



# SPOTLIGHT

Special Graduation 2023 edition

ILLINOIS VALLEY  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

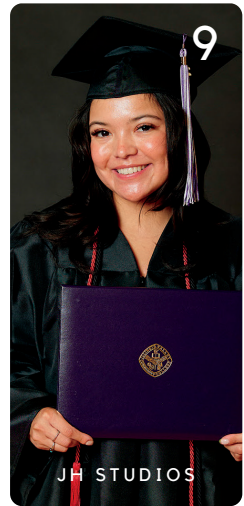
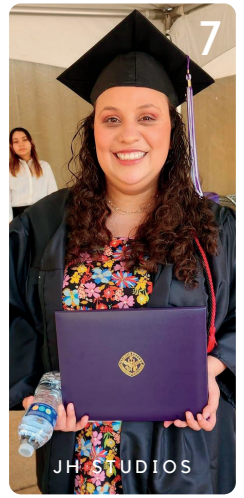
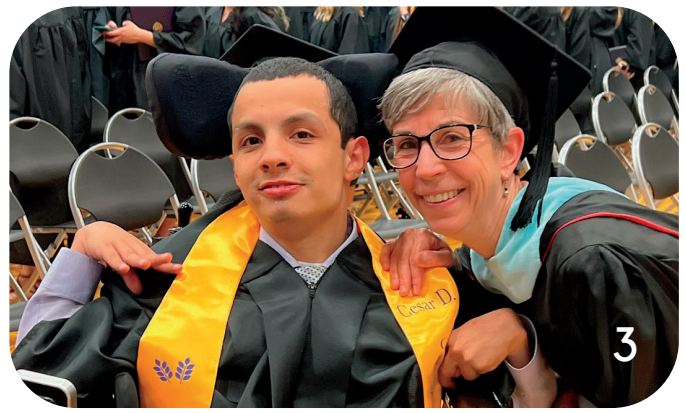
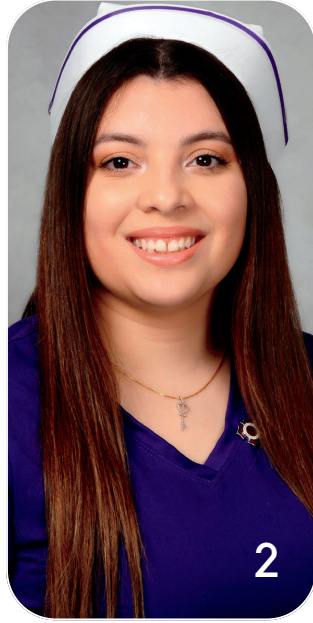
CENTER FOR ACCESSIBILITY &  
NEURODIVERSITY

SUMMER 2023



***ON THE COVER:** Jennifer Tomkins and daughter Fiona celebrate with smiles. **ON THIS PAGE** (clockwise from upper left) Katie Follmer, Lizzie Martinez and family, Lance Moritz; Rosie Rocha admires the cake at her graduation festivities.*





1) Ana de la Cruz; 2) Jasmine Orozco;  
3) Cesar Delgado; 4) Jordan Shaw;  
5) Debora Wambach; 6) Brian Chavez;  
7) Virginia Garcia; 8) Madelyn Hafley;  
9) Rebecca Moreno; 10) Colton Yanish  
and family, 11) Lindsay Gunier

# 'It's Important to Make Memories!'

IVCC's Class of 2023 remembers Covid because it shaped their days as college students. But another thread ran through their lives as well, one that both kept them grounded and propelled them forward, and as the graduates looked back over their last few years, they were quick to acknowledge and praise the staff and faculty who championed, sustained and encouraged them.

"Even just going to one person branches out into a support system," Rosie Rocha discovered.

Over the past six years, Jennifer Tomkins started college, had a baby, took time off, returned to class -- and found herself learning online alongside her grade school-aged daughter. She also endured the death of her mother, whom she describes as "my go-to person."

