

Students Soar at DECA's SoNAR Conference



MEMBERS OF THE CAREER AND TECHNICAL STUDENT ORGANIZATION DECA GAINED KNOWLEDGE, LEADERSHIP SKILLS AND INSPIRATION AT A CONFERENCE HELD IN OUR NATION'S CAPITAL.

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CAREER AND TECHNICAL STUDENT organizations (CTSOs) are an effective mechanism for achieving the goals of education in the 21st century and No Child Left Behind. Through their hands-on approach to learning, CTSOs provide students with many opportunities to become actively involved in their learning and apply classroom knowledge to real-life situations. This experiential approach was vividly on display at DECA's November meeting of its North Atlantic and Southern Regions (SoNAR) in Washington, D.C.

"We wholeheartedly agree with the concept that total student development is necessary for our students to assume successful roles in society and the labor market. That's why we were so excited to host our SoNAR Conference in Washington, D.C.," says Ed Davis, DECA's executive director. "Where, other than our nation's capital, could we bring to life the importance and interconnection of marketing to citizenship and private enterprise?"

More than 1,800 DECA student members and advisers participated in the conference. Those attending participated in workshops and leadership experiences focusing on government, hospitality, entrepreneurship, leadership and marketing, including sports and entertainment marketing.

Government Track

A series of informative workshops held at the U.S. Capitol Building was designed for those who signed up for the government track. Focusing on the federal legislative process, the issues that directly impact career and technical education, and how young people can get involved to affect positive change, the workshops were conducted by congressional

staff members, members of the Public Policy Department of the Association for Career and Technical Education, and representatives from the Democratic National Committee and the Leadership Institute.

Several of DECA's Congressional Advisory Board members, Representatives Thelma Drake (Va.) and Kenny Marchant (Texas), facilitated this incredible access to citizenship information, delivered in a setting that was itself most impressive. Those in the government track also received VIP tours of the Capitol Building, the White House, the Supreme Court and the Library of Congress.

Private Enterprise Workshops

During the conference, members circulated among workshops leading to certificates in marketing, sales and service; finance; hospitality; chapter management; and entrepreneurship. These private enterprise workshops focused on the importance of entrepreneurship, marketing and management to our national economy. DECA worked closely with national education and industry partners to develop workshop content that advances both current policy objectives and workforce preparedness interests.

"Understanding the interconnection between business, government and society is critical to the success of any business," says Roger Glenn, vice president of human resources for Safeway, Inc. "That's why Safeway believes so strongly in the DECA program and was delighted to be part of the SoNAR Conference."

Thanks to DECA's national business partners, who were also in Washington, D.C., for their annual meeting, conference participants were able to engage industry experts on the strategies that make brands household names



▲▲ Monumental Opportunity

In Washington, D.C., DECA students on the government track took VIP tours of the Supreme Court (above), the Capitol Building, the White House and the Library of Congress.

and build individual wealth for investors.

The Target Corporation, one of DECA's newest and most enthusiastic corporate supporters, sponsored a series of workshops on marketing the Target brand and on the daily company operations that determine how the company develops and sells products.

The Washington Capitals hockey association offered an exciting sports marketing track. In addition, the entire group of conference-goers attended a hockey game their first night at the conference at the Verizon Center, where the opening session was held following the game.

By participating in the private enterprise workshops, DECA members not only gained insight into the workings of our national economy, they also learned to integrate marketing into critical math and research skills with the industry leaders who are creating household brands and driving our stock market to new heights.

Leadership and Chapter Management

In addition to their chosen career track workshops, all students also completed a leadership course.

"I learned many more leadership, responsibility and social skills than I ever thought possible," says Samantha Jo Davidson, Louisiana DECA state vice president. "The conference leaders touched every

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basic part of being a professional leader and businessperson; they even spoke about appropriate clothing. Not only was the experience of Washington, D.C., amazing, the learning atmosphere was different than we usually experience on an everyday basis—it was fun!"

Members also benefited from sessions that provided tips on how to succeed in DECA competitive events.

"The different competitive event seminars and presentations were most helpful," says Evan Feuerstein, DECA president at Lawrence High School (Cedarhurst, N.Y.). "I learned so much to prepare me for the competitive events as well as from the expertise of the members of the Target staff."

Other highlights of the conference included a stirring keynote address by Byron Garrett, who lives by the credo: "You have to be willing to do today what other people won't do, to have tomorrow what others never will;" a series of professional and chapter development workshops for advisers; and a closing keynote by motivational speaker Phil Boyte, who challenged the members to make a difference with what they learned at the conference when they get back home.

"These are the types of experiences students can't get at their local schools," says Davis. "Participation in the opportunities DECA and other CTSOs provide helps students learn about the responsibilities of citizenship, the importance of private enterprise to our national economy, the dynamics and interconnection of marketing and management to their career choices, and inspires them to leadership roles in the pathways they choose." ■