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NLSC Review/Bringing Home Gold
Experience the best of the National Leadership and Skills Conference. Then see who won every competition in the annual SkillsUSA Championships.

BY CRAIG E. MOORE

New Officers: Rising to the Challenge
Meet the 15 students who are representing all SkillsUSA members nationwide this year.

BY E. THOMAS HALL

Pick Just One? Advisor of the Year
Encountering any of these great teachers is a memorable experience. Find out which students they’ll never forget.

BY ANN P. SCHREIBER

Her Heart is Racing
Wendy Venturini (pictured on TV with SkillsUSA’s Tim Lawrence) longed for a career that was related to NASCAR but couldn’t find the right track … that is, until the future racing personality ran into her high-school SkillsUSA chapter.

BY TOM KERCHEVAL

On the Cover:
SkillsUSA Champion Lowell Rose of Richmond, Va. Photo by Lloyd Wolf.
Executive Director Tim Lawrence has known SkillsUSA as a student member, instructor, industry partner and state director. Got a question? He can help.

Q: I’ve heard that “it takes 20 years of hard work to become an ‘overnight success.’” How can I speed it up? Tim: As you begin this new school year, I want you to believe that this is the start of something big. Only by making big plans can you move forward on your path in life.

Sometimes it’s hard to see beyond the short term — this week, this month or this year. Try picturing yourself in 10 years. Where do you work? Have you met your educational and personal goals? Are you happy? If you establish a pathway now, it will be much easier to create that future.

This issue of SkillsUSA Champions introduces some incredible people who a few years ago were in your position. Our new national student officers were trying to figure out the future, where they would go and what they would do. Then something big happened: they found SkillsUSA and a mentor who helped focus their efforts and clarify their goals. Our exemplary instructors, like the Advisor of the Year finalists also in this issue, work to help students like you find a path in life.

You’ll also meet TV commentator Wendy Venturini. A SkillsUSA advisor helped her discover a talent for public speaking, then nurtured it until she was a national medalist. While it took a path of hard work in less glamorous jobs, today Venturini is making a name for herself.

Deciding to participate in the SkillsUSA Championships, or taking a Skill Connect assessment in your technical area, can help you improve your skills and document them for a future employer. The national gold medalists listed in this issue started by making that decision. Some of them may continue the process by going on to the WorldSkills Competition. Our recent competitors in Calgary brought home two silver medals and four medallions of excellence — our best showing in years.

SkillsUSA offers many opportunities for you to set short- and long-term goals and create your own path, including our Professional Development Program. These tools are helpful, but the most powerful are the people with whom you surround yourself. Seek out mentors. Don’t be afraid to ask your instructor for help and guidance. Do your part to form a meaningful relationship that helps you succeed in your personal and professional goals, whatever they may be.

How you capitalize on these opportunities is up to you. Dream big, and allow yourself a few years to develop into an “overnight success.”

Got questions about SkillsUSA or other topics? E-mail anyinfo@skillsusa.org or send a letter to the address on the facing page. Put “Ask Tim” in the subject line or mail address.
SkillsUSA Competitors

Earn Pride At WorldSkills

The WorldSkills Competition has been called “a celebration for skills success,” and, this year, SkillsUSA played a larger role in that celebration than ever before. The 16-member SkillsUSA WorldTeam was the biggest to date, and the just-in-at-press-time results of the competition in Calgary, Alberta, are worth celebrating!

Jack Frederick of Kansas earned a silver medal in Automotive Service Technology, and Joe Young (Michigan) earned silver in Welding. Medallions of excellence were awarded to Amela Mujkic (Michigan) in Printing, Ben Janke (Wisconsin) in Car Painting, Craig Growney (New Jersey) in Cooking and Jennifer Miaczynski (Illinois) in Hairdressing.

SkillsUSA celebrates the amazing achievements of the entire SkillsUSA WorldTeam. Relive their life-changing adventure at: www.skillsusa.org/compete/worldteam09.shtml.

SkillsUSA and Lowe’s are jointly awarding Sed de Saber grants to local SkillsUSA chapters, and SkillsUSA is currently seeking schools interested in implementing Sed de Saber as a community service program. What is “Sed de Saber”? The phrase means “thirst for knowledge,” and the program is an interactive English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) learning system. It fosters a more skilled work force and reduces Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) violations, accidents and injuries. To find out how your school can apply for a Sed de Saber grant for up to $10,000, visit: www.skillsusa.org/educators/seddesaber.shtml.

The SkillsUSA team’s performance at the WorldSkills Competition is cause for celebration: two silver medals and four “medallions of excellence.”
Fall 2009  SkillsUSA Champions

A BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESSFUL JOB HUNTERS

In a tough economy, the odds of finding a good job are tougher than ever. But Nora Spencer, Lowe's senior college recruiter, has written an article designed to help you improve those odds. “Job Search Triumph in a ‘Tough Economy’” is now available on SkillsUSA’s Job Board (sponsored by NEW) at: www.skillsusa.org/about/employment.shtml.

When it comes to building your job search, Spencer suggests that job seekers “start simple — get on the Web,” especially the more well-known sites like Monster.com and CareerBuilder.com. But, Spencer is quick to point out, check the individual Web sites of the companies that interest you, too.

