

Changing Lives *every day*

North Texas Job Corps

By Steven Nester

ALL PHOTOS BY KELLI SMIDT

On the sprawling North Texas Job Corps campus in McKinney, young lives have been changing for the better for almost 50 years. Here students can live, earn a GED if needed, and most importantly, learn trade skills that will give their lives a trajectory to success.

Currently, 273 of the 650 students are from Collin County. Corps students use their skills to make McKinney a better place to live.

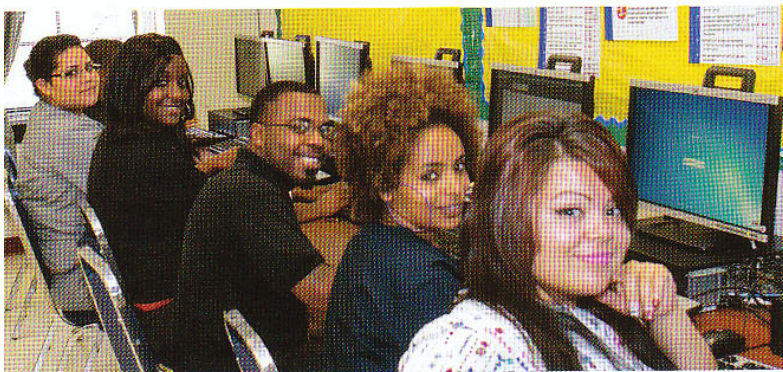
"We are a community treasure that people should know more about," says Laura Bruton, North Texas Job Corps Business and Community Liaison. "Many young people enrolled in Job Corps come from the McKinney area and we provide opportunities for them to give back to the community."

Administered by the U.S. Department of Labor, Job Corps is a no-cost education and career technical training program for eco-

nomically disadvantaged young people aged 16 to 24 who want to improve the quality of their lives through career technical and academic training. North Texas Job Corps offers training in masonry, bricklaying, carpentry, electrical, plumbing, facility maintenance, painting, culinary arts, accounting, office administration, and material and distribution operations, among others.

Eligible students may also enroll at Collin College for their associate's degree while taking part in the Job Corps program. Whatever the skill, trade or educational program, most students end up filling a need in McKinney.

"We value our relationship with the North Texas Job Corps and they truly are a great example of government collaboration with the community for the common good," says Dana Riley, Executive Director of Volunteer McKinney Center.



Giving Back in McKinney

This collaboration can be seen all over town in different settings.

"The students at the North Texas Job Corps have served this community for many years by volunteering throughout the area for local non-profits," Riley says.

The relationships that Job Corps builds are part of its commitment to providing students a well-rounded education that teaches the importance of community service as a valuable component of the human experience.

Among the organizations Job Corps has assisted are Volunteer McKinney and its McKinney Make a Difference Day, as well as Habitat for Humanity. Students also volunteer for landscaping duties around town, and their hard work is appreciated by other groups as well, including Chestnut Square.

Electrical instructor David Linacre's students helped the McK-



inney Housing Authority complete maintenance of light fixtures and switches around town – and that's in addition to taking care of Job Corps' 30 buildings.

"But," Bruton says, "it isn't all hammer and nails." Job Corps students also helped other charitable groups, including the 2012 Muscular Dystrophy Association Lock-Up (for whom they raised over \$1,600) and to McKinney Relay for Life (for whom they raised \$19,833 during the past two years). Students in the home health aide program have worked in McKinney schools with school nurses, Bru-





ton says.

Trish Yanes, Supervisor of the McKinney Community Center, counted on culinary arts students to assist in the kitchen and dining room for the annual Daddy-Daughter Gala last February.

Culinary arts students also cooked for and worked at a fundraiser this past May at the Collin County Regional Airport attended by former President George W. Bush, and they worked a luncheon hosted by the U.S. Department of Labor at El Centro College.

Students on campus have to eat, so culinary students prepare 300 meals a day. On-the-job training also requires solid

book learning.

"Education," culinary arts instructor Dina Cooper says, "is very important in the competitive field of cooking, and the rigor required starts in the classroom."

Cooper stresses the foundations such as baking, butchering, and safe food handling, so once students are ready to begin looking for employment, they'll possess the skill sets needed. Also emphasized is a familiarity with cuisines and ingredients from around the world.

"I tell my students they have to work and learn here because it's not going to be easy," Cooper says. "In the restaurant business they'll be competing against people with degrees from culinary institutes. And that's for entry-level jobs."

Her goal is to initially get them into a hotel or country club restaurant to learn the business. "To succeed in the kitchen, they'll have to keep pushing and get that culinary degree if they feel capable. Coming out of Job Corps they'll have a good basis for that," Cooper says.

After Job Corps

Job Corps assists students in finding internships and full-time employment. Students can stay in the program for up to two years initially and can remain a third year if they pursue Advanced Career Training for an associate's degree or advanced certification at Grayson College or Collin College.

The Work Based Learning staff will match a student with an employer for a six-week internship, and then 45 days before students complete the Job Corps program, the Career Transition

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staff assists students in looking for placement opportunities. Students seek employment, military careers, college courses or other training programs.

Job Corps career training aids the school district with programs that are no longer offered due to tight budgets. "We



fill in the gaps that have occurred due to budget restraints or for other reasons shop classes have been dropped in schools," Bruton says.

"We also we provide more individual learning for students who struggle in the traditional classroom and who need a more life-based setting," she says. "I cannot tell you how gratifying it is to see young people achieve things they thought they couldn't."

"Add to that the skills they volunteer to the community, and everyone ends up a winner," Bruton says.

For more information about Job Corps, go to northtexas.jobcorps.gov/home.aspx.

About the author: Steven Nester is an educator and freelance writer who hosts Poets of the Tabloid Murder, a mystery author interview show that may be heard on public radio.