Johnston’s Greenhouse Provides Outdoor Classroom for Orleans/ Niagra BOCES Students

Orleans/Niagara BOCES students from Newfane Learning Center have started a new science unit about plant structures. Teacher Judi Gewand has found some fun videos on YouTube that relate to that subject. “They are kind of silly, but they pique my students’ interest and make them want to learn more about plants. We also work on science worksheets, lots of hands-on activities, as well as craft activities related to plants.”

The students will start planting flower seeds as part of the unit, so they can learn to take care of them and watch them grow and sprout flowers. To get them started, Ellen Johnston of Johnston’s Greenhouse in Gasport invited the students to see how her plants have grown over the winter and how having them in a greenhouse has helped them to grow. “The students were pleasantly surprised at all of the beautiful flowers and how many different shapes and colors they come in. They also really enjoyed smelling them too. The visit was really a treat,” says Mrs. Gewand.

Adult Education Teacher Rachael Rossi Writes Article for Textbook

Adult Education teacher Rachael Rossi, Ph.D. recently contributed to the textbook, “Confronting Oppressive Assessments”.

The book is an anthology of perspectives regarding the current testing reforms and has chapters written by researchers, teachers, administrators, superintendents, parents, board members and college professors. Specifically it addresses how standardized testing stifles creativity in the classroom. Dr. Rossi’s chapter is about what causes students to drop out of school. She points to the fact that they are bored and have no connection to the school environment, and that they do not see the real life application of school. She also discussed how high school equivalency assessments are becoming increasingly rigorous, so a student’s second chance at achieving a diploma dwindles with each new iteration of the test. “Our schools are now little test-prep factories because so much of what we measure a school’s or even a teacher’s performance is dependent on test scores. Meanwhile, I am on other side of the problem and working with high school dropouts who left because they were bored and didn’t get credit for classes that they took because they did not pass the exams,” she says.

“I was really excited when I was asked to be part of the book,” says Dr. Rossi. “I think that too often the high school dropout population is sort of overlooked in educational reference materials. At the time of the 2010 census, there were 39 million U.S. adults (age 16 and older) who did not have a high school diploma or its equivalent and were not enrolled in school. That is over 10% of the population. I think fewer students would dropout if they had more authentic learning opportunities. I spent a lot of time researching to back this up and it was a real honor to be asked to contribute.”

BOCES Students Help Out at Lockport Library

The students in Mike Brauer’s classroom at North Tonawanda High School have been keeping busy with various volunteer jobs.

One of those locations is the Lockport Library. The students have been hard at work doing various tasks. “My students have been throwing away dried out markers from the craft supplies, preparing summer reading packets and disinfecting book covers,” says Mr. Brauer. “Not only does it give them job skills, they are helping out in the community.”

(LtoR) Josh Pollaro, Judi Gewand, Riley Chew and Ben Porter.

(Front LtoR) Sadie Wanick (Niagara Falls), Hayden Littman (Niagara Wheatfield). (Back LtoR) Brandon Semlberger (North Tonawanda), Terrell Reed (Niagara Falls) and Abhi Bedi (Grand Island).
Early Childhood Education Students Get a Head Start on Career

Students in Christine Burdick’s Early Childhood Education Program at the Orleans Career and Technical Education Center recently received a great opportunity to get a head start on their career. “Several months ago, I was approached by Phyllis McBride, an Early Childhood administrator from the Community Action Organization/Head Start Program of Erie and Niagara County,” explains Mrs. Burdick. “She informed me that there was a need for qualified early childhood educators in our area Early Head Start programs and offered my students a chance to get free Child Development Associate training.”

In order to teach in a Head Start program, teachers need to pass the Child Development Associate (CDA) exam. Much of what is on the exam is part of the curriculum taught in Mrs. Burdick’s class. The Economic Empowerment Program, through Community Action Organization, offered free CDA training to any of the Early Childhood Education students who were interested. “This is a great opportunity,” says Mrs. Burdick. “Once my students graduate and pass the CDA exam, they will be offered full-time employment with an Early Head Start program. My student also received a stipend to assist with travel expenses and the cost of taking the exam and as employees of Head Start they will be also eligible for tuition assistance if they choose to further their education at Buffalo State College.”

Students Bassie Casanova, Katie Klee, Meagan Luthart and Cheyenne Pegelow recently completed the three month training by attending class three nights each week. “The experience has not only prepared them to take the CDA exam, but also has made the better teachers in our preschool program at BOCES,” said Mrs. Burdick. “I am very proud of all them.”

Orleans/Niagara BOCES to Start Tech Academy

High school juniors and seniors interested in computer-related careers now have more opportunities to explore their chosen field at Orleans/Niagara BOCES. This fall, the Niagara Career and Technical Education Center will implement their new Tech Academy initiative, which includes the following programs: Animation, Film and Visual Effects; Web Development and Game Programming; and Cybersecurity and Networking.

“The Tech Academy was formed to build more collaboration between our tech programs, as well as offer students more options within this field,” says Animation, Film and VFX Instructor Jennifer Licata. “Each program is comprised of two one-year, stand-alone courses. While most students still prefer to take both years of their chosen program, students can also come for one year if that fits better with their schedule. We also find that sometimes students have an interest in computer-related careers, but may not know exactly which program best suits them. For example, someone might be interested in designing video games, but not know if they want to create and animate the characters or be a programmer. With the one year structure, they could theoretically take a year of Animation and then a year of Game Programming to customize their experience.”

In the new Web Development and Game Programming course, taught by Michelle LeFauve, students will be building websites and games from scratch using code. “This is not just a user interface design course; students will begin learning programming languages right away. We will also be discussing game theory, history and what motivates people to play games.” She suggests that students who want to enroll in a Tech Academy course should have a solid academic record, be able to focus for extended periods of time, be self-motivated, and organized and posses problem-solving skills. “They should be able to overcome frustrations and work through problems that arise. There are always technical issues that will challenge students in this type of work, and having the patience and determination to solve them is key.”

Both teachers stress that these fields are more complex than students might imagine. “They know they like to watch animation, and they like to play video games, but they don’t necessarily have an understanding of what it takes to create them,” says Licata. “The whole point of the Tech Academy is to give them an idea of what these careers involve before they get to college, so they can choose their majors wisely. Since most of these highly technical occupations require further education, our students will generally be college bound after graduation. Our goal is to help our students be successful when they get there. I recently received an email from a former student who just graduated from a 4-year college with his degree in Video Production, thanking me for the experience he gained in my class. He explained how valuable it was to him to be ahead of his peers in college, and how he still uses many of the techniques he learned in my class. This is a perfect example of what we hope to accomplish with our Tech Academy graduates.”

Students wishing to attend the Tech Academy must complete an interview process in order to discuss their goals and interests, as well as the expectations of the program. “These courses can be challenging, so we want to make sure the program they have chosen is a good fit for them,” says Licata. “After the completion of the interview process, we will have a placement recommendation for every student, whether it be one of the Tech Academy programs, an alternate NCTEC program, or other preparatory work for students who may need to boost their academics, attendance or basic skills needed to be successful in one of our programs. The application process for the Tech Academy starts with the high school counselors at each component district, who complete recommendation forms for any students wishing to apply.

For more information on the programs at Orleans/Niagara BOCES, you can visit the website at www.onboces.org.
Maple Sugar Demonstration Hits Sweet Spot for Culinary Arts Students

Wolf Maple Products owners, Jason and Amy Wolf, recently paid a visit to the Orleans Career and Technical Education Center. They were the guest of Culinary Arts teacher James Atzrott and spent the day giving demonstrations to his students in the morning and afternoon classes. One of the students happened to be their son Jacob. “I love the Culinary Arts program because it’s fun and I took it because I wanted to learn the proper techniques for cooking and baking. It is a great career because everyone wants and needs to eat. I have learned a lot,” he says.

His parents showed his classmates how to make molded maple sugar, granulated maple sugar and talked to the students about the different colored sap produced from maple trees. “There are golden, amber and dark, depending on the time of year,” explained Mrs. Wolf. “Maple is a great natural product that has calcium and potassium and can be used in many different ways. We make mustard, barbeque sauce and dips from it. It’s not just for pancakes.”

Anyone interested in learning more about maple production or trying some of their homemade products can visit them at their farm at 9355 Chestnut Ridge Road in Middleport. “We are so glad that the Wolf family spent time with us,” said Mr. Atzrott. “There are so many different ways to use maple in cooking and it makes a great substitute for recipes calling for sugar. The students really enjoyed learning all the different techniques and we certainly enjoyed the end products.”

Continuing Ed’s Penny Aiken Recognized by NYACCE

Continuing Education’s Penny Aiken was recently recognized by the New York Association for Continuing/Community Education (NYACCE). She received the Distinguished Service to the NYACCE Board Award which was created this year specifically so the Board members could honor Penny. This is what they had to say about Penny. “Penny has worked behind the scenes for many years bringing the NYACCE Student of the Year celebrations to fruition including the endless organization of visits to the Capitol and arranging student visits with their state representatives. Penny also facilitates communication with the Association membership and keeps us all on track reminding us of deadlines and membership expiration dates. Members of NYACCE, past and present, appreciate Penny’s dedication and enthusiasm for NYACCE and the work she has done through the years to carry out the mission of the association. On behalf of us all, congratulations Penny!”

Penny has been involved in NYACCE for 30 years when she enrolled in a JTPA Word Processing class at Orleans/Niagara BOCES Continuing Education. She was then hired as a secretary to work in the Continuing Education office. She is also a recipient of the NYACCE Student of the Year award. “I was speechless when I received this award,” says Ms. Aiken. “I didn’t have any idea of what they were up to. I cried. You could have knocked me over with a feather. I was totally stunned and very honored.”

Orleans Learning Center Celebrates Moms

The students in Kim Wiley’s class at the Orleans Learning Center had a special day for their moms recently. In honor of Mother’s Day the class held a tea party to show them how grateful they are for them.

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Niagara Academy’s Andrew Binks Completes Leadership Niagara LYNC Program

The staff and students at the Niagara Academy are very proud of Andrew Binks. The senior just completed the prestigious Leadership Niagara LYNC Program.

LYNC is a youth leadership development program that is designed for youth to discover the leader within themselves while learning about their community. It is an eight month process that gives about 100 local students a chance to participate in a highly structured, open-ended opportunity to collaborate, examine important institutions and programs across Western New York.

“This program helped me to become a better person,” says Andrew. “I used to have not good people skills and not be able to communicate real well. I wanted to learn to talk to people and take charge in conversations and learn to be a leader.”

“We are so proud of Andrew,” says Niagara Academy Principal Amanda Bennett. “He is a wonderful young man and our high school team felt he was the perfect candidate to send through this training.” “I think everyone felt I was destined to be a leader,” says Andrew. “I am the Vice President of the Student Council. I think everyone saw this potential in me to do a lot in my life. I really love being here at the Academy. The teachers here are very understanding and it’s a nice community.”

Andrew says the experience of being in Leadership Niagara was pretty exciting. “I have always wanted to be part of something like that. It felt amazing. I really enjoyed the fieldtrip to Community Missions. I saw how good it felt to give back to the community and make a difference because the community gives back to you.”

He will be attending NCCC in the fall and plans on going on to Niagara University for Business Administration.
Fashion Design Class Shows Off Collection on Catwalk

Students in Debbie Wilczak’s Fashion Design Program at the Niagara Career and Technical Education Center put on an amazing runway show at the center recently.

The students were finishing up their year by presenting to the audience their collections that they designed and constructed for a collection that was unique to them. The theme was Freeform Expression and the inspirations came from vintage styles, spring florals and color blocking. The seniors presented four complete outfits and the juniors completed three. The judges had a difficult time picking the best looks, but decided that senior Jayla Smith took first place for her collection and that Raquel Dolson took first place for the juniors.

Computer Tech Students Are Getting Wired For Success

The junior class in Paul Hermann’s Computer Technology program at the Orleans Career and Technology Education Center, have been preparing for the State SkillsUSA Competition. SkillsUSA is a partnership of students, teachers and industry working together to ensure America has a skilled workforce.

Several of Mr. Hermann’s students competed at the New York State SkillsUSA Competition in the Computer Maintenance Technology competition April 26-28th in Syracuse. They have been working hard to hone their skills in hopes of moving on to the national competition in Louisville, Kentucky. Students were judged by experts in the field on maintenance and installing components on personal computers.

In class, students were tasked with working through three computer stations that had different issues that needed to be troubleshooting and resolved. Two seniors Jacob Kelkenberg and Andrew McKee helped Mr. Hermann set up the stations and timed the students to see if they could complete their objective in the allotted time. “Each of my students had to write up a service request ticket on what the problem was and then followed up by writing their findings after each task,” says Mr. Hermann. “I feel it was important for all my students to complete this, even if they are not competing, because that is what they will be doing as a career once they graduate. It is important for them to get it done in a timely manner and follow through because that is what their boss or clients will expect.”

The two seniors Jacob and Andrew said they enjoyed helping the juniors with the training and using their own knowledge. “When Mr. Hermann approached us about helping out, we thought it was a great opportunity,” says Andrew. “I have learned so much here in this class and it’s nice to be able to share it with the younger students.” Jacob says his time in the Computer Technology class has been a great experience. “I love it here. It has been a great two years. I have very thankful and appreciative of what Mr. Hermann has taught us. I feel it is really preparing us for when we graduate.”

Teacher Paul Hermann and Alexander Burch (Lockport).
Orleans/Niagara BOCES Graduates LPN Class and Receives Top Ranking

Fourteen Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN) students graduated from Orleans/Niagara BOCES on March 1st. Instructors Marilyn Fleischman, Debra Dittmer and Tina Manz, along with Nursing Coordinator, Karen Kwandrans handed out their nursing pins and congratulations to the students who passed the rigorous classes.

The LPN Program has received word that they took one of the top ranked programs in New York State. PracticalNursing.org contacted Orleans/Niagara BOCES Nursing Coordinator Karen Kwandrans of the exciting news. “It is a pleasure to present this accolade to your school,” wrote Bryce Hall, President of PracticalNursing.org. “Thanks to your entire team for their hard work and dedication to the field. After analyzing nursing programs in New York, it became evident that Orleans/Niagara BOCES not only supports their students during their time on campus, but also prepares them for a career beyond school. The strong LPN program prepares students to conquer the NCLEX-PN and produces graduates who have the ability to confidently carry out what they learned in the healthcare world.”

Mrs. Kwandrans says she and her instructors were very pleased to hear the news. “Our overall pass rate is 94.93% which is way above the state average. We have had one student in the last two classes not pass. We are working towards getting back to 100%.”

Congratulations to:

LPCiminelli Talks to Career and Technical Ed Student at O/N BOCES

Anyone driving around the Western New York area has no doubt looked at construction projects and seen many of them bearing the name of LPCiminelli. The company is one of the largest construction companies in the area and has been in business for 50 years. They have worked on such projects as the Fashion Outlets of Niagara Falls, U.S. Federal Courthouse, the Darwin D. Martin House Complex, Maid of the Mist Docking Station and School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences.

Students at the Niagara Career and Technical Education Center in the Building Trades, HVAC, Welding and Electricity programs were recently introduced to the president of the company, Frank L. Ciminelli, when Building Trades teacher Anthony Molinaro invited him the school. “It was too good of an opportunity to pass up,” says Mr. Molinaro. “Here is one of the biggest construction companies in this area, that employs over 300 people and does international business with the whole Northeast of USA, Canada, China, Lithuania and Costa Rica that could potentially hire some of our students.”

Mr. Ciminelli talked to the students about the history of the company, his education and his construction experience. “My grandfather started the company and I went to college and got degrees in Industrial Engineering and Construction Management. I have 26 years of experience in the field, starting being a laborer when I was 16 years old. I wasn’t 100% sure I wanted to go into the business, but I liked the idea of leaving some tangible behind and the industry is very dynamic. Our company has multiple awards for some of the projects that we have worked on.”

He also showed the students how the company uses virtual reality to show clients how they would design a space and show them a 3D model of the plans. “We even use drones to fly above the site so they can see it from that perspective,” he told the students. “The industry is growing so fast and there are plenty of opportunities.”

He ended his discussion with a building competition for the students. They were placed into teams with index cards and tape and had to build a structure together.

Culinary Arts Students Help Out at Niagara Hospice Event

Niagara Career and Technical Education Center Culinary Arts teacher, Robert Ihle, and his students recently helped out at a Niagara Hospice event. Mr. Ihle says he and his students were honored to provide cupcakes and cookies for the annual Day of Remembrance that was held on May 25th.

The event is held for families who have gone through a year of grieving for a loved one. “We knew there would be 250 attendees and the students wanted to give back to a local nonprofit organization that does so much for people within the community,” says Mr. Ihle.

From Left to Right: Front Row: Domonique Burton, De’Jon Bones, Jennifer Culverwell, Alexis Bruning, Chelsea Tolli, Danielle Gertz
Back Row: Summer Shine, Maureen Wilson, Nicole Culverwell, Samantha Cross, Julie Girardo, Tiffany Mendez, Kaitlin Heacox, Cher Curd.
BOCES Life Skills Students Honored at Riviera Theatre Volunteer Recognition Awards

Students in the Life Skills Program at North Tonawanda High School were recently recognized for their work at the Riviera Theatre.

The students, along with their teacher Mark Kurtz, were honored at the 2017 Volunteer Recognition Awards. The students were thrilled with receiving the award. “Thank you to the Riviera Theatre for this amazing award,” says Makayla Muth. “I enjoy doing various jobs, helping people and learning work skills that will help me to get a job.” Andrew Harris said, “I enjoy working at the Riviera Theatre and thank them for allowing me to work there. I like doing all the different jobs, like learning how to mop the sticky pop off the floor, vacuuming the rugs and washing the windows.” Adam Rougeux says, “I am very proud and honored to get this award and my family was very impressed.”

North Tonawanda Learning Center Students Bring Revolutionary War to Life

Students at the North Tonawanda Learning Center recently brought history to life. The classes of Mrs. Sara Sperrazza and Mrs. Jessica Guarnieri have been learning about the Revolutionary War and Colonial times. “We had a lot of fun with this history unit,” says Mrs. Guarnieri. “The students wore period clothing and played games from that time period. They also gave oral presentations to show off what they had learned in class and from their research.”

North Tonawanda Learning Center Takes Part in Read Across America Day

Students at the North Tonawanda Learning Center joined millions of their peers across the country to celebrate the 16th annual National Education Association’s (NEA) Read Across America Day on Monday, March 2nd.

Students in Julie Nelson’s, Sara Sperrazza’s and Jessica Guarnier’s classes gathered around while Orleans/Niagara BOCES Director of Special Programs, Ron Barstys, read “Green Eggs and Ham” by Dr. Seuss. March 2nd is the birthday of Dr. Seuss and classes participating were asked to read any of his books to celebrate the day. Students enjoyed the story and also took a Reader’s Oath where they promised to read every day. Mr. Barstys says he enjoyed reading to the students. “I loved it. I always game to volunteer to read a book.” Teacher Mrs. Nelson said that the classes tied the book into some projects such as a sequence project, a lesson on comprehension and researching on who Dr. Seuss was.

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Orleans/Niagara BOCES Announces New York State SkillsUSA Champions

Many SkillsUSA students from Orleans/Niagara BOCES returned to their career and technical education (CTE) centers with medals in hand from the New York State SkillsUSA Competition held in Syracuse.

SkillsUSA is a national partnership of students, teachers and industry representatives working together to ensure America has a skilled workforce. Congratulations go to:

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<tr>
<th>Student Name</th>
<th>District</th>
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<td>Rebecca Albright</td>
<td>Royalton Hartland</td>
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<td>3-D Visualization &amp; Animation</td>
<td>3-D Visualization &amp; Animation</td>
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<td>Nicholas Monaco</td>
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We are wishing all our first place students the best of luck at Nationals in Louisville, Kentucky!
Photos from the New York State SkillsUSA Champions

Kennedy Smelski (Lyndonville).
Cameron Cooper (Starpoint) with teacher Amber Croff.
Joseph Hecko

Benjamin Gordon (Lewiston-Porter), Lexi McCoy (Niagara Falls) and Andrew Carrigan (Lewiston Porter).
Kyle Sharkey (Wilson).

Christian DiRamio

Brendan Schyve (Royalton Hartland), Noah Rocklein (Barker), Marisol Cabrera (Barker) and Eliza Serth (Newfane).

Derek Soluri
Benjamin Gordon (Lewiston-Porter), Lexi McCoy (Niagara Falls) and Andrew Carrigan (Lewiston Porter), Kyle Sharkey (Wilson).
Robert Wagner
Newfane Learning Center Enjoys Western Themed Dance

The students from the Newfane Learning Center brought their school year to a close with an old fashioned hoedown. The dance was the site’s annual spring fling.

“ar students and staff held a vote on this year’s theme,” explains teacher Margaret Hagan. “It was a team effort to create the beautiful decorations and prepare delicious treats for everyone to enjoy.”

Students in Mark Kurtz’s class at North Tonawanda High School helped to prepare and serve lunch to the dancers and joined in the festivities. “The kids had fun dancing and are already talking about what next year’s theme will be,” says teacher Sarah Koithan.

Roy Hart Learning Center Has Got Talent

The students at the Royalton Hartland Learning Center showed off their performance abilities and their knowledge of the school-wide of the PBIS (Positive Behavior Interventions) program by performing skits, songs, dances and showing art work at a Great Choice Showcase.

PBIS is a proactive approach to establishing the behavioral supports and social culture that are needed for all students in a school to achieve social, emotional and academic success. Students and staff worked to create a piece to “showcase” the different aspects of the PBIS program from appropriate voice levels, the color system and calming strategies. Throughout the showcase students were reminded to “Be Safe, Be Respectful and Be Responsible”.

Mrs. White and Ms. Schultz’s classes read poems and performed a Watch Me (Whip/Nae Nae) parody encouraging students to use the “thinking space”. Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Kantor’s classes transformed into superheroes to promote good bus behavior.

The showcase included every student and nearly every staff member. Mrs. Dixon was proud to see her speech students expressing themselves on stage. “The kids were very excited to be on stage and to share their knowledge with their peers. It was a great opportunity that many of our students don’t usually get to have.”

BOCES Sites Collaborate to Help Students

Orleans/Niagara BOCES students and staff had an opportunity to see the various BOCES sites working together to benefit the students. One of the occupational therapy (OT) practitioners, Jill Rogers COTA, travels to a variety of the sites to provide occupational therapy services. In her travels she reached out to the shop teachers at the Niagara Academy and Orleans Learning Center sites to see if their classes could make a project of a stepstool and table risers for use in Ms. Rogers’ class to help elementary and middle school students that she services.

The stepstool would be utilized for the younger students who need assistance when seated at their tables or using it for their activities of daily living (ADLs). The table risers would be used to raise up a desk for the older kids who need a place to stand and work in a classroom setting. The shop teachers, Mr. John Vogt and Mr. Steve Kuehn, agreed to help and plans and drawings were exchanged between their classes who got started on the project. The students put their skills to work in bringing the project to life and the end result was a wonderful, functional and good looking piece of furniture.

Ms. Rogers returned to Roy Hart Learning Center with the footstool in hand and put it to use in one of the classrooms, while the table risers will be utilized in a variety of the older classroom setting.

“What a great way for our older students to put their skills to use and benefit our younger students across the sites of Orleans/Niagara BOCES,” says Ms. Rogers.
Diesel Technology Students Receive Over $50,000 in Scholarship Money

When students in Wes Blydy’s Diesel Technology program at the Niagara Career and Technical Education Center joined SkillsUSA, they were hoping to win a couple of awards. They were not expecting to walk away with college scholarships. But thanks to participating in SkillsUSA competitions at regional and state levels, Mr. Blydy says the total of scholarships received is around the $50,000 mark.

