

SkillsUSA

champions

FALL 2011

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national
gold medalists

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On the Cover:

SkillsUSA Champion Manuel Garcia of Modesto, Calif. Photo by Lloyd Wolf.

SkillsUSA champions

SkillsUSA's Official Magazine

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See even more champions on our frequently updated website, www.skillsusa.org, as well as:



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In keeping with a tradition of respect for the individuality of our members and our role in workforce development, SkillsUSA strives to ensure inclusive participation in all of our programs, partnerships and employment opportunities.



Skilled and Motivated

Executive Director Tim Lawrence has known SkillsUSA as a student member, instructor, industry partner and state director. Got a question? He can help.

Q&A



Q: How can SkillsUSA increase a student's personal motivation?

Tim: SkillsUSA is all about celebrating achievement. By providing a way to showcase skills and interact with industry, it gives students higher expectations for their own future.

I hope this issue of SkillsUSA Champions will challenge you to stretch your goals. You'll be inspired by the stories of your new national officers and that of future star Corey White, a SkillsUSA member who's already a seasoned road musician. And when reading about Robert Figureroa's journey from troubled gang member to exceptional boat builder, consider what's possible in your own life.

At SkillsUSA headquarters, we're always thinking about how we can grow as an organization. We're reaching more members than ever — 320,287 teachers, students and alumni — and our national conference is expanding, with over 15,000 attending. The SkillsUSA WorldTeam, which is heading to London in October, is our largest in 23 years. Regardless of the final medal results, I know those 17 competitors will make us proud as they strive for a higher goal. Be sure to follow their progress on our website.

None of this success would be possible without SkillsUSA's industry partners, who contribute more than \$3 million in

cash plus \$35 million worth of donations. My personal goal for the new school year is to encourage more people to support SkillsUSA as we work to expand our grant and scholarship programs, educational materials and training.

To stay motivated, it helps to have a plan. Ours is called Vision 2020. Our strategic goals are to reach more students and alumni, connect more members to industry through effective partnerships, and become internationally known experts in employment readiness.

Still, an organization is only as strong as the individuals who make up its membership. Working together, we can make 2012 another record-breaker. I challenge you to be a strong link in the SkillsUSA chain. Take a leadership role in your chapter. Be active in your school and your civic organizations. Network with industry to tap into the resources available to you.

Whether you are a first-year member or have been part of SkillsUSA for a while, let's all rise to success this year and demonstrate our skill and motivation. Together, we can make this moment in time a personal best. ●

Got questions about SkillsUSA or other topics? Email anyminfo@skillsusa.org or send a letter to the address on the facing page. Put "Ask Tim" in the subject line or mail address.

SkillsUSA's *Biggest* *WorldTeam* Giving Its Best

If you attended the Awards Ceremony at this year's national conference (or watched online), an emotional highlight was the official presentation of SkillsUSA's WorldTeam. SkillsUSA Nation expressed its collective pride in the team and wished the members luck as they prepare for the 41st WorldSkills Competition in London Oct. 5-8.

At 17 members, the 20th SkillsUSA WorldTeam is also one of our largest. It'll

join teams from 53 countries, with more than 1,000 competitors in 46 contests.

SkillsUSA has fielded a WorldTeam since 1975, and the rest of the nation is catching on. By the time you read this, the team will have been featured in *Parade*, the most widely read magazine in the United States. (If you miss the printed version, visit www.parade.com or www.skillsusa.org for a link.) The 2011 WorldTeam hopes to make SkillsUSA proud. It already has. ●

Back to Spread the Word

As a member of SkillsUSA in 1997, Wendy Venturini found herself on the national stage receiving a gold medal in Prepared Speech. Today, as a NASCAR reporter on SPEED channel's popular "NASCAR Raceday" TV show, Venturini takes the national stage every week, and she credits her SkillsUSA experience with helping her stay there.

That's why Venturini recently gave back to the organization by working with headquarters staff to produce audio and video public service announcements. Help us spread the word about SkillsUSA by distributing these PSAs to local media in your area. Learn how at: www.skillsusa.org/educators/psa.shtml. ●



Photo: Lloyd Wolf

SkillsUSA's 2011 **WorldTeam** made its public debut at the national conference. To meet all the team members and follow their **adventures** in London, visit: www.skillsusa.org/compete/worldteam.shtml.

SHARP SKILLS GIVE MEMBERS BIG EXPERIENCE

Keeping your technical skills at their cutting-edge best won't just help you land a job. Sometimes, it'll land you an *experience*.

Mark Dandurand and Nathan Frazo, culinary arts students at Ozarks Technical Community College in Springfield, Mo., experienced a big moment in their careers when they were asked to cook for Sheryl Crow and her band before an area concert.

Chuck White, the singer's personal chef, often contacts culinary schools in cities where Crow is performing to ask for help with meal preparation. When he contacted Lisa Gardner, director of OTC's culinary program, Dandurand and Frazo's names came up right away.

"I didn't think twice [about accepting]," says Dandurand, who'd just won a silver medal in Culinary Arts at the SkillsUSA Championships. Frazo, who placed seventh in Commercial Baking, was just as eager.

The meal included a fried green tomato BLT, a rib-eye steak with smoked tomato sauce, and a strawberry panna cotta for dessert. "[Crow] said the food was great," Frazo adds with pride. The experience reminded both students that, as Crow's hit goes, "every day is a winding road" their skills can take them down. ●

Photo provided by OTC



Dandurand (left) and Frazo

Mega Efforts Earn Mega Prizes

A trip for two to Washington, D.C. ... a luxury suite just behind home plate at a Washington Nationals baseball game ... a tour of SkillsUSA's national headquarters. That's what construction technology teacher and 100-percent SkillsUSA advisor Phil Cronin experienced as part of his SkillsUSA/N.E.W.-sponsored mega prize. What's a "mega prize"? It's part of an incentive encouraging advisors to enroll all eligible students in their chapters. Doing so makes the advisor eligible for great prizes donated by some of SkillsUSA's best partners. For more info, visit: www.skillsusa.org/join/megaprize.shtml. ●

Pin the tail on NLSC fame with your *design*



Sure, the National Leadership and Skills Conference just ended, but that doesn't mean it's too early to think about the 2012 NLSC, especially if you're a SkillsUSA member with a flair for design.

Once again, Lowe's is sponsoring SkillsUSA's national conference pin and T-shirt design competitions, which are open to all dues-paying student members. The winning designs will become the official pin or T-shirt for the 2012 conference and will be produced by the SkillsUSA Store. What a great opportunity to get your skills noticed nationwide!

Entries must be received (not post-marked) by Feb. 1, so start now. For full details and rules, visit: www.skillsusa.org/compete/pindesign.shtml. ●

NATIONAL CONFERENCE CONQUERS

A picture might be worth a thousand words, but that's hardly enough to describe the *spectacularity* (which isn't a word at all) of the 2011 National Leadership and Skills Conference. Even so, here are some words *and* pictures to give you a taste of the biggest NLSC in history.

An early highlight was Champions Night in the Kansas City, Mo., Power and Light District. The second-year event saw a record turnout, as students and advisors got their respective grooves on. SkillsUSA TECHSPO was impressive as ever, with 144 exhibitors from industry and education getting up close and personal with the cream of the SkillsUSA crop.

