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*A publication of the Carroll County Chamber of Commerce and Carroll Tomorrow
in collaboration with the Workforce Education Task Force*

Vol. 1 Number 2

Engineering the Future



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Connecting the Dots

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Karen Kirchler**

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Photo courtesy of Kelly Glanton
Bess Glanton, proud college graduate with an industrial engineering degree in hand, is headed to work at Southwire.

A call for success

“I’m pretty proud.”

To be a trainer for a company with customers across the country by the age of 19, Lexi Norris has every right to be proud.

Wayne Payne, owner of OmniCall Receptionists, brought Lexi on board when she was a sophomore at Villa Rica High School and needed a part time job. The Carroll County School System’s College and Career Academy was his connection for temporary staffing.

“We partnered to hire some students once in a while,” Payne said. “But our vice president of operations recognized right away that we could utilize this workforce. He saw the potential of long-term, part-time help who might start with us in high school, move on to college but still need part time work, and possibly be with us for four to five years.”



Lexi Norris, standing, assists receptionist Yovanna Leon-Rodriguez with problem solving at OmniCall's new call center in Carrollton.

At first, Lexi fit that employee model. However, she has evolved into an indispensable full time staff member responsible for training both new and current employees.

“I problem solve and interact with the operators all day long,” Lexi explained. “I have to understand how to approach employees so that they don’t feel threatened when we need to discuss

how to do something differently.”

As a company that promises friendly, professional receptionists to handle business calls from a wide variety of customers, on-going training is a must. Answering calls from around the world for Southwire requires a different skill set from answering calls from a grieving relative for a funeral home. Every OmniCall receptionist must possess the complete package of skills and Lexi is on hand to provide this specialized training.

“Positivity — that’s what I teach,” she said. “There is nothing you can’t do after this type of work. Learning how to speak properly, how to respond in a professional manner — these are skills you can take anywhere.”

Payne has nothing but praise for his partnership with the College and Career Academy. “They do the screening for us with an understanding of the type of student we can use. We get very bright workers and several of them have gone on to work with us full time. Of course, we think we get the best!”

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Southwire engineering academy

INSPIRING IDEAS, ENGINEERING FUTURES

When Bess Glanton walked across the stage to graduate from Carrollton High School, she knew exactly where she was headed — to study engineering at Auburn University. Four years later, when she walked across Auburn's stage with an industrial engineering degree, she once again knew exactly where she was headed — back to her hometown to work at one of the largest wire and cable manufacturers in the world, Southwire.

Thanks to her participation in the Southwire Engineering Academy (SWEA) as a high school senior, Bess is one of the lucky ones. She had a vision for her future and a roadmap to make it happen.

SWEA is a cooperative internship program for 11th- and 12th-grade Carrollton High School STEM program students. SWEA promotes achievement in science, technology, engineering and mathematics while enabling students to apply these disciplines in a real-world manufacturing setting.

Stacy Lawler, assistant principal and CTAE director at Carrollton High, explained that the program allows students to explore all the career options within engineering to answer the question: Is this my passion?

"Students earn class credit while spending three hours a day, every other day at what we call the war room, the SWEA classroom located at the Carrollton plant," Lawler said. "They work in teams on real-world projects and it is very impressive what they accomplish."

CHS engineering teacher Kasey Austin accompanies the students to Southwire and described some of this year's projects.

"One team created a 3D printer prototype of a cutting tool that both holds and cuts wire and they have actually applied for a patent for it," she said. "A second team conducted a cost analyses between electric and propane



Photo courtesy of Southwire
Carrollton High senior Dorothy Szymkiewicz presents her team's project during the end-of-year program for Southwire executives, Carrollton City Schools leadership, parents, and the Southwire engineering team.

powered forklifts and presented their recommendations to Southwire executives. As a result, Southwire will purchase electric forklifts in the future as a more cost effective measure."

