

VIRGINIA



WORKFORCE CONNECTION

Virginia Workforce Council Spring 2013

From the Chairman's Perspective

By Huey J. Battle
Chairman, Virginia Workforce Council

I am excited to extend a hearty congratulations! to our Career Pathways Workgroup for receiving the 2013 Capital Award of Excellence from the Richmond Chapter of the Public Relations Society of America in the

category of External Video Program. The video depicts what Career Pathways means in Virginia. Amanda Christopher, Communications Coordinator for the VCCS Workforce Development

Services was on hand to accept the attractive crystal statue on May 15 at the Jefferson Hotel in Richmond. This project was a successful collaborative effort in terms of financing the production and developing the script, artwork, message, etc. Partners included the Virginia Community Colleges, Departments of Education, Social Services, Aging & Rehabilitative Services, Labor & Industry, State Council for Higher Education, Virginia Employment Commission and Economic Development Partnership. The workgroup is advisory to the Virginia Workforce Council. Catch the video at: http://www.YouTube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=w4KFgBaEluE

Over the past year, I have visited over half of our local workforce investment areas and attended their Board meetings. While each LWIA is unique and distinctive, they share common challenges and opportunities. The most pervasive challenge they face

(See CHAIRMAN on page 3)

Youth Leadership Summit Draws Hundreds of Youth from Across Central Virginia

The Annual Central Virginia Youth Leadership Summit (Summit) celebrated its 10th anniversary with more than 500 youth, ages 14 - 21, from across Central Virginia on Saturday, March 30, 2013 at the Greater Richmond Convention Center.

The Summit, a cooperative effort of the Crater Regional Workforce Investment Board and the Resource Youth Network, the youth program of the Resource Workforce Investment Board, is designed to motivate and encourage youth in establishing a knowledgeable voice in making decisions about their future; as well as getting them engaged in furthering their education and career path by helping to identify and remove some of the challenges they, their peers and families face.

Dr. Steven Perry, key note speaker, headlined the event, and delivered a rousing message of encouragement and personal responsibility to the Summit crowd. Dr. Perry is one of the most talked about innovative educators in the nation today. He is the founder of Capital Preparatory Magnet School in Hartford, Connecticut, an education contributor to CNN and NBC, and best-selling author.

The Honorable James Holland, Chesterfield County Board of Supervisor and Chairman of the Capital Region Workforce Partnership, addressed the audience prior to lunch after a morning full of workshops that covered topics like leadership, education, financial literacy, employment and other social life skills; with the goal of helping attendees to develop into the leaders who are self-motivated, work-ready and prepared to tackle obstacles to success.

The Summit sponsors, The Crater Regional Workforce Investment Board, and Resource Workforce Investment Board, are entities established to provide workforce preparation services using federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funds to youth and adults in Central Virginia.



Nationally known educator, Dr. Steve Perry, delivers the keynote address at the 10th annual Central Virginia Youth Leadership Summit in Richmond, VA.

The Youth Leadership Summit was established in 2002 to expose youth to their potential and possibilities. The Summit started with focus on youth in the City of Petersburg; however, over the past decade the focus has expanded and now includes youth living in the following areas:

- The Crater Regional Workforce Investment Group includes the Cities of Petersburg, Hopewell, and Colonial Heights; and the Counties Prince George, Dinwiddie, Sussex, Surry, Emporia, and Greensville.
- The Resource Youth Network includes the Counties of Charles City, Chesterfield, Hanover, Henrico, Goochland, New Kent, Powhatan and the City of Richmond.

Learn more about the Resource Youth Network at www.ResourceVA.com, and the Crater Regional Workforce Investment Group at www.learn-to-earn.org.

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DJJ High Schools Consolidated to Become Newly-Named Yvonne B. Miller High School

In an effort to help streamline academic record-keeping as well as create a fuller sense of unity among residents housed at the Department of Juvenile Justice's (DJJ) juvenile correctional centers (JCCs), Governor Bob McDonnell has announced that the high schools on each JCC campus will be consolidated into a single high school to be named in honor of the late Senator Yvonne B. Miller, former VWC member, a career educator and the first African American woman elected to the Virginia House of Delegates and the Virginia Senate.

