

New faces joining health care workforce



2021 Medical Assistant graduate Cindi Clark is ready for a new career in healthcare.

Twenty-three Clark College students who earned their degree in Medical Assistant celebrated their achievement with family and friends during a virtual Pinning ceremony on January 20.

For student Candi Clark, the Pinning ceremony was the culmination of longtime family support and inspiration. As a teen, Clark attended the Pinning ceremony for her mother, Rhonda Hansen-Boyle, who earned her nursing degree at Clark College and now works at the Veterans Administration Medical Center.

During the virtual ceremony, Clark was surrounded by her supportive family—her mother, father and sister—to celebrate her graduation. She says her family's support was instrumental to her success as she navigated life's obstacles—including a global pandemic—to earn her degree.

"I've always had a calling to help people," she said. "Once I told my mother I wanted to go into the medical field, my mom

was 100 percent behind me.”

Medical assistants are in demand. Many will join the healthcare workforce in the coming weeks. The Vancouver Clinic hired 19 of the 23 students.

In addition to her supportive family, Clark is thankful for the help and guidance she received from WorkSource, which has partnered with Clark College to help students succeed.

WorkSource uses federal funding through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and provides critical support and services to workers who want to develop the necessary skills for a good job in high-demand fields such as health care services. Available services include tuition assistance, book allowances, uniforms, supplies, and career counseling.

The program is open to a wide variety of adults including those who have been laid off, displaced, or who are under-employed. Low-income adults and veterans also are eligible.

“Our goal is to get people back to work in high-demand occupations that provide stable and meaningful employment to benefit their families and the community,” said Karin LaValla, WorkSource Health Care Liaison. “By partnering with Clark College, we can integrate our services, working together to provide those wrap-around supports to help students succeed.”

LaValla and her team work directly with Dr. Sarah Kuzera, Director of the Medical Assisting Program at Clark College. They attend the orientation for new students and explain their program. In this year’s class, nearly half of the students were eligible for WorkSource services.

“They receive help with tuition, books, transportation, childcare, financial and job coaching,” said Kuzera. “This has been a stressful year for our students. We’re grateful to

have WorkSource at our side as active partners helping our students succeed.”

“WorkSource has been so helpful—a combination coach and fairy godmother,” said Candi Clark. “When I needed help with tuition, supplies—even scrubs—they were there for me. It’s made all the difference in being able to complete my studies.”

WorkSource also helps students find externships and employment. The federal program provides employers up to 50 percent wage reimbursement for a student’s first 30 to 60 days on the job. Candi Clark has already interned at Vancouver Clinic doing patient care and is eager to complete her testing and get to work.

Certified Medical Assistants are in high demand right now, in part because of the pandemic. Medical assistants work directly with physicians and patients in both the clinical and administrative settings. They maintain the daily workflow of a medical office.

“Our graduates are in high demand,” said Kuzera. “Our program is growing.”

The next class, called a cohort, begins spring term; the first day of classes is April 5. Interested students can learn more on the college’s Medical Assisting page.

During the Pinning ceremony—a tradition in many health care programs—the graduates celebrated one another via Zoom. “It’s harder to do basic things, like draw blood, during a pandemic,” said Candi Clark. “But we figured it out and we can be proud of ourselves that we didn’t give up.”



Rhonda Hansen-Boyle, *left*, congratulates her daughter Candi Clark on graduating from the Clark College Medical Assistant program during a virtual pinning ceremony. Hansen-Boyle is an alumnus of the college's Nursing program.

Clark's story came full circle during the Pinning ceremony, when her mother attached the pin to her daughter's shirt. In the family photo taken immediately after the pinning, Clark proudly wears her pin. Her smiling mother is reaching out to touch her daughter's shoulder.

"This is so exciting for me and my family," Clark said. "It's been a long road to get here. I can't wait to get to work. Healthcare is kind of the family business. We gravitate to the helping professions. It's where we can make a difference."

For students interested in learning more about WorkSource Washington and its educational training opportunities for job-seekers can visit WorkSource's website.

Clark's Career Launch putting

students to work



An open house for Clark College's Automotive Technologies in 2019 showcased the college's partnership with Dick Hannah Automotive.

The State of Washington has recognized Clark College for its outstanding work in Career Launch programs that support student learning and employment. Two Clark College automotive programs have been endorsed by the state's Career Launch Initiative. That good news was announced April 1.

The **Hannah initiative for Technician Education** (HiTECC) supporting area Honda/Acura, Audi, and the Dick Hannah dealerships and the **Toyota Technician & Education Network** (T-TEN) supporting area Toyota/Lexus have been accepted into the state network of Career Launch programs.

