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MASS LIVE



Wearing her Air National Guard uniform, Springfield Technical Community College student Daniela Rizzari stands in front of Garvey Hall on the college campus.

SPRINGFIELD

'Technician of the Year'

STCC student honored for work at Barnes Air National Guard Base

Springfield Technical Community College student Daniela Rizzari works at Barnes Air National Guard Base, where she makes sure the men and women at the 104th Fighter Wing are medically ready for any deployment.

As a medic, she conducts vision exams, immunizations, blood draws and other health checks for the pilots, among other duties.

In recognition of her hard work and accomplishments over the past year, Rizzari in January was named Technician of the Year and also won the 2018 Wing-level award for excellence.

"I won the Technician of the Year for my medical group, which put me in the running for the Wing award which I won for my whole base," said

Rizzari, 32, of Springfield, a senior airman at the 104th.

"It made me feel really good. As a medical group, we put a lot of work into what we do. It was a huge honor to have our group be recognized," said Rizzari, a Liberal Arts Transfer student who has been taking mostly science classes at STCC.

According to a 104th Fighter Wing press release, Rizzari was named Technician of the Year for "her dedication to the medical career field, en-

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uring mission readiness and helping to improve processes." She increased the optometry standards compliance rate for pilots and firefighters by 75 percent.

Rizzari credits STCC classes with helping her attain a better understanding of her tasks at work. For example, lessons in a microbiology class helped her when writing guidelines for an infection control and prevention program.

"After taking microbiology, it was like a light switch," she said. "I understood the spores, the bacteria, the sterilization processes. I can use what I learned in school to write instructions for a medical guide."

Rizzari always wanted a four-year college degree, and she has not let her full-time job as an aerospace medical technician get in the way.

In 2012, before she enlisted, she enrolled at STCC with the goal of eventually transferring to a four-year institution. She viewed STCC as an affordable and flexible option. At the time, she was working as a sales rep for a cell phone carrier.

"I knew I could come here

to STCC and get a great education. I could save 50 percent, if not more, during my first two years here. That was a huge factor," Rizzari said. "The courses are a lot less expensive than starting off at a four-year school. The fees are a lot less expensive."

Two years later, she left her sales job and enlisted at Barnes. She continued her coursework at STCC, even while getting assignments to travel out of state. As a medic for the Air National Guard, she has traveled to hospitals at air bases around the country. She has worked in emergency rooms and assisted with the delivery of babies.

Despite a challenging schedule, she has achieved success at STCC.

"All the professors I've had here have been beyond amazing," she said. "They know how to teach their subjects and how to get each student to understand the material. With my schedule, I may have to leave for two weeks, but they have been wonderful and accommodating."

STCC professor Philip Dalesio recalls having Rizzari as a student in his anatomy and physiology class before she enlisted in the military. Dalesio, whose own sons were in the Army and Marines,

said he was proud of her for her decision to serve her country.

"Rizzari was someone who was not a quitter," Dalesio said, noting that she liked being called by her last name. "This is a special kid. I never gave her enough of a challenge. She was always ready to up the game, and anything that came her way she met."

With a full-time job and a young child to raise, Rizzari has been taking classes at STCC at her own pace since 2012.

But graduation day is around the corner. She is on track to earn her associate degree in May and plans to enroll in the health science program at Westfield State University next fall.

STCC President John B. Cook congratulated Rizzari for her accomplishments.

"We're proud to have had Daniela Rizzari as a student and to know that she's applying lessons from our classrooms to her work in the military," Cook said. "She's a great example of how a student can manage a busy life and achieve academic success. At STCC, we welcome students who might be working full time and raising children. We will work with them to help them reach their goals."