Spencer also cites another important, but often overlooked, resource: local career fairs.

“Show up dressed for success and armed with a stack of simple, professional looking résumés,” she says. “And if a company you like is attending, make it a point to speak to them, even if they don’t have open positions that fit your interests.”

Spencer also cautions young job-seekers not to expect their dream job immediately. The important thing, she says, is to get your foot in the door, even if that means accepting an entry-level position that’s not exactly what you were hoping for in the long-run. (See Wendy Venturini’s story on Page 20 for a perfect example of this good advice.)

Be sure to check out the full article for many more helpful hints, and be sure to make SkillsUSA’s Job Board a part of your job-hunting arsenal.

Calculating Their Winnings

Calculated Industries just released the results of their “Invented in the USA” scholarship competition for SkillsUSA members. Contestants were asked to submit designs for a new calculator that would be useful to the trades represented by SkillsUSA. Justin Levi Gordon of Fulton County Area Vocational Technical School in Mckinneysburg, Pa., took home the first-place prize of $1,000 with his unique construction/scientific calculator combo. Second, third and honorable mention prizes were also awarded. Learn more about this unique “student inventor” competition at: www.calculated.com/scholarship/.

New Year Brings A New Store

A new school year means many things, and one of those things is shopping. That’s why the grand opening of the new-look, newly stocked SkillsUSA online store is so timely.

Featuring an array of brand-new products, from fashion apparel to accessories to gift items, the new SkillsUSA Store will help you show off your SkillsUSA pride to the world. Even the legendary red blazer has received an upgrade, featuring a lighter-weight fabric, personalized labeling and custom buttons.

Check out the new inventory at: www.skillsusastore.org. Visit often, because new products will be added frequently. For help with the site or special item requests, call the dedicated customer service team at: 1-800-401-1560. Happy new year!
NLSC MAKES HISTORY AGAIN IN KANSAS CITY

Bigger than ever. That’s probably the easiest way to describe SkillsUSA’s 2009 National Leadership and Skills Conference. It was a perfect capstone to the record-shattering 307,052 members for the 2008-09 school year.

With almost 15,000 people descending on the greater Kansas City, Mo., area, more than 5,300 competitors and 91 competitions, one might think there couldn’t be anything bigger to talk about. However, the Opening Ceremony included such a moment: a $1.5 million contribution from the Lowe’s Charitable and Educational Foundation, the largest single corporate contribution in the history of SkillsUSA.

But the NLSC isn’t just about getting bigger, it’s also about getting better. Opening Ceremony keynote speaker Stephen Paletta, philanthropist and winner of the “Oprah’s Big Give” TV show, urged students to become “champions of significance.”

On the last day, more than 450 participants fanned out to give back to the city that hosts the conference. This service event was sponsored by Timberland PRO for the eighth consecutive year.

At the conference’s final night, the Awards Ceremony, SkillsUSA champions received the gold, silver and bronze symbols of their incredible accomplishments — sure to yield many more rewards in the years ahead.

To relive the excitement, view the Opening and Awards ceremonies in their complete form at: www.skillsusa.org/events/nlscvideo.shtml. And go to www.skillsusa.org/store/ this fall for a conference DVD.

(Reported by Craig E. Moore)
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2009 NLSC Honorees

Honorary Life Members: Glenn Barefoot, SkillsUSA North Carolina director; Tony Glenn, SkillsUSA board member from Nebraska; Don Hatton, U.S. liaison to the WorldSkills organization; Paul Williams, SkillsUSA board member from Rhode Island

Advisor of the Year: John Crosby, Lassen High School, Susanville, Calif. (see story, Page 17)

Outstanding Educators: Dean Blevins, Kingsport (Tenn.) City Schools; Clare Ciliano, L.A. Wilson Technology Center, Newport, N.Y.; Mark Murphy, Hart Career Center, Mexico, Mo.

Student2Student Mentoring Grand Prize Chapter: Delcastle Technical High School, Wilmington, Del.

President’s Volunteer Service Award (gold level): Bill Bauer, Hackensack, N.J.; Jonathan Jones, Decatur, Ga.; Tanesha McArthur, Columbus, Ga.; Robert Ockenden, Fairport, N.Y.; Kaitlin Tenerella and Gianna Velino, Cranston, R.I.; Laura Woo and Michelle Woo, Troutdale, Ore.

Pat Dalton Outstanding Achievement Award: Kelly Persons, Lowe’s Charitable and Educational Foundation

Torch Carrier Award: Roger Cada, State Farm Insurance Companies; Cameron Ferguson, Caterpillar Inc.
**ACTION SKILLS:** Michelle Gosselin, Montachusett Regional Vocational-Technical High School (RVTHS), Fitchburg, Mass.; Samantha Hall, Central Career and Technical Center, Drummort, Okla.

**AUDIO/VIDEO PRODUCTION:** Jonathan Solis/Hilleigh Armenta, Ben Barber Career Center, Mansfield, Texas; Bryan Sansom/Skylar Haws, Utah Valley University, Orem, Utah

**AUTOMATED MANUFACTURING TECHNOLOGY:** (teams) River Valley Technical Center, Springfield, VT.; Tulsa Technology Center, Broken Arrow, Okla.

