

COMMUNITY

THE MAGAZINE OF METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE
Volume 12, Issue 1



Open here
for special
section inside!



FREMONT HIGH AND MCC: ACCELERATING CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

THE COLLEGE OF FIRST RESPONSE

The lights went out, roofs were razed, trees fell and trampolines bounced around the Omaha metropolitan area during a relentless severe weather season in 2024. When emergencies arise in the College's four-county region (and beyond), MCC students, graduates, faculty and staff go to work. Using the training, tools, technology and experience they gain at the College, they keep our neighborhoods safe and help them recover.

As a thank you to the dedicated first responders who come through our doors, Volume 12 of Community Magazine includes a special section featuring stories about the people who help put the pieces back together when things go wrong — and the MCC programs that prepare them to weather the storms.





Turn to page 14 for a spotlight on MCC first responder programs in action.



Photos courtesy of Jeff Ingraham. Drone images show the damage area that resulted from the EF4 tornado that touched down in Elkhorn on April 26, 2024.

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METROPOLITAN
Community College

Volume 12, Issue 1

Community is a quarterly publication of Metropolitan Community College. Contact the editor at [531-MCC-2726](tel:531-MCC-2726) or efrazier@mccneb.edu.

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HNHC AFFORDABLE HOUSING

As Metropolitan Community College's 50th anniversary year comes to a close, we reflect on the incredible journey that has brought us to this milestone. For five decades, MCC has been a cornerstone of education and opportunity in our community, empowering students to achieve their dreams.

This year, we were proud to partner with Fremont High School at its new Career and Technical Education Center. The state-of-the-art facility is designed to prepare students for career success in high-demand industries. This partnership underscores the College's commitment to providing accessible, innovative education that meets the needs of our students and the workforce.

In this issue, we are pleased to feature a special section highlighting the vital role MCC has and will continue to play in training the area's first responders. From firefighters and paramedics to law enforcement officers and utility linemen, MCC is equipping these everyday heroes with knowledge and training to serve and protect our communities.

As we honor our past and look to the future, we remain dedicated to expanding opportunities, offering new choices in education and making a difference in the lives of our students during all stages of their lives.

We also invite you to support the MCC Foundation. Your generous donations help us continue our mission of providing industry-relevant education, cutting-edge facilities and essential training programs for our students and community.

Thank you for being a part of this incredible journey.

Sincerely,

Amy Recker
Associate vice president for Advancement
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FHS CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION CENTER

PROVIDES ROBUST EDUCATION CONTINUUM IN DODGE COUNTY THROUGH PARTNERSHIP WITH MCC

While taking algebra in high school, Mark Shepard admits he never quite saw how the class would help him later in life. When it comes to the future of education in Dodge County, the Fremont Public Schools superintendent wants the connection between coursework and career opportunities to be clearer, and the options that come with graduating to be more abundant than when he was in high school.

“As you look at opportunities, the conversation for a lot of our families in our district is they want the same thing we all want for our kids — we want better,” Shepard said. “Education is the key for them to better their lives and better their futures.”

In 2021, Fremont voters supported that vision by approving a \$123 million facilities improvement bond that led to the construction and completion of three new elementary schools in the community, as well as a \$9.5 million Fremont Senior High School (FHS) Career and Technical Education Center (CTE Center) that opened this year. Shepard said the widely supported project provides the framework for a robust education continuum in Fremont, a community of around 27,000 challenged by high poverty.

The investment in career education pairs nicely with the town slogan, “Here. We. Grow.”

The CTE Center houses seven career pathway programs offered in collaboration with Metropolitan Community College, all located on-site at the high school — automotive, computer-aided

design/manufacturing (CAD/CAM), construction, diesel technology, health sciences, robotics and welding/metal fabrication. The 8,000-square-foot expansion of the high school substantially increases the number of students who can graduate each year on a career path. Six labs provide industry-relevant, hands-on learning spaces where dual enrollment classes take place.

Dual enrollment classes allow students to earn college credits while in high school, with MCC offering tuition free education to all Nebraska high school students through the current school year. The classes are taught jointly by FHS and MCC faculty. Students can complete their first year at MCC, positioning themselves as strong candidates for sponsorship opportunities with local businesses when they finish high school.



The investment in career education pairs nicely with the town slogan, **“Here. We. Grow.”**

“The facility provides an opportunity for secondary, postsecondary and industry to join forces to support students earlier, from the comfort of their own high school,” said Jordan Pirtle, MCC dean of Secondary Partnerships. “It creates an organic ability to build student skill sets and fosters a direct pipeline for graduates to move into high-paying jobs with local industry partners.”

Sponsorship programs are employer-paid education opportunities for MCC students. Employers cover college tuition and fees while students receive paid, on-the-job training from the company. After graduation, the students step into high-skill, high-demand, high-wage, full-time jobs with the company for an agreed-upon time.

Todd Hansen, MCC associate vice president of Community and Workforce Education, said during holiday breaks and planned school closure days, the facility will also host MCC College for Kids and Teens programs — short-term, workshop-based classes that introduce elementary, middle school and high school students to career experiences and demystify foundational technologies that are in demand in the workforce.

Nate Barry, MCC vice president for Strategic Operations and Initiatives, said the project is an important example of resource sharing and collaboration between the College and high schools within the MCC four-county service area.

“Education has forever been siloed – elementary school, middle school, high school and then on to postsecondary. Once you complete one, we stop, take a breath, and then we’re going to roll you into the next system,” Barry said. “The reality is that’s not how people learn. The transition from high school to college needs much more overlap. [The CTE Center model] allows students to continue their traditional high school experience while dipping their toes into college education.”

Local students have seen this approach work before. Shepard said it started when Valmont Industries, an agricultural industry innovator founded in nearby Valley, approached FHS and MCC with a need for 86 welders.

CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION MODELED ON WELDING ACADEMY SUCCESS

In response, the MCC Welding Academy launched at FHS nine years ago. Beginning with an enrollment of 10, the program now produces 25 to 30 welders each year.

“[Valmont] felt like there was an opportunity here that would not only help their industry but would also help other industries that rely on welders, and in turn, give our students an opportunity to focus on a career,” Shepard said.

The CTE Center’s welding labs were designed based on the layout of the College’s welding facilities on the South Omaha Campus with the support of MCC welding instructors Chris Beaty and Rob Hocking. While the FHS program will continue to support the same welding enrollment, the addition of six dual enrollment programs at the CTE Center increases the capacity for career education in these fields. Shepard said 450 FHS students enrolled in CTE Center programming during its first quarter, with the facility expected to support 700 of the school’s 1,700 students by the end of this year.

“We’ve grown the opportunities for career education exponentially, and we’ve moved our career programming from high school shop classes to true career technical programming,” Shepard said.

Shepard calls the CTE Center an “if you build it, they will come” project because of the community’s buy-in. The school district collaborated with other educational institutions, as well as employers, community organizations and local residents throughout the strategic planning phase.

Shepard said the College’s commitment to career education and connection to industry are valuable contributions to the partnership.

“We met with about 50 local industry partners and talked about what types of opportunities they would have for our students if they learned the appropriate skill sets that would lead to high-wage, high-skill, high-demand jobs,” Shepard said. “We honed them down to seven different career pathways and built it upon the success we’ve had with welding.”

Chase Dillon, who helps manage family-owned Sid Dillon car dealerships in Fremont, said the placement of the CTE Center symbolizes a shift in the way education systems throughout the



nation are thinking about skilled trades and other sustainable careers that do not require a four-year degree.

The CTE Center is on display, not tucked away. To enter Fremont High School on its north side, students pass through the facility. Large glass windows surround its perimeter and entry to each of the six labs inside, allowing the community and sunlight to peek through. At night, sparks emanating from the welding lab can ignite curiosity in people passing by.

From the front porches of houses across the street, students can be seen hauling lumber into the high-ceiling capstone lab. Much like the rear entry to the Construction Education Center on the Fort Omaha Campus, a large retractable door opens to robust floorspace. Inside, the base of a 1,200-square-foot home is sprawled across the floor with a dozen students working without space limitations. On top of a locker inside sits a 2-foot model of the project students made in class last year. It’s a physical reminder of how much more is possible at Fremont High School now. Toward the end of this school year, a completed three-bedroom home will be wheeled out and transplanted into the community.

