

Turn, learn, earn: high-tech C-W course is college-level

BY CARL COOLEY

Now that technology upgrades have been completed in the shop, Chetek-Weyerhaeuser High School students are honing their skills on machine lathes—earning college credits and bridging the gap between a highly skilled workforce and the employers who desperately need them.

“About a year and a half ago we started doing this upgrade on the shop. We asked business what skills were missing,” said Bob Morehead, C-W technical education teacher. “They said welding and machining.”

In June 2013, the C-W School Board approved a \$260,000 project to upgrade equipment in the tech ed department.

Morehead partnered with Chippewa Valley Technical College and Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College to develop a curriculum based on WITC’s course materials and trained personally at CVTC. Seven students are now taking Turning Fundamentals, a course geared to building the skills to operate manual engine lathes.

“He is literally teaching our class,” said Paul Kalin, machine tool technician instructor at WITC-Superior. “When the students complete that class, they have a full (three) credit transcript with WITC.”

Kalin noted that those credits could possibly be transferred to other colleges also, including CVTC for five credits.

“(Morehead) was here all summer taking the first half of our first semester. He is now teaching those concepts to your students at Chetek,” said Steve Michaud, machine tool instructor at CVTC.

Morehead said the course is building fundamental skills needed to work high-tech and skilled manufacturing jobs.

Some of Morehead’s



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Ryan Zeman, a junior at Chetek-Weyerhaeuser, drills out the center of the handle of a machinist’s hammer, his project for the Turning Fundamentals course at C-W, which will earn him college credit.

students said they plan to work in the high-tech trades and engineering, while others were opting for the military, college or were just not sure.

Joe Fortin, a senior from Chetek, said he didn’t want to go into machining but felt confident he could “because I know so much.”

Fortin and his classmates were turning down metal stock into parts to make a machinist’s hammer. Tolerances of ten thousandths of an inch must be followed, which can be frustrating, said Fortin.

“If you take off more than a thousandth of an inch, it can throw off your whole project,” he said while working on the hammer’s shank. Careful measurements

and steady machining skills are what it takes to complete the project.

“The goal isn’t to get a hammer, it’s to get the skills to make a hammer, how to operate those machines,” said Morehead, noting that the days of just making projects are gone, and students take home much more than a hammer at the end of class—it’s real-world, marketable skills.

“There are some entry level jobs where they could go right from high school to an entry level job, but that’s not our plan. It’s getting them interested in the (college) programs,” he said.

Morehead said he has looked to see if any other districts are doing similar programs. A few have attempted to do so but have never come to fruition, he said.

While the first in Wisconsin and one of a few across the nation, he said programs like this should pop up soon because of a state grant that was created in December 2013. Through Wisconsin Act 59, the state will award up to \$1,000 to a district for each student who successfully completes an industry-recognized certification program.

“They will graduate with a welding certificate from the American Welding Society,” said Morehead.

Another course will be added to the program to fill out the machining program, called Milling Fundamentals.

Morehead noted the school’s machines will be the same as used by Parker Hannifin, a coupler parts manufacturer in Chetek, and by other area businesses.

“That’s our next step. Doing the same thing for our milling machines,” said Morehead. “I’ll go down to CVTC and we’ll do the same thing with WITC’s program.”



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Tech ed teacher Bob Morehead, right, gives direction to Lance Loftus, senior at C-W, as he works on his handle shank for a hammer.