

AVTC Hosts TechnoCamp

By Brenda Miner

Hosting middle school students at a hands-on event is helping a technical school meet its enrollment goals while also giving young students a chance to explore career possibilities.

The Area Vo-Tech Center (AVTC) in Russellville, Arkansas, has seen its enrollment rise to the point that, for all practical purposes, most of the center's programs are at capacity. This sounds like a good problem to have. However, now is the time for the center to encourage enrollment based on the aptitude and interest level of the students enrolling in the various programs.

AVTC currently offers student enrollment in auto technology, computer engineering, cosmetology, construction technology, drafting technology, horticulture, hospitality management, industrial equipment maintenance, metal fabrication, medical professions and machine tool technology.

To accomplish the enrollment goal, many ideas were brainstormed, and two were finally chosen as new recruitment tools. The AVTC had been using a single-sheet, tri-fold brochure as its major print item for recruitment. The brochure was being done in-house and was getting "dowdy" looking in comparison to some print items being used by the local school districts. The center decided to commit to a professionally done eight-page booklet that will be mailed to parents and prospective students in

AVTC's participating schools, and that will also be used in parent institutes, at open houses and at parent-teacher conferences. Additionally, the brochure will be placed around the communities served by the AVTC.

Summer Camp as Education

The second tool selected for recruitment targeted students at the middle school level. AVTC recently hosted its first TechnoCamp—an occurrence the center plans to make an annual event. The camp took place in early June, while technical instructors were still present. Each instructor was given the opportunity to offer a half-day camp session to a group of 11-to-14-year-old students recently out of school for summer break.

Students were enrolled in the local Boys and Girls Club, and as one Boys and Girls Club employee expressed: "This is our forgotten age group."

It was a gratifying experience to see these younger students being mentored by the high school-age SkillsUSA students of AVTC.

Students were offered sessions in computer engineering, horticulture, drafting technology, industrial equipment maintenance, automotive technology, hospitality management and metal fabrication. Every student had the opportunity to do hands-on activities and take with them from each session an item they had made, including a desktop computer from their session in computer engineering. All activities were age appropriate and supervised by certified staff of AVTC.

"The school was glad to do this," says Bennie Byrd, automotive technology instructor and camp director. "It gives these kids an opportunity to get a jumpstart on a career by exploring



THE COURIER/Lara Russenberger

TechnoCamp participant Parnell Webb looks for the CD-ROM connector in a jumble of wires during the computer engineering session at the Area Vo-Tech Center's TechnoCamp.

things they might like to do.”

The center felt this age group could begin to explore career and technical education in a meaningful, hands-on environment that could only be offered by a group of dedicated professionals who believe in technical education and care about students, and in a center where the training labs were in place.

Students were brought onto the AVTC campus and experienced training in each program as if they were “real” students. An overwhelming majority of the students’ evaluations of the camp indicated they enjoyed the camp and learned something new. Several stated they wanted to attend the center when they become high school students.

Planning for the Future

Excitement is running high, and the AVTC staff is eagerly planning for next summer’s TechnoCamp. Based on the

experience gained by running the TechnoCamp for the first time, plans are being made by the AVTC to lengthen the time frame, increase the number of

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students enrolled in the camp, expand the number of current AVTC SkillsUSA student mentors, and increase the number of programs offering technical experience to these young students.

AVTC will continue to evaluate the

newest of its recruitment tools and expects to see improvement in its student enrollment. It is the staff’s belief that these tools will allow students to make better choices about which programs their aptitudes and interests are best suited for, rather than coming to a program because their friends are enrolled or their parents/teachers/whomever told them to enroll.

AVTC’s mission is to serve students—and to serve them in the best possible way. In order to accomplish this task, students must make the decision to actively pursue programs in which their interest and aptitude will be of benefit and encouragement to their learning. AVTC plans to soon be saying, “Mission Accomplished!” **■**

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