

HOLYOKE

'Hamp student earns national scholarship



Holyoke Community College biology major Avery Maltz, of Northampton, has been awarded a national scholarship for LGBTQ students. (PHOTO COURTESY HOLYOKE COMMUNITY COLLEGE)

As an 11-year-old middle school student living in New York, Avery Maltz faced many challenges. On top of an undiagnosed learning disability, Maltz had just come out, only to be subjected to relentless bullying by homophobic classmates.

"We actually had to move," said Maltz. "My family was living on Long Island at the time and we ended up moving up to Northampton because it was a more accepting place to be. But it was very disruptive, and that was one of the factors that made it really difficult for me to succeed in school."

After graduating from Northampton High, Maltz spent more than 10 years working at various jobs before enrolling at Holyoke Community College.

"HCC is such an accepting and inclusive place," said Maltz, who still lives in Northampton. "I was really able to express my gender identity more here, which has been awesome,

because, out in the world working retail and having to get by, even in this day in age I had to present in a very feminine way, and it was difficult to express my true self."

At Holyoke Community, Maltz found more than a welcoming community, along with academic success and a passion for research and scholarship. Maltz, a biology major, is part of the college's STEM Scholars Program, vice president of service for the chapter of the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, president and co-founder of the Neurodiversity Club, a peer tutor, supplemental instructor, and caretaker of the college greenhouse.

Maltz was also one of 28 students nationwide to have their work published in *Nota Bene*, the national literary journal of the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society.

To that long list of activities and achievements, Maltz can now add this: national scholar-

SEE **MALTZ**, PAGE C10

"I feel so passionate about building community and not having anyone get left behind in the same way I was for a whole decade of my life."

AVERY MALTZ

Maltz

CONTINUES FROM PAGE C1

arship award winner.

Late last year, Maltz received the Wells Fargo Scholarship from the Point Foundation, the nation's largest merit scholarship program for LGBTQ students.

The award comes with more benefits than just a \$4,800 monetary scholarship. Students accepted into the year-long program attend workshops and receive ongoing counseling and support. After graduating, Point Scholars become part of the organization's alumni mentor network.

"The Point Foundation considers many factors when assessing scholarship applicants, including academic performance, leadership skills, financial need, personal goals and the applicant's involvement in the LGBTQ community," says the organization's website. "Attention is also given to students who have lost the social support of their families and/or communities as a result of revealing their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression."

Maltz was encouraged to

apply for the scholarship by Irma Medina, coordinator of the college's Pathways Program, which helps non-traditional age students transfer to competitive four-year schools.

"From the start, Avery has been immersed in the HCC community," Medina said. "Along with having a strong academic record, Avery is a natural leader. They are not shy about engaging with staff, faculty and other students to explore ways we can improve the student experience to be more thoughtful and caring, especially for LGBTQ students."

Medina cites the college's Neurodiversity Club as one example. The club is based on the premise that people can be diverse in their brain types. Maltz, who was diagnosed with ADHD at the age of 30, founded the club to help reduce some of the stigma associated with conditions such as depression, OCD, and autism.

"I feel so passionate about building community and not having anyone get left behind in the same way I was for a whole decade of my life," Maltz said. "I wanted to create a student network where we could support each other."