What did our teacher intern learn this week?

Terrie Bryant would have made a great researcher. She's curious. She asks a lot of questions. She wants to know “the root of the story, the story behind the story.”

Fortunately for students at Providence Grove High School, where she teaches senior English, Terrie's career choice was swayed from scientific research to teaching — thanks to a “wow moment” that came her sophomore year at Appalachian State University and a professor who brought American literature to life. After 29 years in the classroom, the majority of it at PCHS and Eastern Randolph High School, she’s never regretted that decision.

Still, there's a little of the researcher lingering.

Which is why she decided to enroll in the Summer Teacher Internship Program and why she spent this past week at The Courier-Tribune.

Co-sponsored by the Asheboro/ Randolph Chamber of Commerce, Asheboro City Schools, Randolph County School System, The C-T, Randolph Electric Membership Corp. and Charlie's Heating & Cooling, the program immerses teachers with businesses throughout the community.

They get a firsthand look at the variety of jobs, then tailor lesson plans to teach real-world skills to their students, including the importance of “soft skills” — coming to work on time, critical thinking and interacting well with others. Conversely, businesses can gain insight into the challenges facing teachers and offer valuable tips on what they require in employees.

Eighteen teachers and 18 businesses participated. (See the story on page 2-3D.)

“I know why we took part — we want the community to understand what we do, but why did Terrie specifically ask for us?”

“There are two reasons, personally and professionally,” she explained. “Personally, I couldn't understand how you tell the truth and make a profit. I've always wondered, on any level, how do you say what has to be said, but you still have to pay the bills. So how are the two married — truth and profit? So I knew I would figure that out as I experienced this.”

And professionally?

“Students typically do not have a plan for how they are going to support themselves and their families. They have dreams. They all say, 'I’m going to college. I’m going to be a doctor,' but nobody has a step-by-step plan to make it happen. Or they don’t have a plan at all,” she said. “I try to nurture kids … (to look) at their strengths and personal-abilities, and suggest job paths for them.”

What she hoped to accomplish by shadowing us is to better understand the variety of jobs here and how to guide students on such a career path.

At The C-T, we are much more than writers, photographers and editors, what the public generally thinks of when they think of a newspaper. Job opportunities are available in the business office, circulation, classified, advertising, graphics, ad design, IT and pagination, with skills ranging from math and accounting to computer and technology expertise.

Throughout the week, she observed virtually everyone in the building and evaluated what intrinsic characteristics are needed to do a particular job.

She remembers Advertising Director Justin Little, for example, as a student and member of the golf team at Eastern Randolph. She was impressed by how he has taken that winning drive in athletics and channeled it into a career that thrives on competition. But she was also fascinated, during a brainstorming sales meeting, that the reps were not so much interested in making a sale as they were in “helping a client to succeed.”

On the newsroom side, she was mesmerized by Chip Womick's interview of students for an article about the Village of Barnabas.

“He disarmed everyone in the room. He knew all four of the kids' names and called each one by name,” she said, marveling at how those “soft skills” immediately caught the children's attention and made them feel important. “I watched him put everyone at ease and direct the interview so he got what he wanted. Each participant in the interview felt valued. It was authentic. The kids know when you are authentic.”

She was able to monitor that particular story's evolution, from interview to writing to pagination (designing it on the computer) to opening the newspaper today and reading it as the featured Lifestyles article.

By week's end, I asked her what had surprised her the most.

“The level of compassion and care for this community that comes out of this building from every single person I’ve spoken to,” she replied without hesitation. “I knew the newspaper is about representing the community, but I didn’t expect the level of care … (and) the vigilant policing of giving fair and balanced information.”

She was also stunned by the speed of what we do — and in the end, got the answer she was seeking on what keeps the marriage of profit and truth operating. It’s really quite simple. It's called love — the love of journalism and an ideal that can’t be bought with money.

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