

NEWS RELEASE

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2010 commencement ceremony largest ever, plus two *Teacher of the Year* awards

PINE CITY, Minn. – Pine Technical College held its 43rd spring commencement ceremony last Friday, and with 141 graduates participating, the event was the most-attended in the college's history.

"This year's graduating class topped out at 175, and we were so proud to see a full house at the ceremony," says Joan Bloemendaal-Gruett, Pine Technical College Dean of Academic Affairs. "Graduation is an exciting time for our students, staff and faculty. We all are very proud of them as they take the next step to serve the community in their fields of choice," Gruett adds.

PTC's *Teacher of the Year* award, an annual honor presented at the commencement ceremony, was special this year since the student-nominated award resulted in a tie. The two winners – Alexis Grinde and Wayne Helmbrecht, graciously accepted their awards Friday. Grinde teaches BIOL 1255, *Microbiology*, and BIOL 1260, *Human Anatomy and Physiology*. Helmbrecht, a Lab Assistant, supports manufacturing/machining and gunsmithing students in the Machine Technology lab.

Grinde, a repeat winner, first won the honor in 2007. Writes one student of Grinde on the nomination form, "Alexis goes out of her way to make sure we understand the information. Also, she has a way to put it all in laymen's terms. She makes it fun, and it shows that she puts a lot of hard work into the material."

A student writes of Helmbrecht, "Wayne is full of wisdom and real world experience, and he shares it with anyone who needs help – super nice guy!" Another student wrote of Helmbrecht, "Wayne is approachable and very knowledgeable in the machine shop. He always goes the extra mile to help any student."

James Koppen, CEO of [Pine Medical Center](#), gave the ceremony's commencement address. Previously, Koppen worked as the Director of Pharmacy for the hospital for nearly 15 years and owned a retail drug store in Pine City for 22 years, and in 2009, Koppen was appointed to the Minnesota Board of Pharmacy by Governor Tim Pawlenty. Koppen also is the CEO of His Way Ministries, a tax-exempt organization which works with men and women in addiction. Koppen

recently traveled for his tenth consecutive year to Guatemala with HELPS International on the organization's annual surgical mission trip. Koppen has written two novels and is working to master watercolor painting, a theme he wove into his inspiring speech, "Life as a Journey." In his address, Koppen encouraged graduates "...to paint their canvasses with color and zest."

PTC continues to grow each year in terms of enrollment and programs offered. 142 students comprised the graduating class of 2009, and 125 students rounded out the class of 2008. PTC is accepting applications for new students. Summer courses start June 7, and Fall courses will start Aug. 23. For more information, call 320-629-4543 or visit www.pinetech.edu.

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