



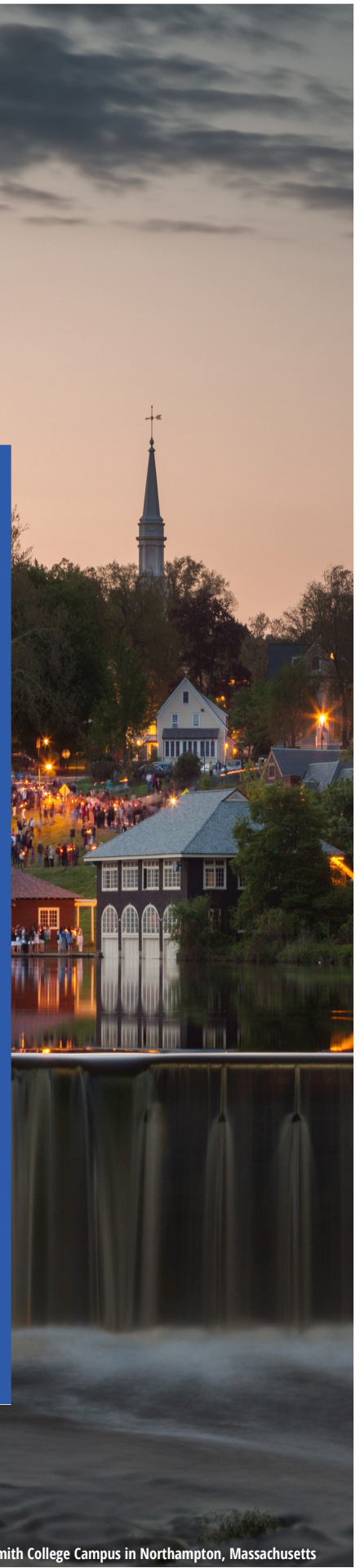
INSPIRED  
PATHWAYS



# Winter Bulletin

COLLEGE ADVICE / NOVEMBER 2023

- *Advice for juniors*
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- *How Pathways is making college more attainable for students*
- *The keys to the community college application process*
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Smith College Campus in Northampton, Massachusetts

# Accepting Help and Giving Back

Inspired Pathways scholarship recipients Dat and Tien Dang reflect on college, gratitude and the impact Hormel Foods has had on their lives.

Written by: Dominique Saint Malo

In 2020, Hormel Foods launched the Inspired Pathways program, which pays two years of community college tuition for children of Hormel employees and helps their dream of going to college come true. "It's been a big jumpstart for us," says Dat Dang, a sophomore at Butler Community College and a recent recipient of the Inspired Pathways scholarship. He and his older brother Tien are both beneficiaries of the program, something for which they and their family are extremely grateful.



The Dang family preparing a meal together

## Seizing the Opportunity

Dat and Tien — who also attends Butler Community College — were both born in Vietnam and are the first in their family to go to college. When they first heard about Inspired Pathways they were immediately excited.

"My dad came home one day and said, 'You should apply for this. This is your

chance to go to college,'" Dat says. This encouragement from their father Truong, who works at Dold Foods, was the push the pair needed to begin the process. Both young men felt more optimistic about the chance to apply and succeed than intimidated.

When asked if he feels any pressure regarding his college journey, Tien says, "Our whole family was excited. My grandma was telling me every day, 'Stay in school, do good in school.' I don't think there's pressure; it's more

like motivation to do our best." Dat echoes his brother: "We should always do our best."

Early in his freshman year, Tien had been majoring in business

administration. He enjoyed connecting with his professors, and one in particular left her mark on him...when she won a bet against him.

