



**MITCHELL TECHNICAL COLLEGE  
FOUNDATION**

Volume 2



**BE THE BEST.**

# The Foundation of the Foundation

The Mitchell Tech Foundation was established in 1999 by board members Chris Paustian, Gopal Vyas, Pat Clark, Keith Bartels, Ed Olson, Bob Mueller, and Greg Kohlenberg. The Foundation serves as the fund-raising arm for Mitchell Tech and is dedicated to four key areas of support:

- Building Scholarships
- Building Programs
- Building Endowments
- Building Relationships

Foundation board members include MTC alumni and business leaders in various industries. Members meet four times per year to help advise Mitchell Tech on the four pillars. Current MTC Foundation board members include:

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# Table of Contents



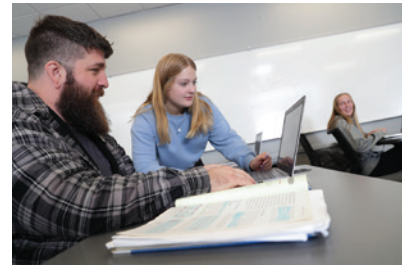
## 4-5

Grads On The Go



## 8-9

Former Power Line Student "Xcels" as a Communications Leader



## 10-11

Support for Life through The Center for Student Success



Meet the Mitchell Technical College Foundation staff (l-r) Robin Jacobsen, Scholarship Advisor; Nick Bakhtiari, Director of Foundation Relations; and Sheryl Plagmann, Project Support Specialist.

This publication is published annually by the Mitchell Technical College Foundation, 1800 E. Spruce St., Mitchell, SD 57301 and distributed to alumni, parents, students, and friends of Mitchell Technical College.

**ON THE COVER:** Mitchell Tech students entering the Campus Center on the Mitchell Technical College campus for class.



## Gratitude in Growth

Mitchell Technical College is making remarkable strides in every direction. The signs of progress are evident wherever you turn. The immense support from groups like **Women for Success @Tech** demonstrates the outstanding community backing. Additionally, the construction of our Ag Power Diesel facility on our modern campus further exemplifies our commitment to student advancement.

This eagerly anticipated release of our second Foundation Magazine fills me with excitement, as it provides another chance to showcase the students, faculty, and alumni who contribute to making MTC truly exceptional.

In my role as Director of Foundation Relations, I am humbled to have the opportunity to highlight the endless possibilities, advancements, partnerships, and achievements available through Mitchell Tech. I sincerely hope you take the time to peruse this glimpse into the multitude of positive developments happening at Mitchell Tech in 2023-2024.

With the December 2023 completion of the Ag Power Diesel building, all our programs will be conveniently housed on our main campus for the first time in decades. Undoubtedly, it is an incredibly opportune moment to be an MTC student.

Thank you to those of you who have supported us through the years. Your generosity has played an instrumental role in empowering us to create an enriching learning environment for our students and foster a vibrant campus community. We are incredibly grateful for the way you have championed our mission and contributed to our growth. As we embark on a new academic year, we are thrilled to welcome you to visit our campus.

Thank you once again for your invaluable support, and welcome to another exciting chapter at Mitchell Technical College.

Sincerely,

**Nick Bakhtiari**  
Director of Foundation Relations  
Mitchell Technical College Foundation  
[Nick.Bakhtiari@mitchelltech.edu](mailto:Nick.Bakhtiari@mitchelltech.edu)



### WAYS TO HELP

Scan with your phone's camera app to support MTC students.

[mitchelltech.edu/donate](https://mitchelltech.edu/donate)



# M Grads On The Go



**Kalli Behm** ▲

**Background:** Grew up in Ohio and graduated high school in 2003. Has an associate degree in criminal justice and worked in the field for years. Moved to Sioux Falls in 2021.

**MTC Program:** Graduated with an Associate of Applied Science degree in Culinary Arts, May 2023.

**Why MTC?:** Mitchell Tech offers the only Culinary Arts program in the state. I was looking for a fresh start and have loved cooking and baking my entire life. This program offered everything I wanted, including small class sizes and one-on-one time with the instructors. I was also able to secure scholarships to help me along the way, including awards from the SD Pork Producers, the South Dakota Wheat Commission, and the John and Diane Weber Memorial.

