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A photograph of a man with dark hair and a goatee, smiling broadly. He is wearing a dark blue long-sleeved sweatshirt with a small red and white logo on the chest. He has his arms crossed and is standing in front of a baseball field. In the background, a large stadium scoreboard is visible against a clear blue sky. The field is green, and a blue fence is in the foreground.

Read about Fredy Quevedo Jr.'s
journey from ECC student to
Spanish-language interpreter
for the Chicago Cubs

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Elgin
Community
College



MISSION

The mission of Elgin Community College is to improve people's lives through learning.

SHARED VALUES

- Excellence
- Freedom of Inquiry
- Ethical Practices
- Accountability
- Collaboration
- Holistic Approach

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The Community College District 509 Board of Trustees meets at 6:30 pm on the second Tuesday of each month, unless otherwise posted on the board's webpage. All meetings are held in: Building E, Room E125 Seigle Auditorium Elgin Community College 1700 Spartan Drive Elgin, IL 60123

You can access board agendas, minutes, instructions for addressing the board, and board contact information at elgin.edu/boardoftrustees.

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Fostering Community

A message from the ECC President and Board Chair

Dear ECC Community,

At Elgin Community College (ECC), the connection between education and opportunity is not just a goal; it's something we see in action every day. In this issue of Impact, you'll read stories that highlight not only the achievements of our students and alumni, but also how they are giving back and shaping the future.

You'll meet students behind the Spartan Pantry, whose efforts are helping address food insecurity. Their work is a powerful reminder that student success extends beyond the classroom. It's about ensuring every student has what they need to thrive.

Preparing students for in-demand careers is another critical part of that work. Through apprenticeships and hands-on training, ECC students gain real-world experience while local employers build the skilled workforce they need. In this issue, you'll hear directly from partners such as Haumiller Engineering in South Elgin, who are already seeing the impact

of these collaborations.

As we prepare to open our new Manufacturing and Technology Center (MTC) in Building S (save the date for our grand opening celebration on September 24!), we are expanding our impact even further. The MTC will provide students with access to innovative equipment and expanded training spaces, while strengthening employer partnerships across the region. Together, we are creating clear, accessible pathways from education to high-quality careers in manufacturing and technology. By aligning our programs with employer needs, we are helping ensure that students graduate ready to contribute on day one.

This issue also highlights alumni who found their paths at ECC and are now making a difference in their fields. From breaking down language barriers as a Spanish translator for the Chicago Cubs to returning to campus as a theater professional for our fall homecoming celebration, each story reflects what makes ECC unique: a deep commitment to our students and a strong connection to the communities we serve.

Thank you for being a part of that work.

Warm regards,

Peggy Heinrich, EdD
President



Jennifer Rakow, BA
Chair, Board of Trustees



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ON THE COVER:

Elgin Community College alumni Fredy Quevedo Jr., Spanish language interpreter for Chicago Cubs players.

Photo courtesy of the Chicago Cubs/Matt Dirksen

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Sid Perkins and Laci VerCande unload food for Spartan Pantry.

HUNGRY TO HELP

Spartan Pantry feeds an increasing need for student support

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CC's Spartan Pantry opens at 10 am every Monday through Thursday. By the time the doors open, the work is already well underway. On Thursdays, student volunteers arrive as early as 8 am to restock shelves with food and toiletries.

That early-morning work reflects something much bigger. Boxes are unpacked, produce is sorted, and the space is prepared for students who rely on the pantry each week. In fall 2025, there was an uptick in pantry visits. Data reports 1,073 students visited in November, a 10% increase from the previous year.

The pantry originated in February 2015 after Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society students discovered that many of their peers faced food insecurity. What started as a student-led initiative has since evolved into a vital campus resource.

Today, the pantry operates through a steady rhythm of partnerships and student leadership. Every other Tuesday, Student Life Coordinator Ali-Reza Kashani delivers food from Northern Illinois Food Bank. On Thursdays, Kashani returns with donations from Sam's Club, a partnership that began in 2024.

From there, it's up to student volunteers to bring the operation to life.

Laci VerCande, the pantry's documentation chair, helps manage day-to-day operations — restocking shelves, assisting at the front desk, and ensuring students can access items.

For Nevaeh Hardebeck, who began volunteering in the fall of 2024, the pantry's growth has been impossible to miss.