"Senator Miller was always in the forefront of the fight to make Virginia a better place for children to learn and live," said Governor McDonnell.

"Naming this school in her honor will serve as a lasting reminder of Senator Miller's commitment and dedication to educating all youth, regardless of their circumstances."

Senator Kenny Alexander said, "Yvonne Miller spent her lifetime fighting for education and for the constituents she represented. She firmly believed in giving everyone the opportunity to succeed. The



Yvonne B. Miller

newly named Yvonne B. Miller High School is an excellent tribute to Senator Miller and an ongoing reminder of her life's work."

Senator Miller's brother James Bond said,

"My sister had tremendous energy, and for many years she focused on giving others the educational opportunities they needed to succeed. She cared deeply about the most vulnerable citizens in the Commonwealth of Virginia, and Yvonne gave them a voice as their tireless advocate in Richmond. For a woman who made so many 'firsts,' this school named in her memory will be a fitting reminder of her life of service."

"The consolidation of the three high schools into one school builds on DJJ's continued efforts to be more efficient and effective," noted Marla Graff Decker, Secretary of Public Safety. "The result will be a much more accurate representation of the achievement of our residents as a single group. It will also bring a readily identifiable name to the high school attended by any DJJ resident regardless of their assigned campus. This unified high school will stand as a lasting tribute to Senator Miller, a woman who believed in education and fought to ensure that all children have access to the fundamentals that will help them to succeed as adults."

The three campuses of Miller High School will be referred to as follows:

- Beaumont JCC: Yvonne B. Miller High School, Beaumont Campus.
- Bon Air JCC: Yvonne B. Miller High School, Bon Air Campus.
- Culpeper JCC: Yvonne B. Miller High School, Culpeper Campus.

The school is the first in Virginia to be named for Senator Miller, a history-maker and a trailblazer who served as a strong voice and passionate advocate for the disadvantaged and children. She was a lifelong educator who was the first African American woman to serve in the Virginia House of Delegates in 1984. In 1988, she began her service in the Virginia Senate, and in 1996 became the first woman to chair a Senate committee.

Senator Miller attended what would become Norfolk State University for two years and earned her bachelor's degree from what would become Virginia State University, a master's degree at Columbia University and a Ph.D. at the University of Pittsburgh before becoming a faculty member at Norfolk State, where she became a professor and chairman of the Department of Early Childhood/Elementary Education.

In addition to her many pivotal roles in the General Assembly, Senator Miller chaired the Commission on Youth, and throughout her career, she was dedicated to educating children and ensuring that all of Virginia's young people benefitted from a strong education.

Education and Training Pays Off for Virginia Man

Many employment sectors traditionally dominated by men have been hit hard by the economic downturn. Jason Collins was one of those affected when he was laid off from his job in the construction industry. While Jason was able to stay home with his child while searching for employment, his bills quickly began to pile up, and he needed to find work soon.

With no high school diploma or GED, it was difficult for Jason to find employment. In hopes that he would gain some direction and job leads, Jason sought the assistance of the Workforce Investment Act adult program operated by People Incorporated.

Upon enrolling in the WIA adult program, staff immediately referred Jason to GED classes through Mount Rogers Adult Education and Jason earned his GED. Jason also received assessments, planning, career guidance, intensive staff assisted job search from WIA staff, and a Virginia Career Readiness Certificate.

When staff assisted job search yielded no employment results, Jason was referred for training services. With career assessment results indicating that Jason possessed a high interest and aptitude in mechanical occupations encompassing electrical power line installation and repair, it was recommended that Jason pursue training related to this field. Through WIA funded groundsman training at TCR Management Group, Jason was able to earn VDOT Flagger Certification, Basic Workzone Certification, and learn occupational skills related to power line installation and repair.

