

—Slug:.....COMM-0837.wc.free_degree_promice
—Contributor.....
—Contributor email.....
—For section.....Town and Village
—Format.....News - no byline
—Dateline.....
—Article Number:.....42454

Notes from editor (not for publication):

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 McClure Foundation's Free Degree Promise extended to
2 current 10th and 11th graders

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

3

####END SUBHED####

4 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

5 The J. Warren & Lois McClure Foundation and the
6 Community College of Vermont (CCV) recently announced an
7 extension of the Free Degree Promise to include Vermont's high
8 school classes of 2027 and 2028.

9 The extension ensures that current 10th and 11th graders
10 will have the opportunity to complete a free CCV associate
11 degree of their choosing just one year after high school

12 graduation, a benefit first offered to the classes of 2023 through
13 2026.

14 Since launching in 2022, the Free Degree Promise has
15 helped hundreds of young Vermonters pursue fast-tracked, debt-
16 free degrees. Students on this pathway are graduating at twice the
17 rate and in half the time as community college students
18 nationally.

19 At a time when Vermont's high school graduation and
20 college continuation rates are the lowest in New England,
21 particularly for underrepresented student groups, the Free Degree
22 Promise builds on the success of state programs like Early College
23 and the 802 Opportunity Grant to help young Vermonters
24 complete high school and continue their career-connected
25 learning.

26 "Extending the Free Degree Promise will keep more
27 doors to opportunity open for young Vermonters while giving us a
28 longer runway to refine the model, analyze what's working, and
29 share what we're learning with the state," said CCV President
30 Joyce Judy in a news release.

31 The state's longtime Early College Program (ECP) lets
32 eligible high school seniors take a full year of college courses
33 tuition-free while completing their high school diploma.

34 Students who successfully complete ECP at CCV can
35 then continue through the Free Degree Promise, earning their free
36 associate degree within five additional semesters and with the
37 benefit of enhanced advising and stipends for expenses such as
38 transportation and textbooks.

39 Since the program's launch, CCV has seen triple the
40 number of low-income students enrolling in ECP and triple the
41 number of people completing ECP persist toward a CCV degree.

42 "Accelerated degree pathways like the Free Degree
43 Promise are a workforce strategy that is truly a win" for young
44 people in our state, said Vermont Department of Labor
45 Commissioner Kendal Smith.

46 This past June, more than 70 Free Degree Promise
47 graduates — representing 13 Vermont counties and including
48 nearly half who were first-generation college students — earned
49 their associate degrees, on average just one year after high
50 school. Twenty-five percent earned degrees in health care and
51 behavioral science, 14% in business, and 17% in STEM,
52 environmental science, and information technology.

53 It was the flexible schedule and debt-free guarantee that
54 helped Jada Unruh from Vernon make the decision to dip her toe
55 into college. “At first, I didn’t think I wanted to go to college
56 because I didn’t want to go into debt,” said Unruh, who balanced
57 coursework with training as a junior firefighter and working full
58 time at a local nursing home.

59 “I was never going to go to college. That was never the
60 plan. And then I saw that CCV had options to be completely
61 online, which allows me to work full-time while being a student
62 full-time. Early College has allowed me to get a college
63 education that I didn’t want [at first], in an accessible way that
64 helped me to feel comfortable doing it.”

65 The McClure Foundation is a 30-year affiliate of the
66 Vermont Community Foundation which works to close the
67 opportunity gap and strengthen rural communities by expanding
68 access to postsecondary education and training opportunities,
69 particularly for young Vermonters. Visit mcclurevt.org/freedegree
70 to learn more. More information about the Free Degree Promise
71 can be found at ccv.edu/freedegree.

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL####

####END BIO/COATTAIL####

LAST ISSUE IN WHICH THIS FILE CAN BE RUN:

73

####BEGIN MAXISSUE####

0

####END MAXISSUE####

LINKS:

74

####BEGIN LINKS####

####END LINKS####

VIDEO:

75

####BEGIN VIDEO####

####END VIDEO####

LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

76

####BEGIN LOGLINE####

####END LOGLINE####