

'I Have My Dream Job'

The generosity of one New Jersey Post aided a woman on her journey to a NASA career

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Growing up in the small community of Cape May, New Jersey, Gabrielle Masterson had a fascination with outer space. More focused on the arts and less on math and science, Masterson would paint pictures of space and the planets.

“I found space amazing and terrifying at the same time,” Masterson said.

During her junior and senior years of high school, Masterson began taking advanced placement math and science classes.

She had a goal of going to college to study physics after she graduated high school in 2018. Getting there, she knew, was not going to be easy with the cost of college tuition.

Masterson said her guidance counselor spoke to her about multiple awards and scholarships for which she could apply. One of those was the Citizenship Award sponsored by Cape May’s VFW Post 386.

She wrote an essay describing how one day she hoped to work for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). Masterson’s essay was selected, and she earned a \$500 award to help her get started at the University of Kentucky.

After a year of studying physics, Masterson changed her major to computer engineering with a double minor in physics and computer science. She had graduate school on her radar after graduation in the spring of 2022.

“Just for fun, I decided to apply to NASA,” Masterson said. “I was hired and started in June.”

Masterson is a CRONUS flight controller at NASA’s Johnson Space Center in Houston. There, she coordinates communication between the space station and mission control. One of her areas of focus is monitoring video and audio messages.

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“Getting out of my comfort zone communication-wise has been the most challenging aspect, but also the most rewarding,” Masterson said. “Growing up, I was a very shy person. Public speaking was the most difficult part of high school for me.”

Masterson said she loves the diversity and hustle and bustle of life in Houston, which is worlds away from her hometown seaside community of less than 3,000 people.

She said she has not and will not forget the kindness of those who helped her fulfill her lifelong goals. To that end, Masterson sent a postcard to the Cape May VFW to thank the members for the award they gave her.

“I knew that college was going to be hard on my own, even with my family helping me as much as they could,” Masterson said. “I worked so hard applying for different scholarships. I was so grateful for each scholarship no matter the amount.”

According to VFW Post 386 Life member Andy Barber, the members were excited to see the postcard from Masterson arrive. Along with a photo provided by her parents, the postcard is framed and hangs inside the Post.

“You would have thought we gave her \$1 million,” Barber said. “This postcard is so touching. It is great she reached out after the fact for such a small amount. This girl is such a special person.”

Barber said that the Post has given out up to \$12,000 in scholarships to the three schools in the Cape May area. The Veterans Home Association runs the Post canteen, which, Barber added, assists in providing the funds for scholarships.

The Post, which counts 215 members, relies on the schools’ guidance counselors when it comes to naming recipients.

“We have faith in the guidance counselors,” Barber said. “They are familiar with the students’ volunteer and community service work in addition to their grades.”

Barber added that the Post has sent VFW items to Masterson and let her know she is welcome to come to the Post any time she is back home in New Jersey.

“They had a piece in my journey of me getting to where I am,” Masterson said. “I have my dream job, and I will always be grateful to them.”

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