In October 2012, Jason began working for Davis H. Elliott Company earning a wage of \$12.26 per hour. Not only was Jason able to increase his pay to \$13.26 per hour upon obtaining a commercial drivers' license, he has been recommended for the apprenticeship program through the company which will allow him to increase his earnings to \$18.26 per hour. This 6 step program will provide Jason with the skill levels necessary to pursue a career pathway toward the position of lineman.

Jason is an excellent example of how hard work and education in high demand career fields can maximize one's potential in terms of employment and earnings. Jason is thankful that he can now provide for his family, and has high expectations for his future career with Davis H. Elliott Company.



Jason Collins

Resource Business Solutions Teams Together for Fort Lee

By Liz Rennie Lungut, Resource Business Solutions Coordinator

Resource Business Solutions is the business services partnership team serving Virginia's Capital Region (Area # 9) and includes the VEC, Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS), Department of Labor and Industry (DOLI), Title I providers (Resource), Community College Workforce Alliance (CCWA), Job Corps, Goodwill, and the Daily Planet.



Site of successful OJT and 100 Jobs for Disabled Vets

The team prides itself on a single point of contact approach to serving business and a one-stop provider of workforce services. So, when team member Wes Seaton, Business Manager for DARS, received a phone call for a large public works recruitment project for Fort Lee, he immediately enlisted the help of the Business Solutions Team.

The contract was due to launch on March 29th 2013 and 160 positions were available to be filled with a variety of jobs from Painter, to Carpenter to Grounds Enhancement Laborer. Wages ranged from \$11 per hour to \$38.22 and had paid time off with full benefits and retirement. The contract required that 75 percent of the labor pool have a verifiable disability, and because of the

transitioning military in the region, the company sought Disabled Veterans as well.

Wes remained the point of contact for the project and partnered with VEC team members to enter the job orders into the VWC. The Business Solutions Team helped spread the word about the project and screened applicants for six months.

Referrals poured in from the workforce partners and thirty eight jobseekers were offered positions and twenty eight OJT agreements were accepted through DARS. Sixty two Veterans were hired as a result of the efforts of the local VEC Veteran's Representatives. Other qualified applicants who did not meet eligibility requirements for those two programs were served through Resource - the Title I provider for the Capital Region - as Dislocated Workers eligible for OJT's. One hundred offers were made and the company saved \$375,260 through OJT's.

The project was a win-win for everyone involved. John Oliver, the CEO of Employment Diversity Resource Consultants (EDRC) felt that, "the personalized attention that Wes provided was second to none. After this positive experience, I anticipate many more candidates will be hired as additional positions become available." He said, "I know that I only have to make a call or send an email to Wes and within a few days I will have some more outstanding candidates."

The Fort Lee Project will be a permanent project that will require continued support from DARS, the Business Solutions Team and the workforce system to help keep the labor sustained. 🌍

Upcoming Virginia Workforce Council Events

- **JUNE 27** - Executive Order 55 Summit - Workforce Development Center, CCWA, Richmond VA
- **JUNE 28** - Virginia Workforce Council Executive Committee Meeting, Spotsylvania Medical Center
- **JULY 16** - Virginia Workforce Council Committees and Full Council Meeting, Governor's STEM Academy, Richmond VA



The Governor's Career Pathways System Work Group and the VCCS won a 2013 Capital Award of Excellence in the category of External Video from the Richmond Chapter of the Public Relations Society of America for the Career Pathways Video. The VCCS submitted the nomination for the award and were top pick for external video by the Richmond Chapter. Amanda Christopher, Public Relations Coordinator for Workforce Development Services at VCCS, accepted the award at The Jefferson Hotel on May 15.