"It definitely wasn't as prevalent and wasn't as large as it was when I started here," said Hardebeck, an ECC dual-credit student and the pantry's logistics chair. "It's become a lot bigger and

better. We've definitely gotten more produce and become a more reputable pantry in the time I've been here."

The growth is driven not only by supply, but by demand. VerCande observed an increase in new accounts through the Link2Feed system, an app used to track visits, which indicated that more students were seeking support.

"I really like giving back to my community, and I really like volunteering," VerCande said. "We try to erase the stigma of food pantries. They can be so scary to go into, and we don't want that, because it's a resource, it's not a statement of need."

That mindset shapes how the pantry operates, and why community support plays such an important role. Campus-wide efforts such as Feed the Need, a regional campus food drive run by the Illinois Community College Board, bring colleges together to collect donations for student pantries, which underscores the importance of collaboration.

ECC collected more than 34,000 non-perishable food items, accounting for 19% of total donations in Illinois and earning the college the top spot in the competition. Donations more than doubled compared with the first drive.

Even outside of major drives, demand remains steady. In fall 2025 alone, the pantry recorded 2,978 individual visits — the highest numbers to date. Throughout the pantry's continued growth and increased demand, volunteers ensure students have access to basic needs so they can focus on their education. ■

LEARN MORE

Visit elgin.edu/spartanpantry to learn more about Spartan Pantry.



Jasmin Perez, ECC student, and law enforcement explorer, outside the Elgin Police Department.

EXPLORING THE BADGE

ECC student detects her career in local law enforcement

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hrough a partnership between Elgin Community College and the Elgin Police Department, local young people interested in law enforcement are

gaining real-world experience and a head start on their college education.

The Elgin PD's Explorer program introduces teens and young adults to careers in criminal justice through hands-on training, mentorship from officers, and community engagement. Thanks to a new initiative at ECC, that experience can also translate into college credit.

Todd Ramljak, EdD, an ECC criminal justice instructor and retired Elgin police officer, helped develop the pathway that allows Explorer participants to earn up to six college credits by demonstrating proficiency in two ECC criminal justice courses, providing motivated students interested in criminal justice careers a valuable head start.

Ramljak thought about the idea after seeing the program in action on campus last summer. "I was watching them, and thought, 'Man, they are really good,'" Ramljak said. "They knew the lingo and the whole nine yards. I kept thinking, 'How do I get them college credit for this?'"

Explorer programs are youth development initiatives run by police departments nationwide, typically open to participants ages 14 to 21. They provide early exposure to law enforcement while helping young people build leadership and life skills.

Through the Elgin program, participants gain experience through ride-alongs, training exercises, and community events, learning skills such as directing traffic, responding to simulated emergencies, and conducting building searches.

For Jasmin Perez, the program helped affirm a career goal she has held for years.

"It caught my attention when I was in middle school," Perez said. "I always wanted to become a police officer. When I was 15 and applications opened, I



Jasmin Perez

immediately applied."

The experience gave her a deeper insight into what a career in law enforcement truly involves.

"I've tried other career paths, but Explorers helped me understand what I want to do in life," Perez said.

Her motivation also stems from a desire to build stronger connections between law enforcement and the community.

"If I went into law enforcement, I would be the first female in my family to do this. When I first told my family [about my

interest], they were 'iffy' about it. Some of my family members have the wrong idea of officers, and I really want to change that," Perez said.

"I want to be the change for my family."

The program also encourages Explorers to participate in community events where they can engage with residents.

"For these community events, you have to go out there and talk to community members," Perez said. "It

helped my confidence to talk with people in both Spanish and English."

Perez, who currently serves as president of the Explorer post's youth board, credits the program with helping her develop leadership skills.

"[Being] president was not on my list at all when I joined. I was too shy, too reserved, but this program pushed me out

of my comfort zone," Perez said.

Elgin PD Commander Heather Lencioni said the program helps young people explore career opportunities in public safety.

"I think it helps them identify their career path, or [explore areas like] technology related to law enforcement," Lencioni said. "Exposure to law enforcement can naturally guide them, and I think it's a great benefit for a lot of these kids."

Chief Ana Lalley said the initiative also strengthens relationships between the police department and the community.

