Trenton Northup was working for his stepfather when he first heard about the Laser and Optics Technology program at Indian Hills Community College (IHCC) in Ottumwa, Iowa from an old high school classmate. “He was telling me all the perks about his job that he has now and all the good things about Indian Hills,” Trenton recalls. Trenton’s friend had already graduated from Indian Hills and was full of praise for the Laser and Optics Technology program and the opportunities that the field affords. Trenton was won over by the glowing recommendation and decided to enroll.

Trenton says he “had no idea what to expect going in” but found himself very interested in the classes and material. He believes that studying lasers and optics is something that just about anybody can do. “You don’t have to have a background in lasers and stuff like that to fall in love with the field,” he says. Trenton’s family wasn’t familiar with lasers and optics, but they enjoyed hearing about what he did during school. His family supported him “100 percent” as he pursued his degree in a field he had come to love.

“**It was so intriguing, and I never got bored with it. It kept me on my toes. I kept learning new things every day.**”

Trenton speaks very highly of one of his professors, Frank Reed. “I don’t know how to put into words how great a teacher he is,” Trenton says. He found it comforting and heartwarming that someone with Frank’s experience was so passionate about new students who were just beginning to learn about lasers and optics. “He would do anything and everything for us,” Trenton says, and it was clear to him and the rest of the students that Frank was invested in them and wanted them to succeed.

Before they graduate, students in the Laser and Optics Technology program are encouraged to contact companies who have hired Indian Hills Community College graduates in the past. Trenton says that students are given a booklet that lists more than seventy-five companies and their contact information. “I was really surprised,” he says, “just how many there were and how quickly some of them responded.” Once he’d let a few places know that he was going to graduate from IHCC’s Laser and Optics Technology program, they were eager to hire him. Students from this program are so highly valued that companies travel to the Indian Hills campus every March to conduct on-site interviews for students who don’t have the time to travel and interview elsewhere in the country. Trenton had received four job offers by the time he accepted his current position at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California. He also had to turn down second-round interviews with two other companies and a paid-for trip and facility visit to another company.

Trenton graduated in May 2015 and is currently a Laser Research Engineer/Technician Level 4 at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. He works in the control room at the National Ignition Facility (NIF), where he is responsible for laser-beam alignment. Trenton is excited to be working at NIF because he is part of groundbreaking research in the laser field. He says, “I wanted to be where the action is, and that’s what this job is. “Any day, something new could happen, and I learn something new every day.”

Trenton says the primary goal at the NIF is to achieve ignition, which would provide a new source of sustainable energy. He loves what he does, in part because, his work has the potential to change the way people use and think about energy, and he sees himself staying in his job for a while. Since starting at Indian Hills, he says, “I’ve never looked back.” His message to students interested in the Indian Hills program: “I guarantee that you will not regret going into this field. It’s awesome, it’s challenging, and it’s so interesting.”

Trenton Northup graduated from Indian Hills Community College in May 2015 with an associate of applied science degree in laser and optics technology. He currently works at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in Livermore, California.