

EDUCATION

A-B Tech
Journal

FALL 2023

Customized and Short-Term Workforce Training Fuels Growth

Community College Delivers Return
on Investment

Biltmore Partners with A-B Tech
for Apprenticeships

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Community College

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A Message from the President

Community College Delivers Return on Investment



Dr. John Gossett

Are you exploring higher education options for yourself or your children? Let's consider why community college may be your best option and provide the best return on your investment in higher education.

First and foremost, community colleges have an open-door admissions policy. That means we accept all

applicants who have graduated from high school, have a high school equivalency diploma, and are 18 years of age or older, emancipated minors, or dual enrollment high school students.

More students attend community colleges than any other type of higher education institution, and we reach a far more diverse group of students than traditional four-year institutions. You may not realize that A-B Tech is the largest college in Western North Carolina, serving more than 23,000 students a year through our academic, continuing education, and workforce programs.

A traditional four-year college experience isn't for everyone, especially today when the cost of college can exceed the price of a home and leave students in debt. But if a bachelor's degree is your goal, beginning at a community college is a wise choice. Completing a two-year associate's degree in A-B Tech's university transfer program, under the NC Articulation Agreement, costs approximately 75 percent less than four-year colleges and provides quality education that guarantees transfer to any public North Carolina university. We also have many grants and scholarships that will help cover tuition and other costs.

A-B Tech also offers a tremendous opportunity for high school students through our Career and College Promise (CCP) dual enrollment program. These students take tuition-free classes and earn college credits while still in high school. Some CCP students even complete an associate's degree before earning a high-school diploma, which is a true "win-win" for both students and their parents!

About half of A-B Tech's graduates also establish successful careers after earning two-year associate of applied sciences (AAS) degrees, one-year diplomas, or short-term certificates in their chosen career fields. A-B Tech educates the region's workforce in healthcare, emergency services, engineering, manufacturing, culinary, hospitality, aviation, brewing, and much more. Many students also start with us by earning a high school equivalency diploma or taking English Language Acquisition (ELA) classes, then continuing in academic or workforce training classes.

Last, but certainly not least, community colleges provide a welcoming, flexible and nurturing environment for all students. We understand that most of our students work full-time, have families, or often are changing careers. To help them succeed, we offer flexible scheduling, many fully online options, and a support network that includes advisers, financial aid, scholarships, career services, counseling, veteran services, and other types of support.

A successful community college assumes a fundamental responsibility for the economic, social, cultural, and overall health of the community it serves. A-B Tech fully embraces our vision of "Changing Lives, Strengthening Communities". I encourage you to explore A-B Tech by visiting in person or browsing abtech.edu. We look forward to welcoming you!

Sincerely,

John Gossett
President

A-B Tech Vision
Changing Lives • Strengthening Communities



Sandra Brown

A-B Tech Celebrates Students, Staff and Alumni at Hispanic Heritage Festival

From painting ceramic Day-of-the-Dead skulls to salsa dancing and savoring Venezuelan empanadas, A-B Tech students and staff celebrated National Hispanic Heritage Month with food and festivities that infused our campus with new life. The college made the choice to honor its Latinx staff and students for the first time in its history to reflect the growing Hispanic population. As of fall 2023, 14.3 percent of A-B Tech's academic students and 41 percent of English Language Acquisition and High School Equivalency students identify as Hispanic or Latinx.

The month-long celebration, which began on September 15 and ran to October 15, also proved the perfect chance to celebrate the life stories of staff and students who hail from Mexico, Central and South America on social media and in outlets such as the college's "No Limits" radio show, where Colombian-born enrollment director Sandra Brown was interviewed.

Enrollment Director Sandra Brown Steers Students toward Success

Sandra Brown knows firsthand the challenges immigrant teens feel when they first arrive in the United States. The 47-year-old West Asheville resident faced discrimination and language challenges when she moved to Charlotte with her family 30 years ago. At the time, she was 17 and unhappy about leaving behind her friends and boyfriend to start a new life that required more than her then-meager English vocabulary. Being a foreigner came with many challenges, including being teased for having an accent and told to "go back to Mexico," even though I'm not Mexican. People thought we are all the same because we are Hispanic."

At 18, Brown met an American boyfriend who later became her husband, and she credits that relationship with helping her learn English and feel connected within a new culture. She went on to study Spanish and Literature at the UNC Asheville, and soon realized how much she loved higher education after teaching a few adjunct classes. A public administration master's at Western Carolina University put her on track for her current role where she is a much-valued advocate and resource for students in the college community.

Brown enjoys speaking Spanish with the college's many Latinx students and played a big role in A-B Tech's first Hispanic Heritage Month this year, planning student activities including Spanish-language film showings and a Day-of-the-Dead-themed art activity.

Living in North Carolina provides regular opportunities to feel connected to her heritage including trips to Charlotte for Colombian festival, or visits to Patton Ave's Mexican market Tienda Los Nenes, which stocks Colombian items. She also visits Colombia every couple of years to spend time with family.

Brown has worn many hats in her life, including owning and implementing a regional foreign language program for schools, and working in student services as a recruiter at A-B Tech. After six years at the college, she's thrilled to have been promoted in July to her current position, where she feels she can make an impact in the lives of fellow immigrants who are struggling to build new lives.

"A-B Tech had long captured my attention," Brown said.

"Recognizing the potential to make a significant impact within underserved student populations, I was determined to work at a community college. It's incredibly rewarding to witness (students') growth and transformation as they pursue their dreams."

