

Peshtigo vo-math students work with NWTTC career coach

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PESH TIG O — Miranda DeMars, a career coach with Northeastern Wisconsin Technical College (NWTTC), worked with vocational math students at Peshtigo High School recently. Donna Kalafut, who teaches math and psychology at PHS, prepares students for the fields of manufacturing, welding, plumbing, carpentry, electrical, HVAC as well as positions in food service and health care.

Kalafut said she works to help students “apply the concepts of algebra, geometry, and trigonometry to their chosen careers.”

Many college credits and certificates through NWTTC can be earned for free while students are still in high school. In vocational math, Kalafut works with the math students to both understand and apply math concepts to their chosen interests. This particular math class goes beyond textbook story problems.

“It’s more hands-on the students use rulers, protractors, compasses, calipers, micrometers and models in this math class,” she said.

“NWTTC has over 200 programs that prepare students for careers in high demand fields,” DeMars adds, “Our faculty have many industry connections, and our curriculums are designed with industry needs in mind. Around 88% of our students are employed within six months of graduation.”

One of Kalafut’s students is senior Nate Lemke, who is already accepted into NWTTC’s HVAC program. Upon graduation, Lemke will have many credentials including the Snap-on Precision measurement, Mike Rowe Work Ethic, Wisconsin Employability Skills, Manufacturing Skills Standards Council (MSSC) certifications.

DeMars has been a liaison to students in local schools since 2017. She helps students with



Miranda Demars of NWTTC explains post high school options recently to students at Peshtigo High School

career exploration as well as help with the application and financial aid process. Senior Natalie Peterson really liked the way DeMars explained how to pay for college.

“I work with students who are undecided about what they want to do after high school. Together, we explore in-demand career ideas complimentary with their values, skills, and interests,” DeMars said. “Countless employers in healthcare, information technology, trades, energy, transportation and engineering continue to hire and pay high wages to graduates with suitable credentials.”

DeMars adds that on average, “our associate degree candidates make around \$45,000 per year,

with many in-demand industries paying much more than that.”

DeMars expresses purpose and satisfaction knowing that she helps students achieve their dreams. “I get to witness students’ confidence grow as they go through the seemingly daunting task of college planning.” She adds, “Earning a post high school credential can transform lives and help lift future generations out of poverty. It’s an honor to be part of that process.”

NWTTC partners with qualified instructors to provide Peshtigo students college credit while attending equivalent classes taught at the high school. Peshtigo teacher Mike Paquette explains that Peshtigo is required to provide the machinery and

tools to complete the courses.

NWTTC carefully inspects the facilities and curriculum to certify NWTTC standards are being met.

Paquette teaches a shielded metal arc welding one credit class and a two credit CNC milling and G-Code which is CNC programming language. Teacher Dawn Waara teaches a four-credit Financial Accounting class, as well as Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Word which are one credit each. Students are able to take these classes for no cost as high schoolers and later enter NWTTC with several credits earned.

Waara explains, “We use the same curriculum and textbook as NWTTC students use in their classes.”

Senior Paris Grabian appreciates that, “It costs us less money and gives us a head start.”

Juniors and seniors in Kalafut’s vocational math class appreciate the variety of programs offered at NWTTC, the affordability of the programs, and the closeness of the campus. Junior Brooks Behnke is considering becoming an apprentice electrician or welder. “What I love most about the NWTTC programs is the variety of options. It’s not very expensive and it’s close.”

Junior Joseph Danielak mirrors that sentiment. “I love how affordable NWTTC is and I can stay in the area.”

Peshtigo students also have interest in the variety of hands-on programs offered at NWTTC.

Danielak is considering becoming a welder or fabricator because he would love to “work with my hands and overcome new challenges every day.”

Junior Troy Kosobucki is looking at NWTTC’s diesel mechanics or fire science programs and prefers “the hands-on training you get as compared to other colleges.” Kosobucki sees in these careers “lots of opportunities to grow, productive days, and ways to help out the community.”

NWTTC and Peshtigo High School are continuing to work together to offer opportunities for any interested students. Students are taught hands-on applicable skills in job-readiness classes that come with free college credits for high school students. Local employers need skilled workers and the Peshtigo School District is working to meet those demands.

Editor’s Note: This article was submitted by the Peshtigo School District.

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A productive forest requires active management

By BILL COOK

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ESCANABA — “Forest health” is an arguable concept. A healthy forest includes an element of mortality and decay, as well as vigorously-growing trees and intact understory. It also involves trajectories over time, that include a growing set of pressures and changing conditions.

