CVTC

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STUDENT SUCCESS STARTS HERE



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CVTC MAGAZINE

A PUBLICATION FOR ALUMNI & COMMUNITY FRIENDS

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STUDENT SUCCESS STARTS WITH ACCESS



SUNEM BEATON-GARCIA, CVTC PRESIDENT, SHAKES HANDS WITH A CRIMINAL JUSTICE – LAW ENFORCEMENT ACADEMY GRADUATE, CELEBRATING THEIR SUCCESS & NEXT STEP IN THEIR CAREER.

Every student who comes to Chippewa Valley Technical College brings a different story, a different starting point and a different vision for the future. What they share is the desire to build something better through education.

Success looks like many things: finding a place where you finally feel at home, gaining the skills to pursue a career you have dreamed about, changing direction when life takes you somewhere unexpected or discovering that your own experiences can become a source of strength in serving others.

WHEN STUDENTS HAVE ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY, SUPPORT AND A COMMUNITY THAT BELIEVES IN THEM, THEY HAVE THE CHANCE TO SUCCEED.

That is why, at CVTC, we believe access and success are inseparable.

Access is more than making an education available. It means creating an environment where students can see themselves here, find the support they need and have a clear path toward their goals. It means recognizing that our students arrive with different experiences, responsibilities, challenges and aspirations, and making sure those differences do not stand in the way of their success.

You will see that in this issue's stories.

For Eli Guthrie, CVTC became a place where he found community and a sense of belonging. His experience as a student, ambassador and soon-to-be graduate reflects the importance of having a place where students can discover not only what they want to do, but who they want to become.

You will also meet five women pursuing Mechatronics at different stages in their lives and careers. Their paths are unique, but each is using education to create new possibilities. Their stories remind us that there is no right time or right reason to pursue an education. What matters is having the opportunity to take that next step.

And then there is Matt Stevenson, whose journey into nursing has given him a deeply personal understanding of the people he serves. Today, working in inpatient psychiatry at Mayo Clinic, Matt draws on experiences from his own life to connect with patients who may be facing some of their darkest moments. His story is a powerful reminder that education does more than prepare students for a job. It can help them discover how their experiences, challenges and strengths can make a difference in the lives of others.

These stories represent just a few of the many ways our students define success.

At CVTC, we are committed to educating all. Because when students have access to opportunity, support and a community that believes in them, they have the chance to succeed.

When our students succeed, our communities are stronger. That is what student success looks like at CVTC.

Dr. Sunem Beaton-Garcia
President, Chippewa Valley Technical College

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ON THE **COVER**



ELIZABETH AUMAN

Maintenance Mechanic Apprenticeship

After years of working in manufacturing, security, and other fields, Elizabeth Auman found her calling in maintenance. Now, she's building on her experience through CVTC's Maintenance Mechanic apprenticeship and gaining new skills in a field where there's always something new to learn.

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THE BUSINESS OF BELIEVING IN HIMSELF

When Eli Guthrie first attended college, he wasn't ready for what came next. After graduating from Coon Rapids High School in Minnesota, he enrolled at UW-River Falls but left after the first semester.

He admits he wasn't as focused as he should have been.

After returning home for six months, Guthrie moved back to River Falls and began working at Valley Bar and Grill in Prescott. He started as a cook, then worked his way up to kitchen manager and eventually general manager. The experience gave him confidence and a new perspective on his future.

"I like the industry, but this is kind of where I was reaching a cap of what I was going to be able to do," he says. "I realized I needed to go back to school."

Guthrie landed at Chippewa Valley Technical College. The accessibility was appealing to him. It was affordable, less than a mile from his home in River Falls and flexible enough to fit around his full-time work schedule.

Now a Business Management student at CVTC's River Falls Campus, Guthrie is preparing to graduate with his associate degree in December before transferring back to UW-River Falls to pursue a bachelor's degree.

Along the way, he has become a student ambassador for CVTC and the Wisconsin Technical College System, an opportunity he never expected when he first enrolled.

"I kind of was just there to get in and get out," Guthrie said. "That was my mindset when it first started. Clearly, that's changed a lot."



"YOU DON'T JUST FEEL LIKE ANOTHER STUDENT. YOU'RE PART OF THE COMMUNITY HERE."

Guthrie says the support he has received at CVTC has been just as important as the flexibility. When he has struggled to keep up, instructors have noticed and reached out.

