



Photos by Tony Wittkowski / HP staff

Devin Kavanaugh, left, watches Byron Pena play "Need for Speed Rivals" on a computer Friday at the Hanson Technology Center in Benton Township. The two were there to promote a CTE course.

## A promise to a new career

### CTE Expo makes first appearance at Hanson Tech Center

By **TONY WITTKOWSKI**  
HP Staff Writer

BENTON TOWNSHIP — Tamia Clay wants to become an engineer for NASA.

The Benton Harbor sophomore first knew she wanted to help people get to space because of her 10-year-old brother.

"A year ago my brother was stressing the fact that he loved the moon and wanted to be out in space as an astronaut," Clay said. "I told him he would be gone for years and that I wouldn't see him, and he said 'you can do the engineering part and make sure I'm safe then.' I love math and I love science, so it was right up my alley."

In order to learn what she must do and what opportunities were out there, Clay needed to do some research.

That's why Clay was among the more than 500 students who attended the fourth-annual Career Technical Education Expo on Friday, which was put together by the Benton Harbor Promise.

It was at the Hanson Technology Center on Lake Michigan College's campus this year, a change from its usual venue at the Boys & Girls Club Teen Center in Benton Harbor.

The Expo's purpose was to heighten Benton Harbor students' awareness regarding postsecondary

Career and Technical Educational opportunities — including skilled trades and other career avenues that can be obtained with a two-year associate's degree or certificate.

The students came from Benton Harbor High School, Countryside Academy and the Dream Academy.

Louis Thomas, director of the Start to Finish program and board member of the Benton Harbor Promise, said holding the Expo at the new Hanson Tech Center was a great chance for students to see what they would be working with.

"It gives these students an opportunity to meet their next instructor or their next employer," Thomas said. "It's mutually beneficial for all parties involved."

Students were given a tour of the center Friday, which included a sneak peek at the building's Fabrication Lab and Simulation Classroom.

In addition to its programs and the annual CTE Expo, the Benton Harbor Promise offers a two-year scholarship for students who live in Benton Harbor and graduate from the school system. The award provides up to two years of the average annual tuition cost for public community college.

Alex Grumbine, who works at Kinexus and serves on the board of directors for the Benton Harbor Promise, said the group of regional employers made up a good slice of the jobs that were available locally.

On hand in the main hall-



Paul Yakel, program manager for Spectrum Community Services, speaks to a few visiting students Friday inside the main hall of the Hanson Technology Center in Benton Township. Students were there as part of the Career Technical Education Expo.

way of the tech center were groups of manufacturers, hotel and health care representatives from about 25 regional employers. The employers included The Inn at Harbor Shores, Lakeland Health, Kay Manufacturing and Vickers Engineering.

"It's a good, diverse group," Grumbine said. "The entire goal is about letting them know about the opportunities in Southwest Michigan — whether that's internships or advice on a career path."

Dionne Bowens, project director for Benton Harbor Promise, said a lot of the regional employers that volunteered to come out and speak with students are already Promise partners. She said board members also reached out to their employers to see who could lend their time for the Expo.

Bowens, who graduated from Benton Harbor High School, said it was nice to

see the collaborative efforts take place in her own community.

With her mind set on NASA, Clay said her favorite part of the Expo was the networking portion.

"There was a good combination of places and businesses," she said. "I thought it might be boring, but it turned out to be really fun."

There were a number of stations she went to that would support Clay's chosen career, especially Aero-tek in Benton Harbor.

She said she's also taken an interest in 3-D printers and is in the process of getting one of her own.

"I'm looking for a job that I'm going to be happy to wake up to in the morning," Clay said. "I want a job that is going to bring me a stable income. I don't want to be uncomfortable financially, and I want to leave something for my children as well."