"We have forged dealer partnerships that have helped make our programs successful. Our 'Earn and Learn' model really

complements those dealers who have a desire to ‘grow their own’ technician,” said Tonia Haney, head of Clark College Automotive Technologies. “Students completing these programs will have the experience and certifications to start their career. Most importantly, our graduates will have a job in a dealership that is invested in helping them grow into a successful technician.”

Opportunities to expand



Kristin Kepner completed the automotive program in 2017 and is currently working at Toyota of Portland.

This endorsement allows Clark College to apply for additional state grants to invest in equipment and technology. It also helps the programs expand to increase the number of the students and automotive dealership partners.

Both programs train technicians to work in the automotive industry. Clark's students enrolled in a Dealer Ready program participate in paid internships, receive factory certified training, and graduate with credentials from highly

respected automotive industry organizations including the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE).

Students learn current automotive technology by working in a 14,000-square-foot facility on state-of-the-art simulators and late-model vehicles donated by local industry.

“Because of our collaboration with Clark College and the T-TEN program, we are able to strengthen our dealership’s core, position our company for the future, and put our people in a position to win,” said Dan Morton, Shop Manager and Diagnostic Specialist at Kuni Lexus of Portland.

High-Demand Jobs



Governor Jay Inslee meets Clark College Mechatronics students February 20, 2020 at a meeting at SEH America with Career Launch and community partners in Southwest Washington.

Clark’s graduates are in high demand by dealerships and

experience an accelerated path to better pay and benefits. Clark College is certified by the Automotive Service Excellence Education Foundation and has been training automotive technicians for more than 40 years.

Clark now has three programs that are Career Launch endorsed. Clark's Mechatronics program was certified last fall, working with business partner SEH-America. With Career Launch support, additional high-tech companies in Clark County plan to launch similar partnerships this fall.

In February, Governor Jay Inslee visited SEH-America to meet with Clark students and the Career Launch partners to learn more about the program and hear from students.

Students have the benefit of working a part-time job in the automotive industry. The company pays the student's tuition while they attend Clark to earn their certificate or degree. The partnership relies on the college's ability to work with employers ensuring curriculum is relevant to the local industry. It's a partnership that maximizes student success.

"This is a great opportunity for Clark students," said Dr. Sandra Fowler-Hill, Interim President of Clark College. "Working strategically with our industry partners, we can help develop the talent pipeline that will allow local companies to grow and will provide outstanding opportunities for our students to succeed."

Real help from the "real

world”



During his keynote speech at Clark College’s 2016 Advisory Breakfast, Vancouver businessman Don Brunell holds up a transistor radio to show how quickly technology can become obsolete.

Last Wednesday Clark College honored the more than 250 men and women from over 160 business and organizations who serve on the college’s 28 advisory boards for professional and technical programs. These industry professionals provide “real-world” guidance for Clark’s professional and technical programs to ensure students receive current, cutting-edge training to succeed in the workplace and enhance the regional workforce.

This year’s breakfast featured guest speaker Don Brunell, a

partner at the Vancouver communications firm Brunell Creative. He is the retired president of the Association of Washington Business (AWB). Nationally, he has served as chair of the National Industrial Council for the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), the Conference of State Manufacturing Associations (COSMA), and the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board under Governors Lowry, Locke and Gregoire. He currently serves on the boards of AAA-Washington, Forterra, *Washington Business Week*, Identity Clark County and WGU-Washington.

“It’s really important at the state level to have a connectivity with local community and technical colleges because this is really where the rubber meets the road,” said Brunell. “There are a lot of good things happening in Washington, and it’s because our community and technical colleges listen to the folks who are our customers.”

Brunell also emphasized the need for the community to serve as advisors to the college by participating in these committees, as well as to be good advisors to legislators.

“The advanced manufacturing center [at Clark] is a very important project to have in this county,” he added. “The [Clark College at Boschma Farms] north campus is where a lot of skills training will be. We need to have those types of investments here, or we will not be able to keep large businesses like WaferTech, SEH and Georgia Pacific here, along with the small businesses.”



Clark graduate
April Gapsch.

The event also included speeches from April Gapsch, a Clark graduate and chair of the Business Medical Office Advisory Committee, and from current welding students Peter Smith and Pachino Palmore. All three speakers were able to attend Clark as a result of the Worker Retraining Program. Smith and Palmore will graduate in June.

