

I'd like to begin by thanking you all for inviting me to join you this evening. I am beyond grateful to have been chosen as one of the first recipients of the Robert C. Massengill scholarship.

Up until last year I had spent the previous 20 years working in the restaurant industry. I worked my way up from dishwasher to line cook, to executive chef. I thoroughly enjoyed my work and learned a lot about time management, teamwork, leadership, and general work ethic over those 20 years. With the onset of Covid-19, the industry I loved began to change. My work hours grew increasingly longer and time with family became more and more infrequent. As a chef I was succeeding and the restaurant was seeing greater and greater increases in profit, but as a father and a husband I was growing increasingly absent. I woke one morning before my wife and 5-year-old daughter. I went to wake my daughter for school and found that she'd been sleeping with a picture of her daddy. This was the only way she could see me on a daily basis. This was my breaking point.

As a teenager I had considered going into a trade, but the fast-paced nature of the kitchen and my love of cooking got the better of me. Now at a crossroads in my life, I found myself again interested in the trades. More specifically electrical work but I had no clue where to begin. It so happened that a bartender at the restaurant was engaged to an electrician who worked for TA Woods. He explained the apprenticeship program at CFCC and set up an interview. My hopes of getting the job weren't high. A 36-year-old chef, with no experience, and no relevant references. Kind of a hard sell. But I was given the opportunity to prove myself and soon enrolled at CFCC.

The past 6 months have been some of the most challenging and yet most fulfilling of my professional life. I've learned so much, whether in class with Mr. Durham or in the field with my crew. I am also afforded so much more time at home alongside my wife to watch our little girl grow up. She still sleeps with the picture of daddy but that's just because she's a daddy's girl. I believe wholeheartedly that I made the right decision for myself and my family and your support helps strengthen that belief.

Being awarded this scholarship is such an honor and will help me to be better prepared for the work ahead. I feel that I am now approaching this journey with the tools necessary to succeed without worrying whether I have to sacrifice to afford what I need. I've been very fortunate to have mentors on my team that have been incredibly generous, which has given me a head start in filling my tool bag. This scholarship has allowed me to add to that collection and become more independent in the field.

I want to thank every one of you for your continued support of the programs here at CFCC and for this generous gift that you've given. I never had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Massengill but from what I've heard, he was an honorable, hardworking man who truly believed in every single student that stepped through these halls. I will do my best to uphold the standards of this scholarship's namesake and stay true to the values Mr. Massengill carried with him throughout his career and in life. A very special thank you to Teresa Cox and TA Woods for sponsoring me in the apprenticeship program. Thank you Mr Durham for keeping class fun and informative. And thanks to all of you for this amazing gift and for providing an opportunity for students young and old to pursue their goals. Your continued support makes it possible for the next generation of apprentices to one day become the Journeymen and master electricians of the future. Thank you.

Best regards,

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