“Here in Fremont and around the area, there are some fairly successful plumbers, electricians, home builders, car dealerships and automotive shops where you don’t necessarily go off to a four-year school to work there,” Dillon said. “But in my experience going to high school and middle school, you didn’t really know a lot about these kinds of classes and programs. As far as businesses go, especially these past few years,



it's been really hard to find enough people to work these kinds of jobs. There's some surprisingly big companies and employment opportunities here that tend to fly under the radar."

Health care employers could also benefit from an increase of students in Certified Nursing Assistant classes. Previously, students had to attend classes at the MCC Fremont Area Center. Now they can take all their classes at the high school, which can accommodate up to 44 students each year.

The center's robotics and automation manufacturing lab space supports high school programming that aligns with the second-largest area of employment in Dodge County — manufacturing. Additionally, the automotive lab, which includes six lifts, will allow up to 20 students to finish with automotive technician skills to support the dealerships and service shops in the retail industry. Up to eight students can follow a pathway to become diesel technicians, and small engine repair training is also available.

Shepard said the programs are designed to bring students into careers at the entry level, but all seven pathways offer opportunities and flexible options for further upskilling, certification or higher degree attainment.

"These pathways allow the student to step off the training when they need to, but step back onto it when they want to pursue the next opportunity," Shepard said.

At the ribbon cutting for the new facility in August, Hansen said the abundance

of "next opportunities" now available in Fremont stood out.

The 1983 FHS grad remarked on the growth of the partnership between the school district and MCC. Hansen remembers when the scope of the College's dual enrollment offering in Fremont was a single English class. Today, the number of courses now approaches 50. Pirtle said the additional space at the CTE Center gives dual credit offerings the room they need for continued growth.

"The building expansion paves the way for more programming space that can also help support expansion in our dual credit offerings," Pirtle said.

Hansen has a unique connection to the project. Early in his career at MCC, he spent more than six years as the school-to-career facilitator at Fremont High School. He has continuously served on the Fremont Public School Board of Education since being elected in 2012. Known for connecting area high school students to opportunities at the College, Hansen often makes these connections when he meets students in passing at the grocery store in the tight-knit Fremont. The CTE Center now provides a dedicated place for fostering even more of those connections.

"The success of the Welding Academy and the proof of concept led us to the building that we have today," Hansen said. "The district has seen the value of dual credit classes and academies, and how MCC can be a partner. It's proven to be viable to students and their families."

A 'GOLDILOCKS' FIT FOR EDUCATION IN DODGE COUNTY

The collaboration between FHS and MCC promotes access to skilled trades and technical sciences education in Fremont that wasn't available before and wouldn't have been feasible for a solo enterprise to deliver to a community of its size.

Fremont is a unique community within the MCC four-county region (Dodge, Douglas, Sarpy and Washington counties), encompassing more than 40% of Nebraska's population. The ever-expanding Omaha metropolitan area now extends nearly all the way to Fremont. Today, Douglas and Sarpy counties are home to a quarter million more people than in 1980. Over the same period, Dodge County's total population has grown by around 3,000.

Scott Broady, MCC dean of Skilled Trades and Technical Sciences, said that before the presence of the CTE Center, the College was limited in the offerings it could provide for these programs, which require large lab spaces and industrial equipment not typically found in a high school setting. He has been meeting with area employers to inform them about workforce development training opportunities now available.

The CTE Center breaks down barriers to opportunities across town and even across counties. Previously, anyone in Fremont who wanted to enter one of the College's skilled trades programs would have to travel 35 to 45 minutes to the Fort Omaha or South Omaha campuses. Providing access to all of these programs on site at the high school maximizes time.

"Even though Fremont is not that large of a community, driving across town to get to class is still a barrier," Shepard said. "For students who are involved in extracurricular activities, they don't have to leave for part of the day to take their college class and then come back. They're here the whole time."

The local business community is investing in the future of the CTE Center and its students. Over the next five years, more than \$2 million in private contributions and in-kind gifts have been pledged.

"We're excited about [the CTE Center]," Dillon said. "The high school did a great job with all the industries represented and built a facility that basically allows the student to do in class what they would be doing in the real world. It really sets employers up with a pipeline to hire students right out of high school who know the career path they want to be on."

If you give a kid in high school a chance, sometime later down the road, they'll understand that people opened doors for them.





FHS junior Elaine Steinbach, who is enrolled in the Welding Academy, plans to take advantage of the additional opportunities the CTE Center is providing during her high school experience.

"I'm passionate about welding because it has been in my life for a long time and I'm pretty good at it," Steinbach said. "I am very thankful to be able to work in the new CTE building because it gives us a chance to use more tools."

"The updated building also allows us to learn in a more functional space that gives us a better idea of what industry facilities will be like. It is also nice to have the building because we have more opportunities for other college-level classes. For example, the construction and automotive classes are both classes I intend to take after finishing the Welding Academy."

In addition to the opportunities the CTE Center creates for students and employers, project leaders said FHS provides a model for other high schools in Nebraska and across the nation to follow.

"The CTE Center is a game changer for the school district, the Fremont community, MCC and eastern Nebraska," Hansen said. "It took a strong vision and a lot of hard work, but this building can be a blueprint for collaborative projects with other high schools in the four-county region and beyond."

Besides connecting with students and helping them develop their passions at a pivotal age, Barry said he is excited about how the facility will shape the next generation in Fremont.

"If you give a kid in high school a chance, sometime later down the road, they'll understand that people opened doors for them," Barry said. "Getting that \$20-an-hour job at 18 is amazing, and it allows you to live in a way that maybe your family has never been able to live, but it also creates a citizen in the community who wants to open doors for someone else. To me, that's the transformation."

RETHINKING THE DEGREE: ENTER CREDENTIAL — COLLEGE —



Dallas Christiansen owed his younger brother Troy \$35. Through graciousness not always extended between brothers, Troy afforded Dallas an opportunity to settle the debt for less than the past due amount.

The screen on Troy's iPhone was broken. A replacement only costs around \$12, but not many people have the technical background to make the repair themselves. Dallas, 19, however, had recently earned two nationally recognized certifications. Christiansen participated and completed MCC Credential College microcredentials during his school day at Keith Lutz Horizon High School.

Credential College is an alternative to traditional degrees, leading to high-skill, high-demand and high-wage careers while they are still in school or shortly after graduation. Through funds allocated by the Metropolitan Community College Foundation's Board of Directors, the pilot program was offered to Horizon students at no cost.

With the skills he developed in the pilot program at Horizon, (part of Millard Public Schools) Christiansen settled his debt with his 16-year-old brother by providing a service. The experience taught Christiansen that as long as smartphones are an everyday necessity, accidents will inevitably happen, placing value on the niche expertise he gained through the Credential College program.

Christiansen is also beginning to understand the reach of word-of-mouth marketing.

Since then, he has repaired two damaged iPhones that belong to friends. These repairs have provided him with an immediate income stream that he plans to tap into until his daytime hours are free, allowing him to apply for a job with a local company specializing in technology repairs.

"I had my iPhone 11 fixed about a year ago and was charged \$130 for it. From what I learned in class and

looking through the prices and everything, I feel like I could make at least an extra 50 bucks for each job I do," Christiansen said.

PROVIDING FLEXIBLE COURSE OFFERINGS AND CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Christiansen was among the first 15 students to complete the Credential College program at Horizon last year. All 15 students are leaving or finishing high school with Wireless Industry Service Excellence (WISE) Level 1 and Level 2 certifications. The curriculum Christiansen followed at Horizon is also offered through MCC Workforce Education's Mobile Device Repair Academy at Digital Express on the Fort Omaha Campus.

The program is a partnership between MCC, the Cellular Telecommunications and Internet Association (the national trade organization for the wireless industry) and iFixOmaha, a local technology repair retailer. MCC was the first community college in the nation to offer an industry-certified mobile device repair program.