“For many years, I had a dream of going to college, but didn’t think it was possible. Then I found myself in a unique situation, without a job or prospects,” said Gapsch. “The local workforce office referred me to Clark College and the Worker Retraining Program. I was enrolled the next day, and graduated with honors last summer. I was hired by Peace Health five months after graduation.”



Welding students Pachino Palmer and Peter Smith show off some of the work they've produced in their classroom.

Clark College offers more than 25 professional and technical education programs. Currently, 39 percent of credit-seeking students enrolled at Clark College are pursuing a degree or certificate in professional and technical education. In 2014-2015, 80 percent of students who completed a career and technical degree or certificate, or earned 45-plus college-level credits prior to leaving, were employed within nine months.

Clark College Advisory Committee members, who are appointed by the administration of a college, provide direction and specifications for current professional and technical education programs, and help identify emerging occupations and skills needed. For more information about the college's advisory committees, visit www.clark.edu/advisory.

More photos from the event can be found on our Flickr page.

Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley

Help Clark students dress for success



Clark staff members help sort ties during the 2013 Career Clothing Closet, an annual event that provides Clark students with free professional attire.

Clark College Career Services is seeking clothing and cash donations for its 11th Annual Career Clothing Closet, which provides professional and/or interview clothing to Clark College students at no cost.

The Closet will be held April 23 and 24 in advance of Clark College Career Days, the college's annual career fair that precedes spring graduation.

While students have access to lots of career-preparation support while at Clark—from resume clinics to industry-specific certification programs—many lack the resources to purchase new outfits appropriate to their chosen careers as they prepare to enter the job market after graduation. As Career Services Director Edie Blakley explains, “The Career Clothing Closet helps our students put their best selves forward in an interview or as they begin their careers.

Beginning a new career can be scary, and the right clothing can help students feel confident.”

The Closet is accepting new or gently used professional, workplace-appropriate clothing for both men and women. New this year, the Closet is also accepting industry-specific clothing (including scrubs, steel-toed work boots, baking uniforms, welding and construction-specific clothing) as well as cash donations. All clothing donations should be in excellent condition, laundered or dry-cleaned prior to donation. Undergarments and torn or stained clothing will not be accepted. Cash donations will be used to purchase clothing in underrepresented sizes.

Donations may be dropped off by April 10 at Clark College Career Services, located in room PUB 002 on ground level of the Penguin Union Building, 1933 Fort Vancouver Way, Vancouver WA 98663. Hours of operation: Monday-Thursday 7:30 a.m. – 6 p.m., Friday 10 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. All donations are tax deductible; receipts will be provided. Driving directions and parking maps are available at www.clark.edu/maps. Questions may be directed to Sharon Orr at sorr@clark.edu.

While donations will be accepted through April 10, organizers are hoping to motivate donors to give now. “We know that this is a time of year when many people are getting new clothes for the holidays and purging their closets, and also when people are looking for end-of-the-year tax deductions,” explains Blakley. “Also, the more donations we gather, the more students we can help, so collecting for the Career Clothing Closet really is a year-round process for us.”

Last year, the Closet provided professional clothing to more than 200 Clark students.

Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley

Clark to offer its first bachelor's degree



This has been a year of highlights for Clark's Dental Hygiene program, including the opening of the Firstenberg Family Dental Hygiene Education and Care Center and now the introduction of a Bachelor of Applied Science degree.

The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) has approved Clark College's proposal to add the college's first baccalaureate degree. Starting in the fall of 2015 the college will offer a Bachelor of Applied Science in Dental Hygiene.

The B.A.S. in Dental Hygiene will benefit both students and

the community, according to Dr. Tim Cook, Vice President of Instruction at Clark College. He explained that this program opens up additional job opportunities to students, while adding very few additional courses to their degree plan. "Previously, students in the Associate of Applied Science program in Dental Hygiene were here for four or more years because of the requirements of the program," Dr. Cook said. "Being able to offer this degree allows Clark students to earn a bachelor's degree in the same time." The new program builds on the current dental hygiene program, with an increased emphasis on research and educational methodologies. Because all dental hygiene curriculum is standardized by the Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA), minimal changes to the A.A. program are required.

The new B.A.S. in Dental Hygiene is Clark College's first baccalaureate degree. Students with an associate degree are typically employed in private practice offices or clinics. The bachelor's degree provides opportunities for dental hygienists to work in dental sales, public health, and research. "Like many other healthcare professions, dental hygiene has experienced a gradual yet steady movement toward the bachelor's degree as the desirable degree for entry-level professionals," Dr. Cook stated.

