

'We want you to stay here': Crawford Tech students sign with local companies



MIKE CROWLEY/Meadville Tribune photos

A group of Crawford Tech seniors sign their letters of intent, signifying their decisions to accept jobs with local companies following graduation next month. RIGHT: Crawford Tech Assistant Director Mike Costa (left) distributes yard signs at the school's signing day ceremony Thursday.

By Mike Crowley
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More than 400 people assembled in the Meadville Area Senior High auditorium on Thursday to celebrate the accomplishments of 85 high school seniors, and the hope for nearly everyone in the crowd was that the students will go far in their careers — but that they won't go far at all.

"You are essential to our community and we want you

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Cadence Gledhill, Arrow Electric Prefab Manager Donnie Marsteller, Josiah Kauffman and Jordan Kohler pose for photos after Gledhill, Kauffman and Kohler signed their letters of intent to accept positions with Arrow following their graduation next month.

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to stay here,” Zachary Norwood, director of the Crawford County Planning Office, told the soon-to-be graduates. “That’s why Crawford County is investing in you.”

The number of students signing on with businesses is a new record for the event, up from a previous high of 64 two years ago, and the number of employers hiring students is also up from 51 last year.

Employers’ interest in Crawford Tech students was easy to explain for Donnie Marsteller, prefab manager for Greenville-based Arrow Electric Inc., who joined three soon-to-be employees onstage as they signed their letters.

“It’s been awesome,” Marsteller said of Arrow’s involvement with signing day, which dates back to at least 2021. “We have a high retention rate with the Vo-Tech.”

Once Josiah Kauffman, Jordan Kohler and Cadence Gledhill had signed their letters, they followed Marsteller off the stage, pausing for a second so the boss could pick up a yard sign from Mike Costa, Crawford Tech’s assistant director. “We hired a Crawford ‘Tech’ graduate,” the signs announced.

All three of the students will soon be working on an Erie Insurance building project, Marsteller said.

Kauffman has already spent about four months as a prefab electrician making electrical panels and helping wherever he’s needed for Arrow through Crawford Tech’s cooperative education program, which allows him to spend half of a typical school day on the job.

“It’s a good experience,” Kauffman said. “They’re a great company.”

Gledhill spent her co-op experience working at an Italian restaurant, she said, but her interest in working with her hands, her positive experience in a construction technology at Cochran Junior-Senior High, and the positive reports from other employees, led her to accept a position with Arrow. She starts in July.

“I’m switching it up, but I’m excited,” Gledhill said. “I didn’t really know what I was going to do this past year and I was like, it’s calling my name.”

Kohler, who has worked for another electrical company during his co-op experience, was excited to start as an apprentice with Arrow in mid-June. The four-year program will enable him to qualify as a journeyman electrician, he said.

“I like how it’s something different every day,” Kohler said. “You’re always doing something different, you’re going somewhere different, you’re always learning — problem solving. It’s challenging at first, but it keeps me busy.”

And the money’s not bad, either, he added, echoing comments Norwood made in his address to the new hires.

Over the last school year, Norwood said, the 163 students in Crawford Tech’s co-op program worked about 59,000 hours, earning more than \$765,000.

“That’s not chump change,” Norwood said of the data that averages out to about \$13 per hour. “That’s real economic impact and it’s proof that skilled education leads to immediate value.”

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