"In general, it basically enhances the relationship between the police department and the youth residing in Elgin," Lalley said. "They're building up their confidence, their knowledge, their teamwork. They're also giving back to the community."

Explorers collectively contribute more than 1,100 hours of volunteer service each year, supporting community events and outreach programs throughout the city.

ECC hopes to build on that experience by recognizing the learning already taking place through the program.

Students who demonstrate proficiency can earn credit for two ECC criminal justice courses — Community Policing and Patrol Operations — each worth three credit hours.

"It's a real win-win," Ramljak said. "They save time and money, they get more exposure to college, and the experience goes hand in hand with their education." ■



Todd Ramljak,
ECC criminal justice
instructor



BASEBALL TALK

ECC grad achieves big-league goal as Spanish language interpreter for Chicago Cubs players

F

redy Quevedo Jr. steps in front of cameras and reporters, knowing his role is far more than translating words. He's translating trust. Culture.

Confidence. As a media relations specialist, Quevedo helps players share their stories authentically, ensuring language is never a barrier to being heard.

It's a role that feels tailor-made, even if the path there was anything but linear.

Born and raised in Elgin, Quevedo grew up deeply connected to his community. Long before he enrolled at Elgin Community College (ECC), he was

already familiar with the campus through the Youth Leadership Academy program, attending sessions as early as middle school. "I came here all the time, so I already knew the buildings and the campus."

After high school, Quevedo's journey took a few turns. He attended college, took time away to work a variety of jobs, and even headed to Minnesota to briefly pursue college football. But by 2019, he found himself back home — and back at ECC, ready to reset and rebuild his confidence.

"I was everywhere, and then I came back home, which is ironic, but it's the thing I'm most grateful for. You never know where the journey might take you, but you

always come back home."

At ECC, Quevedo completed his Associate in Arts in just one year, graduating in 2020. His time at ECC had a profound impact, as he found support through TRiO and worked closely with mentors who helped him map out clear, achievable next steps. "Being here helped me get right mentally for when I would transfer," he said, adding that he initially pursued political science out of high school. "I [then] knew what I wanted to go after."

That sense of care and support mattered. As a first-generation college student and the son of immigrants from Mexico, Quevedo had spent much of his life navigating systems that weren't built with language access in mind. Growing up, he often translated for his mother at appointments, in offices, and in everyday moments. At the time, it was simply what needed to be done. In hindsight, it was the

Fredy Quevedo Jr. enjoying the friendly confines of Wrigley Field.

At right, Fredy gets caught in a 'Gatorade Dunk' after a Cubs win. Bottom right, Fredy helps pitcher Javier Assad during an interview.



Photos courtesy of the Chicago Cubs/Matt Dirksen



Photo courtesy of Scott Changnon and Marquee Sports Network

foundation of a future career.

After ECC, Quevedo transferred to the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, where he earned a bachelor's degree in recreation, sport and tourism with a concentration in sport management. It was there that his vision sharpened:

he wanted to work in sports and use his language and culture as strengths — not side notes.

"I grew up watching sports and playing sports, and I didn't even know jobs like this existed," he said.

That clarity led him to take a leap and start applying for roles even when he felt underqualified. His first break came with the San Francisco 49ers, where he worked in marketing while finishing his

"Don't ever be afraid to pursue an opportunity. Always be yourself and trust yourself."

— Fredy Quevedo Jr.,
media relations specialist

final semester at U of I. When that role ended, he explored his options in the Bay Area. Then came the call from the Cubs in May of 2023, followed by a second move back home.

Today, Quevedo is one of just 30 Spanish interpreters across Major League Baseball (one per team) helping Spanish-speaking

players navigate interviews, media obligations, and public life. But to him, the job is about more than words.

"My goal is to help players find their voices so their stories are told, they are heard, and they feel comfortable being themselves," he said.

That responsibility feels personal. Quevedo knows how powerful it is to see someone who looks like you, sounds like you, thriving in a visible space. He carries

that awareness into every interview and every interaction, hoping young people, especially ECC students, see possibility reflected back at them.

"Don't ever be afraid to pursue an opportunity. Always be yourself and trust yourself."

Looking back, Quevedo credits ECC with helping him build that willingness, along with humility, gratitude, and confidence. "ECC showed me the importance of community," he said. "Of asking for help — of believing that where you start doesn't limit where you can go."