Concentrating on a remote class with an active toddler climbing around was a challenge and she grieved over the "personability" lost through not being in a classroom. "There were a lot of late nights, a lot of tears, a lot of tutoring, and setting my son in front of YouTube so I could finish my homework. It was a lot of hard work and I made it through!"

Since she couldn't change the circumstances of being online her first year in college, Katie Follmer "just had to deal with it. It was a matter of sitting down to homework, focusing, and setting a day just to 'school.'" Katie completed two degrees.

"Blackboard and Zoom meetings really confused me at first. I didn't have help from anybody until I found Tina (Hardy) and we went over everything and got on track," said Colton Yanish.

On top of the pandemic, Lance Moritz underwent a kidney transplant, and was confined at home while he recovered. "But all the wonderful teachers and people like (agriculture program coordinator) Willard Mott and Tina and

(Project Success counselor) Diane (Scoma) worked together to make sure I could succeed online and still get my degree," he said.

Lizzie Martinez stumbled over the conversion to online learning, and "had to figure out how to manage my time, little ways to help my organization. You can't slack off. GPA really matters, especially if you transfer."

Virginia Garcia juggled new college courses and family, and struggled with "just knowing how to be a student. I didn't have the right skills to manage time or study or take notes. As a non-traditional adult student, I had no idea what it took." Then, each new semester "got easier and more natural."

As an adult returning to a college campus, Debbie Wambach relished "just having support emotionally with classes, medical issues, and everything. I had support to change things if I wasn't doing well, and was given other options and techniques to use. You guys are like family!"

As they battled to balance school, social life and work, Brian Chavez, Rosie Rocha, and Rebecca Moreno learned to pivot. Rebecca limited her in-person time on campus, and spread her classes over two semesters rather than one. "It's hard, because we all want to finish, but we want to finish healthy."

Brian cut his outside work hours and shifted instead to tutoring in the Tutoring and Writing Center where he was already studying. He joined a study group and "learned a lot better with a bunch of people rather than figuring it out on my own. We would do problems and compare answers -- and have fun with it too!"

On her way to earning two degrees, Rosie determined "to put myself first instead of academics." She learned "you can have fun here. Academics is important, but it's also important to make memories."

# Scenes from Graduation 2023

Photos by J H Studios for IVCC





# Congratulations You Did It! Class of 2023!



*I learned a lot better with a bunch of people in a study group rather than figuring it out on my own.*

*Even just going to one person branches out into a support system.*

*There were a lot of late nights, a lot of tears, a lot of tutoring ... it was a lot of hard work and I made it through!*

*I had support to change things if I wasn't doing well, and was given other options and techniques to use.*

*Each new semester got easier and more natural.*



# 'You never fail unless you stop trying' -- and other wisdom from the Class of 2023

## **Jasmine Orozco**

PLANS: Nursing

### **ADVICE:**

*You never fail until you stop trying. It may take a little longer than for others, but as long as you believe in yourself, anything is possible!*

## **Katherine Follmer**

PLANS: Transfer to NIU to major in early childhood education

### **ADVICE:**

- *Go to class -- you're paying to be there so make sure you show up!*
- *Don't procrastinate on essays. You may think you're better under pressure, but if you do it early and have it read over by the Tutoring and Writing Center, it's going to help so much.*
- *Don't get down on yourself when you get low grades. Cs are still passing and Cs get degrees.*
- *Make memories while you're here. There's always at least one person you will never forget from your college experience.*

## **Jennifer Tomkins**

PLANS: Started online at Franklin University in January and should complete a degree in communications in May 2024.

### **ADVICE:**

*There are resources for single parents, first generation college students, low income or older adults, child care. If you want to achieve your goal, do it no matter what -- there's help available.*

## **Brian Chavez**

PLANS: Transfer to Illinois State University to major in computer science.

