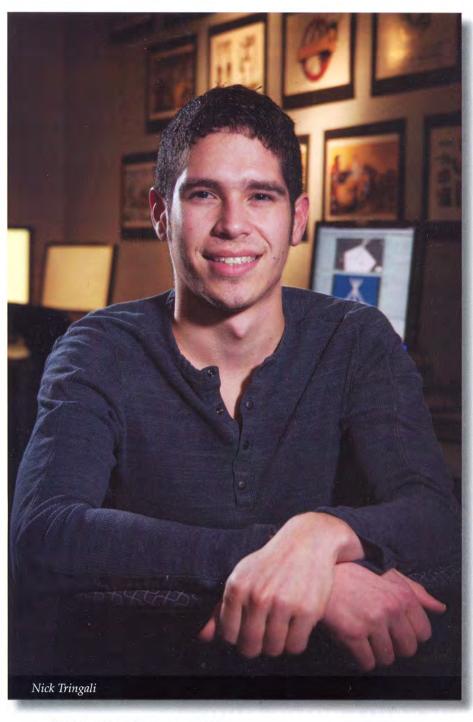# Trains, highways and automobiles

Collin graduates take simulation to a new level

by Heather Darrow

Nick Tringali

Imagine having the ability to enable a person to envision what something will be like in the future. What if you could also resurrect items that are no longer in existence in a 3D format?

Nick Tringali and Michael Butler have the skills to do this and much more. The only question they have is can you tell whether something is real or created by a Collin College communication design graduate?

Tunneling a New Future

Tringali is a 3D visualization specialist at HNTB, a civil engineering company where he creates roads, cars, trees, bridges and tunnels.

"It needs to look good and render fast. In my job we get the exact plans, but we can take creative liberties because we are not actually building it. Getting a 2D plan and creating a good 3D representation is rewarding. It's like creating a piece of art. You start with a blank canvas and can use schematics to create something that more people can understand. We show what something will look like. It is great to do something I really enjoy and get paid for it," Tringali said.

In his spare time, Tringali creates 3D images of objects such as a brass, Italian lamppost and a monocycle, a now extinct motor-

cycle with an engine inside its only wheel. A fan of video games and technology, Tringali didn't realize he wanted to be an artist until college. He earned an associate degree from Collin College in December 2012.

"The Collin program put it all together. We created 600 hand-drawn animations in one class. The industry changed from hand drawings to digital drawings, and it was interesting to experience that progression. I like the fact that Collin has small classes. The professors will teach the topics, and then you have time to ask questions and get feedback," he added.

As a Collin student and president of the Collin Student Animators Workshop, Tringali had the opportunity to attend SIGGRAPH (Special Interest Group on GRAPHics and Interactive Techniques), an annual computer graphics (CG) conference. He was surprised to discover that CG industry professionals create everything from marching band to airport architectural simulations.

"I don't know of another college in the area that sends students to SIGGRAPH. That kind of support is rewarding. You see things you've never seen anywhere else, and you meet thousands of people that all do what you do. It is inspirational. When I came back I felt like I needed to draw things constantly," he said.

When Tringali first started taking classes at Collin he thought the only jobs in this industry were in games and film. It wasn't long before he discovered a varied array of job opportunities awaited him in fields ranging from civil engineering to train simulation.
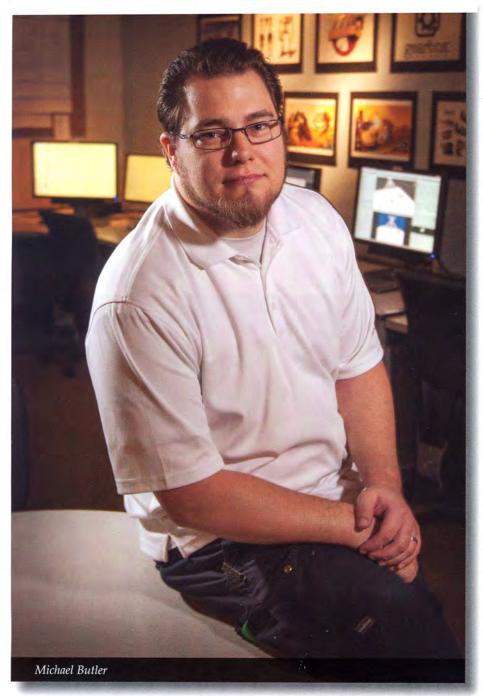
"There are so many different job opportunities in this industry," he said.

Right Place, Right Time

Michael Butler is a graphic designer at Train Dynamic System Division of New York Air Brake. He helps create simulations for engineers who drive trains.

Butler found a job right out of college. He earned an associate degree from Collin College in May of 2013. Two of his most recent classes were in Zbrush software and game art with assistant professor Shawn Spetch, whose portfolio includes numerous XBOX, PlayStation and Wii games, including Call of Duty Ghosts, Ghostbusters: The Video Game and KinectTM Star Wars™.

"I finished my degree in May, and started my job on July 15. I didn't even have my resumé ready. I met Philip Atha, who was working where I work now, at a networking event. He asked what I do, and I whipped out my tablet and showed him my work from the college including what I learned in assistant professor Spetch's class. They wanted an environmental artist, which was perfect for me. The hiring was so fast—that meeting was my only interview," Butler said.

Michael Butler

from Professor Marshall Pittman. They know just about everything in the industry, have great contacts and they help you build up your networking skills," he said.

While Tringali takes creative license in his work, Butler ensures his measurements are precise.

"When the engineer is driving the train he has to know exactly where to park, and the signals have to work. The simulation has to be functional like the real-world environment. We have a cool train simulation room, and it is amazing to have the opportunity to train engineers. Instead of taking up track, they are behind the simulation that we created. We are helping the train companies create more revenue and keeping people safe simultaneously."

Butler never imagined he would have the opportunity to drive trains at work, nor did he dream that the CG field extends far beyond the scope of any railroad tracks on the planet. He and Tringali aspire to live in a world in which the unreal seems real.

"If you are considering the CG field, don't look at games and entertainment as the only choices. There are plenty of companies that are hiring. You can work on commercials or on projects for the medical field or even for the Army and train soldiers. There are so many different avenues for CG artists. There are more and more devices, like tablets, and applications that use simulations. I was surprised to learn that car commercials are usually CG full models and environments. After I saw a recent commercial, I was amazed. It looked so real," Butler said, proffering the highest compliment he could offer a colleague in his field.

For more information about communication design, visit www.collin.edu/academics/programs/CommDesign_agdt.html.   ❖

Butler says to really excel in this field you have to be diligent, a characteristic he developed at Collin.

"Collin offers great professors. I took modeling classes from Professor Tom Ottinger and learned rigging