Hospitality Management Student Fernando Rivera Relishes Connections with Neighbors

Fernando Rivera, originally from Honduras, came to the United States for the first time in high school as an exchange student in Columbus, NC. In 2005, he and his family moved from Honduras to Tryon, where he still had friends from his high school days. After working for a decade in the food industry, Rivera completed the A-B Tech Culinary Arts degree in 2022 and recently began pursuing a Hospitality Management degree in hopes of becoming a manager.

Currently, he works as a chef at the Givens Estates, which he relishes for its friendly community. One of his favorite parts of the job is the open kitchen, which allows the elderly residents to talk to him while he cooks. "The seniors care about me and make me feel welcome," he said. "I had surgery recently and they got me cards."

Though he hasn't returned to Honduras since immigrating, Rivera stays connected to his native culture by eating out regularly at his favorite Latinx restaurant El Que Pasa on Patton Avenue. He enjoys

cooking Honduran food, especially pupusas, which he describes as tortillas stuffed with cheese and meat that are seared and flattened like a pizza.

One of Rivera's favorite Honduran holidays is September 15, when the country celebrates liberation from Spain with Independence Day parades complete with drums, trumpets and cheerleaders wearing the blue and white of the Honduran flag. Rivera hopes to return to Honduras in the next few years to visit his father, uncle and aunts.

Alumna Sonia Escobedo Sows Peace in Asheville's Crime Community

Asheville Police Department detective Sonia Escobedo, 48, learned the importance of family early in life. The daughter of migrant farm workers, her Mexican parents spent six months of the year in California and six months in rural Mexico where Escobedo's grandparents owned a farm. When she was in junior high, her parents decided to move the family to Los Angeles and Escobedo grew up near Chinatown in a neighborhood affected by gang violence. When she was 13, her uncle, who lived nearby, was murdered and the police never solved the crime. The event deeply wounded her family and ultimately prompted Escobedo to join the police force.

"Law enforcement never took the time to dedicate to solve his investigation," she said. "It has crossed my mind since that since (immigrants) don't have the ability to communicate ... they don't get the same amount of attention."

Naturally public service-oriented, Escobedo began working nights at the Asheville Police Department when she was 21 and enrolled in Basic Law Enforcement Training (BLET) at A-B Tech. Since 2013, she has worked as a detective focused on drug and gun investigations. She's also a team leader in crisis negotiation, where she's called on to administer to people experiencing mental health crises. Most recently she helped a man standing on a ledge with a knife in his hand.

"He had substance abuse problems and felt he wasn't contributing to his family," she said. "I was able to help give him options other than taking his life. He was able to go into the hospital and get on medication to help him get off substances."

Escobedo said the key to helping those in crisis has been drawing on her own life experience. "I may not be going through the exact same thing, but I have experienced loss in life that I can draw on and share with folks," she said. "My family was very poor, and we had very little."

Asked what keeps her going in a stressful field, Escobedo credited her strong family base. Her mother, her 21-year-old son, her brothers and sisters and their families all live nearby. "At the end of the day, we find things to do to keep each other in check," she said. "We got each other whatever we're going through." Escobedo draws on that base when talking to someone in crisis who lacks family of their own. "I try to be that (family) for them," she said.

Despite challenges, Escobedo strongly believes in the work she's doing. By helping others, especially the marginalized, she feels she's helping prevent tragedies like her uncle's death.

"Our community of Latinos and Spanish speakers might not be seen as part of the community because we're immigrants. I want to let them know there are others here to help them."



New SOAR Program Builds Occupational Skills for Intellectually and Developmentally Challenged Adults

A-B Tech began a new two-year program this fall that aims to empower adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Successful Occupational Achievement Readiness (SOAR) is an integrated literacy project-based vocational training program designed to equip students with skills needed to obtain jobs.

"This program appeals to a broad range of students, and they will be introduced to a wide variety of careers," said Dr. Barbara Fedock, Coordinator of Adult Basic Education. "For example, one current applicant said, 'I need to be able to get the skills I need to become an auto mechanic, to do autobody work.' I have two other students interested in cosmetology. So, we will design courses to align with their career development. What math skills will you need to become a mechanic? How do you read the text for cosmetology classes?"

SOAR is designed to build both academic and career success and includes activities ranging from public speaking to how to write work-related memos and formal emails, typing or computer skills. SOAR has two phases: the first year dedicated to surveying strengths and building critical thinking, literacy and math skills; and a second year to building employability skills. Fedock emphasized that classes are designed to flexibly accommodate a variety of levels and abilities.

"If a student who applies tests in at a higher level, they might be ready to start our second year in January," she said. "We'll find out what's available to them and meet them where they are."

Students earn a badge for each section of the program they complete and a certificate upon finishing the program. The college also provides students with special accommodations and access to Bloom Fitness, a physical fitness program geared especially towards adults with disabilities.

To learn more, visit abtech.edu/SOAR or call (828) 398-7131.

FACULTY Spotlight



A-B Tech Chefs Stephen Hertz and Chris Bugher

Meet the Creative Forces Behind A-B Tech's 2023 Culinary Team

From concocting homemade sausage to cooking a delicious three-course meal in record time, A-B Tech's 2023 student culinary team has many skills that paid off this past July, earning second in the nation at the American Culinary Federation (ACF) National Finals in New Orleans. Behind the team's success are two men who helped to guide them to the finish line: certified chef instructors and team coaches Chris Bugher and Stephen Hertz played key roles in shaping the student chefs over the course of two years of study. Though they share creative flare and a passion for food, the two chefs bring very different backgrounds and influences to the table.

