

Monday, May 20, 2019

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Contact: Mark Gunderman, Communications Specialist  
Chippewa Valley Technical College  
Desk: 715-831-7288  
Cell: 715-210-4714  
[mgunderman1@cvtc.edu](mailto:mgunderman1@cvtc.edu)

## **From Blacktop to Black Robe: Grad Turns Life Around** *After completing program at CVTC River Falls Campus, Bob Juhnke went on*

**Eau Claire, WI** – Just three years ago, Bob Juhnke of River Falls would not have seemed like a good bet to graduate from college with honors and start a new career in a high-tech field. But the odds started to improve the minute he walked into Chippewa Valley Technical College’s River Falls campus to start a boot camp program to earn his GED.

On Friday, May 17, he walked off the stage at the CVTC spring commencement in Eau Claire with an associate degree in Automation Engineering Technology, graduating with honors. On Monday he started a job as a maintenance technician at Phillips Medisize in New Richmond.

Juhnke was one of 691 graduates in 63 associate degree and technical diploma programs honored at the Eau Claire ceremony. On Thursday, May 16, 47 graduates in 10 programs were honored at the commencement for River Falls campus graduates. A year ago, Juhnke was among the River Falls campus graduates. But he didn’t stop there.

“I dropped out of school in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade,” said Juhnke, 36. “I started laying asphalt when I was 15, going on 16. I laid asphalt and drove truck for 17 years.”

The physical demands of the work and a hereditary condition put a stop to those lines of work for Juhnke. “I had emergency back surgery two and a half years ago. My doctor told me an occupation change was a good idea.”

That led Juhnke to CVTC’s door, where he completed the challenging of the GED Boot Camp, gaining his high school equivalency credentials in six weeks. He sometimes goes back to talk to people entering the program to encourage them to succeed as he did.

“I really didn’t know what I wanted to do after that, but I heard about the Electromechanical Maintenance Technician program at River Falls. It’s a big thing in industry right now with all the automation.” Juhnke said.

“When Bob arrived in class, he was very nervous because this was a huge challenge for him to take on,” said instructor Jon Brutlag. “His way of dealing with the challenge was to immediately enlist the support of his classmates. Bob showed tremendous leadership in the classroom. He would tell everyone that they should all get together to work on homework. Soon the class was meeting

regularly outside of class and everyone who was meeting together was doing well. They all did better because they were helping each other.”

The one-year program at the River Falls campus consisted of the first year of classes of the two-year Automation Engineering Technology program offered at the Eau Claire campus. Juhnke planned to get a job with the one-year credential, but faculty and classmates encouraged him to go on to finish the program at Eau Claire.

“I didn’t want to drive to Eau Claire for classes and wanted to get started making money, but I learned how much more money I could make if I finished the second year,” Juhnke said.

With the encouragement of his girlfriend and their children, he decided to go on.

“Five years ago I was laying asphalt. Three years ago I was driving truck,” Juhnke said. “Now I look through a PLC program and know what’s going on. It’s amazing. I graduated last year with a yellow (honors) tassel and I’ll graduate this year with a yellow tassel. I pulled honors all four semesters.”

Now Bob Juhnke is a pretty good bet to succeed in his new career.

“My kids are 12 and 15. They saw what I’m doing and I hope they see they can do anything they want too,” Juhnke said.

With over 95 programs offered both online and on-campus, 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.

**Cutlines:**

**Family photo:**

Posing with CVTC graduate Bob Juhnke of River Falls after the Spring Commencement are, from left, Bob’s son Haidn Juhnke, partner Jackie Schwartz, son RJ Senich, Bob, and father Ron Juhnke.

**Degree photo:**

CVTC graduate Bob Juhnke of River Falls accepts congratulations from CVTC board president Ramona Mathews as he crosses the stage at the Spring Commencement in Eau Claire May 17. Last year, Juhnke was among the graduates at the River Falls campus, but he continued with CVTC completing an associate degree in Automation Engineering Technology.

###