

Yanira Aviles becomes STCC student trustee

SPRINGFIELD – Yanira Aviles recalled feeling overwhelmed with emotion when she found out her fellow students elected her to serve as Springfield Technical Community College’s (STCC) newest student trustee.

“I cried,” the Springfield resident said. “My hard work paid off.”

As a voting member of the Board of Trustees, Aviles will have the opportunity to work with President John B. Cook and weigh in on long-range planning and fiscal oversight at STCC. She will meet regularly with 10 other trustees that were appointed by the governor. Her one-year term started in July.

Aviles is not taking the responsibility

lightly. She sees herself as an advocate for students who come from a background like hers. They might be the first in their family to go to college. They might have thought higher education was not for them because they couldn’t afford it or because someone told them they’re not “college material.”

She hopes to show them STCC represents an affordable option that paves the way to a successful career. Aviles is on a mission to inspire students who have faced barriers.

“I’m trying to help them,” she said.



Yanira Aviles

“I came from the bottom. I didn’t come here with somebody patting me on the back. I didn’t come with scholarships. I came with what I had, and I didn’t have anything.”

Originally from Puerto Rico, Aviles received her commercial driver’s license and took a job as a long-haul truck driver. She had been driving 18-wheelers for over a dozen years when she

decided to come to STCC in her mid-30s for Adult Basic Education Services. She took courses to prepare for the HiSET, or high school equivalency test.

As a single mother with five children, she wanted to find a better life.

“Driving a truck wasn’t ideal for me and my kids. It wasn’t something I wanted to do anymore,” Aviles said. “I wanted to be able to maintain my family on my own and have a stable income”

Having passed her HiSET exam in 2016, Aviles enrolled in the liberal arts/general studies degree program at STCC.

One of her professors at STCC, Theresa Shea, described Aviles as “a highly motivated student from day one.”

“Yanira exhibits leadership quali-

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ties. She was always prepared and was kind to her fellow classmates,” Shea said. “She has a powerful voice and she’s learning how to use it.”

Aviles hopes to graduate in the spring and then transfer to a four-year university or college and continue with her education. Her goal is to earn a bachelor’s degree and then a master’s degree. “There is no limit in the things I know I can accomplish,” she said.

Aviles works part-time at STCC in Student Financial Services as an adviser to students seeking financial aid - a job that is a good fit given her background. She had received financial help that allowed her to finish her first semester free of charge.

Some of the programs Aviles turned to for support at STCC include the Center for Access Services (CAS), which provides a range of free support for eligible students, including grocery assistance, emergency housing options, utility assistance, health insurance and more; and TRIO Student Support Services, which helps students in adjusting to the college environment and prepares students for the transition either from college into a career or from STCC into a four-year college or university.

“If it wasn’t for STCC’s programs, I don’t think I’d be here” Aviles said. “I want to help other students so they know about the opportunities here at STCC. I want to make sure they get the education they need and deserve. I’m looking out for their needs and their interests and I hope that I’m able to make a difference.”