CHAIRMAN'S PERSPECTIVE *(Continued from page 1)*

is funding. Clearly, it is a struggle to meet and exceed federal and state performance measures with funds shrinking, particularly given the federal sequestration. To augment these funds, I strongly encourage each LWIB to find ways to access non-WIA resources. Additionally, LWIAs must balance the requirements held out by their business community with the expectations of the K through 12 and post-secondary arena. It is important that the Workforce system be seen as a strategic partner in business growth and job creation, while serving the populations with the greatest challenges, including youth, dislocated workers, veterans, the disabled, prisoners that are trying to re-enter a non-criminal lifestyle. They must plan ahead to identify the skills that employers need for future or incumbent workers. I have stressed with each Board, my hope for the Virginia Workforce Council and for them, which is to focus for the foreseeable future, on regionalism, alignment and branding. I also hope to energize our efforts around sector strategies. Whether on the local or state level, each chairperson and director can serve as a "convener" in order to "assemble, summon and rally" their constituencies towards our common goals and work together to seek solutions. My visits have been both enjoyable and informative and I thank each Board for their hospitality. I look forward to visiting the balance of our WIAs in the years to come.

As for the Council, we truly embrace our role as a "convener" in the coming months. On June 27, we will participate in a summit to respond to Governor McDonnell's Executive Order 55, supporting Virginians with Disabilities in the Commonwealth's workforce. We will identify strategies in the public and private sector to increase opportunities for hiring persons with disabilities.

The Council's role has been enhanced as legislative reform will become law on July 1. Our Executive Committee will convene on June 28 to craft important actions necessary to implement those changes. Please join us on July 16 at the Governor's STEM Academy in Richmond for the next full business meeting of the Council to learn more about these exciting plans.

Thank you for all of the great work you do every day on behalf of the citizens of the Commonwealth. Have a great summer. 🌍

Northern Virginia Successful Job Placement Strategies

The SkillSource Group, Inc. (the non-profit arm of the Northern Virginia Workforce Investment Board; Area #11) shares success stories of job seekers whose lives have been positively impacted by their participation in employment programs offered through the five Northern Virginia SkillSource Centers.

Jobs for Veterans (J4VETS) Reaps Success

In August 2012, the SkillSource Group, Inc. received a grant through the U.S. Department of Labor's Veterans Workforce Investment Program (VWIP). The Northern Virginia Jobs 4 Veterans (J4VETS) Initiative is delivering employment and training services to approximately 395 eligible veterans over a three-year period, resulting in veterans earning industry recognized credentials and employment in high demand local businesses. This program has been met with enthusiasm from our eligible veteran clients. As of March 2013, 66 veterans have enrolled; 41 are in training; and 12 have been placed into employment at an average wage of \$26.61/hour or \$55,349 annually. Below are two recent success stories from this program.

Enjoy Retirement or Seek Full-Time Employment

Javier served 24 years in the U.S. Army until he retired from active duty in December of 2012. His service earned him the National Defense Service Medal, Korean Defense Service Medal, Iraq Campaign Medal, Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal and many other commendation and achievement medals.

Despite being eligible for retirement, he decided to seek full-time employment. While being transitioned out of the Army, the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) referred him to the Microsoft Elevate America program for free IT training. He then was referred for additional employment services through the J4VETS initiative.

As a Senior Human Resource Manager/Program Analyst in the Army, Javier had extensive experience in cross-functional team leadership, public relations, strategic planning, regulatory compliance project management and data analysis. However, he did not possess the necessary industry-recognized certifications and credentials needed for many of the advertised positions that he felt qualified to pursue.

While enrolled in J4VETS, Javier received bi-weekly job leads, workshop information and was informed of job fair opportunities. He followed his Individual Employment Plan (IEP) objectives of tailoring his resume to fit the positions for which he was applying, researching job fair companies and positions prior to attending those job fairs, and completing the Project Management Preparation

course at an Eligible Training Provider approved by the NVWIB.

As a result of his initiative and the supportive services and training provided through the J4VETS program, Javier was hired in March 2013 as a Supervisory Administrative Officer at the US Agency for International Development (USAID) at a high five-figure salary including benefits.

J4VETS Scores Another Success


Despite nine years of experience as a Project Manager, Sergio was dislocated due to the declining financial condition of his firm. Sergio found his skills outdated and lacking for today's job market. A Workforce Services Representative from the Virginia Employment Commission referred Sergio to the J4VETS program, as he was a Veteran and seeking employment.

