

'It's a big opportunity'

Early College at Montcalm Community College provides Greenville student an early start to physics education

By Alex Freeman

For half of his life, Zafar Abduvokhidov has acclimated to the rural setting of Greenville.

It was quite the adjustment, however, from the first half of his life journey.

Abduvokhidov was born and raised in Uzbekistan, where he lived in the capital city of Tashkent. Although it's a city comprised of almost three million people, the communities are tight-knit and lively with action.

"We formed communities throughout our building complex, and we knew everybody, so whenever you need anything, you could ask your neighbors," Abduvokhidov said. "It's not very much like rural Michigan, it's very city-like, kids are running around everywhere."

Life changed for Abduvokhidov when his stepfather met his mother. Shortly after, the family moved to the United States, landing in Greenville. Abduvokhidov enrolled at Lincoln Heights Elementary where, for the first few months of second grade, it was an absolute headache. Growing up speaking Uzbek, Abduvokhidov had no prior knowledge of the English language.

"I did not understand a singular word, so every single day, I would show up to school and it sounded like people were just making random noises," Abduvokhidov said. "It got to my head, and it gave me a headache because I just didn't understand what was happening."

Despite the rough start, it only took Abduvokhidov two months to learn English and be able to speak it at a comfortable fluency. Although it may seem quick, when thrust into the environment, "You have no choice but to learn it," he said.

From there, Abduvokhidov excelled in school, taking a particular liking to his science classes. Abduvokhidov aspires to study either astrophysics or nuclear physics at Michigan State University — that's what made a visit from Montcalm

Community College Early College Director, Shannon Tripp, especially intriguing.

MCC's Early College program gives high school students the opportunity to enroll in classes at MCC starting in their junior year of high school. Early College students benefit from an innovative on-campus curriculum which allows them to earn their high school diploma while also earning up to 60 college credits, tuition free. Students in the Early College program can earn their associate degree in just one year of post-secondary education.

Given his lofty educational goals, Abduvokhidov saw an opportunity to get started on his lengthy college education and decided that Early College was the right choice for him.

"It's a big opportunity that I couldn't miss, so I had to take it," he said. "People were signing up, there were about 10 kids from Greenville and it was a raffle-type deal. The worse-case scenario was that I would still be in high school, but I got picked and now we're here."

Now in his first semester on campus taking classes at MCC, Abduvokhidov is still cherishing one aspect of his high school career — loudly cheering on his Yellow Jackets from the student section.

"I'm painted every single game and every single theme I go all-out on," he said. "It's awesome." ■

For more information:

Visit montcalm.edu/early-college

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Ryleigh Shoen, left, and Zafar Abduvokhidov are Early College students.

