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 Wittenberg and Birnamwood. Since 2000, twenty-five high school juniors and seniors in these two communities — supported by their parents, teachers, and 20 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?

Taylor Schwalbach says working at Maple Hills Golf Course and Restaurant has been a great experience. “(Working as a Youth Apprentice) has given me a chance to learn and experience the different challenges you encounter in the work place. It gave me a better look at the career path I plan to take in my future.”

Brandi Gutowski, who is completing a two-year apprenticeship at Associated Bank, agrees. “Youth Apprenticeship helped me get a job I like. Not only did I get the opportunity to learn more about accounting, I also learned how difficult a job can be but that people can help you through it.”

Students also appreciate the opportunity to earn high school credits while earning a pay check. “Thanks to Youth Apprenticeship, I got the chance to earn high school credits while working at my current job” reports Rebecca Matsche, a senior working at Chet & Emil’s.

What’s the return on investment for employers?

According to Linda Spreeman, Teller Supervisor at Associated Bank, “Employers have a great opportunity in the untapped pool of the YA Program. Learning from skilled professionals helps students increase career awareness for present and future employment.”

Julie DeSantis, owner of The Harvest Restaurant, echoes those sentiments. “We hope to teach the kids responsibility, punctuality, leadership, and give them a sense of belonging to a specific ‘corporate culture’. Hopefully, when they graduate, they will have developed some maturity and become productive members of our society. We always encourage them to continue their education in one form or another. For us, it is very gratifying and it’s one way we can give back to our community!”

Vicky Pietz of Golden Hills Farm says, “Being involved in YA helps students try out a career to see if they are a good fit. We have had a number of youth greatly improve their work habits while on our farm. We have kept in touch with most of them and have been told that the farming experience has helped them land and keep future jobs. It's all about giving back.”

Thank you to all of the local businesses that have supported the area’s future workforce through YA in the past. If you’re interested in hiring a YA, contact Scott Cook at Wittenberg-Birnamwood High School.

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**YA Programs A to Z**

Accounting  
Architecture  
Auto Collision  
Auto Technician  
Banking  
Crops  
Drafting and Design  
Engineering  
Finance  
Floral  
Graphic Arts  
Greenhouse  
Health Information Mgmt  
Hospitality  
Insurance  
Landscaping  
Large Animal/Herd  
Lodging  
Logistics/Supply Chain  
Manufacturing  
Mechanical Design  
Network Systems  
Nursing Assistant  
Pharmacy Technician  
Printing  
Programming & Software Development  
Restaurant  
Travel & Tourism  
Veterinary Assistant  
Web & Digital Communications  
Welding  

**YA Thanks These Area Businesses!**

- Applied Laser Technologies LLC  
- Brad Krueger Builders, Inc.  
- Associated Bank*  
- Banner Banks  
- Beversdorf Garage, Inc.  
- Chet & Emil’s*  
- Darwin E Smith Community Aquatic Center  
- Eastbay  
- Golden Hills Farm  
- Harvest Restaurant and Bakery*  
- Homme Home of Wittenberg  
- Hudson’s Classic Grill  
- Maple Hills Golf Course & Restaurant*  
- Mux Creek Mill/William C. Nueske Farm  
- Ostrowski Farms  
- Resch Insurance  
- Roe Dairy*  
- Ronald Raasch*  
- Saint Clare’s Hospital  
- Tomson Farms*  
- Wendler’s Rocky Ridge Farms*  
- Wittenberg Vet Clinic*  

*Businesses currently employing YAs