

>> Hello, and welcome to the Valley Today. I am your host, Janet. Mic, it is Laurel Community College Day. We've got a full screen on the Zoom. Guy Curtis, of course, is with me. He is my co host for the day as he is for all of the Laurel ridge Community College shows. He is their director of marketing. Sally Both is joining us today as well. We've got two graduates from Laurel Ridge Community College. Margaret Kane is joining us. She is 2024 outstanding graduate for the Fauquier campus, and Sydney Patton is joining us. She is the 2024 outstanding graduate for the Middletown campus. Thank you for making some time to meet up on the screen and have a conversation today. Guy Curtis, is this the pinnacle of your year commencement?

>> It certainly is. A lot of hard work by the students and the staff to culminate to this moment of graduation. The years and time and energy put into the next couple of days at the college is well worth it. I just had a reflection earlier today. What do I do and why do I do? What I do here at the college, and it all comes down to these couple of days, and we really enjoy the opportunity to see the students walk across the stage and finally get that achievement of graduating with the college. Is an excellent time to be a part of the college and enjoy this great time of year.

>> Sally, you're in a unique position at Laurel Ridge because you really get to have relationships with a lot of the students because you're writing the stories about them and you're learning about the programs, and you're doing those things. You really get more of an opportunity to get in the weeds on day to day life at Laurel Ridge

>> I do. Sydney and Margaret are two of my absolute favorites. I've interviewed thus far. They're both really impressive. Both as students and as citizens of their communities.

>> Margaret, I want to start with you because you decided on Laurel Ridge right after graduating from high school.

>> I was the day after I graduated. I called the college.

>> Now, was that always your plan because you were home schooled, is that right?

>> I was. Yes. A lot of people I know, especially a lot of home schoolers, I knew when either they dual enrolled or they went straight into Laurel Ridge, right after high school. That had been my plan. I was definitely expecting to take the summer off, but then it was 2020, so there was nothing to do. This summer. I just decided why not go ahead and just enroll.

>> I understand that you enrolled with an idea of studying one thing, but then your passion for something else took over.

>> Yes. I definitely thought I was headed into the medical field. I really

enjoyed all the classes that I took leading up to that. I took A&P and all the psychologies and sociology and all of that, and I enjoyed all of them. But what I ended up really enjoying much more was the English classes that I took. Although my associates is in general studies, that was more of the direction I ended up going in.

>> Then, Sydney, I understand you entered Laurel Ridge under one of the G-3 funding programs that Guy Curtis and I talk about a lot?

>> Yes, I did. I got a postcard in the mail, just as COVID was starting to end and things were starting to progress. I just decided that I would go ahead and go for it. I had been taking all these classes at the library over Zoom, and I was like, how different could it be? Now, three years later. Here I am.

>> Did you have any college experience before you came to Laurel Ridge?

>> I am older. I graduated high school in 2003. Back in Ohio, there was the opportunity to take I was in the marketing program, and there was an opportunity to do a dual enrolled thing where you were able to take some of the marketing classes that were at Toledo University. I took some of those, but that was pretty much it. Then I moved to Virginia, didn't do anything with it, and basically restarted all over again.

>> Was it something you had always intended to do to go back to school to get a degree of some sort?

>> Yes. I had paused to do some family life stuff. Every time that I want to go back to school, something would happen. Pretty much after COVID, I was like, at this point, what other crazy thing could happen? Strike while the iron is hot. I just decided, this is the time. I'm doing it.

>> Kudos to you because sometimes when you say that phrase out loud, how much worse could it get? It gets a lot worse. I'm glad it went the opposite way for you in this situation.

>> Well, there were rocky moments throughout it, but that makes the victory of graduation that much sweeter.

>> Sally, can you explain what the outstanding graduate award is? Give us a little bit of background on that.

>> We award one for each campus, the Fauquier, and the Middletown campus. They're nominated by faculty members. We're looking for students with several main traits, obviously, intellectual ability, their leadership skills, we'd like to see them involved in the college and student life and also involved in their community. Margaret and Sydney are both very, obviously, very intelligent. They are leaders in PTK, and they are also very involved. Sydney with the Samuels library in Front Royal. She was so involved that libraries from

across the country were reaching out to her, according to her nominating professor. Margaret was heavily involved in community activities. She has volunteered with her church. She's been to Mexico to volunteer, and she's also been involved as a tutor on our campus and mentoring her fellow students.

>> Margaret Guy Curtis and I talk a lot about the different types of students that come through Laurel Ridge, from those straight out of public high school, two home schoolers to those gearing up for a certification or those that are returning to get a degree after years and years of being out of school. I wonder how that looked for you. What were you expecting when you first stepped on campus at Laurel Ridge?

>> That's such a good question. I think that I was expecting mostly for it to be people my age straight out of high school. That being said, when you're home schooled, you get used to just hanging out with lots of different people who are not your age. I was much more comfortable, actually, coming and being like, Oh, my goodness. Sitting next to me is this mom, and this Army vet. That was very cool for me and very exciting because I always enjoyed when I would do some group project, and someone would have some background is something that I knew nothing about, and they could bring a completely new perspective to the project or the discussion or whatever it was, which was always so much fun. That was actually my favorite part of community college, honestly, because you really do get a good slice of the community going there.

>> How about you, Sydney? Was it intimidating at all to return to college after you had taken a few years off?

>> One of my classic go to stories is as Sally said, I am involved with the honor society [inaudible 00:07:13]. My first semester here at Laurel Ridge was completely online. I didn't have a single in person class. I got an e-mail invite from the honor society. It had a Zoom attached to it, come to this meeting, find out about it. I went there, and I listened to the whole schpiel at the end, it came time for questions. Professor Brumbaugh opened it up and I asked him, and I was like, look, I was like, obviously, I am an older student. I'm not entirely sure how I'm going to fit into all of this. I was like, I'm really worried about being the creepy mom with snacks. He did an excellent job of explaining. He's like, No, we've got a wide range of students that range from army veterans to moms to this just entire community. He promised me that I wouldn't be weird creepy mom with snacks. I gave it a go, and that was the second time that I dove in and didn't look back.

>> You can never go wrong with snacks, creepy mom or not. Anytime you have snacks, you're always the hit of the crowd.

>> That's how I got volun told that I was going to be president of the Honor Society is because I brought snacks.

>> That second year when you moved off of just online classes and actually got to go to campus and sit in a classroom with other students, what did that feel like?

>> You know that dream that you have where you're back in high school and you've forgotten to do homework assignments and stuff like that. The drive to school that first time felt very much like that. You're sitting in a classroom and classrooms are very different from back in the day. It was a class on the legal ethics of cybersecurity. It was a bit intimidating. But just fell back into it and it just became second nature again. It was great to get to interact with people and to have a professor there. I forgot how great it is to have access to the professor. To be able to have them read your facial cues and realize when you're not understanding. It was really great to be back in person.

Let's take a break. When we come back, can we talk a little bit about your overall experiences at each of the campuses, and then maybe talk a little bit about what you've got planned to do next. Can we do all that in the next segment?

>> Sure.

Good. We are on the Zoom today for Laurel Ridge Community College Day. Guy Curtis and Sally both are joining us. Along with them is Margaret Kane. She is the outstanding graduate for the Fauquier campus in 2024, and Sydney Patton, she is the 2024 outstanding graduate for the Middle-town campus. We're going to talk more with all of them when we come back in just a couple of minutes.

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Welcome back to the Valley. Today, I am your host, Janet Micoit. It's Laurel Ridge Community College Day. So we are on the Zoom with Guy Curtis and Sally both from Laurel Ridge Community College. Joining both of them is Sydney Patton. Sydney is the 2024 outstanding graduate for the Middle town campus. Also, Margaret Kane she is the 2024 outstanding graduate for the Fauquier campus. I want to jump back to you real quick, Margaret, and ask you a little bit about your overall experience at Laurel Ridge. Tell me a little bit about the moment when you realized that what you thought you were going there for isn't what you were actually going to finish going there for.

So I think because I enjoyed my pre-med classes, it wasn't anything that I did in class that turned me off of the medical field, for sure. It was much more of realizing that I enjoyed English classes and English discussions so much more. I think most people go in to whatever career they choose wanting to help people, usually. I had thought the medical field would be the way that I could help people, but I actually started to realize that people around me needed help most with was writing coaching. It's incredible that you can actually help someone get their own voice and articulate themselves. I found that so exciting, and it came so naturally to me that I started to think, well, this is definitely much more the direction I need to go in. It was more my background. Anyway, my mom is a literature teacher. All the home school cops that she participates in. So it wasn't a total shock, but it was interesting leaving that setting and going to more of a institutionalized college and seeing, the same general rules apply, and I can help people in this way. So that was really cool.

Professor Nicole Martin, she's a history and Humanities professor. She nominated Margaret. She wrote that Margaret was one of the most gifted writers she's ever had the pleasure to teach. She's been a professor for more than 20 years.

That's impressive.

Another professor said her papers are a joy to read, and that's not something I often say when grading.

So sweet.

Her writing is stellar.

I feel like English is the basis of everything that we do, whether it's writing, whether it's speaking, whether it's even just reading something, and it gets a bad rap, sometimes. People tend to go to college in general and community college because they want to learn a thing. English isn't usually something people think of in that realm, yet if you do it well, you have better confidence. It can take you in so many different directions.

