

Black Hawk College Associate in Arts graduate Shannon Boynton found the perfect job to continue her journey as a lifelong learner.

In August 2020, she became the museum curator for the Essley-Noble Museum in Aledo, IL. The Mercer County Historical Society manages the museum, which showcases local history and offers genealogy resources.

"I like learning. I think that's why I like the museum job so much. I'm there every day and I learn so much," Boynton said. "We have so many different artifacts, you learn and see something new every day."

Boynton said Black Hawk College prepared her for a four-year school and that transferring to Concordia University Chicago in River Forest went smoothly. At Concordia, she earned a bachelor's degree in communication with a minor in women's gender studies.

"BHC was a great bridge between high school and finding out what I really wanted to do with my educational career," she said. "I was also able to transfer all of my credits over to Concordia."

After graduating from Concordia in December 2017, she studied gerontology/aging studies at Eastern Illinois University in Charleston, earning a master's degree in July 2020.

## Studying at Black Hawk College

The Aledo High School graduate started her college education at Black Hawk College because it was affordable and close to home.

One thing that stood out to Boynton at Black Hawk was the amount of helpful employees. Boynton's educational advisor, Nan Reddy, always encouraged her as she navigated earning an Associate in Arts.



Nan Reddy and Shannon Boynton

“She rooted for me and helped me every step of the way,” Boynton said.

Katie Johnson, assistant professor of speech, also made a lasting impression. Boynton took several of Johnson’s communication classes and what she learned helped her grow and gain confidence.

“She helped with the fear of speaking with and in front of people and allowing myself to better understand interpersonal and personal communication,” Boynton said. “Ultimately, that’s what I ended up getting my bachelor’s degree in.”

Boynton enjoyed the small classes at Black Hawk College, which she said allowed for one-on-one attention and good communication.

Her favorite BHC moments included going to a basketball game with a friend and seeing all the school pride and attending commencement.

“Graduating was an incredible experience in that everyone was so truly and genuinely happy for each other,” she said. “Advisors, peers and staff were all there for us through the whole experience.”

She encourages students to utilize the resources at Black Hawk and not to be afraid to ask their advisors questions and share concerns. They are there to help.

## Working at the museum

The Essley-Noble Museum curator job appealed to Boynton because she has always loved history. It was a favorite subject in school, and she has a special interest in presidential history.

Boynton's tasks include giving tours, cataloging the artifacts, helping with memberships, writing newsletter articles, managing social media, providing customer service, administering the website, looking after the artifacts and assisting with events.



Her favorite part of her job is speaking with past Roosevelt Military Academy cadets. Roosevelt Military Academy was located in Aledo and closed in 1973. Boynton's grandfather taught and coached there for 17 years.

She also loves giving tours of the museum to visitors and watching their reactions when they see all of the museum's offerings.

"Being able to show them the history of our county and pieces like one of Abraham Lincoln's desks and seeing their eyes light up is a special feeling," she said.

Currently, the museum is closed due to COVID-19 restrictions. Boynton has increased the museum's social media presence to help patrons connect to the museum. She launched sharing an artifact of the week when she started and recently began doing flashback Friday posts.

"I look forward to a time in the near future when people can visit the museum again," she said.

Until then, though, Boynton will continue to keep busy at the museum, researching, learning and sharing all Essley-Noble Museum has to offer virtually.

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