

A HEARTY LESSON

(Right) Katie Matthews of Millard South, center, wearing a breathing vest, could not suppress a nervous giggle and smile as her chest receives a heart-stimulating vibration. Instructor Candy Ryan, right, operates the machine while Tori Bradley of Omaha Benson controls the remote. (Below) Jasmine McCain checks out a breathing meter.



(Below) Tau Kaw, Hair Shee and Nyamal Kuon of Omaha South participate in a breathing/airway passage experiment.



COLLEGE & CAREER READINESS

ASF students explore future options of study and work

So many possibilities.

Avenue Scholars Foundation students explored careers or college studies in construction, respiratory care, accounting, horticulture, culinary and general studies Friday, Jan. 17, 2014 during a Senior Academy session at the south campus of Metropolitan Community College.

This day marked the first session in

a five-week series of career exploration classes.

"The whole point is to explore programs and careers students might be interested in pursuing," says Emily Christensen, Omaha Bryan Talent Advisor. "Students get to select which class to attend; everyone goes to five (one each week)."

The last four rounds were held Jan. 24, Jan. 31, Feb. 7 and Feb. 21. Courses covered computer technology, dental assistance, criminal justice, architectural drafting, utility line, business, EMT, Microsoft Office, photography, medical office, transportation trades, nursing, psychology, early childhood, legal studies and industrial trades.



GET ALIGNED

(Above) Avondre Collins of Omaha Benson receives instruction from Ben Neumann, an MCC student demonstrating proper technique for bending pipe.



(Above) Career Talent Advisor Albert Varas observes an MCC student providing demonstrations. (Left) ASF students Cody Chaffin, Augusto Jacinto and Leandro Ramirez-Silva join Collins in watching Neumann demonstrate how to make the next bend.

Students set pace in Modular Math Lab

"Some students could make it or fake it in high school," high school Talent Advisor Emily Christensen says when explaining why many freshmen college students are required to take a remedial math class, or that they struggle when taking more challenging math classes at the college level.

Students find they can't "fake it" in college. To help ease the stress of meeting that challenge, Metropolitan Community College has created the Modular Math Lab.

Two days a week an MCC professor meets with Avenue Scholar Foundation seniors in the lab to help them with their online class. One additional day per week students work in the math lab with ASF Talent Advisors and one MCC math assistant present.

Christensen says ASF students can also work on the classes outside of the classroom.

"It is a self-paced online math course," she says. "They have to test into the course. As a modular course, it will not allow students to progress without understanding. They can't complete a



ONE-TO-ONE Emily Christensen, Omaha Bryan Talent Advisor, works closely with Tori Bradley of Omaha Benson during a Modular Math Lab session at Metropolitan Community College.

course unless they actually get it."

The self-paced element of the course has Christensen most encouraged.

"Some kids have progressed so fast, they have a chance to complete two math courses," she said. "Others have to

go a little slower. It's neat to see them working on it [at their own pace]."

Christensen believes the lab is proving to be a hit in its first year.

"I am excited about it," she said.

'Building Healthy Futures' classes

For Avenue Scholars Foundation, preparing students for the future means more than traditional education in classrooms and career exploration. Administrators and staff believe students must also have a better understanding of their health and how to address health concerns.

ASF has partnered with "Building Healthy Futures," a non-profit division of Building Bright Futures, whose primary focus is creating school-based health centers in Omaha. Medical offices located within school buildings provide anything from physicals or immunizations to connecting students with a mental health specialist or physician.

