ABOVE & BEYOND

Cabrillo student takes hard work to a new level by enrolling in 52 units in one year while maintaining a 3.31 GPA and starting the engineering society

By KARA GUZMAN kguzman@santacruzsentinel.com

APTOS — After graduating high school, Christopher Reinoldsen washed dishes and flipped burgers for a year, dreaming of something bigger.

He worked in construction for three years but was laid off before applying to Cabrillo College’s Engineering Technology certificate program to gain an edge in the job market.

Now the 24-year-old Mushfield, Ore., native is in his second year at Cabrilla, the founder and president of the school’s engineering society, and on track to transfer to a four-year university.

Reinoldsen said working at the bottom of the ladder in construction was a struggle, and he aspired to become an architect.

“I wanted to move to a position like that, but really there was no way I’d get there without working my way up and getting an education,” Reinoldsen said.

He applied to Cabrillo’s Fast Track to Work program, a federally funded financial assistance and academic support program for unemployed adults. The program allowed him to extend his unemployment while taking engineering certificate courses, such as computer-aided design.

Reinoldsen hit the ground running. He took 24 units last fall and 28 units in the spring, more than double the minimum load for full-time students. He’s maintained a 3.31 grade point average, which he said wasn’t easy.

“I spend endless hours studying, trying to understand the material as best I can,” Reinoldsen said. “It’s not like I have a picture perfect memory. I have to really struggle and tear down walls.”

Reinoldsen is also part of Cabrillo’s Mathematics,

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AT A GLANCE

WHAT: Financial assistance and academic support program at Cabrillo College for career certificate programs in culinary arts, digital media, accounting, medical assisting, engineering technology and business.

WHO: Unemployed or underemployed low-income adults who live in Santa Cruz County.

DETAILS: Call 831-479-4344 or visit www.cabrillo.edu/services/file/index.html

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CHRISTOPHER REINOLDSEN, student