The Opening Ceremony pushed excitement levels into the red, setting the stage for the SkillsUSA Championships. The competitions featured nearly 5,700 contestants, a record.

SkillsUSA Night at Kauffman Stadium (home of the Kansas City Royals) saw 10,000 SkillsUSA members take in some professional baseball. Executive Director Tim Lawrence and State Farm's Russ Hoffbauer, SkillsUSA board president, threw out the first pitches to then-national officers Vanessa Mendez and Andrea Arbogast. Their fellow officer, Kendra Liseic, sang the national anthem.

The last day's Timberland PRO community service event drew more than 500 volunteers. Some planted trees in an urban orchard while others filled orders at a local food bank. The conference closed with a moving Awards Ceremony, as new national officers were named and contest winners claimed bronze, silver and gold.

Relive the magic of the week with the 2011 NLSC Souvenir DVD. Order at: www.skillsusa.org/store/dvd.html. ●



Photos: Lloyd Wolf



2011 CONFERENCE HONOREES

Honorary Life Members: Gary Diehl, longtime SkillsUSA staff director; John Gaal, SkillsUSA board representative from the Association for Career and Technical Education; Dick Sherman, SkillsUSA Oregon director; Larry Stone, Lowe's president and foundation chairman

Advisor of the Year: Mark American Horse, Central Technology Center, Sapulpa, Okla. (see story, Page 21)

Kansas City Champion Award: International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 124



Outstanding Career and Technical

Educators: Toni Campbell, Sullivan South High School, Kingsport, Tenn.; Edmund Jones, Somerset County Vocational and Technical Schools, Bridgewater, N.J.; Steven Lick, Allegan (Mich.) County Area Technical and Education Center; Rosa Williams, Breithaupt Career and Technical Center, Detroit

Pat Dalton Outstanding Achievement Award: Greg Rintala, Snap-on Industrial

President's Volunteer Service Award: (lifetime award) Roger Wilkerson, Duncanville, Texas; for list of gold, silver and bronze award winners, go to: www.skillsusa.org/students/volsvc.shtml

Student2Student Mentoring Grand Prize Chapter: Rappahannock High School, Washington, Va.

Torch Carrier Award: Ed Prevatt, National Center for Construction Education and Research; James Wall, National Institute for Metalworking Skills ●



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Congratulations to all SkillsUSA members and instructors who qualified to go to the NLSC in Kansas City this past June. You are all winners whether you took home a medal or not.

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2011 SkillsUSA CHAMPIONSHIPS GOLD MEDALISTS

3-D VISUALIZATION AND ANIMATION Charlie Unsderfer/Dennis Unsderfer, Hutchinson (Kan.) Community College; Oscar Marshall/Jonathon Vaughan, Meridian (Idaho) Charter High School

ACTION SKILLS Mario Delrio, Penobscot Job Corps, Bangor, Maine; Nicholas Collison, Center of Applied Technology – North, Severn, Md. **ADVERTISING**

DESIGN Tiffany Baker, Rolla (Mo.) Technical Institute; McKinzie Madsen, Desert Hills High School, St. George, Utah

AMERICAN SPIRIT (teams) Manatee Technical Institute, Bradenton, Fla.; Buckeye Hills Career Center, Rio Grande, Ohio

ARCHITECTURAL DRAFTING Emberly Valgardson, Utah Valley University, Orem, Utah; Tom Beech, North Medford High School, Medford, Ore.

AUDIO/RADIO PRODUCTION Sheraa Barajas/Kelton Wells, College of Eastern Utah, Price; Chris Landi/Alex Winchell, Monmouth County Vocational School, Wall, N.J.

AUTOMATED MANUFACTURING TECHNOLOGY (teams) Northwest Iowa Community College, Sheldon; Greater New Bedford (Mass.) Regional Vocational-Technical High School (RVTHS)

AUTOMOTIVE REFINISHING TECHNOLOGY Jason Nielson, Utah Valley University, Orem; Kolten Dunkerson, Laporte (Texas) High School

AUTOMOTIVE SERVICE TECHNOLOGY Adam Minihan, Lakes Region Community College, Laconia, N.H.; Michael Mullen, San Luis Obispo (Calif.) High School

AVIATION MAINTENANCE TECHNOLOGY Tyler Brown, Burlington (Vt.) Technical Center; Cody Moss, Tulsa (Okla.) Technology Center – Riverside

BASIC HEALTH CARE SKILLS Erika Dixon, C.A. Prosser School of Technology, New Albany, Ind.

BROADCAST NEWS PRODUCTION (teams) Ozarks Technical Community College, Springfield, Mo.; Southeast High School, Bradenton, Fla.

BUILDING MAINTENANCE Robert Mendenhall, Indian Capital Technology Center, Stilwell, Okla.; Eddie Everett, Delcastle Technical High School, Wilmington, Del.

CABINETMAKING Marc Glover, Salt Lake Community College, Salt Lake City, Utah; Kaydee Walters, Tooele (Utah) High School

CARPENTRY Andy Smith, Washtenaw Community College, Ann Arbor, Mich.; Tyler Roeske, Oak Forest (Ill.) High School

CHAPTER BUSINESS PROCEDURE (teams) Metro Technology Centers Springlake Campus, Oklahoma City, Okla.; Lawrence County High School, Lawrenceburg, Tenn.

CHAPTER DISPLAY (teams) Lake Superior College, Duluth, Minn.; Sullivan South High School, Kingsport, Tenn.

CNC MILLING Aaron Van Wormer, Vincennes University, Indiana; Justin Gagne, Diman RVTHS, Fall River, Mass.

CNC TURNING Macintosh McGrew, Alexandria (Minn.) Tech College; Tyler Maikranz, Princeton (Ind.) Community High School

COLLISION REPAIR TECHNOLOGY Simon Rowe, Cuesta Community College, San Luis Obispo, Calif.; Chance Brickner, Sentinel Career and Technology Center, Tiffin, Ohio

COMMERCIAL BAKING Julie Thompson, Johnson and Wales University, Providence, R.I.; Ashlinn Somma, Sheridan Technical Center, Hollywood, Fla.

COMMUNITY SERVICE (teams) Raritan Valley Community College, Bridgewater, N.J.; Bethlehem (Pa.) Area Vocational-

Technical School **COMPUTER MAINTENANCE TECHNOLOGY** Brady Anderson, Idaho State University College of Technology, Pocatello; Zoltan Shapiro, San Luis Obispo (Calif.) High School

COMPUTER PROGRAMMING Lee Futter, Ozarks Technical Community College, Springfield, Mo.; Robert Klefner, Meridian (Idaho) Charter High School

COSMETOLOGY Katherine Patonai, Salt Lake Community College, Salt Lake City, Utah; Ivelisse Pagán, Escuela Superior Vocacional Bernardino Cordero, Ponce, Puerto Rico

CRIME SCENE INVESTIGATION (teams) Somerset (Ky.) Community College; Ben Davis High School, Indianapolis

CRIMINAL JUSTICE James Skinner, Utah Valley University, Orem, Utah; Zachary Sanford, Polaris Career Center, Cleveland, Ohio

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DIESEL EQUIPMENT TECHNOLOGY Devan Manis, Utah Valley University, Orem, Utah; Matthew Nolan, Howell Cheney Technical High School, Manchester, Conn.

