

Finding home in USA and LMC

Russia native earns commencement speaking slot

By **RALPH HEIBUTZKI**
H-P Correspondent

BENTON TOWNSHIP — When Anastasia Kotlyarova began studying at Lake Michigan College, she couldn't wait to experience what the institution had to offer.

However, as a new arrival from Russia, Anastasia first had to come to grips with expressing herself in the unfamiliar language of English when she started classes in August 2013.

"I was not quite sure that I could speak to everyone because I was not understanding every single word they were saying — but then, after a couple weeks at LMC, I started getting it, and started loving it," Anastasia said. "My work place, friends, faculty, they all guided me."

On Sunday, Anastasia will get another reminder of how far she's come when she and Clarissa Wright address their classmates one last time as the featured commencement student speakers.

For her speech, Anastasia is focusing on "how I got here, what LMC did for me, and what I found at LMC," she said.

Anastasia, 20, of St. Joseph, graduates with a 4.0 grade point average and an associate's degree in business administration.

She's made the President's List throughout her tenure, and is also an Anne Mulder scholar.

Anastasia hails from Moscow. She had traveled with her father Alex, a real estate agent, to Turkey — where she helped him as an interpreter.

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KOTLYAROVA



WRIGHT

Five people gain special LMC honors Sunday

By **RALPH HEIBUTZKI**
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BENTON TOWNSHIP — The first executive dean at Lake Michigan College's South Haven campus will gain LMC's highest service award at Sunday's commencement.

Janice Varney will be one of five people gaining LMC honors Sunday.

The college will present its annual Bernard C. Radde Distinguished Service Award to Varney of South Haven during the 2 p.m. ceremony at the Mendel Center.

LMC President Bob Harrison said Varney is getting the award for her contributions in launching the South Haven campus and helping it become an integral part of the community.

"In 2003, the residents of South Haven entrusted LMC with the responsibility to deliver to them high-quality college education," Harrison said. "Janice took on our ambitions for the area and made them her own. She has and deserves the respect of everyone at the college."

The award is named after the late Bernard C. Radde, a 25-year LMC board member, and is presented annually to a person or persons "who have advanced the cause of LMC and higher education," according to the college.

Varney, a native of Minnesota, has been involved in several community organizations and was recently awarded the 2014 South Haven Chamber of Commerce Lifetime Achievement Award.

Before leading the

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Besides English and Russian, she also speaks German and Turkish.

However, America proved to be a different experience when Anastasia followed her older brother, Denis, to Southwest Michigan in the fall of 2012.

"He came an as exchange student (from Moscow State University). He worked here for awhile, met some people and learned about LMC," Anastasia recalled. "He decided to take me here and show me the area."

Anastasia fell in love with the people and her proximity to Lake Michi-

gan as she adjusted to a completely different culture.

For example, "I didn't drive myself anywhere back home, so I had to drive everywhere alone," she said.

However, Anastasia credits the hospitality that she encountered in and out of the classroom as the biggest factor in helping her adjust.

"They just wanted to know how I'm doing, how my morning is going – that's the best thing," she said.

That adjustment gained momentum about a week after classes started when she landed a work study

job as an assistant for LMC's vice president of administrative services,

Anne Erdman, and her assistant, Kathy Tebell.

"I'd never worked in an office before, and it had a lot of people. It was hard to remember all of their names when I was introduced to every person," Anastasia said, laughing. "But it's like a big family. They had a great impact on me because whenever I had some problems, I knew that I could come to someone and talk."

Anastasia said her professors proved equally supportive.

"After every class, I'd come up to the teacher and say, 'Hey, what were you talking about the whole hour?' They would explain, they would give me the chapter. They were just always great," she

said.

Once settled in, Anastasia threw herself into activities like joining the Phi Beta Kappa sorority and the Business Professionals of America.

Anastasia's educational journey won't end on Sunday, though.

She received a merit-based scholarship to Grand Valley State University, where she plans to earn a bachelor's degree in business administration, with an emphasis in health and hospital administration, an LMC news release said.

She then plans on getting a graduate degree at an Ivy League university.

Anastasia said she expects to work in health administration first with

hopes of eventually crossing over into caring for patients herself.

"I'm doing health administration as a first step, but later I want to do a little medical work, as well. I really want to help people; that always was my goal and my life," she said.

Clarissa Wright

Clarissa, also of St. Joseph, is graduating with an associate's degree in nursing. At 17, she underwent surgery at the University of Michigan and was inspired by the nurses that she met there to pursue a health care career.

