

Local 49 Hosts Hands-On Heavy Equipment Training Event for High School Students Across the State

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MINNEAPOLIS--(BUSINESS WIRE)-- Fall enrollment is now open for the Operating Engineers Career Pathway program, managed by the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 49, who recently hosted high school students from across the state for a hands-on heavy equipment training opportunity at the Local 49 **Training & Apprenticeship Center** in Hinckley, MN.

The International Union of Operating Engineers Local 49 and Minnesota Virtual Academy (**MNVA**) have partnered with school districts across the state to offer the Operating Engineers Career Pathway Program to high school students. This program gives students the opportunity to enroll in online elective courses that are designed to introduce them to the heavy equipment industry. Students also have the opportunity to receive hands-on experience operating equipment at the Local 49 Training Center.

"I think it's just really important that people see that this as a job where you can grow and learn. You're not stuck. You have to think on your feet every day and working with your hands and it keeps your brain active all day long," said Catherine Ludowese, an Operating Engineers Career Pathway Instructor.

At an event on May 22nd, the first group of students enrolled in the program that were able to participate in hands-on training by driving loaders, moving dirt, practicing on simulators, and learning proper safety techniques. In the first cohort, there were students from more than 39 counties and 66 school districts across Minnesota. Of these students, an impressive 15 percent were female, representing the unions efforts to increase diverse representation in the heavy equipment industry.

"My dad is a crane operator and so I want to be a crane operator when I'm older. I learned a lot through this experience, and it gave me a sense of what it would really be like to be a heavy equipment operator," said Sage

Stuber, a student who went through the training in late May.

Local 49 receives no funding for the pathway program which as an investment in our youth and future workforce. However, state lawmakers understand the significance of this opportunity and are seeking ways to offset the budgetary impacts to school districts when students enroll in the program and become a shared student. As part of this legislative session, a bipartisan group of legislators is pursuing state funding to support programs like this. Funding proposals authored by Representatives Dave Lislegard (DFL-Aurora) and Rob Ecklund (DFL-International Falls) and Senators Justin Eichorn (R-Grand Rapids) and Eric Pratt (R-Shakopee) are still under consideration during final budget negotiations at the Minnesota Capitol.

Enrollment is now open for students across the state to participate in the Operating Engineers Pathway Program for the 2021-2022 school year. Students are not required to be full-time students at MNVA to participate and may elect to do so through their home district.

To learn more, visit **the Local 49 website** or send any questions to Sheena Shoemaker, MNVA Career Readiness Education Assistant Coordinator, by emailing **sshoeemaker@k12.com**. All students and families are encouraged to apply before August 30th, 2021, to ensure there is room in the program.

About Local Operating Engineers

The International Union of Operating Engineers Local 49 is the largest construction union in Minnesota and represents 14,000 members in many different industries related to infrastructure and construction throughout Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota. For more information visit **www.local49.org**

About Minnesota Virtual Academy

Minnesota Virtual Academy (MNVA) is a tuition-free online public-school program of Houston Public Schools that serves students in grades K through 12. A Minnesota Department of Education-approved provider of online education, MNVA gives parents and families the choice to access the curriculum and tools provided by K12, a Stride company (NYSE: LRN). Stride offers learners of all ages a more effective way to learn and build their skills for the future. For more information about MNVA, visit **mnva.k12.com**.

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