ELECTRONICS TECHNOLOGY Trenten Dopp, Southern Utah University, Cedar City; Cole Given, Davis H. Hart Career Center, Mexico, Mo.

EMPLOYMENT APPLICATION PROCESS Shamel Weldon, Southeastern Technical College, Vidalia, Ga.; Kyle Duquette, Dighton-Rehoboth High School, North Dighton, Mass.

ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY/DESIGN (teams) Manatee Technical Institute, Bradenton, Fla.; Academy of Careers and Technology, Beckley, W.Va.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP (teams) Dekalb Technical College, Clarkston, Ga.; Kankakee Area Career Center, Bourbonnais, Ill.

ESTHETICS Savannah Dunn, Western Technology Center, Burns Flat, Okla.; Emily Osborn, Lexington (S.C.) Technology Center

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OUS SPEAKING Michael Knowles, Guilford Technical Community College, Jamestown, N.C.; Gabriela Pollack, Cleveland High School, Reseda, Calif.

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JOB INTERVIEW Jamie Russo, Tennessee Technology Center at Chattanooga; Trinity Story, North Point High School for Science, Technology and Industry, Waldorf, Md.

JOB SKILL DEMONSTRATION A Jonah Castillo, Pueblo (Colo.) Community College; Natasha Garcia, Diman RVTHS, Fall River, Mass.

JOB SKILL DEMONSTRATION OPEN Jillian Ricks, Tennessee Tech-



nology Center at Chattanooga; Kelley Dalton, Pittsylvania Career and Technology Center, Chatham, Va.

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MASONRY Dylan Ennis, Central Cabarrus High School, Concord, N.C.; Jordan Zook, Berks Career and Technology Center East Campus, Oley, Pa. **MECHANICS** Tim Evans/Matthew Rademacher, Alexandria (Minn.) Technical College; William Gortemiller/Erik Taylor, Scarlet Oaks Career Development Campus, Cincinnati **MEDICAL ASSISTING** Stephanie Van Arsdale, Tennessee Technology Center at Knoxville; Christine O'Brien, Shawsheen High School, Billerica, Mass. **MEDICAL MATH** Xinia Perez, Manatee Technical Institute, Bradenton, Fla.; Lidiana Quezada, Western Arkansas Technical Center, Fort Smith

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QUIZ BOWL (teams) Tennessee Technology Center at Newbern; North Point High School for Science, Technology and Industry, Waldorf, Md.

RELATED TECHNICAL MATH Benjamin Vetter, Eastern Wyoming College, Torrington; Ed Kim, Westwood

High School, Austin, Texas **RESIDENTIAL SYSTEMS INSTALLATION AND MAINTENANCE** Mark Eslick, Texas State Technical College – Waco; Michael Banowetz, Labette County High School, Altamont, Kan. **RESIDENTIAL WIRING** Jason Vos, St. Cloud (Minn.) Technical College; Dominic Anger, Marchman Technical Education Center, New Port Richey, Fla. **ROBOTICS AND AUTOMATION TECHNOLOGY** Jim Breckenridge/James Glidewell, Andrew Cox/Colton Galvan, Hilliard Technical Center, St. Joseph, Mo.

SCREEN PRINTING TECHNOLOGY Danny Merritt, Forsyth Technical Community College, Winston-Salem, N.C.; Travis Goad, Greenland (Ark.) High School **SHEET METAL** John Halwix, Elgin (Ill.) Community College; Olivia Keech, Delcastle Technical High School, Wilmington, Del. **SUSTAINABILITY SOLUTIONS** Alvina Tom/Zandra Trujillo, Navajo Technical College, Crownpoint, N.M.; Joanna Lee/Jung (Jenny) Yun, Bergen County Academies, Hackensack, N.J.

TEAMWORKS (teams) Wilkes Community College, Wilkesboro, N.C.; Berks Career and Technology Center East Campus, Oley, Pa. **TECHNICAL COMPUTER APPLICATIONS** Jeremy Johnson, Wiregrass Georgia Technical College, Fitzgerald, Ga.; Nikko Hayden, Area 30 Career Center, Greencastle, Ind. **TECHNICAL DRAFTING** Michael Gleason, Utah Valley University, Orem, Utah; Stephanie Rivard, Blackstone Valley RVTHS, Upton, Mass. **TECH PREP SHOWCASE** (teams) Barberton (Ohio) High School; Bergen County Academies, Hackensack, N.J.; Dekalb Technical College, Clarkston, Ga.; Manatee Technical Institute, Bradenton, Fla. (five medals); Minuteman Regional High School, Lexington, Mass.; San Elizario (Texas) High School; Toledo (Ohio) Technology Academy; Waynesville (Mo.) Career Center **TELECOMMUNICATIONS CABLING** Dan Murphy, Metropolitan Community College, Omaha, Neb.; Allison Hassard, Weaver Academy, Greensboro, N.C. **TELEVISION (VIDEO) PRODUCTION** Micah Powell/Nathan Powell, Chattahoochee Technical College Marietta (Ga.) Campus; Javier Brionez/Todd Mueller, Fairfax (Va.) Academy **T-SHIRT DESIGN** Alyson Fowler, Putnam Career and Technical Center, Eleanor, WVa.; Katherine Sullivan, Apple Valley (Calif.) High School

VIDEO PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT Michael Dube/Michael Leeper, Ozarks Technical Community College, Springfield, Mo.; Francisco Morales/Suleimy Perez, F.H. Peterson Academy of Technology, Jacksonville, Fla.

WEB DESIGN Lisa Chester/Sunny Okamoto, College of Lake County, Grayslake, Ill.; Michael Angel/Lorand Moore, Center for Technology, Essex Junction, Vt. **WELDING** Spartak Matvyeyenko, American River College, Sacramento, Calif.; Tim Saxton, Cambridge (Minn.) High School **WELDING FABRICATION** (teams) College of Eastern Utah, Price; Farmington (N.M.) Municipal Schools Career and Technical Education Center **WELDING SCULPTURE** Christopher De La Torre, American River College, Sacramento, Calif.; Samuel Long, Beaufort-Jasper Academy for Career Excellence, Ridgeland, S.C. ●

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Photo: Lloyd Wolf

For a full list of gold, silver and bronze medalists at the SkillsUSA Championships, as well as winners' names in teams with three or more members, visit: www.skillsusa-register.org/rpts/eventmedalists.aspx

Get to know the 15 new student representatives for SkillsUSA. The faces and places may be different, but they're all making their dreams come true. *By E. Thomas Hall*

WADE PERSSON, an automotive technology student at Southeast Technical Institute in Sioux Falls, S.D., already has an associate's degree in collision repair and refinishing. Once a pre-med student, "the car guy" (as he's nicknamed) shifted gears to follow his dream of opening a custom painting business. He's been restoring a 1965 Pontiac Tempest for two years.

Criminal justice student **MARCO CAVASOS** plans to become an attorney. The Texan attends Homer Hanna High School in Brownsville. He's been singing in school choirs since the third grade and plans to minor in music on the way to his law degree. "I've fallen in love with the [SkillsUSA] organization, and I have a deep passion to help the organization grow and become better," Cavazos says.

Meeting **EMAD MADHA**, it's clear how determined he is to become a trauma surgeon. He'll already have two years of college credits after graduating from Somerset County Vocational and Technical High School in Bridgewater, N.J. The health and medical sciences student is certified as an emergency medical technician. Helping save a man's life on only his second volunteer call "was a reality check for me," Madha says.

