

## MDI celebrates Career Skills graduates



SUBMITTED PHOTO

MDI celebrated another round of Career Skills graduates this week. The program has helped 136 individuals build personal and professional tools that improve our communities' workforce vitality. Funded in part by: Otto Bremer Foundation, IRRRB, Northland Foundation and the State of Minnesota DEED – Workforce Development. Pictured, from left, front row, are Chris Stockwell, Brenda Irwin and Tina Tweet; back row, Jeremy Johnson, Dawn Nichols, Melany McFadden, Nick Brohman, Gail Eichorn and Khalil Riendeau.

## HARVEST

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MESABI DAILY NEWS PHOTO

### Current staff of Harvest Food Co-Op.

NHFC has, indeed, come a long way. And that's all thanks to "people power," Parenteau said. "People power got this going." Natural Harvest launched as a small buying club in June of 1976. A group of citizens united seeking access to a larger variety of nutritious whole foods at more reasonable prices. "We were raising food in our own gardens," tapping maple trees for syrup — but there were a number of foods simply not available in the area, Robillard said. Buying club products were distributed at various locations — at a Pike-Sandy farm, eventually in the basement of a church. The group, however, grew so much that purchasing and distributing became difficult to manage. People would call up, looking for goods that remained, and another of the founders, Ann Foleman, had to find a time to "open up" for them, Robillard explained. So, the club's members decided to further "co-operate" by starting a retail store. On Nov. 16, 1979, NHFC was incorporated by the State of Minnesota, and it opened for business in December of that year, with a 600-square-foot store at 119 Chestnut St. The actual retail space, packed with bulk bins, an upright freezer and some shelves, was only about 400 square feet, Robillard said. Wilberg got involved during the infant days of the store. One day, his wife was making bread and he thought, "I should bring some over there." The space was crammed with "buckets on the floor with scoops," he said. "I thought, what is this place?" Wilberg promptly understood what the co-

op was all about. It was a place that sold peanut butter made with only a few ingredients, non-irradiated spices and herbs — things that may have seemed "hippie" to some, but were really old-fashioned, "like what our grandmas and grandpas used." Wilberg would go on to become a buyer for the store; Robillard (then Michelle Greene) became general manager in 1983. The co-op was really less about "selling," and more about "buying" food for people "that was healthy and "real," for them to purchase, Robillard said. For patrons, buying in bulk was not so much about cost-savings as it was about access to quality products, she said. "Money was not the driving force," Wilberg added. People would stock up on cardamom for baking bread at Christmastime; cornmeal was a coveted product for polenta; the Laskiainen ladies would buy 100 pounds of whole yellow peas for the pea soup served at the Finnish sliding festival in Palo. Ethnic supplies — "we couldn't keep them in stock," Robillard said. Customers shared recipes with each other. The store sold products from local farmers, area coffee roasters, bakers and small businesses. And the founders navigated a world — void of Whole Foods and Trader Joe's — where only 27 natural food warehouses in the country stocked all the nation's budding co-ops. For NHFC, that warehouse was in Superior, Wis. A member family would make runs with a truck, later a van, to pick up supplies, Robillard and Wilberg recall. And the co-ops worked together. "Whatever we could do to help each other,

we did," Robillard said of the meetings with other regional co-operatives. By the early-1990s, it became apparent that NHFC needed a new home, Robillard said. Business and architectural plans were developed, with the goal of renovating an old railroad depot building on the south shore of Bailey's Lake. But it was a tough sell. Negotiations lasted for years and the depot was demolished. But, eventually, after many hurdles, a proposal was accepted. With an Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation Board grant to the City of Virginia for new construction of a community co-op, work launched by a contractor on the log building. A buy-a-log funding campaign was started, volunteers put in countless hours on the project, "we cobbled together" miscellaneous and used equipment, Wilberg said. And in 1996, NHFC re-opened in the new structure. It was a January day. The store opened at noon, but closed by 3 p.m. due to a blizzard. It didn't open again for three days because of weather conditions. After sales approached \$2 million at the end of 2013, NHFC in 2014 was granted membership into the National Co+op Grocers (NCG), which represents 145 food co-ops operating more than 200 stores in the country. The business helps unify natural food co-ops in order to optimize operational and marketing resources, strengthen purchasing power, and ultimately offer more value to patrons. NHFC moved into its current eco-friendly new store in April 2017, complete with a deli, a daily hot bar and salad bar, a community classroom

and greatly expanded offerings throughout every section of the store. One of the co-op's latest endeavors was adding additional products to its Co-op Basics line, which offers groceries at more affordable prices. "It's gotten so big now," Parenteau said. "It keeps attracting so many new shoppers." NHFC is "one of the bigger small employers in the area." But working there "feels like more than just a job," she said. Sterle said she feels her role at the co-op is "instilling positive change in the world. On a small scale, I'm doing something positive for the world every day." And the co-op continues to cooperate with other like-minded stores, just as it did in the early days. In fact, the bike blender that will be set up at the 40th celebration will be borrowed from Whole Foods Co-op in Duluth, Sterle said. Members were asked to share memories of Natural Harvest for the Summer 2019 issue of its newsletter, "The Harvest Beet." Here are a few: "Before there was a store front our buying club would get together once a month, I think it was, to order in bulk, which meant that if someone did not want the full bag or box they had to find someone to share it with. I once needed bay leaves, but no one wanted to join me, and I hadn't given much thought to just how many bay leaves there are in a pound. They must have lasted me for years!" "The highlight of our week was a trip to the co-op on Chestnut Street! It reminded us of a European market filled with crates and boxes piled one on top of another. It was crowded and so much fun searching for items. In the summer they put the crates and boxes outside on the sidewalk." "It was a big step to move from Chestnut Street to the log building. I don't think people today realize all the volunteer hours put in and fun we had (and heartache) while obtaining and maintaining the log building. Lots of varnishing went on there for weeks." "What's not to love?! Healthy food, love the bulk section, great atmosphere, and the offering of classes!" Wilberg describes his years working at the co-op as "utopia." Robillard adds that "it makes the heart happy" that "my baby" — nurtured for so many years — has become the great success it is today.

