The Star News

Youth Apprenticeship Expands Horizons

Donna Schulz

You’ve heard the phrase “It takes a village to raise a child”? It’s more than a phrase in Medford and Rib Lake. Since 2000, eighty high school juniors and seniors in these two communities – supported by their parents, teachers, and more than 44 area employers – have benefited from a real-world connection between education and employment by participating in Wisconsin’s Youth Apprenticeship (YA) program.

The YA Program is a one- or two-year statewide program that combines academic and technical instruction with mentored, paid, on-the-job learning. YAs work 450 hours each year of their program while taking related high school or college classes. After meeting the competencies associated with their apprenticeship, they receive a Certificate of Occupational Proficiency from the Department of Workforce Development that is recognized by both colleges and businesses. It’s quite a commitment for all parties involved, so why do they do it?

Medford senior Andy Lehman, who is working at Peoples Choice Credit Union, says, “I’ve learned a lot. This experience will help with my plans to become an agriculture loan officer. It’s definitely worthwhile to take the Apprenticeship program.”

Michelle Brushaber agrees. “It’s helped me realize what the real world is like. My friends tell me that I’m more outgoing since starting in the YA program, and it’s helped me prepare for college. In fact, I already have a job for the fall in the college accounting department.”

Andy Curtiss, Michelle’s supervisor at Taylor Credit Union, has been involved in the apprenticeship program at two financial institutions and has seen how students mature during their time in the program. “It’s fun to watch the change from when they start to when they complete the program.”

Seniors Skyler Hartman and Justin Thiel are finishing apprenticeships in Auto Collision and Auto Tech at Black River Body & Custom and Schierl Tire respectively. Both are enjoying the experience and have “learned a lot from working with the guys in the shop.”

Jason Krueger is completing his second year as a YA at Mid-Wisconsin Bank. “I’ve really enjoyed this experience. Just getting to meet such good people has helped so much. I plan to go to college to get a degree in marketing, and this experience will help me a great deal.”

Phillip Schupp, a junior at Rib Lake High School, is working with Doug Kamps, the work site coordinator at Multitek in Prentice. Phillip explained, "This youth apprenticeship program has given me many skills that will help me be successful when I pursue the Industrial Maintenance degree at Waukesha County Technical College. I can make parts on the lathe down to 1000th of an inch. I get to work on machinery that many high school students will never even see till after they graduate. This is a great opportunity."

Dylan Klimpke, also a junior at Rib Lake, works at Nick's Truck Repair in Medford. “This youth apprenticeship has taken me further than would have been possible in my high school courses. So I am already at an advantage over other students that don't have a youth apprenticeship, and I still have my senior year to learn more skills.”

What’s the return on investment for employers?

Peoples Choice Credit Union CEO Matt Selke said, "Youth Apprenticeship allows our organization to work with students who have a different view point and allows our organization to prepare for the next
generation, both in the work place and for our future credit union members, while providing skills and learning opportunities for that student to use in the future.”

Lindsey Mayer, Marketing Administrator at Mid-Wisconsin Bank echoes those sentiments. "The Apprenticeship program offers students a taste of real career experience before they graduate from high school. Our student has had a taste of almost every area of Mid-Wisconsin Bank, from the teller line to the marketing and IT. The program can open so many doors, not only with developing employment skills, but the networking opportunities as well. As a Medford High School graduate who did not take this opportunity, I would tell all future graduates what an opportunity they are missing out on if they choose not to enroll in this program. Take hold of your future now, it can only benefit you."

Jamie Jakel at Schierl Tire agrees. “It helps students become good associates, and they get a strong start on their careers.”

Taylor Neitzel and Sandra Clarke, her supervisor at Memorial Health Center, are members of a mutual admiration society. “The staff at Memorial Health Center is wonderful. I’m very grateful to have had this opportunity,” said Taylor. Sandra’s response? “The Apprenticeship program is phenomenal. The students I’ve worked with are great.”

Thank you to all of the local businesses that have supported the area’s future workforce through YA in the past. If you are interested in hiring a YA, contact Terry Lybert or Mary Houle at Medford High School or Marilyn Teske at Rib Lake High School.

*Donna Schulz is the K-12 Programs Coordinator at Northcentral Technical College in Wausau.*

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YA Thanks These Area Businesses!

Arlene Stahnke Farm
Associated Bank
B & B Engineering Corporation
Black River Body & Custom*
Brost Farms
Bunkelman Farms
Deerview Meadows Assisted Living LLC
Enerquip
Fidelity Bank
Fuch’s Farm
Golden Living Center – Continental Manor*
Golden Living Center – Rib Lake
H & H Motors
James Packenham
Jannee Pet Fencing
Joe Zenner Farm
Lamberty Farms
Lee’s Auto
M & H Chevrolet
Medford Area Public School District
Medford Motors
Memorial Health Center*
Memorial Nursing & Rehabilitation Center*
Mid-Wisconsin Bank*
Multitek North America LLC
Never Done Dairy
Nick’s Truck Repair
Peissig Farms
Peoples Choice Credit Union*
Peterson Construction
Phillips Plastic
Pomp’s Tire Service
Rib Lake Health Care Center
Schierl Tire & Service Center*
Schmeiser Farms
Schreiner Farms
Schultz Auto Body & Custom
Southside Auto
Taylor Credit Union*
Taylor Made Printing
The Star News
Wanke Builders
Weather Shield Manufacturing Inc

*Businesses currently employing YAs