**Highlights:** I decided to do my culinary internship in Dublin, Ireland. I interned at Fallon & Byrne, which was an amazing experience. The building had four levels and they offered everything from a deli to fine dining

*Mitchell Technical College offers an affordable education that allows students to “be the best” in industries ranging from health sciences to engineering technology to precision ag and everything in between. Our graduates are making a difference at home, across the state, and around the country. A few of them were happy to share their stories with us.*



Kalli with other chefs at Fallon & Byrne, Dublin, Ireland

to catering and events and upscale cakes. I learned from some great chefs—there were seven countries represented in one kitchen!

Another highlight was the spring project right before graduation. I had to write my own menu, create and test dishes, price everything and then present it for people to taste in the Oak Room.

**Career Path:** Augustana University in Sioux Falls hired me as the supervisory sous chef on campus, so I moved back to Sioux Falls after graduation. Eventually, I'd like to own a small farm to table restaurant with an open kitchen concept. A place with its own greenhouse and animals, something small. I feel like I am set to succeed, and plan to give this 110 percent.

**Grad Advice:** Don't be afraid of making mistakes and messing up. The instructors are great and they are here to help. You can get out of this what you put into it, so why not put in 110 percent?

## Taylor Youngbluth ▼

**Background:** Graduated from Armour High School in 2012

**MTC Program:** Propane & Natural Gas Technology (now Natural Gas Technology), Class of 2014

**Why MTC?:** I wanted to get into the Power Line program but it was full, so I switched to the Propane & Natural Gas program and planned to get into the power line program the next year. I was offered a job working on a pipeline while I was in the program, so I decided to just go that route.

**Highlights:** The highlight was probably the fact that a job presented itself before I graduated. I got my degree on Friday and started work on Monday.



**Career Path:** I started right away doing contract work for Distribution Construction out of North Carolina. They had a job for me in Gothenburg, Nebraska where I worked as a fuser for a few months. I spent the next nine years doing contract work all over the country, first with Distribution Construction and then with Q3 Contracting out of Iowa. Once I got married, I knew it was time for a more stable job in one location. I took a position with Mid-American Energy in Sioux Falls as a meter utility specialist in 2021. Today I am an Operations Technician and continue to work my way up the ladder.

**Grad Advice:** If you don't have a farm or construction background, this program will teach you how to run equipment and tools, and will help you figure out if this industry is right for you. Personally, I would recommend starting out as a contractor because you get to travel, and the money can be really good. If you decide to work for a utility, municipality, or construction company, you will have set hours, and your work will be more stable and less demanding.



**Camrynn Wagner** ▲

**Background:** Grew up in Miller, SD, and graduated from Sunshine Bible Academy in 2018

**MTC Program:** Medical Assisting, Class of 2021

**Why MTC?:** Mitchell offered a degree in the exact program I wanted, and it was close to home.

**Highlights:** I had special relationships with many of my instructors, especially in my second year of Medical Assisting. There were only eight people who continued in the program, and it made a huge difference for us to have a small class and build close relationships with our instructors. At this time, I was also a student ambassador for the program and had the opportunity to talk to students and give a presentation about Medical Assisting during Exploration Days. Finally, I met my boyfriend at MTC as he was going through the Power Sports and Marine Technology program.

**Career Path:** I did my clinical externship at Black Hills Urgent Care and then took a position with them after graduation. My mom and significant other live here and I love the Black Hills, so it is where I wanted to be. BHUC is a great company and some of my co-workers have become my best friends. I also mentored a few students seeking their medical assisting degrees, which was an amazing experience for me.

**Grad Advice:** The Medical Assisting program at MTC is an excellent program for anyone who wants to work in healthcare. As a medical assistant there are so many things you get to do, from direct patient care to labs to administrative duties. One day I hope to take the next step and get my nursing degree, but this is perfect for me right now.



# Foundation Events Bring People Together

## Connect, Celebrate, and Remember!

Each year, Mitchell Tech hosts several engaging social events designed to help people feel valued and involved. Three of our favorite gatherings were made possible through the Mitchell Tech Foundation!



