

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

March 8, 2013

Contact: Wendy Smith (307) 674-6446 ext. 2801/Email [wsmith@sheridan.edu](mailto:wsmith@sheridan.edu)  
Dennis Jacobs (307) 674-6446 ext. 2802/Email [djacobs@sheridan.edu](mailto:djacobs@sheridan.edu)

**JOBS, EDUCATION, TECHNOLOGY- \$2,000,000.00**

**Whitney Benefits supports high-demand programs; calls on others to help**

Whitney Benefits announces the creation of the Jobs, Education, Technology (JET) Program. The program is a partnership with Sheridan College and other potential sponsors and will include funding four new instructor positions for five years. The positions will be in areas where there is tremendous demand for educated, skilled workers. The total cost to add four full-time teachers is approximately \$400,000 per year or \$2 million over five years.

In order to fully realize the plan, Whitney Benefits trustees are looking to others in the community to match their pledge. The total pledge from Whitney Benefits is one-half of the \$2 million, or \$1 million, toward this effort. The agreement is meant to allow SC to expand the offerings in such high demand areas as Machine Tool Technology, Diesel Technology, Welding Technology, and Agriculture/Horticulture.

“This is a bold step for our community,” said Roy Garber, Vice President of Whitney Benefits. “We are calling on visionaries in our community and region to match our pledge in order to support students. The manufacturing industry estimates that 600,000 jobs remain unfilled because they cannot find skilled workers. We must do everything we can to train skilled machinists and technicians for the jobs that are here now.”

John Sikkenga, the College’s lone Diesel Technology Instructor said, “I can only accept 12 students each year but we have three times that many apply to the program. The over-the-road trucking industry is in great need of skilled mechanics. Within the next ten years, 60% of the workers in this industry will be retiring. If they are interested in self-employment or working for an established company, all of my students have multiple job offers upon graduation. With the support from Whitney Benefits, we will be able to double the size of our program and provide jobs and career opportunities for more students.”

Students in these technical areas of study often pursue multiple certificates and degrees. “Cross-training in these fields is common and is one of the items employers like to see,” said SC Welding Instructor, Kevin Fox. Many students accept a part-time job in the Sheridan area while pursuing their degree. A co-op, similar to an internship, is built into the curriculum for all programs. Often a part-time position will turn into full-time job opportunities upon graduation, explained Fox.

Lee Spaulding, a Machine Tool Technology student from Billings, MT, began a co-op, part-time job only months into his first college semester. “I am a machinist for a local craftsman,” said Spaulding. “It is great. I get to apply the skills I am learning in class, but at the same time I am learning about new techniques and really about an entire industry.” Spaulding will graduate with his Associate of Applied Science degree in Machine Tool Technology in the spring of 2014. He understands the importance of cross-training and is also taking classes in the other technical areas. “I’ve already turned down one job. I want to complete my degree first, and am confident I will find the right job once I walk across the stage and receive my degree,” said Spaulding.

Sheridan College Machine Tool Technology Instructor Randy Whyte said, “At any given time, I could place every current student in a good job. This field is so competitive; most of my students will have multiple job offers and are able to create the opportunity that is right for them. With the addition of teachers and a secure funding source through the Whitney Benefits JET Program, we will help our graduates secure high-paying jobs and a solid future. ”

Whitney Benefits has played an important role in establishing and helping grow the Sheridan College campus and its programs. This includes the first gift of land on which the campus is built and which now encompasses 140+ acres – all given by Whitney Benefits. In total, Whitney Benefits’ generosity and gifts to Sheridan College exceed \$47 million. Whitney Benefits was created under the Last Will and Testament of Edward A. Whitney, a Sheridan County resident, who passed away in 1917. For more information about Whitney Benefits, please visit their website at [www.whitneybenefits.org](http://www.whitneybenefits.org).