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School Zone: Coca-Cola scholarships aid students' thirst for education

By Cynthia Hodnett

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Lee Koehler, a 47-year-old student at Northeast Wisconsin Technical College, enjoys working with youth at his church and volunteering at Kewaunee County Clothing Closet.

Alejandra Mejia, a 19-year-old student at the college, volunteers with the Green Bay Chapter of the Guardian Angels to keep local neighborhoods safe.

Koehler and Mejia are among 400 students nationwide to receive a \$1,000 scholarship from the Coca-Cola Two-Year Colleges Scholarship Program. Both were selected for their academic success and for completing 100 hours of community service within the past 12 months. Each was nominated by an NWTC instructor.

Koehler, a Supply Chain Management student from Algoma, also helps raise funds for the Community Food Basket, which provides food for the needy.

He volunteers for the Tri-Lakes Association, which promotes awareness about lake issues and conservation and is a part of Friends of the Ahnapee State Trail, a nonprofit group that develops and maintains the Ahnapee State Trail in Wisconsin.

Koehler was working on his associate's degree in September 2003 when the company he was working for went out of business. Koehler was only eligible to receive unemployment for several months and wasn't sure how he would help pay for school.

"It was hard. I had run out of money and was halfway through the program," Koehler said.

"The scholarship helped me meet some of my financial obligations to continue with school."

Mejia, of Green Bay, said the scholarship will help her achieve her goal of becoming a police officer. She is currently enrolled in NWTC's criminal justice associate's degree program and works as a criminal service intern for the Green Bay Police Department.

She has been a part of the Green Bay Chapter of the Guardian Angels since it began in August 2003. Guardian Angels are trained in self-defense, human relations, cardiopulmonary resuscitation and first aid. They patrol the streets in groups of at least four, watching for signs of trouble.

"I'm happy that I received the scholarship because I wouldn't have money to pay for school," she said. "To receive (the scholarship) from Coca-Cola and being one of two people from NWTC to receive (it) makes me proud."