Building Healthy Futures (BHF) came to ASF for advisement in adding more education on health topics

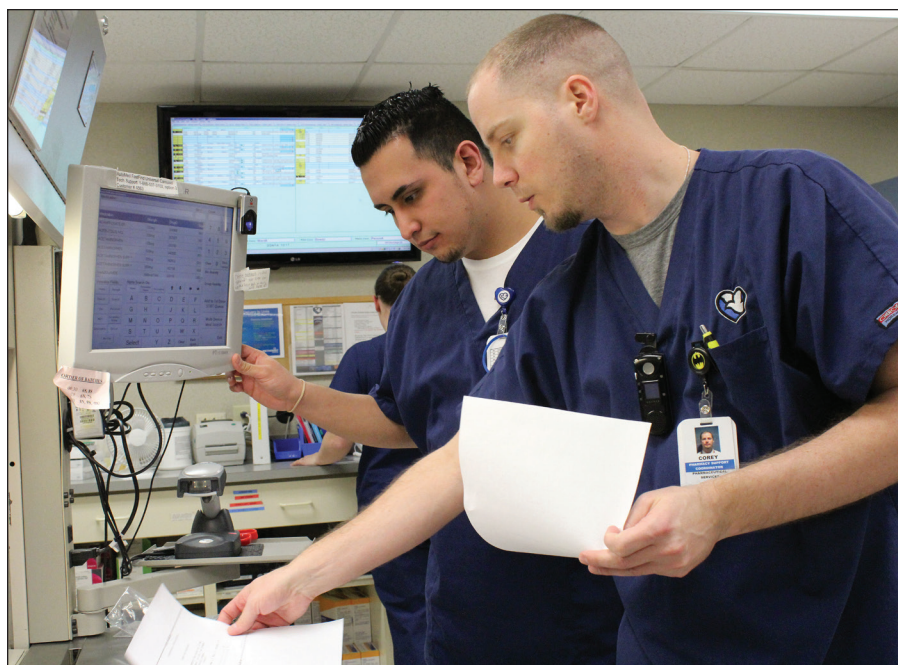
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HILTON HOSPITALITY As emcees for the second annual hospitality luncheon hosted by Hilton Hotel Feb. 24, Spechal Paylor of Omaha Benson and Octavius Williams of Omaha Benson introduce ASF staff and special guests. (Right) Latricia Clark from Omaha Northwest fills a water glass during the luncheon. Twenty-five guests enjoyed a lunch that was set up and served by Avenue Scholar juniors who have an interest in the hospitality career field. This luncheon gave students an opportunity to train and work alongside professionals at the Omaha Hilton.



ON THE JOB ASF graduate Efrain Pinto, left, works closely with Corey Jackson, the Pharmacy Support Coordinator at Methodist Hospital, 84th & Dodge. Pinto continues to seek advice from ASF mentors as he pursues an Associate's Degree in Health Science at Metropolitan Community College. Pinto is also working 25 to 40 hours per week at Methodist, aiming to become a certified medical assistant.



Commitment, ASF guidance lead to success

It was a casual interview session, set up to convene in the Career Center meeting room. The interviewer was dressed in faded jeans and a blue flannel shirt. Efrain Pinto, however, presented himself the way he had been taught by his Avenue Scholars Foundation advisors — immaculately groomed, dressed in a navy blue, pinstriped, three-piece suit.

"I was taught that to be successful you have to act and dress professional," Pinto said. "For this interview I wanted to present myself professionally."

"Driven, motivated, dedicated" and "relentless" are just a few of the characteristics Career Advisors Brad Ekwerekwu and Albert Varas use to describe Pinto and his goal to become a certified medical assistant (CMA).

To reach that goal Pinto is enrolled at Metropolitan Community College, attending classes Tuesdays and Thursdays, aiming to obtain an Associate's Degree in Health & Science. He is also working part-time in the Pharmacy department at Methodist Hospital.

"I did a little research," Pinto says of his decision to pursue work in the medical field. "Wayne Brown, another mentor I worked with, helped me find a path to get into the pharmacy tech field. He helped me find the website for the department of health and human services. He found the application for a pharmacy tech, and I met every requirement they needed, and then I obtained my pharmacy tech license."

Pinto hopes to graduate from MCC in June of 2015 with an Associate Degree in Health Science,

which would enable him to become a CMA. He is already becoming familiar with the responsibilities, having worked as a pharmacy technician on the "retail" side for 15 months. As of Dec. 30, 2013, he is working in the hospital side of the pharmacy department at Methodist Hospital, 84th & Dodge, making \$11.46 per hour, working 25 to 40 hours per week.

