



## NEBRASKA COLLEGE OF TECHNICAL AGRICULTURE

### Learning from the ground up

By Mary Crawford, NCTA NEWS

CURTIS, Neb. (July 19, 2022) \_ Tzi Martinez has grit and determination to learn new skills.

When he walked in the campus facilities office to inquire about a new position posted by the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture, he may have been thinking of an old proverb, “Where there’s a will, there’s a way.”

NCTA was planning to hire a fulltime grounds supervisor, a position put on hold for several years, first by budget constraints and staffing, then Covid-19.

“I went to Randi Houghtelling and said if they (NCTA) were willing to work with me and I was willing to learn about the job, would they hire me, because I was very willing to work,” Martinez said.

NCTA leaders liked the proposal from their student worker and recent college graduate of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. They made an offer pending more on-the-job training and acquiring a turf applicators certificate. A license is required to apply pesticides in lawn care.

Martinez loves to learn.

“I have a lot of literature to read at home on topics such as irrigation, trees and shrubs, studying for my turf applicators license,” Martinez says. “For now, I am in charge of the sprinklers and lawn care, and supervise two co-workers on the mowing, weed-eating, lawn edging, and many other duties.”

A local youth who grew up in Curtis and graduated from Medicine Valley High School in 2018, Martinez headed to the UNL intending to study biochemistry.

He shares that as his Christian faith grew deeper, he then became most interested in helping troubled youth and those in need. He graduated in May with a bachelor’s degree in Child, Youth and Family Studies. Much of his college program, however, was not at the UNL campus.

“COVID opened up a whole new avenue with an online option for my education. I lived at home here in Curtis with mom and dad. And I worked here as an NCTA student worker during the summers of 2020 and 2021.”



*Tzi Martinez, temporary grounds supervisor at the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture, cleans tree and vegetative clippings from a campus greenhouse.  
(Anthony Gardner / NCTA Photo)*

His duties then were with maintenance and facilities, so was familiar with the campus facilities and grounds, co-workers and environment.

“Right now, this past week, I’ve been cleaning, pruning, and caring for the large trees and vegetation in the tropical area of the campus greenhouse,” Martinez said. “I’ve really enjoyed working with the trees on campus.”

### **Working the plan**

A campuswide beautification and renovation program is part of NCTA Dean Larry Gossen’s vision for upgrades at the 109-year-old campus.

Signage, campus lighting, sidewalk and street renovations will mesh with master plans for landscaping and enhancements to building exteriors.

“Tzi has begun training on several key areas of horticulture, landscape, arborist training, turf management, and chemical application,” Gossen announced on June 27. “He is now in charge of all landscaping and turf management projects.”

The grounds supervisor is a clearinghouse for suggestions and projects planned by the student Horticulture Club, campus volunteers, faculty, and staff.

“Please run all project ideas through him before starting something new. He is the person in charge,” Gossen added. “I’m sure he is open to suggestions and ideas. Since he is still learning, he will take all recommendations and make his decision based on the overall campus plan for beautification.”

When he has questions and need for specific input, Martinez has plenty of resources.

NCTA Agronomy Professor Brad Ramsdale is on campus. University of Nebraska Extension educators and specialists are nearby, in North Platte, at the West Central Research, Extension and Education Center.

“Also, I am working with the Nebraska Forest Service and Nebraska Arboretum staff on trees and shrubs,” Martinez said. “I would love to have learning experience on the Lindens and bigger trees around campus too.”

Martinez gleans historical knowledge and grounds tips from Kenny Russell, NCTA’s retired head of maintenance. Russell now works part-time, as needed, primarily in the spring and summer. He handles the pesticide applications until Martinez becomes certified.

“I am willing to work hard and grow in this position,” Martinez says. “I can hop on a mower or do what is needed to get the job delegated or done in a timely manner.”

*Part of the University of Nebraska system, the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture is a two-year institution with a statewide mission of preparing students for successful careers in agriculture, veterinary technology and related industries. NCTA is known for its affordable tuition, high job-placement rate for its graduates, and for the success of student teams in competitive activities including crops judging, ranch horse events, livestock judging, shotgun sports, stock dog trials, and intercollegiate rodeo. The college is consistently ranked as one of the best two-year schools in the nation.*

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Online article: <https://go.unl.edu/jmzr>