

Kids get early jump on career track

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COVENTRY — The high school library was buzzing with activity last month as sophomores interviewed community professionals about their careers.

This career fair is held just about every two years, said School Based Coordinator Donna Hutson, but this year's fair was a little different because much of the planning was done by a Coventry High School student.

Sophomore Robin Davenport approached Hutson about the career fair while working on her capstone, she said. Davenport's core question dealt with how she could help her classmates decide what they wanted to do after high school.

"I didn't know what I wanted to do after high school," Davenport admitted. "So I thought a career fair would help me talk to people and learn about different fields."

To make sure that the fair had representatives from fields that interested the sophomores, Davenport created a grade-wide survey to go out to all the advisories.

Working with the answers to the survey, she and Hutson contacted representatives from every field. They used career clusters to make sure there were no big holes in the fair.

By the time the career fair began on April 30, they had representatives from every cluster, including: agriculture, food and natural resources, architecture and construction, aviation, transportation, arts, audio/visual technology and communications, transportation and distribution, information technology, business management, hospitality and tourism, manufacturing, law, public safety and security, health science, government and public administration, human services and more.

In addition, Hutson pointed out, upperclassmen currently enrolled in the high school's career and technical program set up tables at the fair to show how their program could help students reach their goal.

"So the cosmetology school was right next to representatives from Paul Mitchell Cosmetology," she said. Since students choose to go to the career and technical school for their junior and senior years, it is good to give the sophomores a tangible picture of what that would be like.

Making use of the daily schedule, sophomores came to the fair during twenty minutes of their ad-



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Coventry High School's sophomore career fair was well attended by students and well represented by various career clusters, like architecture and construction, aviation, health science, government and public administration, human services and more.

visory time. They had a questionnaire to fill out as they interviewed at least three of the representatives at the fair. Afterwards, they went back to their advisories to discuss what they had learned.

Sarah and Beth Aldrich, who helped Davenport set up that Friday morning, were enjoying their time talking to people, they said.

"We went to the fire department and they showed us how to look for missing people in a burning building with their thermal imaging," said Sarah.

Beth really enjoyed talking to the girls who came from Paul Mitchell about what they were currently learning about, she said. "They showed us some of their equipment and told us what it's like to be at the school."

Both girls said the Jobs in RI table was especially helpful. Representative [Steve Porter] talked to them about how to write resumes and present themselves in jobs, they said.

"Fifty jobs are posted every day in Rhode Island," Beth said. "And you can actually narrow it down to your town and the field you want to go into."

Talking to the RI Army National Guard also made an impression on them, they added, "you can get paid for going to school."

Halfway through the morning, Davenport was pretty happy with how the fair was going, she said. "It's going very smoothly," she commented, before

excusing herself to make an announcement that it was time for this advisory group to leave and a new one to come in.

Hutson was very impressed by Davenport's work, she said. "She did a great job assisting me and her survey of the students interests dovetailed nicely with what I was planning for the career fair."

Amy Siemmao, a guidance counselor at the school, was instrumental in organizing the schedule on the day of the fair, Hutson added.

As a councilor, Siemmao has already seen how helpful it was for the students who attended, she said this week.

"It just opened their eyes," she said. "Even just having the career and tech programs here be represented at the fair — we've seen an increased interest in enrollment since then."

It's never too early to give kids an opportunity to do career exploration, she added. "the more experience students have meeting with members of the community, exposing them to what's out there, the better. Then they can see the connection between their courses and the outside world and it will help them when they go to college."

Lori Ferguson, the director of the career center, also helped put the fair together, Hutson added, as did Janet Brouillette, a parent on the Guidance Advisory Council.



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Coventry High School sophomore Malaree Shields talks to a Johnson and Wales Admissions Officer at a career fair organized specifically for sophomores at the school.