

Friday, March 8, 2019

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Careers Take Center Stage at Manufacturing Show *Students and public get a look at industrial technology*

Eau Claire, WI – It was a big moment to Evan Anderson of Menomonie. The high school senior sat at a table on a raised platform in a room full of people and signed a commitment to his future. Applause followed.

No, he wasn't signing for a big athletic scholarship, but to something the local economy needs: a commitment to a career in manufacturing. For Anderson, it will start with the Industrial Mechanic program at Chippewa Valley Technical College. He signed his commitment in a ceremony leading into CVTC's annual Manufacturing Show Thursday, March 7.

"It felt big because I knew it was going to be the next two years of my life and a step toward my career," Anderson said.

Getting more people interested in careers in manufacturing is one of the purposes of CVTC's annual Manufacturing Show, held at the Manufacturing Education Center in Eau Claire. The show drew high school students, parents and community members alike for a firsthand look at modern manufacturing through CVTC's Automation Engineering Technology, Industrial Mechanical Technician, Machine Tooling Technics, Manufacturing Engineering Technologist, Mechanical Design, and Welding programs.

Over 50 local manufacturing companies were also represented with display tables highlighting their products and job opportunities, with many on active recruiting missions during a student career fair just prior to the show's opening.

The decision seemed natural to Anderson. "CVTC is local, and I want to stay here," he said. "And I like to fix things. A lot of people I look up to are industrial mechanics."

Tyler Peterson of Boyceville signed his commitment to the Welding program. "My dad got me into welding," he said. "He gave me a piece of flat stock and told me to lay a bead. It's enjoyable. I get to work by myself and with my hands."

Kendra Weber, CVTC recruitment and business development manager, said the signing ceremony was modeled on one held by a national organization honoring students choosing technical education.

“We wanted to bring it to a more local level and we felt aligning it with the Manufacturing Show and the career fair would be a good fit,” Weber said. “It’s a way to recognize our incoming students for their commitment.”

The 25 students from 18 schools who signed their commitments then had an opportunity to tour an area manufacturing facility, then return to the Manufacturing Education Center for the start of the Manufacturing Show.

“This is an opportunity to show off the technology of modern manufacturing,” said CVTC Dean of Engineering and Skilled Trades Jeff Sullivan. “The Manufacturing Show brings together alumni and people in the area, and shows off student projects. Our manufacturing partners come in and show the things they’re doing.”

Robotics clubs from several area school districts competed in the VEX Robot Challenge in which robots they constructed were designed to complete a series of tasks. Both middle and high school students took part in an event that was both fun and educational.

The Greenwood High School team won both the individual skill and team competitions, with Owen-Withee finishing second in individual skill and third in team, and Menomonie High School taking second in team and third in individual skill.

“The students are getting a lot of practice at creative problem-solving and teamwork skills,” said Michele Huppert, science teacher at Menomonie High School and the team’s mentor. “They are finding their talents and learning how to maximize the talents on the team.”

Some visitors were amazed at the level of manufacturing technology on display. Jan and Sharon Gunderson came from River Falls, and Jan proudly showed a card identifying him as a 1960 graduate of what was then called the Eau Claire Technical Institute in the Machine Shop program. He said when they arrived they headed right to the lab in what is today the Machine Tooling Technics program, where he got a look at the modern computer numerical controlled (CNC) machines.

“This was just awesome. We enjoyed this so much,” Jan said as they prepared to leave after touring all the programs.

With over 95 programs and both online and on-campus classes, Chippewa Valley Technical College delivers superior, progressive technical education which improves the lives of students, meets the workforce needs of the region, and strengthens the community. CVTC programs are designed with input of business and industry to prepare graduates for today’s jobs, with 93 percent employed within six months of graduation and associate degree graduates earning an average annual salary of \$44,000.

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CVTC Automation Engineering Technology student Jordan Brocks of River Falls watches as Carl Rabeneck, center, and Quin Rabeneck try their hands at an air cannon game during the CVTC Manufacturing show March 7.

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Members of the Menomonie High School Robotics Club conduct a practice run before their turn at the VEX Robot Challenge competition at CVTC's Manufacturing Show March 7. From left are Kib Lee, Bobby Nelson, Brian Bachand and Kyle Harmer.

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Evan Anderson of Menomonie, left, signs his commitment to CVTC's Industrial Mechanic program and a career in advanced manufacturing while Allison Stewart of Mondovi signs her commitment to the Welding program in a ceremony leading into the CVTC Manufacturing Show March 7.

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