

Frostman visits Kaukauna High School to learn about co-op program

By Brian Roebke
Editor

Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development Secretary Caleb Frostman visited Kaukauna High School on Wednesday, learning more about the school's co-operative education and youth apprenticeship program that helped the school be a 2019 National Award Winner for Manufacturing Career Pathways.

Frostman chatted with three seniors who are participating in the program this year.

Justin King works at Tweet Garot, Michael Kraus works at August Winter & Sons and Anna Roovers works at Capital Credit Union.

King is looking at a career with Tweet Garot and Kraus is interested in working in aerospace engineering.

Despite looking at a chemical engineering career, Roovers will have her certificate for banking and finance apprenticeship when she enters college to become a chemical engineer.

She's presently a teller who gets to work with people who are different ages than her and gets the experience of working as a team.

Nels Lawrence, a KHS teacher who is the youth apprenticeship/co-op coordinator, met with someone from August Winter a few years ago and talked them into hiring a student for their engineering department to do an actual engineering job.

Then he recruited Kraus, who now works for the company.

"His skills are upper level skills," Lawrence said.

Kraus recently did most of the work on drawing plans for a major corporation putting in new air handlers and HVAC systems.

"When you've got talented kids, you get them into the job," Lawrence said, noting that a student of his a few years ago works at August Winter, so the company knows what Kaukauna students are capable of.

"Youth apprenticeship gives them an opportunity that they wouldn't have otherwise," Lawrence said.

The program is a structured opportunity for students to use the skills they learned in school in a real job as soon as they can that's proven to work.

Nick Rieth graduated from KHS in 2001 and started working for Team Industries pushing a broom and never left, and now serves as the director of manufacturing for several hundred employees.

Lawrence loves that when he has a student who is good, he contacts one of his manufacturing friends and gets that student a job in their company, something Rieth said works out very well for them.

In this time when the economy is good and almost every company is looking for employees, the student and company can feel each other out and often make a long-term employment connection.

About five years ago, Local 400



Brian Roebke photos

Kaukauna High School instructor Nels Lawrence (center) speaks with Caleb Frostman, secretary of the state's Department of Workforce Development, about co-op and youth apprenticeship programs at the school. Looking on is Nick Rieth, a KHS grad now employed at Team Industries.

Plumbers and Steamfitters of Kaukauna asked Lawrence if he wanted to work with them and they hashed out how they could get high school students to be part of the union.

Lawrence pointed to King, who just started at Tweet Garot in Wrightstown and by his first day on the job, had already filled out his union application, was interviewed and accepted, and already registered for three classes at the union hall.

"Now while he's in high school he's actually going to be taking

some coursework with the union and when he graduates, look where he's going to be," Lawrence said.

KHS prides itself on having the same equipment that's currently used in private industry, so students are doing the same thing at school that they'd be doing on a job.

Local 400's main purpose is to provide training for its members and qualified manpower to its 105 signatory contractors for all aspects of the plumbing, pipe fitting, HVACR service, and pipe fabrication industries.

Jeff Knaus, the union's business manager, hopes King then starts his five-year apprenticeship right out of high school and is a journeyman at 23 years of age with health care, pension and probably gets a brand new pickup truck and by the time he's 26 owns a house.

"With almost zero dollars out of his pocket," KHS instructor Craig Sackmann said.

When the KHS program sends someone to industry, they've got a background in the area and don't need to be taught everything.

Lawrence recently did grade checks and saw most of them were in 3.75-4.0 GPA area.

"A lot of people have the expectation that people who go into industry don't have those kinds of GPAs," he said. "And they're wrong."

These jobs require a lot of skill and ability and employees can move upward quickly.

Because they're high-skill jobs, they are also higher-paying jobs.

Lawrence said if students go to law school, they're probably going to live someplace else. If they get an apprenticeship with Local 400, they're probably going to buy a house in Kaukauna, become a taxpayer, and send their kids to Kaukauna schools.

"That's a good deal for Kaukauna," Lawrence said.



Kaukauna High Schools students Justin King, Anna Roovers, and Michael Kraus took part in Wednesday's meeting with Caleb Frostman of the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development.

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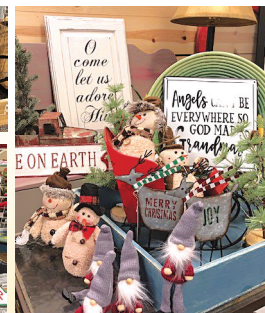
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