After the successful pilot at Horizon, Credential College will expand to other high schools in the MCC service footprint, including each high school in Millard Public Schools, as well as Blair, Fremont, Ralston, Bellevue East

and Bellevue West. Omaha Public Schools will implement the program later in 2025.

In addition to mobile device repair, Credential College offerings include training programs for careers in insurance, human resources, customer service, phlebotomy, pharmacy, mental health, medical, veterinary, skilled trades and technical sciences and information technology.

Each Credential College program is competency-based and typically follows a pass-fail basis. Each offering also integrates career advising and general work skills training to help participants become job-ready upon completion. In most cases, credentials can be earned in six months or less.

Flexibility is also built in. All credentials are stackable and portable, providing students

"I'VE TOLD A BUNCH OF MY FRIENDS THEY SHOULD DO IT. IT'S A GOOD LEARNING EXPERIENCE THAT GIVES YOU AN OPTION FOR A CAREER AFTER HIGH SCHOOL."

with multiple on- and off-ramps to complete higher-level degrees, earn additional credentials or enter the workforce at different stages of their education.

Christiansen is completing his high school credits at Horizon and plans to graduate in December. He said he wants to pursue a career in mobile device repair when he finishes, along with three other students who completed the first cohort.

Christiansen said that before participating in Credential College, he's not sure how he would have answered questions about his college plans.

"I really didn't [have a plan] yet," Christiansen said. "Now I have this knowledge. I might as well use it. Once I graduate, it's definitely something I want to look into. I already have the certification, and it is a newer certification."

Horizon is a nontraditional 9th through 12th grade high school with a student body that ranges from 150 to 180 students. The school provides support services to students through a relationship-based approach. Like MCC, Horizon offers smaller class sizes, allowing students to receive more individualized attention. The school holds four graduation ceremonies each year.

Emili Brosnan, Ed.D., Horizon's principal, said Credential College appeals to the school because it provides a new way to answer a question presented to each of her students:

What does personal excellence look like for you?

"What really pairs Horizon with MCC is how we both approach personal excellence," Brosnan said. "[Horizon is] an alternative school. We want to look at different ways to support kids than in a traditional school. We want to be innovative and offer additional opportunities for our students. Personal excellence for [one student] could be a four-year institution. Personal excellence for [another student] could be going straight into the job market. Everybody is going to have a different definition, and that's great. We want everybody to have an opportunity to be the best at what they want to do. For some people, it doesn't need to be [continuing to college after high school], and that's okay. I think that in society, we're having a little bit of a paradigm shift."

Horizon is offering four Mobile Device Repair cohorts in 2025, one every nine weeks. Brosnan does not anticipate filling each class to be an issue.



"For that first cohort, we had students who were not selected who came back asking, 'Can I do it?'" Brosnan said. "So, it gained some popularity."

SKILLS-BASED LEARNING FOR A GROWING GROUP OF STUDENTS

Credential College is designed to serve a larger population of students than one might think. Nearly 35% of Nebraska public high school graduates do not pursue college after finishing high school, according to the 2024 Nebraska Higher Education Progress Report by Nebraska's Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education (CCPE). The report also notes some of the annual changes in Nebraska's postsecondary education system "have very likely been caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and time will tell if they indicate permanent shifts."

Gary Girard, vice president for MCC Community and Workforce Education, is not waiting for that data to shake out.

"With Credential College, we have a solution. We're really trying to design a program with practical options and career pathways. The idea is to offer programs that can be completed in six months or less, and then build to the next progression," Girard said.

CCPE and MCC are working together to help meet the statewide postsecondary attainment goal — at least 70% of Nebraskans, 25 to 34 years old, to have a degree, certificate diploma or other recognized credential with economic value by 2030. Girard said Credential College supports schools like Horizon by offering focused career guidance and readiness training before students leave the education system.

Designed to shift people's view of employment from "paycheck" to a "career" mindset, Credential College provides a foundational pathway to a quality job after high school through microcredentials. Each offering also includes a route back to college for further upskilling or degree attainment.

"Decades ago, high schools used to prepare students for college or careers, but the intervening years have emphasized college so much that it seems to be the only choice, leaving career-path students to fend for themselves," Girard said. "Credential College puts that important career conceptualization and advising piece in front of students while they're still in high school and gives them more options."

Brosnan said the ability for students to earn credentials through daily coursework during the school day and the relationship-building approach of instructors — one from Horizon, one from MCC (contracted through iFixOmaha) — were key factors in the success of the pilot program.

During each nine-week cohort at Horizon, students meet for 90 minutes each day. Rather than learning from a textbook, students spend most of their time Monday through Thursday working from a tub of tools with devices that need repair.

The Friday class is more focused on job skills training. Jason DeWater, founder of iFixOmaha, teaches students about back-of-house operations and leads role-playing exercises to help them practice customer interactions.

Christiansen said exposure to career opportunities in mobile device repair opened his eyes to possibilities he had never considered before. The hands-on, learning-by-doing approach kept him engaged throughout the program.

"I've always liked taking things apart and putting them back together. When it's something electronic like a phone, and I can fix it without messing it up, it boosts my confidence," Christiansen said.

"I REALLY HAVE TO THANK MCC AND IFIXOMAHA. ... IT'S BEEN A REALLY GOOD PARTNERSHIP."

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE GROWTH

Brosnan attributes the program's success to the direct, inquiry-based learning and relationship-building approach in the classroom. She said Horizon's familiarity with its students allows the school to select strong candidates for Credential College, while the collaboration between instructors from Horizon and MCC contributes to the program's effectiveness.

"I really have to thank MCC and iFixOmaha," Brosnan said. "The teachers in the classroom are dynamic. They work well with our students and understand they have bad days sometimes. The continued relationship-building, flexibility and understanding — all those human components are so important, and they come from all sides. It's been a really good partnership."

After learning that four graduating Horizon students from the first cohort plan to pursue careers in mobile device repair upon finishing high school, Brosnan said she is excited about the opportunities Credential College offers her students both now and in the future.

"It builds hope and futuristic thinking, which are so important, but it also provides an immediate dollar sign," Brosnan said. "It also gives them confidence. For most high school students, their work experience when they leave is a part-time job. [Credential College students] are coming out of high school with these certifications for their résumé. It gives them a bit of a leg up going into the workforce."

Christiansen said he appreciated the opportunity to participate in Credential College, and he encourages others to take advantage of the program.

"I've told a bunch of my friends they should do it," Christiansen said. "It's a good learning experience that gives you an option for a career after high school. It's not just a class where you sit there and take notes. You're constantly working on something. You won't get bored."



FACES OF MCC



**Mary
Aldinger**

**Associate of
Applied Science in
Horticulture, Land Systems
and Management**

My journey with Metropolitan Community College began in 1998, following a career change I hadn't anticipated. When my corporate employer reorganized and eliminated my position, I chose not to relocate to Cedar Rapids, Iowa, with the company. Instead, I attended a series of seminars to explore new opportunities and took an assessment to evaluate my strengths and interests. The results pointed me toward a career in horticulture, a field I'd always found fascinating.

MCC turned out to be the perfect fit for this new chapter in my life. I started with Intro to Horticulture, taught by Addie Kinghorn. Her engaging teaching style and hands-on approach made every lesson interesting. From memorizing the Latin and common names of plants to growing

seeds in the greenhouse and touring landscapes, I discovered a passion for horticulture that I didn't know existed. Paul Evans' Entomology class brought another layer of excitement as we explored the outdoors, identifying insects both helpful and harmful to plants.

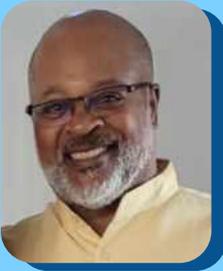
Earning my associate degree in horticulture, land systems and management has enriched my life in countless ways. I worked at a nursery, which deepened my knowledge of plant identification and landscape design. Later, I launched a small business focused on garden renovations and maintenance, turning my passion into a fulfilling endeavor.

One of the most rewarding aspects of my education has been the ability to identify different species of trees, a skill I use every day. My love for gardening has also connected me with like-minded friends. Together, we organized the Royalwood Garden Club, which comes to life each spring after a long winter. We share tips, tour beautiful gardens and celebrate our shared passion for plants and landscapes.