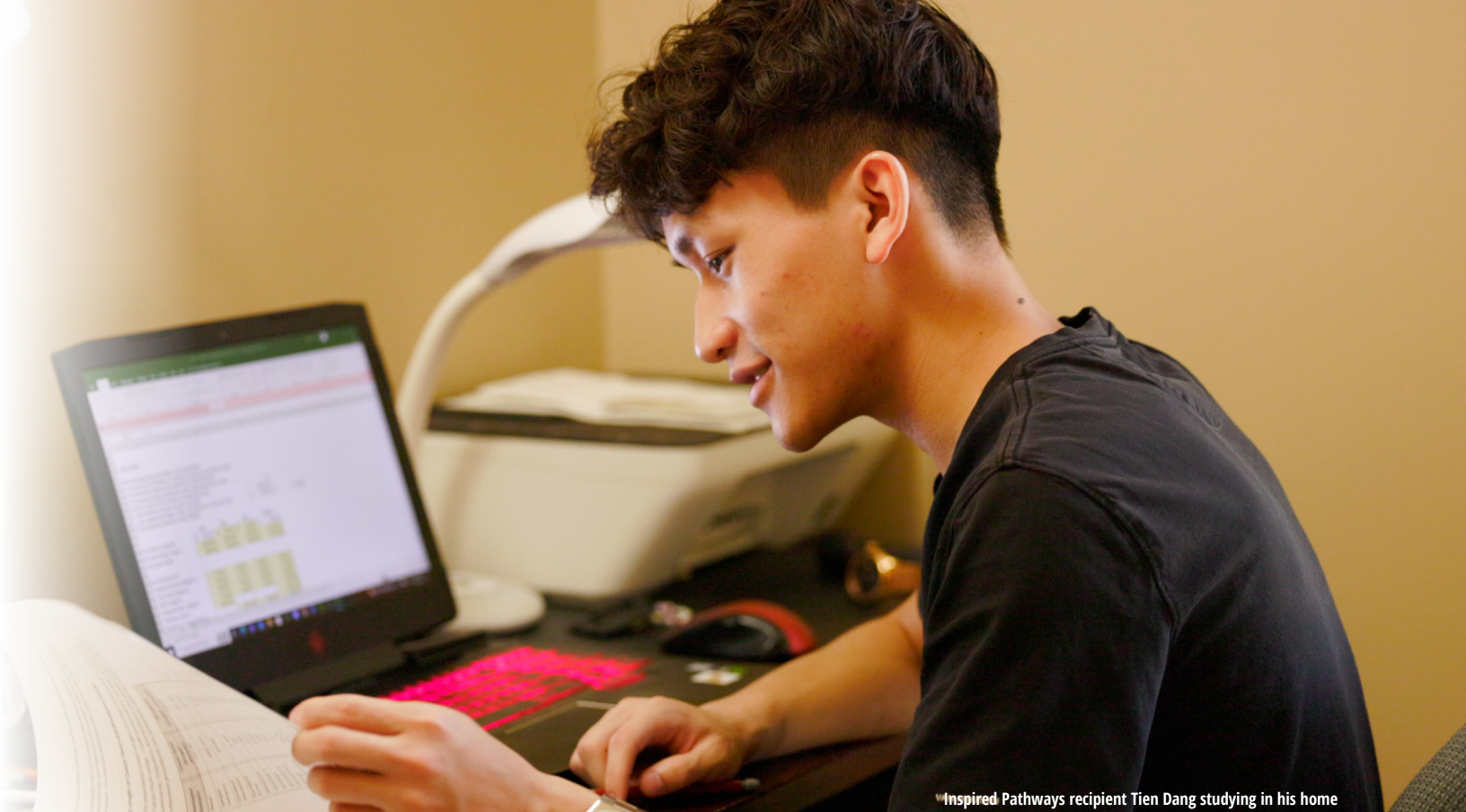
"My financial accounting teacher was a very good teacher," he stresses. "One day, she made a bet with me. She said, 'I bet you're gonna like financial accounting after this class.'" Tien laughs at the memory. His professor was right, and Tien now eagerly and happily works toward the reward of "making the numbers match." Similarly, Dat, a computer science major and self-described problem solver, says, "It's really satisfying when the code works."

Tien applied for and received the Inspired Pathways scholarship two years ago and Dat followed suit not long after, especially since meeting the criteria of other scholarship programs proved complicated. "In high school, I did apply for scholarships and financial aid, but I didn't meet the criteria. Since Inspired Pathways is connected to my dad's employment, it was a great opportunity to work toward our futures and make the most of the support we get from Hormel."

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to go to college.’

**DAT DANG**  
**HORMEL INSPIRED PATHWAYS**  
**SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT**





Inspired Pathways recipient Tien Dang studying in his home

### A Hardworking Family

Truong Dang immigrated to the United States in 1997 and has worked at Dold Foods for 23 years. Truong's work at Dold was one of two jobs he had when he first immigrated here, but Dat says his dad's employment with Hormel Foods was really what allowed Truong to make a place for himself — and subsequently, his whole family — in the States. "My dad's job with Hormel is what allowed us to be here in the first place."

