

STCC's visiting students pursue passion for design

Architecture grads include West Springfield resident from Pakistan

They came to the United States from distant lands. Obed Otabil and Asra Afzaal traveled from Ghana and Pakistan, respectively.

They didn't know each other, but carried in their hearts a passion for design. After settling in Western Massachusetts, Mr. Otabil, of Amherst, and Ms. Afzaal, of West Springfield, ended up enrolling in the Architecture and Building Technology program at Springfield Technical Community College.

Now friends with a shared experience, Mr. Otabil and Ms. Afzaal on May 31 accepted their degrees at the MassMutual Center in Springfield during STCC's 51st Commencement. In an earlier ceremony, they were honored with the Architecture and Building Technology Faculty Award, which is given to seniors who have demonstrated the greatest academic characteristics, creativity and professional motivation to pursue a successful career in architecture and building technology.

Mr. Otabil and Ms. Afzaal both found employment as architectural designers here in Western Mass. and are continuing their education this fall at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. The graduates say they are proud to have started at STCC.

"It was always my plan to go to a community college first. A community college gives you exposure to your field," Ms. Afzaal said. "The Architecture and Building Technology program was so interesting."

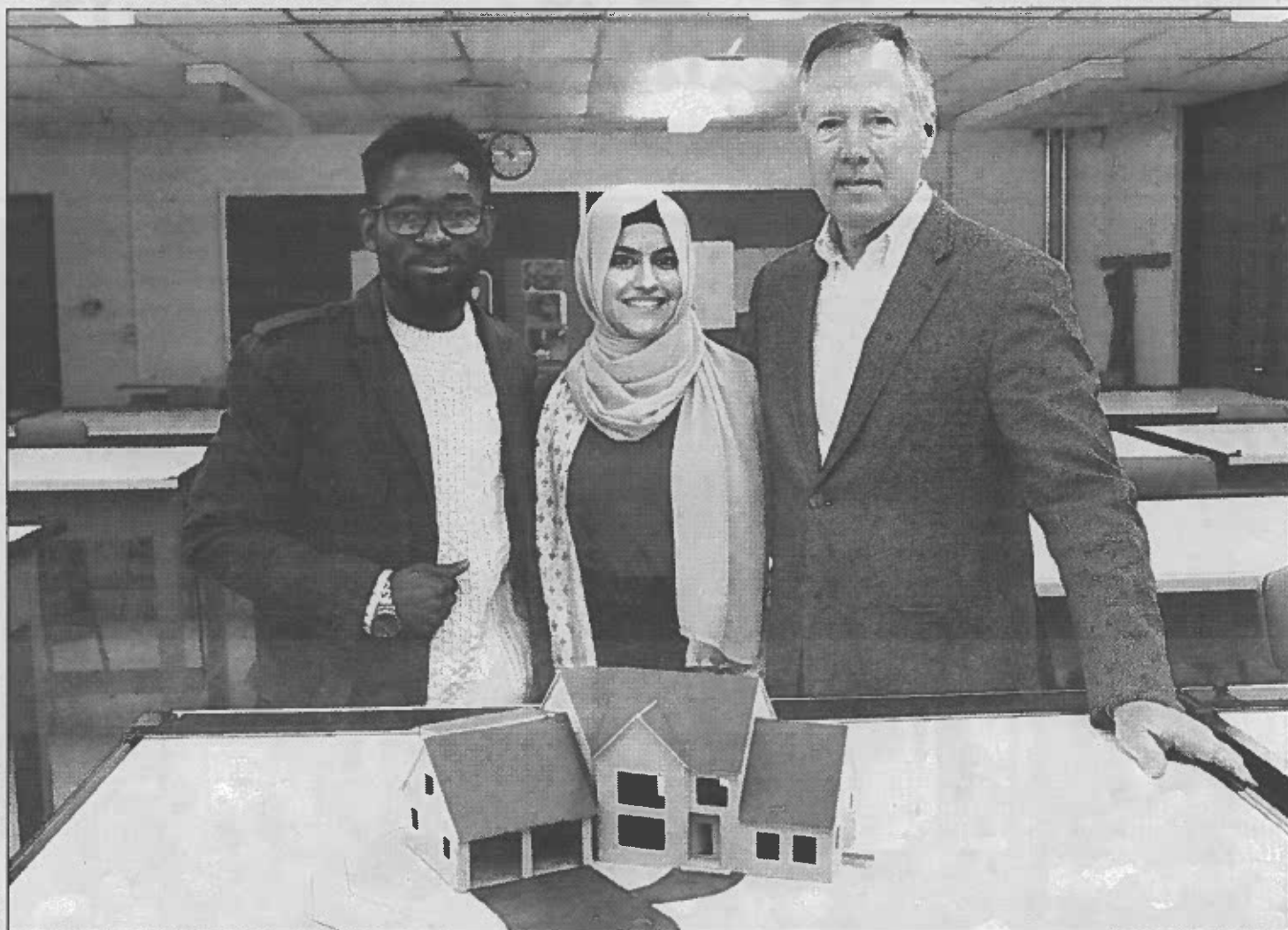
Ms. Afzaal was born in Karachi, the largest city in Pakistan, and moved to West Springfield.

"I came to the United States for educational opportunities," Ms. Afzaal said. "I came here and started high school as a junior. It was then I realized this was an entirely different world. It was not easy to get into the culture, but somehow I managed and soon started enjoying it."

The West Side resident loves to travel and check out different designs of buildings.

"I think buildings are a prominent part of any culture and tradition. I have seen really old architecture and also new architecture. It is amazing to see how the designs have evolved," Ms. Afzaal said.

While in her last semester at STCC,



Obed Otabil, left, Asra Afzaal and Warren Hall, chair of the Architecture and Building Technology program at STCC.

Ms. Afzaal accepted a job in the design department of a company in Springfield. In the fall, she begins studying in the Building Construction Technology program at UMass.

"It's a very smooth transition to go from STCC to a four-year university," she said. "I plan to get a master's degree in architecture and keep living my dream."

Born in Ghana, Mr. Otabil grew up with eight brothers and a sister. In school, a teacher remarked that he had a special talent for drawing. After high school, he studied architectural drawing and trained as an apprentice as an architectural draftsman.

He immigrated to the United States in 2011 and first stayed with a relative in Indian Orchard.

"My first job was working in a group home for two years to pay for my college expenses. STCC was something I heard about from my aunt, from my cousin, from my friends. They were all STCC students. I walked into the Admissions Office at STCC to collect the

information I needed for classes. I was admitted for fall 2014," Mr. Otabil said.

Professor Warren Hall, the Architecture and Building Technology Department chairman, nominated the students for the Faculty Award. He said Ms. Afzaal and Mr. Otabil represent the very best of STCC's student body.

"Asra and Obed are two of our best examples of successful graduates," he said. "We have given them new opportunities, and they have given us so much in return."

"There is just so much to admire about these two students, and we have had so many wonderful moments together both in and out of the classroom,"

Mr. Hall said. "They both came to America with a dream and a passion for design. Somehow, they found our Architecture and Building Technology Program and started taking classes, meeting faculty and other students and got involved. They have worked hard and grown professionally. They have shared their enthusiasm, talent, kindness, thoughtfulness and world view with us and enriched our program."

If you're interested in applying for the Architecture and Building Technology program, visit www.stcc.edu/apply. For more information, call STCC Admissions at (413) 755-3333.