

Coventry students shine in SkillsUSA Competition 2011



Jessica Selby•Daily Times

Regional Technical and Career Center students L-R: Alexis Henebury, Kyle Demellow, Briana Behm, Kelsy Emmet and Robert Ackert all took home gold medals for their outstanding performance in this year's SkillsUSA Competition.

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COVENTRY — The Regional Technical and Career Center at Coventry High School had some real standout champions in this year's SkillsUSA competition.

The school had five gold medal winners, three silver medal winners, four bronze medal winners and their advisor also secured the advisor of the year award.

The school also had six students that received a certificate for passing the National written proficiency test in their designated career and technical areas.

"We have had a really strong turnout in the skills competition this year and I think that is because all of the programs in the career center have really been invigorated right now and the kids in those programs are demonstrating their skills and showing that they not only match up to other school's students but also excel beyond that," Michael Hobin, the principal at Coventry High School said. "And Lynn Swain, the Skills advisor, she is a great advisor and has been instrumental in getting the kids prepared for the process to compete. She is the fuel that is energizing these kids to finish the school year strong; and I am proud of all of them."

All of the students in the Career and Technical Center at Coventry High school are invited to be a part of the Skills USA competition. Those that are selected to compete are transported to the various competition sites, which include New England Tech, the Community College of Rhode Island and Johnson and Wales University, and then asked to perform a series of task in their designated technical and career area.

The students compete with career and technical students from centers around the state in their designated areas.

Taking the Gold

Robert Ackert, a senior at the school, participated in the computer maintenance challenge. He secured the gold medal in that event.

As part of his challenge, Ackert was asked to rebuild a computer from the parts that were provided to him and to make sure that the completed computer worked properly. This challenge, he said, was timed. He was also asked to repair a broken computer, take a 50 question on-line test and complete a questionnaire about computers. Overall, Ackert said, the challenge was quite difficult, but what made it even harder was the pressure.

"The challenges are timed so when

you're working under pressure it is hard to concentrate," he said. "Plus you are in a classroom of like 15 other people so it definitely makes you nervous and I found it hard to focus on what I was doing."

Despite his lack of confidence, Ackert learned that he had earned the gold medal in his competition at the awards banquet that was held last week.

"I went to Skills last year and got fourth so I just figured I would get fourth again, but when they called my name as the gold medal winner, I almost didn't believe it," he said. "I was really surprised."

Alexis Henebury, a junior at the school who is enrolled in the Health Occupations program at the career center, competed in the First Aid and CPR challenge. She also secured a gold medal.

Henebury said that as part of her event, she was asked to complete four tasks. The first was a first aid challenge, the second was a scenario where a choking adult was rendered unconscious and she needed to react to the situation, and then also perform infant and child CPR. Henebury also had to take a written exam.

Henebury said that she really felt the pressure of the event because she had to perform each task in front of a judge on

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actual victims. Normally, she said, she has only practiced on dummies, so when it came time to act with real people, she said she found this competition to be a bit more difficult.

"I remember when it ended my teacher asked me how it went and I was like I don't even know what just happened," Henebury said. "It was all just kind of a blur to me so when they called my name at the awards banquet as the gold medal winner, I thought I would cry. I never expected to win."

Henebury said that because she plans on becoming a registered nurse specializing in neonatal care, this win will be a great asset for her to have on her resume.

Kelsey Emmett and Briana Behm, both seniors in the graphic arts program at the Career Center, competed in the promotional bulletin board event. They too placed gold.

For the event, the participating students are asked to create a bulletin board based on a theme that changes from year to year. This year's theme was "Respecting all Perspectives."

The two students said that going into this year's competition they were slightly more prepared than they had ever been. This year, they said, will mark their third year in the event.

Each year prior, they said, they spent time developing knowledge about how the event runs, what the judges in the event are actually looking for and what they truly want to see in a completed board and its presentation. So entering this year's event, both students said that they were much more optimistic about the turnout

The two students said that they tried to incorporate as much of the Skill's themes, including the organization's crest, into their board as they could. Emmett, who was the brains behind the layout, said that the duo decided that they would max out the dimension requirements while maintaining a simplistic board layout, which Behm, the designated presenter, said that in the three years prior that they had entered the competition they felt the judges favored.

