

Elisa's Story: A clear vision for career success



Driven and determined are two words often used to describe Elisa Hornedo. After all, she has excelled in academics since a young age, and has served as a strong role model for her three younger sisters.

At 21, when her son Elijah was born, Elisa's determination kicked into overdrive. Having returned from a brief time in Florida, she moved in with her father and found herself at an important crossroads in her life. "I wanted to do something for Elija's life already, and wanted to start a career fast," she said. "I love school and wanted to get my bachelor's degree, but I wanted to provide for him more quickly."

Elisa loves to cook and thought of going into the culinary arts, but eventually lost her appetite in this field. She visited large universities, but says she felt like "just a number," and was uninspired by the lecture style instruction. Then, her father Eddie, an optician for more than 25 years, learned of Benjamin Institute of Technology, the only college in Massachusetts to offer an associate degree program in Opticianry.

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Suddenly, Elisa's vision for career success came into focus— to become an optician like her father and join the fast growing optical industry. In less than two years, she earned her Associate Degree, graduating with honors. Upon graduating, she landed a job as a full-time optician at Parrelli Optical in Beverly. Opticians are in such high-demand that Elisa worked part-time at Pearle Vision, while she was still a full-time student. Between 2012 and 2022, the Bureau of Labor Statistics anticipates 23.4 percent employment growth in the field, which translates into 15,800 new jobs.



Opticians are part optical technicians and part fashionistas. They dispense glasses and contact lenses, repair eyewear, fit patients with eyewear, and select the right type for their eyes and lifestyle. They can work in optical chains, as well as in hospitals and medical practices that offer optometry services as well. In Massachusetts, opticians' starting salary is around \$48,000 year or about \$24 per hour.

"Opticians are in such high-demand. If you study hard and get a degree, you will be able to jump in this career immediately," she said. "I'm helping people. I have patient appointments. I'm fitting glasses and contacts, and earning a good paycheck. I'm so happy I made this decision."

Elisa is joining a growing number of young folks who seek an associate degree as an alternative to a more costly 4-year Bachelor's degree. Increasingly, young people are seeking ways to earn their degree faster, graduate with less college debt, and earn more money upon graduation. In fact, nearly 30% of Americans with associate degrees now make more than those with bachelor's degrees, according to Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce.