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Souderton Area High School Health & Human Services Career Expo highlights career pathways

Expo at Souderton Area High School introduces students to various available careers

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Tuesday, April 4, 2017



FRANCONIA >> Souderton Area High School's April 4 Health & Human Services Career Expo probably didn't lead to any immediate job offers, but that wasn't the goal.

"It's not the typical career fair," said Amy Tarlo, mentorship coordinator for the school's Pathway 360 program. "Our goal is to expose them to careers that they might find themselves in one day."

After hearing the Expo's keynote address by Montgomery County Commissioners Chairwoman Dr. Valerie Arkoosh, the students met in small group sessions, each lasting 15

minutes, with three of 41 presenters, each of whom told the students their story of working in health and human services.

That gives the students the opportunity to talk to professionals in the field and get first-hand information, said Stuart Marjoram, a business education teacher at the school and the Health & Human Services Pathway coordinator.

Under the Pathway 360 program, every student at Souderton Area chooses one of four career pathways, Tarlo said. The choices are health and human services, industry and engineering, business and communication, or art and humanities.

Students make the choice beginning in ninth grade, but can switch in later grades, Tarlo said. The students are advised on the courses that will help prepare them for jobs in the field they have chosen, she said. There are also job shadowing and mentorship opportunities and other efforts to expose the students to jobs in their chosen field and help them make decisions about their future careers, Tarlo said.

"You can't be what you can't see," she said, "so we want the kids to see as much as they can before they graduate."

The health and human services pathway has the most students, Marjoram said.

"It encompasses a lot because of the services piece of it," he said. "There's lots of service businesses."

Arkoosh told the students the Pathway 360 program is cutting edge.

“I wish I had something like this in my high school,” she said

“Montgomery County offers a broad array of opportunities in the fields that you’re exploring,” she told the students before outlining her path to becoming a medical doctor and involvement in health and human services.

“The three top employers in Montgomery County are all in health care — Merck, Abington Hospital and Main Line Hospital,” Arkoosh said.

Eight hundred students in the Souderton district have parents who work in the pharmaceutical industry, she said.

There are also a lot of food preparation jobs in the county, including meat processors, she said while listing some of those in the Souderton area.

“Montco is preparing food for the region and the world,” she said.

The food service industry also provides jobs at the hundreds of restaurants and grocery stores in the county, she said.

There are 74 hotels in the county with the possibility of another half dozen on the way, she said.

There are also thousands of law enforcement jobs in the county, which has 49 municipal police departments in addition to jobs in the county sheriff’s department and detectives in the district attorney’s office, she said.

The need for people with a health and human services background is growing, she told the students.

“We need you to take on these challenges and I am so pleased that you’ve indicated an interest in these fields,” Arkoosh said.

The Health & Human Services Career Expo, held at the high school the morning of April 4, kicked off a two-day Pathway 360 Spring Symposium with visiting representatives from Dodge City in Kansas, the Greater Latrobe School District and Pottstown NAACP.

“They’re here to learn a little bit more about our program and it is a great day for them to be here,” SAHS Principal Sam Varano said.

The symposium was part of the work done in connection with a \$250,000 U.S. Department of Agriculture grant to Souderton Area High School to help with food safety efforts to eradicate or limit E. coli in food and to help spread the Pathway 360 model.

The symposium also was scheduled to include a tour of the local area, including driving by or stopping at area meat processors, other Souderton Area schools, Montgomery County Community College’s new Health Science Center and North Montco Technical and Career Center.

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