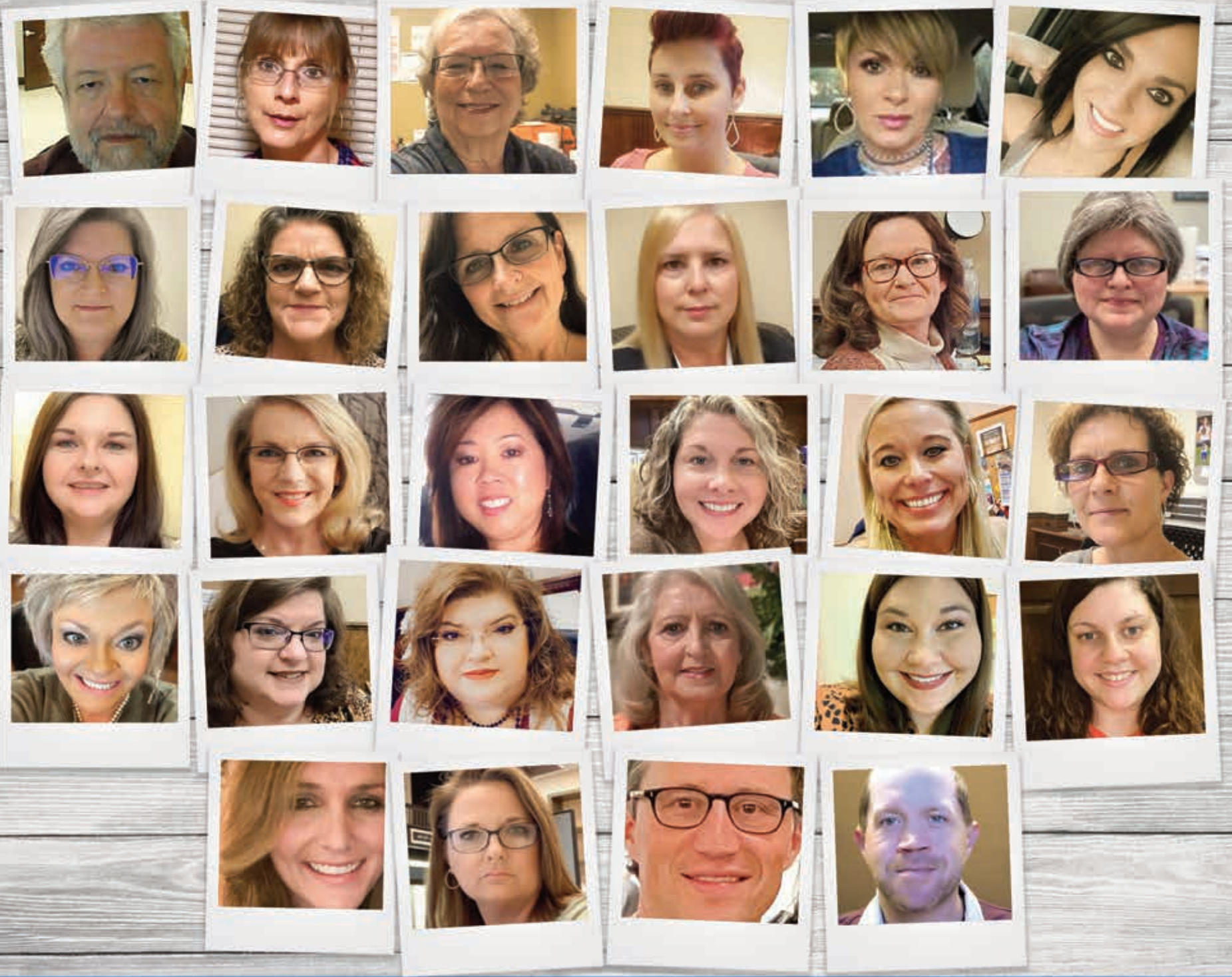




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Annette Watkins has been the director of marketing and public relations at Neshoba General Hospital for nearly 14 years.

Watkins loves role at Neshoba General

By **SCOTT HAWKINS**
SCOTT@neshobademocrat.com

Annette Watkins takes her job as director of marketing and public relations for Neshoba General seriously.

That doesn't mean she doesn't have fun and enjoy the job that has expanded over the nearly 14 years she has been in the position.

