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Hoopeston man receives Individual Achievement Award from state agency

By Jordan Crook
Chronicle Reporter

A Hoopeston man was one of 26 people in Illinois to receive an Individual Achievement Award from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity's Bureau of Workforce Development Oct. 22 at a banquet in Springfield.

Daniel J. McCalla Jr., was nominated for the award by Jeff Fauver, chairman of the Vermilion County Workforce Investment Board, for his dedication to going back to school following the closure of Rantoul Products.

McCalla said he was surprised that he was one of only 26 Illinois citizens to be chose to receive this award.

"It was a great honor to receive the award," he said.

McCalla thanked his family and friends for supporting him in his goal of returning to school and attaining a career he could enjoy.

"Without them there's no way I could have done this," he said.

McCalla said the Vermilion County Job Training Partnership program helped him fund his return to school following the closure of Rantoul Products in 2007.

He enrolled in classes at Danville Area Community College shortly after seeking aid from JTP.

At DACC, McCalla said he students networking and information technology, subjects that he had been interested in since he was in high school.

McCalla said he always had an interest in taking various pieces of technology apart and seeing how they worked, so he saw networking and information technology as a good career to enter.

He said he was initially concerned about returning to school after so many years in the workforce and was also concerned about traveling more than 30 miles each day to reach DACC from his home in Hoopeston.

McCalla eventually overcame these doubts with help from consultations with JTP personnel and became one of DACC's most academically successful students.

When he graduated earlier this year, McCalla had a perfect grade point average, was the number one student in the class and delivered the valedictory address at his graduation ceremony.

He said he had not attended college before because he needed to work full-time to "get the bills paid," however, through these state programs he was able to afford to attend school and given a chance to succeed.

"These programs gave me the support I needed to earn my education and find a career I truly enjoy," McCalla said.

Prior to graduating, McCalla was hired by



Daniel J. McCalla Jr., recently received an Individual Achievement Award from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity's Bureau of Workforce Development on Oct. 22 in Springfield.

Hoopeston Regional Health Center to work in their Information Technology department.

He said he is responsible for maintaining the hospital's computer equipment.

McCalla said he enjoys his new job much more than he ever enjoyed his old job at the factory.

He said he had worked as a third-shift forklift operator at Rantoul Products for seven years and did not like the work he was doing.

He said he new job at HRHC is the complete opposite of what he experienced at Rantoul Product, describing it as "the greatest job I've ever had," and said finding a job like this was his main reason for going back to school.

McCalla said he did not want to trade one bad job for another and his degree, which he received in May, allowed him to do just that.

"The important part of me going back to school was to do something that I was going to enjoy," he said.

Along with his work at the hospital, McCalla has been a volunteer firefighter with the Hoopeston Fire Department for the past five years. He is also a member of the Rankin Lion's Club and is co-chairman of the Fourth of July Celebration Tractor Pull.