Dat and Tien agree that Hormel Foods was always something their dad could depend on to help him support his family. They were both quite clear though: their entire family is hard at work basically 24/7. Their mother works two jobs, and Truong always seems to be on the clock. "He works seven days a week, and five of those days he'll probably work overtime." Truong is passionate and grateful for this work and wants to improve every day; if he supports Hormel Foods, he says, Hormel Foods can continue to give back to their employees' families. As for Dat and Tien, when they're not

in school, they work weekends as nail technicians. Dat says, "My parents have been very strong role models for me; seeing them have so much determination, to see them work so hard to support us, that's something that makes me want to give it my all so that when the time comes, I can give back to them." Tien agrees. "My parents are probably my biggest role models." In addition to the family's dedication to both work and school, they also make a point to find connection whenever possible.

### Finding and Nurturing Community

Between the family's work schedules and Dat and Tien's school year, the Dangs don't always have much time to spend together (though occasionally, they'll find time to take a family trip or visit the zoo). Dat says one thing they always make time for, however, is family dinner. "I think that's really important; you need that connection with each other daily." In fact, Dat and Tien both appreciate real human-to-human connection. They like unwinding with their family after a long day and they like making connections with their

peers at school. Dat says he likes having smaller classes where it feels like people really know each other and he can truly connect with his teachers and the community.



The Dang family sits down to eat dinner together

Similarly, Dat and Tien feel like Hormel Foods is really taking care of their own. "My perception of Hormel hasn't changed," Dat says. "I've always idolized it and my dad's connection to it. My dad could rely on Hormel to help him support his family." And when asked how it feels to be able to support his sons through the Inspired Pathways program, Truong has one thing to say: "I'm just so happy."



## SATs and ACTs

# What's Up with Testing?

For decades colleges and universities have relied heavily on two tests to help them make their admissions decisions. For just as long, educators have argued that these tests don't accurately reflect a student's ability to be successful in college. Placing so much weight on a single standardized test has led students to ignore the activities that ARE indicators of future success like enrolling in challenging classes, having a job, or engaging in experiential learning opportunities.

*Written by: Nate Lockett, Program Director, Hormel Inspired Pathways*

Due to the pandemic, colleges were forced in 2020 to suspend their testing requirements, prompting testing companies to implement some long-desired changes. The essays, arbitrary vocabulary sections, and point deductions for incorrect answers have been removed in favor of more reading and evidence based questions, plus options for taking the test remotely.

Colleges have taken it a step further. Currently, nearly 1600 colleges and universities have announced that they will continue to make testing optional, and the entire University of California system (including UCLA and UC Berkeley) have said that they will never again consider either the SAT or ACT as part of the application.

What does this mean for current high school students who are planning on college? One of my former colleagues at UC Berkeley noted, "Colleges are really starting to value students who take initiative and make an impact. They want to find students who are:

- Taking the most challenging classes at their high schools, especially the APs (Advanced Placement).
- Engaging in some sort of meaningful work outside of the classroom. That can be clubs, volunteering, internships, sports, or jobs.
- Making a positive impact on a community they are a part of, including but not limited to their town, school, or even their own household."

While standardized testing will likely stick around in some form, it is no longer recommended to spend hundreds of hours or thousands of dollars on test prep. Your time would be much better utilized by working to improve your grades, finding an area outside of school that you're passionate about and becoming more involved in it.

If the college you're applying to still requires the SAT, I would strongly recommend using Khan Academy's test prep program. It was created in collaboration with the organization that oversees the SAT, it is absolutely free, and most importantly after taking their diagnostic exam, it tailors its questions to the specific needs of the student studying.

# What Should HS Juniors Be Doing Now?

Junior year of high school is a crucial time during the college admissions process. Below are several steps juniors can take to help set them up for success.

## Focus on Academics

This is the most important thing a student can do to improve their chances of gaining admission and securing scholarships. Do your homework, stay for extra help, and if given the opportunity, take as many advanced classes as you can while still maintaining a B or better.

## Meet with a Counselor

Working with a counselor will ensure that you don't miss out on any opportunities and are able to find a program that is the best fit for you.

