

# A remarkable journey



Evans Kaame

This year's recipient of the Community College President's Award in Honor of Val Ogden is Evans Kaame, a student who has been through much and traveled far to pursue his educational dreams.

## About Evans Kaame

Evans Kaame was born and raised in a small community in northwestern Kenya. After his father died, the family was thrown into hardship and poverty. "I watched my younger siblings crying as my mom left early in the morning and came home at 9 p.m.," he recalled. "We didn't know if we were going to eat at night or not."

When Kaame was in his early teens, he decided to leave home and live on the streets to ease the burden on his mother and siblings. "The street was a new life with so many barriers ... but because tragedies happen in life, I had to do this," he said. "I had no other option. I fought cold nights in the street ... being on drugs and breaking into people's homes. I had to survive. I had no choice."

In 2009, the course of Kaame's life changed once again, when a charity called New Hope Children entered him into its program providing housing and education to street children. At New Hope, Kaame's academic potential became realized. He graduated from high school in 2016 at the top of his class. However, his challenges were not yet over: He could not afford to enroll in college in Kenya.

New Hope's founder, Rachael Swanson, lives in Vancouver and graduated from Clark College. She encouraged Kaame to apply to Clark, and in 2018, after securing a student visa and scholarship funding from Clark College Foundation, Kaame enrolled at Clark as an international student.

Kaame has thrived at Clark College. This past academic year, he has served as student government president. He has run on the college's track-and-field and cross-country teams. He has volunteered with multiple local organizations, as well as at Clark College's Penguin Pantry and as a Peer Mentor for international students. And he has earned a Grade Point Average of more than 3.9 while doing so.

After graduating from Clark College with his transfer Associate in Arts degree, Kaame intends to continue his studies, focusing on business administration, political science, and comparative religious studies. He hopes to one day create a global initiative focused on leadership and management.

## **About the Community College President's Award**

The Community College President's Award in honor of Val Ogden is given each year to a student who has completed their studies at Clark College and is transferring to Washington State University Vancouver. They receive full tuition and fees

for two years while they finish their bachelor's degree at WSU Vancouver. The award is traditionally announced during that year's Commencement ceremony.

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## Finding her way



Vita Blanco at Clark College's 2019 Multicultural Graduation Ceremony.

This year's recipient of the Community College Presidents' Award in Honor of Val Ogden was Esmeralda "Vita" Blanco, who graduated with an Associate of Applied Science in Business Administration.

"At Clark College, [Vita] has truly found her voice," said Clark College President Robert K. Knight in announcing the scholarship during the college's 2019 Commencement ceremony. "Wherever she goes, people are touched by her enthusiasm and determination."

Blanco did not have an easy path to college. The youngest of 27 siblings, she spent part of her youth homeless and dropped out of high

school after the birth of her first daughter in order to work and support them both. In 2016, now a single mother of two teen-aged daughters, Blanco decided to risk leaving her job in order to enroll in the High School 21-Plus program at Clark College, which is designed for adults earning their high school diplomas. Six months later, she received a standing ovation at Clark College's 2016 commencement ceremony when she shared her story as a student speaker.

During that speech, Blanco recounted what going back to school as an adult was like for her. "The first time I had to write an essay, it took me 30 hours—true story!" she said. "But the day after I handed it in, my daughter needed help with her own middle school essay, and for the first time, I was able to help her with her homework. I knew then that I was on the right path."

Blanco stayed on that path, transferring into college-level coursework. She said that her experience in High School 21-Plus "lit a fire" within her to continue her education. She excelled in her college-level classes, making the Vice President's List for her high GPA. She joined both the Entrepreneur Club and Phi Theta Kappa (the international honor society for two-year colleges) and became a Student Ambassador. Additionally, in January 2019 she was named a Transforming Lives Scholar by the Washington State Association of College Trustees.



Vita Blanco learns that she has been named the Community College Presidents' Scholarship recipient at Clark College's 2019 Commencement.

"My mantra is, 'It's never too late and you're never too old for college,'" said Blanco. She plans to continue her education at WSUV by completing a bachelor's degree in communications and public speaking.

The Community College President's Award in honor of Val Ogden is given each year to a student who has completed their studies at Clark College and is transferring to Washington State University Vancouver. They receive full tuition and fees for two years while they finish their bachelor's degree at WSU Vancouver.

*Photos: Nick Bremer /Clark College*

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# “I want to be a role model”



Nicholas Freese '17 waits in line to participate in commencement.

