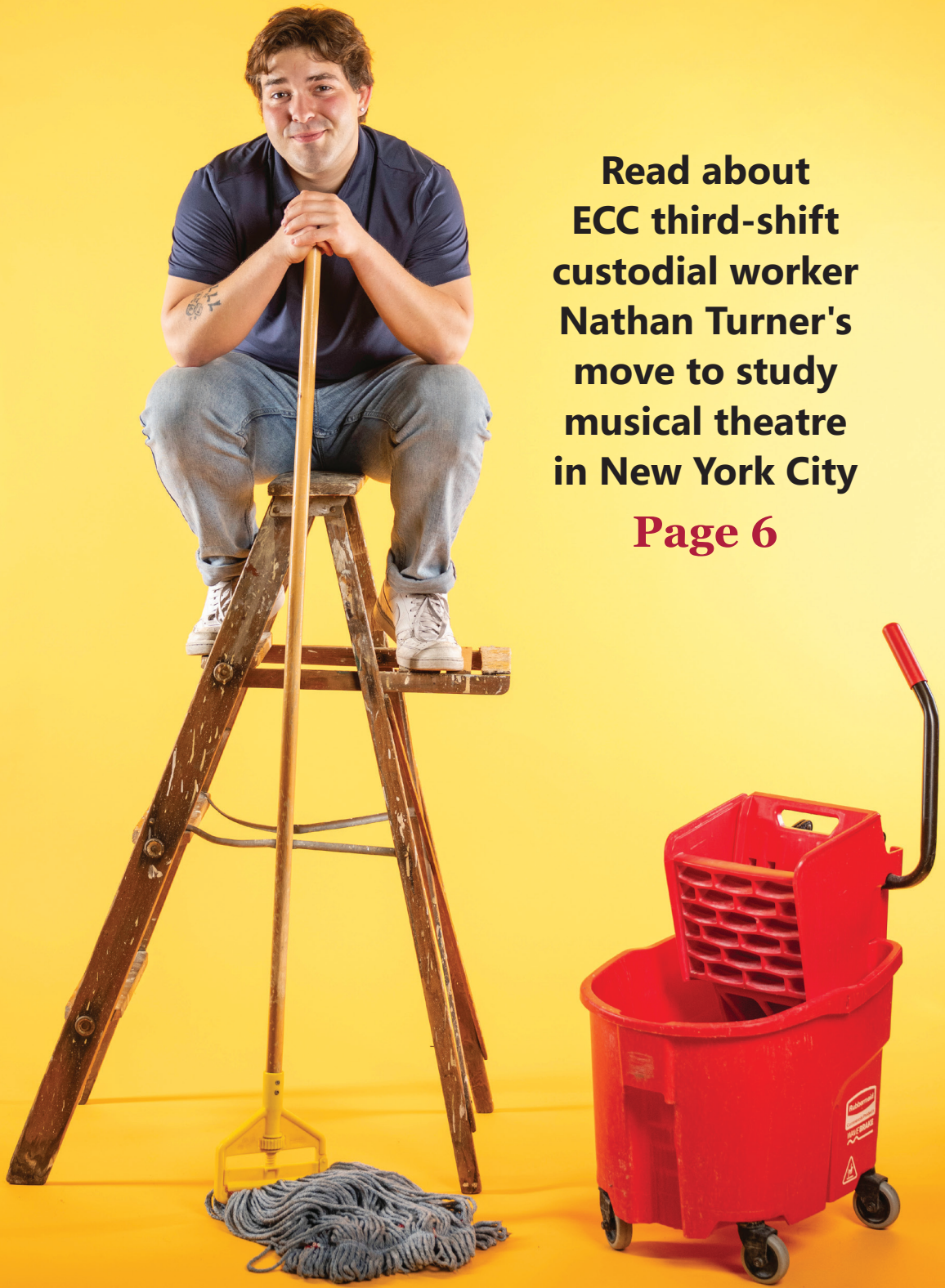
A PUBLICATION OF ELGIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

# Impact

Fall 2026 | Volume 33 | Issue 2



**Read about ECC third-shift custodial worker Nathan Turner's move to study musical theatre in New York City**

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Elgin Community College

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# Fostering Community

## A message from the ECC President and Board Chair

Dear ECC Community,

At Elgin Community College, opportunity can take many forms. It can mean gaining the skills to begin a new career, discovering a creative passion, finding the confidence to pursue an ambitious goal, or returning to give back to the community that helped shape you.