KATHRYN BERRY studies criminal justice, with the goal of becoming a forensic chemist. At one time, "I saw myself going nowhere, and with SkillsUSA I've become a confident public speaker and a leader throughout my school and throughout everyday life," Berry says. At Eastland Career Center in Groveport, Ohio, she's also serving on an advisory committee with its teachers "to make school a better place."

In 1992, **JEREMY BALLENTINE**'s life spiraled downward as the 14-year-old was suddenly left without any adult guidance at home. Playing in a state soccer championship — only to see the game called due to a brawl — was his highest achievement. Then last year, after enrolling at Tennessee Technology Center at Pulaski, Ballentine opened a SkillsUSA packet that "changed my life forever," he says. The industrial electricity student owns a local heating and air conditioning company and "would love to see it national."

While she's currently in a graphic design program, **C.J. DEHART** would like to be a regional manager of a hotel chain. "SkillsUSA has really refined the skills that I have," says the student from Westwood High School in Austin, Texas. At the SkillsUSA Championships, her Opening and Closing Ceremonies team has won consecutive gold medals.

"If it hadn't been for SkillsUSA, I wouldn't be doing any of the stuff I'm doing. It's given me the platform to get toward motivational speaking," says **STEPHEN ALLEN**. A business administration major at Oconee Fall Line Technical College in Dublin, Ga., Allen used his speaking skills to help arrange a private tour of the White House during SkillsUSA's Washington Leadership Training Institute.

CHRISTI DURHAM, who's set her sights on working as a NASA engineer, asserts "there is no such thing as a ceiling." Studying electronics at Meridian (Idaho) Technical Charter High School and interning at Boise State University, Durham has often endured jokes as the only female in class. Fortunately, she also has a black belt in taekwondo.



DIEGO CARVALLO admits his life was a wreck before he joined SkillsUSA. "I've had a complete turn, to the point where I'm getting colleges coming to me ... because of my grades, because I've improved so much, because I've become such a better person by it." With his energy channeled properly, the criminal justice student at Centennial High School in Roswell, Ga., has earned his pilot's license, founded two businesses and decided on a double major in engineering.

It's not every day that a dental assisting class has an experiment on the space shuttle. But that's hardly the apogee for Massachusetts' **VICTORIA HOLBERT**, who studied whether astronauts were more likely to get cavities. As a star athlete, "sports were all I knew," she says, until finding Montachusett Regional Vo-Tech School in Fitch-

burg. "Ever since then, it's just been taking off from there."

CHANCE LITWIN is proof that hard work and determination can lead to success. He grew up (fast) in public housing, went to work at 12, and at one point had no place to live and slept in his car. But after meeting SkillsUSA advisor Lisa Bruce, "I learned that who I am depends on me," Litwin says. For this mechanical design technology student at Gadsden (Ala.) State Community College, the future now may include engineering, law and politics.

"I hope and wish to be a manager in a hotel, to travel and help people," says **ELENA MELEKOS**. When not taking culinary arts classes at Sussex County Technical School in Sparta, N.J., she's been a longtime community volunteer. "My main goal in life is to help as many people as I possibly can. Through

SkillsUSA, I've gained the confidence to talk to people and have that passion go into helping them," Melekos adds.

Under his family's house rules, **CALEB HOUSTON** doesn't watch TV — "a waste of perfectly good daylight," my grandmother says" — and instead excels at baseball and swimming. The criminal justice student wants to be a U.S. marshal. Being a SkillsUSA member at Warren County Career Center in Lebanon, Ohio, "is just adding on to my family," he explains.

Not long ago, **KARMEN AYRES** was told that kidney disease would take her life. Even after successful surgery, she suffered memory loss. "I am

a fighter, and my dream is worth chasing," says the residential wiring student at Aberdeen (Wash.) High School. Ayres would like to be a public relations official for a large electrical company.

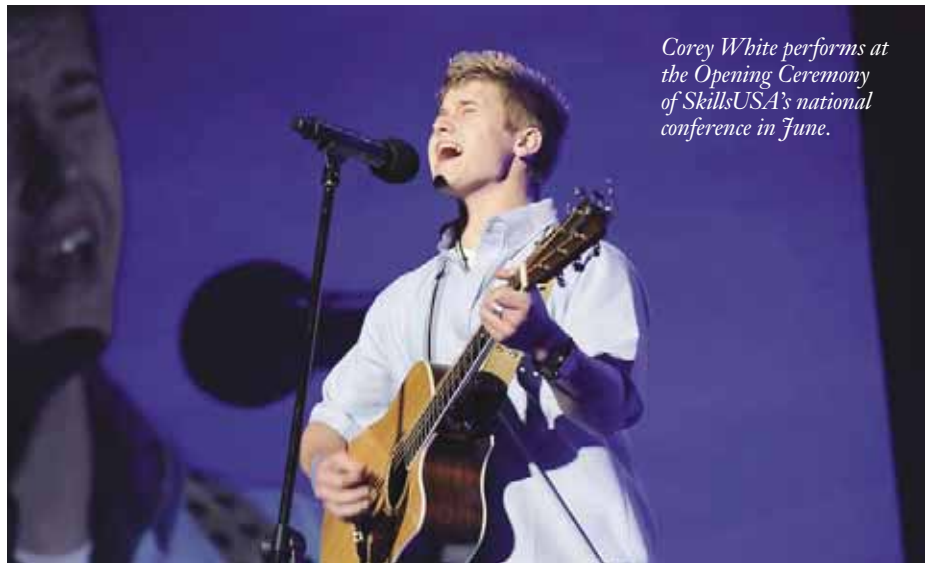
Oklahoma City's **VERONICA SENKOWSKI** finished a network technology program and moved on to cyber security. "Because of SkillsUSA, I graduated high school one credit hour away from my associate's degree in my field," she says. Now at Francis Tuttle Technology Center's Portland campus, Senkowski plans to start her own business soon, making jewelry out of (what else?) computer parts. Her ultimate goal? A company that creates fully automated "smart homes" combining computers and architectural engineering. ●



OFFICERS

Photo: Lloyd Wolf





Corey White performs at the Opening Ceremony of SkillsUSA's national conference in June.

BORN TO ENTERTAIN

Music is His Craft

By Craig E. Moore

Corey White started playing the guitar when he was just 8 years old. “As soon as I learned my first three chords, I said, ‘OK, I’m ready to play a show!’” he remembers.

That kind of confidence would offer White the chance of a lifetime just a few years later when he joined his idol, Willie Nelson, onstage for an impromptu duet. (More on that later.)

The Bixby, Okla., native began to play in front of audiences when a local group called Mid Life Crisis let him entertain the crowds between its sets. Before long, White was asked to join other young artists

in a western swing band called Oklahoma Stomp. He was only 11 at the time.

He honed his skill in the band, playing regularly at Cain’s Ballroom in Tulsa and touring the country.

For SkillsUSA member Corey White, music is a platform for leadership: “Music gets me in front of huge audiences. It’s what you do with those audiences that matters.”

“We played all over the U.S.,” White explains. “We opened for the Oak Ridge Boys in Kansas, played at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. That was my start in music.”

