

A space for competition, connection

Waukesha County Technical College unveils esports facility



Courtesy of WCTC

From left to right, WCTC Esports Coordinator and Coach Ian Sheeley, President Richard Barnhouse, and Dean of Students Jonathan Pedraza cut a ribbon to commemorate the grand opening of the WCTC Esports Lab.

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PEWAUKEE — Esports have taken college campuses by storm in recent years, and Waukesha County Technical College — always keeping an eye out for ways to innovate and modernize — has hopped on the trend.

On Tuesday, the college unveiled its 1,800 square foot esports lab, complete with 18 fully-equipped Alienware gaming stations with accompanying Alienware accessories, four televisions, and a dedicated Super Smash Bros. gaming area with a Nintendo Switch OLED

paired with an 85-inch monitor. WCTC also has a streaming lab to produce YouTube and Twitch streams.

WCTC Esports Coordinator and Coach Ian Sheeley says the lab was created in alignment with the college president's mission.

"President Barnhouse has a very clear vision of where he wants to take WCTC. He wants to bring the college into the future, into these new fields, these uncharted grounds where new ideas can really prosper," he said. "It's more of a wave that the school is embracing with all these new ideas."

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From left to right, students Alex Pettigrew, Wes Lidwin, Dante Herrera (seated) and Tony Resendiz (standing) test out the equipment at the WCTC Esports Lab on Tuesday.

Esports

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The esports lab is located in Building B, on WCTC's main campus in Pewaukee and is open to students looking to play some video games and build connections.

"It offers a space for them to work on their skills in competitive gaming, but also acquire skills outside of competitive gaming, like leadership skills, social skills," Sheeley explained. "And more general skills that they can hopefully take and use in their personal life and in their business life after college."

Now that the lab is developed, WCTC is starting up its own esports teams. Apex Legends, FIFA, chess, Fortnite, Valorant, Overwatch, Super Smash Bros., Rocket League, and League of Legends are among the video games Sheeley is putting teams together for.

"I've worked in esports for the past three years, and there's sort of

a competitive canon of these games that usually are free to play," Sheeley added. "They're the most watched [competitive games] on Twitch and YouTube. So, I'm following a greater trend in esports."

The esports program is open to every student at WCTC. To get involved, students can join the WCTC Esports Discord. Then, Sheeley will post in the Discord, scheduling a three-hour bootcamp-style tryout for each game.

During the tryout, Sheeley will take into consideration both the skills the students display as well as the competitive rank the game provides to all players. Students also must have a minimum 2.0 GPA. Based on the data he collects, Sheeley will then form teams.

"I'll form a varsity, a JV, then a JV 2 and JV 3 team. As many teams as we can fill," he said.

Whoever tries out is guaranteed a spot on a WCTC esports team.

"From there, we will just develop their skills," Sheeley explained. "If

they're not on varsity that first semester, by the next year I'm hoping to develop them into a varsity player ...We're just really trying to build a community here."

In spring, WCTC will be joining the National Association of Collegiate Esports and will participate in online tournaments. NACE offers around \$18 million in scholarships.

Beyond the national association, WCTC will also be participating in a collegiate conference just for esports programs in Wisconsin to give their players an opportunity to compete in person.

"It'll be a great way to foster some rivalry and some competition," Sheeley said. "It's important to have these local tournaments because in-person esports is so electric. It really captures the lightning in the bottle that is esports. You have two teams from the same state, they know each other and you put them in the same room to duke it out. It's just such a fun environment to be in."

WCTC is also hoping to eventually host some tournaments in its very own esports lab. The college also plans on offering esports camps for middle and high schoolers, scheduling academic classes within the facility, and providing recreational gaming opportunities.

But Sheeley knows that regardless of whatever game is played in the lab, the students will be enhancing their college experience.

"It's a great tool for students at WCTC if they want something more, if they want extracurriculars," he said. "It is really a foundation piece for the future growth of WCTC, where people see WCTC Esports as a place for them to really develop as a person and develop their skills in gaming. And, overall, it's a social place where people can have fun and make friends."

For more information about esports at WCTC, visit <https://www.wctc.edu/campus-life/activities-organizations/student-clubs.php>.