Tyler Dumbacher first became interested in photonics when he was in high school. As a junior, he chose to take an Introduction to Lasers elective class. He loved the class, and his interest grew every day; he was fascinated by how rewarding and exciting the photonics field could be. He knew that if he wanted the best opportunities to take him where he wanted to go in life, photonics was the best choice for him.

Tyler did some research online and visited the Laser and Optics Technology program at Indian Hills Community College (IHCC) in Ottumwa, Iowa. For the next two years, Indian Hills would be his home away from home. He didn’t find his classes difficult, but it was the first time he had ever lived by himself, and he found it extremely tough to be on his own without any family nearby. He is thankful that he had the support of his friends and instructors to help guide him along the way, and says that their support made his experience worthwhile.

Tyler had a solid foundation in math and science, which helped him when he was faced with difficult course work. “I have always been interested in math and science, for as long as I can remember. There were times when I struggled, but because I invested the time in learning math and science, I didn’t have to work as hard [in college].” Tyler didn’t cut corners; he saw difficult subjects as a challenge and an opportunity to better himself and improve in areas that might need work.

In May 2014, Tyler graduated from Indian Hills Community College with an associate of applied science degree in laser and optics technology. Currently, Tyler is a laser technician for Akima Infrastructures, a contractor company working with the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory at the National Ignition Facility (NIF) in California. NIF is the world’s largest and most energetic laser facility. Tyler works in the injection laser subsystem (ILS), where he operates, maintains, and troubleshoots laser systems. For Tyler, the best part of his work as a laser technician is being on the forefront of cutting-edge technology and having the potential to help making scientific history.

“The photonics field is the best field in the world. I wouldn’t trade anything to change the line of work I’m in. I love the variety and numerous job opportunities in this field—it’s amazing!”

Tyler believes that students who enjoy hands-on work and problem solving and are willing to work hard and put in the necessary time will find a career in photonics very rewarding. “This is a growing field,” he says, “and there are more opportunities than laser technicians to take them all. It’s definitely worth it!”

Tyler Dumbacher went to Rock Bridge High School in Columbia, Missouri, and earned an associate of applied science degree in laser and optics technology from Indian Hills Community College. Tyler says that his greatest achievement has been working at the National Ignition Facility, located at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California.