Although I could say I'm retired, my work continues. I care for the landscape beds around my home and partner with my neighbors to cultivate a vegetable garden on their acreage.

Looking back, MCC changed my life in profound and positive ways. It gave me the tools to grow not only my career, but also my personal passions. For that, I will always be grateful.

**“MCC CHANGED MY LIFE IN
PROFOUND AND POSITIVE WAYS.
IT GAVE ME THE TOOLS TO GROW
NOT ONLY MY CAREER BUT ALSO MY
PERSONAL PASSIONS.”**



William Graves

Associate of Applied Science
in Business Transfer

When I decided to attend Metropolitan Community College, I was balancing a full-time job and looking for a way to advance my career. I wanted more than just a high school diploma; I wanted to build a future I could truly enjoy. MCC offered me the flexibility and support to take that first step, and it changed my life.

One of my proudest accomplishments after graduating from MCC was earning a full-ride academic scholarship to Creighton University, where I completed a master's degree in business administration. That experience solidified my belief in my own potential and opened countless doors for me. Another milestone was returning to MCC, not as a student, but as an adjunct instructor. Being able to share my knowledge and experiences with others has been one of the most rewarding aspects of my journey.

MCC laid the foundation for my career. After retiring from Union Pacific Railroad, I was able

to use my education in various roles that I continue to enjoy to this day. My time at MCC sparked an interest in learning that I didn't know I had and showed me that I could achieve anything I set my mind to. That confidence has carried me through many opportunities, including my current role as a loan specialist with the U.S. Small Business Administration, where I'm still working at age 72.

One of my favorite memories from MCC was my Introduction to Computer Programming class, taught by an instructor named Stevey Wonder. His encouragement and recognition of my skills gave me the confidence to believe in myself. He once suggested I pursue a career in computer programming after seeing me help fellow students in class. His words, along with the practical, real-world experience of all my instructors, left a lasting impact on me.

Looking back, I can say with certainty that MCC set me on the right path. It gave me the tools, the confidence and the opportunities to pursue a fulfilling career and life. At 72, I am still enjoying meaningful work and feel grateful for the education that started it all. MCC taught me that it's never too late to chase your dreams and create a life you love.

'Tis the season for giving.

Support MCC students by giving to:

- Student food insecurity fund
- Scholarships
- Academic program growth funds

Give the gift of education.

Visit mccneb.edu/Foundation or call 531-MCC-2346.

THE COLLEGE OF FIRST RESPONSE





EMPOWERED TO HELP: Historic summer storms ignite spirit of service in Utility Line graduates

The summer of 2024 was an intense time to work an internship as part of the Metropolitan Community College's Utility Line program. Even by the severe weather standards of the Great Plains, it was a particularly challenging season, especially in the eastern half of Nebraska.

Three recent graduates of the MCC Utility Line program shared their experiences responding to severe weather events that left more than a quarter million Nebraskans feeling powerless — literally and figuratively.

The hours were long, the temperatures harsh, the work demanding and the pressure was high — exactly the kind of career all three wanted. Let's hope there isn't a next time that straight-line winds require more than 1,500 utility line workers (and related industries) to work around the clock to re-electrify the grid.

But if there is, Jaysen Preister, Cole Wagner and Marshall Siebke will be ready to respond again.

Preister, 19, began an internship with Omaha Public Power District (OPPD) in May after completing his utility line courses at MCC. He said he will never forget how the shift he thought was ending on Wednesday, July 30, was actually marking the beginning of a new phase. He worked 40 straight hours between July 30 and 31 after hurricane-force winds with gusts exceeding 90 miles per hour knocked out power for more than 220,000 OPPD customers. Preister's first summer on the job featured the largest power outage — and response — in the public utility's 78-year history.

Preister said there were early signs indicating it was going to be a busy day. His crew had just finished repairing a snapped utility pole in a customer's backyard. On the way back to OPPD's Papillion Center, known as the "trouble center," Preister knew plenty of action awaited them upon their return.

“We were leaving our job around rush hour when everyone’s trying to get home,” Preister said. “We just saw this big, dark wall cloud move in, and started thinking, ‘Oh, this is not good.’ We had a blast driving back to the center as the storm was happening. All kinds of stuff was flying around. We didn’t see any power lines go down, but we knew it was happening.”

By the time they returned to Papillion, the outage counts were increasing rapidly. When longtime journeymen started reacting to the growing number of affected customers, Preister said he began to understand how extraordinary the conditions were.

“We knew we were going to be working overnight,” Preister said. “People who had left work earlier than we did started shuffling back in because they knew they were going to get called. It was something. Luckily, I was able to get some coffee, and I don’t really like drinking coffee.”

Journeymen experienced with large emergency responses began preparing apprentices and interns for what to expect in the immediate hours and days ahead.

“They told us, ‘This stuff is really serious, and this is where people can get hurt,’” Preister said. “They told us there are going to be a lot of people who are going to be angry that their power is out, and that this is a dangerous task that we have to do. They gave us a run-through of how we should act, what procedures should be done and the importance of following the directions that the leads give you.”

After getting a little rest after his first 40 hours, Preister put in 16 hours each day for the next week. In eight days, he nearly worked as many hours (around 150) as a full-time American worker puts in during an entire month (160) — the bulk of it earning time-and-a-half, adding up to the biggest paycheck of his life.

“It all went to my savings account,” Preister said.

He said he focused on listening and absorbing everything he could from the experience, while also considering how he could best help his team.

“Things were so mangled,” Preister said. “Wires were down everywhere, but it was cool to see how we put it all back together. I learned a lot in school, but this storm was a huge learning experience. One of the good memories is I really saw people come together, not just OPPD workers, but tree workers and people in their neighborhoods helping each other out.”





LEARNING IN ADVERSE CONDITIONS

MCC Utility Line instructors Tim Bowling, Greg Babst and Dave Havranek said trouble calls are where some of the best learning happens for interns and apprentices in the utility line industry. Typically, people in the beginning of their careers don't work on high-voltage lines until they have accrued at least a year of on-the-job experience. However, with large areas of Omaha and Lincoln de-energized, recent MCC graduates gained uncharacteristic and valuable early career learning experiences. Babst said some even climbed four to five utility poles per day responding to the storm.

"In those conditions, you learn how to do the different kinds of rigging, and you reconstruct everything without having a print in front of you or an engineer with you. You are just going off what is damaged and sitting in front of you," Babst said.

There is no simple way to simulate the real-world conditions utility line workers faced this summer, but instructors have provided hands-on learning on the concourse and lab space of the MCC Applied Technology Center, where Utility Line students take their classes. In this setting, an annual Utility Lineman Rodeo competition takes place between skilled trades and technical sciences college students throughout the region.

Additionally, Babst, Havranek and Bowling take students out for training during inclement weather (except when lightning is present). They also create opportunities through a special night class Bowling developed.

In this lab, which students built during the winter and early spring quarters, the area is intentionally wrecked to simulate the aftermath of a tornado. All the power to the site is turned off. Students arrive in the dark around midnight, working with flashlights and high beams on work trucks to make repairs and restore electricity.

"It will never be quite like the real thing, but we try to give them that experience before they go out on their internship," Babst said.

Once general education credits are completed, Utility Line program students can earn an associate degree from MCC in just one year. The first nine months take place at MCC in the fall through spring quarters. During summer quarter, students participate in paid internships with local utility companies and contractors. A longer-running weekend program is also available.

Babst said the Saturday-only offering is likely the only weekend program of its kind in the nation. Earning an associate degree is strongly encouraged for employment in the regional workforce.

“Working in the Midwest, it is rare for a utility to hire you without you having a utility line technician associate degree. They’re not hiring off the street like they did 30 to 40 years ago,” Havranek said.

“When you were a kid, you were told if you got in trouble to find a firefighter or a police officer. I’ve always told my kids and even the students I teach here that you can find a line crew, too. They’ll take care of you.”