### **ADVICE:**

*Relax a little on classes. I cut my hours working and joined a bunch of organizations here and met a lot of new people, made great friends and learned new skills I never thought I'd learn. Best decision I ever made!*

## **Elizabeth Martinez**

PLANS: Attend North Central College to get a bachelor's in literature with a minor in gender studies, and eventually become an editor or proofreader.

*ADVICE: If you've never been in a college level class, it's not like high school. Grades really matter. It's not like you fail one assignment and can get your grade up the next assignment. It's harder to get your grade up. GPA really matters, especially if you transfer. You can't just slack off. My first year at IV, I kinda slipped and that first semester still affects my GPA.*

## **Rebecca Moreno**

PLANS: Has already started a bachelor degree program through Franklin University. Plans to double major in accounting and business, get a master's and go into bookkeeping as a CPA.

### **ADVICE:**

*Use all the resources you can, because IV offers so many. You can customize them to your own needs. You're not in competition with anyone else. Even if it feels like a slow process, end it with the best grade you can. Don't get overwhelmed, because it becomes hard to focus.*

## **Debora Wambach**

PLANS Relocate to the Chicago area to work as a certified nursing assistant in a hospital while pursuing an LPN and RN.

### **ADVICE:**

*Realize college is a change. You have to be more organized than in high school. Your social life is different. Everything is, so be flexible and don't pressure yourself. Ask for help, and use your resources. One person can point you in the right direction, and you don't have to go looking yourself.*

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# More advice from the Class of 2023

## Rosie Rocha

PLANS: Travel abroad for month's study in Spain; transfer to University of Illinois to pursue elementary education with a bilingual endorsement.

ADVICE:  
*I ask for help. I had always resisted that, it was just not something I did. But there's so much help here and it's free. Take things day-by-day. You can have fun here.*



## Virginia Garcia

PLANS: Take a little time off before looking for a job. Catch up on life with family and kids.

ADVICE:  
*Don't be embarrassed to ask for help. We don't know it all, that's why we're going to school. So it's OK to learn to be a different type of student.*



## Madelyn Hafley

PLANS: "I'm going to start looking for job; I'm really good with computers."

ADVICE:  
*Stick with it, always ask questions and work hard.*



## Colton Yanish

PLANS: "I don't really know yet; I'm trying to figure it out. I'm thinking of a baseball school, like University of Wisconsin or Eureka College. (He's been an Eagles pitcher/first baseman)"

ADVICE:  
*Don't be afraid to ask questions. No question is stupid. I was terrified at first, but break out of your comfort zone and you'll be all right.*



## Ana de la Cruz

PLANS: After achieving a CNA certificate, will move into the medical assistant program

ADVICE:  
*Ask for help. Try to have all the information clear. Find out what is the way to ask all your questions when you don't know how to start.*

## Lance Moritz

PLANS: Applying his agronomy degree to work on the family farm and expand the family's lawn care business

ADVICE:  
*I would give them the confidence. If you've got medical issues, IV is the place to go because the people there make things possible no matter what the circumstances are.*



## Lindsay Gunier

PLANS: Nursing

ADVICE:  
*There is no shame in having to reach out when you need help. And ... find people to study with who complement your learning style!*



## Jordan Shaw

PLANS: Shifting from marketing entrepreneur to become an account executive at an integrated business technology firm.

ADVICE:  
*Don't compare yourself to other people. Recognize and acknowledge your journey is your own, and you're not there to compete with anyone else. Focus on your goals. Be open to the experience, take advantage of it, but don't let it scare you.*



## Cesar Delgado

PLANS: "I will be a dedicated server for the farmers with my podcast Backroads of Illinois. It is my own business."

ADVICE:  
*"I am grateful to be a college graduate from IVCC. I have a certificate for agricultural studies. Tina Hardy is great to accommodate for your classes, which means that you can be successful in college. IVCC is worth it!"*



## Levi Bland

PLANS: Take a break to just relax, but plans to continue with school.

ADVICE:  
*Don't be afraid of failing in classes. I nearly did because I was so afraid of failing ... but I didn't. Be able to get through without stressing yourself.*