**AUTOMOTIVE REFINISHING TECHNOLOGY:** Kayla Tonick, Career Institute of Technology, Easton, Pa.; Phil Davie, Washhtenaw Community College, Ann Arbor, Mich.

**AUTOMOTIVE SERVICE TECHNOLOGY:** Tony Foley, Central Campus High School, Des Moines, Iowa; George Heindl, Madison (Wis.) Area Tech College

**AVIATION MAINTENANCE TECHNOLOGY:** Elliott Ott, Aviation Center, Swanton, Ohio; Donald Qualls, Greenville (S.C.) Technical College

**BASE HEALTH CARE SKILLS:** Elizabeth Nunez, W.M. Davies Jr Career and Technical High School, Lincoln, R.I.; **BROADCAST NEWS PRODUCTION:** (teams) Arlington (Va.) Career Center, Coffeyville (Kan.) Community College; **BUILDING MAINTENANCE:** Robert Taylor, Mid-East Career and Technology Center, Zanesville, Ohio; Michael Schmidt, Western Technology Center, Burns Flat, Okla.

**CABINETMAKING:** Benjamin Wilde, MacArthur High School, San Antonio, Texas; Chase Trayal, Meridian (Miss.) Community College

**CARPENTRY:** Jake Richards, Butte (Mont.) High School; Tyler Wingen, South Central College, Faribault, Minn.

**CHAPTER BUSINESS PROCEDURE:** (teams) Natrona County High School, Casper, Wyo.; Utah Valley University, Orem, Utah

**CHAPTER DISPLAY:** (teams) Bethlehem Area Vocational-Technical School (AVTS), Northampton, Pa.; Gordon Cooper Technology Center, Shawnee, Okla.

**CNC MILLING TECHNOLOGY:** Joseph Pusdevis, Romeo Engineering and Technology Center, Washington, Mich.; Joseph King, Calhoon Community College, Huntsville, Ala.

**CNC TURNING TECHNOLOGY:** Corrie Albergaaria, Diman RVTHS, Fall River, Mass.; Amber Heintz, Boise State University, Idaho

**COMMERCIAL BAKING:** Andrew Coen, Minuteman Regional High School (RHS), Lexington, Mass.; Mateusz Plaza, Culinary Institute of America, Hyde Park, N.Y.

**COMMUNITY SERVICE:** (teams) Blackstone Valley RVTHS, Upton, Mass.; Sarasota (Fla.) County Tech Institute

**COMPUTER MAINTENANCE TECHNOLOGY:** Christopher Jaques, Auburn (Wash.) Riverside High School; Theo Walston, J.F. Drake State Technical College, Huntsville, Ala.

**COMPUTER PROGRAMMING:** Thomas White, Meridian (Idaho) Charter High School; Peter Corcoran, Lawson State Community College, Birmingham, Ala.

**COMPUTER SECURITY:** Laina Call, Ogden-Weber Applied Technology College, Ogden, Utah; Kendra Roberts, Somerset Community College, Laurel Campus, London, Ky.

**CRIME SCENE INVESTIGATION:** (teams) Aiken County Career Center, Warrenville, S.C.; Serena Illinois Central College, East Peoria, Ill.; **CRIMINAL JUSTICE:** William Rochester, B.J. Skelton Career Center, Easley, S.C.; Brett Christiansen, Utah Valley University, Orem, Utah

**CULINARY ARTS:** Katelyn Christiansen, Blackstone Valley RVTHS; Brie Pullini, Honors Career and Technical Center, Cheektowaga, N.Y.; Chris Castro, Central New Mexico Community College, Albuquerque

**CUSTOMER SERVICE:** Amelia Fleming, Hart County High School, Hartwell, Ga.; Tony Patrick, Warrensburg (Mo.) Area Career Center

**DENTAL ASSISTING:** Katelyn Christiansen, Blackstone Valley RVTHS; Brie Pullini, Honors Career and Technical Center, Cheektowaga, N.Y.; Casey Muhlestein, Utah Valley University, Orem, Utah

**ELECTRONICS APPLICATIONS:** Matthew Wilson, Davis H. Hart Career Center, Mexico, Mo.; Drew Collins, Linn (Mo.) State Technical College

**ELECTRONICS TECHNOLOGY:** Spencer Crockett, Parkside High School, Salisbury, Md.; Jason Milliser, Central Nine Career Center, Greenwood, Ind.

**EMPLOYMENT APPLICATION PROCESS:** Megan Evely, Frederick (Md.) County Career and Tech Center; Brian Roberts, Lamar Institute of Technology, Beaumont, Texas

**ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY:** (teams) Davis H. Hart Career Center, Mexico, Mo.; Utah Valley University, Orem, Utah

**ENTREPRENEURSHIP:** (teams) Somerset County Vo-Tech, Bridgewater, N.J.; Manatee Tech Institute, Bradenton, Fla.

**ESTHETICS:** Ana Plasencia, North Mecklenburg High School, Huntersville, N.C.; Raychel Bland, Lurleen B. Wallace Community College, Opp, Ala.

**EXTemporaneous speaking:** Wade Coffman, Eastland Career Center, Groveport, Ohio; Jason Anderson, Northland Career Center, Platte City, Mo.