In this issue of Impact, we invite you to meet some of the people who bring those possibilities to life.

Our cover story introduces you to Nathan Turner, an ECC employee and student whose passion for musical theatre has taken him from overnight custodial shifts on campus to a scholarship at the American Musical and Dramatic Academy in New York City. Turner's story is a reminder that dreams do not have an expiration date and that sometimes the next chapter begins in the most unexpected places.

You'll also meet Lukas Muñoz Carrillo, an ECC alumnus who is now studying at Harvard Law School. His journey from ECC to Harvard is impressive, but what stands out most is his commitment to service. Experiences with his family, community, and students have shaped his desire to pursue a career in law to make a difference.

This fall, ECC celebrated the grand opening of its new Truck Driving Center. The facility expands opportunities for students and working adults to gain the hands-on training and credentials they need to enter or advance in the transportation industry. Inside, you'll learn more about how ECC is preparing students for careers that keep our communities and economy moving.

You'll also discover the creative work of Peter Infelise, an ECC graphic design professor and founder of an independent mask-making studio. This fall, Peter brought his passion for hand-sculpted, limited-edition masks to the community through a horror-inspired art exhibition, offering a glimpse into the creativity that extends well beyond the classroom.

Across these stories, you'll see a common thread: ECC is a place where people can explore what is possible and then take the next step toward it.

Whether that means stepping onto a stage, into a courtroom, behind the wheel, or into a studio, our students, alumni, and employees continue to show us what can happen when people are given the opportunity to learn, create, and pursue something meaningful.

Thank you for being part of the ECC community and for supporting the people and ideas that make our college — and our region — stronger.

Sincerely,

**Peggy Heinrich, EdD**
President





**Jennifer Rakow, BA**
Chair, Board of Trustees

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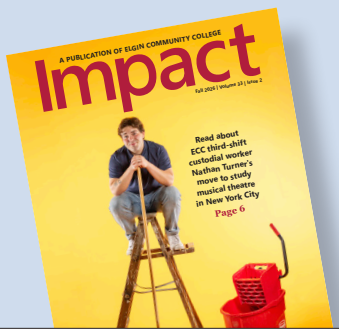

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Elgin Community College third-shift custodial worker Nathan Turner

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**Associate Professor of Design Peter Infelise (far right) mugs for the camera beside two of his mask creations.**

# BEHIND THE MASKS

## Professor Peter Infelise features creatures in monster mask exhibition

For three decades, Elgin Community College (ECC) Associate Professor of Design Peter Infelise has brought monsters to life through his handcrafted masks. To celebrate, he curated "Electric Horror: The Art and Design of Peter Infelise," an art exhibition at ECC's Safety-Kleen Gallery featuring more than 50 monster masks, all inspired by colorful horror comics, monster magazines, and vintage horror imagery.

With some nudging from an ECC colleague, Infelise decided to showcase his work at the college this past semester; however, his fascination with monsters began long before he made his first mask.

"In the late seventies and eighties, there was a Channel 32 television show called 'Son of Svengoolie' on Saturdays," Infelise said. "I would watch the old black-and-white horror movies and fell in love with classic Universal monsters like Dracula, Frankenstein, and the Creature from the Black Lagoon."

That childhood fascination eventually grew into a business and, surprisingly, opportunities in film and television.

TV and film actor Daniel Roebuck, a frequent customer of Infelise's mask business, The Devil's Workshop, reached out while working on musician and director Rob Zombie's movie "The Munsters." Roebuck asked Infelise to paint masks for the movie. Zombie loved the designs so much that he had the film's art director repaint the production masks to mirror Infelise's work.