From Elgin classrooms to one of baseball's most iconic ballparks, his journey has come full circle. He's grounded in home, fueled by purpose, and driven by a belief that language access isn't just a service. It's a bridge that breaks down barriers and creates broader connections.

And thanks to Fredy Quevedo Jr., more voices are crossing it every day. ■



Ivan Colon coaches ECC apprenticeship program student Henry Piehl at Haumiller Engineering in South Elgin.

WORKING IT OUT

ECC apprenticeship program trains students for life

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hen Gina De rosier-Cook talks about the Manufacturing and Technology Center (MTC), she doesn't start with square footage or equipment. She starts with people.

"I wake up every day and get to make an impact in the community, and now I can make even more," said De rosier- Cook, dean of workforce development at ECC. "I assist people who can't afford their bills or are living in their cars. Now I can say, 'Here's a pathway,' and by the end of your [program], you are self-sustaining."

For De rosier- Cook, the MTC is more than a new facility — it's direct access to opportunity, sustainable wages, and careers that enable individuals to thrive in their own neighborhoods.

Manufacturing has long been part of the region's economic backbone. It's the number one industry in the region with over 37,500 jobs. Yet many students don't realize the opportunities that exist just miles from home.

"They can get a quality education at an affordable rate in their backyard," De rosier-Cook said.

Employment Through Education

This proximity will also strengthen ECC's growing apprenticeship and internship programs. Over the past several years, apprenticeships have increased by 200%, and internship participation has expanded dramatically through multiple workforce grants and partnerships.

ECC apprenticeships are customized business solutions that enable employers to tailor training to their specific needs.

"Employers love the nimbleness," De rosier- Cook said. "They're reinforcing what's happening in the classroom on their shop floors."

For ECC apprenticeship partners like Haumiller Engineering, which manufactures assembly machines for medical devices and more, the value of this type of partnership is already clear.

"ECC has made it really easy for us to build an apprenticeship program," said machining manager Ivan Colon. "We're able to bring in students, train them, and give

them a real career path — something they can build on whether they stay with us or not."

The MTC's physical presence matters, too. "Just having the space to expand so programs aren't limited — that's huge," Colon said. "And when people drive by and see that facility, it's going to spark curiosity. The visibility alone is going to bring more people into manufacturing."

Meeting Industry Demand

"It's a challenging candidate market," said Dave Butts, an HR recruiter at Haumiller. "We were going weeks and months without finding viable candidates. We



"I wake up every day and get to make an impact in the community."

— Gina De rosier-Cook,
dean of workforce development,
Elgin Community College

students for higher-earning careers, with new offerings such as quality control and pipe welding expanding those opportunities.

Many programs can be completed in 18 months or less and lead to annual earnings of \$75,000 or more. Additionally, through apprenticeships, workforce grants, and funding through initiatives such as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act,

had to rethink our approach and grow our own talent to build a pipeline."

A wave of retirements, often referred to as the "silver tsunami," combined with workforce disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic, left local manufacturers with significant talent gaps.

The MTC will enable ECC to respond to those gaps at scale. Programs in advanced manufacturing, HVAC/green energy management, welding, and maintenance technology prepare

many students receive financial support for tuition, tools, work boots, and books.

With the MTC's innovative labs, modern equipment, and dedicated training spaces, ECC can enhance course offerings, serve more students, and introduce high schoolers to manufacturing sooner through apprenticeships.

"Now we're not just hiring, we're developing our own pipeline," Butts added. "That's how we're going to meet the need moving forward."

Short-Term Credentials, Long-Term Mobility

While the MTC will support degree pathways, it will also expand short-term credentials designed for immediate employment. ECC's manufacturing pre-apprenticeship program, for example, can take someone from unemployed to credentialed and interviewing with employers in just seven days.

"Seven days to success," De rosier- Cook said. "From no credentials to interviewing with companies that want to hire you."

The new facility will remove one of the biggest barriers to initiatives and programs that help people improve their skills and quickly find employment: capacity constraints.

"Space is the most precious commodity," she said. "When you remove that barrier, we'll be able to do more work and help more people who are unemployed or underemployed."