**NOTICE:**  
**TO THE STUDENTS, PARENTS, EMPLOYEES AND PATRONS OF GRAND RAPIDS INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT #318:**  
VOCATIONAL EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES WILL BE OFFERED WITHOUT REGARD TO race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, disability, sexual orientation, or age. MN Pre-employment criminal background checks are processed on all District 318 employees and volunteer coaches. The district may process criminal background checks on other individuals who provide services to the school district.  
**SCHOOL DISTRICT #318 VOCATIONAL CURRICULUM OFFERINGS**  
• Business Education  
• Technical Education  
Summary & descriptions found on District website: www.isd318.org  
Admission is open to all regardless of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, disability, sexual orientation and age. If you have a Title IX or 504 issue relating to these vocational offerings, please contact: Kasie VanQuekelberg, ISD #318 Title IX Coordinator, 820 NW 1st Ave., Grand Rapids, MN 55744. 218-327-5708 or Ken Decoster, ISD #318 504 Coordinator, 820 NW 1st Ave., Grand Rapids, MN 55744. 218-327-5705.

**PUBLIC NOTIFICATION:**  
In the event Independent School District #318 needs to close school or implement a late start or early release due to inclement weather or other school emergencies, the information will be posted on the District 318 website www.isd318.org and announced via an automated phone call and email.  
We will also be using the below listed television and radio stations to inform you.  
The following radio stations will be informed: KOZY 1320 AM, KMFY 96.9 FM, KAXE 91.7 FM, WCCO 830 AM,  
The following TV channels will be informed: Channel 3 KDLH, Channel 4 WCCO, Channel 6/11 KBJR/KR11, Channel 9 KMSP/Fox 9, Channel 10/13 WDIO/WIRT, Channel 5 KSTP, Channel 11 KARE

**NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN:** That Independent School District #318, pursuant to the U.S. General Education Provisions Act and Minnesota Government Data Practices Act declares the following as "Directory Information" as provided in said ACT and that information relating to students may be made public if said information is in any of the following categories: student's name, dates of attendance, grade level, enrollment status, participation of officially recognized activities and sports, weight and height of members of athletic teams, degrees, honors and awards received, most recent educational agency or institution attended

Directory information does not include personally identifiable data which references religion, race, color, social position, or nationality. Any parent of any student in the District may notify the District of their desire that some or none of the above information is to be released without their consent by contacting the building principal in which said student attends and completing the Directory Information Opt Out form. This notification must be given to the District within thirty (30) days of this publication notice. If filed, a denial will remain in effect until such time as it is modified or rescinded by the parent or eligible student.

It is the policy of the Board of Education of Independent School District #318 / Grand Rapids Schools to comply with Federal and state laws prohibiting discrimination and all requirements imposed by or pursuant to regulations issued thereto, to the end that no person shall, on the grounds of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, disability, sexual orientation and age be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any education program or in employment, recruitment, consideration, or selection; therefore, whether full-time or part-time under any education program or activity operated by the district for which it received Federal financial assistance.

**Public and Media Information/Opt-Out Form**  
ISD No. 318, Grand Rapids, Minnesota  
Parent/Guardian Information  
Our schools are an important part of community life; and as such, the school district and its students deserve a certain amount of attention whether through the media or in conjunction with school district approved digital media. Special events regularly take place at and in school and in conjunction with school activities, and we would like to share these activities with the community and other school district patrons through news releases, photographs, videos, other electronic means, and/or on the school district's approved digital media sites. Often, these news releases and digital media posts are accompanied by pictures of students taken by school staff, newspaper or media personnel, or other individuals authorized and approved by the school district. ISD 318 digital media presence was established to provide a learning experience for students and staff and an opportunity to communicate with parents, community and other online users about the learning activities and extra- and pro-curricular activities of ISD 318 and its schools and students. The digital media sites provide information about school and activities, including photographs of school events and special awards. The school district will not publish the full names of students in the photographs, and only first names will be used, when and where appropriate. The only exceptions to the above procedure and policy would be with regard to college recruitment, senior pictures, graduation announcements, school related yearbooks, drama playbills, and sport activity sheets and programs, etc. The school district will follow the aforementioned procedure, as it considers this information, photographs, videos and other technology showing likenesses of students and student activities to be property interests of the school district. However, should you choose to opt-out by giving a blanket denial of permission for the intended uses contemplated above with regard to your student, you must sign the document below, which clearly indicates by your signature that no permission is given for the use of your student's likeness for any of the intended purposes. The school district will make all reasonable efforts to respect your request and desire.