From the Bronx to Maui

Hertz, who grew up in New York City, began helping his single mom cook at age 7 when he learned to make a mean scratch marinara sauce. His repertoire expanded when an Italian cook at a pizza restaurant taught him how to spin a pizza. As a teenager Hertz's family moved to Hawaii and his skills expanded when his boy scout troop leader began asking him to cook monthly meals on camping trips for the entire troop.

Despite his natural kitchen skills, Hertz chose to pursue stage lighting, sound and set design in college. It wasn't till he was a student at Brevard College that Hertz saw friends working in restaurants and began to think of cooking as a viable way to make money so he could afford his own apartment. He found, however, that landing a restaurant job wasn't easy without any formal experience. Finally, after visiting one Italian restaurant multiple times, Hertz told the manager he knew how to spin a pizza.

"She was like alright, well, show me," he recalled. "So, I threw the pizza, and the owner was walking through and he's like, 'Hire him!'"

Hertz stayed at the restaurant for five years and was running the kitchen by the time he left. After graduating, he initially "never wanted to see another kitchen again", but after several years of working at the Flat Rock Playhouse doing seasonal design work, he found himself back in the kitchen supplementing his income in a fine dining restaurant. Working in an upscale atmosphere for the first time ignited his appetite to learn more.

At his mother-in-law's suggestion, he checked out the renowned A-B Tech Culinary Arts program and was inspired to apply. Hertz went on to win a silver medal with the student culinary team in 2011 in Dallas and after graduating landed a job as executive chef at the Champion Hills Club in Hendersonville. While working there, Hertz stayed connected to A-B Tech, returning each year to help judge student capstone projects. When a teaching position opened in 2017, he decided to apply. Having started a family, he found a teaching schedule allowed more time to be with his wife and young daughter.

When not teaching first-year students, Hertz spends his free time perfecting "the perfect homemade Tabasco sauce" from a blend of hot peppers he buys locally



and grows himself. He also likes to challenge himself by competing in national recipe competitions, most recently one for Kikkoman soy sauce where he made Spam Musubi, a Hawaiian favorite.

Asked if he's surprised by where he has landed in his career path, Hertz smiled. "Cooking is one of those things that came naturally so it makes sense that that's what I ended up doing," he said. He also said the time he spent in theater school has not gone to waste because the drama and creativity found in the kitchen often mirrors the process of theater production.

"I've always been into art and making things, and restaurant work is its own type of theater," he said. "You have the dining room that's a stage and your food on the plate where you give your guests an experience. It's a storyline with ebb and flow. You start with something spicy and then mellow it out and take them on a journey."

West Virginia Roots

Like Hertz, Bugher's path to professional cooking was circuitous. Born in Winston-Salem, he grew up Huntington, WV, where he studied zoology at Marshall University. While in school, he began working at an Italian restaurant to pay his bills and found that he thrived in the kitchen's fast pace.

"It's got this certain glamour to it that's better when you're younger," he reflected. "You go to college during the day then at night go in and cook and it's a big rush, get out at 11 or 12 and have a night life as a college student."

For fun, Bugher decided to take an eight-week cooking class along with his science classes, and the rest is history. Smitten with the culinary bug, Bugher enrolled full-time in Marshall's culinary program. "I really loved the teamwork, being on my feet behind a stove, and all the excitement that comes with being on a line," he said. "I was able to have a creative outlet, make money, and build lifetime friendships."

While still in the program, he began working as an adjunct professor and banquet chef, working his way up to running a retail space for students and faculty. He went on to start a catering company doing private events for several years, then worked in corporate healthcare managing a kitchen and food for four hospitals, a job that required a pager and 70-hour weeks. Having his first child in 2014 prompted a change in lifestyle. Eager to spend more time with his family, Bugher jumped when he saw an ad for a full-time chef instructor job at A-B Tech that also involved coaching its nationally ranked student culinary team.

"I'd always seen A-B Tech when I was doing competitions and they'd always won," he said. "So, when I saw an opening, I was like 'I want to go there and be part of that winning program.'"

For Bugher, cooking is a creative outlet, and the second-year instructor keeps himself challenged by competing. He began competing as a student and has continued individual competition over the years, as well as coaching seven A-B Tech student teams to the ACF National Finals. In 2018, he won ACF Southeast Chef Instructor of the Year and competed in ACF Nationals. Last year, he received an ACF Presidential Medallion and competed in the Culinary World Cup in Luxembourg. This past May, he won the title of Global Vegan Chef of the Americas at the Worldchefs Global Chef's Challenge in Santiago, Chile, and will compete in the international Global Vegan Chef Challenge next fall in Singapore.



Josh Waters

Traveling to another culture where he's pushed to use local ingredients and flavors satisfies his desire to grow as chef, and feeds his teaching. "It's a huge adrenaline rush being in a foreign country where you can't speak the language and you have a set time to cook and compete," he said. "I've learned more competing than I have in any restaurant I've ever worked in."

When not teaching, Bugher also runs a small catering business, Apex Culinary, doing pop-up events at local breweries, which will help fund his trip to Singapore. He's also busy with planning and will soon begin testing recipes to determine his competition meal. He recently tapped a special chef assistant for the contest, former student culinary team captain Josh Waters, an Asheville native who earned Culinary Arts and Baking & Pastry Arts degrees and a Therapeutic Culinary certificate from A-B Tech. Waters also won the Culinary program's prized Global Cup, which is awarded to the student who prepares the best international meal.

The two chefs will work side by side in the kitchen to prepare their self-designed meal, an American dish with a Singaporean twist. Waters, 23, who works as kitchen manager of High Vista Country Club in Mills River, said he considers Bugher a mentor and was honored that he was chosen to accompany him to Singapore.

