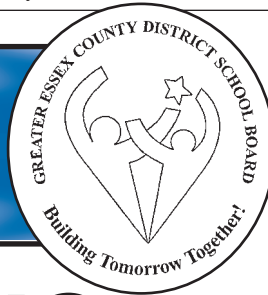


Salute to excellence



Staying ahead of the curve

By Susan Lewis
Special to The Star

How do you get experience if you've never had a job? And how do you get a job if you don't have experience?

This is the chicken-and-the-egg question that has faced young people seemingly forever. But, for more than 400 local high school students, the answer has come through the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program, first offered in Ontario at W.F. Herman Secondary School in 1988 as the Precision Metal Trades Program.

The program was designed to promote careers in skilled trades and to respond to the continuing demand for skilled workers. Since its initiation locally, it has produced 446 Precision Metal Trades apprentices. Forty-two students were placed in industry this year alone.

"The Precision Metal Trades Program is recognized throughout Ontario as the 'Flagship Precision Metal Trades OYAP Program,'" says Bob Senchuk, who serves as Teacher Consultant for Technological Studies, OYAP and Apprenticeship Programs for the Greater Essex County District School Board.

The Precision Metal Trades Program's great success was recently recognized with an Yves Landry Foundation Award, presented November 13 at the Sheraton Centre Toronto Hotel.

The Yves Landry Foundation, founded in 1998, is based on the vision, principles and hopes of the late Yves Landry, former chairman, president and CEO of Chrysler Canada, of forging an enlightened partnership between industry and education, train a world-class pool of skilled manufacturing workers, technicians, technologists and engineers, and to secure technological advantage in a rapidly changing world.

The foundation provides the opportunity for business, education and government to collectively be part of the solution to advance technological education and skills training in order to resolve the skilled labour shortages facing Canadian industries.

"This award, in recognizing the value of this program, also recognizes the strong support we've had from teachers and employers," says Senchuk. "Receiving it was a great honour."

The Secondary School Apprenticeship Program was initiated by the board's technical director at that time, Wes Smith, Herman Secondary School metal trades teacher Peter Williams, MTCU training representative Tom Payne, board co-op training coordinator Don Shearer, and industry representatives. The goal was to establish a program that would address the shortage of skilled workers in the precision metals trades industry in the Windsor and Essex County area.

The program is directed at students who have an interest in pursuing a career in this field. Through the program, Grade 11 students attend school from September to February, then go on a work placement from February to the following February – even working during the summer months. They then complete another school term between February and June, after which they graduate.



"By the time they graduate, they will have completed their classroom education along with many of the competencies they will need to receive their journeyman status," says Senchuk. As well, they may well earn more than \$25,000 in that year, which has led the board to have financial planners come in to talk to the students.

"We remain the only Ontario school board that mandates that our students get paid," says Senchuk. "We have always been ahead of the curve."

And, because the students are well-paid, it is much more likely they will receive meaningful work to do. "Employers don't want to pay these kids to sweep floors. We have some students who are doing work on molds that are worth more than \$250,000."

The program's objectives include:

- provide a technology program that leads students to a meaningful career
- recruit female students into careers in the Precision Metal Trades
- give students formal, on-the-job

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Left to right are: Mary Jean Gallagher, Director of Education, Steve Rodgers, Magna International Inc. (Award Sponsor), Bob Senchuk, Technology Consultant and Ed Kotevich, Precision Metal Trades OYAP Leader.



successful tradesperson in the manufacturing sector.

Currently, 72 students are enrolled in the program with more than 100 employers participating.

Demand for the program is high and it boasts a 90 per cent retention rate. "You have to be an excellent student. It is a demanding program."

As well, there is a continuous request for students from employers, says Senchuk. "We get calls every day."

Paul Bondy, executive director of the Windsor-Essex County Development Commission, applauds the program as having provided "significant benefit in helping to alleviate this (skilled labour) shortage by exposing secondary school students to the experience and opportunities of a rewarding career in the skilled trades."

And Ted Callighen, president of the Canadian Association of Moldmakers, calls the program, "highly respected by our members as well as through the local manufacturing sector. This is demonstrated by the strong support provided in training placement for these students."

The Conference Board of Canada has also recognized the program as the Best Education-Industry Partnership in the Province of Ontario for 2001.

"These accolades help draw more attention and generate interest in manufacturing technological education," says Senchuk.

The Precision Metal Trades OYAP Program continues to evolve to move toward being the best training program for both students and employers. In September 2001, in response to industry's needs and the growing shortage of skilled tradespeople in precision metal trades, the board expanded its Precision Metal Trades OYAP program from Herman, to also include Sandwich Secondary School and General Amherst High School. And, in September 2003, after consultation with teachers, guidance counsellors and employers, the three-year program was changed to a two-year program to meet the mandates of the new curriculum from the Ministry of Education and Training.

"The change to the program is beneficial to the students as well as to employers without compromising the integrity of the program," says Senchuk.

The program is even being integrated into the elementary technology centres that serve more than 3,000 Grades 7 and 8 students in Windsor and Essex County.

In addition to sharing the program with 17 boards of education throughout Ontario, vocational educators from the U.S. have been invited to view the program's set-up and operation. Says Senchuk: "People know a good thing when they see it."



Scott Summerfield (left) and Vido Pantovic (right) are two students benefiting from the Precision Metal Trades Program while learning practical skills at Classic Tool & Die.






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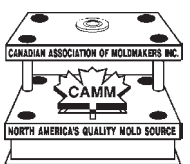


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Congratulations to those who have helped make
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Mary Jean Gallagher
Director of Education

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