The approval of this program caps off a year of highlights for the program, including the opening of the Firstenburg Family Dental Hygiene Education and Care Center. The \$3.3 million renovation was funded by donations from a variety of entities including the Firstenburg Foundation, Roy and Virginia Andersen Endowment, M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust, John A. and Helen M. Cartales Foundation, and many others. Renovations of the space allow the program to serve more students and more patients – particularly children and underserved populations.

The addition of the B.A.S. in Dental Hygiene is part of a larger push to expand access to baccalaureate education in Washington State that began with the passage of HB1794 by the

Washington Legislature in 2005. This bill, which included language allowing community and technical colleges to begin offering applied baccalaureate degree programs, was designed to meet the state's goal of increasing the number of baccalaureate degrees earned in Washington to 42,400 by 2019. As of the fall of 2013, there are 11 colleges in the State Board of Community and Technical College (SBCTC) system offering 23 different applied baccalaureate degrees.

Applied baccalaureate programs are seen as a perfect fit for community and technical colleges because they fill the gap some employers are finding in filling jobs that require both technical proficiency and the skills that a baccalaureate degree typically provides. These degrees also broaden the range of jobs and promotion opportunities available to students, both key goals for community and technical colleges.

Training Tomorrow's Workforce



Welding instructor Caleb White, left, shows students Grant Gwilliam and Cody Cook how to use a CNC plasma table, which is used in the computer-assisted cutting of metals. White has been active in developing new curriculum that teaches Clark students fabrication, a skill many local employers are seeking.

This summer, Clark is taking the next step in boosting our region's economy by introducing a new technical program and adjusting some existing programs to better meet the needs of today's employers.

Highlights of these changes include:

- A new Industrial Maintenance Technician (IMT) program that combines a selection of Clark's existing Mechatronics, Machining, and Welding courses to train students on how to provide preventive maintenance and repair support to manufacturing and other mechanical industries. Leaders from regional industry have indicated a strong need for qualified IMTs, and labor

surveys show that the average annual wage for IMTs is \$43,000.

- Clark's Welding program is introducing all-new curriculum that not only expands the variety of welding processes taught but teaches students how to use those processes in fabrication, a skill many local employers are seeking.
- Starting fall quarter 2014, Clark's Mechatronics and Machining programs will begin offering night classes to help accommodate the schedules of current industrial workers who need to expand their skill sets to meet the changing needs of modern industry.

Anyone interested in enrolling in these programs can visit www.clark.edu/gotech to learn more.

All these changes were made in direct consultation with local employers.



Damond Batties looks on while Nicole Doyle works in an argon purge chamber, which is used in welding air-sensitive materials like stainless steel and titanium that are common in modern industry.

“As the largest workforce training provider in Southwest

Washington, Clark College continually meets the needs of the business community and ensures that students are equipped with high-demand, relevant skills, whether they are full-time students entering the workforce or incumbent workers developing new skills to improve the productivity of their employers,” said Michelle Giovannozzi, Director of Corporate & Community Partnerships for Clark College Corporate & Continuing Education. “Over the last year, we partnered with regional manufacturers to develop the new Industrial Maintenance Technician program and the revised Welding curriculum in order to support growth through the economic recovery and beyond.”

“The underlying driver for all of Clark College’s Career and Technical Education programs is to provide students with relevant and rigorous educational opportunities that give them the skills that meet the workforce demands for our local and regional industries,” said Genevieve Howard, who as Clark’s Dean of Workforce, Career & Technical Education oversees the college’s Mechatronics, Machining, and Welding programs, as well as such well-regarded programs as Computer-Aided Drafting & Design and Automotive Technology.

Clark College has long served as the premier resource for training skilled technicians who meet the needs of this region’s industry. Through advisory committees and regular outreach, the college has developed partnerships that allow it to respond quickly to the needs of local employers. These new changes are part of that practice—a practice that has made the college Southwest Washington’s best source for career and technical training.

Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley

Clark College to expand in the Gorge



Bingen, Wash., is the site of a new Clark College facility offering educational opportunity to the residents of the Columbia River Gorge.

Less than a year after establishing a location in the Columbia River Gorge, Clark College is expanding its academic and technical offerings and moving into a new, larger facility.

The new location in Bingen, Wash., which is still being negotiated, would house both new classes designed for the needs of local employers as well as existing classes currently run out of Clark's facility at the Wind River Education Center in nearby Carson. That facility was opened in fall 2013 in response to widespread interest from Columbia Gorge residents and school districts in having access to affordable, college-level classes; it will close when the Bingen facility opens in order to house all Clark programs in one convenient location.