After being enrolled and assessed by the J4VETS program, Sergio's military and Project Management background matched him with management, engineering and administrator occupational options. In addition, he scored Gold on the Virginia Career Readiness Certificate, which signified that

he possessed the skills needed for 85% of the jobs profiled by WorkKeys, an educational and occupational assessment tool.

Working closely with the J4VETS Job Developer, Sergio researched the firms, job vacancies, and job skills needed in today's employment market. He traveled as far as Atlanta to participate in the interview process.

Sergio pursued Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) Foundation and Project Management Preparation (PMP) training with an Eligible Training Provider approved by the NVWIB. He completed the ITIL Foundation Certificate in IT Service Management in February; and was on target to complete the PMP course in April 2013.


As a result, Sergio obtained a full-time, exempt position of Program Manager earning a lucrative salary with Carney, Inc., a performance acceleration company that helps Federal civilian and Defense agencies through performance consulting. Despite just starting in March, he has full administrative, operational and financial responsibility for two of the firm's four programs which account for 40% of the company's annual revenue. 

High Demand Registered Nursing Proves Career Change Success Story

Every day is busy in the Post-Anesthesia Care Unit at Bristol Regional Medical Center (Wellmont Health Systems). However, no day is too busy for People Incorporated dislocated worker client Travis Rife, who is thankful for a work schedule as busy as his. "I am very blessed with the help I have received through the dislocated worker program. I am working a job that I love and I work with some of the most amazing people."

After receiving a permanent layoff notice from Alcoa Forge Products in December 2009, Travis was somewhat deprived of hope when faced with the challenge of leaving a company where he had devoted his time and talents for 12 years. Working as a Process Specialist and providing oversight of production line processes, Travis was not prepared for the career change that would be forthcoming.

Not knowing what to do, Travis sought the assistance of the dislocated worker program after learning about the program at the Bristol Virginia Workforce Center. Through assessments, planning, guidance, and coaching provided by dislocated worker staff and funding provided by the Trade Act Program, Travis was able to complete the nursing program at Virginia Highlands Community College. Travis earned his Associate of Applied Science Degree in nursing and within three days of graduation, Travis obtained a position at Bristol Regional Medical Center and is now employed as a Registered Nurse.

With a 1.9% growth rate and 2,528 projected openings in the New River/Mount Rogers Workforce Investment Area for registered nurses, Travis now has the peace of mind that he will always have a job. "It is a great feeling to achieve a goal that may not have been possible without the aid of the dislocated worker program, and for that I will always be grateful." 



Travis Rife

The Alliance for Quality Career Pathways Addresses National Career Pathways Metrics



Shawn Avery, Vice President, Peninsula Council for Workforce Development and Sharon Peery, Dean, Community, Workforce, and Economics Solutions, Southwest Virginia Community College stand in front of a poster and video display highlighting Virginia's successes in starting up regional career pathways to meet the workforce needs of high tech industries throughout the Commonwealth.

Workforce Investment Board leaders from three regions and state level officials from the Virginia Community College System and Governor's Office participated in the first national meeting of the Alliance for Quality Career Pathways held April 16-18 at Lansdowne Resort in Leesburg, VA.

Virginia Workforce Council member and Chair of the VWC Performance and Accountability Committee, **Danny Vargas**, provided the opening address for the national meeting of career pathway and workforce development teams from 10 states. Mr. Vargas addressed the Governor's Economic and Workforce Development successes, recent accomplishments of the VWC



, and the work of his committee in moving forward evaluation and assessment of Workforce Investment Board regions.

The Alliance for Quality Career Pathways is a consortium of 10 leading states in workforce development convened under the leadership of the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) to develop and field test quality national benchmarks and metrics for career pathway programs. In addition to VA, states participating in the Alliance's work, funded by the Joyce and James Irvine Foundations, include: Arkansas, California, Illinois, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Oregon, Washington, and Wisconsin.