Yet another team created a spaghetti chart of all of the steps involved in a particular wire change-over that reduced the time required for the machine to be out of service. "Every second the machine is not running, Southwire is not making a profit, so this student project was also implemented," Austin noted.

Out of the 2016 SWEA cohort, 11 of the 18 seniors are heading into college engineering programs, including Dorothy Szymkiewicz who will attend MIT this fall. She was also accepted to Sanford, Duke, Princeton, Georgia Tech, University of West Georgia and

University of North Carolina.

"Participation in the SWEA confirmed engineering for me by showing me the real-world side of the engineering field," she said. "It allowed me to interact with engineers who are now mentors and friends. It provided a very good introduction of what you can be doing past college."

Mentors are a valuable component of the program and Southwire engineers from throughout the plant volunteer their time to work with these high school students. Franklin Turner, electrical engineering manager, and Karin Vukovinsky, quality engineer, both find it very rewarding to give back to their community by helping young people.

SEE **IDEAS/PAGE 9**

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A conversation

with Karen Kirchler

*Vice President of Adult Education
at West Georgia Technical College*

What path did you take to begin working in adult education?

I came to Adult Ed rather accidentally, after having worked in social services for a number of years. I had returned to my hometown of Panama City, Florida and I responded to a classified ad posted by the local community college. They were looking for someone to help grow their small GED program. I got the job and began learning about Adult Ed from the ground up. I taught, I ran orientations, I did marketing and community outreach. It was a great opportunity and within about a year I was running the program.

Explain the value of adult education to our workforce and

on the economic growth of Carroll County.

Individuals who lack a high school diploma or GED credential are more likely to be unemployed, rely on public assistance, and to experience incarceration. Their children are less likely to complete high school. The GED credential opens the door to job opportunities that aren't available to them otherwise. It opens the door to advanced education and training leading to even better employment opportunities.

When employers are looking at a community as a possible location, one of the biggest considerations is the education level of the workforce. The proportion of the population with a high school diploma (or GED) is a marker for employers. When we increase the number



Photo courtesy of West Georgia Technical College

Karen Kirchler, vice president of Adult Education at WGTC, is congratulated by WGTC President Steve Daniel after being named the national Outstanding Administrator of the Year by the Commission on Adult Education, a 13,000-member organization dedicated to advancing adult education and literacy opportunities.

of individuals who earn a GED after dropping out of high school, we improve the quality of the workforce and make our community more attractive to employers.

Beyond that, we diminish the number of individuals who are in need of support and public assistance. Statistically speaking, communities

with higher literacy rates generally experience lower crime rates as well. In terms of an investment in community improvement, Adult Education and literacy services as a whole, provide a huge return on investment for a community.

SEE **KIRCHLER/PAGE 9**

About Karen Kirchler

Karen Kirchler joined WGTC in 2008 after 10 years at Gulf Coast Community College in Panama City, Fla. and has served in her current capacity since 2011. She holds a master's degree in communication from Florida State University.

KIRCHLER

FROM PAGE 8

As an administrator, what do you find are the greatest challenges to adult education and literacy?

I think there are two primary challenges relative to Adult Education and Literacy. The first being the difficulty in conveying the breadth of the need and benefit of the service. There are almost 15,000 adults 25 years and older in Carroll County who lack a high school diploma or GED — about 20 percent of that population. Add to that the 16-24 year-olds who don't get captured in the U.S. Census data and you have a pretty significant proportion of the working age population that lack access to postsecondary training and, in most cases, employment leading to a sustainable wage.

The return on a community's investment in Adult Education is difficult to measure, but a number of studies in recent years

have shown a definitive and significant benefit. Employers who are looking to make a difference (by educating their own workforce or just investing in the community) and local governments wanting to make worthwhile use of public funds should look no further than their local Adult Education program. We do get funded through federal and state grant money, but it isn't enough to allow us to begin to make a real dent in that 15,000.