"You don't just feel like another student," he says. "You're part of the community here."

That sense of connection has helped Guthrie become more open to opportunities he never anticipated, including his recent appointment by Gov. Tony Evers as a student representative on the WTCS Board.

He still doesn't have every detail of his future mapped out. But he's comfortable with that.

"I've realized that plans kind of go out the window when you keep them too strict," he says. "You've got to be open to new opportunities."

For Guthrie, success is no longer about having every answer. It's about having the opportunity to keep moving and knowing he has the support to take the next step.

AN EARLY START

DUAL CREDIT GRAD BUILDS ON CVTC BEGINNINGS



When Sydney Herr graduated from CVTC with an associate degree in Business Management before even graduating from high school in 2024, she wasn't quite sure where the experience would take her.

Two years later, the 19-year-old Prescott native is a sophomore at UW-Madison, preparing for a future that could take her into engineering, the U.S. Navy and potentially the field of nuclear energy.

Herr began taking college courses at 14 as one of two students from her high school selected for CVTC's Business Management High School Academy. She earned her associate degree a semester before graduating from Prescott High School.

Today, Herr is majoring in chemistry at UW-Madison, with a goal to apply to the College of Engineering at the end of the semester.

"I feel like a lot of skills that I learned at CVTC, like how to communicate, how to effectively time manage, were all beneficial as I worked through the program." Herr said.

Those skills have proven particularly valuable at a large university. The communication skills she developed at CVTC, including writing professional emails and communicating with instructors, have helped her navigate relationships with professors and teaching assistants.

"It was a great experience. I learned so much from it," she said of taking 80 college credits from CVTC and UW-River Falls combined.

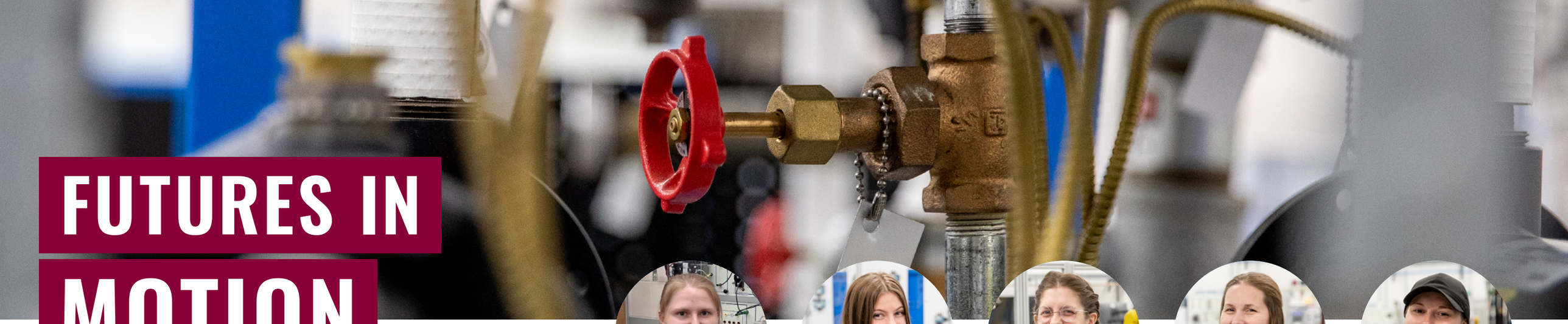
Herr also is a member of the Navy ROTC at UW-Madison, an experience she describes as demanding but rewarding. After graduation, she plans to serve in the Navy and hopes to become an engineering duty officer, a role that could involve helping build submarines and ships.

Longer term, she remains interested in nuclear energy and sustainability, with a goal of helping develop cleaner products and technologies.

For Herr, the future looks different than when she first entered CVTC. But the lessons she gained from getting an early start continue to follow her.

Her sentiment in 2024 rings true today.

"I just always want to be better," she said. "I take what I've learned and all the failures that I have and just use those as momentum to keep going and just be better."



FUTURES IN MOTION


MARLAYNA DIEL


LILLY ARMSTRONG BAGLIEN


SARAH SEVEN


ELIZABETH AUMAN


CHEYANN COTE

AS MANUFACTURING EVOLVES, MORE WOMEN ARE FINDING THEIR FIT IN THE FIELD

For Marlayna Diel, becoming a Mechatronics student at CVTC was not part of the original plan.