For special recipes from Bugher and Hertz, visit abtech.edu/recipes.

Kitchen with a View

Culinary Grad Roman Nourse Lands Job at Biltmore Estate



Roman Nourse

Roman Nourse, a 2023 Culinary Arts graduate, knows first-hand the meaning behind the phrase “Do it afraid”. The 24-year-old Cullowhee-based chef has risen to meet challenges, both in and out of the kitchen this year. Last spring, he defeated 22 competitors in the Southeast Student Chef of the Year contest to land a spot to competing in the American Culinary Federation’s (ACF) National Student Chef of the Year competition in July. Though he didn’t bring home a medal, he returned home to score a coveted position working as Demi Chef of Banquets at the Inn on Biltmore Estate.

Back in July, Nourse saw an ad for Sous Chef of Banquets at the Inn on Biltmore Estate and decided to apply, despite not having the banquet experience it required. “I applied for the job I wasn’t qualified for and came in to do an informative interview with the executive chef,” he

recalled. “When I told him I didn’t have the banquet experience, he turned me down, but he offered me Demi Chef of Banquets and told me once I get experience there, I can go on for the Sous position.”

Nourse, originally from outside Nashville, is relatively new to the culinary world. In 2017, he began a meteorology program at the University of North Carolina, though soon realized that his heart wasn’t in it. He found his way to the A-B Tech Culinary Arts program at a friend’s suggestion. “I was cooking for friends a lot at the time on Monday nights and I realized how much I loved cooking because it makes people happy,” he said.

After graduating in May, Nourse went with the student culinary team to the ACF Nationals. He previously competed as a member of the team and returned this year for the chef competition. He’d spent months practicing preparing a self-designed three-course meal within the 90-minute time limit, but ran into an unexpected hurdle when at the competition. “I burned myself,” Nourse recalled, explaining how his time was thrown off as a result.

Despite the mishap, Nourse is thrilled he got to compete and said he “cried the whole way home” because he was so happy and proud to be supported by classmates. He hopes in the next year or two to return to A-B Tech to continue his studies by completing the Baking & Pastry Arts program. In the meantime, he’s focusing his talents on his new job at the Inn at Biltmore and working on sprucing up the inn’s standard banquet menu, which changes daily.

His schedule, which is 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. five days a week, is a mix of food handling, managing a staff café, and supervising several restaurant colleagues. Ironically, it’s the time in between banquets during quieter times that’s proven most challenging. “My (competition) speed has come back to bite me,” he chuckled. “If I go too fast and get too much done then I don’t have any work to do when it’s slow.”

Landing the Demi Chef job, Nourse said, was “the second scariest thing I’ve ever done” next to the ACF competition. Yet, he’s reaping the benefits including a great salary, having the chance to build his reputation at one of the area’s most reputable institutions, and feeling like he’s finally earned the title of “Chef”.

Learn more at abtech.edu/culinary.



Ukrainian students Nataliia Chorna and Elsa Horbatyuk

Ukrainian Students Build New Life at A-B Tech

Ukrainian-born student and college employee Elsa Horbatyuk, 20, recently described herself as a clock pendulum. “I do this,” she said smiling and moving her hand back and forth. “That’s my life. I’ve moved five times so moving to the U.S. wasn’t so difficult.” For Natalia Chorna, 46, also a student and A-B Tech employee, the transition from the Ukraine hasn’t been as easy. The 46-year-old mother of two spent several months displaced traveling Europe with her ten-year-old son before she found a U.S. sponsor. Despite their different pathways, both women arrived as English Language Acquisition (ELA) students at A-B Tech in the past year, and now work alongside each other in Transitional Studies and the ELA department. As “greeters”, they assist international students, including A-B Tech’s growing population of Ukrainians, registering them for classes, booking tests, and gathering department data.

A-B Tech has seen an increase in its Ukrainian student population since Russia invaded the Ukraine in February 2022. ELA and Transitional Studies Coordinator Amber Hollinger said that 145 of the present 533 English language students hail from the Ukraine, the majority referred to A-B Tech’s free English programs by Catholic Charities Diocese and Lutheran Services Carolinas.

Both Horbatyuk and Chorna arrived at A-B Tech as English language students and within months of arriving, were offered their current positions. Fluent in English, and eager to help others, supervisor Amber Hollinger said having both women at the front desk is invaluable. Chorna has been “hardworking, thoughtful and creative”; Horbatyuk “tech savvy and supportive”. Many Ukrainian students have reported benefits of working with staff fluent in their language, Hollinger said. Having Horbatyuk and Chorna close at hand has “fostered a feeling of belongingness in the department.”

In addition to working 20 hours per week, both Horbatyuk and Chorna are pursuing degrees at A-B Tech and hope to settle in the United States. Horbatyuk, who moved here with her parents and brother, is studying for an associate degree in History. Born in Portugal to Ukrainian parents, Horbatyuk speaks five languages. When she finishes her degree at A-B Tech, her goal is to become a court interpreter where she can use her language skills. “It would be something easy that I could enjoy,” she said. In the meantime, she’s enjoying being one of the first faces students see when they walk through the door. “People are very nice here,” she said. “I’m happy to help them.”

Two semesters away from an associate degree in accounting, Chorna, who studied fashion design at university in the Ukraine, soon hopes to find a full-time accounting job. At the time of the invasion, Chorna had been working in the capital of Kyiv for several years as an accountant for her husband’s engineering firm and running her own business designing women’s gowns. Since arriving in the U.S., she’s been assisting a local fashion designer and building a loyal clientele for her own embroidered handbags. Her life has finally settled down this year. Her oldest son Bohdan, 18, is in Germany attending college. Slava, her youngest, is in his second year at Rainbow Day School. Her husband Maksym joined her and Slava last December. Finally, Chorna feels free to focus on her long-term dreams. “I like the work I do (at A-B Tech),” she said. “The English teachers are amazing and there are nice, intelligent people here who do a very important mission to help people improve their lives.”