The second challenge is that there's still a great deal of stigma surrounding individuals who do not complete high school. There are perceptions that they aren't smart, can't learn, have behavior issues. I can tell you from years of experience that by and large, those stereotypes aren't accurate depictions. People leave high school for many reasons — and often they are very good reasons. They may need to get a job or care for an ailing parent. Their family situations may be untenable and they leave home and as a result, can't

continue to attend school. They may experience bullying or the traditional school system just doesn't meet their needs as learners. For some of our students, it was a matter of bad judgment or poor choices, but we're talking about 16-18 year-olds.

Teenagers aren't renowned for their excellent judgment and to hold those decisions against them for years and years, or to presume that the prevailing stereotypes apply to them is a mistake. Even more than being a mistake, it isn't helpful. If you care about your community, you'll want these folks to have an opportunity to improve their education level — because we all benefit. And they can do it. I have met incredibly smart, motivated, inspiring people in our classes.

What are your goals for adult education in the next 10 years?

My goals are to find new partners that allow us

to expand our reach and services in order to begin to have a real impact on the number of persons who lack a high school diploma or GED. Also, I want to ensure that we're not just teaching academic skills, but also that our students will be ready to enter the workforce and be excellent employees, or enter college and be successful students.

How do you envision meeting these goals?

We have to develop more and deeper partnerships with other service providers, employers, local governmental agencies... you name it. Adult Education is what we're here to do, but the scope of the issue is so great, it requires a collective community approach. We are ramping up our local advisory committee and looking for partners to work with us. Anyone interested can contact me for more information at Karen.kirchler@westgatech.edu.

IDEAS

FROM PAGE 6

"I think back and realize that I always enjoyed taking things apart and wanted a job that allowed me to do that but I had no idea what an electrical engineer actually did in the work setting," Turner said. "This program allows students to make informed decisions."

For Vukovinsky, the value that Southwire places on giving back to the community was one of the reasons she chose to work there. "Serving as a mentor is a great opportunity to represent the company and show 17- and 18-year olds what's available in the engineering world."

Michael Schmittou, SWEA lead engineer, serves as Southwire's liaison for the SWEA and according to Lawler, "his passion and love for our kids is incredible."

"In addition to serving our youth, we have another vision for the program — to grow our own engineers from students who already have invested in this community and will hopefully come back here to work," Schmittou said.

And so Bess Glanton is the perfect Southwire Engineering Academy success story — SWEA participant, college engineer graduate, and soon to be Southwire employee.

"I asked my college peers how they knew engineering was for them and NOT ONE of them had the knowledge and hands-on experience

that I had," Bess said. "This program is unique to our community, it's not happening in the big cities. I arrived for my freshman year knowing that I was on the right track from the very beginning."

She took advantage of Southwire's summer internship program for even more hands-on experience and also worked at other manufacturing settings while in college.

"I had several job opportunities but chose Southwire because I already had a relationship with them that started during the Academy," Bess said. "I knew that I wanted to work where they were already invested in me — I wasn't just another employee. The culture of this company — I knew I wanted to be a part of it!"

Business professionals share career pathways with eighth graders

More than 1,500 eighth graders from Carroll County Schools, Carrollton City Schools and Oak Mountain Academy attended the second annual Career Expo hosted by the Carroll County Chamber of Commerce.

Each student had the opportunity to visit two career pathways of their choice and hear from a professional in one of 18 different career fields such as engineering, nursing/medical, business and cosmetology, among others.

Chamber President Daniel Jackson, UWG President Dr. Kyle Marrero and WGTC President Steve Daniel welcomed students to the UWG campus and the WGTC Waco campus. The event is coordinated by the Chamber's Workforce Education Task Force with the goal of supporting the development of a highly trained and educated workforce for Carroll County.

The professionals conducting the sessions are exemplary representatives of the community willing to volunteer their time and talent to provide career guidance to young adults.





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COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS: CREATING A COMMUNITY OF SUPPORT

Communities In Schools (CIS) is one of the largest drop-out prevention programs in the country and it is impacting Carroll County students in a big way. Carrollton City Schools and Carroll County Schools served 174 students during the 2015-2016 academic year in unique CIS learning environments. Here are two students' stories.