When Nicholas Freese heard his name announced as the recipient of the Community College Presidents' Scholarship in Honor of Val Ogden, there was one person he wanted to discuss it with, above all others: his 4-year-old daughter, Sadie.

“I really want to know what my daughter thinks about this,” he said as he stood in line to receive his degree, clearly still stunned by the news that he would be able to attend Washington State University Vancouver for two years, tuition-free, in order to complete his bachelor's degree. Clark College President Bob Knight made the announcement during the 2017 Clark College Commencement ceremony.



Nicholas Freese stands, stunned, as he learns that he has received the 2017-2018 Community College Presidents' Scholarship.

It might seem strange to want to know a toddler's opinion on your academic achievements, but for Freese, Sadie has been at the heart of his pursuit of higher education. "With her, I have the opportunity to be awesome, just from the get-go," he said during an interview prior to Commencement. "She can just think of Daddy as this great guy who's worked hard and pursued his goals."

Freese is painfully aware that many people who have known him since his own childhood might not see him in such an unambiguously positive light. Growing up in Albuquerque, New Mexico, Freese began getting into trouble around the time he entered high school. Trying to escape a violent home life with an alcoholic father, Freese began staying with friends—including "some people I probably shouldn't have been hanging out with," he said.

By his junior year, Freese was struggling with his own addiction issues. He bounced between alternative schools, but didn't graduate from any; he tried rehab, but it didn't stick. For the next few years, he wandered from city to city: Denver, Seattle, Honolulu, Saipan. By the time he landed in Vancouver, he had made the commitment to get sober, but hadn't found much

direction past that.

All that changed after Sadie was born. “At first, it was like, ‘Daddy’s being clean,’ but after a while I felt like, ‘That’s great, but what’s Daddy going to *do*?’” Freese recalled. “I don’t want to be borderline poverty, like I grew up. I want to be a role model.”

Freese enrolled at Clark College. At first, he found college daunting—less academically than logistically. “I didn’t understand how registration worked,” he said. “I had to use my resources. I had to ask for advice, and I’m not used to asking for advice. I’d be in the Financial Aid Office every day for a week, trying to figure things out.”

But as Freese continued at Clark, he learned how to navigate its support systems. Advisors showed him how to plan his degree; he met friends while working out in the Fitness Center; he took advantage of other free and subsidized services like the Counseling and Health Center and the college’s dental clinic. In the end, Freese graduated with honors, earning a cumulative GPA of 3.77.



Clark College President Bob Knight congratulates scholarship recipient Nicholas Freese.

It hasn’t always been easy. Freese had to balance his studies



with caring for Sadie and volunteering in his community. He serves as a mentor to other recovering addicts, works on clean-up parties in his neighborhood, and participates in activities aimed at improving police-community relations. Additionally, he has worked during much of his time at Clark, though he credits his wife, Ashley, with keeping the family financially afloat while he pursues his education.

“She’s paying the bills,” he said. “She’s working toward this just as much as I am.”

Freese, now 28, plans to major in public affairs at WSUV, with the long-term goal of becoming a lawyer. “I want to be a voice for those who don’t have a voice,” he said. “I want to help people.”

A first-generation college graduate, Freese said he hopes that sharing the story of his struggles and success will help to inspire others who might be facing their own challenges. “I want to show people in a similar case that this is possible,” he said.

For Freese, earning this scholarship means that he will be able to concentrate on his studies at WSUV instead of on how to pay for them. But it also carries deeper meaning than the easing of financial burdens.

“What it means to me is that I’m there, I’ve reached that level,” he said, raising his hand to about chest-height. “I’m not just getting an associate degree—*I’m doing well.*”

And he knows just the little girl to celebrate that with.

*Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley*

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# On Her Way



Kathleen Fockler smiles after receiving the news that she has received the 2015-2016 Community College President's Scholarship.

About a month ago, Kathleen Fockler was on the way to a Beaverton testing facility to sit for the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX), the exam each nursing student must pass before officially becoming a Registered Nurse.

She was ready. It had taken her 20 years to reach this point, but she felt confident that the rigorous coursework of the Clark College Nursing Program had prepared her for the exam. Finally, after years of struggle, she was going to achieve her long-held dream of becoming a nurse.

And then her car broke down.

In the middle of the Route 26 tunnel.

During morning rush hour.

It could have been a disaster. But Kathleen Fockler, age 47, is not someone to submit to defeat. When the tow truck arrived, she persuaded the driver to take both her car and herself to the testing site. She had driven there the week before just to be sure of the route—"I didn't want to get lost," she explains—so she was able to direct him there swiftly.

