

Thomas Micke

Age: 28

Hometown: Kimberly, WI

Program: Business Management

An Echo of Success: How One Generation Empowered the Next

Life threw everything it had at FVTC Business Management student Thomas Micke during his spring 2025 semester. While juggling 16 credits and two jobs, he was at the hospital for his father's major surgery when his mother was suddenly admitted to the ER just floors away. In an instant, Micke found himself navigating two family medical emergencies during an incredibly stressful week.

"I was sleep-deprived and overwhelmed," Micke recalls. Amid this profound uncertainty, a different kind of message arrived: an award letter from the FVTC Foundation informing him he had been selected for the Al Zierler Memorial Scholarship. **"Receiving this scholarship brought a sense of relief and reassurance," he says. "It provided financial stability when I needed it most, enabling me to be present for my loved ones and continue my education with some peace of mind."**

This support was more than just financial; it was a connection to a legacy of resilience. The scholarship honors Al Zierler, a first-generation college student who graduated from FVTC in the 1970s. To afford his education, Zierler worked the night shift at a cheese factory, often sleeping in his car on campus for a few hours before class. Those hard times were never forgotten as Zierler worked his way through a career in accounting to eventually become the President and CEO of Capital Credit Union.

Zierler's career came full circle when he was named FVTC's 2011 Alumni of the Year and the 2013 Winter Commencement Speaker. To honor the footing FVTC gave him, The Al Zierler Memorial Scholarship, a fund through the Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region, was established by his family to support the next generation of FVTC business students. **"If a scholarship in his name can ease a student's financial burden, he would be thrilled,"** his wife Judy shares.

"The Al Zierler Memorial Scholarship Fund is just one of the many examples of the partnership the Community Foundation has with FVTC to provide educational opportunities," says Megan Schuessler, vice president of donor services and gift planning at the Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region. "We are proud of our partnership that supports numerous programs and, in many cases, allows a person's legacy to live on through a named scholarship."

Keep Moving Forward

In Micke, Zierler's legacy finds a powerful echo. A military veteran and entrepreneur, Micke lives by a quote from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.: "If you can't fly then run, if you can't run then walk, if you can't walk then crawl, but whatever you do you have to keep moving forward."

The Al Zierler Memorial Scholarship gave Micke the breathing room to do just that — to walk, and sometimes crawl, through one of the most difficult periods of his life without having to abandon his goals. That forward momentum carried him through a difficult spring, and he will graduate next fall. It is a testament to how one generation's hard-won success can empower the next to keep moving forward, no matter the obstacle.