Infelise's creations also appeared in an episode of the television show "What We Do in the Shadows," when a character wore his Krampus mask.

Although his work has reached film and television audiences, Infelise continues to share his creative knowledge in the classroom. At ECC, he teaches graphic design courses, including motion graphics and digital illustration.

Infelise made his first mask while taking a ceramics class at Harper College. They were assigned to sculpt a mask, and while many did tribal-like pieces, he decided to sculpt a zombie because of his love of monsters. This led Infelise to sculpt more monster heads.

"This goes back to 1995: I didn't have internet access, so I ordered a videotape out of the back of a horror magazine on how to make Halloween masks," he said. "I watched the thing dozens of times until I finally worked up the nerve to try it."

> "It really took off when I started making the type of monsters I liked, rather than trying to figure out what would sell."
>
> **— Peter Infelise**

After making masks for about a year, Infelise left Harper and started his company, but soon realized he didn't want to spend his entire career making masks. He returned to school to finish his bachelor's degree at the Illinois Institute of Art's Schaumburg Campus. He received his master's degree from the Academy of Art University in San Francisco.

Looking back, Infelise is proud of his work and how he found success by creating art that inspired him, not the other way around.

"It really took off when I started making the type of monsters I liked, rather than trying to figure out what would sell," he said. "Once I stopped worrying about that and made the things that I really liked and wanted to exist, that made all the difference in the world." ■




Maggie Carlton

# STEERING HER FUTURE

## ECC alumna Maggie Carlton shifts her career into higher gear

After working in the trucking industry for nearly 15 years, Maggie Carlton knew a lot about what it took to keep drivers on the road, but there was one important thing she hadn't done — drive a truck herself.

Carlton began her career in accounting before moving into trucking safety, where she managed driver qualifications and compliance with U.S. Department of Transportation requirements. The role put her in regular contact with professional drivers, but she realized there was a gap in her own experience.

"I knew the logistical parts, but I actually never drove a truck, so I didn't have the full background of it," Carlton said.

She decided to change that by enrolling in Elgin Community College's Truck Driving Program.

Carlton wasn't looking to leave the logistics industry or to become a full-time driver immediately. She wanted to better understand the vehicles and the experiences of the drivers she worked with, while adding a skill that could create new professional opportunities.

Carlton enrolled in ECC's 16-week night program, attending classes Monday through Thursday evenings while continuing to work full time and raise two teenagers. The program includes more than 50 hours of driving on public roads and 150 hours of practice in the skills lot.

"Day one, I didn't even know that we were driving manual trucks," Carlton said. "That was very scary. It was very nerve-wracking not knowing what you're getting into and not understanding how manual trucks shift and how big they are."

Carlton credits her ECC instructors with pushing her through the uncertainty and helping her gain confidence behind the wheel. "They did it with good intentions and to push you because they know you could do better," she said.



**Instructor Nate Davidson coaches Carlton at the wheel of a truck driving training simulator, used to teach vehicle safety without road risks.**

> "Day one, I didn't even know that we were driving manual trucks."
>
> **— Maggie Carlton**

By May 2026, Carlton had earned her commercial driver's license (CDL). She didn't have to wait long to put it to use. Carlton joined a friend who drives professionally on trips to Wisconsin and helped move loads back and forth. She has also assisted with truck recoveries when company vehicles experienced issues, driving a replacement truck to stranded drivers so loads could get moving again.

But one of the biggest benefits of earning her CDL has come away from the driver's seat.

Carlton recently accepted a position with a construction company that hired her in part because she has a CDL. Although she isn't working as a full-time driver, her responsibilities now include evaluating drivers on their knowledge of vehicles and pre-trip inspections.

When new drivers are hired, Carlton can assess whether they understand the truck's components and how they operate — knowledge she now has firsthand.

Having her CDL also gave her the flexibility to drive when opportunities arise and potentially earn side income.

Carlton's experience comes as ECC marks a new chapter for the program. In November, the college celebrated the grand opening of its new truck driving program facility, which includes an expanded CDL training lot.

Carlton also hopes more women will consider getting behind the wheel.

Being a woman in a male-dominated industry wasn't new to her after working in trucking for so long. Still, she acknowledged that being the only woman in a room or a training environment could be intimidating, but she didn't let it stop her.

Carlton encourages other women and working adults who are interested in earning a CDL to give it a try, even if becoming a full-time driver isn't their ultimate goal.

"Do it at least as a backup if you're interested in learning about it," she said. "It's definitely a good career path." For Carlton, earning a CDL didn't mean abandoning the career she had already built. Instead, it added another dimension to it.

After years of working alongside professional drivers, she can now say she understands their work from both sides of the industry. ■

COVER STORY

# DRAMATIC




## ECC custodian opens curtain on new role in move to New York City

Before the break of dawn, when Elgin Community College is quiet, Nathan Turner can sometimes be heard singing.

For three years, Turner has worked ECC's custodial third shift, cleaning classrooms and hallways while the campus sleeps. His coworkers know him as 'the guy who sings in the hallways."

Now, Turner is trading those quiet hallways for New York City.

This fall, the 24-year-old ECC student and employee departs Elgin to attend the American Musical and Dramatic Academy (AMDA) to study musical theatre.

For Turner, the opportunity represents the next chapter in a journey that has taken him from childhood theatre to the U.S. Marine Corps, an overnight job at ECC, and, eventually, back to the stage.

The youngest of five children, Turner began performing when he was two years old. Theatre remained part of his life until he joined the Marines, where he served two years in the infantry.

Even there, performing was never far from his mind.

During nine-mile hikes that began before sunrise, Turner remembers putting his head down and imagining what he might do someday.

"When I get out, this is what I'm gonna do," Turner recalled thinking. "I want to do this show."

After leaving the Marines, Turner was looking for work when he found the overnight custodial position at ECC in 2023. The schedule suited him, and the job came with an unexpected benefit: tuition reimbursement.

It took about a year before he began using it.

His return to the theatre was almost as unexpected. While working one night, Turner noticed ECC Theatre members rehearsing the musical "Rent," and he stopped to watch. A conversation with then-director Douglas Orlyk led Turner to audition for the rock musical "Next to Normal." He was cast as Henry, a supportive love interest to the female lead.

Turner was back on stage. At ECC, he continued performing while taking classes in acting, dance, improv, and stage combat. He credits Orlyk and director Marc Beth with helping him regain confidence as a performer. His acting and stage combat



# CHANGE

Nathan Turner on stage in ECC's Blizzard Theatre

instructor, Scott Westerman, helped him come out of his shell.

"They showed me so much love and were so encouraging, saying things like, 'You might be scared. You might be nervous. You haven't done this in a while, but that's okay. We got you.'"

The experience also reminded him of what he loved about theatre: bringing together people who might otherwise never meet and giving them permission to create.

"It's a space to kind of just be yourself," Turner said, "and to learn what being yourself is." Pursuing that passion wasn't always easy.

During one semester, Turner took four classes and a weekly voice lesson, while participating in ECC's honor society and working from 10 pm to 6:30 am. Some mornings, he would drive home, sleep a few hours, then head back for an 11 am class. After classes and campus activities, he would go home, sleep a bit more, then return to work.

The schedule meant missing time with friends and questioning whether the sacrifices were worth it.

"I kept telling myself, it's all in hopes of something better," Turner said. "Musical theatre is something I want to do professionally. It's something I want to do for the rest of my life."

One morning after work, that "something better" appeared on his phone.

While scrolling through Instagram before bed, Turner came across an ad for AMDA auditions in Chicago. On a whim, he registered.

He auditioned about a month later. Within a week, he learned not only that he had been accepted but also awarded a talent scholarship.

