



John Matuszak / HP Staff

Benton Harbor High School student Tasharon Carlisle, seated, gets her hair trimmed Thursday by fellow student Tyrece Lamar, under the supervision of cosmetology instructor Cathy Cohn at the Benton Harbor Promise Career Technical Education Expo. Students from Benton Harbor, Countryside Academy and Dream Academy were introduced to opportunities in a variety of fields, from medicine to manufacturing to law enforcement. The Benton Harbor Promise guarantees any of the students who graduate tuition to a two-year college or technical training center.

Career expo urges students to be a cut above

By JOHN MATUSZAK
HP Staff Writer

BENTON HARBOR — Area students learned about growing job opportunities at a career and technical education expo Thursday — including hair styling.

But even that field requires more training than just handling scissors, according to Cathy Cohn, cosmetology facilitator at Benton Harbor High School.

“It’s not just standing behind a chair cutting hair,” said Cohn, participating in the event attended by students from Benton Harbor High School, Dream Academy and Countryside Academy.

“You need education in everything from chemistry to electricity to psychology,” Cohn said as students swarmed around her booth giving and getting make-overs.

The invited students are all part of the Benton Harbor Promise, which guarantees tuition to a two-year college for anyone who graduates, said Alloyd Blackmon, one of the event’s organizers.

“There’s no reason you can’t go to college. The money is available,” said Blackmon, a marketing executive with Whirlpool Corp. on loan to the Benton Harbor Promise.



Berrien County Sheriff’s Deputy Jonathan Bowman talks to students about staying out of trouble during the Benton Harbor Promise Career Technical Education Expo Thursday. Having a criminal record can derail job opportunities later in life, Bowman told students from Benton Harbor High School, Countryside Academy and Dream Academy.

About 400 students were expected to attend the event held at the Boys & Girls Club Smilow Teen Center in Benton Harbor.

The goal is to expose students to career opportunities, many of which require only a two-year associate’s degree or a professional certificate.

Cosmetology is a growing field with a wide range of opportunities, said Cohn, who has worked in a psychiatric hospital and prisons as well as a freelance stylist.

A stylist can make from \$12 an hour to \$1,000 a haircut working with the Hollywood stars, Cohn said. And a student who gets their cosmetology certificate can make money cutting hair on campus while attending college, she said.

This is the second year for the career expo. This year has more of an emphasis on manufacturing jobs, which are becoming available as the economy improves and older workers retire, Blackmon said.

Lakeland HealthCare

had nine specialists available to talk to students.

Monica Nichols has been an ultrasound technician with Lakeland for seven years.

“The payroll grade is good, and it’s not about to go away,” Nichols said of the field of diagnostic imaging, which includes CT scans and MRIs.

Lake Michigan College, which participated in the expo with other community colleges, has an ultrasound training program, Nichols said.

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What's the best part of her job?

"Spying on people's insides," Nichols confided. "No two are alike, and they're always moving around and doing stuff. It's fascinating and it's not repetitive. I also like helping people who are in pain, or scared, or both."

The career expo showed students the connections between what they are learning in the classroom and their future employment.

"We try to make it real for the kids," Blackmon said. "It shows them that the reason to go to school is to land a job and find something that you love to do. If they think about careers, they'll take school more seriously."

What young people do in school is important, but what they do on their

own time can help or hurt their future, as well, emphasized Berrien County Sheriff's Deputy Jonathan Bowman.

"So many of the youngsters have messed up their opportunities with things they did when they were younger," said Bowman, a 1984 Benton Harbor High School graduate and a 10-year veteran with the sheriff's department.

A misdemeanor charge of domestic violence can bar you from a law enforcement career, Bowman cautioned students he spoke to.

Along with staying out of trouble, Bowman urged students to make themselves marketable by furthering their educations.

A local law enforcement job can lead to working with the state police or even the FBI, he said.

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