Not that all of it was easy. “Everyone has to pay their dues,” White acknowledges, even for someone starting so early in life. “By being in Oklahoma Stomp, I was able to play tiny shows and work my way up.”

After five years with the group, White decided to branch out on his own. As a Christmas present, his mother arranged a meeting with country music manager, agent and impresario Jim Halsey. White spoke with Halsey for a while and impressed him enough to be offered an internship.

Halsey, whose career spans more than 60 years, has worked with many recording

artists including Waylon Jennings, Reba McEntire, Clint Black, Tammy Wynette, Mel Tillis, Merle Haggard, Dwight Yoakum, the Judds and Lee Greenwood.

While interning for Halsey and his son Sherman, “I would play my music for them every chance I got,” White says. After several months, they decided to manage his career. “They [currently] only manage three acts,” White points out, “Roy Clark, the Oak Ridge Boys and myself.”

ON THE WEB

- ➔ Check out Corey White’s official website: www.coreywhitemusic.com
- ➔ White singing at SkillsUSA’s National Leadership and Skills Conference: www.tinyurl.com/4y8cmhj
- ➔ Watch his big moment onstage with Willie Nelson: www.youtube.com/watch?v=nld47buxjts

This has been a huge career boost for him. “Their endorsement automatically demands the respect of the music industry. They have incredible personal connections and were gracious enough to share those connections with me.”

A connection White made on his own was when he sang onstage with Willie Nelson. He got a ticket to the music legend’s show and made his way to the front row with a cardboard sign that read, “It’s my dream to play a song with you.”

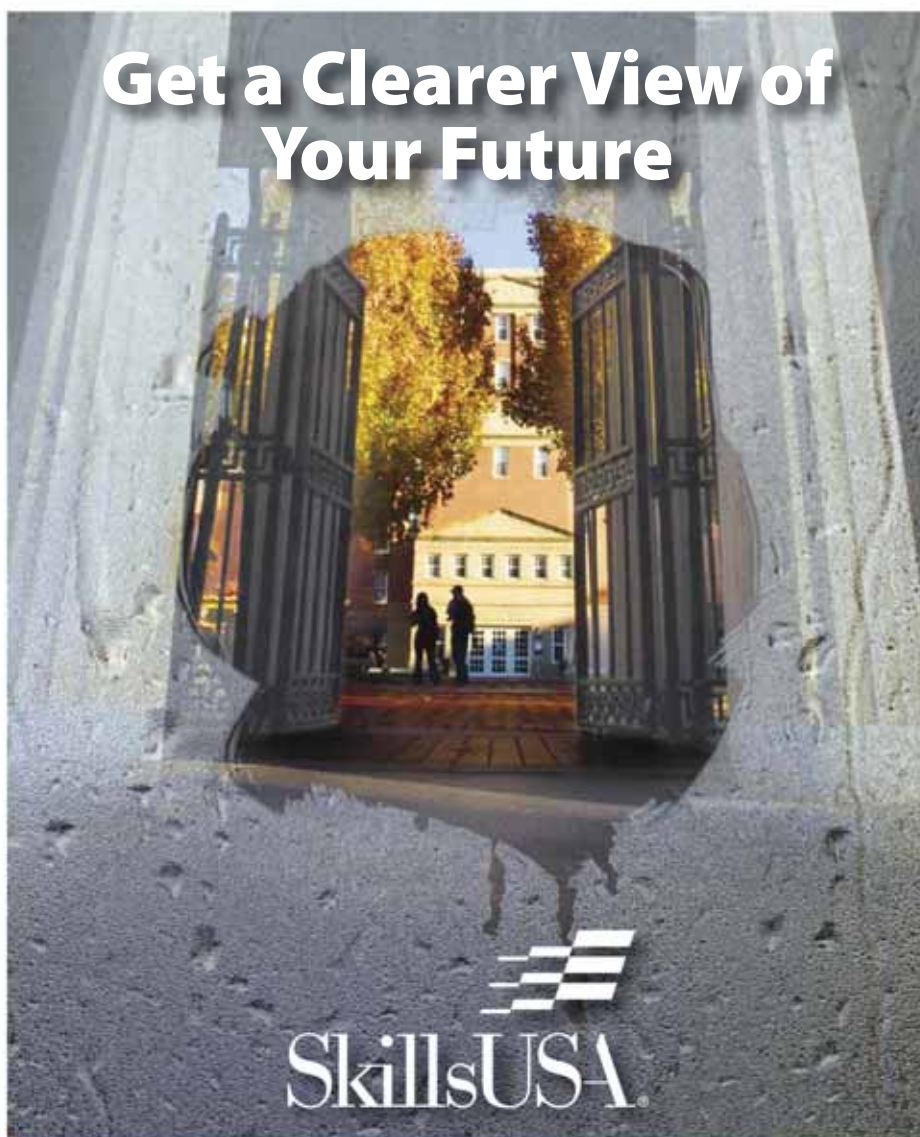
As White remembers, “I held it up for a good hour!”

Finally, Nelson leaned down and said, “What do you wanna play?”

“I said, ‘Milk Cow Blues,’” White recalls. “He said, ‘Come on up!’”

“Afterwards, he signed a bandana, which I gave to my grandpa, the biggest Willie fan ever.”

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Another unbelievable experience

White learned another side of the music industry as a broadcast sound engineering student at Tulsa Technology Center’s Riverside campus. He was introduced to SkillsUSA after hearing a former national officer, C.J. Wetzler, speak at the school’s kickoff event for career and technical student organizations.

“There were no competitions for our subject, so I was discouraged to join [at first],” White says. But Wetzler knew SkillsUSA offered other opportunities for students and convinced White to become a member anyway.

“C.J. is my mentor,” White now reflects. “He’s a huge advocate of SkillsUSA. He really encouraged me to join for the experience as well as the people!”

Wetzler suggested White represent his chapter and school as a performer during SkillsUSA’s National Leadership and Skills Conference. After submitting audition materials, White was selected to sing for the Advisor of the Year award segment of the Opening Ceremony. He describes the experience as “unbelievable!”

Now that he’s finished with high school — graduating early at 16 — White plans to spend the next couple of years focusing completely on his music career. Eventually, he plans to attend Belmont University in Nashville, Tenn.

White continues to strive for excellence. “Honestly, I believe performing is my trade,” he says. “I spend hours practicing my craft, trying to constantly improve.”

“As far as leadership goes, I see music as a platform. Music gets me in front of huge audiences. It is what you do in front of those audiences that matters.” ●

Opera singer? Anesthesiologist? She's keeping her options open



Photo: Lloyd Wolf

Kendra Lisec doesn't let fear stop her from trying new things.

Take performing. In June, she sang in front of more than 15,000 students, teachers and business partners at SkillsUSA's National Leadership and Skills Conference (NLSC) without seeming to bat an eye.

Speaking of bats, the same week Lisec sang the national anthem in a baseball stadium before a Kansas City Royals game (see photo, Page 9). Oh, and it was broadcast on TV, too. Was she scared?

"This was probably one of the most terrifying but also one of the most rewarding experiences," Lisec says.

"I had practiced and sang the national anthem many times, but of course it is a completely different feeling, singing in a stadium built for 37,000 people. I was extremely nervous."

But taking challenges two at a time is something Lisec seems to do.

For example, she's attending Campbell University in Buies Creek, N.C., as a double major in vocal performance and — wait for it — pre-medicine.

