Robert Kraft
Indian Hills Community College

Robert Kraft’s interest in photonics started before he graduated from high school. His father unexpectedly came across the Laser and Optics Technology program at Indian Hills Community College (IHCC) and suggested that Robert take a look at it. Robert ended up researching the program and careers associated with the photonics industry. After seeing all the opportunities and what the photonics industry could offer someone straight out of a two-year program, Robert knew that photonics was a career he would like to pursue.

When Robert first enrolled at IHCC, he didn’t know much about the photonics field or what to expect from the laser program. Robert did know that science and math would be a part of the program, and he also knew that math had never been the easiest subject for him. “Math and science have always been challenging for me,” he says, “but once these subjects were applied to something I thought was interesting, it became easy to me. Math, science, and photonics—it was all intertwined together.” Robert worked hard to complete his degree. “Completing all the lab hours and work, as well as understanding the material and getting them done in a timely manner was a struggle,” he recalls. “But once I got the hang of things, it was no trouble at all.” No matter the challenge, Robert carried on, and as he learned more about photonics, he felt it “broaden his horizon.” The more he learned about photonics, he says, the more he understood where he wanted to go in life and what he wanted to do.

After graduating in 2015, Robert accepted a job at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory as an Engineer Technician 4. He is an operator for the ignition laser system (ILS) at the National Ignition Facility (NIF). He works on subsystems that help control experiments with the world’s most powerful laser.

“I love what I do,” Robert says. “I find lasers and optics incredibly interesting, plus working with the world’s most powerful laser is pretty exciting.”

Robert is certain that the field of photonics will continue to grow over the next few years. He plans to keep working and learning all he can as a laser technician at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, and he also sees himself pursuing a degree in optical engineering down the line.

“The best part about photonics is working in the field. Every day brings challenges, and every day I learn more. It sure has paid off for me.”

Robert Kraft graduated from Indian Hills Community College in 2015 with an associate of applied science degree in laser and optics technology. He enjoys learning new things in his field every day.