Working at night made it difficult for Oscar Rodriguez to stay awake during his classes at Carrollton High School and he began to fall behind. His math teacher introduced him to the Performance Learning Center (PLC), a non-traditional program serving 8-12th graders in a smaller, computer-based learning environment.

"In regular high school classes, a teacher has about 100 students a day and they can't help everybody at the same time," Oscar said. "At the PLC, if I needed help right now, I got help right now and then I could move on. I didn't have to follow other students — I learned at my own pace."

Oscar attended the PLC for his junior and senior years, completing subject work online and traveling back to the traditional high school campus for electives via transportation provided by the PLC. He was also able to take advantage of the dual enrollment program in welding with West Georgia Technical College and graduated from high school with one year of college already under his belt. Earning several welding certifications, Oscar discovered



Photo courtesy of the Performance Learning Center
Oscar Rodriguez demonstrates his welding skills acquired while dual enrolled at West Georgia Technical College and Carrollton City School's Performance Learning Center.

"I'm really good at this!"

"My father had a fourth grade education in Honduras and was on his own since the age of 13. He learned many aspects of construction by watching and teaching himself and I am the first generation of our family to attend college," he said. "I have been an example for my twin sisters who I recruited to the PLC and we all three graduated from high school at the same time."

GRADUATION RATES 2015

Average for Georgia: 78.8 percent
Carrollton City Schools: 87.6 percent
Carroll County Schools: 82.7 percent

Source: Georgia DOE

Each CIS site has a coordinator and Carrie Olinger serves Carrollton City Schools students who attend the Performance Learning Center for a variety of reasons.

"My job is to listen to the student, determine what their goals are and link them to existing community resources in order for them to obtain their goals," she said. "One student may want to accelerate their pace, one might have experienced health issues and needs to catch up, one might be pregnant and has childcare issues after the baby is born. Every student's plan is different because their needs are all different."

"I can't help anyone else if I can't help myself."

Samiracle Thornton admits she had a behavior problem at school but feels that she has matured since participating in a group led by CIS Site Coordinator Temekia Cheely. "I haven't been in trouble once this whole school year!" she announced.

The CIS model for Carroll County Schools is somewhat different than the Carrollton City School's approach. Located at Villa Rica High School, Cheely is an advocate for students at risk of

SUPPORT

FROM PAGE 12

dropping out of school, bridging the gap for them while working with counselors, social workers, nurses, the attendance team — anyone who can help break down the barriers her students face.

While attending regular high school classes, Cheely's core group of students are often knocking on her door to ask for help, bring in a fellow student who needs a caring adult, or even to bring good news. Samiracle dropped by to report that she passed advanced algebra!

Samiracle has another year of high school before she hopes to pursue a two-year degree in a field that will allow her to work with teenagers. "I'm a positive person but I knew I had to get my behavior turned around. I was influenced by the wrong crowd and now I try to talk with younger students on the bus to get them to see that making the wrong decision is just not worth it," she said.

Cheely assisted approximately 75 students during the 2015-16 academic year, with rewarding feedback.

"One student referred to me as her second Mom, another said I was her best friend," Cheely noted. "I don't just like my job, I love it!"

And her students love her. Samiracle credits Cheely with helping her stay in school. "Seeing one of my friends get

Villa Rica High School Site Coordinator Temekia Cheely, left, cherishes the relationships she nurtures with students such as junior Samiracle Thornton, right.

kicked out of school, made me stop and think — hey, that could have been me. But I had someone who cared."

Cynthia Langley serves as the director of Communities In Schools of Carrollton City and Carroll County and is thrilled that the success of the PLC and Villa Rica High School sites has made it possible to expand the CIS presence to more Carroll County schools — Temple High and Middle Schools, and Central High School.

"Our goal is not to reinvent the wheel, but to find the resources that are available to help our kids not only in school, but beyond the classroom," she said.

