-be base stealers.

"I've just kept developing and trusting the process," Wright said. "Every day, it's about chopping wood and carrying water — not getting stuck on the results. If you fall in love with the process, the growth happens without you even noticing."

head baseball coach Jake Sabol.

That mindset didn't go unnoticed by CMU

"Aydin has grown tremendously since coming to CMU," Sabol said. "In his first year, he faced some adversity and had to wait for his opportunity. Once he got it, he never gave it back. Even when he wasn't the everyday guy, he stayed prepared, and that played a huge role in the season he had."

One of Wright's most memorable moments came on March 12 at Marshall University, when he recorded his first career NCAA Division I home run.

"Before that, I wasn't getting a lot of playing time, and I kept telling myself that when the opportunity came, I was going to make the most of it," he said. "After that home run, my confidence just shot up, and it really helped drive the season I had."

Following his junior year, Wright underwent shoulder surgery, and his availability for the upcoming season remains uncertain, according to Coach Sabol. He is currently working through rehabilitation in hopes of being ready for opening day on February 13, 2026, though as of late November, it was still unclear whether he will be cleared to return by that time.

While his athletic future is temporarily on hold, Wright continues to excel in the classroom. Although his major is general business, he is planning to pursue a master's degree in teaching.

"I want to become a teacher and a mentor for kids in Chicago and inspire the younger generation to become the best version of themselves," Wright said.

Coach Sabol believes Wright's mentality gives him the tools to reach even greater heights.

"His greatest strength is his mindset," Sabol said. "He consistently has high-quality, productive at-bats and always comes in with a plan. He doesn't allow emotions to control him, which is especially important at a premium position like catcher. If he can return healthy and continue to develop his speed and power, I believe he has a real chance to play at the next level. It will take hard work, but he is more than capable."

As Wright reflects on his time at Frontier, he offers simple but heartfelt advice to current and future Bobcat student-athletes: enjoy every moment.

"My best advice to FCC student-athletes is to soak it all in," he said. "Those were some of the best moments of my life. The community, the coaches, the players — they'll all become memories sooner than you think. I catch myself wishing I could go to La Fuente for one more meal or make one more Walmart run with my best friends. Appreciate the time you have with your teammates and make the most of every second."

FIRST PITCH DINNER

SPONSORED BY FNB

FRIDAY, JANUARY 23, 2026 • 6 P.M.
FAIRFIELD FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH
FAIRFIELD, ILLINOIS

TICKETS: \$30 PER PERSON
TABLES: \$200 FOR 8 PEOPLE
DINNER: CATERED BY BIG BOY

**CELEBRATE THE START OF BOBCATS
BASEBALL WITH AN EVENING OF
GREAT FOOD AND FUN!**

**MEET THE TEAM AND ENJOY
DINNER AS OUR BOBCAT PLAYERS
SERVE AS YOUR WAITERS AND
EVENT STAFF!**



FCC BOBCATS BASEBALL
CONTACT: MATT MCCUE 618-847-9271 EXT. 4242
mmccue@iecc.edu

GAEL SALINAS



SCAN THE QR CODE TO PURCHASE YOUR TICKETS!

FCC IN PICTURES



1 Donna Frutiger leads a yoga session inside the Bobcat Den..

2 Ellen Shreve welcomes students during High-Five Friday at Center Street on November 14.

3 Peyton Owen explains to the class what qualities make an effective teacher during Introduction to Education course.

4 A student in Angie Harrison's psychology class takes notes.

5 Jody White explains the programmable controller system to high school students at Preview Day.

6 Construction crews pour concrete footers at the athletic facility site.