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Campaign acquaints high school students with choices

by SOPHIA RUFFIN

The "Work It! Louisiana" campaign is officially up and running in Terrebonne Parish.

The career awareness program was launched Thursday at the Terrebonne Vocational and Technical High School.

The objective of the South Central Industrial Association's career day was to educate all sophomores from all four high schools in Terrebonne on career opportunities in the Bayou Region, said SCIA Executive Director Jane Arnette.

"It is our intent to give the students gainful information on the appropriate technical skills to meet the needs of their career opportunities," she explained.

Businesses from the surrounding area participated in the event. They provided valuable information about job opportunities and education requirements.

"This is a great opportunity to assist the students in developing their game plan for the future," she said.

"Work It! Louisiana" is a pilot program of the Louisiana Department of Labor in cooperation with the Terrebonne Economic Development Authority (TEDA). The program is being implemented in Terrebonne, Lafourche and St. Mary parishes to redefine education directions in the Tri-parish area, according to Arnette.

"We designed the program to encourage enrollment in the technical education systems, as well as encourage career paths for students of all grade levels," SCIA President Don Hingle said.

Exposing the kids to career opportunities is the best way to get them on the right track, he noted. "We are not here to train, but to expose the students to potential career paths."

The present businesses were there to do exactly that.

Take Ray Thibodeaux, a marine superintendent with J. Ray McDermott Inc., for example. Thibodeaux started out as a rigger for McDermott, a leading worldwide marine solutions company with fabrication facilities in the U.S. Now, he has risen through the ranks.

"They start you out at the bottom and give you the skills you need for upward mobility. From there, the sky is the limit," he said.

Vo-Tech High School Principal Marcel Fournier said, "More than 1,100 students came out for the career day. There were 40 different businesses ranging from welding to healthcare, many of them relevant to the Vo-Tech school, but some of them were not. But all of them entailed what this region has to offer to the students."

Some of the high school students already have ideas about what they want to do after graduation.

Terrebonne High School student Steven Parks wants to keep with his family tradition in becoming a law enforcement officer in Terrebonne Parish.

"Many of my family members are law enforcement officers, and that's what I want to do," Parks said.

Keyshana Coleman, also from Terrebonne High, said, "Going to college is important to me because I want to make something of myself. And for those not going to college, vocational training would be perfect for them - they can get an education and make a living all in one."

Coleman wants to be a fashion designer and photographer. The 10th grader said once she crosses her tassel on graduation day, she plans to go to Georgia to attend Clark Atlanta University to study Mass Media Arts.

From their standpoint, many of the students viewed the job fair as a plus for industry workers and potential employees. They agreed that the Vo-Tech high school and the Bayou Region's job market have a lot to offer to today's working class.

South Terrebonne High School student Christopher Boyd said the job market has a variety of jobs to offer the working class.

"People just have to make it their mission to look for the job that's suitable for them," he said.

Agreeing with Boyd, Terrebonne High student Adrienne Poincot said, "There's something out there for everyone. We just have to be willing to work hard and go after the job we want."

Poincot, a possible candidate for LSU or Northwestern State University, said she is leaning toward a career in pediatric medicine. "I like nursing and I love kids, so the Vo-Tech nursing program will give me the tools I need to prepare me for my career," she said.

Out of all the students present at the fair, a few were undecided. Boyd's fellow classmate, Trena Parfait is proof of what the program is trying to prevent - students who come out of high school with no idea of what's in store for them.

"This job fair is great for me because it gives me the opportunity to see what's out there before I actually get into the workforce," she said.

Weatherford, one of the world's largest diversified upstream oilfield service companies, offers 30 different career paths - from the unskilled to the highly-trained professional - for those other undecided students and adults.

"We have positions where people can grow and be successful," said Weatherford General Manager Patrick Seely. "Right now, Weatherford's biggest demand is for skilled machinists, machine operators and welders."

Seely is also SCIA's Workforce Development Committee co-chair.

Weatherford was instrumental in acquiring the machinist program at the Vo-Tech. The program, an industrial mechanics course, is in its second year.

"The program is going to be a big plus for this area," he said.



Terrebonne Parish high school sophomores visited the Terrebonne Vocational and Technical High School Thursday to learn what skills are required at various companies in the region. Part of a program called "Work It! Louisiana," the Career Day tour was sponsored by the South Central Industrial Association. * Photo by SOPHIA RUFFIN • Tri-Parish Times