**FIREFIGHTING:** Robert Jones, Austin High School, El Paso, Texas; Steven Ryckman, Manatee Tech Institute, Bradenton, Fla.

**FIRST AID/CPR:** Tyler Nadeau, United Technologies Center, Bangor, Maine; Erin Parisen, Metropolitan Community College, Omaha, Neb.

**FOOD AND BEVERAGE SERVICE:** Melissa Rubincum, Delcastle Tech High School, Wilmington, Del.; Emily Spiller, Ozarks Technical Community College, Springfield, Mo.

**GEOSPATIAL TECHNOLOGY:** Timothy Hales, Central Piedmont Community College, Charlotte, N.C.

**GRAPHIC COMMUNICATIONS:** John Utinowicz, Royal Oak (Mich.) High School; Brandon Noll, Illinois Central College, East Peoria

**HEALTH KNOWLEDGE BOWL:** (teams) Southwest Vermont Career Development Center, Bennington, Vt.; Ouauchita Tech College, Malvern, Ark.

**HEALTH OCCUPATIONS PROFESSIONAL PORTFOLIO:** Jenny Diaz, W.M. Davies Jr Career and Technical High School, Lincoln, R.I.; Stephanie Miller, Tennessee Technology Center, Athens

**HEATING, VENTILATION, AIR CONDITIONING AND REFRIGERATION:** John Huhn, Paul M. Hodgson Vo-Tech, Newark, Del.; Ryan Reekers, Des Moines Area Community College, Ankeny, Iowa

**INDUSTRIAL MOTOR CONTROL:** Andrew Peters, Miami Valley Career Tech Center, Clayton, Ohio; Ben Marse, Northwestern Iowa Community College, Sheldon

**INTERNETWORKING:** Matthew Vicari, South Tech Ed Center, Boynton Beach, Fla.; Vernon Depee, North Carolina State University, Raleigh

**JOB INTERVIEW:** Keanna Mosley, Duncanville (Texas) High School; Sarah-Jane Thaxton, Jones County Junior College, Ellisville, Miss.

**JOB SKILL DEMONSTRATION:** (teams) Kelly Carreiro, Diman RVTHS, Fall River, Mass.; Frank Cowgill, Pueblo (Colo.) Community College

**JOB SKILL DEMONSTRATION OPEN:** Daniel Cullen, Colonial Heights (Va.) Vocational Center, Gabriel Gardner, Tennessee Technology Center, Chattanooga

**MAJOR APPLIANCE TECHNOLOGY:** Roberto Laza, Robert Morgan Educational Center, Miami, Fla.; Joe Graupman, Hibbing (Minn.) Community College

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While coming from all corners of the country, SkillsUSA’s student leaders have a lot in common — starting with a dream

By E. Thomas Hall

Finding the confidence to speak in public and the support to campaign for a leadership position is not easy. Just ask any of SkillsUSA’s 15 national officers. Andrew Zigler of New Braunfels, Texas, had three SkillsUSA advisors in as many years and worked hard to get each new one involved. Ruben Amador of Las Cruces, N.M., wound up running his high-school chapter himself after his advisor left. All the officers will tell you that without the support of an advisor and a state association, getting elected is impossible.

“When I do just the basic math in my head, it comes out to over 2,000 days that I’ve been dreaming or working toward this one year,” Amador says.

And then there are the unexpected setbacks during campaigns at the National Leadership and Skills Conference. While in Kansas City, Cody McPherson of Sapulpa, Okla., got the call that his father had been hospitalized. “That happened on Monday and then I had to go through the rest of the week campaigning,” he says.

“That really taught me a lot, because you’ve got to be ready to roll with the stuff. No matter what happens, you’ve got to keep your dreams intact.”

Amador agrees it’s worth the effort. “That one moment giving my first speech or introducing myself as a national officer candidate was just a dream come true.”

Interested in your own run for office? Start at this Web page: www.skillsusa.org/students/officers.shtml. Check out the profiles there — and on the following pages — to see if you’ve got what it takes.
“SkillsUSA gave me the leadership skills and self confidence to really break out of my shell,” says ANDREW ZIGLER, high school division president. Studying criminal justice at New Braunfels (Texas) High School, he plans on a political career but is “definitely a huge [science] geek,” Zigler adds. He was allowed to skip freshman biology class after bringing in his own science journal.

STEPHEN LUPTON, high school vice president at large, has always lived on a 50-acre farm in coastal North Carolina. “As a freshman, I was the kind of kid who sat in the back of the classroom and rarely even raised his hand,” says the drafting student at West Carteret High School in Morehead City. His career goal now? “Public speaking — motivational, most likely,” he answers.

Although she’s in cosmetology and hopes to own a salon, Oklahoma’s FALLON ELLIOTT also wants to earn a college degree in sociology. That should be an interesting combination for her clients. As for SkillsUSA, “it’s given me so much confidence, I can’t even begin to describe it,” says the high school division’s secretary, a student at Kiamichi Technology Center in Atoka.

