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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

CVTC Grad's Career Change is 'Something for Myself' *Graduation celebration also marks milestone for the MLT program*

Eau Claire, WI – Contemplating a late-life career change, Deb Van Den Heuvel was in a position to do something for herself, unrestrained by child-rearing duties or societal norms that she dealt with growing up. Chippewa Valley Technical College turned out to be the perfect place for her to strike out on a new path as a machinist.

“My kids were getting out of college, and I wanted to do something for myself,” said Van Den Huevel, 52, who splits time between Mondovi and Gilman. “I had been sitting in an office all day and wanted to do something more active.”

Van Den Heuvel will graduate from CVTC's Machine Tooling Technics program this summer. She will be one of 171 graduates in 30 programs honored during a virtual graduation celebration from 7-7:30 p.m. Thursday, July 30 on CVTC's Facebook page. The celebration will also mark a milestone for one of CVTC's health programs.

Van Den Heuvel recalls how her four brothers signed up for the industrial arts classes back in high school, but young women at the time were discouraged from enrolling in those classes that she feels she would have enjoyed.

Her life took a different path. She married a man from Gilman and raised four children, all grown now. She enrolled in North Central Technical College in Wausau in the medical transcription program and worked at Mayo Clinic Health System in Eau Claire. Her family settled in Mondovi for many years.

Mayo eliminated its medical transcription workers, but offered her a medical secretary position in Rochester, Minn. The long commute, partly by bus, made for long days. Taking advantage of the availability of her husband's parents' home, she took a job at Aspirus Medford Hospital.

Looking to break into something new, Van Den Heuvel explored programs at CVTC and chose Machine Tooling Technics.

“Number one, the pay is very good, and there are lots of opportunities for work,” she said. “And I like the creativity. I like working with things.”

Being an older female in a class of mostly younger men was a little daunting, but Van Den Heuvel found a welcoming atmosphere.

“The instructors were accepting and the students were very helpful,” she said. “There was a lot of teamwork among everyone. We all wanted each other to succeed.”

Van den Heuvel was also impressed by the patience of the instructors, who did not mind explaining points multiple times, concentrating on helping everyone get it right.

With homes available in both the Mondovi and Eau Claire areas, as well as Taylor County, Van Den Heuvel is keeping her mind open on job opportunities. But she will find a job. CVTC Machine Tool graduates are much prized among employers who struggle with a shortage of machinists in the area.

The virtual graduation celebration will feature remarks by CVTC President Bruce Barker, English Language Learner Instructor Juli Baker and Human Resources program graduate Shawniece Patterson.

The graduation celebration will also include brief video remarks by Mary Jo Walter, who founded CVTC’s Medical Lab Technician program 50 years ago.

“In April 1969 while on maternity leave at Sacred Heart Hospital, I got a call from the lab director asking if I would consider joining Sr. Francis Regis in setting up a new laboratory class at District One Technical Institute,” Walter, 80, recalls, using the name of CVTC at the time. “It started as a 15-month course to become a clinical lab assistant.”

The program is now two years leading to an associate degree as a medical lab technician.

Working under the supervision of long-time college President Norman Wurtzel, Walter and Sr. Regis worked long hours, much of it volunteered, to prepare for the program’s first students in August 1969. Medical labs were quite different back then, Walter noted.

“I wouldn’t be able to work in the school’s lab today because I don’t use computers,” she said. “We had to do everything by hand.”

Visiting the Health Education Center for the first time in May, Walter said she was impressed with the facility and the lab.

“And to all of those who have graduated from the program in the past 50 years, I’m sure that all of your teachers want you to be blessed in your lives and work and know that you are doing noble and important work,” Walter said.

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.

Cutline:

Deb Van Den Heuvel programs a CNC machine in the CVTC Machine Tooling Technics lab during one of her final weeks in the program before graduating. Students working in labs are required to wear masks and maintain social distancing to the extent possible.

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