

Chicopee's Ashley Rivest: Taking Account

HOLYOKE – Numbers make Ashley Rivest happy. She loves to count, to calculate, to crunch.

"I have always been a numbers person," she said. "I think that's just how my brain is. With math, there's always a right answer. There are steps to get to a certain place, and once you get there you know you're there. You don't have to second-guess. You know it's right."

Step one: After graduating from Chicopee High School in 2015, Rivest enrolled at Holyoke Community College, unsure whether to use her math skills to pursue engineering or accounting. As usual, she figured it out.

"Being here definitely helped me realize that accounting was the path for me," she said. "In accounting, I love the way everything is supposed to work out. Things are supposed to equal each other. It's supposed to be balanced, and that's what I love. You know when you're doing things right. Everything falls into place."

At HCC, Rivest did a lot of things right, and everything has been falling into place for her. On Saturday, May 27, when HCC celebrates its 70th annual Commencement at the MassMutual Center in Springfield, she will be there. She graduates with high honors, a G.P.A. of 3.86, a transfer scholarship from the HCC Found-

ation, and her associate degree in business administration. Her next step: Transferring to Western New England University to get her bachelor's degree in accounting.

It will come as no surprise that math and accounting were Rivest's favorite college classes. In particular, she credits professor Alison Sawyer for making accounting fun and being a mentor to her inside and outside the classroom.

"She helped me with my resume and pushed me to do more things," she said.

Getting involved, though, was not a big stretch. As a member of the Girl Scouts, Rivest was involved for more than a decade in community service activities, volunteering at area soup kitchens, preparing care packages for U.S. troops overseas, delivering homemade cards to veterans at the Holyoke Soldiers' Home and singing "Happy Birthday" to them.

She played a big part last fall launching Alpha Xi Omega, the new campus chapter of the Phi Theta Kappa national honor society. Naturally, she served as treasurer.

She joined the Emerging Leaders Business Club and entered HCC's Elevator Pitch Contest, where budding entrepreneurs invent theoretical products or services and then deliver a 90-second

marketing spiel. She won for "The Scrub Buddy," a Roomba-like robot that cleans showers, tubs and bathrooms. In April, she advanced to the annual Elevator Pitch Contest sponsored by the Grinspoon Entrepreneurship Initiative, delivering a flawless pitch before some 450 people at the Log Cabin in Holyoke.

She didn't place but knew she'd done well. The highlight for her was the moment an administrator from Western New England University tapped her on the shoulder, and said, "We had you pegged for first."

"That made me feel so good about myself," she said.

Her college experience wasn't without struggles. As a first-generation college student being raised by a single dad, she worked while in school, first at Subway and later as a server at Eat in Springfield. For two years, she was also a caregiver for her grandmother, who fell and broke her hip during Rivest's first semester at HCC, and then developed dementia.

"Taking care of my grandmother and being a student — at 19 that's not something I ever thought I would be doing," she said. "That was challenging, but I'm glad that she was there."

Rivest has already started



TURLEY PUBLICATIONS SUBMITTED PHOTO
Chicopee resident Ashley Rivest will graduate from Holyoke Community College with honors on May 27.

working at Berkshire Industries in Westfield thanks to an accounting internship she secured through HCC's Experiential Education department and the help of another HCC accounting major, Dave Madsen, '00, Berkshire's controller.

"I'm working with Dave, learning how they do things, just seeing how they operate," she said.

The company, located near Barnes Airport, makes complex precision machine parts for the aerospace industry. The equipment is cool, Ashley notes, but it's the account ledgers that really get her excited, especially when the numbers all work out and the books balance.

"That's my favorite thing," she said.