Youth Apprenticeship benefits many

BY DONNA SCHULZ • FOR THE WAUSAU DAILY HERALD • APRIL 22, 2011

Are you familiar with the phrase “Got Milk?”® and the advertising campaign featuring celebrities wearing milk mustaches? Living in the dairy state, we understand the importance of the milk question. What about the phrase “Got high school-age employees?” That question is just as important. Let me explain.

Businesses often hire high school juniors and seniors for part-time positions. Many of those students are, or could be, employed through Wisconsin’s Youth Apprenticeship (YA) program to the benefit of the business, the student, the school district, and the community. Nearly one hundred high school sophomores and juniors participated in interviews for health, finance, and auto tech apprenticeship positions in recent weeks.

When hiring an apprentice, employers get an employee who is eager to work and learn. Students have to apply to the YA program, and their parents, teachers, and employers sign an education training agreement so everyone understands the commitment involved. The student receives high school credit, a letter grade on his/her transcript and, at the end of the apprenticeship, a certificate of occupational proficiency from the state that is recognized by colleges and employers. As Wausau East sophomore Emma Myles explains, “I am pursuing a Youth Apprenticeship position because it is a great opportunity for me to gain on-the-job experience, get a step ahead of the competition for college, and because I am really interested in Finance as a career.”

Schools receive a stipend through the North Central Wisconsin School-to-Work Partnership for every student registered as a YA. While it’s not a lot of money, every little bit helps. And because students often continue working for their employers after graduation, the community gains a skilled workforce that is committed to the local area. Terri Markstrum, VP Talent Acquisition & Staffing at M&I Corporation explains, ”This program is an exceptional way to grow young talent for our community. Participating in the Finance Youth Apprenticeship program since its inception has provided our students with invaluable work experience which has laid a foundation for their future success.”

Kris McGarigle, President of Ministry Good Samaritan Health Center in Merrill, agrees, “We enjoy working with Merrill High School and the Youth Apprenticeship program and believe that both Ministry Good Samaritan Heath Center and the students in the YA program benefit. The students bring a fresh attitude and thirst for knowledge as they learn about patient care and support services, and our staff enjoys mentoring them. Several students have continued to work at Ministry Good Samaritan or go on to health-related careers after this program.”

Students know that learning from skilled professionals improves their future employability. Kayle Kislow, a junior at Wausau East, interviewed for a YA position in Finance even though she has been working as a
cashier and an order entry associate for more than a year. “I am pursuing a Youth Apprenticeship position because I want to become an accountant. I believe this will be a great opportunity for me in pursuing my dream.”

Susette Gunseor at Advantage Community Bank agrees. "(The YA program) is a wonderful opportunity for the students and the financial institutions involved. The students we interviewed portrayed confidence, self-motivation, have experience interacting with people, and have goals we would like to help them achieve."

Haley Germ, a junior at Mosinee High School, knows that getting accepted into the YA Health program as a certified nursing assistant (CNA) puts her one step closer to her dream of a career in the medical field. “I want to get a head start in my career as a nurse or doctor. This will give me a good opportunity to work with people one-on-one and help others in some of their lowest times.

DC Everest junior Ashley Slivicke has her sights on becoming an OB/GYN and knows that working as a CNA while still in high school will help her realize that goal. “I want to be able to help people and work with people. I have high expectations for myself in the future in the medical field, and I would really like to get a head start.”

If you’d like to connect with a student looking for an apprenticeship or want to learn more about the YA program, contact your local high school YA coordinator or Donna Schulz, K-12 Programs Coordinator at Northcentral Technical College in Wausau at schulzd@ntc.edu.

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