"I got there just a couple minutes after the exam began, and when I explained my situation, they let me go ahead and take the test," Fockler recalls.

From the beginning, Fockler's road to becoming a nurse has been beset by unexpected detours and daunting challenges. And each time, Fockler has been able to overcome these roadblocks with a combination of preparation, persistence, and support from those around her. During the 2015 Commencement ceremony, her persistence was rewarded when Clark College President Robert K. Knight announced that she was the recipient of this year's Community College President's Award in honor of Val Ogden. This scholarship provides full tuition and fees for two years to a Clark graduate completing their bachelor's degree at Washington State University Vancouver.

"I still can't believe it," Fockler says. "This is an incredible opportunity. A door has just been opened right up for me."

Fockler began taking pre-nursing courses at Clark in 1994. However, her plans were derailed when her then-newborn son, Gabe, began experiencing seizures and developmental delays. "The timing was not right," Fockler says. She decided to leave school and concentrate on supporting her son and her daughter, MaKenzie, who was born three years after Gabe.

Fockler held onto her dream even while spending many years working as a paraprofessional assistant in the Evergreen

School District Early Childhood Center, helping support children with developmental delays. It was only when Gabe entered Clark through the Running Start program that Fockler felt the time was right for her to return to school as well.

At first, the experience of returning to school after 20 years was intimidating. Courses required online registration—Fockler didn't even own a computer. But she quickly found the support she needed at Clark.

“The resources that Clark has are tremendous,” she says. “There's a math lab, there are computer labs, there's a retention specialist in the nursing department. There's just so much in place to help the student.”

Fockler is quick to point out another resource that helped her on her journey: the college's scholarships office. “When I applied to nursing school, I thought, ‘How am I going to do this?’” she recalls. “At the time, I was working two jobs, and I'd heard how demanding the nursing curriculum was.”

But Clark's scholarship specialists quickly went into action, finding Fockler potential scholarship opportunities and encouraging her to apply. “[Outreach/Scholarship Coordinator] Lizette Drennan was like my cheerleader,” she recalls. “There was a postcard of the scholarship staff that I found, and I stuck it in my binder to remind me about the people who were supporting me. I had a picture of my family, and Lizette's smiling face.”



2015-2016 Community College Presidential Scholarship recipient Kathleen Fockler takes a moment to hug and thank her nursing professors at commencement.

Fockler also found support from the nursing faculty, who encouraged her to keep going. Fockler gained confidence after working in the program's state-of-the-art simulation lab, which helped her develop clinical skills before she even began her internship.

That internship proved to be another challenge. From the beginning, Fockler had set her sights on becoming a pediatric nurse working with medically fragile children, a goal formed through her experiences sitting in hospitals with Gabe early on. But Clark's nursing program had only one pediatric internship opening per cohort.

A faculty member suggested Fockler volunteer at the Center for Medically Fragile Children (CMFC) at Providence in Portland to gain experience. Clark didn't have an internship partnership set up with the CMFC; these agreements are labor-intensive and highly competitive. But Fockler so impressed the CMFC staff as a volunteer that they decided to create an internship partnership for her. Now, Clark has a regular internship opening at the center.

Throughout her studies, Fockler has shown a tireless work ethic. She went over notes while waiting in her children's doctor offices. She reviewed cranial nerves while sitting beside her mother's hospital bed after a surgery. And when Fockler herself had to undergo thyroid surgery, she didn't skip a class, deciding to simply attend the evening lecture rather than her standard morning one.

"Each day, I try to learn everything I can," she says.

On top of all that, Fockler found time to regularly volunteer with the Evergreen School District, the CFMC, SHARE House, and the Student Nurse Association of Clark College.

Despite her talent and perseverance, however, Fockler knew there was another huge hurdle standing between herself and her goal. In order to work in a specialized hospital setting like the CMFC, Fockler would need to earn a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree. Fockler—who lives in Vancouver with her children; husband, Bunnell; and mother-in-law, Beth LaViolette—has begun working with an in-home nursing care service for medically fragile children. Even so, she couldn't see how she could afford university tuition for both herself and MaKenzie, who is entering the University of Washington in the fall. Receiving the Community College President's Scholarship means her way is now clear to continue her education.

Fockler is effusive in her thanks to all the organizations who have provided scholarships to her, including the Clark College Foundation, Vancouver Rotary, and 40 et 8.

