

Comments of scholarship recipient Kaitlin Burke at the 2009 TCC

Educational Foundation Scholarship Luncheon

I am honored to be here today with scholarship donors, TCC board members, TCC administrators, and my fellow scholarship recipients. I'd like to start by telling you a little bit about my journey and how it brought me to TCC. I grew up in New Jersey, the only child of a single mother who always encouraged me to continue my education after high school. She knew that education was the key to giving me opportunities to become whatever I wanted to be and I had high aspirations! My mom always wanted to see me achieve my goals and my dreams. She started teaching me the value of a good education very early on. I was expected to excel and set goals for myself before I even entered high school. She taught me to love reading and would read to me every night. I still remember by heart some of our favorite books. Her college education was interrupted by life circumstances, beyond her control and I watched her work long hard hours just so we could get by. Even though she worked hard every day, she still came home with a smile for me, her pride and joy! Her dedication, love and support taught me to be a humble and hard-working person.

From a very young age, I was fascinated by the way the human body worked and I loved reading and learning about it. In high school, when I was exposed to biology and the sciences, my interest grew and I knew I would love to have a career in the world of medicine. After high school, when most of my friends were entering college, I enlisted in the United States Navy, due partly to the difficult times our country was enduring. The terrorist attack on September 11, 2001 occurred on my 17th birthday, the day I was supposed to get my driver's license. Needless to say, my test didn't happen. Thankfully I didn't lose any family members, but I was still affected on a personal level. In the Navy I served as a Hospital Corpsman, where I was able to

learn more about the human body. I spent all my available time around doctors and nurses, asking questions and doing hands on care whenever possible. This experience fueled my desire to become a doctor. Eventually I was stationed in the Hampton Roads area. In my free time, I began attending Tidewater Community College, because their class schedule offered the most flexibility. After I was discharged from active duty, I became a full time student. At TCC, I was offered many opportunities to enhance my learning experience, one being the STEM pioneer program. It was this program that solidified my decision to become a physician. The professors and staff at TCC exceeded my expectations. Each one took a personal interest in my education and I sincerely believe they afforded me opportunities that have opened many doors for me inside and outside the classroom. One experience in particular I would like to tell you about is the mini-semester that I spent at Brookhaven National Laboratory. With encouragement and sponsorship from STEM Pioneer Project staff members Susan Fincke and Laura Soulsby, I applied for this 5-day experience and was thrilled to learn that I was accepted. The experience I gained from this short time at BNL was above and beyond regular classroom experiences. We actually worked in the lab with professionals in their field and were able to experience real life lab experiments as well as network for summer internships. Ongoing learning allows me to see things with different perspectives and enables me to develop my critical thinking skills. Thanks to TCC, I will be going back to BNL to do a medical research internship this summer. I will be working with Dr. Dilmanian on his studies of microbeam radiation therapy and its effects on pediatric brain tumors. None of these opportunities would have been possible without the scholarship support I received; scholarships have opened doors for me at TCC.

A college scholarship is more than just a reward. Being awarded the T. Michael Laney and Betty Shores Memorial Scholarships was a great honor not only for me but for my mom as

well. These scholarships reinforced the lessons I was taught, that if I applied myself and worked hard, I could realize my dreams. Being awarded these two very generous scholarships has enabled me to dedicate more time to my studies, while at the same time participate in extracurricular activities and clubs that I couldn't be a part of if I had to work more hours. Currently I am the Vice-President of Service for the Virginia Beach chapter of Phi Theta Kappa. I am also able to fully participate in the STEM pioneer program that includes mentoring and site visits. I have the time to volunteer for community service events such as toys for tots and providing medical support for a variety of charity based races.

All of this hard work will pay off this May when I will graduate and receive my Associate of Science degree. I applied to the College of William and Mary and Old Dominion University for the fall semester and am waiting for decisions from these schools. I will continue to seek scholarship opportunities as the cost of college tuition continues to rise. I know I have to be an exemplary student and well-rounded person to be considered for any scholarship. These two TCC scholarships have made such a difference in my life, and I am truly grateful and honored to have been chosen as a recipient of such generous gifts. I know I should say thanks, but thank you is so easy. Since actions speak louder than words, my true thank you will come in the future when I am out of medical school and am able to provide a scholarship for students just like me! Until that time comes, I hope you all know how truly appreciative I am and that my success the last few years at TCC would not have been possible without the support of my professors and TCC's scholarship donors.