At 18, she was studying neuroscience and psychology at a university with the goal of becoming a psychiatrist. But after working full-time at a cookie factory, she discovered something unexpected.

She was really good at understanding how things worked.

“I had a knack for it,” Diel said. “I notice patterns quickly.”

That realization eventually led Diel, now 25, back to school at Chippewa Valley Technical College, where she is pursuing an associate degree as a Mechatronics Specialist.

Her path was not straightforward. She left college, worked in manufacturing, bought her first home and navigated significant health challenges before deciding that a career working with machines made more sense for her than pursuing medicine.

Today, she works full-time as a production technician at Ohly Americas, a supplier of specialty yeast extracts, while taking a full course load at CVTC. Her employer is building a second factory in Eau Claire, where Diel is expected to move into maintenance and potentially automation engineering as she continues her education.

“They will always need me. I will fix the robots,” she said with a smile.

Diel is one of seven women currently studying in CVTC’s mechatronics-related programs across its Eau Claire and Menomonie campuses. According to Mechatronics Specialist Instructor Vince Fiorani, that number is unique.

“In the past, we’d be excited if we could find two (women) in the program at the same time,” Fiorani said. “Right now, there are seven.”

For Fiorani, the growing number of women in the program reflects changes in modern manufacturing.

“We don’t deliver the curriculum any differently,” he said. “What it tells me is that the workforce and the working conditions and a bunch of those things have changed, are changing, and will continue to change.”

Manufacturing is no longer the “dark, dirty, dangerous, boring” work it was sometimes perceived to be, he said. Mechatronics combines mechanical systems, electronics, hydraulics, pneumatics, electrical troubleshooting, programmable controls and automation, creating opportunities for people with different interests and strengths.

“More and more, I find that women are discovering that there’s a role for them too, and that they can do this,” he said.

The seven women in the program did not all arrive there the same way.

Lilly Armstrong Baglien, 20, of Osseo, first learned of CVTC through a high school academy in electrical maintenance. She discovered that technical work was easier and more interesting than she expected, and she decided to continue in the Mechatronics program.

“I think the most important thing I’ve learned is to not be so scared to ask for help,” she said.

Sarah Seven, 27, of Elk Mound, took a different route. After working in warehouses and other jobs, she wanted a career that would provide financial independence and freedom. Now she works as an industrial mechanic at the Menards Distribution Center while completing Mechanical Maintenance coursework.

> MANUFACTURING IS NO LONGER THE "DARK, DIRTY, DANGEROUS, BORING" WORK IT WAS SOMETIMES PERCEIVED TO BE.

Elizabeth Auman, 45, of Stanley, also found her way to maintenance after years of working in manufacturing, security and other fields. At Cascade, she discovered that the variety of maintenance work suited her.

“I could be in this job for 40 years and I’d still learn something new every day,” Auman said. “You’re not doing the same thing every single day.”

Cheyann Cote, 29, of Eau Claire, worked in several manufacturing environments before becoming an industrial mechanic at the Menards Distribution Center. She chose CVTC’s Mechatronics Specialist associate degree to strengthen her troubleshooting skills and expand her capabilities.

“It really helps me feel like I am capable of just about anything that work needs me to do,” Cote said.

That sense of possibility is part of what Fiorani sees changing in the field.

The technical skills students develop can be applied throughout manufacturing, automation, logistics and other equipment-heavy industries. Students can build their education in layers, adding skills and credentials as their careers develop.

For Diel, that possibility changed how she sees her own future.

She once imagined herself spending years in medical school. Now she works with machines, solves problems and is preparing for a future in automation.

“I’ve been very impressed,” Diel said of her experience at CVTC. “It’s very welcoming. Everybody is always willing help.”

For Fiorani, the growing presence of women in mechatronics is ultimately about more than numbers.

“It opens up the possibility,” he said. “Students can see it’s very doable and possible and beneficial.”

And for students like Diel, the possibility is no longer theoretical. She is already building a career in a field she once had not considered, while making it easier for the next person to see herself there, too.

MAKING THE CUT

ALUMNA FINDS HER NICHE IN BARBERY

As high school graduation neared for Brecken Anderson in 2022, she was laissez-faire about her future.

“I didn’t want to choose at 18 what I was going to do for the rest of my life,” Anderson said.

While many of her classmates were finalizing college plans, Anderson was unsure whether she wanted to continue school at all.

