



Summer School

By Abby Ledoux

(THURSDAY, August 21, 2014) -- As summer vacation winds down, most students are gearing up to return to school, but Milton High School incoming seniors Joshua Hetrick and Taylor Wensley never really left the classroom.

Two of nine students accepted to the Husky Summer Institute from a pool of over 50 applicants, Hetrick and Wensley spent the summer at the Milton injection molding plant learning about computer numeric control machining.

The program, in its inaugural year, is a partnership between Husky, Vermont HITEC and the Vermont Department of Labor. The students presented their final projects at the plant last Friday.

For eight weeks, local high school juniors and seniors spent eight-hour days in the plant learning CNC fundamentals in the classroom and shadowing Husky machinists at work. They finished out each night with four hours of homework. At least they were paid, an intern wage of \$10 an hour.

"They're taking their summer where they could be working at maybe a Shaw's or a McDonald's, and instead they're actually investing in themselves," Vermont HITEC President Gerry Ghazi said. "They're actually demonstrating all the skills that prove they could handle a college education."

Envisioned as a two-year program, the institute translates to 25 college credits for students who successfully complete both summers. Hetrick and Wensley leave the "foundations" portion this summer with 17 credits each.

"I'm ahead of the game," said Hetrick, who plans to study engineering at an out-of-state, four-year college following his graduation from MHS next year. Then, he hopes, he will return to Husky for full-time employment.

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“The engineering and the hands-on learning I figured would be a great opportunity to get,” Wensley continued of the Husky program. “The time management skills and the heavy workload, I definitely feel like that’s going to help me.”

Vermont HITEC proposed the program to Husky, and the ability to directly train future employees was a selling point.

“We reviewed it and thought we would take the opportunity to get this into the high schools so we could hopefully draw some future potential hires,” said Corey Lombard, Husky site coordinator and programming department team leader and Milton resident. “We’ve had great success.”

That defines Hetrick and Wensley, both of whom plan to return next summer. One participant, a graduating senior, has already applied for a permanent position at Husky. He will go through the interview process, and Husky hopes to extend him an offer soon, Lombard said.

Vermont HITEC partners with employers in healthcare, information technology and manufacturing to offer apprenticeship programs like Husky’s. They’re meant to combine education with real world experience, leading to potential employment.

“[The manufacturing world] used to be the three Ds: dirty, dead-end and dangerous,” Ghazi said. “But now, when you see the plant itself, you’ll see it’s a totally different environment.”

Wensley’s father works for the company, but Hetrick applied with little knowledge of exactly what the program entailed, hoping for the best.

“I’ve known about Husky my whole life; when I was born, the plant was being built,” Hetrick said. “Basically, I [only] knew that this was in the engineering field. I said, let’s try it out. I got here, and now I love it.”

Lombard said Hetrick’s experience was typical of applicants.

“It was kind of surprising, disappointing to me how many people didn’t know about Husky and didn’t know what we had to offer here as far as technical skills and future engineering positions,” Lombard said. “So it was great to give awareness to the students that there are career opportunities locally in a field that can take them anywhere in the world.”

Internationally, Husky employs more than 4,000 people worldwide in 100 countries, according to its website. Besides the Milton plant, manufacturing facilities are located in Canada, Luxembourg, Austria and China.

“It’s given me perspective,” Hetrick said, noting the convenience of living just down the road from the plant. “When you’re here actually doing it, that’s when it’s eye-opening.”

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Through classroom study and hands-on experience, students learned to write programs that create parts on the computer-controlled machines.

Vermont HITEC gave the students laptops, textbooks and other necessary materials. Along with a HITEC teacher, Husky employee Ben Smith served as the main educator for the foundations class, held in a converted office space on the machinist floor for the first half of each day.

After an hour break, students returned to the floor to shadow Husky machinists serving as their mentors, who work on the multi-million dollar lathes. Husky purchased two smaller training models of the machines, which students used in the classroom.

“The small investment that we’ve made in these machines and the technology is just a small price for what we think we’re going to get out of these students as potential employees,” Lombard said.

Toward the end of the program, students sometimes helped with actual production when extra hands were needed on the floor.

“The effort they put forth has really showed,” Lombard said.

Along with college credits, the Milton students also leave the program as registered members of a nationally recognized U.S. Department of Labor pre-apprenticeship program. Next summer, they will enter the advanced class.

Ghazi and Lombard both noted the impressive amount of work the students completed during a highly coveted summer vacation.

“I was warned ahead of time there was going to be a lot of work, and there certainly was,” Wensley said. “[My summer] wasn’t something I was wanting to give up, but I knew it would be worth it in the end.”