Learn more at abtech.edu/ELA.



Increased Community and Employer Demand for Continuing Education and Workforce Training Fuels A-B Tech Growth

A-B Tech's Continuing Education and Workforce Division is having a banner year driven by increased demand for customized and short-term workforce certification and training. Since January, more than 21,500 people have taken continuing education and workforce training classes delivered by A-B Tech.

The college's Advanced Manufacturing Center also experienced the largest statewide increase in Customized Training for employers this year, expanding its trainings from 173 in 2022 to 242 so far this year, serving 2,187 students over 3,952 total hours. Training for Pratt & Whitney's new hires and ramped up training for GE Aerospace accounted for more than 50 percent of the overall growth.

Other departments within the Continuing Education and Workforce Training division include Community Enrichment, Emergency Services, Focused Industrial Training, and Occupational Training. Workforce programs that have seen significant growth include Truck Driver Training/CDL Licensing, Nurse Aid, Clinical Massage, Community Health Worker, and continuing education for Emergency Services professions.

"Our division is very focused on continuing to respond to the needs of our community with short-term programs," said Deborah Bailey, Vice President for Continuing Education and Workforce Development. "We realize that there is no one size fits all and we try to stretch ourselves to engage with the many opportunities that come our way. I'm excited to work with such a great team of people who care about their contributions to our community."

Advanced Manufacturing Center's Customized Training Program Sees Record Growth

A-B Tech's Advanced Manufacturing Center (AMC) has seen a sharp rise in the number trainees and companies served by its

Customized Training program, which assists companies with employee training. Since January, the program has served 31 companies and 2,187 trainees in the categories of technical skills, professional development, business support, continuous improvement and safety.

Why the sudden boom in demand for training? Kevin Kimrey, Director of Economic and Workforce Development, believes several factors are in play. "The employers we serve are busy. They've been growing like wildfire, and many have been adding new employees."

Another factor, he said, is that more companies are changing systems and adopting more automated machinery. Manufacturers are increasingly using robots for repetitive tasks, such as packing beer, performing quality checks and creating parts.

"Automation is a trend with just about every company we work with," he said. "We're developing several new training programs now and every one of them includes some sort of automation."

Kimrey said demand for technical trainings also is rapidly increasing and the AMC has offered six trainings in automation to employers in the last three months, requiring equipment upgrades and more training for instructors to use the new machinery, including simulated manufacturing lines that are 100 percent automated.

Lead Instructor Jim Falbo was hired in January to teach the college's growing array of automated technology classes. Falbo said he hasn't seen such rapid change in manufacturing in his lifetime. "I've been in this field since I was 16 and I'm now 56. I've never seen it accelerate so fast," he said. Falbo believes the increase in automation is due to in part to the fact that employers are struggling to fill manual positions. "Covid changed a lot of our workforce and offered more people the chance to work at home," he said. "For industries where you have to be in person, they're going to automate as much as they can."



A-B Tech Instructor Jim Falbo teaching GE Aerospace employees



Deborah Bailey, Vice President for Continuing Education and Workforce Development

Falbo recently worked with a group of GE Aerospace machinists who took turns working with a FANUC Robot Arm, which can do “picking and packing” work normally done by hand without the need for a break; but the robot requires human oversight, which creates new jobs and training needs.

Another significant change in manufacturing is the increased demand for short-term training, Falbo said. More employers prefer to hire workers with no experience and train them themselves instead of waiting for students to complete a long-term degree, he said.

Long-time AMC customer BorgWarner is one of those companies. The automotive parts manufacturer used A-B Tech’s machining fundamentals training for 100 new hires this year. BorgWarner Resources Specialist Christen Chiles said that being able to tell recruits the company does its own training helped attract new employees.

“We mention the (A-B Tech) class,” she said. “It’s a great way to let (workers) know you’re not going to be alone out there on the shop floor; you’ll have support with your new role.”

Despite the growth in automation, Falbo believes people and machines will continue to work together, at least for the foreseeable future. “Robots are not going to take over everything in our lifetime,” he said. “There are a lot of tasks that robots can’t do. But that is slowly changing.”

Kimrey said 40 percent of the AMC’s Customized Training growth this year resulted from training aerospace manufacturer Pratt and Whitney’s new hires. According to Pratt and Whitney General Manager Dan Field, A-B Tech’s Customized Training enabled the company to rapidly hire and train the workforce for its new 1.2 million-square-foot manufacturing plant in Asheville, representing a \$650 million dollar investment and 800 new jobs. The AMC has provided additional training for the FANUC Robot Arm and another automated machine used for carrying materials. Future plans call for A-B Tech to construct a



new education and training facility on the Pratt & Whitney site.

At FedUp Foods, the AMC has provided a wide range of customized training from safety to leadership and management. The company, which produces its own Buchi Kombucha label, grew in 2020 and expanded its focus to being a private label beverage manufacturer. With 115 employees spread between its production facility in Marshall and its warehouse in Erwin, TN, Cofounder Sarah Mullins said that continual education is part of her company’s mission.

“I want to create a growth mindset to empower my team and create a supportive environment where they can thrive personally, and professionally.” Mullins touted a 10-week leadership program the AMC conducted based on the book “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People” by Stephen Covey. The program, she said, has helped supervisors build “healthy habits many of us don’t learn growing up.”