Each participating state sent a team of policy, program and data experts to help develop a national framework for career pathways including: common criteria of career pathways, progress indicators and performance metrics. By developing and then testing common performance metrics, career pathways can be evaluated on national as well as state and local levels. As the first national initiative to address national metrics for pathways, the Alliance has attracted interest from a number of national organizations prominent in workforce development including National Governor's Association and US Office of Vocational and Adult Education.

The new national framework will be available in June, and the 10 participating states will then begin beta testing of the framework and metrics. Thanks to state and local workforce leaders Elizabeth Creamer (Gov's Office), Wendy Kang (VCCS), Elizabeth Moran (VCCS), Jeanian Clark (Lord Fairfax CC), Sharon Peery (Southwest Virginia CC), and Shawn Avery (Peninsula Council for Workforce Development) for their participation and contributions to the project.

South Norfolk Workforce Revitalization Pilot Program Makes Jobs More Accessible

In early January, Opportunity Inc, partnered with the Chesapeake Public Library, a Share Network Access Point member, to organize a unique job event in South Norfolk, a distressed area of the city. Like many similar areas, South Norfolk suffers from high unemployment and a large number of people who rely on public transportation. This pilot program sought to improve employment retention by connecting local residents with local jobs.

Trade Team, the recruitment arm of Colonna's Ship Yard, was the program's industry partner and identified immediate openings in four occupations: Fire Watch, Brush Painter, Hydro Blaster and Structural Welder. Through a coordinated outreach effort, 168 people expressed an interest in these positions.

Job seekers completed a Resume Writing Workshop conducted by Opportunity Inc. as well as an Interview Skills Workshop and Mock Interview conducted by volunteers from the Hampton Roads Society for Human Resource Management. All activities were held at Chesapeake's South Norfolk Indian River and Dr. Clarence V. Cuffee Libraries to make the programs more accessible to jobseekers.

A total of 25 candidates completed the entire process and were interviewed by Trade Team recruiters on January 30, 2013. Of these 19 candidates are confirmed hires. Candidates passed over for various reasons were referred elsewhere for employment or further training. The 76% hiring rate is significantly better than Trade Team's typical 20% rate. Equally as impressive, as of this writing, 18 of the 19 hired are still employed with Trade Team.

By all accounts everyone was pleased with the results. Many job seekers were hired on the spot or shortly thereafter. Recruiters saw potential hires who were confident and well prepared for their interviews. The experience was summed up nicely by Trade Team's General Manager David Breen. "All of us at Trade Team appreciate the opportunity to partner with Opportunity Inc. and the library to put good people in a position to obtain good jobs." Plans are underway for another event later this year.



Miguel Barrios interviewed for a fire watch position with Trade Team in Chesapeake.

Western Hampton Roads Served by Opportunity Inc.

ManJaz White watched as enthusiastic teens walked down the runway at a recent fashion show hosted at Paul D. Camp Community College (PDCCC) in Franklin. They weren't wearing Prada and Gucci, but they did show off the hottest trends for emerging professionals.

"It was a really good experience being able to see and learn what you should and shouldn't wear to an interview," says ManJaz, a student from Southampton High School who won best "worst" example of what to wear to an interview. She walked the runway with a short black and white striped skirt with a black tank top.

The fashion show was just one aspect of the services and programs that Opportunity Inc. provides for area residents between the ages of 14 and retirement. This particular activity was hosted by students in Opportunity Inc.'s new youth program Emerging Scholars. The program, which serves current juniors and seniors, is located at PDCCC in Franklin. Franklin and its surrounding rural counties face many challenges including unemployment.

The Emerging Scholars program provides students with opportunities to take college courses, participate in paid internships and build job readiness skills such as how to write a resume.

In addition, Opportunity Inc. will fund a new program for out-of-school youth between the ages of 18 and 21 at PDCCC. This program will help bridge youth to post-secondary education opportunities. It will offer academic remediation, career exploration, on-campus internships and college student developmental courses.

"Programs like these give youth the assistance and nurturing that may be absent in their homes or at their schools," says Candice Artis, the Emerging Scholar's program coordinator and a biology teacher at Lakeland High School in Suffolk. "I believe that within this area, because there are not many things that are youth-centered, these type of programs are necessary to help diminish the possibilities of youth turning to other illegal and harmful activities."