Turner was playing a video game when the email arrived. He stopped, stood up, and opened it.

"My heart skipped a beat," he said. "That was the first time I felt like, okay, this is gonna lead somewhere."

The moment carried even more meaning because, while serving in the Marines years earlier, Turner wrote in his will about what he hoped to do if he returned home: pursue theatre in New York.

Now, he is.

And for the students walking ECC's hallways, wondering whether their own difficult chapter will ever end, Turner has learned something worth sharing.

"The story will eventually end," he said, "but the chapter will change."

For Turner, New York isn't a finish line. It's another beginning.

"All the hard work, all the sleepless nights that I've gone through, all the nights of picking up trash and wiping down toilets — it's not for nothing," he said. "The hard work doesn't stop here. It's just starting now." ■




Kyle Two Bulls

# DRAWN TO THE FLAME

## Graduate rekindles interest to become a firefighter and paramedic

Kyle Two Bulls already held a bachelor's degree when he returned to the classroom at Elgin Community College. This time, though, he knew exactly where he wanted his education to take him.

When Two Bulls first went to college, his future wasn't as clear. He enrolled at the Indiana Institute of Technology in Fort Wayne, Indiana, excited for the opportunity to play collegiate lacrosse but unsure of the career path he wanted to pursue. During his sophomore year, he began reconsidering an interest he'd had since high school: becoming a firefighter and paramedic.

Although increasingly drawn to the fire service, Two Bulls decided to complete his bachelor's degree in business. After graduating from Indiana Institute of Technology in May 2025, he knew his next step would require a different kind of education. To become a firefighter and paramedic, Two Bulls needed specialized, hands-on training, so he chose ECC and began the college's Basic Operations Firefighter Academy the month after earning his bachelor's degree. After completing the eight-week academy, he enrolled in ECC's yearlong paramedic program.

For Two Bulls, going from a four-year university to a community college wasn't a step backward. It was the education he needed to pursue his chosen career.

The fire service was also familiar territory for Two Bulls. His father, Ronald Two Bulls, spent 32 years as a firefighter with the Buffalo Grove Fire Department and now serves as senior director of academic programming and public safety training at ECC's Center for Emergency Services.

"It's neat to see him go through the experiences that I did as a new firefighter," said Ronald Two Bulls.

But once Kyle entered the program, his own experience with ECC's faculty and training reinforced that he had made the right choice.




**Kyle Two Bulls checks equipment inside an ambulance at a McHenry Township Fire Protection District station.**

"I highly recommend ECC," said Kyle Two Bulls. "I wouldn't be where I am today without all the support I received. I also want to give props to the instructors. They're a great group of individuals who want to teach, help the next generation, and share their experiences. It tells you something about them."

Much of that learning came from instructors who brought years of experience in the fire service and emergency medical care into the classroom. Two Bulls noted that their stories about responding to fires and emergency calls helped him understand how experienced firefighters and paramedics make decisions in high-pressure situations.

"Kyle was a great student," said Lindsay Seyl, ECC's paramedic program director and clinical coordinator at Ascension Saint Joseph-Elgin. "He was engaged and always showed enthusiasm for what he was learning and how to apply it in his practice to become a paramedic."

Two Bulls also found that his years as a collegiate athlete had prepared him for the fire service in unexpected ways. Lacrosse taught him the importance of teamwork, preparation, and accountability — qualities that became even more important when the people beside him weren't simply teammates competing to win a game, but firefighters relying on one another to save lives.

As ECC's Center for Emergency Services celebrated its 10th anniversary in October, Two Bulls' journey exemplifies how the facility prepares students for careers in firefighting, emergency medical services, and public safety.

After completing his fire academy and paramedic training, he began working for the McHenry Township Fire Protection District in March 2026. Now, he is putting his ECC training into practice while continuing to learn on the job.

As he builds his experience and skill, Two Bulls is focused on passing his national paramedic exam and becoming a solid asset to his department.

