

Alumni Spotlight

CUYAHOGA VALLEY CAREER CENTER

Kayla McDonnell Class of 2021



Kayla McDonnell, a 2021 graduate of North Royalton High School, took her first steps toward a career in print through the Graphic Imaging Technology program at CVCC, instructed by Patrick Ruebensaal. She was initially drawn to CVCC for the opportunity to meet new people and try something new—especially as she was still unsure if college was the right path for her. She saw CVCC as a way to help guide that decision. During a tour of the career center, Kayla was captivated by Mr. Ruebensaal’s classroom, where t-shirts, stickers, and other student-created work lined the space. As a creative individual, she quickly knew this was the program for her and was thrilled when she was accepted. While at CVCC, Kayla was nominated and selected as Student of the Year for her entire class! “I was so surprised and honored,” she shared. Reflecting on her experience, Kayla credits CVCC with giving her both the technical foundation and the confidence to pursue her career in print. “CVCC gave me the base knowledge and understanding of print materials and machinery that I needed to feel prepared going into this field. It gave me a strong foundation and a leg up going into college,” she said. “The community at CVCC was unmatched. Students from different school districts and backgrounds came together and learned how to work as a team—it was incredible.”

Kayla also found herself growing into a leadership role. “I truly excelled at CVCC. Mr. Ruebensaal trusted me with responsibilities that helped prepare me to be a leader. It was clear that he believed in me, and that meant so much at the time. I remember realizing I was picking things up quickly and was able to help classmates who were struggling—that was such a rewarding feeling.” She credits Mr. Ruebensaal for encouraging her to continue her education and supporting her through the college application process. “He really pushed me to go to college and was so helpful every step of the way.” Even after graduating, Kayla has stayed in touch with Mr. Ruebensaal—returning to his classroom to speak with current students about her experience in both the program and at Ferris State University.

Beyond the classroom, Kayla cherishes the sense of community she found at CVCC. “It felt like a family. Around the holidays, we’d get our work done but also bring in food, share meals, and just spend time together. Those are some of my favorite memories.” She also recalls the impact of returning to in-person learning after COVID. “Coming back during my senior year after months of remote learning was truly healing. Being together again and getting back into the print lab was an experience I’ll never forget.” Among her proudest accomplishments, Kayla highlights receiving awards from the Graphic Arts Association, earning a spot on the Dean’s List multiple times in college, and working at a small, family-owned print shop in college. “That experience taught me so much about customer service and how to run a business—it was so valuable.”

Today, Kayla works at Gilson Graphics, where she recently transitioned from an account manager role on the sales team to a customer service representative position. After graduating from Ferris State University with a major in Graphic Media Management and a minor in Small Business Entrepreneurship, she stepped directly into her role at Gilson Graphics. In her current position, she helps coordinate production plans, communicates customer needs to the operations team, and ensures projects run smoothly from start to finish. Looking ahead, Kayla hopes to one day open her own print shop focused on eco-friendly and sustainable practices—and maybe one day even teach, just like Mr. Ruebensaal. Her advice to future students: “CVCC will open up a world of opportunities you didn’t even know existed. Make as many connections as you can. Everyone there truly wants to support you and see you succeed—I felt it in every inch of that building.” Keep up the great work, Kayla! We are so proud of you.

Written By: Makayla Robertson, CVCC Media Specialist

