When Riley Guest started to think about going back to school, he knew he wanted to study something exciting and cutting edge. He was introduced to photonics by a couple of friends that had graduated from the Laser and Optics Technology program at Indian Hills Community College (IHCC). After inquiring about the program at Indian Hills, he quickly became fascinated by the growing photonics industry and the broad applications of lasers, and he decided to enroll in the program.

Riley had been out of school for five years. He thought that going back to school would be tough, but to his surprise, it wasn’t as difficult as he expected. According to Riley, the instructors at Indian Hills were “awesome”, and the learning atmosphere was one of the best parts of returning to school. The academics program at Indian Hills felt a lot like going to work, but Riley found that he didn’t dread waking up for his 7:00 a.m. class. Most days, he found himself working in the laser lab doing hands-on activities with other students in his tight-knit class. A major challenge for Riley was facing the math and science he had avoided in high school. But once he started to apply himself to his photonics classes, his interest and confidence grew, and he found himself especially interested in physics and its applications.

Riley completed an associate of applied science degree in laser and optics technology in 2015 and, since then, has been working as a laser technician for Foro Energy. His responsibilities include everything from maintaining and troubleshooting laser systems to working with engineers on new design projects.

“‘It’s definitely not the same thing every day, and I am always learning something new. I like being able to come to work every day and know that I’m not going to be doing boring work. It’s funny, because you’ll say to yourself when you’re in college, ‘When am I going to use this?’ In my job, everything I learned, even stuff as small as vocabulary words, we use.’”

Riley finds photonics inherently fascinating; he says the best thing about working in photonics is “when you realize you are working with light! The whole thing hit me when I realized all the different things that can be done with light.”

Riley’s advice to others considering a career in photonics is to choose a specialty area that is personally interesting. “There is such a wide range of work you can do,” he explains. “You can make a great career path in research or design or medical applications. Make sure it’s something that you really want to do. If a subject interests you and you think it’s something that you want to try, I highly recommend trying it.” Riley appreciates the career opportunities that a technical degree provides.

“‘Technical degrees are in demand. Every place you go to work needs technicians. Something is always going to need to be fixed.’”

Riley’s future is bright and definitely involves photonics. “I plan on applying my Indian Hills degree further to pursue a bachelor’s degree in laser engineering and physics, with an emphasis in optics, because that’s the kind of background we need here at Foro Energy. I want to definitely direct my education towards something physics related.” Riley’s focus and passion for photonics and physics will no doubt take him exactly where he wants to go.

Riley Guest earned an associate of applied science degree in laser and optics technology from Indian Hills Community College in 2015. He currently lives in Littleton, Colorado.