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Student internship program expanding to Sisters and Prineville

Program connects high school and college students to local businesses



Ridgeview High School senior Logan Heagerty, right, films Ricky Reed as he works on an aircraft component at a Composite Approach facility in Redmond on Thursday, October 18, 2018. Heagerty participates in an internship with Composite Approach through the Youth Career Connect program. (Joe Kline/Bulletin photo)

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After connecting more than 100 high school and college students with internships last school year at businesses in Bend, Redmond and Madras, the Youth Career Connect program is expanding to Sisters and Prineville.

Youth Career Connect, which was founded by nonprofit education organization Better Together in 2017, received an additional \$45,000 from the Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Committee earlier this month, which will allow Prineville and Sisters' local businesses to join the program. Last year, Better Together raised \$300,000 from a variety of groups, including Central Oregon Community College, East Cascade Works and the Oregon Department of Education, to support Youth Career Connect in its first two years.

Kim Daniels, executive director at the Prineville-Crook County Chamber of Commerce, said Youth Career Connect will not only help Crook County businesses find employees, it'll also teach students job-searching skills.

“(Prineville) is a small town where people have connections, but teaching cold calling, walking into a business not knowing anyone, just knowing these skills of what it’s like to secure a job” is important, Daniels said.

Caprielle Foote-Lewis, the managing director for Economic Development for Central Oregon’s Sisters Country branch, called the expansion “a step in the right direction.”

Foote-Lewis and Daniels said their respective groups are working on hiring internship coordinators that will link students to interested businesses.

One Sisters organization that is excited about Youth Career Connect’s possibilities is the Sisters Folk Festival. Development Director Steven Remington said he believes students working for the festival, who would be work in fundraising and public relations, could learn a wide range of skills.

“An internship is an opportunity for people to gain a new skill set or to improve an existing skill set. It just helps them give a better presentation and understand business a little better,” he said. “We’re interested because we think that we do an amazing array of activities in public relations, copywriting (and) communications.”

Better Together Executive Director Katie Condit said Youth Career Connect’s goal is to have the education and business worlds help solve each other’s problems.

“The struggle is to connect business and education, (but) this model is a solution to that confusion and really streamlines it,” she said. “This was co-created between education partners and business partners. It wasn’t just one sector trying to solve the program.”

A large majority of these internships are paid, according to Jessica Fitzpatrick, director of programs at one of Youth Career Connect’s partners, East Cascade Works. Redmond Internship Coordinator Larry Holeman said students can select an internship from a list provided on Youth Career Connect’s website

(<http://youthcareerconnect.org/views/listInternships2Condensed.php>). After that, the student is vetted by the internship coordinator, the school and the business before being offered the job.

In Redmond’s industrial east side, composite manufacturer Composite Approach has found success with its Youth Career Connect interns. General Manager Sam Meier said his company has hired six interns since the program began, many of whom have become permanent employees.

“The Youth Career Connect program has been super awesome,” he said. “The quality of interns that (Holeman) and the teachers at the schools have selected and brought have been high-level.”

The company has one intern on staff: Ridgeview High School senior Logan Heagerty. Heagerty, 17, shoots and edits training videos for Composite Approach’s new employees — a job that uses his talents honed from a young age.

“It’s just kind of crazy that something that I did as a kid was able to come full-circle, and I can apply that to a job now,” he said.

Fellow Ridgeview senior Jaime Tracewell, 17, said she interned at Redmond Economic Development Inc. from June through August, looking at supply chains for manufacturers and finding gaps. She said it was the best experience of her summer.

COCC first-year student Sergio Hernandez, 18, had a summer internship at Sunwest Builders, where he got to sample trades, from plumbing to electrical work to construction. He said the internship helped solidify what career he wanted to pursue.

“I have multiple interests, but a big one is architecture,” he said. “With that internship, it actually helped me favor that interest more than others.”

Holeman said Youth Career Connect helps more than just the students and businesses who directly participate in the program.

“The ability to have a connection from the businesses into the schools, and being able to be an enabler for that, it helps the business, it helps the region, it helps our entire economy,” he said.

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