"They saw my enthusiasm for learning," Pinto says of applying at Methodist. "I have always been a learner. If I learn something new, I will push my self to get better and execute everything I know and to learn more."

Once he obtains his certification, Pinto plans to continue working as a medical assistant while attending evening classes for pharmacy. He wants to earn a bachelor's degree in biology.

"I would like to become a pharmacist or physician's assistant," Pinto said. "I have been told I have the personality for either."

Pinto's journey to a professional career began with Avenue Scholars Foundation in his senior year, 2009, at Omaha South High School.

"I was recommended by my former mentor, Paco Fuentes, who was the director of the Boys & Girls Club of South Omaha," Pinto said. "I felt I could be the first member of my family to go to college and become a professional in the future."

At ASF, Pinto's first talent advisor was Giovanni Jones for high school and Ashira Jones through college. Although technically Pinto has aged out of ASF, he continues to work with Career Advi-

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"Our mission is to ensure careers for students of hope and need through education and supportive relationships."



BEAR POWER Omaha Bryan seniors Maktin Gonzales, Juan Alvarez, Jonathan Castelan and Adalberto Castanon share a light moment at the beginning of the first Men of Standard meeting Jan. 28.

Men's fellowship group mixes fun, food, sports

Men of Standard, the new fellowship group of Avenue Scholars Foundation, is off to a busy start.

Following its Jan. 28 organizational startup, the group met Feb. 6 for food and fellowship, Feb. 8 at UNO men's basketball game and March 6 for a discussion of Healthy Relationships, personal health, drug and alcohol awareness, and distraction control.

Brad Ekwerekwu, Career Talent Advisor, says about 10 to 15 men have attended each meeting.



Thar Thar Lay of Omaha South introduces himself to Joey Webster of Millard South during the first men's fellowship meeting held at the ASF Career Center.

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into its curriculum. Talent Advisors Emily Christensen, Omaha Bryan; Evan Feezell, Omaha Northwest; and Juan Cangas, Omaha South, worked with Kris Chavez of BHF over several meetings to write a curriculum that has been introduced to Omaha Bryan, Omaha Northwest and Omaha South. These schools were selected because health centers are located in the actual buildings at Northwest and Bryan, and South has a center located at an elementary school one block away.

"Our students, especially if they are aging out of their parents' health insurance or Medicaid, start to own their own personal health care; unfortunately, we were seeing a lot of students just not caring for their personal health any longer; they were not sure where to start," Christensen says. "Major topics they (BHF) cover are health facilities, immunizations and family health history."

Avenue Scholars staff teach the curriculum as a unit, and Chavez helps with assessment and evaluation of the curriculum. Students leave the class with a personal health portfolio, which allows them to take their personal health records, family health history and vaccination records with them. Thus, they are equipped with the health information needed to set up their own health care provider.

Next year the health curriculum will be established at the other four high schools: Omaha Benson, Omaha North, Millard South and Ralston.

Pinto follows path to medical career, inspires others

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PROUD TO WEAR BLUE Efrain Pinto strikes a pose before beginning a work shift at Methodist Hospital.

sors such as Ekwerekwu and Varas.

"According to Dr. B and Dr. J [Jef Johnston, Chief Operating Officer], I will always be part of the program," he said. "They have an awesome team here that keeps me pointed in the right direction. I owe ASF a lot."

Pinto realizes he can be a role model for younger ASF students.

"I am the only one, I think, that has two career paths," he said.

According to talent advisors and his Methodist supervisor, Pinto is well on his way to a successful career in the medical field.

"Efrain is very motivated and enthusiastic to

do good things," Ekwerekwu says. "It's only a matter of time before he moves up to a management position."

"He is very committed to his personal growth," Varas says. "He is well on his way to becoming a professional."

Corey Jackson, Methodist's Pharmacy Support Coordinator, is the direct supervisor over Pinto and 45 other interns, techs and students. He says Pinto is doing well making the transition.

"It's not easy coming over to the hospital side [from retail]," Jackson said. "Efrain is catching up pretty quickly. [Plus] he always has a smile; he has been a breath of fresh air."