For high school treasurer EVE RAGGE, her first love was visual arts. That attraction drew the Atlanta resident to a graphic communications program. SkillsUSA has “given me opportunities that I would not have had,” she says. “I’m getting to travel a lot, I’m meeting new people, and I’m just growing every day.” Ragge attends Cross Keys High School and plans to be an architect.

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“SkillsUSA has given me friends from across my state and across the country,” says high school parliamentarian BECKY KIMBALL of Longwood, Fla. As a health services student at Lyman High School, she’s particularly interested in the national debate over her field. Her career goal is to “provide health care to children who may not be able to afford it,” Kimball says.
Diagnosed with dyslexia as a child, **GIANNA VELINO** keeps looking for ways to improve as a communicator and reader. “SkillsUSA has helped me with that a lot,” says our Region 1 vice president — “just the tricks they give you to become a better speaker and better at writing speeches.” She studies graphic communications at Cranston (R.I.) Area Career and Technical Center.

**ZIA GREEN**, Region 2 vice president, is the third graphic communications student on the current officer team. But there are differences: a foster child, she was born with gray hair. “I want to be chief editor of a magazine,” says Green, who goes to Kendrick High School in Columbus, Ga. “SkillsUSA was an introduction to what I’m going to experience in the long run.”

“Before SkillsUSA, I was from a small town and I never really got out much. I just kind of hung out on a farm with my friends,” says electrical technology student **JASON BRIGNER**, now Region 3 vice president. “SkillsUSA gave me this opportunity in life to go out and make something of myself.” After Eastland Career Center in Groveport, Ohio, he’ll go on to be an electrical engineer.

A long and colorful family history precedes **EDUARDO LUNA** of Brownsville, Texas, and his election as Region 4 vice president. Luna became a U.S. citizen in 2000. His ancestors in Mexico range from respected politicians to “a very famous pickpocket,” he says. But the criminal justice student at James Pace High School adds he’s on the right track. “I want to study to be a lawyer.”

“SkillsUSA has given me a head start in life. It’s given me speaking skills, leadership skills, and helped me to be able to show who I really am in front of an audience — and not be terrified to death of it,” says **KIMBERLEE JUDD**, Region 5 vice president. A health occupations student at Valley High School in Orderville, Utah, she plans to teach career and technical classes herself someday.

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President of the college/postsecondary division, ANNALEE SANTOS is new to Brigham Young University’s campus in Rexburg, Idaho. The health occupations student wants to be a sports trainer. She’s also lived in Utah, Nevada, Oregon, Washington and, until recently, Florida. After growing up all over the country, “I’ve been given opportunities to network” in SkillsUSA, Santos says.

Being born eight weeks premature meant “a constant struggle at first,” says BRANDON MULLINGS, college/postsecondary vice president. “I was told that I would never go to a normal school.” But in his senior year of high school, the computer science student racked up 33 credit hours at Central Florida Community College in Ocala. His goal is to be a computer engineer.

For NICK DADDONA, college/postsecondary secretary, “SkillsUSA has programs to help you in just about every aspect of your life.” After military, public safety and business careers, he entered Tennessee Technology Center’s massage therapy program at Chattanooga State. Daddona also recently got to know his birth family on a Mohawk reservation.

“I believe that you change things through passion, not position, but if you have both you can do twice as much,” says college/postsecondary treasurer RUBEN AMADOR. The six-year SkillsUSA member once ran his high-school chapter after the advisor became ill. A business major at Doña Ana Community College in Las Cruces, N.M., he’d like to work in state-level education.

At first, the student who eventually became college/postsecondary parliamentarian wasn’t sure about getting involved. But “there was the simple fact that SkillsUSA makes you feel welcome, SkillsUSA makes you feel like you’re family,” CODY McPHERSON says. Now studying criminal justice at Oklahoma State University in Okmulgee, he’s aiming for a law degree.

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Pick Just One?

Remembering the Best

By Ann P. Schreiber

When the 2009 SkillsUSA Advisor of the Year talks about his students, John Crosby isn’t sure if he’s made an impact on them, but he’s sure they’ve made an impact on him. Crosby says it’s tough to pick the one he remembers most.

When pressed, he brings up Noemi Castro, a former SkillsUSA national officer. “She started out as a young lady of Hispanic origin living out of a car with her family. She completely turned her life around,” Crosby says.

Castro's list of accomplishments includes overcoming a language barrier to become a translator for a curricula publishing company and earning a scholarship for Chrysler’s College Automotive Program. “She’s going to teach our student leaders for our state. We’re very proud of that,” Crosby adds. “She's testified before Congress for career and technical education. She was in Reader's Digest. I’m on her coattails, rather than the other way around.

“There are stories after stories [about my students]. She was the most famous.”

Like the other four contenders for the title of top advisor, Crosby’s memorable moments in education are prefaced by whether or not SkillsUSA played a part. All can relate to having one student in particular who made it all worthwhile.

WEB RESOURCES

- Find out more about the 2009 Advisor of the Year candidates. Visit: www.skillsusa.org/educators/aoy.shtml
- Know an outstanding SkillsUSA advisor? You can nominate that person for Advisor of the Year by contacting your state association director. Get the contact information for your state at: www.skillsusa.org/about/dir4.shtml
- Read the story of John Crosby’s former student, Noemi Castro, at: www.skillsusa.org/champions/2003-Fall/noemi.html
An automotive service technologies instructor at Lassen High School in Susanville, Calif., since 1978, Crosby is director of a California Partnership Academy. Such academies represent a high-school reform movement focused on smaller learning communities with a career theme.