"I guess it really does take a village to raise a nurse," says Fockler, who hopes one day to be able to fund her own nursing scholarship. "The community supported me tremendously, and working hard is my way of paying them back."

### **Additional Scholarships**

Through the support of the Clark College Foundation, two other finalists for the Community College President's Scholarship were awarded \$3,000 scholarships to continue their education. President Knight announced the scholarships to **Julie Mercado** and **Melanie Brawley** during the Commencement ceremony as well.

*Photos: Clark College/Hannah Erickson (top) and Clark College/Jenny Shadley*

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## Making the Most of her Opportunity



2014-2015 Presidential Scholarship recipient Natasha Hambrook

Early in Natasha Hambrook's high school career, things weren't looking so great. She felt frustrated by the lack of academic challenge in her classes; at the same time, she was having trouble accessing help in subjects where she was having difficulty, like math. She could have become discouraged. She could have checked out, or gotten into trouble, the way some bright but bored young students do.

Instead, she came to Clark.

Hambrook enrolled in Washington State's Running Start program, which allows students to take college classes while still enrolled in high school. That decision paid off on June 19, when Hambrook not only earned her associate degree at age 17, but was also named recipient of the 2014-2015 Community College President's Award. The annual scholarship is given to a Clark College graduate who is transferring to a WSU Vancouver degree program and who has demonstrated leadership potential, a commitment to community service, and academic achievement. The scholarship award provides full-time tuition and is renewable for one additional year, essentially providing full tuition to complete a bachelor's degree.

Hambrook, who lives in Vancouver with her family and will turn 18 in July, has thrived at Clark, earning a 3.98 grade point average—yes, even in math, a subject she came to love. “Coming to Clark College has been the best experience,” she says. “I've met so many amazing instructors and classmates who really believed in me.”

Hambrook took classes in Clark's challenging biology and chemistry sequences as preparation for her chosen career path of becoming a pediatric surgeon. She says one highlight of her time at Clark was getting to visit the college's cadaver lab during a biology class.

“We got to reach inside the body,” recalls Hambrook. “I think a lot of people were surprised by how I reacted, because I'm



kind of a 'girly girl,' and I think they thought I'd be turned off by that. But I loved it."

Hambrook was able to get a different kind of hands-on experience at Clark with another one of her interests: volunteerism. In winter quarter 2014, she became the Student Volunteer Coordinator for Clark's Service and Leadership in the Community (SLIC) program. In that role, she organized groups of students on volunteer trips to organizations like Habitat for Humanity and Clark County Food Bank, as well as a beach-cleaning trip to Cape Disappointment State Park.

On top of the 10 hours per week spent working for SLIC, Hambrook spent another six or more hours volunteering at the Southwest Washington Humane Society, where she helps care for cats and trains other teen volunteers.

Hambrook says her commitment to community service comes both from a love of helping others and from her own family's experiences. "My family has received help from the food bank in the past, so I know there's a need for community service," she says.



Natasha Hambrook receives her degree from President Knight at Clark's 2014 commencement ceremony.

Like 73 percent of Clark's student body, Natasha Hambrook is a first-generation college graduate. Her parents describe her as a very driven, self-motivated young woman. "She did it all on her own," says her father, Matt Hambrook, of Natasha's decision to enter Running Start and pursue a degree at Clark. "We just ferried her around."

"I am so proud of her accomplishments," added Natasha's mother, Denise Hollar-Hambrook, who has been working two jobs to help support the family, which also includes Natasha's younger brother, Matthew. "She will be a compassionate doctor—she will make a difference."

Clark College President Robert K. Knight announced Hambrook's scholarship during the college's 2014 commencement ceremony at Sleep Country Amphitheater. During the announcement, he said that a nominator had described Hambrook as "a rare type of goal-oriented student who combines exceptional natural ability with a willingness and eagerness to learn."

Hambrook plans to spend the summer continuing her volunteer work at the Humane Society, and possibly at the Free Clinic of Southwest Washington as well. She's already investigating on-campus volunteer opportunities at WSU Vancouver, where she will begin taking classes in the fall of 2014.

"It feels so amazing to have won this scholarship," Hambrook says. "I am so grateful I had the opportunity to participate in Running Start, because Clark helped shape me into the woman I am today."

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# Congratulations, Class of 2014!



Student speaker Michelle Brincefield addresses her fellow graduates during the 2014 commencement ceremony.

Clark College honored its 78th graduating class—the largest in the college’s 80-year history—at the 2014 Clark College Commencement ceremony held Thursday evening, June 19, at the Sleep Country Amphitheater.

