



STORY BY Erik Cassano

SPEARHEADED BY TWO MANDEL SCHOLARS, “THE VOTING EXPERIENCE” DEMONSTRATED THE VOTING PROCESS AT ALL FOUR CAMPUSES

Cuyahoga Community College student Anthony Ahmad never really thought about the importance of voting while growing up. But that changed during his senior year of high school.

“I had a history teacher who really put it into perspective,” said Ahmad, 19, of South Euclid. “I learned there is more than the presidential election every four years. There are state and local elections, and all of them have the potential to impact our lives.”

Ahmad and fellow Tri-C student Kyle Ray want to impact others in the same way. It’s something they conveyed to students and staff at all four Tri-C campuses in September with The Voting Experience.

The two launched the project after being selected as national Democracy Fellows through Tri-C’s Office of Government Relations. Each received a stipend from Campus Vote Project, a national organization that encourages college students to be politically active and vote. The goal was to create a lasting project encouraging voter registration.

The interactive exhibit they designed familiarizes students with the process of registering, researching candidates and issues in a nonpartisan fashion, and casting their ballots.

Ahmad and Ray developed the exhibit with a team of more than 30 Tri-C faculty and staff members including Mary Hovanec,

Katie Montgomery and Jensen Hanna; a coalition that included student life directors at each campus; and representatives from the Cuyahoga County Board of Elections.

The students — who are part of the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Scholars Academy — began planning the project in February. Discussions turned what started as a simple idea into a much bigger concept.

“Originally, we were just going to set up tables to get students registered to vote,” Ahmad said. “But we had some meetings with the student activities departments at a couple of the campuses. That’s how we developed the idea of an interactive exhibit.”

The interactive aspect is critical. The goal of The Voting Experience is to educate and familiarize, but Ahmad and Ray also wanted the exhibit to be fun and engaging — two things young adults often don’t associate with voting.

“It made it more interesting as students walked through the voting process,” said Ray, 18, of Seville. “We had sample ballots where they got to vote on their favorite ice cream flavor or superhero.”

Tri-C received a National Voter Registration Day grant to help offset costs for The Voting Experience. More than 40 students assisted Ahmad and Ray with the project.