“Nature knows best” is a popular mythology, but nature doesn’t “know” anything. Rather, nature is a set of processes, both innate and human-induced, that impact the succession, or orderly change, of forests over time. That successional pathway can be managed, rather than defaulting to “benign neglect.”

The best way to ensure a productive forest future is to build it. That requires active management, especially with the growing influences of human need, exotic species, deer depredation, and climate change.

It can be tough world out there.

A healthy forest possesses a full complement of composition, structure, and function that is appropriate at a particular point in time. These criteria won’t be the same for a thirty-year-old northern hardwood stand as compared to the same aged aspen stand, or middle-aged red pine, or swamp conifers in a bog. The criteria will be different for a young stand versus an overmature stand.

A forest or woodland with a green overstory and open “grassy” understory may be visually appealing. However, it is usually an ecological basket case.

On the other hand, an area demolished by severe winds or a wildfire is often quite healthy, as the “catastrophic disturbance” resets the process of forest succession.

Visual quality is a particularly lousy measure of forest and ecological health.

Let’s return to the idea of composition, structure, and function.

Composition is about the species mix, and relative abundance of those species. Forests are dominated by trees, so trees are the dominant players in forest ecology, along with the soil. Some forest types, such as jack pine, have naturally fewer tree species, while rich northern hardwood stands can rival many tropical forests in terms of diversity.

Identifying a tree is fun, but knowing why it’s there, what that species’ presence implies, and who else should be present is more rewarding, yet.

The tricky thing about composition is seeing what is absent, rather than only what is there. Missing components are overlooked by casual observers. Also, a forest dominated by a single species, especially at a particular point in time, might be healthy if it’s aspen, but unhealthy if it’s sugar maple. “Rules” aren’t universal.

Forest structure involves



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Northern Hardwood health and vigor are strongly impacted by the amount of light penetrating the forest canopy. This ecological function can be managed through careful forest thinning.

such aspects as vertical “layers” and forest density variation across the landscape. For example, an oak woodland ought to have a mix of woody species that provide branches from the ground to the top of the canopy. When understory shrubs and young trees are absent, one must wonder why.

Function involves many of the environmental goods and services that we all depend upon, from wood, to water, to wildlife habitat. Tree vigor has much to do with function

and forest health. Understanding function can get hairy, as it includes sciences that track energy, nutrients, competition, symbioses, and change over time. Functions are not often clearly visible from a casual walk in the woods. To fully understand function, one must first be versed in composition and structure. Function has much to do with “reading the landscape” and familiarity with the biological sciences.

A good example of putting all this together might be the observation of a single species. Let’s say a black-throated blue warbler, a tiny bird that most people don’t know about. Not often seen, it’s the male call that perks one’s awareness of its presence. This identification is about “composition.”

Should this tweety-bird be heard in Michigan, then you’re probably in the U.P. or parts of the northern lower. You’ll likely be strolling through a northern hardwood stand, by definition, one dominated by sugar maple. You won’t see much because the understory is fairly dense. A structural aspect. Chances are that the forest is in the middle to latter stages of forest succession. Another structural aspect, with bit of function tossed-in.

This forest harbors many wildlife species, but if there’s an understory, the deer densities are at tolerable levels. The ground is covered by fairly thick mats of decaying leaves and litter fall, unless earthworm densities are high (an exotic set of species).

The soil is well-protected from the erosive power of spring melt and heavy summer thunderstorms. The air is cooler and moister

than open areas. Nutrients are recycling at rates slower than they’re lost to the ground. Some of these “free” nutrients find their way to the streams and rivers, therefore supporting aquatic insects, that feed trout, which is why you might be strolling in the forest in the first place.

These factors contain elements of function.

Forest health is far more than epidemics of gypsy moth, spruce budworm, garlic mustard, or the ratio of mortality to growth. It’s more than green space that relieves the abused souls of urbanites. It’s more than appreciating the ephemeral spring blooms or the colors of fall or the quiet of winter.

To manage a forest is to understand the variable relationships of composition, structure, and function, in addition to aspects of economics, harvesting, and markets. This is the domain of the professional forester and wildlife biologist. If you’re fortunate enough to own a forest, consider hiring this sort of expertise to build the sort of forest you want to see in the future. It can be a rewarding set of experiences.

Bill Cook is a retired MSU Extension forester/biologist based out of Escanaba.

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