Students who begin with a short-term credential often return for additional certifications, associate degrees, or advanced training. ECC's continuing education offerings, such as OSHA and safety training, help ensure that lifelong learning remains accessible and affordable.

"We want to be that reliable resource for people," De rosier- Cook said.

ECC's Manufacturing and Technology Center is a commitment to opportunity, stability, and meaningful careers right here in the community. ■

SAVE THE DATE!

The MTC grand opening is Thursday, September 24, 2026, at 4 pm.



Katrina Syrris

ENCORE PERFORMANCE

Alumna returns to ECC's stage to present Shakespeare production

K

atrina Syrris initially did not see herself as a CEO — that would take years. She did, however, dream of the stage from a young age.

As a student in Larkin High School's

Visual and Performing Arts Academy, Syrris was drawn to theater early on. After graduating, she chose Elgin Community College for its affordability and theater program.

"I was really happy to have ECC [as an option]," she said. "It is a fantastic school."

Syrris discovered more than just a cost-effective pathway at ECC: she found

mentors who challenged her and shaped her future. She graduated in 2013 with an Associate in Arts degree, then transferred to Aurora University, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in English with an emphasis on academic research and writing. But it was during her time at ECC that her foundation was established.

Now-retired Professor Stephen Gray, who served as director of theatre at ECC for 15 years, became a mentor to Syrris.

"I learned so much from him; it was a privilege to have him [as an instructor]," she said. "He taught theater, but it went beyond theater: He stressed literary analysis, not just how to create a character."

Gray held her to a higher artistic

standard, something she now appreciates as essential preparation for leadership. She also credits David Zacker's humanities course.

"It taught me so much about how the world works and the foundational philosophy that people live by, but they may not be able to identify," she said.

Turning Opportunity into Leadership

In 2018, at age 24, Syrris took a leap she never anticipated. When her friend's theater internship fell through, Syrris' mentor suggested something daring: start her own company and employ that same friend as an intern.

She had never considered that

possibility before, but her theater experience made her realize she was very capable.

While working as a freelance marketing professional, Syrris founded Goodly Creatures Theatre, which celebrated its eighth year in April 2026. Since 2020, she has directed and produced Goodly's Shakespeare in the Park series, traveling throughout the Chicagoland area. The series has drawn more than 2,000 attendees each summer.

"When the Shakespeare in the Park opportunity was offered to me [by the Geneva Cultural Arts Commission], I had to think about it for a bit, and then I decided to take it on because it aligns with our mission to make classic works accessible."

Through community partnerships in Geneva, Algonquin, Schaumburg, and Elgin, Goodly's productions are offered free to the public.

"That is my shining jewel in the crown of Goodly, that we are free to the public — every educational program that we do," she said. "I think it's really important to keep the arts accessible, because I think the arts are essential for a healthy community, a healthy democracy, an informed populace, and a compassionate populace."

By removing financial barriers, Syrris ensures families, students, and first-time theatergoers experience performances in their own neighborhoods.

Beyond performance, Syrris is passionate about community building and supporting small business owners. She offers educational workshops and has collaborated with the Schaumburg Public Library, where she led sessions on empowerment, creativity, and more. Syrris has also conducted workshops at the Blue Box Cafe in Elgin and the Lake Cook Career Collaborative. She currently serves on the Elgin Cultural Arts Commission and recently began pursuing her MBA at the University of Illinois Chicago.

A Full-Circle Homecoming

This fall, Syrris returns to where her artistic journey was developed. Goodly Creatures Theatre will present William Shakespeare's "As You Like It" at ECC's SecondSpace Theatre on Saturday,



An actor entertains an audience during an outdoor performance of Shakespeare.

September 19, at 7:30 pm, as part of ECC's Homecoming weekend celebration.

The performance will serve not only as a homecoming highlight but also as a continuation of ECC's role as a cultural hub for the region, connecting alumni achievement with community enrichment.

For Syrris, bringing her company to ECC is meaningful. The same stage that once challenged her to grow as an actor will now host her as a director, producer, and CEO — a full-circle moment that reflects the power of community college beginnings. ■

LEARN MORE

Visit goodlycreatures.com to learn more about Syrris and her company.

Visit eccartscenter.org to learn about future productions at ECC.



Goodly Creatures Theatre's Shakespeare in the Park series draws a summer crowd.

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