



**Vadnais Heights Economic  
Development Corporation**

**Presents Workforce Success Stories:**  
*Showcasing Careers in Manufacturing and Skilled Trades*

**EMPLOYEE'S HEARING  
DISABILITY IS NO OBSTACLE  
TO HIS SUCCESS WITH DU  
FRESNE MANUFACTURING**

**By Nicola Kelley Hyser**

As a young boy growing up in a small town near Detroit Lakes, Dave Kuehl dreamt about becoming a pilot. His deafness, however, blocked that path to the skies and sent him on other roads ... first, to Washington, D.C., to study IT at Gallaudet University, a private university for the deaf and hard-of-hearing; then, to a technical college in Tampa, Florida, to study electrical engineering.

Kuehl began working with Du Fresne Manufacturing in Vadnais Heights about 14 years ago, setting up and operating a Pemsrter – a machine that inserts hardware into precision metal parts. A few years later, he trained in and quickly mastered the operation of press brakes, which bend material into different shapes. Du Fresne's customer base is diverse in the areas of defense, industrial, hi-tech, medical and telecom; Kuehl and fellow employees manufacture products such as enclosures for

X-ray equipment, radar systems and high-end computers.

Over a year ago, Kuehl applied for his current position: Robotic Press Brake Programmer. Then, thinking he would have to sit in an office, he withdrew his application. His employers quickly addressed that concern, and today Kuehl trains fellow employees in operating the state-of-the-industry equipment ... just as he has taught them sign language. Training for his new position was challenging at first because of communication issues, so Du Fresne hired an interpreter.

In an online questionnaire, Kuehl wrote, "I like working at Du Fresne; they're like family to me. There have been challenges, but I like learning new things. I'm grateful for this job; the Amada robotic machine is hi-tech, saves us a lot of time in production and is uncommon in North America." Du Fresne now has two Amada machines, and Kuehl and another employee are among a handful in North America that can program them.

What's next on Kuehl's goal-list? An engineering degree at Century College, then on-the-job training at Du Fresne. Kris Diemer, Du Fres-



**DAVE KUEHL,  
Du Fresne Employee**

ne's VP of Human Development, says, "College-educated engineers who apply at Du Fresne are not as qualified as Dave because they don't have his experience, skills, knowledge and behavioral competencies. We're very proud of his accomplishments and glad he's on our team."

In the precision metal industry, Du Fresne Manufacturing excels at fostering employee development, innovation, state-of-the-industry technology and continuous improvement.

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Contact VHEDC Executive Director Ling Becker: 651-485-9532; [lingbecker@vhedc.com](mailto:lingbecker@vhedc.com).