Through those years Watkins has taken on additional duties, including overseeing the WellnessWorks employee health program, headed up by Client Engagement Specialist Mandy Cumberland, managing the hospital's gift shop and heading up the hospital's annual float in the Philadelphia Christmas Parade.

"I am a people person," Watkins said. "I enjoy communicating with the people and helping the people find what service they need within our facility."

As far as the hospital Gift Shop, Watkins credits the shop's manager and a group of auxiliary volunteers for operating one of the area's best hospital gifts shops.

"We have a manager, Jo Burt, who runs the day-to-day activities at the gift shop such as ordering goods, stocking the shop, going to market, and handling the schedule for the volunteers to work in the shop in three-hour increments," Watkins said.

The volunteers deserve credit for the gift shop's suc-

cess, she said.

"All of our volunteers truly run it or work in it on a volunteer basis," Watkins said. "We do have one employee who works around 20 to 25 hours a week who handles getting all the merchandise ordered and stocked in the scheduling of the volunteers."

Those are just a few of the responsibilities Watkins manages at the hospital.

One of Watkins' most enjoyable parts of working for Neshoba General, however, is heading up the hospital's involvement in the annual Philadelphia Christmas Parade.

"I'm responsible for our float that is done," Watkins said. "I pulled together a

group of people who help me with that."

Watkins said that each year the hospital parade float follows a theme.

"It is fun," Watkins said. "We like dressing up in character, depending on what we're doing."

With the parade just weeks away, Watkins declined to share this year's theme.

"I don't want anybody to know until they see it coming down the street," Watkins said, adding they are hard at work creating this year's costumes. "We are putting together the costumes and so forth. We try to be creative, something original each year. Try not to make it a cookie-cutter type

of event."

Watkins, a lifelong resident of Neshoba County, said the community is a great place to call home and events such as the annual Christmas parade help bring the community together.

"I grew up in Bloomo," she said, adding she moved to another part of the county for a while. "Then I ended up moving back to Bloomo and I live there still."

Watkins worked approximately seven years with The Neshoba Democrat as advertising director before moving on to work at Neshoba General nearly 14 years ago.

Her husband, Randy Watkins, builds custom homes with Watkins Construction LLC, and their son,

Drew, is the superintendent for the company. Their daughter, Kristian, lives in Madison with her family.

Watkins said she loves living in Neshoba County.

"We are a very close-knit community," Watkins said. "When there is someone in need, people come out of the woodworks to help that family or that individual. It is not like in the big cities where you may not know very much about your next-door neighbor."

While she has been at the hospital just short of 14 years, Watkins said she hopes to be at the hospital for many more years.

"I hope to retire here," Watkins said.

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LOADING EQUIPMENT FULL SERVICE DEALER

ECCC's diesel tech learning is hands-on

By **STEVE SWOGETINSKY**
 steve@neshobademocrat.com

The instructors who run East Central Community College's Diesel Equipment Technology program and the Truck Drivers Training programs here in Philadelphia have worked for years in those industries.

And both said that learning by doing is the key to making it through their programs and landing a career with good pay.

"You have kids who when they start, don't know what a screwdriver is," said Scott Hale, who is in his first year teaching in the program. "The book stuff, I can use a board and show the process of how it works. But getting out there and doing it is where you learn. Every situation is going to be different. You may not know now. But if you get your hands on it, you will know something before long and it

sticks."

Hale lives in Decatur and is originally from Quitman. He has been around shops and mechanics most of his life, including 25 years in diesel mechanics. He came to ECCC after working at Waters International in Meridian.

Mike Reeves had a career as a truck driver before becoming an instructor in the early 2000s. He started driving dairy trucks part-time when he was 17. He lives in Decatur.

"You can complete our program in eight to 10 years and go to work," Reeves said. "You can leave here now and make \$60,000 or \$70,000 your first year. That's not a lot of time to start a new career."

East Central Community College's Diesel Equipment Technology program and Truck Driver Training program are both "busting at the seams" in the number of stu-

See **ECCC**, page 7



The students studying in East Central Community College's Diesel Equipment Technology program have a new real-world learning tool for their Philadelphia classroom. Structural Steel Services of Meridian has donated a 2013 Freightliner Cascadia diesel truck to the program for classroom use. The company initially sought the assistance of the Diesel Equipment Technology students in repairing the truck's engine. However, the students determined that the engine had suffered catastrophic failure and repair would not be feasible. The company then donated the truck to the college for classroom use.