The AMC also continued customized training for New Belgium Brewing, which the college helped recruit to Asheville from its homebase of Colorado in 2013. The AMC helped recruit the first round of New Belgium employees in 2015 and, in collaboration with A-B Tech’s Craft Beverage Institute of the Southeast, has since trained more than 500 people in different areas.

“Whether training in communication, safety certifications or mechanical prowess, A-B Tech is a steadfast partner in helping the business thrive,” said New Belgium Instructional Designer Chris Ortiz. Most recently, New Belgium needed customized training to teach employees how to manage the FANUC Robot Arm, which was brought in to automate the process of filling variety packs of beer. “Before, a person had to place the beer in the pack, and it would take two people to do that work in an 8- to 10-hour shift. If you have one robot, it can do it 24/7,” Falbo explained.

Occupational Training Programs

The demand for short-term occupational training also spiked this year, perhaps nowhere as much as in healthcare. A-B Tech’s Nurse Aid (CNA) and Clinical Massage programs have wait lists of 200 and 107 people, respectively. Both programs train students and prepare them to take licensing exams.



“These programs offer the opportunity to learn, and experience firsthand what the healthcare industry is like,” said Teresa Robinson, Associate Director for Health Occupations. “It is like a reality check before someone gets so invested financially, academically, and emotionally in a career that is not suited for them.”

She heard from one student that “Nurse Aide is a class that gave me insight on the ability to take care of someone unable to care for themselves. I learned compassion and understanding of the aging. I love my class and will be moving on to the nursing program in the spring”.

The wait list fluctuates, but increases as students complete prerequisites for nursing programs. Demand also increased when A-B Tech resumed the Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN) program this year, Robinson said.

Bailey said A-B Tech also offers several CNA high school programs, as well as classes at A-B Tech Madison, Transformation Village, and Goodwill. A-B Tech also began a Community Health Worker program that has performed well in its first year.

The Clinical Massage program also has a wait list that grows almost daily, Robinson said. Students cite “the affordability of the program and the schedule, which allow a great work-life balance that you don’t find elsewhere.”

Another in-demand occupational program is the Commercial Driver’s License (CDL) training for drivers of tractor trailer trucks (CDL-A) and large

passenger vehicles (CDL-B). The training can be completed in as little as four weeks.

“Recognizing the need to support the local demand for drivers, we launched our CDL program in partnership with TransTech,” Bailey said. “To date, it has been one of our fastest growing new programs.”

Emergency Services continuing education classes also continue rapid growth, spurred by new Fire Academy trainings, she said. (Read more about our Emergency Services division in the Fall 2022 issue of the Education Journal at abtech.edu/education-journal.)

To learn more about A-B Tech’s Continuing Education and Workforce offerings, visit abtech.edu/CE or call 828.398.7900.



Food, Beverage and Natural Products Entrepreneurs Find Success with A-B Tech Enka’s Small Business Hub

With more than 250 restaurants and 20 breweries, Asheville has long captured the hearts of entrepreneurial foodies. And with its plethora of farms, the area has also attracted makers of natural products like witch hazel, tea and lavender soap.

A-B Tech Small Business Center (SBC) Executive Director Jill Sparks said that many food, beverage and natural products manufacturers are coming to the A-B Tech Enka campus to launch their businesses and find support in a unique hub that offers everything from free coaching and affordable space to rent to free use of a commercial kitchen. In addition to the Small Business Center, A-B Tech Enka is home to the NC BioNetwork, A-B Tech’s Craft Beverage Institute of the Southeast, Blue Ridge Food Ventures, the Enka-Candler Farmers Market, and clients and tenants with similar business interests.

“People can come here to learn more about how to start a business and in addition to writing a business plan, they can have access to facilities where they can produce a product, engage in research and development, and have their products tested for quality,” Sparks said. “When they discover this is all in one place, it doesn’t seem so overwhelming.”

At the Small Business Center, the entrepreneurially curious can find free business coaching, classes and access to the Business Incubation Program, which offers laboratory and office space and storage starting at \$4 per square foot.



Jill Sparks

The BioNetwork, an initiative of the NC Community College System, offers food, beverage and natural products-related industry classes and onsite training, laboratory rental space and laboratory testing services.

Blue Ridge Food Ventures is a shared-use kitchen where entrepreneurs can find support, including product



development, use of packaging equipment, and guidance with navigating business-related government regulations.

The Craft Beverage Institute of the Southeast at A-B Tech provides both curriculum programs and non-credit courses in brewing, distilling, fermentation and related practices.

The Enka Candler Farmers' Market offers small businesses a chance to sell their wares on Thursdays from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. year-round.

Many food and natural product entrepreneurs are thriving after receiving support at A-B Tech Enka.



Earth Echoes: Debra Maslowski first came to the small business center in 2005 for a “kick in the butt” and somebody to tell her she was on the right path. At that point the Swannanoa-based herbalist and soap-maker had been selling her homemade soaps to family and friends for two decades and wanted to take her business to the next level.

After meeting with Sparks, Maslowski, who is originally from Minnesota, gained the confidence and

connections to launch her business Earth Echoes. These days, in addition to selling her products at the East Asheville tailgate market and online, Maslowski has expanded to create wholesale products for clients including Mountain Well Being in Leicester for whom she makes a colloidal copper and silver soap. She recently returned to the Small Business Center for coaching on how to register a homeopathic poison ivy remedy she created that she plans to test using the Bionetwork. Currently she sells her products on Amazon and her website and continues to receive business counseling from the SBC a couple of times a year.



