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Local businesses facilitate YES program

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Some local businesses say the employability skills of new graduates are steadily decreasing in Schuylkill County, but a new course offered to seniors in five county school districts is working to reverse the trend.

“We’ve recognized that there’s a weakness in the people applying for employment — not only us, but the people throughout the company,” George F. Litsch, vice president of operations of Schuylkill Products, Cressona, said.

“I have seen a decline in some soft skills with people coming out of high school, particularly when it comes to working in teams, understanding the importance of being at work at the designated start of a shift and not being late,” Jack A. Hallick, human resources manager at Michael Foods, Klingerstown, said.

Enter the YES — Your Employability Skills — Certificate Program to help alleviate the lack of employable skills. The 120-hour program is a year-long, curriculum-based, elective course that teaches students skills such as conflict resolution, goal-setting, writing, interview training, resume writing and job application tips, according to the Northeast Pennsylvania Manufacturers and Employer’s Association Web site.

“The prospective employee should know how to properly fill out a job application. That’s step one, and too many people don’t have a clue on how to get started,” Litsch said.

About 90 Schuylkill County Employers, including Schuylkill Products and Michael Foods, are endorsing the YES program implemented by the Northeast Pennsylvania Manufacturers and Employer’s Council Inc. in 2006. The York Operating Partnership — a partnership between educators, businesses and industry in York — developed the program.

Schuylkill Haven School District was the first to enroll in the program in Schuylkill County; Blue Mountain, Mahanoy Area, Minersville and Pottsville high schools followed. Pennsylvania is the only state implementing the YES program, which enrolls more than 700 students in 29 schools throughout the state, according to Darlene J. Robbins, president of the Northeast Pennsylvania Manufacturers and Employers Association.

“It’s important for students who are not only going into the world of work, but who are going into college or who are going into the military,” she said.

Students in the program have access to a video library with “powerful, up-to-date” videos; they receive six hours of tours within Schuylkill County businesses; and business representatives visit classrooms to lead workplace modules, Robbins said. Students must also maintain a 95 percent attendance rate, pass the literacy and aptitude tests and pass a drug screening in order to receive a YES certificate, she said.

“If more businesses and industry opened their doors to the students, they’d have a much better idea of what’s available out there and how to compete for those positions,” Litsch said.

Senior Michael Sinitsky is leaving for the Air Force in August and says he’ll be better prepared because the YES program teaches “business-related skills and life skills that you don’t really learn in other classes.”

Senior Ashley Hessner said that students who go through the course may have an advantage over those who don’t.

“It’s fun. You get to learn different things about the work world,” Hessner said. “I think it would be a good choice to take the class.”

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