Clarissa said her goal is to "make a positive impact on people in their most vulnerable moments. Attending LMC is

the best decision I could have made."

Her speech, titled "Lessons Outside the Lecture Halls," will focus on the benefits of her LMC experience.

She credits LMC's nursing program with giving her self-confidence and time management skills, as well as the clinical experience needed to succeed in her field.

Clarissa is a member of Phi Beta Kappa, Student Senate and Sky Diving Club. She plans to continue her education in nursing.

Graduating students enter a commencement speaker competition, from which a panel of staff and faculty members chooses the finalists.

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South Haven campus, Varney served as LMC's dean of student services for more than six years, helping to develop the Richard J. Pappas Student Services Center.



VARNEY

Honorary degree

The late Raymond Ricordati Jr. of Buchanan will gain an honorary Associate of Arts degree for inspiring LMC students and employees after returning to college at the age of 63. His legacy will be celebrated at a special ceremony before commencement.



RICORDATI

Ricordati owned successful businesses, including Chicago Florist Supply, a wholesale family business; and

Heirloom Construction, a builder of luxury homes throughout Michigan and Chicago. But despite his professional accomplishments, Ricordati long regretted not earning a college degree, so in 2014 he enrolled as a full-time student at Lake Michigan College's Bertrand Crossing Campus.

"Ray served as a mentor to the younger students in the course, suggesting helpful study strategies, providing words of encouragement, and telling students that excuses don't work in the business world," said his history instructor, Tim Moore.

Alumni service

The Alumni Service Award will be presented to Donald C. Mitchell of Benton Harbor. The award is given to alumni who have made important contributions personally or professionally to the community or LMC.

Mitchell's family has lived in the St. Joseph-Benton Harbor community since 1870, and they have passed along their commitment to the community from generation to generation. An Air Force veteran, Mitchell

serves on various community service organizations, including as a member and past president of the Lake Michigan College Alumni Association Board of Directors.

When he returned to Michigan, Mitchell was hired as the first black office employee at Bendix/Allied Signal Corp. as an industrial engineer. After his retirement from Bendix, he worked for 15 years as a mortgage originator.

He works part time as a starter at the Harbor Shores Golf Club.

While at Bendix, Mitchell earned his Associate of Science in Business Management from Lake Michigan College. He has been a member of the LMC Alumni Board since 1997.

He lives with his wife, Geraldine. They have two grown children, Stacey Mitchell Johnson and Ryan Mitchell, and three grandchildren.

Alumni achievement

The Alumni Achievement



MITCHELL

Award is presented to an alumnus who attended LMC within the past 15 years and has demonstrated significant achievement and distinguished themselves in career, education or community such that they would be role models to current LMC students.

The award will be presented to Brittnee Ashten Carter of South Haven.

Carter's academic inclinations became apparent early when she chose as a sophomore at South Haven High School to take a course in Japanese at LMC. She took advantage of dual enrollment at LMC, becoming the first South Haven student to earn her associate's degree before graduating from high school.

Today, after three more degrees, publications in academic journals, and two fellowships, Carter is working on her Ph.D. in political science at the University of Kansas.

Carter has earned two

bachelor of arts degrees in Russian language and literature and Spanish culture and language at the University of Notre Dame, and a Master of Arts in International Studies – Russian, East European and Central Asian Studies – from the University of Washington.

Carter lives in Kansas with her partner, Thomas Ringenberg.

Beckwith award

The Clarence Beckwith Distinguished Alumni Award will be presented to Andrew Bauer of Bridgman. Named in honor of LMC's first president, the award is given to alumni who have accomplished significant personal and professional success.

Bauer has served with distinction as a conservation officer for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources for 23 years. Assigned to Berrien County since 1991, his job duties change seasonally, enforcing the state's hunting, fishing, marine safety, off-road vehicle and snowmobile laws throughout Southwestern Michigan. Conservation officers are fully sworn po-

lice officers and can enforce all laws throughout the state.

When he was named the Shikar Safari's International Conservation Officer of the Year in 2001, he was surprised because he was much younger than many former awardees. He says that this award was his proudest moment, being in the company of the other awardees, who are "very hardworking, creative people."

Bauer earned his Associate in Business Administration with honors from Lake Michigan College and a Bachelor of Science in Business Management from Grand Valley State University.

Bauer lives with his wife Jennifer and their two children in Bridgman. Their son, Zach, graduates from LMC this year and hopes to follow his father into law enforcement, and their daughter, Camille, is a freshman at Bridgman High School.



BAUER



CARTER