



Career Awareness Program benefits students

High school juniors in the Avenue Scholars program have benefitted from a busy fall of exploring careers. This year, Avenue Scholars, through its Career Awareness program, has partnered with 19 different businesses/organizations to offer a total of 26 events.

Businesses/organizations new to Career Awareness were Munroe-Meyer's Autism Care for Toddlers Clinic, AIM Institute, Werner Technology, Steamfitters Union, Sheppard's Business Interiors (SBI), Elman Print, Scott Data Center, Cornhusker International, No More Empty Pots, Hilton Garden, Omaha Henry Doorly Zoo, ACCESS-Bank, and McGill Gotsdiner Workman & Lepp.

Returning partners: Woodhouse Auto, Baxter Auto, CarStar, Fulton Homes, Quality Career Pathways, and QLI.

"Businesses truly understand the value of Career Awareness experiences. Thankfully, our business partners have been willing to partner with us to offer in-person experiences this year," said Lindsay Decker, Career Exploration Coordinator.

Although the continuing Coronavirus Pandemic has limited the number of students who can attend each event, Avenue Scholars has been creative in providing ample opportunities for every student who wishes to participate.

"In an effort to honor business health guidelines and to keep our students as safe as possible, we've collaborated with businesses to offer multiple sessions of their event so that we can serve as many students as possible who might have an interest in their particular industry,"

Decker said.

The overall goal of the Career Awareness program is to enable students to be better informed of their potential career pathways and what steps they will need to take in pursuing those careers. The program has made a difference in students' success in finding careers that fit their interests.

"Our business partners are truly skilled in understanding how to expose students to their industry — it's really an exciting thing to witness; business and education merging together," Decker said. "For example, I loved watching our culinary students cook a meal and learn various culinary techniques with No More Empty Pots. It's funny because I typically spend months planning these events, so it's always special to watch a students' faces light up when they're having fun and connecting with a business partner—that's how you know a seed was planted in a student's mind."

Decker sees every event as a successful experience for students.

"Career Awareness gives students a chance to experience an industry through their senses. A student can take in what they've learned and see if they can imagine themselves in a similar role," she says. "I always joke that whatever the outcome with a Career Awareness event, it's always a win to me. If a student didn't like the event, that's a win. If they *did* like the event, that's a win, too! Regardless of the outcome, they're getting close to discovering what's important to them when it comes to imagining themselves at work."

Senior grows, excels in AS family

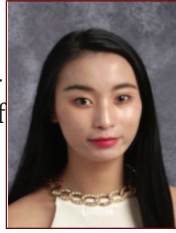
Jia Jia Pitts, a Certified Manager at McDonald's, is an Outstanding Senior Scholar.

Jia Jia, who plans to pursue a career in Business Management, is thankful for being part of the Avenue Scholars family.

"Avenue Scholars is like a family who helps you with everything in your life, like school work, job stuff, and even personal stuff," she said. "If I was not in this program, I would not know what my future is and what my next steps should be. I would just be living in the day to day not thinking about the future."

Papillion-LaVista Career Coach Ashley Knott has been impressed with how well Jia Jia has adapted to life in Omaha.

"Jia Jia came to the U.S. at 13 after being adopted. English is not her first language, but she was bound and determined to not let that stand in her way," Knott said. "Two years after arriving in the U.S. Jia Jia started a part-time job at McDonald's where she remains employed today. She's found so much success in this job that she's been trained and promoted for a manager position. She's currently the top wage earner in my Senior Class, she has excellent grades in her classes, and she was able to successfully pass her driver's test and buy her first car all in the last six months. There is nothing that will stand in Jia Jia's way to success."



Junior plans for Business career

MacKenzie O'Brien, an Outstanding Junior Scholar, is a Shift Lead employee at Firehouse Subs.

MacKenzie, who plans to pursue a career in Business, has welcomed the opportunity for personal growth.

"Avenue Scholars has been a pleasure to be in so far. I've learned more about myself and the things I want to do after high school," she said. "It's a class I look forward to during the day to relieve my stress and know that it's a trusted place to be in. It's meant a lot to me that I get this opportunity."

Career Coach Ashley Knott appreciates MacKenzie's enthusiasm for class and work.

"Kenzie consistently shows up ready to whole heartedly engage in class. She gives 100% to everything she does, including her school work, her extracurricular activities, and her job," Knott said. "In her role at work, Kenzie has been promoted to Shift Lead, as she has proven herself to be exceptionally reliable and hardworking during her time there. Additionally, in the Avenue Scholars class, Kenzie is one of the most thorough students with the completion of her assignments and is frequently the first to volunteer to contribute verbally during discussions."



UPDATE

Avenue Scholars is well into its sixth year with the Papillion-La Vista Community Schools. With 46 active juniors and seniors this year, the Avenue Scholars program is growing and thriving.



This year's group of students has already proven themselves to be an excellent group of hard working, committed and resilient students, especially given the circumstances over the last year with Covid-19. Many of them brought with them a wealth of part-time job experience, and several others have worked to secure employment this fall. Our goal is that ALL students have valuable work experience by graduation, related to their career of interest, if possible, as we know this is the best way for students to gain work-ready skills.

In the classroom, the juniors have learned about Avenue Scholars and the benefits that come from the program in addition to the commitment required of them. They've also learned about their individual Gallup Strengths, prepared for and attended Career Awareness Events in their industries of interest, and have researched the careers they are considering pursuing. We'll round out the semester by developing our resumes, attending an Internship Fair, and discussing effective work habits.

The seniors started the semester by reviewing the commitment required to earn the privilege of being able to activate their full scholarship following graduation--including having strong attendance, passing all their classes, participating in a part-time work experience, and demonstrating strong soft skills both while at school and in the workplace. These students are also enrolled in a dual enrollment course through MCC with me as their Instructor. The course focuses on the development of college and career success strategies. This has been a bit of a transition, but most seem to be weathering it well and figuring out that college is for them. Additionally, the seniors have also updated and refined their resumes, many have applied for and/or are working in their industry of interest, and nearly all have met the work experience requirement of the program at this point. While this will be a year of transition and skill-building for the future, most students are moving in the right direction, and I'm hopeful they'll be especially informed and confident in their career pathway moving forward.

Ashley Knott

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