

Personal Experience Leads Owens Student into Cardiac Sonography Program

SARA LOVEJOY

People choose their career paths for a variety of reasons. For Owens Community College Cardiac Sonography student Sara Lovejoy, the choice was extremely personal.

Lovejoy was born with a coarctation of the aortic valve, a congenital heart defect that is a narrowing of the aortic arch. She also had a ventricular septal defect, a hole between her left and right ventricles, and a bicuspid aortic valve.

She has annual checkups with her cardiologist, so Lovejoy has been on the other side of the ultrasound wand many times.

"I don't know what everyone's situation is walking into the hospital, but I know I could help in some aspect. I know what it's like to be on the other side of it," Lovejoy said.

Lovejoy, a 2020 graduate from Archbold High School, went to another community college and received her office administration degree. When she realized that wasn't what she wanted to do for the rest of her life, her mind returned to cardiac sonography.

She started her search in December 2023 for educational programs, but her options were limited. She decided to come to Owens, which already offered associate degrees in Diagnostic Medical Sonography and Vascular Sonography. When an advisor told

her of the Cardiac Sonography program starting in Summer 2024, Lovejoy's decision was made.

"I love the program," Lovejoy said. "It's definitely not easy, it's been hard, but it's been a good challenge. It's a small class and we've gotten pretty close pretty fast. Our instructors are all hands-on with us. ... It's been worth all the hard work."



Owens sonography instructor Mary Sizemore said there's a large need for cardiac sonographers in the area. Local hospitals are "very eager for our students to complete the program," she added.

There are 12 students in the first cohort. They'll do hands-on practice and learning in the classroom and lab for the first year before getting more than 1,000 hours of clinical experience in their second year. Already, there are 20 clinical sites lined up for the students.

Sizemore said sonography is a hands-on job with lots of hand-eye coordination needed. The instruction reflects that, with

students learning to scan with their left hand and operate the machine with their right. According to Sizemore, that's ergonomically necessary because of the way the heart is positioned in the body and how patients need to be positioned during scans.

"It's really helpful because a lot of our students are right-handed, so this is a learning curve to get those fine movements with the left hand," Sizemore said. "They'll go out to the clinical world and it'll be a smoother transition for them. They're already going to be familiar with working with these machines."

The Department of Sonography program was one of the 11 departments which recently moved to the new Healthcare Education Center on the Owens campus. The students are receiving top tier instruction in classrooms and labs that are accurate representations of the spaces and equipment they'll encounter in the real world.

"We had a space before, but this is so much nicer, so much bigger," Lovejoy said. "It allows for a lot more moving around and learning. It's brought a lot to our ability to learn." ■



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