Sheldon native gain hands-on environmental, mining experience while in college

Employers value relevant work experience when considering job candidates. This summer, 10 geology students from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire are getting that experience while being paid. Among them is Rachel Fliflet, a senior from Sheldon. She is an intern in non-metallic mining at Fairmount Santrol in Menomonie. Fliflet also received a $700 Unimin Field Geology II Grant for field studies in Montana in May and June.

Several of the paid internships are part of UW-Eau Claire’s Responsible Mining Initiative, housed in the university’s geology department. The initiative was created when, in November 2013, the UW System awarded UW-Eau Claire a $451,000 Economic Development Incentive Grant to prepare highly qualified graduates for work in the mining industry, the environmental consulting industry and regulatory agencies such as the Department of Natural Resources.

Fliflet is one of 10 UW-Eau Claire geology majors who is working a paid internship this summer in Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, and Alaska.

“I have been working with various departments and coordinators on several different projects, such as updating records, wildlife monitoring documents, and on-site blasting data,” Fliflet said. “Daily tasks have included air quality monitoring data collection, birdhouse and wildlife assessment, and operating heavy machinery in mine production. This internship has taught me a lot about the practices of the mining industry, as well as the permitting and compliance process.”

The Responsible Mining Initiative has three outcomes to expand professional opportunities and improve workforce quality including outreach to state high school teachers and students; curriculum development activities to add a focus on economic geology, contaminant hydrogeology, and restoration ecology; and developing a vibrant paid internship program directly benefiting both students and industry.

Fliflet is benefiting tremendously from her internship, according to Kent Syverson, professor and chair of UW-Eau Claire’s geology department. Her paid work experience is preparing her to work in the mining industry, the environmental consulting industry, or to attend graduate school with full funding.

“These internships are providing UW-Eau Claire geology students with amazing opportunities to gain practical work experience, as well as graduate with fewer loans,” Syverson said. “At the same time, we’re benefiting the environmental and mining industries by partnering with them to develop highly skilled professionals to fill their workforce needs and protect the environment.”

UW-Eau Claire geology majors are, earning stipends ranging from $7,000 to $13,000 that are paid by the students’ employers. Several also have received scholarships through the Responsible Mining Initiative.