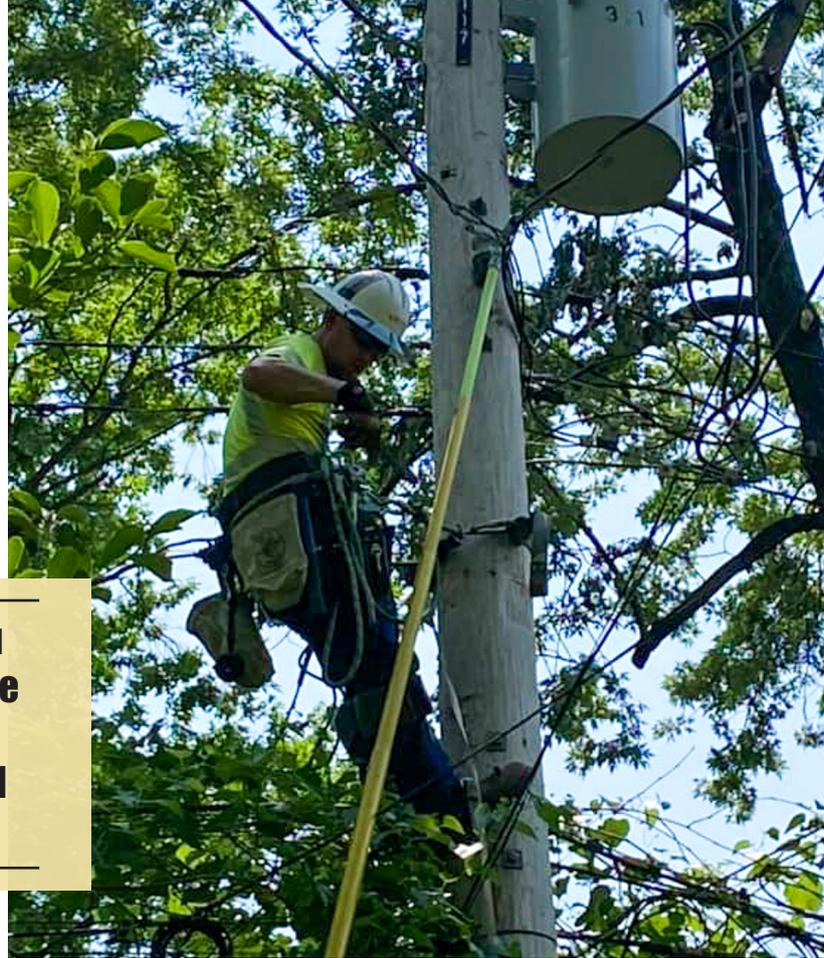
Capping the program at around 50 students annually ensures class sizes remain small enough for effective hands-on instruction and allows for the right ratio of student-to-internship opportunities. Apart from working outdoors, earning potential and job security are also career draws.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of electrical power line installers and repairers is projected to grow by 8% over the next decade. Babst said the starting pay for entry-level apprenticeships with smaller, rural electric association providers is around \$25 an hour, while compensation with larger municipalities is above \$35. Employer apprenticeship programs typically take four years to complete through on-the-job training and curriculum completion. After passing the test to become a journeyman, pay often exceeds \$50 an hour.

“Working for the power company is a good job no matter where you’re at,” said Babst, who worked for the electric utility in Wahoo before becoming a full-time Utility Line faculty member at MCC 12 years ago.

Wagner, a 2023 MCC Utility Line alumnus, came to the same realization. He had previously earned a bachelor’s degree in computer science and was doing software engineering work that left him unfulfilled.

“I realized after my second year that I did not like being inside at all,” Wagner said. “I applied for line school, got in and have loved it ever since.”



Working in more rural parts of the state with Nebraska Public Power District, one of the hardest parts of Wagner’s job is accessing the power lines that tornadoes and severe weather damage. During one stretch this summer, he worked 13 consecutive 16-hour shifts.

“For a while, Mother Nature was acting up every weekend, it seemed like,” Wagner said.

The work has brought him into contact with landowners who have lost their homes and people experiencing their worst days.

“You’re doing something to help everyone else who’s in some kind of distress,” Wagner said. “You don’t realize how much you use electricity until you don’t have it.”

Havranek, who spent 35 years working at OPPD, said that in addition to the return on investment of an associate degree in the utility line industry, a special satisfaction comes from turning people’s lights back on.

“With what’s been going on with these storms over the summer and [hurricanes Helene and Milton], when you turn people’s lights back on, you’re a pretty crucial part of living,” Havranek said. “Turning people’s lights back on is what makes linemen different. When you were a kid, you were told if you got in trouble to find a firefighter or a police officer. I’ve always told my kids and even the students I teach here that you can find a line crew, too. They’ll take care of you.”

THE RIGHT CAREER FOR A GROWING FAMILY

Siebke, 33, came to the MCC Utility Line program from Lincoln, seeking a career change like Wagner. He had spent nearly a decade doing maintenance on locomotives in the railroad industry. Though starting at the ground level in a new field felt risky, the career stability, pay and hours in the utility line industry were appealing to him.

There was no guarantee Siebke would earn an apprenticeship after completing his associate degree and internship at MCC, but he believed if he applied himself, it would be worth it.

Siebke was working the second shift at the railroad, from 3 to 11 p.m. He and his wife, Courtney, were ready to start a family, and he wanted to work more traditional hours. He applied for the MCC Utility Line program and started taking classes in September 2023.

The next nine months were grueling. Siebke needed to keep his job at the railroad to pay bills, while commuting from Lincoln to Omaha during the week for MCC Utility Line classes from 8 a.m. to noon. Before and after his shift at the railroad, he would fit in short chunks of time to study, then

put in more focused time on the weekends.

"I didn't have a child at that time, so that made it a little bit easier, but it was still no easy task," Siebke said. "It was a pretty stressful time in our lives to leave a company I'd been working with for nine-and-a-half years and take a chance on an internship with Lincoln Electric System (LES)."

Siebke started the internship with LES in May. The same weather system that devastated Omaha in July also affected around 30,000 Lincoln customers, making it one of the largest outages in LES history.

"I got to see it firsthand," Siebke said. "When you throw that breaker on, put that fuse in or fix the pole that turned the power back on for 10 households that have been waiting for multiple days, customers come out, thank you and offer you Gatorades because of course it's probably the hottest week of the summer [when the power goes out]."

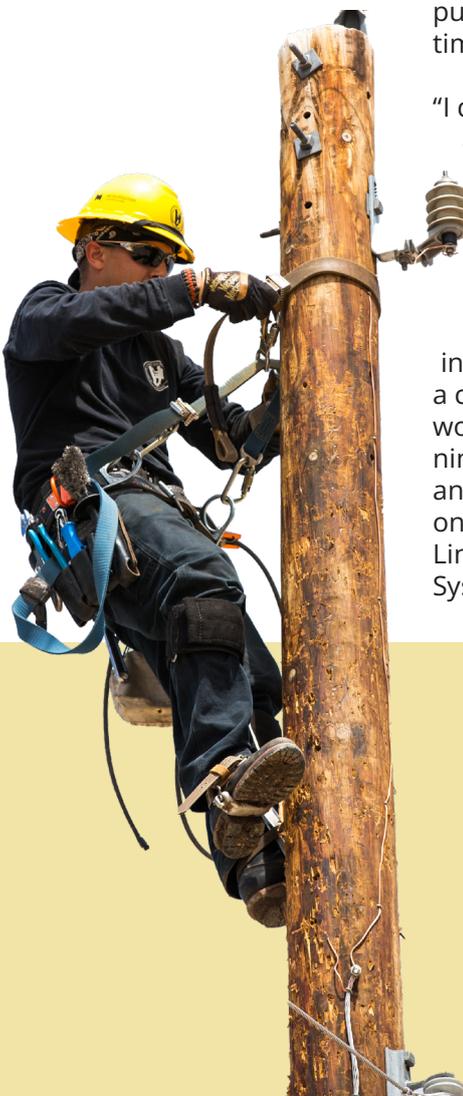
"That's never something I got to see working at the railroad. The locomotives rolled in. We fixed them, then we rolled them out the door. Seeing that customer reaction, especially for new interns [in the utility line industry], I think it puts a little bit of extra drive in people to get those lines repaired and keep the system reliable."

