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CVTC Gas Utility Program Starts, with Help from Utilities

Eau Claire, WI – Utility companies that urged Chippewa Valley Technical College to start a Gas Utility Construction & Service program are showing strong support for the program now that it's begun. Eighteen students in the one-year technical diploma program started classes in June and an essential part of their learning is made possible by equipment donations by Xcel Energy and Alliant Energy.

"The program is a true partnership with all of our utility industries," said Adam Wehling, dean of energy, agriculture and transportation at CVTC. "Our partnerships with Xcel and Alliant have added to the \$200,000 grant we received from the state to start the program."

Wehling said half of the grant money funded marketing efforts, and instructor RC Jensen's early start last January, providing time for him to set up the program and write the curriculum. The other half of the grant helped buy supplies and equipment.

However, \$100,000 doesn't go far when it comes to buying the kind of equipment needed. The utilities stepped in and made a difference.

"Utility companies have a useful life for their equipment, and some of the pieces they were phasing out they decided to donate to CVTC," Wehling said.

Donated pieces include a backhoe, a utility truck and a van, Wehling said. "It's equipment that you would be using when you are out trenching with a crew. We had to put some money into it for maintenance, but it saved us a lot more."

Also, natural gas pipes and fittings have a "use by" expiration date, Wehling explained. Such supplies that the utilities could no longer use they donated to the CVTC program.

"It's good for our purposes because we are going to pressurize it with air, not natural gas," Wehling said. "We're able to get useful life out of the product."

"We wouldn't be able to do what we do without that equipment," Jensen said. "We couldn't afford to buy the equipment it would take to do this."

Utilities are supporting the program in other ways as well. "We are getting educational support as well," Jensen said. Xcel is providing some people to come in to help in the areas that I am not as

strong. I want to bring in subject matter experts to go over those parts. They are being very helpful in that sense.”

The first class of students will finish in March and graduate at the May 2020 CVTC commencement ceremony. But companies are not waiting that long to start the recruitment process.

“We already have close to 100 job offers for the graduates,” Wehling said. “We have one job offer from Georgia, but our goal is to supply workers for the greater western Wisconsin area.”

CVTC is already taking applications for the next Gas Utility program class beginning in June 2020. For more information go to <https://www.cvtc.edu/academics/programs/gas-utility-construction-service>.

With over 97 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 95 percent employed within six months of graduation and associate degree graduates earning an average annual salary of \$46,816.

Cutline: CVTC Gas Utility Construction & Service program students Tyler Bee of Elmwood, center, and Den Henning of Eau Claire test a pressurized line for leaks while instructor RC Jensen, left, looks on, at the CVTC West Campus this summer. For training purposes, the line was pressurized with air, not natural gas. Donations of equipment like the fittings shown from utilities Alliant Energy and Xcel Energy have helped the program get off to a strong start.

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