Two Bulls' route to the fire service wasn't the path he had envisioned when he first started college. His bachelor's degree gave him one foundation. ECC provided the specialized education and hands-on training he needed to turn a longtime interest into a career.

For him, coming to ECC wasn't a second start, it was the right next step. ■




**Harvard Law School student, and ECC graduate Lukas Muñoz Carrillo**

# LAW MAN

## ECC graduate journeys from classroom to courtroom

Lukas Muñoz Carrillo wanted a career that gave him a strong connection to the community. He also wanted a way to channel his desire to help people after seeing his family grapple with difficult legal issues. The Elgin Community College graduate applied to law school in the fall of 2024 and was "floored" when he was accepted to Harvard Law School.

But Carrillo's interest in law began long before Harvard, shaped by his family's experiences navigating the U.S. legal system and a growing desire to serve others.

When Carrillo was in third grade, his undocumented cousin, then in his early twenties, was in a car crash. Without a driver's license, his cousin was arrested at the scene.

"There was a real fear in my family that he was going to get deported," Carrillo recalled. I remember we reached out to so many people at the time. We even reached out to his country's consulate."

His family, originally from Chile, reached out to an immigration attorney who guided them through his cousin's deportation proceedings. He and his cousin later both became DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) recipients once it was issued in 2012, which deferred his cousin's deportation.

Carrillo also watched his mom contend with legal challenges after starting a small business, including issues involving a business contract and a landlord. Those experiences showed him how difficult the legal system can be to navigate without the right guidance.

In 2019, he enrolled at ECC, where he found opportunities to become involved in his community through the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, the Spartan Pantry, and the speech team.

"ECC became the place where I rebuilt my confidence, discipline, and sense of opportunity," he said.

Carrillo described volunteering at the pantry during the COVID-19 pandemic as his first experience serving a larger community. On the speech team, he found another kind of community and a mentor in Tim Anderson, ECC professor of communications studies.

"I learned a lot from him," he said. "He's someone who took the time and cared."

After ECC, Carrillo transferred to Elmhurst University, where he received a bachelor's degree in philosophy and economics in spring 2023. After graduating, he spent two years teaching fourth grade in Dallas, Texas.

The experience strengthened his desire to work in public service, but also showed him that the classroom wasn't where he could make the impact he envisioned.

"I was in an inner-city school, and I was seeing how the system or social policies had failed children and the negative consequences they were having," he said.

Carrillo began looking for another way to address some of the challenges he was seeing. Law, which had interested him because of his own family's experiences, offered a new possibility. He applied to law school and began at Harvard in 2025.

Once there, a criminal law course introduced Carrillo to another potential avenue for public service: prosecution. In summer 2026, Carrillo returned to Illinois to intern with the Cook County State's Attorney's Office at the Rolling Meadows District 3 Courthouse, where he worked in the preliminary hearing courtroom.

> "ECC became the place where I rebuilt my confidence, discipline, and sense of opportunity."
>
> **— Lukas Muñoz Carrillo**

The experience strengthened his interest in prosecution while also showing him the complexities of the work.

"Sometimes you see kids who are 18 or 19 and charged with felonies," he said. "It's really heartbreaking."

As Carrillo moves forward in his legal journey, he's taking his new knowledge of the court system with him. He's been able to apply it as an internship he started this fall with the Harvard Immigration and Refugee Clinic. He plans to graduate from Harvard Law School in 2028.

Bonita Goist, manager of alumni and affinity relations for ECC's Institutional Advancement and ECC Foundation Division, has watched Carrillo continue to build on the foundation he established at ECC.

"Going from ECC to Harvard is not a small leap, but Lukas continues to expand his horizons and explore ways he can give back," said Goist.

Carrillo said he is grateful for each experience, especially those at ECC. It's what led him on his current path.

"My time there [at ECC] taught me that success is not defined by where you start, or by whether you begin at a place like Harvard," Carrillo said. "It is defined by what you do with the opportunity in front of you: the discipline you develop, the persistence you show, and the refusal to let your circumstances determine your future." ■


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