

# ROADS TO SUCCESS

Fitness-focused career programs offer two paths to the same destination

By Macomb Daily

Like the mirrored back walls of the dance studios and fitness centers they call second homes, Justine Vescio and Leah Crandall would see a reflection of themselves in each other if they ever were to meet. And the same goes for the two Macomb programs that are connecting them to their dreams.

Vescio, a 2020 home-schooled high school graduate, has studied ballet, jazz, tap and hip hop, with a performance at the Detroit Opera House in a Ballet Met production of *The Nutcracker* among her credits. She picked up weight training during the pandemic to keep herself in shape and enrolled in a program at Macomb that will allow her to help others live an active life.

"I chose Exercise Science because I will be able to share my love for health and fitness with others when I get into my profession," said Vescio. "I would love to work with clients to improve their physical or mental health. My goals are to start my own practice helping people achieve optimal fitness."

In Macomb's science-based Exercise Science program, Vescio is learning about lifestyle and disease, cardio fitness, strength training, nutrition, stress management, exercise physiology and more. She is pursuing associate degrees in Exercise Science, and Health and Wellness Promotion, the credits from which will transfer to a four-year college or university if she decides to pursue a bachelor's degree.

"I am enjoying what I am learning," said Vescio, "and excited about the future."

Macomb's Exercise Science program offers students opportunities to earn a variety of certifications de-



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Leah Crandall turned her passion for weight training into a new career after completing Macomb's Certified Personal Fitness Trainer program, which shares similarities (and three credits) with its Exercise Science associate degree program.

pending upon their career goals. Vescio has earned certifications in health and life coaching and is close to earning one in personal training. All the while, she continues to work in the field.

"I am an instructor at CycleBar in Rochester Hills," offered Vescio, "and as a dance teacher at both 2nd Street Studio of Dance and the Gotta Dance studios."

Crandall, who earned an associate degree in business from Macomb in 2012,

took up weight training as a hobby during a 22-year career in advertising and marketing that included membership in the million-dollar (sales) club. But an off-the-cuff comment from her employer, in essence that she'd sell more ads if she put as much energy into it as she did into lifting weights, had her reconsidering the meaning of "success."

"That lit my fire," recalled Crandall. "The very next day, I sent in my resignation."

When Crandall received

Macomb's Workforce and Continuing Education (WCE) Schedule of Classes in the mail shortly thereafter, she found a perfect match to her skills and interests: Certified Personal Fitness Trainer. She would learn about biomechanics, exercise physiology, fitness testing, equipment usage and health assessment in as little as nine weeks, allowing her to quickly transform what had been a hobby into a career. And the national exams for the certification credential were included in the fee. Crandall signed up.

"After completing the certification course, I was so happy that I announced it on Facebook," she offered. "That led to a health mentor position with the St. Clair County Mental Health Department." She enjoyed the work that included prescribing healthy eating and workout plans to patients and planting vegetable gardens with them as they learned about the relationship between nutrition and a healthy attitude. In January 2020, however, Crandall took her career in yet another direction when she opened an F45 Training studio in Rochester Hills followed by a second one in Shelby Township a year later. Part of an international franchise, the F stands for functional full-body workouts, while the 45 references the minutes spent, as Crandall puts in, "in heart pumping, sweat dripping fun."

"It's the best workout on the planet," said Crandall, who practices what she preaches five to six days a week. "At 53, I feel great and the strongest that I have ever felt." In the WCE program, Crandall earned certification in first aid and CPR, as well as three credits that can be applied to Macomb's Exercise Science program, in lieu of taking the Exercise Leadership course.

"I don't even consider what I do work," offered Crandall. "It's more of a passion — to help everyone live a healthier lifestyle, especially during these crazy times."