Approximately 2,100 degrees and certificates were conferred on the next generation of our community’s workers, leaders, and scholars—up from 1,900 the year before. Approximately 715 graduates participated in the commencement ceremony, including 235 Running Start graduates—again, a new record for the college, which has the largest Running Start program in the state.

“Tonight we are here to celebrate your individual accomplishment, and more than that, we are here to celebrate a community of accomplishment,” said Clark College President Robert K. Knight in his opening remarks to the Class of 2014. “Our community needs each and every one of you with your individual skills and talents.”

Clark College Board of Trustees Chair Royce Pollard echoed that thought in his own remarks, saying “We know our future is in good hands with you, just as our community has been in good hands with Clark College alumni for eight decades now.” The former Vancouver mayor then asked the graduates to raise their right hands and repeat the following pledge: “I will never forget that I am a member of the Penguin Nation.”



Presidential  
Scholarship  
recipient Natasha  
Hambrook takes her  
seat after  
receiving her  
diploma.

For the second year in a row, the ceremony’s student speaker was chosen through an essay contest open to all 2014

graduates. Outgoing ASCC president Dena Brill introduced Michelle Brincefield, who entered Clark through Running Start and is planning on attending New Mexico Highlands University on a full athletic scholarship.

“Wherever life takes you after today, you can always take pride in knowing that you have a college degree,” Brincefield said. “No one can take that accomplishment away from you.”

During the ceremony, Clark College President Robert K. Knight announced the names of the recipients of the 2014 Exceptional Faculty Awards. The 2014 awardees are Kelly Fielding, instructor of psychology; Chris Martin, instructor of computer technology and computer graphics technology; Sarah Theberge, professor of early childhood education; and Jim Wilkins-Luton, professor of English.

Knight also announced the recipient of the 2014-2015 Community College President’s Award, which is given to a Clark College graduate who is transferring to a WSU Vancouver degree program and who demonstrated leadership potential, a commitment to community service, and academic achievement. Natasha Hambrook will receive full-time tuition that is renewable for one additional year.

This year’s commencement speaker was *ABC Evening News* anchor Byron Pitts, who delivered an inspiring speech about the importance of helping others. Pitts began by explaining his own difficult beginnings with education: Until age 12, he was functionally illiterate, and it took the unflagging support of his single mother to help push him toward academic success.



2014 commencement  
keynote speaker  
Byron Pitts

Pitts said that while some of that night's graduating class may have had an easy time earning their degrees, he suspected many had had rough roads to travel. "I imagine there are some graduates here tonight who heard too often, 'Not you, now now, not yet. You're not good enough. You're not ready,'" he said, adding that he called such graduates "Children of the Storm."

"To you, the Children of the Storm—to you for whom this night was not guaranteed—you especially have a responsibility, I think, to allow somebody else to live their dream," he said. "Whether it's in nursing or as a machinist or going on to continue your education—whatever it is, in that space where you stand, make life better for someone else."

Pitts received a standing ovation, and it was clear that many attendees found his message inspiring, as posts on social media soon showed.

*Photos and Video: Clark College/Jenny Shadley.*

*Watch the entire ceremony on CVTV.*

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## **A Night to Celebrate**



Natasha Hambrook, recipient of the Community College President's Scholarship, receives her diploma from President Robert K. Knight at Thursday's commencement ceremony.

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year before. Approximately 715 graduates participated in the commencement ceremony, including 235 Running Start graduates—again, a new record for the college, which has the largest Running Start program in the state.



Lines rapped around the amphitheater as the number of students participating in commencement reached an all time high. Linda Calvert, Associate Director of Running Start, escorted Oswald through the crowd.

During the ceremony, Clark College President Robert K. Knight announced the names of the recipients of the 2014 Exceptional Faculty Awards. The 2014 awardees are Kelly Fielding, instructor of psychology; Chris Martin, instructor of computer technology and computer graphics technology; Sarah Theberge, professor of early childhood education; and Jim Wilkins-Luton, professor of English.

Graduate Natasha Hambrook was the recipient of the 2014-2015 Community College President's Award. The annual scholarship is given to a Clark College graduate who is transferring to a WSU Vancouver degree program and who demonstrated leadership potential, a commitment to community service, and academic achievement. The scholarship award provides full-time tuition and is renewable for one additional year, essentially



providing full tuition to complete a bachelor's degree.

