

TRAINING FOR TOMORROW

Affinity Living Group partners with college to launch education program

“This is about you. This is an investment we’re making in you,” said Affinity Living Group President and CEO Charlie Trefzger as he addressed a room of 30 certified medication technicians Tuesday morning at Catawba Valley Community College (CVCC). “It’s not just about how you give out pills. If you came here today thinking you were just going to learn how to give pills better, sorry, that’s not why you’re here.”

The students — who are all current employees at assisted living facilities managed by Affinity — were at CVCC for a three-day course to grow their skillsets and grow as leaders, Trefzger said.

“This is about you as a whole person,” he said to the class. “This is about you being a leader in the company.”

Tuesday marked the inaugural class of Affinity Academy, a job training program and partnership between the Hickory-based company and CVCC.

Affinity Living Group is one of the largest senior housing providers in the southeast, with more than 100 communities under its management and over 4,000 employees across eight states. The Affinity employees attending the course represent top performers, hand selected by Affinity’s management to participate in the new initiative.

“I am so excited for our staff to be able to have the opportunity to grow as employees,” said Michelle Livingston, vice president of Human Resources for Affinity. “They’re selected to do this program. They don’t have to enroll, they don’t have to pay anything. They get paid to be a better employee, and to me that’s just remarkable.”

The idea for Affinity Acad-



Above, Affinity Living Group President and CEO Charlie Trefzger, right, welcomes the inaugural Affinity Academy class alongside Catawba Valley Community College instructor Dana Glenn. At left, students celebrated as they received certificates for completing the first Affinity Academy course.

emy came from Trefzger himself, and began taking shape in June 2017 with an initial meeting with CVCC President Dr. Garrett Hinshaw. Hinshaw’s passion for education and Trefzger’s visionary thinking, Livingston said, launched the program into reality. From there, Affinity’s management worked with CVCC staff to develop the first curriculum for the program, geared toward level-two medication technicians.

The medication technician course, taught by CVCC instructor Dana Glenn, focuses on building a stronger foundation in eight key areas, including customer service, financial management, integrity and stress management.

“We’re going to have fun,” Glenn said as she emphasized the importance of a positive attitude to the class. “But I also want it to be a positive learning experience.”

Ultimately, Livingston said, the goal is to develop curriculum for each employment level within the company.

“Healthcare is going to continue to grow and we are going to continue to grow as a company,” Livingston said. “With this program, our staff can see that this can be a career, not just a job. They truly can enhance their skills. Someone can start out as a personal care aide and go all the way to be an executive director — we would provide the ability to do that.”

The program is the first of its kind for CVCC in the area of health sciences, but drew inspiration from CVCC’s successful Furniture Academy, which partners with local manufacturers to train students for jobs in the furniture industry.

“We thought, ‘Wow, what a concept. We could be the first healthcare company to do something like this,’” Livingston said. “It truly is very forward-thinking for our industry, which is just exciting to be a part of.”

With 86 total community colleges across North Carolina, Livingston said the possibilities for Affinity Academy are endless.

“You’re here to amp up your game with your med tech knowledge,” Trefzger said to the kick-off group. “And then I want you to go out in the world — the Affinity world — and make it a better place for our residents.”