Archaeus Apothecary: After studying Biology as an undergraduate, skincare specialist Amanda Vickers went on to earn a master's in Applied Ecology and Conservation at Johns Hopkins University. Recently, Vickers was accepted to the SBC's Business Incubation program. After previously co-owning a skincare business with others, she's excited now to have her own laboratory space for the first time.

She's focusing on a few products, including bath bombs that blend essential oils with all-natural ingredients such as cannabis, pink Himalayan salt and rose clay. She's also currently working on developing a plant extract called Dream Weaver intended to help people to better recall their dreams.

“My goal,” Vickers said, “is to help people tap into the divine spark inside of themselves, their intuition.”

Asheville Tea Company: Jessie Dean began Asheville Tea Company in late 2016, and with the help of services from the Small Business Center, the Craft Beverage Institute and Blue Ridge Food Ventures, she's been able to grow her company exponentially. Having worked for many years in wilderness therapy, Dean shifted to owning her own business so she could stay home with her kids. Having worked as a corporate executive in the wilderness therapy field, she had some experience with hiring and budgets, but said, “with manufacturing there was a huge learning curve.”



She relied on the Small Business Center for coaching and help finding community support, including attorneys and tax advisors. She then utilized the Business Incubation Program and said it helped Asheville Tea Company win an award in 2022 from Venture Asheville as one of the top seven fastest growing companies in Asheville with an annual growth rate of 82 percent during the three years she incubated. Dean said Blue Ridge Food Ventures also was invaluable in helping co-package and store her teas.

Dean graduated from the incubation program in May and is gearing up to launch her first brick and mortar shop on Thompson Street across from the Antique Tobacco Barn by the end of the year.

Enka Candler Farmers Market: In August, the Enka-Candler Tailgate Market unexpectedly lost its long-term sponsor. Faced with imminent closure, Board of Directors President Kim “Dirt” Murphy said the first thing she did was to turn to the Small Business Center for advice on how to remain open and finish the market season. In a perfect example of the symbiotic relationships within Enka's business community, the market's board leaned on Sparks and Small Business Specialist Daphne Carson to guide them through the process of securing the SBC's parking lot for their market, which includes 14 small businesses, as well as a conference room where they could conduct board meetings.

Sparks said she is thrilled the market was able to remain at A-B Tech Enka so her clients will continue to have a home base. Murphy is grateful to have found such strong resources so close to home. “We hope to deepen our partnership with the Small Business Center for years to come,” she said.



Learn more at abtech.edu/SBC.



Biltmore Culinary Apprentices Graham Edwards and Chevas Farmer



A-B Tech Marks National Apprenticeship Week with Biltmore Estate Partnership

A-B Tech and the Biltmore Estate recently celebrated National Apprenticeship Week by announcing a new apprenticeship partnership in culinary arts.

Observed November 13-19 this year, National Apprenticeship Week is a nationwide celebration that brings together business leaders, apprentices, labor, education institutions, and other critical partners to promote the value of Registered Apprenticeships. This year's theme was Registered Apprenticeship: Superhighway to Good Jobs.

"The theme reflects the prominence that Registered Apprenticeships have received as a proven and industry-driven training model that expedites the pathway into good jobs and improves diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in the workplace," said Debbie Cromwell, A-B Tech's Director of Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeships. "Registered Apprentices are individuals who receive on-the-job training from a master-level supervisor, as well as job-related education from community colleges and/or trade organizations. Apprentices are paid employees who need additional training to qualify for a position. This experience is often referred to as 'Earn While You Learn'."



Graham Edwards

Biltmore's culinary apprentices include Graham Edwards, Chevas Farmer and Lorya Harbison, who take classes in A-B Tech's culinary certificate program and work in restaurants on the Biltmore Estate. Cromwell said the Biltmore hopes to expand the partnership to include apprenticeships in other career fields.



Lorya Harbison

Support for apprenticeships is strong nationwide and the NC General Assembly has awarded millions in grant funding over the last two years to ApprenticeshipNC for assisting employers in creating new career options for both youth and adults through a registered apprenticeship program, Cromwell said. "Both Madison and Buncombe county employers have embraced apprenticeships with great enthusiasm, providing a multitude of new options for their communities," she said.



Chevas Farmer

A-B Tech works with ApprenticeshipNC to track approximately 150 apprentices within numerous occupations such as healthcare, early childhood education, mechatronics, electrical, technology, HVAC, emergency services, business, and culinary. Cromwell said the college also gets state curriculum funding for more than 30 apprentices who are its students, as well as for IBEW electrical apprenticeships that are run through continuing education.

An apprentice may be a current high school student, recent graduate, experienced worker, military veteran, or an individual seeking re-entry. "It's life-changing for students who are part of this program," Cromwell said. "They're earning while they're learning. That's like the golden egg."

Learn more at abtech.edu/WBL or call 828.398.7603.

Dogwood Health Trust Grant

Provides Free Tuition for Early Childhood Education Students



As any parent of a preschool-aged child can testify, quality childcare is not easy to come by these days. To help bolster childcare in the region, the Dogwood Health Trust awarded A-B Tech a \$500,000 grant that enables students to receive an Early Childhood Education certificate for free. In August, the college launched the Blazing Trails Early Childhood Education Scholarship, which provides 20 students with full tuition, textbooks, and loaner laptop computers as they work to complete an Early Childhood Certificate program in as little as two semesters.

Education Department Chair Tamara Reynolds said the grant is helping to train teachers during a time when the field is experiencing a national shortage of qualified teachers and local childcare centers are struggling to replace staff lost during Covid. According to a recent NC Chamber Foundation survey, 60 percent of parents with children ages 5 and younger reported having to miss work because of lack of childcare.