"Because I am double majoring in such different areas, I am taking a heavy class load," Lisec admits.

While that may be a *slight* understatement, she credits SkillsUSA's Professional Development Program with helping her handle such an intense schedule. PDP teaches crucial skills in goal setting and time management, but was it enough?

"The most important thing SkillsUSA taught me was to believe in myself," Lisec responds.

Her chapter advisor also provided a great support structure. When Lisec was a junior at West Johnston High School in Benson, N.C., Todd Thibault recognized her potential and encouraged her to get involved in SkillsUSA as a leader, competitor and performer.

"The next thing I knew, Mr. Thibault was pushing me to run for state office and audition to sing the national anthem at NLSC," she says.

Thibault, who's now a SkillsUSA advisor at Neuse Charter School in Smithfield, N.C., also convinced her to be a national officer. She served as last year's college/postsecondary secretary.

"There are many SkillsUSA advisors who support their students just as much as Mr. Thibault supported me," Lisec says. "We, the students, may not say it all of the time, but we truly appreciate everything you do." ●

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'DILIGENT STUDY, ARDENT PRACTICE'

Robert Figueroa grew up surrounded by gangs. He and his twin brother became involved by proximity.

"It's not that I chose that life," explains the resident of Florida's Gulf Coast. "It's just, you chill with those people, and then everyone assumes you're in a gang."

His parents did everything they could to stop him and his brother, Figueroa adds. "I promise you, they punished us. We were just too dumb. We didn't care."

Gang members "put you on the spot," he says. "They tell you, 'You're either with us or against us.' Either way, you get beat up. I got jumped at 11 years old. Three people jump you; they jump you to see if you'll fight back or if you're going to be too scared. I went home that day and my mom started crying. She looked at me. She already knew."

Fast forward seven years. "At the time, I was working construction," Figueroa remembers, "and I had bought a brand-new car. I was driving down a dark street — real dark — and somebody threw a rock at the car, so I stopped. My brother, he gets out and he starts cussing ... and it was a whole party of people. I got out, thinking nothing was going to happen."

"We started fighting, and the next thing you know, somebody pulls a shotgun. He pulled the gun on my face, and I was like, 'If you're going to shoot me, shoot me.' And he shot me."

That was two years ago. "You can see, I still have BBs," Figueroa refers to the gun pellets that riddled his face. "They got me in the eye. I got shot in my teeth."

Eventually requiring four surgeries, his recovery was long and painful. The brothers tried to put the shooting behind them. Hoping it would cheer him, their mother took Robert on a visit to her native Honduras, since only their immediate family members were living in the United States. His twin stayed behind.

"We flew to Honduras. I met all my family," he says. Returning from a walk one evening, he found everyone crying. "My mom just tells me, 'Your best friend and your brother are dead.'"

Robert Figueroa's life was marred by gang violence until it was nearly taken from him. Now, moved by words in a different creed, he's fighting for a future with a career and family.

BY ANN P. SCHREIBER



“My brother got shot. It was three streets from where I got shot.”

According to Figueroa, his brother and his friend had been in a fight before the shooting but managed to escape. As the two walked on a main road, the shooters allegedly drove by, then opened fire with an automatic weapon.

“My brother was shot 17 times,” he remembers, “and my friend was shot five times. While I was at the funeral, I was like, ‘I don’t know what to do with my life.’ My mom asked me, ‘What are you going to do now?’”

Figueroa pauses. “Then she told me, ‘Why don’t you go back to school?’”

Healing

Figueroa visited Vicki Miller at Manatee Technical Institute (MTI) in Bradenton, explaining what had happened. Miller arranged for him to attend without tuition. Signing up for David Stinnette’s classes in boat and yacht building and repair, he got involved in SkillsUSA.

The student credits Stinnette for helping him succeed. “He’s counseled me,” he says. “He’s told me some wise stuff.”

His emotional and physical scars now healing, his eyesight returning, Figueroa filled in for a contestant on MTT’s Opening and Closing Ceremonies team. Soon after competing at the SkillsUSA Championships in Kansas City, Mo., he recites part of the SkillsUSA creed used in that contest: *“To prepare myself by diligent study and ardent practice ...*

“Just the first sentence makes so much sense to me in my life. If you want to be prepared, you’ve got to study. You’ve got to be ready. You’ve got to be willing. You’ve got to want it.

“I came to school and it flipped my whole life around,” Figueroa points out. “I never in my life ever thought that I would be in Kansas City, never thought that I’d be competing. I never thought I’d leave Florida.

“I don’t know, when stuff like that [gang violence] happens to you and then you have new people surrounding you [at MTTI] ... your mind develops, you mature. You’re like, ‘You know what, I don’t have to live the life I lived before.’ Now I can get on a boat and go fishing, go bowling. I never did things like this as a kid.”

Figueroa now has his sights set on working in the boat building field and getting paid for doing something he loves. He doesn’t want pity, and he doesn’t want to work around grouchy people. “It makes life harder,” he explains. “My ideal is to live life, get married, have a family and have kids.

“Before, I never smiled. Now when I sleep, I twitch and I’m smiling. That’s how happy I am. I never in my life thought that I’d be doing this.” ●

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A Best Case Scenario

By E. Thomas Hall

Consistency and enthusiasm are very much in evidence when this instructor is on the scene. These and other traits make SkillsUSA advisors the best in the nation



Photo: Lloyd Wolf

Finding human remains. Locating murder weapons. Fighting international terrorism. Not many students can claim to do that — unless they're taught by Mark American Horse, SkillsUSA's advisor of the year.

American Horse, who traces his ancestry back to a Sioux chief, teaches criminal justice at Central Technology Center in Sapulpa, Okla. For 11 years, he's had full classrooms, with 100-percent SkillsUSA membership, to the point of often having to turn students away.

"My students are outstanding recruiters," he explains. While they're on what American Horse calls a small satellite campus, their influence is wide-ranging. His students helped get a new chapter started at another school last year, and American Horse has been mentoring and presenting to new teachers for the past 10.

SkillsUSA is "a professionalism training course," he says. "It allows me to not only teach my students their craft but also how to take that craft out into the world and be successful once they get there. Because what's really the evaluation of me as a teacher is how successful they are once they leave my program."

His former students want to give back immediately. One state trooper, who was recently involved in a chase that ended with a shooting, is proof of that.

ON THE WEB

- ➔ Before being named national advisor of the year, Mark American Horse was the winner in SkillsUSA's Region 4. Learn more about the program at: www.skillsusa.org/educators/aoy.shtml
- ➔ Contact your state association director to nominate your advisor for next year's award. Find your state at: www.skillsusa.org/about/dir4.shtml
- ➔ Even if you're a new advisor, SkillsUSA offers lots of resources at: www.skillsusa.org/educators/newadvisors.shtml

The instructor remembers, “He came back to my classroom before going home that night to let them know, ‘Pay attention to what you learn in the classroom, *because this happened*, and while it was happening, it reminded me of a scenario that Mr. American Horse was talking about. So I positioned my car over to the side and shined my light over.”

The trooper’s act, American Horse adds, “wound up saving his life, because the guy had set up an ambush for him. So, I know they want to give back to the classroom.”