Siebke's coworkers at LES must have noticed that bit of "extra drive." About two weeks before the birth of their baby girl, Layna, Siebke got the phone call from LES in September he was not sure he would receive when he started the internship in May. He accepted an offer to become an apprentice.

"The trainer for the apprenticeship said they saw that I took a gamble on myself," Siebke said.

Should Layna ever be faced with a similar decision in her life, Siebke said he does not want anything to hold her back, either.

"Career stability was my major [reason for making the career change], but also being able to tell my daughter in the future to not be afraid to tackle challenges in life and never be afraid of change," Siebke said.



**Think the MCC Utility Line program might be the right change for you?
Visit mccneb.edu/UtilityLine for more information.**



FIRE SCIENCE TECHNOLOGY STUDENTS DO BEST WITH WORST MOTHER NATURE HAS TO OFFER

Since service is at the heart of their career pursuit, it is not surprising that Metropolitan Community College Fire Science Technology students would be eager to lend a helping hand or put in some extra effort. About 36 hours after straight-line winds snapped some trees at their trunks and uprooted others, 16 Fire Science Technology students volunteered to assist with the response.

Among them was Kennedy Karschner, a four-sport varsity athlete in high school; Hailee Nelson, who began serving on the Valparaiso Volunteer Fire Department as soon as she was old enough at 16; and Levi Buelt, who recently started an internship with the Papillion Fire Department.

Along with their 13 other classmates, they had recently learned how to use a chainsaw to ventilate a live fire in class. Mother Nature provided an opportunity for real-life application after scattering tree limbs across lots, puncturing holes in homes, smashing vehicles and spiking home and auto insurance claims across Douglas County. Over a half-day, these 16 students worked in neighborhoods in southeast, southwest and northwest Omaha, helping restore a sense of order for families overwhelmed by the storm's aftermath.



"We needed to learn how to use the chainsaws better and get more experience, and it happened to be convenient [with the timing of the storm]," Karschner said. "It was also a good way to get out of the classroom and into the community."

Karschner transferred to MCC from another community college to pursue an associate degree in Fire Science Technology. MCC is the only community college in Nebraska to offer the program.

Karschner said she retains information best through hands-on experience. Her company — groups of four students who fanned out into neighborhoods to survey the damage and remove debris — accomplished in minutes what would take families several hours (or days) of hard labor or cost hundreds of dollars to hire out. They cut large, heavy pieces of fallen trees into smaller ones and worked together to move debris to collection spots. Some students climbed onto rooftops to clear branches and inspect for damage.

Nelson said her experience being part of a volunteer fire department inspired her to pursue a career as a working firefighter. She said the teamwork and camaraderie built from learning and working together in the MCC Fire Science Technology program throughout the school year aided the students while they were volunteering.

Nelson said she gained an appreciation for working with people experiencing hard times.

"While we were working in one yard, an older woman came around the corner to talk to our company," Nelson said. "She told us she lived alone, and her kids weren't going to be able to help for a while and asked if we could help clean up her yard. When the four of us got there, there was a huge tree going through her garage. You could see it coming through the top and the bottom. Some of it was beyond our experience level, but we helped clean up all around her yard and got all the logs piled up and moved out."

"She just sat there and thanked us because she wouldn't have been able to do it and wasn't going to be able to get a tree removal company there for a couple more weeks. Her story kind of stuck with me," Nelson said.

Boomer Strawn, MCC Fire Science Technology program director and instructor, said the experience Nelson described is exactly what he hoped students would draw from the day. Being involved in the community is a key part of the career and an aspect that students can only learn on the job. When opportunities for real-world practice arise, instructors take advantage.

"It's important for future first responders to have firsthand experiences during times of natural disasters, and I believe one hundred percent in helping our neighborhoods during their time in need," Strawn said. "Service-learning projects like these are not only important to MCC Fire Science Technology but to all of MCC."

Buelt said it was an eye-opening experience in terms of the scale of damage and the strength of response.

"It was crazy to me to see how a whole city can be affected by one event," Buelt said. "Thankfully, it didn't do more damage than it did, but it felt like everybody in the city had a tree down, branches to move or needed help of some kind. I thought it was a great idea to do some hands-on work, get some new knowledge and use it for a good cause."

Their good deeds did not go unnoticed. A few days later, pizza arrived at the Applied Technology Center, ordered and paid for by grateful neighbors the students helped.

Karschner, who is in the process of applying for internships, said the MCC program has been a good fit for her. She is looking forward to working in a career where she can make a difference.

"It really feels like we're more than just a class," Karschner said. "I've gotten to know some of my fellow students really well and they've become some of my best friends. It was a good experience to get out in the community that we're going to be working with very closely someday as first responders."

Visit mccneb.edu/FIST for more information about the Fire Science Technology program.

MCC DEVELOPS DRONE TRAINING COURSE FOR FIRST RESPONDERS

Training to serve
200 learners by
end of January 2025

Jeff Ingraham has spent 42 years in education, including 15 years teaching students, working professionals and hobbyists how to fly drones according to Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regulations. In his eight years of teaching noncredit drone classes at Metropolitan Community College, a major source of pride is knowing the people he is empowering with the training are using it to make communities safer.

"We've had a ton of law enforcement officers, firefighters, utility line workers and other emergency first responders take our Saturday class over the years," Ingraham said.

The value of the class to emergency responders led to the College's development of a specialized course for first responders, which launched this fall, said Todd Hansen, MCC associate vice president for Community and Workforce Education.

"Tailoring the training to first responders helps make communities safer by enhancing emergency response capabilities across the entire spectrum of first responder careers. The first responder community has seen a lot of value in the training."

Images courtesy of Jeff Ingraham

“Tailoring the training to first responders helps make communities safer by enhancing emergency response capabilities across the entire spectrum of first responder careers,” Hansen said. “The first responder community has seen a lot of value in the training.”

Since the College began offering the specialized drone training class, more than 200 first responders are expected to receive the training by the close of January 2025. The three-day, eight-hour classes prepare participants to take the FAA Part 107 Remote Pilot Certificate test, which demonstrates understanding of the regulations, operating requirements and procedures for safely flying drones professionally in compliance with FAA Small UAS Rule (Part 107). The quality of the training has drawn participants from well outside the College’s four-county service area.

MCC Community and Workforce Education added January classes to meet the demand from first responders after initially offering courses through December.

“MCC is proud to support the critical work first responders do in our communities with a hands-on class that helps them get comfortable using this innovative technology,” Hansen said. “The course is designed to equip first responders with the essential skills, fundamentals and knowledge to operate drones in national airspace.”

The following agencies have received the training so far:

POLICE DEPARTMENTS:

Omaha, Bellevue, Blair, Beatrice, Council Bluffs, South Sioux City

SHERIFF’S DEPARTMENTS:

Douglas, Washington, Butler, Buffalo, Cuming, Dakota, Hall, Johnson, Polk, Platte

FIRE DEPARTMENTS:

Omaha, Fremont, Waterloo Volunteer, Lincoln

Josiah Black, a firefighter with the Waterloo Fire and Rescue Department, said he felt well prepared to take the final exam after completing the training.

“Metropolitan Community College provided incredible, in-depth training on the use of drones for the first responder community,” Black said. “The course, led by amazing instructors, helped us develop vital skills for piloting unmanned aircraft, which are becoming essential in search and rescue operations.”





TECH-ENABLED EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Ingraham said drones are extremely helpful in emergencies and natural disasters because of their speed, efficiency and support capabilities for search and rescue, surveying, resource distribution and much more. They can quickly reach high vantage points to provide views of wide areas or zoom in for high detail from a distance.

“The thermal imaging cameras help in search and rescue after a natural disaster to find people or for police to find suspects after a crime has been committed,” Ingraham said. “Firefighters can determine where the hot spots are on a roof, where things are deteriorating beneath and see if it’s safe for entry.”

Drones had ample opportunity to provide support during a destructive severe weather season across the four-county region in spring 2024. The time-saving technology assessed damage and streamlined resources in response to the EF4 tornado that touched down in Elkhorn, Bennington and Washington County on April 26, leveling several homes and shredding rooftops on dozens more. Drones were also deployed during flooding and power outages caused by powerful straight-line winds over the summer.