The expansion is made possible in part by a \$315,000 grant received by the college from the State of Washington to increase enrollment in aerospace education, approximately half of which is going to provide STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) education at the Bingen facility. The grant is part of an \$8 million, statewide program to help two-

year and technical colleges prepare future employees in the aerospace field.

The new Bingen location will include a computer lab and classroom space for classes in Computer Aided Design and Drafting (CADD), a skill that many regional employers cited as in high demand. The college will also be hiring a full-time employee in the Columbia River Gorge. The college is on an aggressive timeline, and will be ready to offer classes in the fall of 2014.

The college is also moving its Transitional Studies (basic education, GED preparation, and ESL) programs and other academic offerings previously provided at Wind River to the new Bingen facility. These other offerings include classes taken by area high school students through Washington State's Running Start program, which allows students to take college-level classes while still enrolled in high school for little or no tuition—potentially earning their associate degree while still in high school.

Additionally, Clark College Corporate and Continuing Education (CCE) will use the new facility to continue and expand its specialized training for local employers. Beginning in fall 2014, CCE will also begin providing professional-development courses to the public, including LEAN, blueprint reading, Excel, Word, Outlook, Business Writing, email etiquette and communication, and essentials of supervision.

A full list of courses and activities in the Columbia River Gorge will be available on the Clark College website later this summer.

Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley

Something to Smile About



A crowd applauds the ribbon cutting of the new Firstenberg Family Dental Hygiene Education and Care Center.

The Firstenberg Family Dental Hygiene Education and Care Center officially opened with the cutting of a ribbon during a ceremony on June 17, 2014. About 75 guests joined President Robert K. Knight, dental faculty and students, Clark College trustees and Clark College Foundation board of directors to thank individuals, foundations and groups that provided funding for upgrades and new equipment.

Knight thanked the dental faculty, staff and students for doubling up on lab time and dedicating themselves to the refurbishing process. He noted that schedules were extra demanding—some classes ran from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m.—because of space restrictions.

At \$1.5 million, The Firstenburg Foundation provided the lead gift for the care center. Knight noted how The Firstenburg Foundation is an example of partnerships that make Clark County and Southwest Washington a better place to live and work.

“The Firstenburg Foundation is supporting enhancements to a facility that helps our students get the experience of working in a modern dental setting. Our students, in turn, are sought-after to fill dental hygiene jobs in the region and beyond. The Firstenburg Foundation, therefore, has a direct impact on the health and welfare of our region and on Clark’s ability to maximize student learning,” he said.

Bill Firstenburg said his father was a stalwart supporter of Clark College and would have been proud of the new facility.

“Some would have called him conservative, but he didn’t mind spending money if he got value out of it. You’ve got value here to the community. The Dental Hygiene program in particular, gives support and care to those who can’t afford it,” he said.

Dental student and All-Washington Academic nominee Amelia Longbons ’14 said an important lesson she learned was the overall health effects proper dental care has on society. “Dental hygiene is about prevention and attaining and keeping good health. This facility helps students learn so we can help improve the health of the community.”

Blake Bowers, the dean of Business and Health Sciences, said Clark’s Dental Hygiene department and its Clark County partners offer \$600,000 worth of free dental services to children during its annual Children’s Dental Health Day, in addition to other outreach efforts.

“There is a lot of caring and compassion that occurs within our program at all levels,” he said.

The renovations included adding six more patient chairs, new equipment and technology, paperless charting and an advanced radiology suite. The clinic now complies with federal patient privacy and confidentiality requirements so that they can continue to serve thousands of community members.

Nearly \$3.3 million in donations from a variety of entities—including The Firstenburg Foundation, Roy and Virginia Andersen Endowment, M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust, John A. and Helen M. Cartales Foundation and many others—made the renovations possible.

Upgrades were necessary in order for Clark to keep pace with the demand for workforce readiness and federal patient privacy rules in the dental hygiene field.

The Oregon-based company, A-dec, built custom-made work stations including modular chairs, cabinets, lights and computer monitor mounts for the space.

Clark's Dental Hygiene program provides education and access to oral health care to low-income residents. The clinic fills 3,200 appointments for 2,000 patients annually. Students serve the community by participating in oral health programs in area schools and caring for patients at the Free Clinic of Southwest Washington, Clark County Skills Center, and Share, a Vancouver-based homeless service.

See more photos on [Flickr](#)

A version of this story originally appeared on the Clark College Foundation website.

Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley