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NSF Grants Boost CVTC Manufacturing Education Efforts

Three awards total nearly \$1.7 million

Eau Claire, WI – Three National Science Foundation grants totaling almost \$1.7 million will enhance Chippewa Valley Technical College’s efforts to remain on the cutting edge of recent developments in manufacturing technology and enable the College to share information with area high school partners and other technical colleges.

“Manufacturing technology changes rapidly today and it’s critical that CVTC keep up with the latest developments,” said Jeff Sullivan, dean of engineering and skilled trades at CVTC. “By working in partnership with our area manufacturing industries and our partners in the K-12 school systems, we can help industry adopt the latest technology and provide them with workers trained to use it. We are thankful to the National Science Foundation for supporting us in these efforts.”

Two of the grants were announced on Thursday, Aug. 8.

The largest of the grants, for \$599,737, will focus on the use of cyber-physical systems (CPS) in manufacturing. The award will allow CVTC to increase enrollment in its Automation Engineering Technology, Industrial Mechanical Technician, and Information Technology-Network Specialist programs, and help local high school students to earn college credits for developing skills related to CPS technology.

CPS technologies are transforming the way people interact with engineered systems, just as the Internet has transformed the way people interact with information, according to Sullivan. The project focuses on the rapidly changing needs for education related to CPS, including mechatronics, industrial controls, industrial robotics, and industrial Internet of Things, Sullivan said.

The grant will enable CVTC to provide industry certifications and work-based learning experiences to students enrolled in manufacturing programs and to area high school students through CVTC’s existing Mobile Manufacturing Lab program. The grant will also provide professional development and instructional support to assist college and high school instructors in teaching CPS concepts and skills.

Sullivan noted that instructional materials created will be available online to educators statewide.

The second grant of \$524,270 announced Thursday focuses on robotics training in education and advanced manufacturing sectors. The grant will allow CVTC to develop a Robotics Operator

Certification training program to address area employers' growing needs in automation and industrial maintenance. CVTC and area high school students will benefit from the certification program, according to Tim Tewalt, CVTC Industrial Mechanics instructor.

Tewalt said funds will develop curriculum for the program, purchase equipment and provide professional development for instructors, including at local high schools. The grant program also includes robotics training for incumbent workers to take place at CVTC campuses in Eau Claire, Menomonie and River Falls.

A third grant for \$567,350 will focus on additive manufacturing, or 3-D printing, which uses multiple layers of materials to create 3D objects. The award was announced in April with grant activities already underway.

With the additive manufacturing grant, CVTC will work with industry partners and secondary schools to develop new courses related to 3D printing. A fabrication laboratory, or Fab Lab, will be created to provide students with hands-on learning opportunities. The program is designed to prepare students for high-demand technician careers in manufacturing industries.

The Fab Lab, which will be equipped with various types of 3D printers, will also be available as a space for local entrepreneurs to explore the use of modern technology. It is expected that the project will contribute to increasing the number of skilled technicians for the regional workforce.

Wisconsin Third District Congressman Ron Kind congratulated CVTC on receipt of the grants.

"Making sure we have the workforce to fill open jobs in Wisconsin is vital to boosting our rural economy and boosting local businesses. But right now, too many local employers are struggling to fill positions in manufacturing and automation engineering with the skilled workers they need," Kind said. "This grant will help Chippewa Valley Technical College provide students with the training and tools they need to be successful in filling these open jobs and keeping these local businesses local, which is exactly what our economy needs."

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 Industrial Mechanic Instructor Tim Tewalt shows students the operation of a model robotic production line in the program lab. Three National Science Foundation grants will boost CVTC's efforts in manufacturing education and provide benefits to area high schools as well.

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