Continuing education is a hot ticket these days. Consider some findings from a recent survey by the U.S. Department of Education:

- More than 46 percent of all U.S. adults take continuing education courses each year.
- A total of 54 percent of all employed adults take courses annually.
- Older adults are seeking continuing education in greater numbers than ever. That includes about 41 percent of adults aged 51 to 65, and 22 percent of adults 66 and older.

What’s more, another recent survey noted that more companies use continuing education and training to attract and retain employees and boost productivity. In fact, more than half of Fortune magazine’s “100 Best Companies to Work For” paid for between 21 and 40 hours of training per employee in 2001, and another 34 percent paid for 41 to 80 hours of training.

The growing interest in supplemental education isn’t restricted to adults, either—numerous studies point to more and more kids and high school students filling gaps in their learning, or just indulging individual interests, by taking classes outside of school.

Why are more people pursuing continuing education? A look at specific programs available at WITC’s Ashland, New Richmond, and Superior campuses provides insight as to why people are eager for it—and what WITC offers learners of all ages.

**BOYD GROTH: A lifelong learner**

Boyd Groth figures that between his primary education, college, medical school, and now a year at WITC’s Ashland campus, he’s spent 24 of his 65 years in school. And he swears that the teaching he’s received in the two-year Marine Repair Technician course is among the best he’s ever seen. “This is as good as the best of it,” he says. “The instructor, Tim Edwards, is right up there with the best teachers I’ve ever had.”

Groth spent 30 years as a rural family physician near Mosinee, Wis., but he has a lifelong interest in boats and motors. The death of his wife in 2006 was followed closely by his retirement from medicine, and finding himself at a crossroads, he decided to do something positive. “I had planned working on boats as my retirement activity, so I wanted to find the best course I could,” he says. “I did some research on the Internet, and the course at the Ashland campus looked like one of the very best in the country. I don’t think there are a half-dozen other courses I could find that were as good. I couldn’t believe that I found exactly what I wanted so close by, but it turned out to be true.”

Groth was so excited about the course that he moved the approximately 120 miles to Ashland to immerse himself in the new educational opportunity. Once he started taking the course, his high hopes were confirmed. “We mostly work on outboard motors—taking one apart piece by piece and putting it back together,” Groth says. “We work on ‘project motors’—motors with something wrong with them. The idea is learning how outboard motors function and how they’re fitted into boats.”
The diploma also includes instruction in electrical and mechanical systems, steering and transmissions, and hulls and accessories. Once he’s done with the course, Groth wants to start a company that will convert old sailboats to diesel-electric sailboats. Traditionally, he explains, sailboats have sails along with a diesel engine that goes directly to a propeller. But the addition of electric power is a coming trend. “It’s something that’s developing rapidly in the recreational boat market,” he says, adding that he’s looking forward to this new chapter in his professional life, thanks to the qualified tutelage of WITC instructors Edwards and Todd Larson. “It’s taken over the commercial boat market.”

That flexibility has paid off for the college, its students, and area employers, such as MasterCraft in Rice Lake and Northwire Inc. in Osceola. Case in point: Northwire. In 2003, it created a scholarship program for employees who wanted to learn on the job. The company worked with WITC and applied for a state Workforce Advancement Training (WAT) grant, which it used to pay for training in cabling technology and extrusion, the process of creating wiring covering.

The WAT grants are designed to upgrade the skills and productivity of employees at established, for-profit businesses in

### NORTHWIRE:

**On-the-job learning**

While many colleges only aspire to coexist with the business and industry in their town, WITC takes that relationship a step further, according to Susan Yohnk Lockwood, dean of Continuing Education on the New Richmond campus. “We provide customized training to business and industry,” she says. “We can take a course off the shelf and tailor it to a company’s needs, or we can build a new course from scratch. And, we can teach at a WITC campus, at a company site, or anywhere in between.”

To find out more, go to www.witc.edu/business, or contact:

- **Ashland:** Bambi Pattermann, 800.243-WITC, ext. 3111,
e-mail: bambi.pattermann@witc.edu.
- **New Richmond:** Susan Yohnk Lockwood, 800.243-WITC, ext. 4252,
e-mail: susan.lockwood@witc.edu.
- **Rice Lake:** Dennis Holtegaard, 800.243-WITC, ext. 5246,
e-mail: dennis.holtegaard@witc.edu.
- **Superior:** Kim Pearson, 800.243-WITC, ext. 6385,
e-mail: kim.pearson@witc.edu.
COLLEGE FOR KIDS:  

The Ultimate Head Start

It’s a cry that every parent dreads come summertime: “There’s nothing to do!”

WITC’s Superior campus is seeing to it that those words are heard less frequently, and that kids learn a thing or two in the process. Last year, it debuted its College for Kids program, a summer enrichment initiative designed to serve school-age students aged 9 to 14 in a learning atmosphere that supports inquiry and exploration.

A blend of hands-on educational content and recreational activity, College for Kids runs the gamut from valuable opportunities for skill building (Babysitting, Basic Spanish, Jewelry Making Basics, Art-Self Portrait) to ways to burn off some energy (Dance and Fit Kids) to just plain fun (Young Aviators, Weird Science).

The ideas for the classes, and for the program in general, “came from a variety of areas,” says Kim Pearson, WITC Superior dean of Continuing Education. “There’s such a demand for programming for kids beyond the age where they can really appreciate a standard child-care format, yet they’re too young to leave home alone. So there’s a gap, and we’re trying to fill it.”

Pearson has an 11-year-old, so she understands the tough spot kids that age find themselves in. “Someone else in our office has two 12-year-olds, and other people have similarly aged kids,” she says. “So once one person spoke up, a number of people started saying the same thing: ‘We need this.’”

Deb Gonser enrolled her son, William, and daughter, Elizabeth, into College for Kids last summer, and had nothing but good things to say about it. “They enjoyed it very much,” she says. “WITC provides a great course selection for them, allowing them to build skills and confidence in a fun and age-appropriate environment.”

William’s favorite course was the aviation class, and Elizabeth enjoyed both the babysitting and jewelry-making courses, says Gonser. “In fact, I wear the jewelry that she made me,” she adds. “Weird Science, taught by WITC Superior instructor Charlie Glazman, was especially popular, Pearson says. The class gave kids the opportunity to make “slime,” freeze bubbles, create volcanoes, and indulge in other delightfully messy endeavors, all while learning the scientific principles behind each activity.

Last summer, the flagship program drew about 30 kids to two four-week sessions in June, and next year Pearson is expecting even a greater turnout. “The response has been really positive,” she says. “I think everyone who participated this year plans to come back next year.”

“College for Kids is really a good fit for our community,” agrees Gonser. “It not only provides a needed service during the summer for quality childcare, but the kids look forward to attending. They often get bored with the standard summer childcare routine, and WITC provides a nice break from that.”

To learn more about WITC’s College for Kids program, contact Kim Pearson, dean, Continuing Education, 715.394.6677, ext. 6385, e-mail: kim.pearson@witc.edu