Ingraham said utility line workers get “almost giddy” when they discover how drones can aid and protect them by limiting direct exposure to high-voltage equipment. Without the surveying capabilities of drones during a winter storm, utility line workers typically have to inspect power lines and equipment for damage by going house to house on foot.

“Drones can literally just fly down the lines the whole way down the block to determine the best access points and routes to restore power,” Ingraham said. “They can zoom in on the tags of damaged equipment to find out what needs to be replaced and if it’s in supply. Without hardly getting out of their truck, [utility line workers] see exactly where the problems are and map out their next steps.”

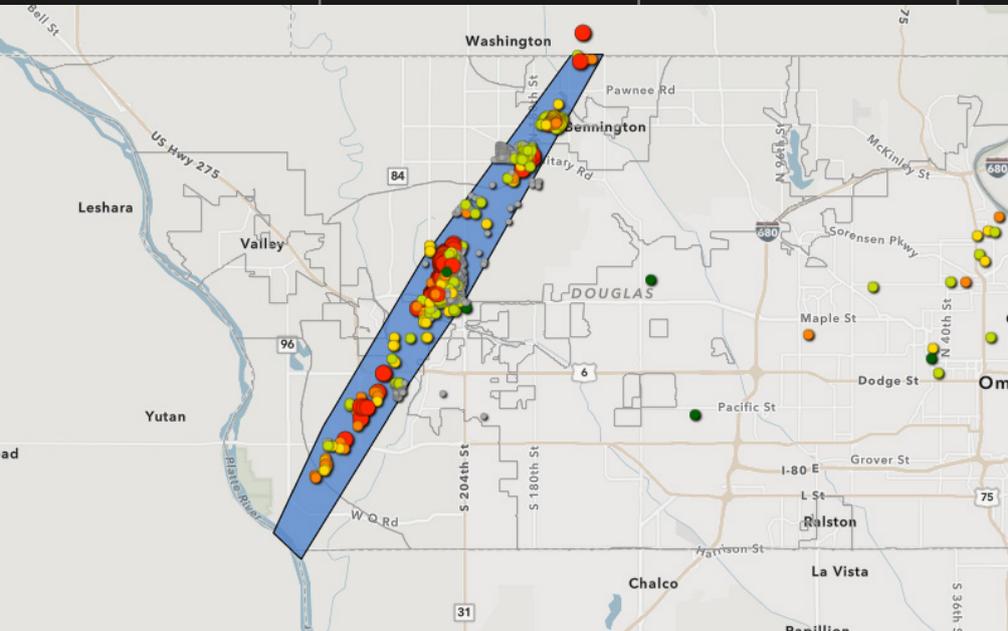
Jeff Ingraham
Manager of STEM Programming

Sgt. Tyler Friend from the Omaha Police Department’s Air Support Unit said the Arbor Day tornado provided a good example of how drone technology can inform emergency response and maximize department resources. By coordinating drone operations with the Nebraska Geographic Information System and Papillion Police Department, the organizations took more than 16,000 images to create a damage assessment of the tornado’s path, categorizing the degree of damage at each point (see recreated graphic on this page).

In the aftermath of the destructive tornado, Hansen said the Community and Workforce Education team got to work developing a drone class specifically for first responders. Offered in a condensed format from the traditional five-day, eight-hour noncredit class, the course is taught over three days. The content includes exam preparation, with hands-on flying time also built in. Course participants practice maneuvering drones through training zones on the Parade Grounds at the Fort Omaha Campus or near the College’s IT Express location in north downtown Omaha. Occasionally, a relevant use case for hands-on training presents itself during class.



Destroyed 183	Major 237	Minor 169	Affected 335	Inaccessible 0
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Damage Reports

- **Destroyed:** Total loss, structure is compromised, not repairable
- **Major:** Substantial structural damage to walls and roof, repairable
- **Minor:** One (1) wall damaged, section of roof missing or damaged, repairable
- **Affected:** Some shingle damage, few broken windows, cosmetic damage to siding, repairable
- **Inaccessible:** Access to property is blocked by obstruction
- **No damage**

Tornado Damage Area



For example, when a group of firefighters attending a training session began receiving notifications on their phones about a nearby blaze, they took the drones outside to observe the scene from about eight blocks away. In high detail, they watched firefighters respond in real time while maintaining a safe distance from the working fire.

Ingraham said the applications for law enforcement are far-reaching. Drones create situational awareness in crowd control and support at large public gatherings. They can access vantage points ideal for surveillance and assist in crime scene investigations. Additionally, drones can provide insight on traffic and help with accident reconstruction.

"You can scan a field and do a grid search in minutes with a drone that would take a team of 20 people to walk," Ingraham said.

Friend said the drones are changing the ways law enforcement can engage people involved in crimes, providing a first-person view without placing the officer in harm's way to obtain the visual.

"Perhaps what we are most proud of is using the small, indoor tactical drones as an officer-safety tool to enter buildings and conduct searches without having to send police officers in," Friend said.



TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES BEYOND THE FIRST RESPONDER COMMUNITY

From event photography to insurance adjusting and farming, freelance opportunities for drone operators are abundant through forums like Zeitview, which posts contract work available to licensed pilots. In the aftermath of last spring's storms, Ingraham said he received around a dozen requests each day to gather imagery for insurance appraisals.

"It could be a wedding where they want a drone movie of the bride and groom walking out of the church, or it could be a bank foreclosing on a house that wants to see the condition it's in," Ingraham said. "[A 107 license to fly drones provides] good income and career opportunities."

Although drones have been around for a while, Ingraham said they will soon become much more ubiquitous in American life. Amazon's Prime Air service provides one-hour drone delivery that recently expanded from College Station, Texas, to the West Valley area of Phoenix. Flying at speeds of up to 50 miles per hour at an altitude of 400 feet, its fleet delivers packages weighing five pounds or less to a customer-approved drop-off location below via a grappling hook. Amazon plans to expand its drone delivery services to more cities in 2025.

The Federal Aviation Administration also recently updated its regulations to allow for the integration of advanced air mobility aircraft, commonly known as air taxis, to operate safely in the National Airspace System. In the near future, hailing a "ride" to the airport from Uber or Lyft could technically become booking a "flight."

"As I like to say about these drones, the sky is the limit," Ingraham said.

For more information about the training or to register, contact Patti Mixayvanh at pmixayvanh@mccneb.edu or 531-MCC-2562.

FROM METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE WE BRING YOU:



**The official podcast of MCC, featuring the people,
programs and happenings of a community college
with no shortage of stories to tell.**



Recorded at the MCC Fort Omaha
Campus, hosted by MCC folks and
featuring all things MCC.

Listen on Apple Podcasts,
Spotify and YouTube.

MCC OFFERS NEW CRISIS RESPONSE AND INTERVENTION TRAINING CREDENTIAL FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Metropolitan Community College is offering a new credential training in safe and effective response for law enforcement officers and workers who commonly engage with people experiencing crisis. Starting in fall, an MCC Community and Workforce Education microcredential in Crisis Response and Intervention Training (CRIT) is available in modules tailored to law enforcement (40 hours); public safety (24 hours); and allied health careers, education and customer care professionals (16 hours).

Through funding available through the Nebraska Opioid Fund, MCC was awarded a grant by the

Nebraska Fire Marshall's Office to fund MCC Police training to become certified CRIT instructors.

The new CRIT curriculum offered at MCC builds on a previous training model with new content for engaging with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, including effective strategies for responding to people experiencing mental health- and substance use-related crises.

The goals of the training include:

- Expanding knowledge of mental health conditions, substance-use disorders and intellectual and developmental disabilities
- Creating connections with people who are affected
- Enhancing awareness of community services
- Emphasizing the de-escalation of crisis situations
- Supporting officer safety and wellness



Dave Bell, MCC deputy police chief, said information covered in the module for law enforcement officers has everyday applications. The training, offered in partnership with the MCC Fire Science Technology program, is designed to reduce the stigma associated with behavioral health conditions, increase empathy and grow participants' confidence in their ability to successfully intervene in a crisis.