His current students have assisted in real homicide investigations. When the local sheriff’s department was searching for the body of a young woman that had been dumped in a wooded area, “they asked us to come out there and help find it, and my students were actually able to recover the body,” the instructor says. In another local case, his class demonstrated a grid search that helped locate in 45 minutes a shotgun, used in a double murder, that had been missing for three weeks.

The students, some as young as 16, must get written parental permission before embarking on such investigations. While

“That’s just a shell. That person is no longer there, and this is the last thing that you can do for that person: to make sure that they get back to the family.”

there haven’t been any negative reactions, a counselor is close by, just in case. “The people who have problems are the ones that internalize it, hold it in, don’t want to talk about it, try to put it in the back of their minds,” he says. They always have a “very detailed debriefing” afterward.

“With the students, at the very beginning we’re talking about forensic science and recovering bodies, forensic anthropology and remains, and things like that,” he adds. “Over a period of time, they start to get a little desensitized to it.

“But the spin that I put on it is, ‘That’s just a shell. That person is no longer there, and this is the last thing that you can do for that person: to make sure that they get back to the family.’”

His class has taught law enforcement professionals a thing or two. Students wrote their own curriculum on lifting fingerprints and presented it to local officers who hadn’t had that training.

“For my students to pass, their ‘student’ from industry had to score 85 percent or better on the written exam and 90 percent on the competency-based examination,” American Horse says. “We got it certified by the Council on Law Enforcement Education and Training, so my students were able to give them a certificate.”

They’re also pioneering virtual reality technology in the classroom. “We don’t just take a picture of the crime scene,” he explains. “We’ll take a picture of the evidence and move it five degrees at a time.” Investigators can later look all around it, zooming in close enough to see fingerprints. “That’s something that we’re trying to bring out into the industry now.”

In an annual project, his students create a scenario in which they create a terrorist organization in theory, then involve SkillsUSA members from other states in its investigation. “We set the network up so that people are doing coordinated SWAT team operations across time zones,” the instructor says.

“We’ve gotten the attention of the FBI, the Joint Counterterrorism Task Force. They come along and actually use it as kind of a sandbox to work in, because they asked us, ‘Can you do a Weapons of Mass Destruction spin on this?’ And I said, ‘Yes, I can.’ So we figured that into the scenario.”

Consistency and excitement

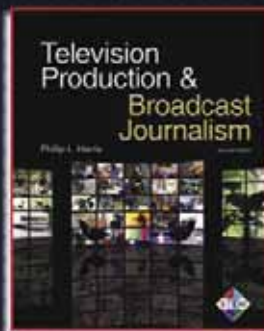
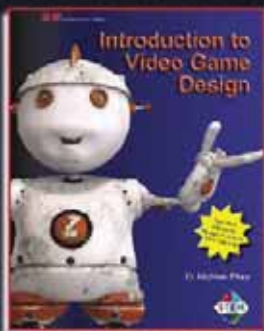
The SkillsUSA advisor believes it’s important to be consistent so students know what to expect. “I think my colleagues would say that I’m excited about being at work every day and they can tell that. And I think that’s important to a student, because if they see that you’re excited to be there, they’re excited to be there.”

American Horse has had other exciting jobs — military parachutist, SWAT team leader and security director for a luxury hotel — but none more rewarding.

“I’ve been invited to every graduation,” he says. “Every one of my students that has gotten married, I’ve gotten an invitation. I’ve been in five wedding parties, and I’ve given two brides away. And you can’t put a price on that to me.” ●

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WHAT MAKES A GREAT SKILLSUSA ADVISOR?

Organization. “Almost to the point of nauseating redundancy” is how CAROL OLSEN, SkillsUSA’s Region 1 finalist in the Advisor of the Year program, describes it. “I had a student come back and say to me, ‘Mrs. Olsen, you torture me with all your organization. I’ve got to tell you, it was the best thing that ever happened to me once I hit college.’” Her graphic arts students at Cape Cod Regional Technical High School in Harwich, Mass., have painted snowboards to raise \$2,000 for an autism foundation. They also put on a popular, annual craft fair that showcases their skills to the community.



Optimism. “What a lot of my students see in me is that, ‘Mr. O, you’re always happy,’” says Region 5 finalist OSCAR OLIVAS. From keeping a refrigerator stocked for his construction trades students at Peoria (Ariz.) High School, to pulling a trailer bearing their photos as they carry out local service projects, Olivas makes them feel at home. “We can give the kids all the knowledge in the world, but it’s got to come from the heart, and it doesn’t come from the heart until they experience it,” he adds. “I think that’s what is so important in career and tech ed: it’s hands-on application and it’s relevant.”

Compassion. “I will find you and I will make sure you graduate,” Thomas Washburn stresses to his Centennial High School students in suburban Atlanta. Toward that goal, the Region 2 finalist, who got his Ph.D. in mentoring, pairs incoming freshmen with seniors who have similar backgrounds. The law and justice instructor needed a mentor when he started teaching and had to write the curriculum. At the diverse, comprehensive school, he’s earned the academic teachers’ respect. “I have students for three or four years, which is nice,” Washburn says. “That way, I get to be a real part of their lives.”

Dedication. “Our area is so small,” says Region 3 finalist MARY MOTZ. But this cosmetology instructor runs her SkillsUSA program as a partnership of students with industry, even if the closest JC Penney salon is an hour’s drive away. In her 23 years at Huron Area Technical Center in Bad Axe,

Mich., she’s had to be resourceful, from rescuing yard-sale mirrors for school labs to breaking in administrators who “don’t get our competition and how important it is for the students,” Motz adds. “They don’t have to make it to nationals, but having them get as far as they can, that’s our pat on the back.” ●



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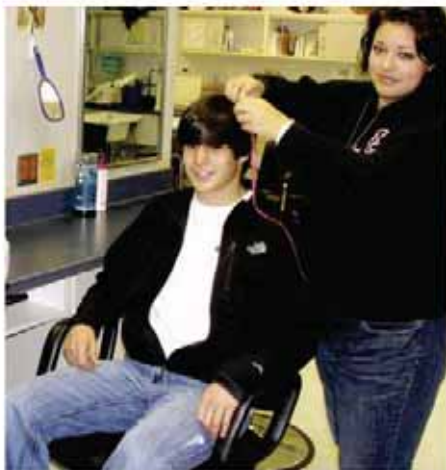
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A GIFT TO SHOW ASSAULT VICTIMS SOMEONE CARES

SkillsUSA members at Clearfield (Pa.) County Career and Technology Center help a local rape crisis center offer “care kits.” When victims arrive at the hospital after an assault, their clothes are kept as police evidence, so the kits provide replacement clothing and toiletries.

Felicity Cowfer, Renee Fisch and Cierra Gillingham organized a benefit dance for the crisis center and raised more than \$235 to buy clothing for the care kits. Students also collected toiletry items at the dance and placed collection cans with information about the center at area businesses. ●



Even the male students signed up for pink hair extensions during Etowah High’s fundraiser to help eradicate breast cancer.

