NORTHWEST MICHIGAN WORKS! a program of Networks Northwest
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NEWS RELEASE
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Northwest Michigan Works! Celebrates Record-Breaking Apprenticeship Graduation Class

TRAVERSE CITY, MI – **Northwest Michigan Works!**, a program of **Networks Northwest**, celebrated a record-breaking milestone in workforce development on Friday, October 30, recognizing **77 graduates** from Registered Apprenticeship programs across the region. Representing **23 different occupations**, this year's graduating class marks the largest apprenticeship graduating class in the region's history.

Held at the Blue Bridge Event Center in Traverse City, the graduation celebration brought together apprentices, employers, mentors and workforce partners to recognize the dedication and accomplishments of individuals who have developed valuable skills through hands-on training and related classroom instruction.

The event also highlighted the impact of Registered Apprenticeship programs on local businesses and communities. Employer representatives from **Kalkaska Memorial Health Center, World Magnetics, Moore Mechanical, NMCAA, MR Products, Great Lakes Eye Consultants, Great Lakes Orthopaedic Center, Habitat for Humanity, Serra Traverse**

Networks Northwest and Northwest Michigan Works! are supported by the State of Michigan and are proud partners of the American Job Center Network. Projects may be funded with the authorized and appropriate use of federal funds. Contact Networks Northwest for additional information. Equal opportunity employer/program. Auxiliary aids and service are available upon request to individuals with disabilities. Individuals with speech or hearing impairments may call the Michigan Relay Center by dialing 711.

City, Cherryland Electric Cooperative, Red Barn Auto, Munson Healthcare, Villa at Traverse Point, and **United Engineered Technologies** shared their experiences and perspectives on how Registered Apprenticeship strengthens their workforces, develops talent, and creates meaningful career opportunities throughout the region.

Apprentices **Josh Nelson** of **MR Products** and **Montana McClouth** of **Red Barn Auto** shared their personal experiences, offering insight into the value of earning while learning, developing new skills and building a career through Registered Apprenticeship.

Graduates represented a diverse range of industries and occupations, including **construction, healthcare, customer service, early childhood education, CNC programming, manufacturing, automotive technician specialties** and **more**. The variety of career pathways demonstrates how Registered Apprenticeship can help employers develop talent across multiple industries while providing individuals with opportunities to advance their careers.

A highlight of the celebration was the recognition of **Jill Ponstein** of **Kalkaska Memorial Health Center** as ***Mentor of the Year***. This award recognizes her commitment to supporting apprentices, sharing industry knowledge and helping develop the next generation of skilled professionals.

“The Northwest Michigan Works! Apprenticeship Services Team is incredibly proud to host this annual event and this year was even more special. With 77 graduating apprentices in 23 different job titles, we recognized Journeyworkers in very traditional trades as well as emerging occupations. Extraordinary mentors and dedicated employers were also recognized for their efforts in supporting apprentices throughout their journeys. We are grateful to play a role in these success stories and proud of what we continue to accomplish with all of our apprenticeship partners throughout Northwest Michigan,” said **Evelyn Szpliet**, Northwest Michigan Works! Regional Director of Apprenticeship Services.

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The record-breaking graduation class reflects the continued growth and importance of Registered Apprenticeship as a workforce development strategy in Northwest Michigan. By combining paid, hands-on experience with structured training, apprenticeship programs help businesses build a skilled workforce while giving individuals a direct pathway to career success.

Congratulations to all 77 graduates, and thank you to the employers, mentors and partners who make Registered Apprenticeship opportunities possible throughout Northwest Michigan.

Northwest Michigan Works! is a program of **Networks Northwest**, connecting job seekers with career opportunities and helping employers find, train and retain talent. Through Registered Apprenticeship and other workforce development initiatives, Northwest Michigan Works! supports career pathways that benefit individuals, businesses and communities.

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NOTE to Media: Images are oftentimes available upon request by emailing Dana O'Dell at dana.odell@networksnorthwest.org and stating preferences for resolution, file format, and file size. Or phone (231) 929-5075. Check our online Media Room at networksnorthwest.org/media

Founded in 1974, Networks Northwest facilitates and manages various programs and services for the 10-county region. These programs include Northwest Michigan Works!, APEX Accelerator (formerly PTAC), various business services, and many different regional planning initiatives in response to our communities' requests and needs. You will see the broad spectrum of workforce, business, and community services Networks Northwest offers if you visit our website, networksnorthwest.org. Networks Northwest's member counties are Antrim, Benzie, Charlevoix, Emet, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Leelanau, Manistee, Missaukee, and Wexford.

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