Afton mother and son chase career dreams together at NTC

NTC serves high school and adult students, and sometimes both generations of one family at the same time. Such is true for Kristen Hopkins, a mother currently enrolled in NTC’s Practical Nursing program and her son Nathaniel Shire, a first-year Culinary Arts student.

The mother and son duo, who carpool to school together every morning, are both excited about the opportunity to chase their dreams and think it’s even more fun that they get to do it together.

They also spend a lot of time in the kitchen together. Hopkins has certainly helped nurture Shire’s love of food. In addition to cooking with his mom and the influence of many cooking shows they watched together over the years, Shire’s father is an executive chef in Oregon.

“This is just something I have always wanted to do,” said Shire. “I love to cook. I especially love to cook for other people. I have a classmate who is interested in opening his own business after graduating and I would love to be able to work with him.”

The family only recently moved to Oklahoma from Georgia after Hopkins’ husband retired from a 20-year career with the Air Force.

Shire was lucky enough to move here just in time to be one of the first students to use the newly-remodeled and expanded Culinary Arts classroom.

Hopkins started by taking her CNA and all the required courses to be accepted into nursing school through adult education classes.

“After my husband’s retirement, I decided it was time for me to follow my dream of being a nurse,” said Hopkins. “My family has been very supportive.”

For Hopkins, the dream of becoming a nurse is something she has been holding onto since she was eight years old.

“I was diagnosed with Melanoma when I was a little girl,” said Hopkins. “At that time the nurses still wore the white uniforms with the caps and shoes and tights. They were people who I really looked up to and they just really stood out to me as being special. They took such good care of me and were so compassionate. I just wanted to be like them.”

Following her personal dreams is only part of the equation for why the mother of three chose NTC.

“I really wanted to be a role model for my children,” said Shire. “I didn’t continue my education when I was younger, but they have always known I wanted to be a nurse. So I wanted to prove to them that you no matter how old you are or where you have been, it’s never too late to follow your dreams.”

Hopkins is seen by her classmates as the “mothering one” – a role with which she is obviously okay.

“I absolutely love it here,” said Hopkins.
Welch Skill Center opened in July of 2015, in response to an obvious need in Oklahoma for older youth to be dependent and able to make their own way upon turning 18. Through a partnership between Northeast Technology Center’s Afton Campus and the Office of Juvenile Affairs, the skill center residents are able to travel the 17 miles from the center to NTC’s campus to attend training courses designed especially for them. The classes available to the Skill Center residents are Basic Electricity I and II, Basic Welding I and II, Plant/Facility Maintenance Technician, Introduction to Computers and Heat and Air Conditioning I and II.

While vocational training has been an important part of the Welch Skill Center program development, upon opening, it was never envisioned that all students would attend Northeast Tech. But now there is a great partnership between the two organizations. It’s hard to say you’re successful after just one year, but at this point, every student has received a certificate. The students see it as a reward to be able to come to NTC. The instructors report that the students are attentive and hard working.

Claremore - A lot of students come through NTC’s programs each year, but it’s not often that four successful students are all from the same family. That’s what makes Hunter, Jordan, Jack and Grace Smith special. Both of the older brothers, Hunter and Jordan, completed the EAST program at the Claremore Campus before going on to college. Hunter is now at Rogers State University working toward a degree in Applied Technology and Jordan just transferring to OSU to finish his degree in Aerospace Engineering after completing three years at RSU. The youngest brother, Jack, opted to follow in his brothers’ footsteps and is currently enrolled in the EAST program. Grace is the only sibling who went through a different program. She attends the Health Careers program. The four Smith siblings are great advocates of NTC!

Kansas - Students at our Kansas Campus recently had a day of fun as faculty and staff hosted its semi-annual Student Appreciation Day. Staff grilled hot dogs and set up several game stations for the students. Basketball, nine-square, volleyball, Foosball, board games and tug-of-war were just some of the activities in which they could participate. And while we hope our students know how much we appreciate them, what really made the day special was when the Welding class turned Student Appreciation Day into Bonnie Appreciation Day. In honor of her retirement next week, the class, led by adult welding student Mark Penner, presented Lead Culinarian Bonnie Parmain with a vase they welded. Then one by one, each student helped her fill the vase by presenting her with roses and hugs. Bonnie, you will be missed!

Pryor - NTC recently implemented LOKDOWN, a cloud-based communication tool used by building staff, administrators and emergency responders to communicate during an emergency event. This was led by the Pryor Campus after an incident involving the Mayes County Sheriff’s Department put them on lock down for several hours. One of the lessons learned from that situation was that we needed to communicate better with our staff during these types of situations. New Student Advisor Willie Ng had worked with LOKDOWN at his previous job and recommended it to NTC. The cost to the NTC district for this technology is $100 per month and includes all six NTC locations. LOKDOWN does not replace any other protocol previously being used in emergency situations, but does offer a way to improve that protocol.

Business & Industry

Afton Adult Ed partnership provides skills to underprivileged youth

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