Yes. People are often so uncomfortable asking for help because they think, I speak English or whatever it is. I can read. So I don't need help writing. I know how to write, but because it's amorphous, often you need much more help in that area than I also tutored A&P, and those students were much more comfortable coming to tutoring. Why would do one or two sessions with them and they were done because they just needed to memorize something, whereas the English students, it was hard to get them to come, but then they kept coming back because they needed continued help.

There's a whole lot more creativity involved in English than I think people give it credit for, too.

Yes. That is so true.

Sydney, when you came into Laurel Ridge, you came in on the G3 and then kind of expanded. Oh, I'm going to do this. Was there ever a moment where you thought, no, not doing any of this? This was a terrible mistake.

So I joined the day that fall classes started. So I wasn't able to actually start when everybody else did. I had to start after Labor Day. So because of that, my first semester was all general education stuff. It was all the stuff I expected. I didn't get my first taste of cybersecurity until the two summer classes that I was required to take to stay on track. It was actually my first cybersecurity class. It was accelerated. So it was a 14 week class shoved into five weeks. I remember thinking like 2.5 weeks in, oh, my what did I do? This is crazy. I'm not going to be able to do this. I was having a real imposter syndrome moment, and I was ready to, like, throw in the towel. I reached out to the professor who is my favorite professor of the program. He is the one that talked me down off that ledge and reminded me that my field needed voices like me, that there's a place for me in the field. It happened twice that I thought about stopping and he was there both times to keep me from that. So even after you get after that first hump, it can sneak back up on you again. It is a wild ride. But once you find your thing, you do what I did. It ends up expanding, and now here I want to come back and teach so that I can hopefully be the voice like Professor Allen was with me and remind future students that they belong in this field. If they want it, they can have it.

Guy Curtis, we talk about that a lot across all of the different programs that's offered at Laurel Ridge is that unique one on one aspect that students really get to have a relationship with their professors, with the advisors, and it's all about getting the student to that finish line, however they need to get there.

That's right. There's so many different experiences that our faculty and staff and instructors bring us hearing the story earlier about Margaret's experience with different audiences within the classroom, you've gained so much. I think it's the unique value that a community college provides, whether it's the industry experience professors and their real time world experiences, as well as the students that come to the classroom, you couldn't ask for a better picture or prepare yourself for that subject area that you're focusing on and eventually graduating with. Absolutely.

>> Margaret, now that it's in your rear view and you can look back at the whole of your experience, was it what you expected? Was it half of what you expected or can you even remember now what it was you expected?

>> It was definitely much more than I expected because I had planned to go for two years and then take a couple of gen aids and probably go into a four year, but I ended up doing for a while, what will be most of my higher education at Laurel Ridge and I had such a fantastic time. I had so many

wonderful opportunities to get to know my community better that I wouldn't have had, and that I did not expect, especially because, like, Sydney, I started totally online, so I wasn't expecting any form of connection to the college. I ended up being just very involved, which was again, much more than I was expecting.

>> How about you, Sydney?

>> I was expecting to be online. I was expecting to do all the online classes. I was not expecting to do all the things that I did. I thought I'd just get my degree and move on and transfer to a four year, so it has exceeded my expectations. There is no way I could go back to three years ago and tell myself that I'm going to be here at this moment, and I wouldn't believe it. I'd be like, no, so it's been everything and more.

>> You mentioned a second ago that your long term goal is to come back and be a professor at Laurel Ridge, where are you on that timeline?

>> In order to come back and teach at a community college, you need to have a master's degree in your field that you're going to teach. This fall, I am transferring to Shenandoah University where I will get my bachelor's in cybersecurity and then I will also pursue my master's, most likely at Shenandoah. But if I've learned anything through my time, it is don't make plans too hard set in stone because life does not play by those rules.

>> Margaret, you've got a pretty big accomplishment that you're about to have in the next few months because you're going to become a new mom. What are the plans education wise?

>> Yes, so right now, I'm pretty laser focused on having the baby. But my husband and I have talked a lot about me going back for probably my bachelor's in English and hopefully starting a writing coaching business and I think that would work really well because I want to stay home with my kids, and so that's something I can do virtually or locally. I've had lots of success with coaching people online over Zoom, and so I'll probably continue that.

>> With the small business developments that are located right there in the college, you've got all your boxes checked.

>> I didn't even know about that until Sally both told me about it, and I was very excited.

>> Sally commencement is upon us. It's going to be happening within hours of people hearing the show on the radio today.

>> Yes. At 2:00 today. Our health professions graduates will have their commencement ceremony and tomorrow, all of our other graduates at 2:00 will have their ceremony.

>> It's quite a sight to behold. My favorite part is when they throw their caps in the air, but just I think that's a generic favorite part for everybody.

>> We will have pinnings after the health profession ceremony for the nursing students, the medical laboratory technicians, students, and the surgical technology students, and our EMS students will have a coin ceremony.