"Mental illness is not a crime," Bell said. "This training is very humanistic. CRIT's overall philosophy is officer safety, public safety and diversion from the criminal justice system when possible. It shows that a police response isn't always going to result in someone going to jail."

Bob Lausten, MCC Police training coordinator, said a unique aspect of the training, which is offered at the MCC Sarpy Center, is that it is provided in tandem by a lead officer from the MCC Police Department and a lead behavioral health instructor from a partner organization. In addition to the learning modules, law enforcement officers will participate in role-playing scenarios covering a range of crisis events in which attendees receive real-time feedback on their response.

At the conclusion of the training, participants take an exam, which they are required to pass for certification. In addition to the microcredential, completers will receive a CRIT lapel pin for display on their work attire so people they encounter during their work can identify them as a resource during a crisis.



The Nebraska Crime Commission requires law enforcement agencies to complete continuing education for mental health training. The MCC CRIT credential is valid for three years.

"What really excites us about this training is its holistic approach and the ability to offer it beyond the law enforcement community. It is the latest nationally vetted curriculum, and it is also vetted by MCC Community and Workforce Education staff to meet the College's standards," Lausten said.

For more information on CRIT, contact Bob Lausten at rslausten@mccneb.edu or 531-MCC-2222.



MCC STUDENTS PARTNER WITH HOLY NAME HOUSING CORPORATION TO BUILD AFFORDABLE HOME IN MILLER PARK

In mid-August, the Metropolitan Community College Fort Omaha Campus was bustling with excitement as Construction and Building Science students watched their yearlong project being wheeled out of the Construction Education Center. A modular single-family home more than 150 students worked on over the 2023-24 academic year left the campus to be placed on its permanent foundation, blocks away from the campus.

The Construction and Building Science program's 2024 Capstone project was a collaboration with Holy Name Housing Corporation (HNHC), a nonprofit organization committed to offering affordable housing and homeownership education to Omaha-area residents. HNHC acquired a residential lot in the Miller Park neighborhood and provided the funding for the home's planning, construction and placement. Over the College's four-quarter academic year, students built the 1,165-square-foot residence in four modules inside the climate-controlled Capstone Lab in Building 25.

After completing construction during the final days of the summer quarter, students came to class to see a crew carefully maneuver the house onto a flatbed truck for its relocation to the Miller Park neighborhood. The four-bedroom home features two bathrooms and a single, attached garage. It was installed over a basement foundation later that afternoon.

Matt Cavanaugh, executive director of HNHC, said the home will fill a critical need for affordable housing in Omaha.





"There's pretty much an unending need for housing at this point, and it's at all levels," Cavanaugh said. "The cost of housing has become so high that creating homes that are attainable for people on all different income levels and all different experiences is a huge need."

The Capstone home will soon be on the market, ready to provide a family with a quality, affordable living space. HNHC will oversee the final steps, from placing the house on its foundation to preparing it for sale.

Beyond teaching hands-on construction and project management skills, the project allows students to serve the community. MCC Construction and Building Science instructor Andrew Henrichs, who led the project, said the Capstone home connected the students to service learning in a meaningful way.

"A lot of our students have either direct or indirect ties to this part of Omaha," Henrichs said, "and they want to see it go through a rebirth, as well. They take a passion in knowing that someone's going to live in the house. It just ties the learning all together."

MISSION-BASED LEARNING

Since 1983, HNHC has managed 400 affordable housing units and built more than 500 homes. The nonprofit offers three housing programs: the Crown Program, affordable senior housing and a Shared Equity Program, each designed to provide homeownership opportunities.

The Crown Program offers affordable rental homes along with a homeownership incentive account, which allocates a portion of tenants' monthly rent toward down payment assistance for future home purchases. The program also requires tenants to attend workshops annually to learn about basic life skills, financial literacy and asset-building strategies.

HNHC's Shared Equity Program involves a 10-year rental lease agreement where the cost of the home is split between HNHC and the tenants. This program mandates homeownership training, and at the end of the lease term, tenants have the opportunity to purchase the home, provided the lease has not been terminated and the tenant is not in default. Through community partnerships, HNHC secures funding to provide tenants with capital that traditional banks typically do not offer.

To address the housing shortage, HNHC is exploring factory-built housing as a cost-effective solution. Henrichs said HNHC will often purchase an empty lot or tear down a dilapidated

house to build a new residence, typically in northeast Omaha.

In its collaboration with MCC, HNHC saves on labor costs for its homes while providing students with practical industry knowledge and experience working in different phases of construction. During the Capstone project, MCC students gained a thorough understanding of construction by framing the modular house from the ground up.

"When you can actually build a whole house, it just makes that skill set sink in that much better," Henrichs said. "The students definitely have buy-in for it."

Erika Lopera, who has been taking remodeling classes at MCC for the past year, said she enjoyed giving back to the community through the project.

Lopera said she particularly liked learning about project management, tools and safety. From installing windows to painting walls and conducting inspections, everyone was involved in a variety of tasks. Lopera also appreciated the freedom to try different techniques and learn from mistakes during construction.

"It's super nice," Lopera said. "Every time that you try to do something, you try to do it well, because you know that someone is going to use it. It's for real. It's not a game."

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

In addition to HNHC, Henrichs said Pella Windows & Doors was another supportive partner. Pella donated the windows and provided guidance throughout the installation process, offering both cost savings and educational opportunities.

"The students are installing the windows to Pella standards supervised by Pella-certified installers," Henrichs said. "That simulates more of a true job site than we even could as instructors, so that's pretty cool."

The partnership between the College, HNHC and Pella is beneficial for everyone. When Cavanaugh visited the job site, he said he could sense the investment from the Pella team.

"You could tell that the Pella representatives were really excited about working with the students," Cavanaugh said. "I think everybody loves the idea."

Henrichs said as the project neared completion over the summer, the students working on the final touches experienced everything involved in preparing a house for the market.

NEW BEGINNINGS

"I think they learned this summer that not every part of construction is fun, but they learned what has to happen to get through the final stage," Henrichs said. "I think it really opens their eyes to the details, too, because they get to see it up until the end."

Conner Leu, a second-year student in the MCC Construction and Building Science program, said he learned many skills from the Capstone project. His work included building bathroom vanities, making kitchen cabinets and completing exterior siding.

Although Leu grew up around construction (his father is a residential contractor), he said the College's collaboration with HNHC was a new and rewarding experience.

"I think they do a really good job at teaching things the right way here," Leu said. "I think their instructors are really good, and HNHC gets a good quality home at a much better price."

Leu, who plans to work in the commercial sector after graduation, said the program provides specialized expertise hard to find outside of MCC.

"It's a thing that I think a lot of kids don't experience in high school," Leu said. "There are some kids here who have come in and have never had a chance to do anything even close to this."

"WHEN YOU CAN ACTUALLY BUILD A WHOLE HOUSE, IT JUST MAKES THAT SKILL SET SINK IN THAT MUCH BETTER."

Along with enhancing skills, the MCC program prepares students for the workforce by providing flexible educational pathways. The program offers two associate degree tracks — construction management and construction technology.

Shorter term credentials are also available. A Framing and Finishing Specialist Certificate of Achievement is offered, along with career certificates in Commercial Construction, Construction Management, General Construction/Remodeling, Masonry and Concrete Construction and Residential Carpentry.

Companies also gain job-ready employees when they hire MCC graduates. Henrichs said he wants to expand the program by teaching advanced cabinetmaking for the next house.

"Our Capstone projects provide something extra for our students, and I think they better us as instructors," Henrichs said.

Besides supporting students, Cavanaugh said HNHC is invested in a long-term collaboration with MCC because of the need for skilled workers. He wants more students to experience the joy of driving by a house and seeing a family sitting on a porch or setting up holiday lights, knowing they contributed to making those homeowners' dreams a reality.

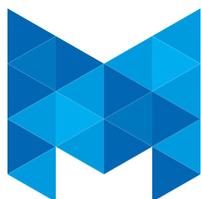
"We need people to understand how a home is built, to come onto our job site and work," Cavanaugh said. "We're going to really attack this home affordability issue from every angle."

Visit mccneb.edu/Construction for more information on the MCC Construction and Building Science program.



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