"There are a lot of requirements that the competition itself requires we follow, so we had to stick to that, while trying to incorporate our ideas," Behm said. "Having been in the competition for the two years prior, we learned a lot about what our mistakes were and also what types of things the judges were looking for and went in this year hoping that we had a gold winning board and sure enough; we did."

Kyle Demello, a senior enrolled in the automotive program at the school, participated in the automotive skills challenge. He too walked away with a gold medal.

As part of the challenge Demello had to travel through ten different stations making repairs to ten different bugged vehicles. Each repair had to be completed in less than ten minutes. Demello said that he had to determine what was causing an engine on a bugged car not to start, repair a timing belt, perform an alignment check and an engine diagnostic.

He said that each of the tasks that he was asked to perform were tasks that he had done before in his automotive course, but felt the pressure of the competition because of the time element.

"I remember being at one station just trying to focus on that task and get it done when you would hear the two minute buzzer letting you know that you only had two more minutes to get it done and before you knew it, you had to move," he said. "I would just try to calm myself down before I got to the next station so that I could try to refocus my self on the next task. It was really nerve wrecking and I definitely wasn't expecting to get the gold when it was all over."

Advisor proud of students efforts

Even Swain, who has been an advisor for the Skills competition at the Career and Technical Center for more than 10 years, said that she was impressed by how well the students did this year.

"They called Coventry quite a bit at the awards night this year," she said. "Our kids usually do do very well, but this year we did pull exceptional numbers and I am just so proud

of all of them.

"I think it is partially because all of our instructors have that industry experience as well as the general education skills that they present to them in the classroom, but also because our kids are so committed to this," she said. "Even the kids that didn't medal, as far as we are concerned, they are all winners just by going and competing; it shows that they are a force in their fields and will only improve as time goes on."

Winners to compete in Nationals in Nebraska

All of the gold medal winners from the Coventry Career and Technical Center will be flying as a team to the national Skills competition, which is scheduled to be held in Kansas City, Nebraska on June 19th.

Swain said that the school sponsors the students, but asks that the students come up with \$100 themselves to offset the costs associated with the trip. To help the kids cover that cost, Swain said that she and the skills students organize various fundraisers.

"We figure that if the kids did well enough to secure themselves a spot in the national competition, they deserve to be able to go and we would never want to inhibit their ability to participate at the national level because of a costs associated thing so we try to cover the cost as a school," Swain said.

At the national competition, the students will be competing in "very similar style competitions," Swain said. Their tasks will be basically the same, but the feel will likely be very different, she said.

"There will be the best of the best students from all over the country and even places like Guam and Puerto Rico at this event, so the competition factor is much more intense here," Swain said. "The competition tasks, though, they will be very similar so the kids just need to try to focus on that and try not to feel the pressure of the event."

Skill Advisor of the Year

This year it wasn't just the students that were recognized at the awards banquet though. Swain also learned that she too would be honored for her accomplishments.

Swain was called to the stage at the annual awards banquet and announced as the Skills Advisor of the Year. Each year one advisor from all of the area career centers are recognized for their commitment to the program and their involvement with the students. This year it was Swain that received that recognition.

Swain, who herself was a member of skills as a High School student, said that she is honored to be recognized, but doesn't do what she does for anything more than her love and passion for the technical programs.

Swain started in Skills as a student at the West Bay Vocational Center. From 1990 to 1991 she served as a VICA (Vocational Industrial Clubs of America) as it was then called, vice president. She also secured many awards herself as a student in the program, culminating her career with the winning of the gold medal in the competition for commercial baking as a high school senior.

Looking back on her life, now serving not only as an instructor at the Coventry High School Career and Technical Center, but also as its Skills USA advisor, Swain said that she feels things are just coming full circle and that she is grateful that she is able to watch many of her students excel in career fields that they someday aspire to be in similar to the way she did as a student in the program years ago.

The other medal winners were:

Silver Medalists:

Dan Meza, Pete Mollo, Ryan Rueter and Mike Westcott – Teamworks

Alex St. Pierre – Job Skill Demo "O"

Paige Cookson – Prepared Speech

Bronze Medalists:

Ashley LaFleur – Job Interview

Jason Plante – Electronic Technology

Alicia Demarias – First Aid and CPR

Samantha Lavalle – Cosmetology