

THE POWER OF CTSOs

TWO YOUNG WOMEN RELATE HOW DECA SHAPED THEIR LIVES

By Christopher Young

Whether they're blue or red, the career and technical student organization (CTSO) blazers represent more than nearly two million students annually. When those members put on their blazers, they become some of career and technical education's (CTE's) superheroes within their organizations, schools and communities. They become role models, leaders, philanthropists, project managers, advocates and our future.

The journey of CTSO students is full of incredible experiences, and for each student, his or her participation in a CTSO will have a unique meaning. For some, it's about networking, for others it's about competing, and for others it's about preparing for the future. On the other hand, for CTE educators, it's all about the students and the stories they share about the impact CTE and CTSOs can make.

Morgan Thompson and Elsa Tavares are two of many CTE superheroes. Thompson and Tavares recently completed their terms as national officers for DECA and Collegiate DECA, respec-

tively. Here, they share their experiences and reflections on the impact that CTE and CTSOs have had on them, as well as the members they served.

The Voice of Members

Thompson: Serving as the national president of DECA was easily the greatest honor I have had because I got to dedicate myself to serving the organization I love and make an impact on an international level. This opportunity gave me the chance to meet people from around the world and connect through DECA. At each point in my DECA career I felt myself growing as a leader. But on the national team, I grew faster than I ever had before.

Tavares: The biggest impact of my term as national president was realizing that I was the voice of members that I interacted with. Each of them relied on the statements I made. I was the "eyes" or portal into the organization at the national level. For this reason, representing the organization in the highest of professional manners was a responsibility I took personally, and I applied the same

honesty and integrity to my personal and academic lives as well.

Preparing Members for College and Careers

Tavares: I believe CTE and CTSOs are vehicles that drive students into college and careers with quantifiable, quality experiences that can be beneficial to companies across industries and the economy as a whole.

Thompson: There are no better tools that can prepare students for their future college and career plans like CTE and CTSOs. They give students relevant material, and challenges the students to think creatively about how they can apply it to their lives.

A New Kind of Learning

Thompson: CTE means a new kind of learning. It's a kind of learning that takes students beyond the classroom and shows them unlimited opportunities. It opens students' eyes to careers they never knew about, it pushes them to challenge the way they think and to gain skills they will use in their careers.



▲ Morgan Thompson watches as Luke Christie, MDA National Youth chairman, pumps up DECA members running in the annual Finish Line/DECA 5K in April 2013.

It's not just about the material you learn in CTE classes, it is the experience you receive by participating in CTSOs that brings the information to life. You gain professional skills needed for your career. Projects engaging the community, thinking creatively and working with teams to accomplish goals set CTE

students far above the rest and help them enjoy school more while doing it.

Connecting Digitally

One major goal of Thompson's was to use social media in new ways. She spearheaded a Google+ Hangout with the national presidents of all the CTSOs during CTE

Month in February 2013, as well as initiated many DECA social media initiatives.

Thompson: I saw an opportunity to really expand the reach and scope of our message and took the lead on creating innovative ways for members to connect to DECA through social media. One of my favorite projects was creating various campaigns for DECA month, such as an Instagram photo-a-day challenge, Facebook post days and monitoring the #DECAmonth and #DECAsuperweekend hashtags during the three regional conferences.

Service Learning

Members in all CTSOs have the opportunity to support the national charities or causes that the CTSOs have adopted at the national level. That translates into service learning, which promotes civic awareness while also teaching important 21st-century skills, such as collaboration and communication, as well as project management skills.

Tavares: CTSOs create visibility in the community by engaging students in service learning projects that provide lasting and sustainable growth at a grassroots level. I participated in many local service projects such as breast cancer walks and food drives.

Recognizing the benefit of service and responsibility to the community, DECA members continually impact and improve their local and broader communities, raising almost \$500,000 for the Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA), contributing countless volunteer hours and raising thousands more dollars for other local organizations.

Thompson: During my sophomore year of high school, I got involved with the MDA. I learned how to run fundraisers, organize events and get others involved. Each year, my relationship with MDA grew, and by my senior year I had raised \$10,000 for MDA and had built deep relationships with families served by the MDA in my area. I also had the opportunity to



be a counselor at MDA Summer Camp, where I had the chance to work one-on-one with campers.

Making a Statement for CTE and CTSOs

Tavares: I knew the diversity of my experience inside and outside the classroom could begin to engage members in conversations about growing DECA at the collegiate level. During a general session discussion it finally hit me: A major aspect of my role was to be able to effectively translate the mission, vision and benefits to major stakeholders at all levels of the organization. That meant students, teachers, administrators, and business and community partners.

I wanted to motivate action and expand our brand recognition so that when businesses hear “I am a DECA member,” they know the level of talent, professionalism

and work ethic that comes with such an individual.

Into the Present

Morgan Thompson is studying advertising and marketing communications at Johnson and Wales University, a longstanding DECA partner, in Providence.

After graduating from the Community College of Rhode Island, Elsa Tavares is now a student at Johnson and Wales University where she studies business administration.

They both remain active in DECA and Collegiate DECA. **1**

Christopher Young is the high school division and communications director at DECA Inc. He was a DECA chapter member, state officer and state advisor at both the high school and college levels before joining DECA Inc. He can be reached at christopher_young@deca.org.



Photo courtesy of Frank Peterson/DECA

- ▲ Elsa Tavares congratulates Mohamed Sakallah of the Univ. of Minnesota for winning first place in the Marketing Management Event at the 2013 Collegiate DECA International Career Development Conference.

Advocacy Resources

Just in time for CTE Month, the National Coordinating Council for Career and Technical Student Organizations has provided a new set of advocacy resources on its new website at www.ctsos.org.

The initiative represents the collective impact of all 11 CTSOs under a unified brand. The website describes the role and impact CTSOs have in CTE, in addition to providing the following advocacy tools:

- 1 A downloadable flyer for each congressional district in each state that reports the combined CTSO membership within that district. This flyer is ideal for visits with state or federal legislators.
- 2 A more detailed state report that showcases the impact and importance of CTSOs and CTE, as well as providing a school listing of all active CTSO chapters and total membership.
- 3 A downloadable brochure providing a brief overview of each CTSO.
- 4 Connection to the Association for Career and Technical Education's Action Center that allows advocates to send messages to members of Congress.

CTSOs are key components to strong CTE programs, and the student members are among our best advocates. As schools send student representatives of their CTSOs to legislative events, these new resources will allow representatives to advocate on behalf of all 11 organizations and their combined annual membership of two million students.

You can also post your CTSO story to www.facebook.com/ctsos or follow other CTSO stories at www.twitter.com/NCCTSO.