## Explore College Options

Consider factors such as size, location, academic programs and campus culture. Create a list of colleges that align with your preferences and goals.

## Prepare for Standardized Tests

Some colleges still require standardized test scores (SAT or ACT). Begin preparing for these tests by taking practice exams and considering test preparation courses. Plan to take the actual exams in the spring or early fall of your senior year. We suggest using Khan Academy for SAT prep: it's online, free and uses actual SAT materials.

## Participate in Extracurricular Activities

Engage in extracurricular activities that align with your interests and showcase your talents. Quality is more important than quantity, so focus on activities you are passionate about and can commit to consistently.

## Visit College Campuses

If possible, visit college campuses to get a sense of the school's environment and culture. Attend campus tours and information sessions, and speak with current students to get a sense of what life on campus is like.

## Explore Potential Majors and Careers

Begin exploring potential majors and career paths. While it's common for students to be undecided, having a general idea of your interests can help you choose colleges that offer strong programs in those areas.

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# I've Applied to College, Now What?

The early application period for four-year colleges takes place between mid-October and November. This is when many students prepare and submit their college applications. But, with more than six months left of senior year, prospective college students still need to take steps to ensure that they put themselves in the best position possible before choosing a college.

## Take Your Time and Evaluate

Once admitted, students have until May 1 of their senior year to choose which college they want to attend. No college can take away the acceptance prior to that; it's a federal law. So take your time, research and visit the colleges that you were admitted to. Remember, you're going to call this place home for the next four

years, and research has shown that students who are happy with their college choice do exponentially better academically. In terms of impact, being comfortable on campus is just as important as the prestige of the institution.

## Apply to Back-Up Colleges

While the early application deadlines for colleges have just about all passed, the regular deadline for many schools is during the first week of January, so you still have time to get applications in. Start evaluating potential safety and backup colleges now, as you'll only have a couple of weeks between when you hear back from your early deadline colleges and when the regular deadline applications will be due.

## Complete Your FAFSA (and CSS Profile, if Needed)

For the first time in decades, the FAFSA did NOT open on October 1. FAFSA will now open in early December. It will be important to submit it as soon as possible to ensure you get your financial aid award letters well before the May 1 commitment date, and that you maximize your award, because Federal Student Aid assistance is on a first-come, first-served basis. Some colleges — mostly private universities — also require the CSS profile. Similar to FAFSA but more in depth, it is important to determine if your college requires this form. Colleges that use the CSS profile often have significantly more financial aid to offer, so if your college gives you the opportunity to submit it, make sure you do!



# Success Story: Making College Possible

Inspired Pathways helps Illinois students learn career basics and life lessons

*Written by: J.K. Rose*

This past May, 20-year-old Janeth Hermosillo proudly strode across a stage in the gymnasium of Illinois Valley Community College to receive her diploma after completing an associate's degree in medical lab science. Just moments before, the college president handed her smiling 19-year-old brother, Alejandro, his diploma for an associate's degree in art.

The siblings were recipients of the Hormel Inspired Pathways Scholarship, which pays for two years of community college tuition for children of Hormel Foods employees.

It was a joyful achievement for the entire Hermosillo clan: Janeth and Alejandro were the first college graduates in the family. The occasion was marked by a big party featuring heaping servings of smoked brisket, Janeth says.

The siblings grew up in the small town of Mendota, Illinois, where Janeth distinguished herself by being the rare female tuba player in her high school band.