The current Blazing Trails student cohort ranges in age from 20 to 50 and two thirds are currently working in the field. The 16-credit certificate program requires three classes over two semesters, including a regular Wednesday night class and hours spent outside of class completing computer modules and classroom observation. A-B Tech's Early Childhood Education certificate can be put toward an Early Education Certification (EEC) through the state, which will qualify students to be lead teachers in licensed childcare centers. It also counts toward a 70-credit Early Childhood Education associate degree at A-B Tech.

Sharon McGraw, a recipient of the scholarship, enrolled in the program in hopes of changing careers from her current role selling health insurance policies. Having worked as a substitute teacher, she is hopeful the certificate will give her a professional boost so she can earn a living wage at a quality school. She said the grant has helped to relieve the financial pressures of attending college.

Instructor and cohort coach Beth Pokorski has enjoyed the opportunity to teach face-to-face for the first time since the covid pandemic and all the support and the comradery that brings. "This first cohort is blowing me away with their dedication," she said. "Having such an engaged group eagerly participating in this experience despite the challenges of taking classes while working, gives one hope for the future of early childhood education."

Reynolds said the Blazing Trails Scholarship will continue for the next three years and will cover up to twenty students each year. The next cohort will be admitted in January.

Learn more at abtech.edu/education. For additional information or questions related to the scholarship application and interview process, please contact Dr. Beth Pokorski at (828) 398-7900 x 7243 or at bethpokorski@abtech.edu.



Sharon McGraw

News Briefs

SGA President Re-Elected

Ryan Adams-Clark has been re-elected to a second term as Student Government Association (SGA) President and student representative to the A-B Tech Board of Trustees. She is enrolled in A-B Tech's university transfer program and plans to transfer to UNC Asheville. She also completed motorcycle training, studied art, and received other certifications at the college prior to enrolling to pursue a degree. Adams-Clark is involved in the Asheville community as a volunteer with Meals on Wheels, MANNA Food Bank, and the homeless community.



WRES No Limits Radio Show Marks 10th Anniversary

A-B Tech's No Limits radio show on WRES 100.7 FM was founded in September 2013 and is celebrating its 10th anniversary. The show was the brainchild of station founder John Hayes and Rev. James Lee, who saw it as a vehicle for encouraging more African American youth to attend college and, specifically, A-B Tech. The original co-hosts were Lee and Phyllis Utley, both A-B Tech employees at the time. They were succeeded by current hosts Duane Adams and Leronica Casey.

Listen to the two-part 10th anniversary show with Adams, Casey and special guests at abtech.edu/no-limits.



News Briefs



Students from Western Carolina Correctional Center for Women Earn Academic Awards

Students from Western Carolina Correctional Center for Women attended an academic awards ceremony at A-B Tech in July to be honored for their achievement in the Human Services Technology degree program. Twelve students made the college's President's List or Dean's List. The students were part of the Second Chance Pell Experiment, which allowed individuals in correctional facilities to access Pell grants to pursue postsecondary education. Dr. Gene Loflin, A-B Tech's Associate Vice President for Instruction, said the ceremony marked only the second time that individuals from a NC correctional facility were allowed to participate in an on-campus event. "We wanted to highlight the hard work and dedication these students have put into achieving their recognitions," Loflin said. "We appreciate the support of the NC Department of Adult Corrections and the Western Carolina Correctional Center for making this opportunity possible."



New Board of Trustees Member Appointed

Asheville native Roger Reid has been appointed to the A-B Tech Board of Trustees by the Asheville City School Board. Reid is employed as Teen Association Director for the YMCA of Western NC. He previously served as a teaching assistant in Asheville City Schools and worked at Mission Hospital. Reid graduated from A-B Tech with an associate degree in Dental Hygiene and earned a bachelor's degree from Mars Hill University.

Campus Events

Autumn in Asheville



The annual Autumn in Asheville event held on October 12 raised more than \$90,000 to benefit A-B Tech students. Kudos to the College Advancement and Culinary Arts and Hospitality departments for planning and executing a beautiful, delicious event, and our deepest gratitude to the sponsors, donors, partners, board members, and employees who attended.



Fall Festival

A-B Tech students and employees celebrated the start of a new academic year at the annual Fall Festival in September. More than 1,000 attendees enjoyed dancing on the Beech Tree Deck, cotton candy, giveaways from vendors, and free t-shirts.

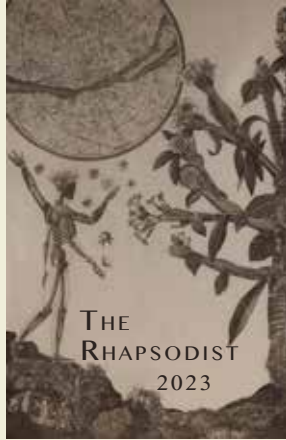
New Student Welcome Day

A-B Tech welcomed new students in August prior to the beginning of Fall Semester. Held at the Bailey Student Services Center, the event allowed new students to meet with staff and advisors, explore financial aid, and visit the Bookstore.



Campus **Events**

Rhapsodist Reading



Writers and poets shared their work in October at a special reading marking the 12th anniversary of The Rhapsodist, A-B Tech's literary and arts journal. Learn more at **abtech.edu/rhapsodist**.

Calendar of Events

December 22 - January 1 **Winter Break**

January 8 **Spring Semester begins**

January 15 **Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday**

September 5 **Transfer Fair**

April 1 - 6 **Spring Break**

May 11 **Commencement**

Learn more at **abtech.edu/calendar**.



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