### ◀ Donor Appreciation

The MTC Foundation Donor Reception is an annual event held in the Muth Electric Commons. In order to express gratitude and recognize the generosity of individuals, families, and businesses who have made donations to Mitchell Technical College throughout the past year, donors are treated to an upscale dinner prepared and served by the students from the Culinary Academy of South Dakota. The culinary students showcase their skills and provide a memorable dining experience for the attendees.

In addition to the culinary experience, the highlight of the evening is the presentation of special awards to the donors. These awards serve as a token of appreciation for their generous contributions to MTC. The recognition ceremony is an opportunity to publicly acknowledge the impact these donors have made on the institution and its students. It serves as a moment to celebrate the collective efforts of the MTC community in supporting the college's mission and vision.

### Donor Luncheons ▶

The Mitchell Tech Scholarship Luncheons are special events organized by the Mitchell Tech Foundation, to facilitate connections between scholarship donors and recipients. The luncheons aim to provide donors with an opportunity to meet the students benefiting from their generosity. These events take place in the Oak Room, a venue located on the Mitchell Tech campus.

During the luncheons, gourmet meals are served, prepared by students in the Culinary Academy of South Dakota program. The Scholarship Luncheons serve as a platform to foster personal connections between the donors and the students. These luncheons not only acknowledge the generosity of the donors but also create a sense of community and support among the Mitchell Tech scholarship recipients. The events help strengthen the bond between the institution, its students, and its benefactors, promoting a culture of giving and investment in education.



### A Memorable Student ▲ Golfing Experience

The Mitchell Tech Golf Classic offered an exciting opportunity for MTC students to engage in an afternoon golf tournament while immersing themselves in a social gathering and discovering the invaluable support provided by the MTC Foundation. This event served as a gateway for students to understand the Foundation's role in aiding their educational journeys.



With an array of enjoyable twists, the Golf Classic guaranteed a delightful experience. Participants anticipated thrilling prize drawings, complimentary food, and the chance to mingle with MTC industry partners. The event took place at the Lakeview Golf Course in Mitchell, attracting an average attendance of approximately 60 enthusiastic students each year.



**MITCHELL TECHNICAL COLLEGE  
FOUNDATION**

# Former Power Line Student “Xcels” as a Communications Leader



*“I am a huge proponent of tech schools for many reasons.”*

*Eric Pauli*

Eric Pauli is proof that the path to a successful career doesn't always follow a straight line.

The Community Relations Manager for Xcel Energy started his journey in the energy industry with a Power Line Construction & Maintenance degree but took his first job in the field as a contract designer—a job that didn't involve climbing poles.

“I was a weak climber, so it's probably good that I never became a lineman,” he admits. “When I talk to people who are interested in power line, I want them to know that this career isn't just about climbing poles. I work with multiple company leaders who graduated from Mitchell Tech and didn't start out as linemen.”

## Finding His Way

Eric graduated from Milbank High School in 1996. He was young and undecided about his future, so he went to Lake Area Tech and earned an ag business degree, figuring it would come in handy on the family farm. He then attended SDSU for a year to continue his ag business education but was still uncertain about his direction.

“I talked to my cousin's husband, and he was going through the power line program at Mitchell Tech,” he says. “It sounded interesting. At the time, I thought I would go through the program, work in power line and still be able to do some farming on the side.”

While he was in the program, a representative from a contract company that worked with Xcel Energy talked to his class about design work opportunities within the company. Eric liked what he heard and decided to pursue a job as a contract designer in Minneapolis after graduation in 2002. In 2004, he took a full-time job as an associate designer for Xcel Energy in Sioux Falls.

## Becoming A Leader

Eric continued to learn and work as an associate designer for the next nine years.

In 2013, a position as Xcel Energy's Community Relations Manager became available. He got the job.

“My power line background really helps me understand the industry, the people who work in it, and those that are looking to know more. I have in-depth knowledge of the design aspect, and I have all the appreciation in the world for the linemen,” he explains.

To help him in his career path, Eric decided to complete his bachelor's degree in management through the University of Sioux Falls Degree Completion program.