Pink hair for a cause

To benefit their county breast cancer foundation, cosmetology students at Etowah High School in Attalla, Ala., offered pink hair extensions for \$3 each. SkillsUSA members, teaming with the school’s other career and technical student organizations (who held separate fundraisers), collectively raised \$437. ●

Rolling for dough

At their school’s 23rd annual bowl-a-thon, students at Calvert County Career and Technology Academy in Prince Frederick, Md., brought in a grand total of \$10,000 to cover SkillsUSA travel expenses. At these events, each lane costs \$150 for two hours of bowl time. In addition, bowlers who register for the day’s events can win door prizes ranging from bottles of wine to gift certificates at local restaurants. Participants who get a strike in a lane with a red-topped pin also win \$5 and a free bowling game. ●



(From left) students Ashley Slaughter, Johanna Buchanna, Keyonta Brown, Aislynn Barnes and Camille Link enjoy their school’s traditional bowl-a-thon.

Annual projects remember 9/11

Each year, students at Tulsa (Okla.) Technology Center’s Lemley Campus construct tribute walls to the victims of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. According to masonry instructor Chauncey Kila, the students return to school



in August and have until Sept. 11 to complete their project. Because Kila has one morning and one evening class of beginner students, each works on its own project, resulting in two tribute walls. “I tell my students that one way to be successful in life is to be committed to your job. I use the 9/11 event as an example,” Kila says. “When people were rushing to get out of the towers, firefighters and policemen were rushing to go in, because they were committed to saving lives even if it cost them their own.” ●

The *Future's* Foundation Depends on *Education*

Every 26 seconds in the United States, a student drops out of high school. But studies show that career and technical education students are *more* likely to stay in school. Why do you think that is?

As a class, split into small groups and discuss why students consider dropping out. Write down the best comments.

Next, identify what it is about involvement in CTE that makes students more likely to graduate. Use examples from your own SkillsUSA experience.

Regroup as a class and talk about what you learned. Then share your thoughts with a wide audience at www.26seconds.com, home of the BMOR (“Be More”) project designed by State Farm and America’s Promise Alliance. On this new website, students can encourage peers to graduate. They can also enter challenges on the 26th of each month for prizes like iTunes downloads and gift cards. SkillsUSA is one of 16 organizations invited to participate, so log on and make a difference. ●



Photo: Lloyd Wolf

Education is a better safeguard of liberty than a standing army.

— EDWARD EVERETT

Find the photo, win a prize



No, the picture on the left isn’t abstract art. It’s actually a distorted part of another photo in this issue. Find the original photo and send us the page number where it appears to win a SkillsUSA pen and pad set (first prize) or travel mug (second prize). To enter, email your answer, name, address and phone number to: anyinfo@skillsusa.org (include “Photo Contest” in the subject line). Or, send to: SkillsUSA Photo Contest, 14001 SkillsUSA Way, Leesburg, VA 20176. One first- and one second-prize winner will be drawn at random from the correct entries. Entries must be received by Nov. 15. **Congratulations to last issue’s winners: Danny Sandbeck of Fargo, N.D., and Janice Hall of Memphis, Tenn.** ●

SkillsUSA Champions features our members' photography. We're looking for images of SkillsUSA chapters in action, or ones that show individual members' concentration or perseverance. For details, email thall@skillsusa.org (put "Image Photo" in the subject header) or write SkillsUSA Champions, 14001 SkillsUSA Way, Leesburg, VA 20176. The photographer's chapter is awarded \$150. ●

SkillsUSA Texas delegate Erik Noguez (front) fuels the energy during the "parade of champions" at the 2011 National Leadership and Skills Conference. Photographer Larry Stephens of Dubiski Career High School in Grand Prairie, Texas, captured the moment.



Photo: Larry Stephens

TEAMWORK, SIMPLY STATED, IS LESS "ME" — IT'S MORE "WE." THAT'S WHAT SKILLSUSA IS ABOUT.

NEW SKILLSUSA NATIONAL OFFICER KATHRYN BERRY, GROVEPORT, OHIO

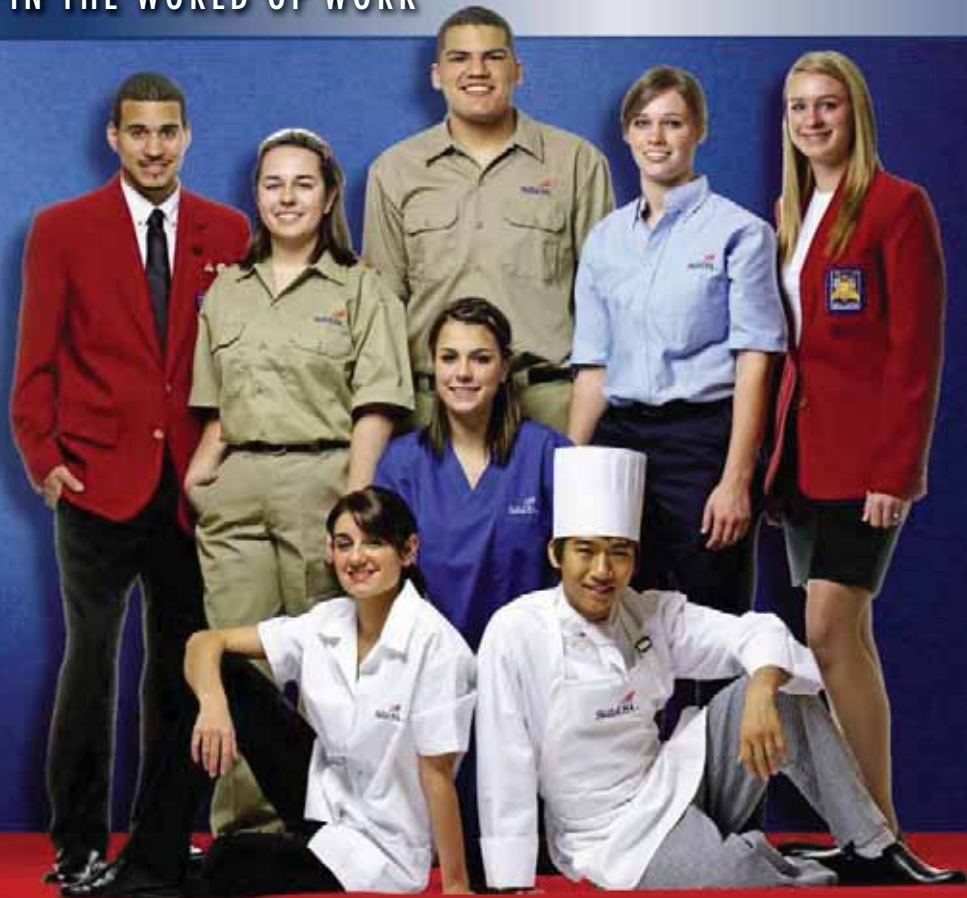
You're not a program if you're just a shop. If you don't have that CTSO [career and technical student organization] behind you, then you're not a program.

OSCAR OLIVAS, SKILLSUSA ADVISOR, PEORIA (ARIZ.) HIGHT SCHOOL

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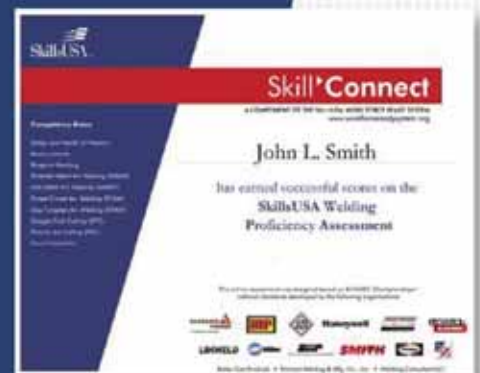
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