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DSPS Communications

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Wisconsin DSPS Presents Check to Northcentral Technical College *Youth Firefighter Training Grant to benefit local fire departments, area students*

Madison -- The Wisconsin Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS) today presented a ceremonial check for \$25,000 to Northcentral Technical College (NTC), one of four recent winners of a DSPS Youth Firefighter Training grant. The grants aim to boost recruitment in fire departments by introducing fire service careers to Wisconsin high school students.

“It’s all about public safety. Our Wisconsin fire departments do more than fight fires. They are on the frontlines of all aspects of community safety,” said DSPS Secretary Dan Hereth before presenting the check. “We’re proud to present these funds, and to further Governor Tony Evers’ efforts to work with local communities and other partners to help keep Wisconsinites safe.”

The grant will help fund a new program, NTC’s Youth Firefighter Academy, which will train high school students to be Firefighter Level I volunteers/employees and prepare them for the Emergency Medical Responder certification exam. Grant partners include the volunteer Central Fire and EMS District, as well as Colby and Abbotsford high schools.

“I think it (the Academy) is a great idea. Even if we get students that only join us for a while, maybe as they move on in life they can serve in another department in another community, because most every department has recruitment needs right now,” said Central Fire and EMS District Chief Joe Mueller, explaining how many of the current volunteers at his department are getting older and closer to retirement age.

Recruitment and retention have become key issues for many Wisconsin fire departments but particularly the all-volunteer stations. The Youth Firefighter Grant Program is designed to help address these concerns by exposing high school students to career and volunteer opportunities in the fire service at a time when they are making decisions about their future careers and endeavors.

The principal at one of the partner schools, Colby High School, is Steve Wozniak, who also serves as a volunteer firefighter at Central Fire and EMS. He also went through his firefighter training at NTC and was instrumental in getting the ball rolling on this collaboration.

“At 36, I’m one of the younger members of the department and that’s kind of scary,” said Wozniak. “We need to do what we can to fill that gap and recruit younger firefighters.”

Next year, NTC will train up to six high school students to be Firefighter Level I volunteers or employees.

“By working together, we are building pathways ensuring a viable, and sustainable, public safety workforce for central Wisconsin,” said NTC President Jennie Worden.

Wisconsin DSHS regulates firefighter health and safety and manages the state fire prevention program. It also administers the 2% fire dues program, which distributes funds collected from insurers and matched by the state back to qualifying fire departments.