“It was nice that so many of my credits from my tech school education transferred. I am a huge proponent of tech schools for many reasons, and this is one of them,” he explains.

## Playing A Role in the Future

Today Eric's career has him managing community relations in 19 communities in Southwest Minnesota and 34 communities in South Dakota. His duties include overseeing Xcel Energy's Foundation and handling charitable contributions, scholarships, sponsorships, and volunteers. He also works alongside economic development efforts in the communities he serves and is a liaison with the media and local co-ops.

One of his favorite parts of his job is being able to support students seeking careers in the energy industry.

“I love coming to Mitchell Tech to provide scholarships or donate equipment,” he says. “It's a great school and a valued partnership. I feel fortunate to be able to stay connected and involved through Xcel Energy and attend events like the MTC scholarship luncheon. Never in my wildest dreams did I think I would be doing something like this as a career, but it's been a great journey so far.”

# Support for Life through The Center for Student Success



At Mitchell Tech, helping students graduate into a rewarding career often involves support beyond the classroom. In fact, this assistance can be the difference between a student earning a degree and a student dropping out of school.

“The Center for Student Success has been evolving since 2016 to meet students where they need us most, whether it’s academically, emotionally, socially, physically, or financially,” explains Kellie Nielsen, a Campus Counselor and Student Success Coach at MTC. “For example, when we discovered there are students on our campus going hungry, we did something about it. I have been managing the

Mitchell Tech Cupboard since 2017 and have seen how grateful students are to have this service.”

## Mitchell Tech Cupboard

The Mitchell Tech Cupboard is a food pantry available to all MTC students facing food insecurity. “I try to buy items I would feed my own family,” says Kellie. “It’s important for the students to maintain a sense of dignity. I have learned that students don’t reach out until they really need it. Often, students are cautious while shopping at the Cupboard. We try to encourage them to take as much as they need so it lasts them awhile.”

Kellie says she pays attention to what students need and she asks questions to get a better idea about what to stock in the Cupboard.

“I have found that students sometimes don’t have access to pots and pans or even can openers. I buy items that are easy to cook, meals that only require a few ingredients and grab-and-go foods. We do have a freezer and our faculty and staff are good about donating hamburger to fill it.”

During the 2022-23 school year, the Mitchell Tech Cupboard was accessed twenty different times. To utilize the service, students fill out a form on MyTech and then meet with one of the Student Success Coaches.

“Sometimes a student has lost a job or has been sick and missed too much work, and money is tight,” she explains. “This past winter, we had students who struggled to pay extra high electric bills or had car problems. This is where the Legacy of Student Success Endowment comes into play.”

## Legacy of Student Success Endowment

The Legacy of Student Success Endowment is partially funded by a Foundation initiative that ensures money is available to students faced with short-term financial burdens that could cause them to leave school before earning a degree.

To be considered for funds, students fill out a form on MyTech and then meet with Kellie one-on-one to determine eligibility based on factors such as attendance, grades, employment and lifestyle habits.

Legacy of Student Success Endowment funds have been used to help students with gas money, book purchases, car repairs, utility bills, partial rent payments, small emergencies, and day-to-day needs.

## Academic Tutoring

One of the most valuable services available through The Center for Student Success is the free tutoring provided to all Mitchell Tech students. The tutoring program is managed by Jessica Deinert, who is also a Campus Counselor and Student Success Coach.

Any student in any program can access free tutoring. Tutors are Mitchell Tech students who have been recommended by faculty for their grades, attendance, and positive attitudes. Last year, there were 17 student tutors representing a wide variety of classes on campus. Prior to being hired, tutors go through three hours of online training.



“Tutoring is beneficial to the tutor as well as the people we’re teaching,” says Brent Williamson, a student tutor who is seeking a degree in Automated Controls/SCADA. “Tutoring helps me have a better understanding of the material, and I find that teaching is the best way to learn.”

According to Jessica, a total of 48 students signed up for tutoring in the fall and 21 signed up for tutoring in the spring.

“Our tutors don’t just support classroom learning, but they also teach skills like organization and planning. They help students understand various teaching styles and study techniques,” she says. “I believe this could be one reason why we see the drop in need for tutoring services in the spring.”

