

Dual Enrollment Makes a Difference in Southside

Welding. Jacob Wray did not think he would enjoy welding classes but decided to take a chance through the Southside Virginia Community College Dual Enrollment Program. As a senior at Park View High School, he learned that he loved welding and now, this is what he does for a living.

Dual enrollment programs operate as collaborative partnerships between high schools and colleges. They offer students who meet prerequisite requirements an opportunity to jumpstart collegiate and professional careers by earning college credits and industry certifications while still in high school.

Wray, a LaCrosse native, took the year-long program at Lake Country Advanced Knowledge Center in South Hill. He attended classes at the Center from 8 a.m. until 11 a.m. then returned to his high school for the rest of the day.

About his instructor, John Evans, he said, "He is a great instructor and a good friend."

Wray now works as a millwright for C & L Machine and Welding, located in Amelia Court House, Virginia. About his job, he says "I'm a welder who operates heavy machinery and work in the field for companies who need welding repair on equipment or repairing worn down metal that they use on an everyday basis. We weld on any and everything there is."

He earned 12 certifications during his stint at SVCC which looks great on a resume. The certifications are all from the American Welding Society and are in Mig, Stick, TIG and various other material categories.

According to the AWS website, "One of the best ways to advance your welding career is by earning a specialized certification. This opens up opportunities for more money, leadership roles and higher-level career challenges. AWS offers nine different certification categories, from inspectors, supervisors and educators to radiographic interpreters, welding engineers and fabricators."

Wray noted that one of the projects his class worked on while he was in school was making metal targets for the local police department. They created a fixed target and another that actually spins. The class often spends time on projects that benefit the community.

The ability of dual enrollment to reduce the total cost of degree or credential attainment is perhaps the best-known advantage of dual enrollment, but programs also confer other benefits. Participating helps these young adults develop the confidence they need to persist and achieve their goals. For students focused on technical and professional credentials, dual enrollment options help them acquire the knowledge and develop the skills necessary to be

competitive in the workforce. For students who are the first in their families to attend college and for those from groups that are traditionally underserved by institutions of higher education, dual enrollment courses offer a preliminary look at what college work will require.