“We’re helping a lot of at-risk students,” he says, “because being in a partnership academy, our students are one-half to one-two-thirds at-risk students. These are the kids who would have fallen through the floor boards.

“I tell my teachers that it’s the rare teacher who takes the at-risk students and is able to turn them around, teach them leadership skills and teach them skills to help them prosper. It’s not just me doing it, it’s all my academy teachers. The teachers put out the extra effort it takes to help those students. Every year I think, ‘How many kids can we get to graduate?’”

**Paul Elder, Georgia**

Paul Elder is the diversified cooperative training coordinator and overall SkillsUSA advisor at Harris County High School in Hamilton, Ga. He’s advanced the cause of SkillsUSA for 30 years.

“I think any teacher remembers the first couple of students when you start teaching,” Elder says. “For me, there was a young man who had a really bad family situation. Broken homes are a common thing. Unfortunately, I didn’t realize it at the time, the impact I was having. But, his mother and other people told me over a period of two or three years that I did.

“We still have a relationship today. I ran him for a [SkillsUSA] state office, and he didn’t get it. He didn’t get elected, but he made sure we had a good kid in there the following year. He became his campaign manager. He made sure other kids got into the program.

“I look upon him as an example of leadership. Leadership is making sure other people get involved,” Elder adds. “He didn’t get the glory that lots of my kids have, but he’s the one I look upon as the best kid. He tells everybody his skills at leadership started within my classroom.”

**Jennifer Leff, Minnesota**

In the early 1990s, a graphic design class at Carver-Scott Educational Cooperative (CSEC) in Chaska, Minn., sparked Jennifer Leff’s lifelong passion for printing and SkillsUSA. She’s been back in the same class as lead instructor for 10 years. In 2007, she coached her first national Advertising Design champion.

Leff won a bronze herself in 1994.

“The one student in particular that I remember is very recent in my mind because he just graduated from college,” Leff says. “He came into my class four years ago as a junior, and he didn’t know about the graphics program. When it came time for the competitions, I asked him to consider competing in the Ad Design competition. ‘You have a knack for this,’ I told him. He competed and ended up taking first at states.

“I found out after he had been in the program that there were major problems with him back at this home school. He was ready to drop out of school. He went to nationals. At the Awards Ceremony that night, they called first place, and he won. He started out as a student who was going to drop out of school, and he graduated this year through the scholarship that he received from the contest.

“SkillsUSA pushes the students to do things that they never thought they could,” Leff points out. “I started with SkillsUSA in high school and know what it did for me. That’s what I’d like to give back to the students.”
James Maynard, Maryland
After becoming a HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning) instructor 16 years ago at Parkside High School in Salisbury, Md., James Maynard made special-needs students a particular focus.
“Everybody has good qualities,” Maynard explains. “I make things work for kids who nobody else wants. As long as I get the job done, and they’re successful at it, then that’s the way to go. It’s my whole philosophy of teaching.
“I had one young man who got into a major scrape with the law,” he says. “There was a murder involved. He got 40 years, plus 20 more for a handgun violation. He approached me, through his mom, about continuing on with the HVAC program.”
After arranging for his student to have the course books and a laptop, Maynard was able to see him a couple of times a month, because the penal institution was tied to a community technology center. “He wore an ankle bracelet for the last two years he was with me. But when he was with me, he was always A-1.”
Maynard’s abundance of empathy for his students goes back to his own past.
“In the ’60s, if you failed senior English, you had to come back another whole year. I failed and was considered a dropout,” he says. “I had already signed up for the Marine Corps. I was gone, and I wasn’t coming back. So I did it the hard way. I don’t want my students to go through that. It was hard and very expensive.”

Tom Renninger, Ohio
For 14 years, Tom Renninger has been an electrical trades instructor and advisor at Sentinel Career Center in Tiffin, Ohio. He spent 22 years in industry before that.
“I had one student who came into my program,” he remembers, “and my counselor said that he’s a ‘bad apple.’ I said, ‘I don’t know that. I never met the guy.’”
With the warning fresh in his mind, Renninger asked all the students to introduce themselves on the first day of class.
“In the ’60s, if you failed senior English, you had to come back another whole year. I failed and was considered a dropout,” he says. “I had already signed up for the Marine Corps. I was gone, and I wasn’t coming back. So I did it the hard way. I don’t want my students to go through that. It was hard and very expensive.”

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— Jennifer Leff, Region 4 Advisor of the Year

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On the fast track.” “Kicking life into high gear.” “Lapping the competition.” When talking about a successful NASCAR personality, these metaphoric clichés can be difficult to resist. But when considering the success of Wendy Venturini, one of NASCAR’s most recognizable television correspondents, why should these phrases be resisted?

Through her natural drive and determination — turbo-charged (here we go again) by her experience as a SkillsUSA member — Venturini merged her career onto “the fast track” early by deciding where she wanted to take her life, “kicked it into high gear” by taking advantage of every opportunity that came her way, and “lapped the competition” by landing her dream job in her early 20s.

