



News & Information

Rhodes State College is First in Ohio to Partner with The Uniquely Abled Project for Special Job Training

LIMA, Ohio, April 13, 2021 – Rhodes State College is partnering with California-based Uniquely Abled Project to be at the forefront of reimagining today’s workforce in northwest Ohio. This new workforce initiative, the “Uniquely Abled Academy” (UAA), is the first at a college in Ohio.

A free training program to eligible Rhodes State students, the UAA’s mission is to shift the paradigm of thinking about an individual as “disabled” to thinking of them as “uniquely abled.” The Uniquely Abled Academy training program for Computer Numerical Control (CNC) machinists is a 16-week distinctive program, matching the individuals on the autism spectrum, whom it serves. The typical characteristics of those on the spectrum are a perfect match for operators of CNC machines, which are used to cut and shape materials for manufacturing.

“The Uniquely Abled Project is exactly as it sounds--a program for uniquely abled individuals who have huge potential and need to be given the chance to succeed in a meaningful career. These uniquely abled individuals have high IQs, a strong work ethic, and the patience to succeed when given the chance. The Uniquely Abled Academy provides structure and a career pathway for the program and serves as an implementation guideline for educational institutions to collaborate with partners like Rhodes State,” said Dr. Ivan Rosenberg, Founder, Uniquely Abled Project, Valley Village, California.

Rhodes State College is able to offer this program free to students because of a \$10,000 grant received from the HAAS Foundation. Toni Neary, Director of Education at Haas Tower -

Morris Group, Inc., said “On behalf of our entire team at HFO Midwest, we are so excited to launch the first Uniquely Abled program in the state of Ohio. The program has shown amazing results throughout the country, and we are so proud to have the capability of the Gene Haas Foundation to provide scholarships for individuals pursuing the program. When we look at the skills gap and increasing inclusion and access to programming, this is a prime example of education for all. Thank you to Uniquely Abled and Rhodes State College for blazing this trail in Ohio.”

“The term ‘Uniquely Abled’ has been coined to distinguish what a person can do, as opposed to what they can’t do, which is often the stigma attached to the term ‘disabled,’ said John Wheeler, Program Coordinator of the UAA as he described the initiative. “It has been observed that jobs requiring individuals with a high degree of focused attention to detailed repetitive processes, able to follow clear objective instructions, and familiarity with computers are well suited for a person with high functioning autism.”

A group of students started the program on April 12, 2021, and in the new Academy they will learn to program, setup, and operate CNC machines, combined with the use of quality control instruments, shop mathematics, and blueprint reading. Graduates will qualify for entry-level positions, including machine trainee, machinist apprentice, CNC operator, and CNC programmer. Students will not only learn the required skills of CNC operation, but also the soft skills needed to obtain and keep employment. Rhodes State will work with manufacturers to place graduates and provide post-hire support to the student and coaching to the employers.

Today, CNC operators are in short supply in the manufacturing industry. The Ohio Occupational Employment Projections Report predicts 1,325 openings per year through 2026 for CNC operators at a median hourly wage of \$19.28. The Rhodes State UAA will help meet this demand while opening a door of opportunity for a new, fully qualified workforce.

For more information about the Rhodes State “Uniquely Abled Academy,” contact John Wheeler at (419) 995-8194 or visit www.RhodesState.edu.

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