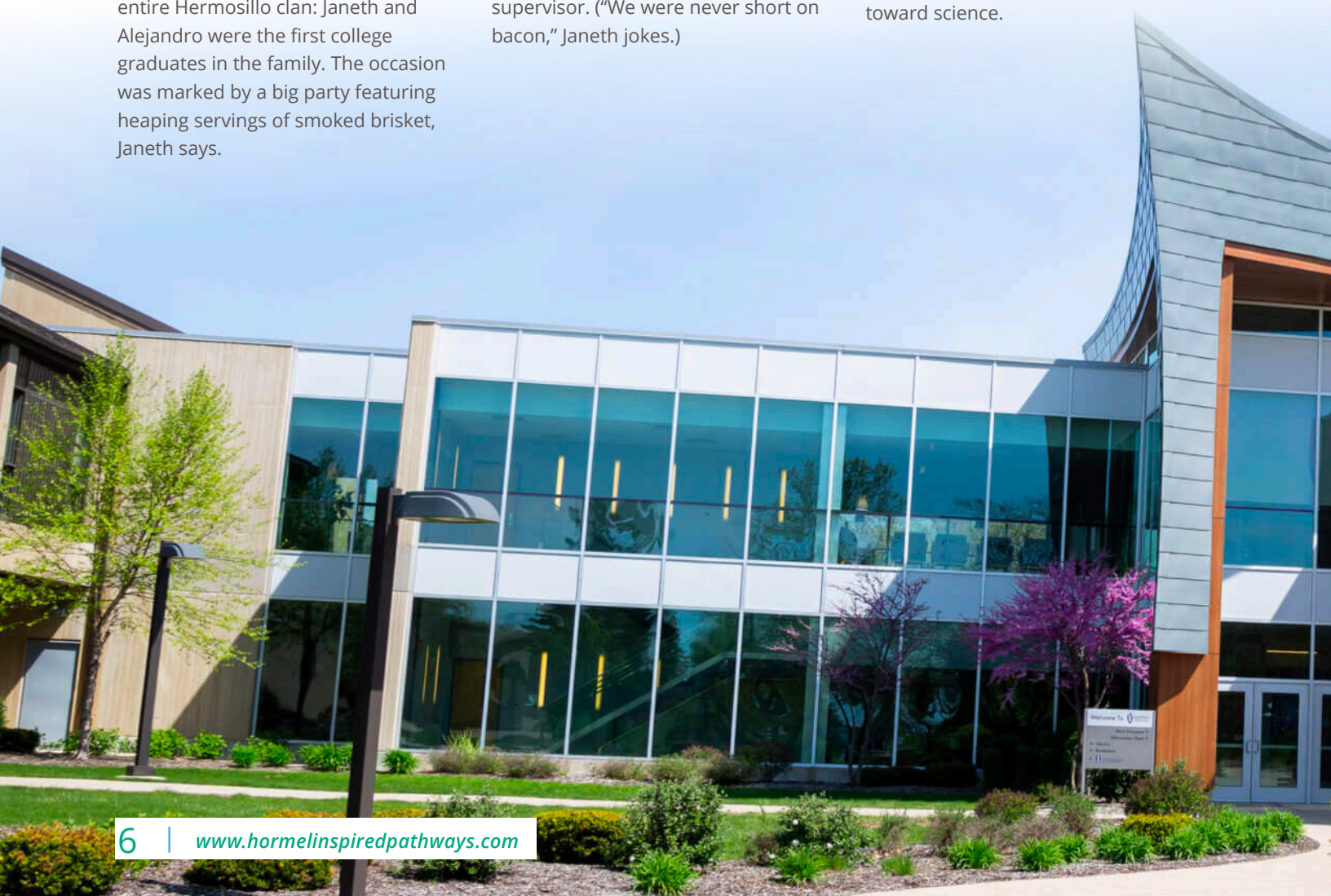
"I was given the opportunity to switch from trumpet to tuba in freshman year, and I took it," she says. She played the unwieldy instrument at football games, parades, and in the town's regionally renowned Sweet Corn Festival, which pulls in thousands of visitors each August.

The siblings' father, Gerudiel, has worked at the Hormel Foods Rochelle Foods plant for 25 years, lately as a supervisor. ("We were never short on bacon," Janeth jokes.)

## Inspired Pathways Helps Pave the Way

When Gerudiel heard about the Inspired Pathways scholarship, Janeth and her brother were eager to take advantage of it. "Mendota's a small town, right off Interstate 39," Janeth says. "There's not much to do, other than go to school and hang out with friends." Alejandro sped up his studies to finish high school early, so he and Janeth could carpool to Illinois Valley Community College together, a 50-minute commute.

From there, their paths diverged: Alejandro studied art while Janeth gravitated toward science.





"I knew I wanted to work in the medical field, but didn't want to be a nurse or doctor," she says. She had an aha moment in a microbiology class, while she analyzed soil samples under a microscope to identify the squiggly, back-lit shapes of bacteria, fungi, protozoa and nematodes on the plates. "I really enjoyed the class and thought, 'Hey, maybe this could be a career.'"

Turns out it is. Medical technicians, she was thrilled to learn, spend their days collecting and analyzing samples of bodily fluids so doctors can make informed decisions about patient treatment plans.

### Transfer to the University of Illinois

This fall, Janeth transferred into University of Illinois in Springfield, where she's studying for a degree in Medical Laboratory Science. The job market looks promising: according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, there is a shortage of medical technicians in many parts of the country, which means an abundance of openings.

“College is helping me get to where I want to be in life. It’s not only teaching me the basics of my career, but it’s also taught me everyday life lessons, like saving money and time management.”

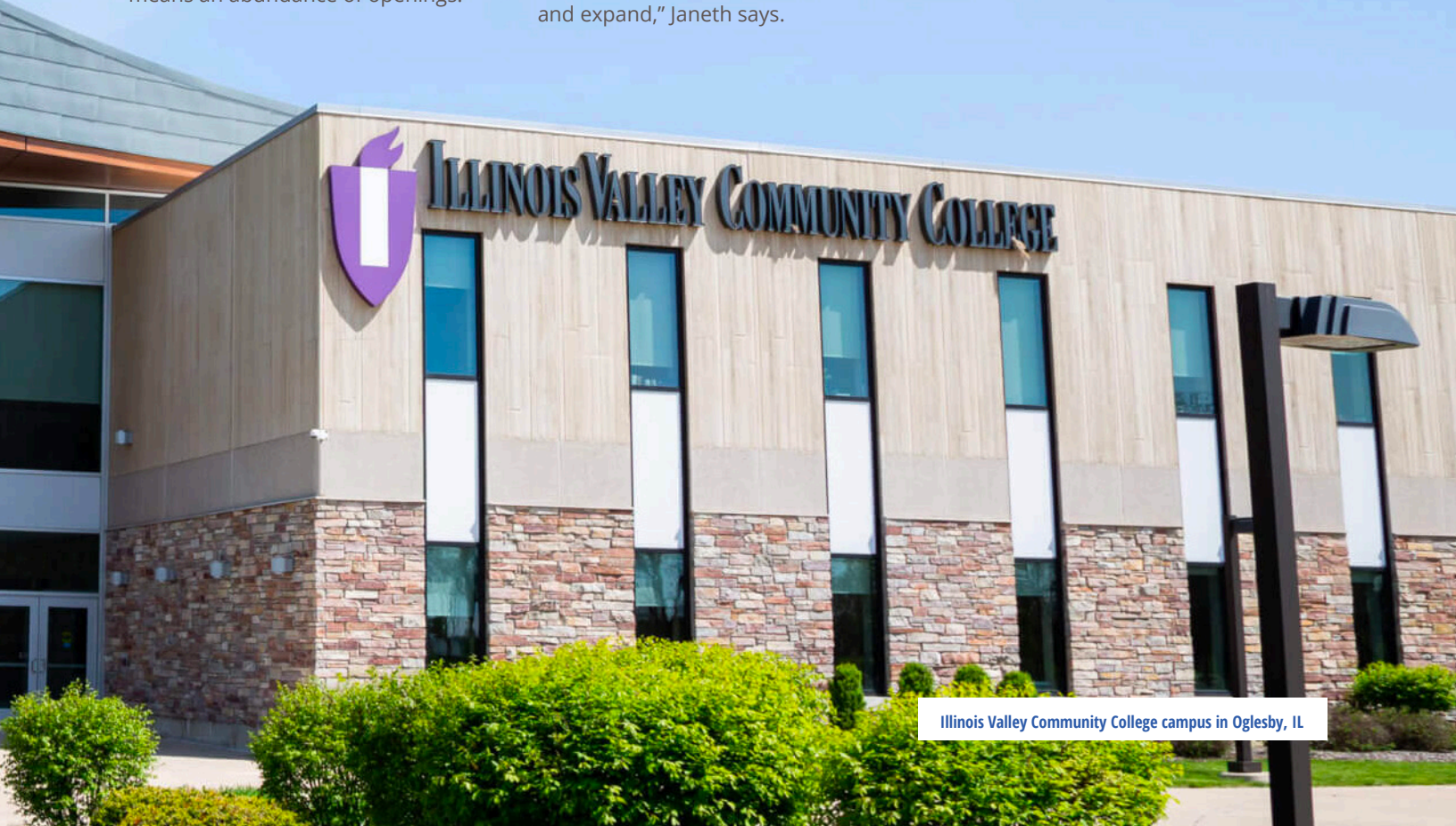
**JANETH HERMOSILLO**  
HORMEL INSPIRED PATHWAYS SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT

But Janeth already has her eyes set on one hospital in particular: Rush University Medical Center, in Chicago — the oldest hospital in the city and one of the top-ranked in the country.

“They probably have a whole lot of opportunities available there to grow and expand,” Janeth says.

Meanwhile, her brother Alejandro has transferred to Southern Illinois University, a college three hours away from his sister, to study business law.

Now both siblings are ready for the next stage of their lives.



Illinois Valley Community College campus in Oglesby, IL

# Untying the Knot of College Applications

Inspired Pathways helps alleviate the national counselor shortage for Hormel Foods families.



When applying to college these days, students and their parents are often overwhelmed. The admissions landscape has become increasingly complex, with multiple deadlines, application options, types of testing, and essays. Even parents who successfully applied and attended college themselves are at a loss when working to help their children, because admissions today are unrecognizable from what they were just a decade ago.

With few options for help, most families turn to their local high school counselors. However, these professionals are also overwhelmed. The average high school counselor is responsible for 430 students, nearly double the maximum recommended by the American School Counselor Association. On top of that, college

admissions is a small fraction of their day-to-day responsibilities.

What has resulted is entire generations of students who have missed out on attending their best-fit schools, left tens- or even hundreds-of-thousands of dollars of financial aid on the table, or have passed up a college education entirely.

Other parents have turned to private college counselors. These experts ensure their child doesn't miss out on the opportunities available to them, but they come with high price tags. Even at the lower end of the spectrum, the cost can be \$200 an hour or \$15,000 for comprehensive application support, with some agencies charging three to four times as much.

Fortunately, the Hormel Foods community can turn to Inspired Pathways advisors. With decades of experience within college admissions offices, the Inspired Pathways team has helped Hormel Foods families navigate the college admissions labyrinth, giving expert guidance on what colleges are looking for both in their students and in the required essays, what sorts of colleges a student should be applying to, and how to maximize the available financial aid. These advisors are an invaluable resource for families to succeed in finding the right college at a price they can afford, while reducing the stress of the process.



# Supporting Community Colleges: Good for Students and the Community

Community colleges play a crucial role in shaping the educational, economic and social landscape of their communities. The impact these schools make extends far beyond simply helping people get better jobs. The schools respond to local labor and service needs, they contribute significantly to the overall well-being and development of the communities they serve, and their graduates often stay in the community after graduation. Below are some of the ways these colleges support their local community.



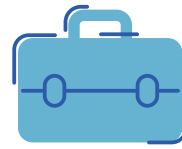
## Access to Education

Perhaps the most obvious contribution: community colleges provide affordable and highly accessible education. This is especially beneficial to residents of rural areas who often face additional barriers to attending traditional four-year institutions, such as impossibly long commutes.



## Healthcare Training

Many community colleges focus heavily on healthcare professions, helping address shortages of healthcare workers, a major issue throughout rural and urban communities alike. Areas with community colleges that develop partnerships with local health organizations often see major improvements in overall community health.



## Job and Revenue Creation

Simply put, community colleges provide many good-paying jobs. This means more opportunities for local residents, and sizable increases in tax revenue for the local community.



## Workforce Development

Community colleges often collaborate with local industries to tailor their programs to the specific needs of that region's workforce. This is the reason that vocational and technical training programs vary by community college, as they reflect the needs of their community, contributing significantly to local economic development.



## Technology and Innovation

Community colleges play a role in introducing technology and innovation to rural areas. In many places throughout the United States, community colleges were the first institutions to bring reliable high-speed internet to their counties and towns.



## Social Center

Community colleges often serve as focal points for social interaction and community building, providing a space for individuals and groups to come together. Many community colleges host local high school graduations, and often make their concerts, events and speakers available to the public.

**In summary**, community colleges serve as an integral part of the communities they serve. They help develop a skilled workforce, promote local economic growth, and provide many services that improve the overall quality of life in their cities and towns.



# INSPIRED PATHWAYS

