



## Forward Thinking

Brighter days ahead for GPTC students & staff



Understatement: 2020 has been a challenging year. We have endured. 2021 will be a year characterized by student success and expansion for Georgia Piedmont Technical College. Brighter days are ahead.

Why am I so optimistic about our future? Here is what I see:

The college is currently seeking approval for new programs to include Carpentry, Logistics, Mechatronics, and Precision Machining. You will also notice a heightened focus on healthcare programs. Of particular note, we will expand our presence and program offerings in partnership with the Rockdale Career Academy. Current programs will continue to receive funding for "world-class" equipment upgrades.

Campus beautification efforts will commence as we look to create student-focused spaces that promote "community" among our learners. Our common areas, furnishings and conference centers are long overdue for an uplift.

Over \$1M of upgrades in information technology will be completed to include new servers, classroom computers and network upgrades. A substantial investment is being made in state-of-the-art security cameras with thermal capabilities that will be installed across campuses to help us maintain a safe and healthy learning environment.

These are just a few initiatives that are already in the works for the coming year, and there will be more. 2021...here we come!

- Tavaraz Holston, President

# GOAL winner sets sights on success



**Moving Forward** Mandy Higginbotham, above, Paralegal Studies graduate, plans on continuing her education at Mercer University in law after a year off.

By Justin Clay

For Georgia Piedmont Technical College (GPTC) graduate and 2020 Georgia Occupational Award of Leadership (GOAL) award winner and Student of the Year, Mandy Higginbotham, taking the first step toward a brighter future was not easy – but necessary.

"I had stayed at home for 10 years with kids," Higginbotham, mother to five, said. "I had no experience, no education and decided I would never be in that position again." So, Higginbotham did what any person determined to get out of a difficult situation would do.

She moved forward. "I got an education and I got a career," she explained. "I already had five kids – so, I couldn't go very far.

"I needed something that was close by," she added. And GPTC was her answer.

On a Tuesday that would have been like any other for Higginbotham, she made that change. Casting every self-doubt she had aside, Higginbotham decided to enroll at GPTC. This decision, however, had been a product of much thought and deliberation.

"[The decision to enroll at GPTC] had been a bit of a process – I had considered it for some time," she said. "I had to remind myself that I am brave, capable and that I have to stop making excuses to remain stagnant!"

Higginbotham, however, did not tread into this unknown frontier without a direction. "I did have a specific area of study," Higginbotham said. "I did want to be a paralegal and be in law."

And that was exactly what she did – by enrolling in the Paralegal Studies courses offered at GPTC's Newton Campus location in Covington, Higginbotham turned her life in a new and exciting direction. She would

go on to pursue an associate of applied science degree, equipping herself with the tools and skillset needed to succeed.

"The biggest impact on me were my teachers," Higginbotham said. "[Ms. Murray and Ms. Haymore] were so helpful."

The climb to success for Higginbotham did have its challenges. "There were certainly times where I was frustrated," she said, "where I thought I generally do not have the time or energy to finish this and [my teachers] just encouraged me and pushed me along."

Like many experiences during 2020, her academic career was not unscathed from the reach of the novel Coronavirus/COVID-19. The pandemic forced students like Higginbotham at the time to finish their education remotely.

While Higginbotham says the experience of completing her last semester from home – with all of her kids and husband close at hand, while teleworking – was stressful, there was still something to be gained.

"Don't give up on your dreams," she encouraged, "just because this short period in our times seems overwhelming."

"You have to look into the future," she continued. "Even when I started college, it felt like it was such a big task.

"It was two years of my life not being at home every night and studying all the time and not being able to do things with the kids," Higginbotham added. "But I realized the two years were going to go by whether I was following my dreams or not. So, go for it."

In one of her last duties as this year's GPTC GOAL winner, Higginbotham addressed her fellow graduates on Dec. 11 in the 2020 Virtual Commencement Ceremony. Hear her inspiring keynote speech and watch the full celebration [here](#).

## Truist Bank grant supports GPTC Adult Ed in manufacturing training

By Jana Wiggins

Georgia Piedmont Technical College students looking to improve their English language fluency or earn a high school equivalency credential can gain basic skills and manufacturing job skills in as little as five weeks and at no cost, thanks in part to a new grant from Truist Bank.

Eligible GPTC Adult Education students in DeKalb, Newton and Rockdale counties with little or no manufacturing experience can enhance their in-demand skills and enter the workforce quickly through the grant-supported Manufacturing READY Career Pathways program. Funds will cover books and supplies and help with certification costs.