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Left to right: Robin White, Laurie Johnson



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school and college transcripts or an official high school equivalency diploma.

Truck drivers program

“The demand for truck drivers is huge right now,” Reeves said. “It is not an accredited class, You get a certificate of completion going through Workforce Training. When they complete the course, they are ready to go to work. We have recruiters who come in looking for drivers.

The course starts in the classroom for a couple of weeks where students learn the rules and regulations that have to do with the trucking industry. Then they get their learner’s permit down and start hands-on driving in the 18-wheeler which is owned by the College.

Reeves recommends truck driving as a career.

“Trucking has always been good to me, I always had a job,” Reeves said. “I did a lot of driving in the Southeast United States region.”

He said that he has trained people from all walks of life to drive a truck.

“I have students who I taught in the early 2000s and they are getting ready to retire,” Reeves said. “I trained a whole family one time. The man started and someone dropped out so he brought his son in. He said, ‘Let me go and get him away from McDonald’s. They graduated. Then his sister came through the class and then his brother. Later, his wife, who was a nurse, got tired of that and went through the class.’”

ECCC

Continued from page 5

dents applying to take the courses and the need for them in the workforce.

“Literally, our issue right now is being able to turn them out fast enough,” said ECCC president Brent Gregory. “Companies hire them before they are finished with the class. So, we are looking at how we can expand them in Philadelphia. We have heard nothing but success stories.”

The first class for the Diesel Equipment Technology program started in August 2019. It is located in one of the outer buildings at the old U.S. Motors Plant.

ECCC has been operating its truck driver training program since 1997. Last year, it was moved to Philadelphia at the diesel technology site.

Both programs are at capacity with 16 diesel technology students and four truck driving students. The diesel equipment program starts in August and runs through July. The truck drivers class lasts between eight and 10 weeks.

Diesel Equipment Technology

If you are interested in training for a good-paying job, and don’t mind getting your hands dirty, the diesel mechanics class may be an option.

“Nobody wants to get nasty and oily and go home with diesel smell on their clothes,” Hale said. “But there is a demand for people



Mike Reeves, left, teaches truck driving for East Central Community College. Scott Hale, right, is the new instructor for the Diesel Equipment Technology program.

to do it.”

He said the pay has gone up in the last 10 years.

“Typically, someone starts out at \$16 to \$18 an hour, depending on what level of training they have,” Hale said. “Someone fresh out with a certificate might start out at \$13 an hour. But once they get past 90 days and the company sees they are for real, the pay will go up.”

Students have three op-

tions. They can attend classes from August to May, and earn a Career Certificate. Or they can go through June and get a Technical Certificate.

They also have an option to get an A.A. degree and graduate from East Central. Hale said he encourages that, noting that a two-year degree will open the door to other opportunities, such as moving into management.

There is time spent in the classroom each day. But Hale believes the best lessons are learned by doing.

“We split it up,” Hale said. “This semester, it is four or five hours a day. Next semester, we will have some full days. If we have four hours on a day, I will take two hours in the classroom and the other two in the shop. It’s a hybrid class. We start the course at a baseline and go from there.”

Hale is also teaching life lessons. He has had students who were hired and couldn’t show up for work on time. He is in the process of installing a time clock so they can punch in at the start of class, just like they would at a real job.

Anyone interested in entering the program in the fall of 2022 must complete the online ECCC application for admission at www.eccc.edu, and submit all official high

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Thank you to all of our team members that are helping us build a stronger safer community for everyone.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way healthcare workers take care of our patients and our employees.

In an effort to decrease the spread of COVID-19 and Flu, Neshoba General continues to take extra steps to protect our patients, staff, visitors and community.

We have guidelines in place to keep everyone as safe as possible.

- Screening everyone at entry, including our physicians and team members.
- **EVERYONE** wears a mask at all times.
- Social distancing is required in all areas of the facility.
- Limited visitation policies are in place.
- Using UV-C lights to clean and disinfect patient rooms for added protection.
- Increased our daily cleaning and sanitation to sterilize rooms in our clinics and waiting areas.

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