Like most success stories, however, Venturini’s tale began with a period of internal questioning. She wondered how someone who wasn’t interested in driving cars for a living could still be a part of the family racing business she loved.

“My brother’s a driver, my father’s been in racing since the 1970s, and my grandfather raced as well, so we’re three generations deep,” Venturini explains. “I spent my whole childhood going from track to track, city to city, and I was basically a sponge, taking in all this knowledge and experience in that garage area. When I was in high school and got involved with SkillsUSA, I really wasn’t sure how I could stay involved in the family business, because I didn’t want to race.”

Her involvement at Northwest Cabarrus High School in Concord, N.C., fueled by a perceptive and persistent chapter advisor, would forever alter her life’s trajectory.

“My advisor, Randy Basinger, approached me to get involved,” the 1997 graduate says. “He handed me a list of possible things I could compete in and said, ‘What can you do on this list?’ I handed it back to him and said, ‘I don’t know how to do any of that,’ and he handed it back to me and said, ‘Look again.’”

For reasons she didn’t fully understand, the student reluctantly chose the Prepared Speech competition. Two years later, as Venturini accepted a gold medal at the SkillsUSA national conference, she realized for the first of many times just how fortunate a choice it was.

“If it weren’t for my advisor,” Venturini says, “I wouldn’t have known what I was supposed to be doing, nor did I realize I had any talent for [public speaking]. Who thinks they’re going to be a speaker? Now, I get paid to talk, and that’s not a bad job, but SkillsUSA was where I got the confidence to do it.”

Once Wendy Venturini realized what she wanted to do in life — and how to get there — she put the pedal to the metal until her goal was in the rear-view mirror.
She adds, “I was unsure of myself at first, but every time I went to the next level, I got more positive feedback and gained more self-confidence. That’s the cool thing about SkillsUSA. It lets you identify yourself, and you can see where your life could be headed and find a purpose for your life.”

Suddenly, she had an answer to where her place was within the NASCAR world: television. With a new arsenal of skills, talent and confidence that eluded many of her peers, Venturini pursued her goals.

While attending the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, the student wasn’t content to simply ace her heavy course load. She worked on student television productions and commuted each weekend to serve as an intern at a local news affiliate.

“I would leave the party scene every weekend that most college kids were into and work at the sports department at the local news station in Charlotte, because that’s where the opportunity was for me,” she says. “I had a great group of people who let me work with the equipment and let me learn so much.”

That weekend sacrifice paid great dividends in Venturini’s progress, and when college ended, her career as a broadcaster began. “I worked at a local cable news affiliate as a news reporter. We would shoot our own videos, edit them, write our own stories, and then sit at the desk and do the 6 o’clock news. It was probably the most work I’ve ever put in for the least amount of pay,” she laughs.

But Venturini hadn’t lost sight of her goal of a NASCAR-related career. She convinced the station’s general manager to let her host her own racing show on top of her regular duties. That helped get her foot in the door at a production company producing NASCAR-related programming for TNN (The Nashville Network).

Her first duty? “Logging tapes,” she says. “You don’t get much lower than that. It is so boring.”

Venturini wasn’t bored for long. Within three years, she was a producer for NASCAR Media Group, with her “NASCAR Victory Lane” airing on cable TV’s Speed channel. That’s when the throttle opened — opportunity speeding past opportunity — leading to her position today as a reporter for “NASCAR RaceDay,” Speed’s highest rated show.

**‘There are roadblocks’**

The reporter calls this her “dream job,” but it’s obvious she took on cold, hard reality to make it happen. Still, there’s no checkered flag in sight for Venturini, who continues to rack up the accolades.

In 2007, she made NASCAR history by becoming the first woman to call an entire race broadcast from the booth. Her latest undertaking, “The Real Deal,” is a high-profile, often controversial segment where she probes deeper into the world of NASCAR. It’s all helped Venturini to be considered one of the most dynamic and knowledgable women in the industry.

Still, the former SkillsUSA member has never forgotten her roots. When asked to return this year to the organization’s national conference, it was as a keynote speaker.

“When I was on the plane to Kansas City, I was looking over the pledge and the creed, and it brought back so many memories,” Venturini says. “I said to my mom, ‘Read this, this is really good stuff!’

“We were reciting this back in high school, and now I see how it all really does apply to a real, everyday career,” she adds. “The people I work with who follow these things, I really get along with. The people
Venturini also recently gave SkillsUSA a live, on-air shout-out, appearing with Executive Director Tim Lawrence and driver Jimmie Johnson during a promotion for Kobalt’s “Tough Tools for Cool Schools” program. “This is how I got started,” Venturini said to millions of viewers as she pointed to the SkillsUSA logo on Lawrence’s shirt.

This is a success story that, according to Venturini, is ready to be rewritten many times over by any SkillsUSA member — as long as you take advantage of the opportunities that are, for now, within your grasp.

“Use this time in SkillsUSA as a discovery process to reflect on your talents and your goals,” she says, “and be diligent about following through. Make sure you’re passionate about what you’re doing and take responsibility for your actions.

“Nothing’s handed to you in life. There are roadblocks, and I’ve had them. But if it was easy, everybody would get there quickly. Don’t make excuses. If the path you’re going down isn’t working for you, find another one.”