Often students experience problems that are beyond their control — homelessness, lack of proper food and clothing, lack of proper rest due to work or caring for siblings. CIS site coordinators work with students and their families to improve the issues they are facing.

"There are so many resources in Carroll County and many families don't know about them," Langley pointed out. "Success in life begins with high school graduation and our site coordinators take a special interest in seeing that each student attains that goal."



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Tanner Connections

connects the dots

It takes more than doctors and nurses to run a health care system. A multitude of career pathways are available in this exciting and ever-growing field, so Tanner Connections was created to give area high school students a look inside the health care industry.

In 2011, Tanner Health Systems partnered with Carroll County, Carrollton City, Bremen City and Haralson County schools to create Tanner Connections, a work based learning internship program which provides high school students experience and valuable mentoring in a healthcare setting. More than 100 students have participated and several have gone on to be employed by Tanner.

Damian Lott is one of those students who turned the Tanner Connections experience into a full-time job.

“During both my junior and senior years, I did an internship with Tanner in the IT department,” Lott said. “I was one of those kids who had not a clue about what I wanted to do and this opened up a door for me to continue my education in work I’m good at.”

Terry Welch, Lott’s information technology teacher at the College and Career Academy, discovered his talents when he was in the tenth grade.

“I asked my students to complete a questionnaire to determine how much they already knew about technology, and when I read what Damian wrote, I thought ‘Holy Cow, this kid knows a lot!’” Welch said.

According to Welch, she then encouraged Lott to participate in Tanner Connections after he demonstrated his skills around her classroom, also helping other teachers with technology issues.

“The Tanner Connection program has been so successful that the Harvard Graduate School of Education in conjunction with Pathways to Prosperity Network reviewed the program in hopes of developing a template that other schools and employers across the U.S. could use to launch their own work based learning internship programs.”



Damian Lott is a student who turned the Tanner Connections experience into a full-time job.

TANNER CONNECTIONS

“Damian was a very quiet student hiding behind his hair,” she remembered. “When Tanner Connections came up, the next thing I knew he had cut his hair, he greeted our students on tours at Tanner — he was a completely different person.”

“I enjoy doing new things,” Lott said. “I was asked to make a presentation for the College and Career Academy’s board of directors and I know how important it is to be around successful people, so I said yes.”

Lott is now a Service Desk Analyst, Level II and holds two professional IT certifications from West Georgia Technical College and is working on a third. “What I do is problem solve for all our hospitals and clinics,” he explained.

“Tanner Connections is an incredibly powerful tool that allows us to reach out to young people in our community and help them fulfill their potential,” said Danna Deering, education specialist for Tanner Health System. “We provide professional mentoring and hands-on work

CLINICAL AND NONCLINICAL AREAS FOR INTERNSHIPS

- Nursing
- Pharmacy
- Food and Nutrition Services
- Information Technologies
- Laboratory Services
- Marketing and Graphic Design
- Engineering and HVAC Security
- Business Services

experience in the student’s area of interest. Student also learn ‘soft’ skills that lead to success, including character development, professionalism, customer service, listening skills, networking and more.”

Tanner Connections students spend three hours a day, five days a week, serving in various capacities around the health system. The goal of the program is to help students continue to a post-secondary education, whether through a four-year university or a technical college, while also helping to ensure that the west Georgia region has enough trained medical professionals to continue serving its growing and aging population.

Deering noted that while the program involves an investment of time and energy from many Tanner Health System professionals, the students provide a real service and Tanner hopes to grow a future workforce among them.

According to Christi Runyan, Work-Based Learning Coordinator for the College and Career Academy, 67 of their students have participated in internships since Tanner Connections began. Students work at the Carrollton and Villa Rica facilities.

“I wouldn’t be where I am today if Mrs. Welch had not seen my potential,” Lott said.

While Lott appreciates his teacher, she also appreciates him.

“If you have just one success story like Damian, it makes a teaching career worthwhile!” she said.

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