

Jupiter on the rise





By KATHERINE NOLL

AS A SCRAWNY NEW JERSEY TRANSPLANT TO EAST STROUDSBURG, PA., and one of the few black students in his school, Jeff Jupiter was a favorite target for bullies. After one memorable pummeling he remembers his perpetrator looking at him and snorting “you should play football.”

The vicious taunt became more like a challenge.

"Why can't I play football?" Jupiter asked himself. It was a transformational moment.

Before long, the self-described "very skinny" Jupiter was a talented linebacker on his high school football team, tackling opponents with a ferocity that's hard to cultivate.

"I had this built-up aggression from being picked on," said Jupiter, now a communications major at NCC. "I would just mow people over."

In high school, Jupiter went from a linebacker to a running back. Once he found out he was fast enough to run rings around the competition, he joined the track team. When he wanted to

participate in a sport between those two seasons, he became a wrestler.

"All because of a joke," Jupiter said. "I don't like being told I can't do something. I can be hard-headed, but that's what makes me push myself forward."

Today, Jupiter radiates confidence. He's still lean but toned and fit. It's hard to imagine him being picked on by anyone.

But the first thing you'll notice about him is his friendly smile. Years of bullying haven't created barriers between Jupiter and the world. Instead, they instilled a desire to help others. And help he does in many different ways at NCC.

Whether it's as a mentor in NCC's Residence Hall, organizing movie nights, handing out treats to students, serving as vice president of the Student Senate

or chairman of the Community Service Committee, Jupiter is always ready to jump in.

Yet he almost gave up on the idea of higher education.

"My mom said I should go to community college first. But I thought, 'no, I'm smarter than that.' I bought into the community college stigma," Jupiter admits.

Jupiter instead enrolled at East Stroudsburg University after high school as a business marketing major. When he found out at the end of his first year that he would be unable to receive a Pell Grant again, his college dreams began to die.

"Losing \$2,500 a year might not be a crisis for some people, but it made a big difference to me," he said. "I wasn't sure what to do. I didn't want to move back

home. I didn't want to be stagnant. I wanted to move forward."

Jupiter, along with his girlfriend Gabrielle Lopez, temporarily moved in with Lopez's mother. They worked, saved money, and within six months got their own apartment.

Jupiter had a job at Panera Bread, where he was so successful that his employer urged him to take the management track within the company.

"I started thinking maybe school wasn't for me. I thought I should work," said Jupiter. "While I liked working there (at Panera), I wanted to do something I truly loved. I came home one night and said to Gabby: 'I think we should go back to school.' She 100 percent agreed."

The major obstacle was money. Would

they be able to work, pay rent and focus on their education? After extensive research, they discovered that NCC was the only college with dorms that they could afford.

"Coming to NCC made a world of difference to me," Jupiter shared. "It made me view education differently. I was intellectually challenged every step of the way. In my previous experience, I felt like I was taught the same way, over and over. The professors didn't personalize it.

"At NCC, subject to subject, class to class, the professors engage you in different, personal ways. You're not going to get that at a university when there are 100 other kids in class with you."

While Jupiter felt like the professors were personalizing things for him, he was

unknowingly doing the same in return.

"He is one of those students I will always remember," said Timothy Molchany, associate professor of communications. "After meeting everyone in our small group communications class, I specifically asked Jeff and his group to work with the sixth graders at East Hills Middle School in Bethlehem."

In 2014, Molchany started an annual community engagement plan that partners East Hills students with NCC communication studies majors so the middle schoolers can learn about the importance of higher education while getting study tips.

"Jeff embraced the project," Molchany

CONTINUED ON PAGE 73

said. "His group made repeated visits. Mr. Kenney, a sixth grade teacher at East Hills, was so impressed. He said to me, 'If these are the type of students you have at NCC, I'll encourage more kids to attend.'"

What Molchany certainly will never forget is how Jupiter and some of the other students in his class rallied to help Molchany's family during a tough time.

"One day I came to class feeling pretty upset. Jeff asked what was wrong, and I told the class my daughter had just informed me that she was being bullied at school," Molchany shared.

