

Picture Yourself Here: AC Cowan

Thanks to funding from the Michigan Reconnect program and a commitment to education from his employer, Kalamazoo resident Aasiah "AC" Cowan is well on his way to gaining an associate degree in industrial mechanics. The 38-year-old father of three has worked for the Target Distribution Center in Galesburg for the last 10 years and started classes at Kalamazoo Valley in the fall of 2021. He qualifies for free tuition through the Michigan Reconnect program. "It's an amazing program," he said. "One thing that had always been a deterrent to me going to college was that I didn't want to owe a lot of money."

Cowan first came to college in 2008, but didn't complete a degree. "I hadn't been in school for so many years but my family is growing and I needed to start earning more," he said. "For me, Reconnect was a great opportunity to have a fresh start without having to worry about getting into a lot of debt. I knew I needed an education to make the kind of money that my family needs." His fiancé Erin Zirkle-Britt is a travel nurse and he wants his skills and earning potential matched with hers.

Because his employer supports his efforts to learn and expand his capabilities, Cowan's work schedule is arranged around his classes. And while he wasn't enthusiastic about learning prior to graduating from high school in 2003, Cowan is maintaining a 3.6 GPA at Kalamazoo Valley. His welding and electrical classes enhance his abilities at work. "People are breaking things all day at work," he said, explaining that he and his coworkers are "the glue that keeps the building together" by maintaining conveyors, motor control systems, electrical systems and more.

Cowan is on track to graduate in less than a year and plans to transfer on to pursue a bachelor's degree in business. Kalamazoo Valley has given him the spark to keep learning, he said. He's enjoying the hands-on aspect of his classes. "I'm a visual learner," he said. "I tend to learn faster when I can actually put my hands on it," he said.

While he may have had qualms about returning to college as a fulltime employee and busy father and soon-to-be husband, he is certain that he's on the right path. "Don't give up. Stay the course," is his advice to others. "It will be worth it in the end."

