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Transforming Lives award ceremony Sunday, Jan. 19

OLYMPIA, Wash. – Five community and technical college students and graduates will each receive a \$500 “Transforming Lives” award from the Trustees Association of Community and Technical Colleges (TACTC) at a special ceremony on Sunday, Jan. 19, in Olympia. The awards portion of the event will begin at 6:30 p.m. at the Red Lion Inn, 2300 Evergreen Park Drive S.W.

The annual Transforming Lives award honors students and graduates who overcome barriers to achieve their higher education goals, demonstrating how Washington community and technical colleges help transform lives through education and support. Each college fielded a nominee and five were selected: Alain Patience Mizero, **Bellevue College**; Miraclejoy Curtis, **Big Bend Community College**; Timm Lovitt, **Edmonds Community College**; Alan Lovaasen, **Olympic College**; and Jeffery Ray, **Tacoma Community College**.

“These students are inspiring and have overcome incredible odds to succeed,” said Dan Altmayer, TACTC president and Highline Community College trustee. “A recurring theme is the individual care and attention of faculty and staff that helped the students believe in themselves and sparked their transformation.”

The following students or alumni will receive awards and share their stories at the ceremony:

- **Alain Patience Mizero, software engineering** – *“My dreams came true at Bellevue College.”*
Life for Alain Patience Mizero began in Rwanda with medical complications at birth which led to permanent disability in his right arm. Despite teasing and isolation, he held onto his dream of studying software engineering and finished high school in one year instead of three. He was selected to study in France based on his academic achievements, but his studies were cut short when he suffered an aneurysm. Brain surgery left him with limited peripheral vision in his left eye and caused him to lose his languages (French and Kinyarwanda) and required a year of rehabilitation to regain and master his language skills. While he didn’t finish his education in France as he had hoped, he used his experiences to focus on higher achievement and set his sights on the United States. He came to the U.S. in 2010, knowing only a friend of a friend. He soon ran out of money and was homeless for a year. A shelter volunteer helped him find a room in a house near Bellevue College, and in fall 2011, he enrolled at the college. Mizero will graduate with an associate transfer degree in computer science and has been accepted to the University of Washington Tacoma for winter quarter.

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- **Miraclejoy Curtis, associate of arts transfer** – *“Big Bend Community College faculty and staff provided resources, challenged me, and shared wisdom on reaching goals.”* Miraclejoy Curtis’ father died of cancer when she was 12; her mother was consumed with drug and alcohol abuse and quit taking care of Curtis and her nine siblings. After moving from place to place, skipping school, and hanging out with the wrong crowd, she realized she wanted more from life and attended Columbia Basin Job Corps in Moses Lake, where she earned her high school diploma in one year. A Job Corps college coordinator saw something in Curtis — that she didn’t yet see in herself — and suggested she apply to Big Bend Community College. The faculty and staff at BBCC supported and challenged Curtis, providing resources and helping her reach her goals. Today, she is a member of Phi Theta Kappa honor society, presents at national conferences, and is halfway through her transfer degree, with plans to transfer to Central Washington University. She shares what she has learned as a peer advocate in the Student Success Center (the first job she has ever held) and wants to empower young black girls to realize their self-worth.
- **Timm Lovitt, associate of arts transfer** - *“Edmonds Community College instructors were committed to my success and challenged me to engage and get involved.”* When Timm Lovitt joined the military on September 4, 2001 to make something of himself and explore the world, he had no idea only one week later, the country would be at war. After five years in the Army, serving tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, he pursued his education at Edmonds Community College. He struggled academically, not realizing the toll of his experiences in the military. His numerous combat situations — including surviving a suicide car bomb — had led to traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). His invisible wounds impacted his cognitive abilities, reading retention, attention span, and attendance. Dr. Peter Schmidt, Veterans Training Support Center project director at EdCC, encouraged and empowered Lovitt to deal with his struggles, connecting him with Services for Students with Disabilities. The extra help improved Lovitt’s grades and he went on to make the dean’s list every subsequent quarter and charter two student clubs: Students Alliance for a Viable Environment and the Veterans’ Club. He was involved in the “Boots to Books” monument installation on campus, which he hopes helps veterans understand their value to the community and the college’s commitment to help them succeed. He earned a bachelor’s in public affairs from Seattle University and master’s in business administration from Western Governors University, and hopes to earn a doctorate degree and work with student veterans.

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- **Alan Lovaasen, manufacturing technology** – *“At Olympic College, they saw me for who I could be and not for what I had done.”* After Alan Lovaasen accidentally shot and killed one of three people who had broken into his home, he was sentenced to more than six years at Two Rivers Correctional Institution. Upon release, he finally began to live his life with purpose. He grew up in a dysfunctional family and unsure if he could re-adapt to society. The WorkSource Office veterans’ outreach encouraged him to go back to school. At Olympic College, the Air Washington staff welcomed him and believed in his ability to succeed, even with his felony conviction. He credits Olympic College instructors for putting up with his endless questions, freely imparting their wealth of practical knowledge, personal encouragement, and professional references. Since graduating with President’s List honors from the manufacturing technology certification program, he now works for Armstrong Marine and continues to rebuild his life.
- **Jeffery Ray, human services** – *“My Tacoma Community College advisor saw something in me that I didn't see myself. ... He sparked a desire in me to think critically ... and trust myself, which opened many doors.”* In a life marred by violence, prison, homelessness, substance abuse, and low self-worth, Jeffery Ray never attended junior high or high school. Upon release after a seventh trip to prison, he worked in a drug and alcohol treatment center, where he discovered a passion for helping people. Soon after, he enrolled in the Tacoma Community College human services program. During his internship in the Access Services department, Ray interacted with students of all ages, cultures, and races, acting as a nonjudgmental sounding board for others, speaking openly and honestly about his struggles and triumphs of returning to school after 30 years. When he allowed a mentor into his life, a deeper transformation took hold. He graduated with honors from TCC and is currently a senior studying social science at The Evergreen State College Tacoma. He is driven to make a difference, especially to help youth struggling with issues of identity and self-worth.

Washington’s 34 community and technical colleges serve about 400,000 students each year. Students train for the workforce, prepare to transfer to a baccalaureate institution, gain basic math and English skills, or pursue continuing education.

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Note: See all 34 nominee stories at [Transforming Lives: Student Nominees Publication 2014](#) 

About the Trustees Association of Community and Technical Colleges:

The Washington Trustees Association of Community and Technical Colleges (TACTC) is comprised of all 151 trustees of the 30 two-year college districts in Washington and is the "trade association" for trustees. The vision of TACTC is to ensure quality, affordable and lifelong educational opportunities for all the people of Washington State. The mission of TACTC is to support, educate and unite Washington State community and technical college trustees in fulfilling their duties and responsibilities.