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**EMBARGOED UNTIL FRIDAY, APRIL 9**

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## **CVTC Honors Business Partner, Alumni**

### ***Awards presented at virtual Spring Gala April 8***

**Eau Claire, WI** - Eau Claire-based WIN Technology is a business built on partnerships, owned by 31 Wisconsin-based independent telephone companies that united to build a fiberoptic network that allows for faster speeds, greater bandwidth and increased reliability. The company has now been honored with the 2021 Chippewa Valley Technical College Proven Business Partner Award.

The award was presented Thursday, April 8, at the Alumni Association's virtual Spring Gala. Also honored were Michele Koch, chief operations officer at Northwestern Bank, with the 2021 Distinguished Alumnus Award and Anthony Nied, owner of Safe & Simple Organic Lawns, as the Outstanding Recent Alumnus.

CEO Scott Hoffmann says WIN could not have developed into the company it is today without CVTC.

"WIN is very fortunate to be able to tap into the pool of graduates coming out of CVTC," Hoffmann said. "The Chippewa Valley should also feel fortunate to have such an outstanding educational institution that readies individuals for the workforce. This has been a key factor in the growth and development we are seeing in the area."

"From hiring multiple CVTC graduates to being active participants in the college, WIN Technologies has been a strong partner with the College for many years," said CVTC President Bruce Barker. "Like CVTC, WIN recognizes the value of strong partnerships."

"WIN operates a 10,000-mile fiber optic network across the Midwest," Hoffmann said. "What we do with the network touches hundreds of thousands of lives every day. Our network may carry your cell phone conversations or data. It is used for critical communications infrastructure between institutions and businesses."

The company employs 130 people, including 80 in Eau Claire.

"I believe over one-third of our staff are CVTC graduates," Hoffmann said. "We started down this path over 15 years ago when we determined we would need to hire and train in house for the skill sets we need. It is very important that we continue to partner and remain involved in supporting the efforts of CVTC. In doing so, we are supporting the community, but we are also supporting our own future."

Michele Koch started at Northwestern Bank in Chippewa Falls as a receptionist and rose to the position chief operations office. A Chippewa Falls native, she graduated from CVTC in 1984 with a Financial Services program degree and started at the bank a few weeks later. She moved up the ladder, including safe deposit vault attendant, teller, loan processor, head teller and human resources director.

Her CVTC degree and 30-year reputation for work ethic and job performance convinced Jacobson that she was ready for the COO position, which normally requires a four-year degree.

"I am proud to be an employee of a community bank that gives back, both in monetary donations and volunteer hours," Koch said.

Koch has served as a volunteer with the Chippewa Falls Moose Lodge, Agnes' Table, Junior Achievement, and as a member of the finance committee for the Chippewa Falls Oktoberfest. She has also given back to CVTC as a member of the Alumni Board and service on the Spring Gala planning committee. She has volunteered at CVTC graduation ceremonies and usually attends the spring scholarship receptions. "I promote the college whenever possible," she said. "We have hired several CVTC graduates at the bank. They are awesome employees!"

Outstanding Recent Alumnus Anthony Nied enrolled in CVTC's Landscape, Plant and Turf Management program in 2010 after having already earned a bachelor's degree from UW-Eau Claire. He took an interest in the horticulture field when he started working in it during the recession.

After his CVTC graduation, Neid worked for Down to Earth Garden Center in Eau Claire, becoming a manager involved in all areas of the business. After six years, he started his own business, which now focuses on organic and eco-friendly lawn care.

Nied is spreading the word on the advantages of organic lawn care. "I organize free educational sessions on an annual basis on multiple subjects, including do-it-yourself organic lawn care, and a new session on natural alternatives to lawns," he said.

Nied has donated his time and resources to improving landscaping at local schools, and provides support for organizations like Beaver Creek Reserve, Bob's House for Dogs and the Eau Claire Chamber Orchestra.

Nied has remained close to CVTC since his graduation. He attends the Horticulture program's interview day and last year hired a student intern. He serves on the program advisory committee as well as a subcommittee that created landscape and lawn care classes available to community members.

With over 115 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 \$47,452.

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Director of Human Resources  
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