Hambrook, who lives in Vancouver with her family and will turn 18 in July, came to Clark through Washington State's Running Start program, which allows high school students to earn college credit while still enrolled in high school. While at Clark, she maintained a 3.98 grade point average while taking classes in Clark's challenging biology and chemistry sequences and contributing more than 15 hours a week in volunteer work. Some of that work was through her personal commitment to the Southwest Washington Humane Society, where she helps care for cats and trains other teen volunteers; Hambrook has also served as the Student Volunteer Coordinator for Clark's Service and Leadership in the Community (SLIC) program. In that role, she has organized groups of students on volunteer trips to organizations like Habitat for Humanity and Clark County Food Bank, as well as a beach-cleaning trip to Cape Disappointment State Park.



Hambrook says her commitment to community service comes both from a love of helping others and from her own family's experiences. "My family has received help from the food bank in the past, so I know there's a need for community service," she says. Like 73 percent of Clark's student body, Natasha Hambrook is a first-generation college graduate. She plans to study medicine and become a pediatric surgeon. "It feels so amazing to have won this scholarship," Hambrook said after President Knight's announcement at commencement. "I am so grateful I had the opportunity to participate in Running Start, because Clark helped shape me into the woman I am

today.” This year’s commencement speaker was *ABC Evening News* anchor Byron Pitts, who delivered an inspiring speech about the importance of helping others.

*Read more stories from Clark’s commencement on Clark 24/7 early next week.*

*Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley. More photos from Clark’s commencement ceremony are available on the college’s Flickr site.*

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## All in the Family



Presidential Scholarship recipient Ramona Vercher at Clark College’s 2013 Commencement.

Every last Sunday of the month, the Vercher family holds a big dinner for all its many members: Donnie and Louise Vercher, their nine children, 14 grandchildren, and assorted in-laws, relatives, and friends. The family would have plenty to celebrate at their June dinner: Ramona Vercher, the second-youngest of the Vercher children, was named the recipient of the 2013-14 Community College President's Award. The annual scholarship is given to a Clark College graduate who is transferring to a Washington State University Vancouver degree program; it provides full-time tuition for one year, renewable for one additional year, for a total of four semesters.

The whole Vercher family was in attendance at commencement, when the award is announced. As Clark College President Bob Knight described Vercher's achievements, a massive cheer filled the amphitheater when the family realized she had won.

Vercher, who is a resident of Vancouver, graduated with honors, earning an associate degree in business administration. A first-generation college graduate, she plans to major in business administration with a specialization in finance while attending WSU Vancouver.

While at Clark, Vercher served in a number of volunteer roles both on and off campus. She was a work-study tutor at the Student Learning Center helping Adult Basic Education (ABE), General Educational Development (GED), and English as a Second Language (ESL) students in all subjects. She was also a Classroom Tutor, assisting professors in the classroom, and part of Clark's Homework Help program, where she assisted individual students. Within the greater community, her volunteer service has included work with the City of Vancouver's Urban Youth and Urban Forestry programs. Additionally, she helps run the charity begun by her family's small business, Daddy D's BBQ, providing Christmas presents to families in need, and works there as a cashier.

"Receiving this scholarship means everything in the world to

me,” said Ramona Vercher after the ceremony. “I am a first-generation college student, so to have this opportunity to continue my education is the biggest thing that has ever happened to me in my life.”

Knight said that people who know Vercher praised her for her strong work ethic. Indeed, Vercher has often begun study sessions at 5 a.m. to fit them around her work and other activities. She and her longtime boyfriend, Dwan James (also a Clark student), have regularly eschewed fun weekend outings for “date nights” of studying.

Vercher attributes her work ethic to the example set by her parents; Donnie regularly works 13 hours a day at his barbecue restaurant, a business he began after breaking his back doing construction work on bridges. “I never graduated high school,” said Donnie. “I think [Ramona] sees what her parents went through and wants better.”

Indeed, many of the Vercher children are pursuing education. Ramona’s brother Sherman recently graduated from Western Oregon University, and two of her sisters received their GED diplomas at Clark’s GED and high school completion ceremony on June 22.

Vercher was one of three finalists selected for the award. President Knight announced that the other two finalists, Jennifer Campbell and David Taub, would receive \$1,000 scholarships from the Clark College Foundation to continue their education. Knight said of the three finalists, “They are all sterling examples of what Clark College is about.”

Vercher plans to continue being an example of both Clark College and her family. “I am going to do big things through this scholarship,” she said. “This definitely won’t be the last you see of me.”

*Photo: Clark College/Jenny Shadley*