FOR ANDERSON, CVTC OFFERED AN AFFORDABLE AND PRACTICAL PATH INTO A CAREER THAT FITS HER.

That’s when her mother, who worked in student services at Eau Claire North High School, stepped in. She saw her daughter struggling to decide on a path, so she made a bold move. She signed her daughter up for CVTC’s Cosmetology program.

At first, Anderson was not thrilled. She had never been especially interested in hair and did not picture herself in the beauty industry.

“I never got into nails. I couldn't braid. I don't like touching people,” Anderson said with a laugh. “So, when she signed me up for it, I really didn't think I would like it at all. But I went through with it and ended up really liking it.”

Anderson joined the program in January 2024 and gave the program a real chance.

That decision changed everything.

Anderson graduated from CVTC’s Cosmetology program in December 2024 and discovered a passion for barbering along the way. While she enjoyed the hands-on learning and supportive instructors at CVTC, it took her time to figure out exactly where she fit in the field.

By the end of the program, she determined that men’s hair was her niche.

She had already been cutting hair in her garage outside of class, building experience and confidence. Soon after, she connected with a local barber who gave her an opportunity right away. Despite warnings from others not to focus on men’s hair or rent a chair so early in her career, Anderson trusted her instincts.

That confidence eventually led her to open Brecx Barbershop on Barstow Street in Eau Claire at the age of 21.

When a retail space became available, Anderson saw an opportunity and took it. Her mom once again encouraged her to go for it. Her dad helped make the dream real.

Anderson’s dad spent weekends helping transform the space by handling plumbing, lights and other building projects so Anderson’s dream could become a reality. Anderson also leaned into her creativity, furnishing the shop with thrifted, antique and Facebook Marketplace finds that gave it a distinctive style.

With a moody man cave meets automobile theme, the aesthetic is fun, comfortable and interesting – right down to the Rolling Stone magazine pages turned flooring in the wash area.

For Anderson, CVTC offered an affordable and practical path into a career that fits her.

Now, the Eau Claire native has built more than a business. She has built a future on her own terms with a little push from her mom, a lot of help from her dad, and the skills she found at CVTC.



BRECKEN ANDERSON

OWNER | BRECX BARBERSHOP

BRECKEN ANDERSON WASN’T SURE WHERE HER LIFE WOULD TAKE HER UNTIL HER MOM REGISTERED HER FOR THE COSMETOLOGY PROGRAM AT CVTC. NOW, ANDERSON IS THRIVING AFTER OPENING BRECX BARBERSHOP, SPECIALIZING IN SHORT CUTS AND STYLES.





FINDING PURPOSE

THROUGH EXPERIENCE

MATT STEVENSON, A CVTC NURSING GRADUATE & REGISTERED NURSE AT MAYO CLINIC HEALTH SYSTEM, DRAWS ON HIS OWN EXPERIENCES WITH MENTAL HEALTH TO CONNECT WITH PATIENTS.

When a patient on the psychiatry unit is struggling, Matt Stevenson has something to offer that cannot be found in a medication cart or a chart. He offers up his own story.

“I can think of a couple times in particular, like when a patient had been struggling, and I’ve kind of stepped up, told them my story, and then that’s really helped them be able to feel like somebody can relate to what they’re going through, at least on some level,” Stevenson said.

> AT CVTC, YOU’RE MORE THAN JUST A STUDENT OR A NUMBER.
>
> I’M GLAD THAT I TOOK THE CHANCE AND WENT BACK TO SCHOOL.

Stevenson knows what it feels like to struggle with mental health. As a teenager, he experienced depression and suicidal thoughts and eventually attempted to take his own life. Years later, after finding his footing and discovering a passion for helping others, he enrolled at CVTC to pursue nursing.

Now, as a CVTC graduate and registered nurse at Mayo Clinic Health System in Eau Claire, he draws on his personal experience to connect with patients facing some of the same challenges he once faced.

That’s the kind of connection Stevenson hoped he would be able to make when he made the leap to study nursing at Chippewa Valley Technical College.

On the inpatient psychiatry and psychology unit, he has found a career that allows him to combine his newly learned nursing skills with his ability to understand what it feels like to struggle with mental health.

“The tasks that aren’t really talked about are just building that rapport with patients,” he said.

For Stevenson, becoming a nurse was not simply about earning another credential. It was part of a much longer journey toward finding his place and discovering how his own experiences could help others.

