

Northland Community and Technical College, Marvin partner to bring small NCTC campus to Warroad

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A Warroad, Minn., company and Northland Community and Technical College have partnered to bring an accredited mechatronics program to Warroad in 2022. The new program

features innovative curriculum and delivery methods that will support the growing need for advanced manufacturing automation skill sets – not just nationwide, but especially in northwest Minnesota.

This education option provides a modernized, human-centered curriculum that enables students to structure their learning schedule around their individual needs and advance at their own pace through online learning and in-person skills assessments, Northland said in a press release.

The partnership pairs Northland with Marvin, a window and door manufacturing company based in Warroad that employs approximately 1,800 in Warroad, but which also has locations throughout the nation.

The new facility, the Advanced Resource Center for Innovation and Education, is rooted in a competency-based education model that is meant to cater to all learners regardless of their educational goals. The competency-based education model does not rely on traditional college timelines or semester blocks and allows students to enter courses anytime during the year while working through the material at their own pace and on their own schedule.

“Advanced manufacturing automation is the highest sought-after skill set in the country and mechanical, electrical, automation and manufacturing technologies are an urgent and growing need for employers throughout Minnesota,” Marvin’s Peggy Anderholm, education manager for the Advanced Resource Center for Innovation and Education, said. “This partnership allows Marvin to be a part of the solution while providing a first-of-its-kind education opportunity to our community. We could not be more excited to see the long-term

impact this will bring to Warroad, to Minnesota, and to Marvin.”

The site is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission, effectively making the Warroad site its own small campus with an instructor based there. Students will have the opportunity to complete competency demonstrations to gain credit for prior learning.

Students will be able to earn up to a two-year associate of applied science degree or any number of certificates within the 60-credit program. Courses will be available on a standalone basis to help students master a specific new skill or take their personal interests to the next level. Students will be able to start and pause a course based on their schedule and what skills they want to complete before the end of the semester.

In addition to traditional college students, the program hopes to reach workers and people who may not normally consider going to college due to the time commitment. The competency-based model allows flexibility to pick and choose how to fit college into their schedule, said Andrew Dahlen, manufacturing process technology instructor at NCTC.

“It's a more unique way of running education,” he said. “Education should be more like Amazon: when you want something, you put in your cart and it's delivered tomorrow. Now, we're not there yet, but this model is getting us closer to that.”

It's a model the East Grand Forks campus has been trying with manufacturers in the Grand Forks area. The program in East Grand Forks is in the start of its second year.

Marvin donated the Warroad facility that will serve as Northland's additional campus and committed to remodeling it into a mechatronics lab with an attached student study and meeting space, as well as a space for future programming collaboration.

Northland invested in a redesign of the mechatronics curriculum and will staff a full-time instructor in Warroad while enhancing support services for students in Roseau County and the surrounding areas. Details are still in the works of who will fill that role.

The partnership comes after years of work and discussions, Anderholm said. She spent time over the last three years talking with tech schools and other past partners to see if they could make something work. In the end, Marvin found a partnership with NCTC.

"We're in this together and it's equally heavily driven by both of us," Anderholm said.

While the partnership between Marvin and NCTC is bringing the program to Warroad, it isn't limited to Marvin employees. Dahlen noted that Polaris may want to decide to use the center, too, or a number of other people in the region.

"We're going to see some interest in having that available next door," he said. "(It will be) a resource where they can keep the people they have, and run them through and get them educated, increase their knowledge and skills, and therefore, increase the functionality of all the jobs."

Additionally, junior and senior students at Warroad High School will have the opportunity to complete the certified production technologist program, comprised of the first four

courses of the mechatronics curriculum. The high school program can be completed for college credit or for a Manufacturing Skills Standards Council industry certificate and will provide an opportunity for paid work experience, giving students a head start on their postsecondary education or career.

Enrollment for the Northland mechatronics program at the new facility will open this fall on a rolling basis for January 2022 students. Scholarships and financial aid may be used toward tuition costs. More information on the new mechatronics opportunity can be found at northlandcollege.edu.