

BUSINESS

Marvin, Northland community college start new degree program to help staffing shortage

Marvin and Northland Community and Technical College are bringing a flexible advanced manufacturing program to Warroad.

By Patrick Kennedy (<https://www.startribune.com/patrick-kennedy/6165811/>) Star Tribune |

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As in many factories, the machinery at the windows and door manufacturer Marvin has become more complicated to run.

As a result, there is a shortage of workers trained to operate the robots and automated machinery.

Marvin, located in Warroad near the Canadian border, decided it needed to train its workers and prospective new ones in the area to run the increasingly complicated and expensive machines.

The closest educational partner with an existing program was 80 miles away, so the company decided to work with Northland Community and Technical College and build a new degree option.

"We really talked a lot about what as a community we needed ... and how we wanted it to be different," said Peggy Anderholm, Marvin's education manager. "We knew we wanted a mechatronics program, that was a given, and we wanted it to be in Warroad, but we also wanted a different delivery model."

So for three years — thanks to support from the company and a \$100,000 grant from Minnesota State Advanced Manufacturing Center of Excellence out of Bemidji State University — the college has designed an advanced manufacturing and mechatronics training program.

It will be housed in the new Advanced Resource Center for Innovation and Education, built on a piece of land the size of a city block that was donated by Marvin. The ARC center will become Northland's fourth campus. The cost of developing the program and building the space to hold it was not disclosed.

Northland had an instructor who had worked in manufacturing and understood that continuing education leads to retention. So the program was designed to be flexible around work schedules.

"The other big ask I had for them is what I call credit for prior learning, what they call structured credit," Anderholm said.



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Marvin windows is working with Northland Community and Technical College to establish a flexible mechatronics degree program.

Each class will include online materials, a hands-on lab component and a mastery assessment. Each class will be offered every semester and courses will be self-paced with the only deadline being the end of the semester.

"Ideally, education needs to be more like Amazon: Find a course you like, add it to the cart, and starting learning today," said Andrew Dahlen, a mechatronics instructor at Northland Community and Technical College.

Students will be able to focus on the training they need, apply for credit for work they have done in other areas and choose to finish with a two-year degree or a certificate.

Because life happens, students in the program are not limited to a traditional semester system and are able to start and pause the program at any time.

"Those of us who went to college know that some of college was jumping through hoops," Anderholm said. "We are trying to take the hoop-jumping out of it."

The ARC building will house about 4,000 square feet of lab space, a student study and collaboration space and room for student services. Anderholm jokes it will have a campus feel because it sits kitty-corner from both a brewery and a coffee shop.

At least one of the instructors will live in Warroad to help the program become embedded into the community, Anderholm said.

Warroad High School students will also be able to take four courses through the mechatronics program that can be counted as college credits.

Classes start in January.

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