

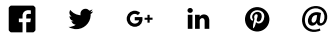


http://www.salemnews.com/opinion/column-learning-real-life-job-skills/article_b5f8f4f7-b93d-5ec1-8d4c-98265cdba10b.html

Column: Learning real-life job skills

Mary Sarris

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It is tradition for all children to think about “what they want to be when they grow up.” While adults often wish they were children again, children look longingly toward adulthood, when they can be in charge of their lives and running the world! While ironically we know, as adults, that we are often only marginally in charge of our lives and none of us runs the world, we also know that it is important for our children to always have dreams that keep them focused on doing what is right now so they can successfully fulfill at least some portion of those dreams when they do indeed grow up.

The North Shore Workforce Investment Board and its North Shore Youth Career Center are hard at work with the Salem schools, helping Salem students dream their dreams and make them come true. We know the realities of our very complex local, state, national and international economy and work hard to translate these in a way that excites and motivates rather than intimidates our emerging workforce. We understand what is needed to become a police officer, an engineer, a nurse, a banker, a carpenter and, yes, even a rock star or professional athlete — all sorts of careers that are within the reach of Salem youths. We provide support and guidance to our teachers and guidance counselors as they help our teens excel.

We do this in several ways, including:

Connecting activities — Through the generosity of the state Legislature, we have staff who provide workshops and job/internship development with Salem High School students. The staff offer intensive career development services to help students see the connection between academics and their future careers. Workshops include skills to “Find, Get and Keep” a job. Other activities include field trips, job shadow days, and information about college and skills training programs.

F1rstJobs

— Through the active support of the business community, we help teens find their first and often most important summer job. This is not an easy task, as any parent knows. The economy in general, the rising skill levels of all jobs, the presence of technology, retirees returning to work and other factors have had an enormous negative impact on the teen job market. However, part-time employment in high school has been proven to have a positive effect on teen development, resulting in higher grades, higher graduation rates and higher college entrance rates. F1rstJobs provides teens with the skills they need to successfully enter the job market and hopefully stay employed throughout their lives. Simultaneously, F1rstJobs strategically reaches out to the business community and others to hire teens OR to contribute to a fund through which our local nonprofit organizations hire teens. Salem schools actively participate in F1rstJobs, through which almost 500 teens have found employment over the past six years.

Tech Trek — New this year, Tech Trek is a partnership with local schools and youth-serving organizations, the WIB and Career Center, and our high-tech and life sciences industries, emerging forces in the North Shore economy. Through Tech Trek, students will visit life technology companies and see firsthand the day-to-day activities, innovations, inventions and miracles developed right in our own community. We hope this project inspires Salem students to think seriously about careers in these industries, which provide solid jobs at high wages for those who make the commitment.

Youth Blueprint — The WIB regularly researches the critical and emerging industries in our region and publishes this detailed information in print and on our website. Recently, we published a Youth Blueprint, which speaks directly to our students. These blueprints are now available at Salem middle and high schools and are being put to good use as these dreams build.

Keila Lora, a recent graduate of Salem High School, worked at the North Shore WIB through F1rstJobs as an office assistant and newsletter editor. Keila said, “F1rstJobs taught me a lot of responsibility and helped me to build time-management skills. Although it was a summer internship, I felt as though I belonged to something bigger, and this built my self-esteem and encouraged me to work toward higher goals.” Keila is now a nursing student at Salem State University and works as a technical nurse assistant at Salem Hospital, well on her way to a satisfying and high-paying career.

Salem High School provided Keila with the support she needed to accomplish this. All students need and deserve this opportunity, and Salem High delivers.

Mary Sarris is the executive director of the North Shore Workforce Investment Board. This is one in a regular series of columns from the Community Advisory Board for the Salem schools.

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