After graduating from CVTC’s Residential Construction program following high school, Stevenson attended a university before returning to CVTC for nursing. He said the difference in how he was treated as a student at CVTC was significant.

“At CVTC, you’re more than just a student or a number. I’m glad that I took the chance and went back to school,” he said. “It’s just a very natural feeling for me, and that was what I was hoping for when I went back to school.”

His path has also given him opportunities to share his story and continue to help others.

“There definitely was that plan for me,” he said. “Just took a little bit to figure that out and to know that I am doing what I was meant to do is a really great feeling.”

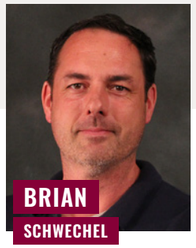
RECOGNIZING EMPLOYEE EXCELLENCE

CVTC recognized 11 employees for their outstanding contributions to students, colleagues and the college during its annual employee awards ceremony. With support from the CVTC Foundation, these awards celebrate excellence in teaching, student support, leadership and the many ways employees contribute to a positive college culture.



NIC ASHMAN

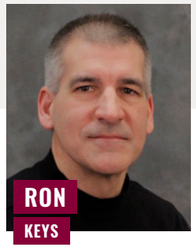
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BRIAN SCHWECHEL

CUSTODIAL EVENT MANAGER

CULTURE OF EXCELLENCE AWARD



RON KEYS

GENERAL EDUCATION INSTRUCTOR



MEGAN SIEMEK

SURGICAL TECHNOLOGY INSTRUCTOR

JOHN FRANK OUTSTANDING EDUCATOR AWARD



HEATHER DOUGHERTY

STUDENT SUCCESS SPECIALIST



LARISSA SMITH

INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGIST



MITCHELL JACOBSON

LIFE SCIENCE ADJUNCT INSTRUCTOR



MARIANA WOPAT

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING INSTRUCTOR

STUDENT SUCCESS ADVOCATE AWARD



TERRA WEST

MEDICAL LAB TECHNICIAN ADJUNCT INSTRUCTOR

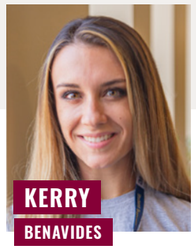
ADJUNCT EXCELLENCE AWARD



KATIE NELSON

NURSING INSTRUCTOR

DOMER NEW FACULTY TEACHING AWARD



KERRY BENAVIDES

IT SYSTEMS ANALYST

HANNAH + RYAN CONNOR EMERGING LEADER AWARD

WE ARE PROUD TO CELEBRATE THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF OUR EMPLOYEES & THE IMPACT THEY HAVE ON OUR COLLEGE COMMUNITY.

SUNEM BEATON-GARCIA
CVTC PRESIDENT

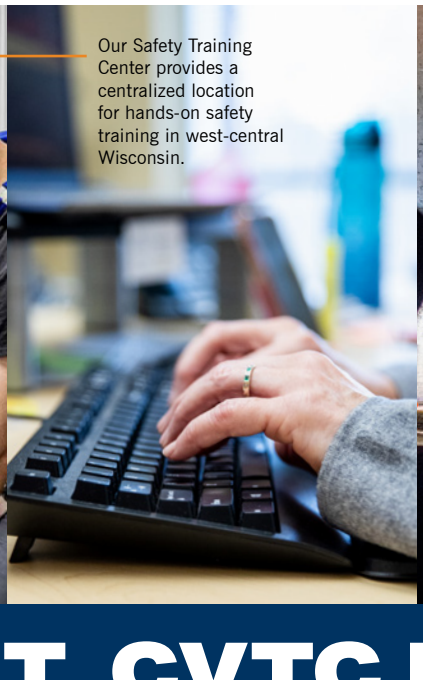
ACCOLADES + AWARDS

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WAIT, CVTC DOES THAT?

You bet! From OSHA and safety training to technical skills and leadership development, **CVTC helps individuals develop their skills and businesses train their teams.** Learn more about training opportunities in manufacturing, business, leadership, safety, first responder, healthcare, and transportation: **cvtc.edu/WorkforceSolutions.**

SPRING 2027 EVENTS

LEARN GROW LEAD

Wednesday, April 21, 2027

For administrative and business professionals

cvtc.edu/LearnGrowLead

CAREGIVER CONFERENCE

Tuesday, May 4, 2027

For caregivers and healthcare professionals

cvtc.edu/Caregiver

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