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By Karin Elton, Marshall Independent

CNA program: layers of success

MARSHALL - Marina Monzon, a mother of six and grandmother to two, said she felt her future would just be one of "staying at home" until her sisters, both certified nursing assistants, encouraged her to participate in the free CNA class offered by Southwest Adult Basic Education.

Now, she said, she is "thrilled and happy" about being in the class and for her future prospects.

"I'm very grateful, because I didn't have the money to attend this program," she said.



Photo by Karin Elton

Monzon was one of the students who spoke Monday afternoon at the Marshall Area Technical and Educational Center about the CNA Career Pathway Training.

The students spoke before a panel of area legislators - District 16A Rep. Chris Swedzinski, R-Ghent, District 16 Sen. Gary Dahms, R-Redwood Falls, and Rep. Lyle Koenen, DFL-Clara City. Also in attendance were area employers, Pat Mellenthin, CEO of Prairie Home Hospice & Community Care, Jackie Esping and Hayley Jerzak from Avera Marshall

and Jason Swanson of Prairieview Healthcare Center.

"There's a real need for qualified CNAs in the community," said Mellenthin. "I don't know what we employers would do without this program."

The Career Pathway Training project offers the opportunity for unemployed or under-employed, adults to prepare for and enter a career that leads to long-term, stable employment.

Pat Thomas, the coordinator for ABE Southwest Minnesota, said the program serves youths and adults at the same time, which has benefits for both cost efficiency and learning.

"The benefits that the youth and adults experience from being together are greater," Thomas said. "This is the only program in the state that has youth and adults together."

The program takes place at MA-TEC, which is part of Marshall Public Schools. It is co-instructed by Minnesota West Community & Technical College faculty with Adult Basic Education instructors.

Keland Whittler, a Marshall resident and a father of three, said prior to attending the CNA class, he "didn't have much going" for himself. He came to the ABE office to get his GED and was introduced to the certified nursing assistant program.

"I'm so grateful for this program," Whittler said. "It's given me vision. I didn't have vision. I want to continue to work in the medical field." He said he wants to better himself for himself and his children.

Marshall High School student Ashley Stattelmann said she is "learning better in a class with adults because most kids my age aren't very mature."

Sandy Sik of Balaton said fewer than two months ago, she was "sitting on the couch watching TV and eating chips" wondering what to do with herself. After years of being a caregiver to her son who has a bone disease and to her parents and working at "high heavy labor" jobs, she was depressed.

"My body can't do it anymore and my soul can't take it anymore," she said of her previous work. She is grateful for the opportunity to take the CNA course.

"I don't have the money," she said. "This saved my life."

After the students spoke, Dahms said the CNA program was "very impressive. You're here because you want to be here. It's very heartwarming to hear your stories. You're on the right track. It was enjoyable to be able to come to this type of setting."

Dahms said his father died about a month ago and the experience made him realize "what an important job" CNAs do. I realize how important it is to have folks that are qualified. It would be nice if we could spread this program throughout the state."

The Career Pathway programs are a collaboration between Marshall Public Schools, SW MN Private Industry Council, DEED, Minnesota West Community and Technical College, SW ABE and area employers.