

Friday, July 17, 2020

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Mark Gunderman, Communications Specialist
Chippewa Valley Technical College
Desk: 715-831-7288
Cell: 715-210-4714
mgunderman1@cvtc.edu

At CVTC, Open Air Classes Perfect for Social Distancing ***Agronomy, Gas Utility students gain hands-on experience outside***

Eau Claire, WI – At Chippewa Valley Technical College, keeping students safe during the COVID-19 pandemic is a top priority. The College has found innovative ways to keep delivering high quality education in these times. Sometimes safe social distancing is easy – like when the classroom spans 145 acres.

Earlier this summer, nine Agronomy Management students gathered in a field on the east side of Menomonie, where instructors had previously planted corn, soybeans and oats to do what they call “crop scouting.”

“We’re looking at growth stages and checking to see the health of the crops,” said Jake Ingli, a 2014 graduate of Plum City High School now living in Ellsworth. “We’ll do yield evaluations later in the year and try to identify insects that might become a problem.”

On this summer day, the corn was looking a little brown along the edges of the young plants, which Ingli said was an expected temporary condition called nitrogen burn, as they had recently spread a nitrogen fertilizer.

“This is a great way to get out of the classroom and into the field,” Ingli said. “When the pandemic happened, we were already done with our eight-week classes, but we weren’t able to get out in the field and plant. We’re getting the chance to get outside now.”

“Right around spring break, I knew everything was going to change,” Brent Christianson, Agronomy Management instructor, said. “Our schedule was the biggest thing. Students were supposed to move to Truck Driving to earn their Commercial Drivers Licenses, but we had to delay that. They started that June 1.”

Instructors had to do the planting, but as the crops sprouted, students could hit the fields once again. Everyone had masks ready when needed, but there’s a lot of room out there.

“On a 145-acre field, it’s pretty easy to maintain social distancing,” Christianson said. “The only thing that’s changed now is instead of going back to campus to do reports, they do that from home.”

By mid-July the crops were looking fantastic, Christianson said, with corn tasseling, the oats within about three weeks of harvesting and the soybeans going strong.

RC Jensen doesn't need 145 acres when his Gas Utility Service & Construction students head outside to learn about the digging and installing of lines that is a major part of the instruction. But the open area near the Fire Safety Center on the West Campus has plenty of room for his 11 students.

"The day my students finished the program, on March 13, I was told that things were going to be changing, but by then all my students were gone," Jensen said. The program starts in the summer, so Jensen had some time to prepare for a new normal.

"We're maintaining social distancing as much as we can when we're outside in the lab," Jensen said. "One of the biggest things we deal with is safety. It includes everything, including how you bend over to pick something up."

Jensen explained he has adapted instruction to the students' benefit.

"They're getting even more hands-on because I am teaching the theories when we're out in the field instead of in the classroom. When we are within six feet of physical distance, we do this," Jensen said, pulling his mask from around his neck up to cover his face.

Angela Scholtz, a Fall Creek High School graduate living in Fairchild, loves the program.

"I had been working at hotel, but got laid off because of COVID-19," she said. "I thought this was right up my alley. They're doing everything they can to keep us safe, and I love being outside."

Total social distancing isn't possible in CVTC's Truck Driving program, as an instructor must be in the cab with a student. But some adjustments have been made.

"Our classroom work was all online already, so that was the easy part," said instructor Jeff Frederick. "But we had to get cleaning supplies for all of the trucks and have procedures for wiping everything down, then have the truck sit for 15 minutes empty. And we had to get used to wearing masks all day in the truck."

Another change was having just one student instead of two in the truck with the instructor.

"It's the new normal. They're doing a great job keeping everyone safe," said student Eric Pedersen of Eau Claire. "My instructors are doing an amazing job and I think we're getting even more time with them."

With over 155 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.

Cutlines:

Jake Ingli, a CVTC Agronomy Management student from Plum City, now living in Ellsworth, inspects the growth of corn at a CVTC field on the east side of Menomonie earlier this summer. Students have returned to hands-on learning at CVTC when necessary, and outdoor work provides the perfect opportunity.

CVTC Gas Utility Construction & Service student Angela Scholtz, a Fall Creek High School graduate living in Fairchild, stands in the outdoor lab area of the program earlier this summer, while her fellow students work in the background. Students have returned to hands-on learning at CVTC when necessary, and outdoor work provides the perfect opportunity.

#

CVTC does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or age in employment, admissions, programs, or activities. General inquiries regarding the College's non-discrimination policies may be directed to:

Director of Human Resources

Chippewa Valley Technical College

620 W. Clairemont Ave. Eau Claire, WI 54701