Some of the more popular classes for tutoring are in the Health Sciences Division, Accounting, SCADA, AC/DC Analysis and general education classes like English and Math.

## Success Starts Here

The whole idea behind The Center for Student Success is to ensure students graduate with degrees that will help them achieve personal, career and educational goals. While the MTC Cupboard, Legacy of Student Success, and Tutoring are some of our highlight programs, we offer much more, including free mental health counseling, disability and learning services, and career guidance. To find a full listing of services provided by The Center for Student Success, or to learn more about how The Center helps students thrive in all aspects of life, visit [mitchelltech.edu](http://mitchelltech.edu).



### WAYS TO HELP

Scan with your phone’s camera app to support MTC students.

[mitchelltech.edu/donate](http://mitchelltech.edu/donate)

# Rising to New Heights

*Mitchell Tech's first female power line grad comes full circle as an instructor*



**Nicole Grosz**

Power Line Construction & Maintenance Instructor  
Mitchell Technical College

Mitchell Tech's Power Line Construction and Maintenance Instructor Nicole Grosz will be the first to say the college's power line program isn't for everyone.

The career is physically demanding and brings new challenges every day, including climbing utility poles and carrying heavy tools in all types of weather.

"It sounded like the perfect job for me!" she says with a laugh.

Twenty years ago, Nicole was the first female to earn a power line certificate from Mitchell Tech. Her twin sister Shannon followed in her footsteps, but the two sisters are a rarity in the industry.

"There are just a handful of women with power line degrees," she says. "I grew up with a love of the outdoors and basically lived outside. I like to be busy and physically active. I checked out the power line program during Exploration Days when I was a junior in high school and I was hooked."

Nicole started her career as a line worker doing contract work, eventually moving to Gillette, Wyoming, for opportunities in the coal mine industry.

"We were always either setting up or tearing down power lines to power the areas being mined," she explains. "It was a great experience, but after four years I needed a change. I took a position with the City of Gillette and became a Journeyman Lineman for the next ten years."

Her job duties with the City of Gillette included repairing downed power lines, locating underground power lines for customers and being on-call for storm emergencies.

Eventually, Nicole wanted less on-call work, and transitioned into a metering job for the City of Gillette, where she learned a whole new set of skills.

"My husband and I were originally going to stay in Gillette for a couple of years, but we were there until my husband had the opportunity to move back home to farm in 2018. We moved to Armour, South Dakota, and I retired from my metering job," she says.

She found retirement boring even after her husband put her in charge of the cows.

"I wanted a job, but it needed to be the right job," she says. "It took a couple of years before an opening came up in Mitchell Tech's power line program. Fortunately, they hired me and I started as an instructor in the fall of 2021."

Today she is one of four power line instructors working to teach the next generation of students everything it takes to be a successful lineman.

"This is a job that's not going anywhere. Our national grid is aged and in need of repair, so we're going to need people to do this for a long time," she says. "If you like being outside and you like being physically fit, it's a rewarding career that offers a good salary and good people. If you are a woman who is interested, come talk to me. I can tell you exactly what it's like because I've been there."

# Community Women Circle Around Mitchell Tech with Donations and Support

Last April, women from the Mitchell community came together to make a difference in the lives of students attending Mitchell Technical College.

The idea was to support Mitchell Tech through a women's "giving circle," a concept Sheryl Plagmann, Project Support Specialist, read about in an article for the South Dakota Community Foundation.

"A giving circle is when a group of people with similar interests and values pool their money to donate to a shared cause," she explains. "They decide how the money is used and provide support in other ways, such as volunteering. In our case, it's also a way for members to learn more about Mitchell Tech and the needs of students."

The giving circle, officially called **Women for Success @Tech**, recruited its first eight members after the introductory meeting. Combined with six founding members, the group started off with fourteen women dedicated to donating \$500 annually, as well as their time.

"We had such a great turn-out at our social last April," says Sheryl. "The women in attendance were thrilled with the idea of supporting students at Mitchell Tech."

