
18 selected for pre-apprenticeships

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ASHEBORO — Eighteen local students have been selected for pre-apprenticeships in a program designed to expand the workforce pool for advanced manufacturing in Randolph County.

In April, representatives from area manufacturing companies meandered through classrooms at Randolph Community College (RCC) during an orientation event. Armed with packets of information on each potential apprentice, including a photo, demographics and application information, the reps sought to identify candidates who would fit well into their organization’s culture — for the next four to five years.

“Longer if the apprenticeship led to an offer of full-time employment. The week-long event was step four in the process leading to the first cohort of Apprenticeship Randolph apprentices. “We have a group of kids who have known since they were in diapers that they were going to college. Then we have a group of kids who really know that they don’t want to go to college,” said Nancy Cross, director of Career and Technical Education (CTE) for the Randolph County School System (RCSS). “They don’t necessarily see a connection between what they’re doing (in high school) and their next step. Apprenticeship Randolph serves as that connection.”

RCSS, RCC, the Asheboro/Randolph Chamber of Commerce and members of manufacturing industry came together after years of planning to create Apprenticeship Randolph. The program was launched this year in an effort to overcome the interest gap, or the disconnect between public perception and modern manufacturing.

Modeled after Guilford Apprenticeship Partners (GAP), Apprenticeship Randolph is a four-year educational and on-the-job training program. Students accepted as apprentices are enrolled in college courses at RCC, while at the same time working in the industry.

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Application timeline

This year’s inaugural program kicked off in December 2016 with 10 informational sessions that were scheduled through January. More than 1,800 students and parents from RCSS, Asheboro City Schools (ACS), Uwharrie Charter Academy (UCA), and private and home schools attended the informational sessions. The next step was for interested students and parents to attend at least one open house at one of 12 participating charter member manufacturing companies.

Forty-four applications were received by Apprenticeship Randolph. Of the 44, one was from a UCA student, one from ACS student and the remaining 42 were from RCSS students. Twenty-two applications met all of the program’s requirements. Of the 22, 19 students attended the four-day orientation week held April 17-21 at RCC and led by college faculty and industry leaders. Eighteen of the students who completed orientation accepted pre-apprenticeships.

After industry representatives and the students got to know each other during the open house and orientation events, a draft day for pre-apprenticeships was held May 1. “We met in a room at RCC with a white board and we put up all the industries’ names and we put up all the kids’ names,” Cross said.

A survey in which students and industry representatives indicated their top choices was then consulted. After pairing matches for first choices, in which a student and company each picked each other as a first choice, they began looking at close matches. At the end of the draft, all students and companies ended up with either their first or second pick.

“From the minute they (the company representatives) met that student, they work to build a relationship that will create a skilled employee who is also a loyal and dedicated employee,” Cross said. “It’s as much about the culture that they are trying to create through this program as it is about the increased workforce.”

What program entails

The summer pre-apprenticeship program includes two courses at RCC, Industrial Safety and Basic Welding Processes, held at RCC’s Archdale Center. In addition to 10 hours of class time per week, the pre-apprentices began working 32 hours per week on June 12 at their respective pre-apprenticeship placements. The students are earning $9 an hour for 40 hours, rather than 32, during the six-week summer program.

In August, there will be a signing day, at which time the companies will offer apprenticeships to selected students who have successfully completed the pre-apprenticeship program.

A full apprenticeship for those who are now seniors in high school includes a 20-hour workweek, the rest of their high school coursework, and classes at RCC. Those who graduated high school in June will work a 32-hour workweek at the job site, receive pay for 40 hours with a full benefits package, and coursework at RCC. When the full apprenticeship has been completed, the apprentice will have an Associate of Applied Science in Manufacturing in addition to a journeyman’s certificate.

“This affords them the opportunity to both get the education, have a lucrative employment opportunity and stay right here.” Cross said.