Or, as Venturini did, make your own.

Past member sports SkillsUSA logo on race car

Nationwide viewers of the NASCAR Sprint Cup Series race in Sonoma, Calif., were treated to something they may not have seen before. Popular driver Jamie McMurray’s No. 26 Irwin Ford Fusion featured the SkillsUSA logo.

The logo was displayed on the highly visible deck lid of the car as part of Irwin’s ongoing partnership with SkillsUSA. The partnership has added personal meaning for McMurray, who was a member of SkillsUSA (then called “VICA”) during his high-school years.

“On behalf of Irwin and Roush Fenway Racing,” McMurray said in a statement before the race, “I’m excited and honored to represent SkillsUSA. It’s a great organization, and by including them on the car, I hope more people will learn about them and their programs.”

McMurray also presented a special autographed helmet to SkillsUSA at the 2009 national conference.

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How many successful people have you heard say, “I don’t know how it happened! I was just watching television, and success just fell into my lap!” Success takes work — work focused on goals.

As part of an in-class exercise, develop and write two short-term goals: one related to your future career, the other to your personal life. Make each goal specific and reasonable, and list all the specific actions or steps it will take to reach each goal. Return to those goals every week or more and evaluate your progress.

More on goal setting can be found in SkillsUSA’s newly revised Professional Development Program (PDP), and now the first two levels are online. The online version has been completely restructured, features all-new interactive media and includes an entirely new (and free) learning management system.

To learn more, visit: [www.skillsusa.org/educators/pdponline.shtml](http://www.skillsusa.org/educators/pdponline.shtml).

A goal without a plan is just a wish.  
— ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPERY

No, the picture on the left isn’t abstract art. It’s actually a distorted part of another photo in this magazine. Find the original photo and send us the page number where it appears to win a SkillsUSA hoodie (first prize) or ball cap (second prize). To enter, e-mail your answer, name, address and phone number to: anyinfo@skillsusa.org, with “Photo Contest” in the subject line. Or, send to: SkillsUSA Photo Contest, 14001 SkillsUSA Way, Leesburg, VA 20176. One first-place and one second-place winner will be picked from a random drawing of correct entries. Entries must be received by Nov. 15.

Congratulations to last issue’s winners: Sandy Johnson of Deer Creek, Minn., and Greg Wenger of Greenwood, Miss.
They’re making holidays bright

As a memorial to drafting student M. Shane Willis, who passed away several years ago, the SkillsUSA chapter at Moultrie (Ga.) Technical College holds an annual holiday toy drive. The toys and monetary donations are collected from students, staff and faculty. Donations benefit the Colquitt County Christmas Cheer Toy Shop and the pediatric ward at Colquitt Regional Medical Center. Pictured from left are the college’s SkillsUSA state officer, Shannon Green, and local officers Simmie Hall and Christopher Zeigler.

Expressing gratitude with dinners

At Greater New Bedford (Mass.) Regional Vocational-Technical High School, SkillsUSA students show their gratitude to those in the local Veterans Transition Home by cooking and serving turkey dinners. Students join the staff of the facility to provide hundreds of pounds of cooked turkey to area veterans and their families. Of course, no dinner this size would be complete without gallons of gravy, plus side dishes and pie. Sarah Lopes (above), a member of the SkillsUSA American Spirit team with Jonathan Alves and Kassandra Pombo, enlisted the help of the school's culinary arts department to prepare the turkeys and help serve the meals. Lopes and her team also reached out to the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick, a New Bedford civic group, which donated the turkeys.

Spare Change Stretches Far in Cancer Fight

Students at John D. Rockefeller IV Career Center in New Cumberland, W.Va., participate in the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society’s “Pennies for Patients” program. In this community service project, the students donate their spare change to fund blood cancer research and patient aid programs. Led by the chapter president, Miranda Durbin, students are encouraged to donate at least one penny to the cause.

“I think this is a really great program. I've known several families, including my own, who have been assisted by the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society, and I have the utmost respect and admiration for their advocacy,” says Durbin.

Sharing comfort food

Involving classmates in the Des Moines, Iowa, community, Central Campus culinary students Tori Stifel and Tory Stodden (pictured, left and center) make meals for families staying at the local Ronald McDonald House. The facility offers rooms for families of pediatric patients at a nearby hospital. With a local grocery store’s contributions — and a local chef’s mentoring — students delivered easy-to-heat meals to accommodate families in stressful situations.
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, e-mail 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.

Told to create an image that featured “pouring,” photography student Paige Stevens took this creative approach. Her instructor at Tulsa (Okla.) Technology Center is Clay Allen.

SkillsUSA really gave me a different perspective on life: to get out there, set goals for myself and become a better person; to become a leader; and to become the champion that everybody in SkillsUSA is.

JASON BRIGNER, SKILLSUSA NATIONAL OFFICER, AMANDA, OHIO

I HAVE RECEIVED TENFOLD WHAT
I HAVE GIVEN THIS TREMENDOUS ORGANIZATION. TO BE PROVIDED
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THE TEAM WHO SELECTS INCREDIBLE SKILLSUSA PROJECTS TO
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