The initiative will play a crucial role in ensuring students have access to educational opportunities and can continue their studies despite financial constraints.

Sheryl goes on to explain that financial aid helps pay for college, but loans don't cover unexpected expenses that can cause students to drop out before graduation.

"Before I started working at Mitchell Tech, I was unaware of how many students struggle with financial support. Twenty-



## Women for Success @Tech

four percent of our students receive no financial help from parents or guardians. The cost of car repairs can derail a student's chances at graduating with a degree," she explains. "This is why the Legacy of Student Success Fund was established through The Center for Student Success. It focuses on empowering students and making a positive impact."

Donations from **Women for Success @Tech** will also concentrate on scholarships for female students.

"The idea of women supporting women is important to our members," says Sheryl. "Mitchell Technical College attracts twice as many men to campus, and women are less likely to graduate. We want to change those facts."

To join the **Women for Success@Tech** giving circle, members must be women who are committed to giving \$500 per year. They are asked to recruit one new member to join each year, and all members must be passionate about the mission of Mitchell Technical College.

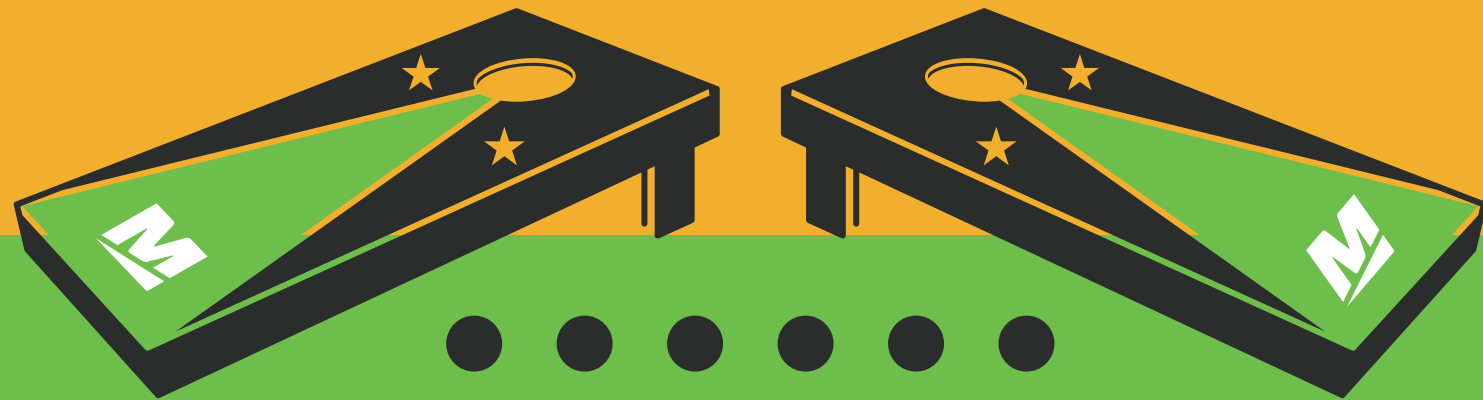


**Sheryl Plagmann**  
Project Support Specialist

For more information about **Women for Success @Tech**, or to join the group, please contact Sheryl Plagmann at [sheryl.plagmann@mitchelltech.edu](mailto:sheryl.plagmann@mitchelltech.edu).



# Spring 2024 Alumni CORNHOLE Tournament



Join us **April 26, 2024** for an exciting  
Mitchell Technical College Alumni  
Cornhole Tournament  
at the World's Only Corn Palace!

All skill levels are welcome. Enjoy food and games, and seize the chance to win amazing prizes. At least one person on a team must be a Mitchell Tech Alumni to enter.

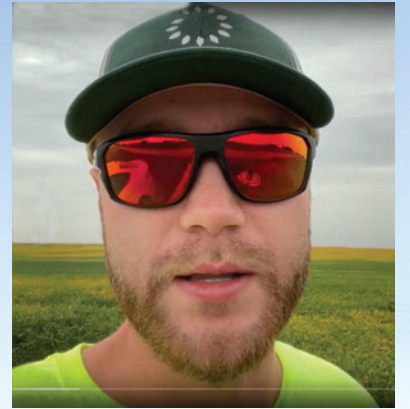
To receive all the latest information,  
and to be added to our email list, contact  
Nick Bakhtiari at [nickbakhtiari@mitchelltech.edu](mailto:nickbakhtiari@mitchelltech.edu).