In addition to these youth programs, Opportunity Inc. provides a full slate of workforce services for adults in partnership with the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC) and Paul D. Camp's Career Development Center. Together, they serve more than 25,000 adults per year.

So, what's next on Opportunity Inc.'s agenda for Franklin? A satellite office for the Youth Career Center is set to open this summer bringing more intensive services such as job skills workshops and interactive career immersion camps for youth between the ages of 14 and 21. The main location for the Youth Career Center has been in Virginia Beach's Pembroke Mall since 2010.

Rick Sciuolo, Opportunity Inc.'s Vice-President says, "We continue to think that a Center would be a great complement to the other services Paul D. Camp offers in the Franklin area such as the Career Services initiative, the Career Coaches and the dual enrollment activities."

Andrea Harrell, Opportunity Inc.'s Director of Youth Initiatives added, "A major challenge in serving a rural area is the large population of rural youth facing transportation issues. With a satellite office located in Franklin we can accommodate those youth with the same services we provide in the eastern Hampton Roads area." 🌍

Youth stand together with their awards after walking in a professional dress fashion show at Paul D. Camp Community College.



More Than 1,000 Teens Connect With Businesses at The Youth Career Center's Summer Opportunity Fair

A group of 30 teenagers surrounded the Farm Fresh employment opportunity table recently handing over resumes, filling out applications and listening intently to the recruiter's description of jobs available. "I feel like a rock star," said Jonathan Webber, the Farm Fresh store director. "I wasn't nearly this popular in high school."

Webber was just one of 35 vendors who attended the Youth Career Center of Hampton Road's Teen Summer Opportunity Fair hosted in March at Pembroke Mall in Virginia Beach. Other vendors included Wells Fargo, Virginia Beach Parks & Recreation, Ocean Breeze Waterpark, ECPI University, Tidewater Community College, and Girl Scout Council of Colonial Coast. The Pembroke Mall staff donated the space and set-up tables to allow vendors to give local youth information about job openings, summer camps, volunteer opportunities and educational programs.

More than 1,000 neatly dressed youth ages 14 to 21 had professional portfolios in hand as they mingled through the crowd of vendors, introduced themselves and described their talents, abilities, skills and aspirations. The number of youth came as no surprise to Center staff members since recent statistics report that unemployment rates fell for every group of Americans last year except for teenagers.

In Virginia, the unemployment rate for teens between the ages of 16 and 19 jumped to 26 percent in 2012—higher than the national rate of 23.5 percent.

Before the fair started, 25 lucky teenagers who participated in the Center's 5-week Job Club were able to network privately with employers over hors d'oeuvres. During Job Club, the youth learned how to speak with employers and present themselves at a networking fair.

Heaven Allen, a shy 16-year-old Bayside High School student, says her self-confidence increased significantly by attending Job Club. She visited almost every booth and got a lot of positive feedback from employers. "I'll use the phone and email etiquette skills I learned in Job Club to follow-up with the employers I met," she says.

"I was very impressed with the turn out and the quality of the candidates," says Jessie Leger, a recruiter at AAA Pool Services in Virginia Beach, who added that this was the best fair she'd ever attended. "The teens I spoke with were all incredibly polite, introduced themselves, shook my hand and asked excellent questions regarding the job and the future benefits of being a lifeguard." Lindsey Sigafoos, the community outreach manager for the Chesapeake Humane Society was recruiting for potential volunteers. "It was a great event, and I think we got a lot of new volunteers," she says.

At the end of the event, Opportunity Inc. staff members were thrilled that so many youth came out and that the employers were ready to give them great opportunities to work, learn or volunteer with their companies, organizations and institutions. "Because of this event, literally hundreds of young people will have challenging and rewarding opportunities they would not have otherwise had this summer and beyond," says Rick Sciuolo, Opportunity Inc.'s Vice-President. "It was simply an amazing event for all involved." 🌍