>> Sydney, do you have any advice for a student who's listening that maybe is following a similar path to yours and that it was a couple of years ago. I'll say a few years ago when they graduated high school, and they're giving it some thought. What advice do you have for somebody?

>> It's lame and it's cliché, but just do it. It's that first step is the hardest. But once you get over that first step and you get into it, then get involved. One of the greatest things that I did throughout this entire experience was I joined the honor society and I became involved over at student life. Chris Lambert is the one that leads that, and he leads ambassadors, and pretty much if it's student related, he touches all aspects of that program. He has a way that you can be involved in this and when you get involved, it leads to things like scholarships and experience and additional trainings. I've gone to leadership conferences. I've done all of these things because I decided to just jump in and get involved. I have gotten far more out of Laurel Ridge than I pay in tuition.

>> Margaret, how about you? Do you have advice for somebody who's thinking about it, but just isn't sure it's a path they want to take?

>> I would say it's slightly less romantic than Sydney's. It is much more heart rending, but it's a great financial decision. If you're not sure what you want to do, rather than spinning your wheels or jumping into a four year degree that you don't think you'll enjoy, try some classes out at the community college because it's not a huge investment of time or money. But you can discover what you're interested in, and that will absolutely pay dividends in future. The other thing I would say is once you do that, get to know your professors, get to know people on campus, the librarians, the police officers, the people at the front desk. Because once you do that, I think you get really plugged into the college and people know you, they recognize you, they want to help you, and they're on your side. It just really helps you get through those stickier moments that Sydney was talking about, where you feel like, there's no way I can do this. You have people around you who know that you can and who are there to support you.

>> Guy Curtis, one of the really cool things about Laurel Ridge Community College, too, is that even though commencement is about to happen, registration is ongoing for a lot of the programs. Sydney participated as part of a G3 program, and you can pretty much sign up for those classes year round.

>> That's right. Our Summer classes are about to start soon as well as the Fall.



Apply today if you're looking to get a degree or certificate program of some sorts. But if you're looking to get into some fast track programs that are going to take a few weeks instead of years depending on your time frame, and your ultimate goal, Sydney said earlier, this is your time. Your time to make a change, looking to grow, whether in your current position or you want to find a new career entirely or just start your career. College is a great place to begin. We have a few places if you're looking to learn more about the college and the programs, you can schedule a tour with one of our college coaches or you can come and do information session. We have a few of those events later this spring and summer. More if you just want to browse our website, [LaurelRidge.edu/forward/explore](http://LaurelRidge.edu/forward/explore) is a great place to start. Many of the programs you'll find like G3 and Fast Forward you'll see some indication of those financial benefits. But honestly, if it's not some of those grant state funded programs, there's tons of scholarships at the college awards. A lot of times too, it doesn't hurt to find out. A lot of folks turned down financial opportunity because they just didn't take a moment to look up a scholarship or see if they're eligible or not. For example, G3 and Fast Forward are providing folks with certain household threshold incomes, if they may believe I make too much money, and I wouldn't be eligible, but it doesn't hurt to find out. I think the greatest part of it is that we have college coaches and staff, financial officers that can help you find out. Let us help you navigate your funding options and help you find your way, because you'd like to learn more or just visit us. Visit [LaurelRidge.edu/forward/visit](http://LaurelRidge.edu/forward/visit), schedule tour, one on one meeting. Come to an information session, we'll explore more programs.

>> I certainly encourage people to go to [LaurelRidge.edu](http://LaurelRidge.edu) and find all of Sally's wonderful stories and hear about these student experiences. Because sometimes reading somebody else's story and finding that it mirrors yours in some way is a great boost to your confidence to give this a shot.

>> Yes, I know a lot of our students inspire future students through their stories.

>> Sally, thank you for pulling the crew together today. I appreciate your time.

>> Thank you for having us.

>> Margaret, I wish you a ton of luck. Congratulations on the outstanding graduate, and I wish you luck as you move forward.

>> Thank you so much.

>> Sydney, I might come back to Laurel Ridge and take a class in cybersecurity if you're a professor. How about that?

>> That would be awesome. I promise it'll be a fun experience.

>> Guy Curtis, I'm going to put Chris Lambert on a list of possible guests for a

future show so he can talk about all the cool fun things from student activity side at Laurel Ridge.

>> I think the summertime is a great time for him because it's a little slower so yes, the timing is right, but there are tremendous benefits through Chris's programs of student life and activities that we want to highlight. Great suggestion. Thank you.

>> I will be back tomorrow with a brand new episode of the Valley Today. We're talking with Chris Conyer from Winchester City Parks about all of the cool fun programs and events that they've got going on at Jim Barnett Park, and across the city, so meet me back here for that just a few minutes afternoon.