All proceeds will be used for  
Mitchell Technical College student scholarships!

**Be on the lookout for more information!**

## Alum Spotlight

### Sky is the limit for 2021 Geospatial Technologies grad



**Drew Robinson**  
Flight Ops Manager, Taranis



Imagine a job where you get paid to fly a professional drone across some of the most beautiful farmland in the country.

That's the career Drew Robinson enjoys after graduating with a Geospatial Technologies degree from Mitchell Technical College in 2021.

"I love my job. I work independently and get paid for doing something I look forward to every day," he says. "I feel like I'm making an impact. My work helps farmers with their precision ag efforts and saves them a ton of time."

After graduating from Mitchell High School in 2017, Drew knew he wanted a college degree but wasn't sure what to pursue. He worked in masonry for three years while he explored his options. After talking to friends who attended Mitchell Tech, he decided a Geospatial Technologies degree fit his tech savvy personality.

"I thought it would be difficult to go back to school after three years away, but instructors like Devon Russell made it easy. I am a hands-on learner and that is how most classes are taught," he explains. "In addition to learning things like GPS, and computer software and mapping, I received my professional Drone Pilots License."

After his MTC graduation, Drew worked at Vantage Point Solutions in Mitchell as a CAD Specialist. While he liked the work, he realized he was not meant for a desk job. He took a position with Blue White Robotics and began performing aerial drone inspections

for farmers around Sioux Falls and southeast South Dakota. Blue White Robotics is a subcontractor for Taranis, a global leader in precision ag technology and crop intelligence.

"My first summer I logged over 72,000 acres—way more than anyone else at Blue White," he says. "When the people at Taranis saw my numbers, they hired me to work directly for them as a Flight Ops Manager. I still fly the fields, but I am also in charge of training new pilots and making sure every field around our area is being inspected."

His position with Taranis is a year-round, full-time job that allows Drew to help farmers identify weeds, stand counts, insect damage, disease, nutrient deficiencies, and overall field health. At the end of each day, he uploads hundreds of drone photos and sends them to the lab at Taranis, where specialists know how to "read" the pictures and target problems and anomalies within each field.

"I fly drones from May through November, and in the winter, we work on research and development to enhance our capabilities and software programs," he says.

When Drew was considering various degree options, he researched the commercial drone industry and knew it was a promising field with impressive growth into the future.

"The program at MTC is top quality. I learned everything I needed to do my job," he says. "In fact, the drone I learned on is the same kind I fly for work. It really is a dream job."

*"My first summer  
I logged over  
72,000 acres."*





1800 East Spruce Street | Mitchell, South Dakota 57301

If you have a story idea that would be great for this publication, please send it to [foundation@mitchelltech.edu](mailto:foundation@mitchelltech.edu).

# Legacy of Student Success Endowment

We firmly believe that financial constraints should never be the barrier preventing talented and motivated individuals from realizing their full potential. By contributing to the Legacy of Student Success Endowment, you have the opportunity to make an immediate and lasting impact on the lives of aspiring students. Your generous donation will provide them with the necessary resources to continue their education, secure a brighter future, and make a positive difference in our community.

Every contribution, no matter the size, will go directly towards support for those students who are facing exceptional circumstances. Your donation can help cover tuition, textbooks, living expenses, or other educational necessities.

We kindly request that you share this appeal with your friends, colleagues, and any individuals or organizations who might also be willing to lend their support.

To donate, please visit our secure online donation portal at [mitchelltech.edu/donate](http://mitchelltech.edu/donate) or use the enclosed donation form to contribute by mail. Your gift is tax-deductible, and a receipt will be provided for your records.



**Nick Bakhtiari**

Director of Foundation Relations  
Mitchell Technical College Foundation

[Nick.Bakhtiari@mitchelltech.edu](mailto:Nick.Bakhtiari@mitchelltech.edu)

605.995.7227

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