Students may earn up to four industry-recognized credentials in OSHA-10, Basic Forklift Operator, CPR/First-Aid/AED and GeorgiaBEST-SoftSkills during the intensive, short-term program.

The flexible Manufacturing READY Career Pathways courses begin online, in person and on campus in January 2021. Learn more about the Truist Bank Grant Career Pathways program [here](#).

## GPTC and partners sign mechatronics apprentice agreements



**Earn While You Learn** Three mechatronics program apprentices sign industry training agreements with DeKalb County's ThermoPac.

By Jana Wiggins

Using a demand-driven workforce development approach, Georgia Piedmont Tech worked closely with regional employers, Rockwell Automation and the Newton County Industrial Development Authority to address the shortage of workers in advanced manufacturing jobs through a U.S. Department of Labor registered mechatronics apprenticeship program.

Six industries signed agreements with GPTC and ten student apprentices on Dec. 14 in

Covington, signifying the beginning of a three-year commitment including both technical classroom instruction and on-the-job training. Using an earn-while-you-learn model, the program and training costs are covered entirely by the American Apprenticeship Initiative Grant.

The Georgia Apprenticeship Mechatronics Track program, using the Rockwell Automation curriculum, will teach the fundamentals of mechatronics – a field that incorporates mechanics, electronics and computer science with manufacturing to increase efficiency. Participants will gain experience in core competencies including motor controls, blueprint reading, functions of electrical and electronic systems and automation.

Mechatronics program partnership industries include Thermo Pac in DeKalb County; SRG Global and Verescence in Newton County; and Golden State Foods, Haver and Boecker and MGM Products in Rockdale County.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

• Winter Holidays / Dec. 24 – Jan. 3, 2021  
College campuses are closed.

• Spring Semester 2021 begins / Jan. 11, 2021  
For more information, please visit [gptc.com](http://gptc.com).

• Spring 2021 Welcome Week / Jan. 12-14, 2021  
Free food, fun activities, games & much more!

## From student to alumni to faculty/mentor



Sam Mitchell

Contributed by Cory Thompson

It was the Spring of 1997 when a young man from Pittsview, Alabama, looked at Georgia Piedmont Technical College as his pathway to a rewarding career. He entered the Air Conditioning Technology program and earned a diploma and an associate degree in the field.

Two years after entering the college as a student, he walked through the doors of the Human Resources Office to sign on as an adjunct instructor. Simultaneously, he worked

full time as an air conditioning technician. Then, he acquired his Georgia Contractor's License. Later on, he became an independent contractor as well. Fifteen years later, every student who has come through the HVAC program worked with and looked up to Sam Mitchell. Throughout the course of everyone's life, there are people who shape and direct one's course. Mitchell credits Glynn Kenner, an Air Conditioning instructor, for helping to influence and craft his education and career path. "Mr. Kenner was an instructor

who recognized my potential, and he was instrumental (in my) development," says Mitchell. "He was a key factor in my transition from adjunct to full time instructor in 2005."

As Sam Mitchell helps direct young minds, he reflects on the people he influences himself. "I view today's students as leaders in our air conditioning industry ten years from now. My job is to help them see their full potential and show them the path which can lead them to achieving it."



Jesus Chinchay

## Going Above & Beyond

Jesus has an amazing work ethic. He approaches each task, no matter how big or small, with the same enthusiasm and effort. He continues to go above and beyond to carry-out the mission of the college. During the college's shut-down, Jesus was available to assist his colleagues, vendors and even the U.S. postman with mail and shipments while we were all working from home.

We appreciate his commitment to "The Way Forward."

- Vita Jordan, Director of Accounting

**Favorite part of the job?**  
It allows me to help other people.

**Advice you always give to others?**

I always look for "the Middle Way," to reconcile opposing viewpoints and maintain balance whether in work or personal life.

**Favorite book?**  
*El Camino del Lider (The Path of the Leader)* by David Fischman presents ancestral stories of China, Japan, Africa and India; the stories explain leadership and wisdom.

**Favorite memory?**  
My favorite memory was the day my daughter was born. To have her in my arms was the most emotional and unforgettable moment of my life.

**What would be your life's theme song?**  
"La Vida es un Carnaval" by Celia Cruz. In this song, Celia Cruz tells us that any obstacles we face, no matter how difficult they may seem, are small in comparison to our lives and you'll never be alone because God will be with you.

