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## Iowa Western awarded \$475k grant to update aviation technology program

**Tim Johnson**

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The 1981 Piper Cheyenne 2XL, which was donated to Iowa Western Community College's aviation maintenance tech is pushed into the school's hangar at the Council Bluffs Municipal Airport on Thursday, Dec. 17, 2020.

JOE SHEARER, NONPAREIL FILE PHOTO

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Tim Johnson

Iowa Western Community College's Aviation Maintenance Technology program has been awarded a \$475,000 grant by the Federal Aviation Administration, the FAA announced Friday.

"The grant is for only 18 months, but we are hoping to use that to update the curriculum, update equipment and increase student enrollment," said Matt Mancuso, executive director of economic and workforce development for the college.

The award was part of \$5 million in grants designated by the agency "to develop a diverse talent pool of aviation maintenance technicians," a press release from the FAA stated. The funding will go to organizations that will teach technical skills and prepare students for aviation maintenance careers.

"A career as an aviation maintenance technician opens a wide world of opportunity," said A. Bradley Mims, FAA deputy administrator. "These grants will allow us to reach and support individuals who may not (have) had the chance to pursue this exciting career before."

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Recipients can use the funds to establish new educational programs; provide scholarships or apprenticeships for individuals pursuing employment in the aviation maintenance industry; conduct outreach about careers in the aviation maintenance industry to primary, secondary and postsecondary school students; and support educational opportunities related to aviation maintenance in economically disadvantaged areas, according to the press release.

Iowa Western plans to use the funding to step up recruitment efforts, expand student support services and expand and update the program, Mancuso said. For recruitment and outreach, the college will use the funding to produce brochures and videos and add a part-time recruiter for veterans.

The college will work with veterans organizations and Offutt Air Force Base to recruit veterans to the program, he said. In addition, officials will work more closely with Council Bluffs Community Schools and Burke High School in Omaha. Each high school will receive training equipment so students can experience aviation maintenance. College officials will also reach out to adult learners.

To improve student support services, Iowa Western will hire a part-time math tutor for aviation students to use, implement peer mentoring and provide tutoring for certification in aviation maintenance after students graduate, Mancuso said.

A full-time lab assistant will be hired to increase the capacity of the program by up to 25 students, he said. The FAA requires a student-teacher ratio of no more than 25 to 1, and first-year students are usually at 25.

“With an additional staff member, we are able to increase the capacity of the first year,” Mancuso said. “It is a hard program with both academic and FAA requirements, so many students find it challenging — and many do not persist. That is why we are focusing on recruiting and support after they get into the program.”

As of November, Iowa Western’s aviation technology program had 25 first-year students — the maximum admitted — and 20 second-year students.

**By Tim Johnson**