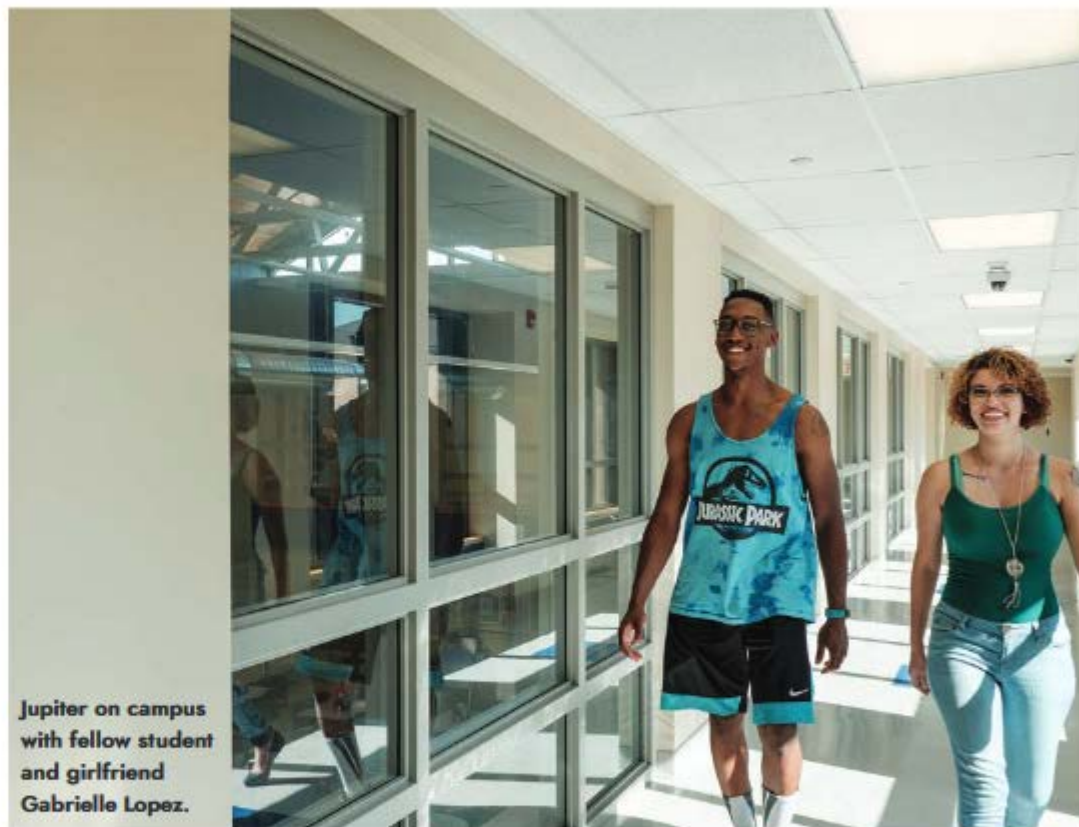
Along with Jupiter, there were other students in the class who had experienced bullying. About a week later, Molchany was handed a beautiful, hand-decorated envelope. Inside were notes to his daughter, with messages such as "It gets better" and "Stay true to yourself."

"They went above and beyond," Molchany said. "They didn't just help a fellow human being, they helped multiple human beings: my daughter, my wife and myself. Jeff is so busy and involved with many things on campus, but when he sees that someone needs help, in spite of being incredibly busy, he helps.

"I love this young man. He's one of those students who inspire you to be a better teacher so you don't let them down."

What does Jupiter think of the community college stigma now?

"It's such a mistake to go straight into a four year program. Skip it, save money and take



Jupiter on campus with fellow student and girlfriend Gabrielle Lopez.

advantage of all this community college offers. Then move up. It made a world of difference in my life," he said.

As for Jupiter, right now his future is on the rise. He is adding one more thing to his full schedule: planning a career.

"I'm really interested in pursuing the technical leadership bachelor's degree that NCC offers through Bloomsburg," he said. "I know whatever I do, I'm going to find a way to help people and advocate for them. I really feel like I can do anything." 📷