



When a U-turn RIGHT is the TURN

More than one route to your life work's passion

By Elizabeth Whitchurch
Photos by Debbie Gregerson and Terry Anderson

U-turns – we all make them. We'll be tooling along enjoying life and the scenery, when suddenly something just doesn't seem right. So we slow down, pull over and think for a moment. Realizing a possible mistake, we turn around and head back, searching for what we missed. And when we find it, we make the turn and start heading in the new direction, confident – or at least pretty sure – that we're now on the right road.

So it was for WITC Agricultural Power and Equipment Technician student Kyle Bechel about two years ago. He was on the university path, studying agri-business and agronomy, and things were interesting, he says, but his current path seemed out of sync for his life's work passion.

Bechel, a 2005 Menomonie High School grad, followed the typical growth path through high school. He works the family farm, plays softball in the summer, attends church, hunts, fishes, and spends time with family and friends. All that fit into his plan. So when it came time for college, he applied at one four-year college, was accepted and attended classes. But after three-and-a-half years at the university, life seemed out of whack. So Bechel slowed down, pulled over and made a U-turn to see what route he'd missed.

What Bechel discovered upon retracing his steps was his passion. "I talked with my uncles on the family farm and decided I'd be happier working as a diesel mechanic. My passion is for tractors and working on equipment," Bechel says. "I'd heard good things



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about WITC's Agricultural Power and Equipment Technician program from a mechanic at home in Durand. He said it was a good program. And now I'm working at that dealership, too."

The technical college route was something he'd overlooked, assuming the four-year was where he was meant to be. "I wanted to experience the four-year college atmosphere," he says. "And it was fun, but my grades are better now than they were then," he says with a shy smile. He feels the schedule at WITC is more flexible, making it easier to work the farm and the dealership in conjunction with his schooling. "I actually learned more here (at WITC) in one week than I did in a year at the U," Bechel says. "Not that it (university) wasn't interesting or didn't have good information, it just wasn't my learning style.

"I feel a technical college is more personable than a four-year liberal arts college," Bechel says. "I also really like the hands-on approach a technical college offers. I'm very impressed with the teachers. They are teaching because they love what they are teaching and cannot wait to pass their knowledge on to the students.

"If you have a question, you can ask it right away and they always do their best to answer it. At the university, everything was pretty much the same – go to class, listen to a lecture, take notes, take the test. It works for some people, but not me," Bechel explains.

"The reason I chose the ag mechanics program at WITC is because I'd heard many good things from many people about not only the instructors, but the course material and the way the program operated.

"So far it (technical college) has more than exceeded what I expected, and I am very, very happy to say that now I wake up and can't wait to go to class!" Bechel looks forward to graduation in the spring of 2011, with more work at a dealership.

The project he's working on this year is a John Deere 4320. So far he's replaced the rear axle and brakes, made some transmission changes and done some front axle work. Currently he's rewiring the electrical system. When finished, the tractor will return to the family farm and its work.

Bechel offers sage advice to anyone considering college: "Explore all the options. Follow your passion before you choose what college you want." And don't fear the U-turn; you may discover your life work's passion on another pathway.

Agricultural Power and Equipment Technician is a two-year program offered at WITC-New Richmond. For more information, go to witc.edu/pgmpages/agpower. ■

Offered at the New Richmond Campus



Agricultural Power and Equipment Technician

The modern farmer depends on numerous machines every day. Dust, dirt, fertilizers and extreme weather can wear down even the toughest equipment. When breakdowns occur everything grinds to a halt.

Available at WITC's New Richmond campus, the Agricultural Power and Equipment Technician program shows its students how to get both old and new equipment back to work.

The program, which is unique to Northwestern Wisconsin, consists of practical knowledge and shop management skills to help students master installation, service, assembly, adjustment, repair and operation of various types of machinery and tractors. Students also learn how to work with hydraulics, transmissions, electrical systems and air conditioning. Classes like 12-Volt Electrical Theory, Diesel Engines, Power Trains and Mobile Hydraulics provide students with a wide range of skills. Much of this coursework also translates into jobs in diesel repair or other industries to assist in a wide array of employment options.

To learn more about the Agricultural Power and Equipment Technician program, visit witc.edu/pgmpages/agpower or call 800.243.9482.