SkillsUSA is a national partnership of students, teachers and industry representatives working together to ensure America has a skilled workforce. Students in SkillsUSA compete at local, state and national levels to show off their skills.

At the regional competition held at Alfred State College, Kyle Sharkey from Wilson placed second for the Diesel Technology Contest and was awarded a $3,500 in scholarship from Ohio Technical College and 25% off his tuition to Universal Technical Institute where he will be attending college. When he competed in Syracuse at the New York State competition he took first place and was granted another $10,000 in scholarship money from Ohio Technical College and an additional 25% of his Universal Technical Institute tuition. He will be competing at the National competition in June in Louisville, so there is a potential of even more money towards continuing his education.

The Regional competition at Alfred State College saw Rob Wilcox from Wilson took second place in the Small Engine Contest where he was awarded $3,500 from Ohio Technical College and $2,500 from Universal Technical Institute. He also won additional scholarship money from competing at the State Championship as well in Power Equipment Technology. Wyatt Janese from Niagara Wheatfield took third in the Diesel Technology competition and Cooper Fournier from Wilson placed third in the Power Equipment Technology Contest. They both received a $2,500 scholarship from Ohio Technical College and $1,500 from Universal Technical Institute.

Classmates Spencer Lilly from Wilson received $1,000 from Ohio Technical College for participating in the Machine Operations competition at New York State SkillsUSA. Makayla Rubin, a student from Niagara Falls, received a $500 scholarship from Ohio Technical College for competing in the Machine Operations Competition at the Regional competition. Cheyanna Gentry from Niagara Wheatfield received $500 from Ohio Technical College for participating in the Diesel Technology competition and another $1000 from them for participating in the Motorcycle Competition at the New York State competition.

“I am so impressed with my students and their performance at the competitions and it is rewarding to see them be able to come back with some scholarship money to put towards their education,” says Mr. Blydy.

Emergency Response Team Talks to Security and Law Enforcement Students

Lieutenant Aaron Schultz and Deputy Sean Grapes recently stopped into the Orleans Career and Technical Education Center to talk to the Security and Law Enforcement students. Both law enforcement officers are with the Niagara County Sheriff’s Office and are also part-time SWAT (Special Weapons and Tactics) personnel that are trained to be first responders. “We don’t have a full-time SWAT team,” says Deputy Grapes. “We all have other jobs at our department and we work with other law enforcement agencies along with certified paramedics.”

The two officers discussed deployment tactics and equipment and how they handle various situations that the SWAT team is called in for. They talked about the selection process for the team and the training they do 18 times a year. “To get on our team, you need to be a Sheriff’s Deputy and we need to see how you interact. You will also have tryouts and you have to take a physical education test,” says Deputy Grapes. “There is of course a background check and most importantly that person has to realize that they are part of team, not an individual.”

The training to be on the SWAT team is four weeks. “What we do is very secretive,” says Lieutenant Schultz. “They usually involve search warrants and most of us don’t know it is happening until the day of the hit. We usually have 10 to 20 search warrants a year and we have to go in hard and fast and secure the location. Sometime we have to use deadly physical force.”

The officers showed the students some of the equipment they use and talked about the perks of their job. Student Johnny Castanzo says he found the presentation very interesting. “They use a lot of cool tools and found their stories interesting on different drug busts and the different tactics they use for various situations. I think it would be cool to get into being on a SWAT team. I plan on joining the Air Force after graduation and then I want to be a State Trooper.” Teacher Gene Newman says he loves being able to give the students hands-on experiences. “Their presentation provides reality to the concept of how the Sheriff’s ERT truly works and it was great they could demonstrate a stun grenade device. The students really enjoyed it.”
SkillsUSA Chapter at NCTEC Becomes Chapter of Excellence

The SkillsUSA advisors at the Niagara Career and Technical Education Center have recently achieved being called a Chapter of Excellence. The relatively new program honors chapter achievement relative to the SkillsUSA framework of developing personal, workplace and technical skills. The framework actualizes the SkillsUSA mission, “to empower members to become world-class workers, leaders and responsible American citizens.” It also serves as the blueprint for career readiness which is the ultimate goal as a chapter within the organization. Advisors work alongside students in the organization to plan, organize and implement activities during the school year for their members, which develops their skills and builds character.

