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By Mary Crawford, NCTA News

Irrigation industry recruits former Marine

CURTIS, Neb. - When Collin Overmann left California after four years of service with the U.S. Marine Corps, the Nebraska native wasn't sure of his next assignment.

"I thought about going to a lineman school in Texas," Overmann says.

Then, a friend from Milford told him about the demand for center pivot irrigation technicians and the Irrigation Technician Certificate program in Curtis.

The 2012 graduate of Elkhorn South High School headed for a campus visit to see the NCTA-Reinke Irrigation Technology program at the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture.



Collin Overmann

"I liked the college and the community a lot, and the academic program was ideal," Overmann said. "I knew I wanted to live in Nebraska, where I could spend most of my work time outside, and thought this was a great career choice for me."

With tuition assistance from the GI Bill due to his military service, Overmann started his NCTA program in August. He is pursuing the 1-year irrigation technician program, along with another semester for advance welding courses.

"I wanted to take some electives that aren't required for the irrigation tech program such as the small engines class and agricultural economics," Overmann added. The two were on his course schedule when classes began in late August.

Then, in September, while volunteering at the NCTA display with Reinke Irrigation during Husker Harvest Days in Grand Island, Overmann took his career a step further.

He interviewed for a college internship with Holdrege Irrigation, which also owns locations at Alda, Lexington and Ravenna.

The dealership offered him a job after completing the 34-credit hour irrigation technician concentration, complete with a \$500 per semester scholarship matched by Reinke's corporate office based in Deshler, Nebraska. In turn, Overmann made an employment pledge for two years of work for the dealership.

"We will put Collin out there in the field next summer where he will get more hands-on training," explained Tim Schmidt, vice president of Holdrege Irrigation. "Once he graduates and is here fulltime, we'll see where he wants to settle down and be located within our company."

The NCTA-Reinke partnership started in 2013, as a result of industry demand for the technicians who install center pivot irrigation systems through Nebraska, the U.S., and internationally.

"The college answered the request by industry to offer a curriculum specifically tailored for this technical trade," said Brad Ramsdale, NCTA's chair of the Agronomy and Agriculture Mechanics Division.

The start-up was launched with Reinke Irrigation installing a new, GPS-operated pivot system at the NCTA farm, plus donating electrical and irrigation supplies to the college. Last year students erected a three-tower “mini pivot” from the company, operational in an ag mechanics shop.

“I would like to the program grow and have more students with Collin’s interest and desire,” said Dan Stehlik, his ag mechanics instructor, who is currently teaching students from Nebraska, Kansas and Texas. “We have many more requests for employees than we can fill, from Reinke dealers and from dealers of other center pivot brands.”

Overmann likes his current courses in AC and DC Electrical Analysis, Introduction to Electric Code, and Welding, as well as Small Engines, Ag Economics, and an NCTA required course in Learning Communities (leadership, service, diversity, campus resources, etc.). Next semester he adds Irrigation Systems and Safety classes.

For more irrigation technology details, contact Stehlik or Ramsdale at 1-800-3-CURTIS. Online article at: <https://go.unl.edu/i4v6>

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Note: These and more high resolution photos are available upon request



NCTA Dean Ron Rosati, Collin Overmann and Dan Stehlik



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Collin Overmann of Elkhorn is studying irrigation technology at the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture in Curtis. He received scholarship support from Holdrege Irrigation and Reinke Irrigation last week presented by NCTA Dean Ron Rosati, left, with Dan Stehlik, ag mechanics instructor. (Brent Thomas/NCTA News photos)