Advisors Laura Koeppel and Donna Quinn have been busy assembling evidence from this school year with the help of the SkillsUSA Senior Executive Officer Team. Mrs. Quinn explained that there are four levels to the Chapter of Excellence program: Quality Chapter (1), Chapter of Distinction—Bronze & Silver (2), Chapter of Distinction—Gold (3), and Model of Excellence (4). “The first level honors chapters for achieving essential standards and really is a series of online check-off boxes and brief responses. We began with this level last year.” Mrs. Koeppel added, “After attaining Level 1, we decided to go for the next level, which recognizes chapters that go beyond baseline requirements, they are graded against a rubric, and then awarded bronze or silver distinction. It requires more documentation, creating “SMART” goals that are quantitative, plus you must submit photos of each event with a text caption. All areas must be succinct. There were very detailed rubrics and specific criteria throughout the submission.”

The students and advisors did such a great job submitting the information required that the NCTEC SkillsUSA Chapter was able to skip Level 2 and go right onto Level 3. “Our goal was to just improve upon last year’s Level 1 and get a silver or bronze in Level 2,” said Mrs. Koeppel. “We would’ve been happy with that. We were pleasantly surprised when we were notified by our SkillsUSA State Director, Bruce Potter, that we were going to be recognized at the State conference on April 26 for securing a Chapter of Distinction Award, but we didn’t know it would be a gold award! We ended up being one of five chapters in the state to achieve gold.” Kaila Veach, Senior Vice President at NCTEC SkillsUSA, went up on stage with Mrs. Quinn during the Opening Ceremonies to accept our award.

Each advisor, 42 in total at the Niagara Center, received a banner to hang in their classroom. “Usually a school with a SkillsUSA chapter might have one or two advisors running their club, but we have 42,” said Mrs. Quinn. “Many clubs downstate are run after school hours. Here, we do a lot of things during student hours, once a month. Our teachers, teacher aides, and support staff on every level are involved in what we do,” says Mrs. Koeppel. “We actually could not have done this without the strong support of all of our staff and administration who help us set up our fundraisers or events, buy our items for sale throughout the year, participate in our activities, and give permission for students to carry out their plans for the chapter. SkillsUSA is a club run by students, for students. We advisors are here to support and assist them as they carry out their plans,” said Mrs. Quinn.

“I could not be any more proud of our advisors in our school because collectively they work together and give us the best they can for our students. They give us a great club,” says Robert Ihle, who is the Area 1 SkillsUSA Advisor Trustee and a Culinary Arts teacher at the center. “I was very excited when they told us. I am glad to see that Niagara Career and Tech Education Center is leading the way.”

Certified Personal Trainer Students Are Pulling Their Weight

Recently the junior Personal Trainer class at the Niagara Career and Technical Education Center competed in a weightlifting competition. The students each have three attempts at the bench press, squat and deadlift.

Their heaviest weights lifted using good technique were recorded for each exercise and then the total weight of three exercises were added together.

“The class of 2018 broke some records and raised the bar for future classes,” says teacher Jared Karas. “This is the first year that we ever had a student lift over 900 pounds and the first year we had two students lift over 1,000 pounds.” Dillon Bovanzier from Niagara Falls, lifted 925 pounds. Dylan Morrisette lifted 1,075 pounds and Michael Panise lifted 1,160 pounds. “These students are now officially in the 900 pound club and the 1,000 pound club. It was truly amazing to watch these students motivate and push each other. We literally were running out of weight plates to use. Our next investment for the gym will be additional weight plates and a drop platform. We are also looking forward to their next competition as seniors,” says Mr. Karas.