Finding Your Strength
Prepare to Succeed

standing tall
the courage
to be different

students unite
against bullying

icebreakers to help
make friends

the nation’s best
in technical skills
and leadership

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If I Had a Hammer: Building Dreams
Meet Shreela McFadden, a construction management student who’s knocking down preconceptions in almost every way possible.
BY ANN P. SCHREIBER

National Officers Turning Heads
Your student representatives are gearing up for a banner year. Get to know them all, then hear from one officer who had to survive being bullied before making history.
BY TOM KERCHEVAL AND CRAIG E. MOORE

A Safe Place
The serious topic of bullying continues: A brainy student recounts how focusing on a career put her in the line of fire before she met an unlikely ally. Find out how SkillsUSA members are uniting against this growing problem in our schools.
BY ANN P. SCHREIBER

Standing Room Only
Even after 40 years of teaching, Don Runyan still knows how to pack a classroom. That’s one reason he’s been chosen SkillsUSA advisor of the year.
BY E. THOMAS HALL

On the Cover:
SkillsUSA Champion Michael Tomas of Bradenton, Fla. Photo by Lloyd Wolf.
Byekwaso Gilbert, SkillsUSA Program Manager

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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.

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Your Own Campaign Trail

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

Q: Everybody’s talking about elections right now. How does this democratic process relate to me?  
Tim: Results of the presidential and congressional campaigns will affect you as part of your community and country, even the world as a whole. Just as our national elections begin at the grassroots level, the democratic process starts inside your local SkillsUSA chapter. At this organization’s core is the belief that every member has the right and responsibility to be a leader. 

As the new school year begins, so do elections for local chapter offices. I encourage you to step forward at your first SkillsUSA meeting and seek an elected position. If you feel more comfortable in a support role, then lead or serve on a team or committee. Either way, you’ll have an opportunity to make a difference. 

In this issue, you’ll read about students and teachers who’ve embraced leadership. But ask any of them how their journey began, and they’ll tell you about starting small, surrounding themselves with the right people and finding a way to learn and grow a step at a time. 

There’s a story about one student in construction management who knows she has always “stuck out” as an adoptee from India, living with a single parent in Idaho, and being female in an industry dominated by men. By surrounding herself with positive people and believing in herself, she has grown to embrace her natural abilities.

It’s not just students whose lives change through involvement in SkillsUSA. Our advisor of the year finalists have more than 100 years combined in the classroom. Helping students achieve success is what motivates them year after year in spite of changes within schools, budget cuts, new programs and other challenges. 

Also in this issue, we have highlighted our 2012 national gold medalists as well as the students elected to serve as our national officers. Their stories are no different than yours; most never dreamed of the success they’ve achieved. But now they can look back and trace the important, small steps they took with teachers, mentors, industry leaders and friends on their journey to success and leadership.

This is the time of year to clarify your own dreams. Allow SkillsUSA and those around you to help you fulfill your incredible potential. Step forward, volunteer, try something new — just be involved. If you do this, we may be reading about you in a future issue of SkillsUSA Champions.

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

SkillsUSA’s national conference (see Page 8 for coverage) is our membership’s biggest focal point, but attending other organizations’ events helps the uninitiated get focused on SkillsUSA.

The Construction Industries Institute recently held its national conference in Baltimore, and SkillsUSA was a major participant. Positive connections were made with more than 650 construction executives attending the event.

Karmen Ayres, an electrical trades student from Aberdeen, Wash., spoke at one of the conference’s most popular sessions. Her impressive message — on SkillsUSA’s important role in developing the skilled workers many industries need — received more than applause. Winding up her term as a SkillsUSA national officer, Ayres fielded job and internship offers as well as invitations to speak at two other major construction conferences.

Grantsing Solutions to Needs

Lowes continues its four-year reign of generosity with another round of SkillsUSA grants in 2013. But this time, there are some changes to the program.

Now ranging from $2,500 to $25,000, the grants will go to schools, classrooms or students who have a need to improve their educational experience. Successful applicants will detail the need for classroom improvements, tools relevant to their training program, leadership development opportunities or competition clothing.

The strongest applications will detail how grant dollars will provide a life-altering experience. For more, visit: www.skillsusa.org/educators/lowes.shtml.

During her speech, former national officer Karmen Ayres served as a living example of her topic: the benefits that come from positive collaborations between industry and education.
what’s new

THESE CHANGES BRING CHANCES TO IMPROVE

Just like your socks (hopefully), times change. So does technology. Pursuing success in your chosen field of study with outdated information is about as cutting edge as that MySpace profile of yours that’s been collecting cyberdust for the past five years. SkillsUSA strives to keep its technical programs in lock step with changing times, which is why the SkillsUSA Technical Standards book and CD-ROM is regularly updated.

The newest update, affecting nearly 50 contests, is available at: www.skillsusa.org/store/cds.html. The CD package includes a poster and the latest SkillsUSA Contest Projects CD-ROM, featuring actual descriptions from the most recent SkillsUSA Championships.

Prevent a dull future — keep your skills sharp.

Rewarding Others is Rewarding

So many people are involved in a successful SkillsUSA program that sometimes, despite the best intentions, their work goes unrecognized. That’s life in a busy school setting. Now SkillsUSA’s new Awards Webstore can help you make a long-lasting thank-you in a short amount of time, whether you’re recognizing a big or small achievement.

Honor a great officer team. Thank an advisor or a valued volunteer. Whoever’s the target of your appreciation, the online store lets you create personalized awards and plaques using a variety of styles and frames. Use preloaded images or upload your own.

To get started, visit: www.skillsusa.org/shop/awardstore.shtml.

Early Registration Gets the Reward

Our national Mega Prize program is about to go local. From Sept. 17-Nov. 15, SkillsUSA advisors are eligible to win $50 Lowe’s gift cards when submitting their membership online. Advisors must be professional members of SkillsUSA, register at least 90 percent of their previous year’s total student membership, and have a minimum of 15 members in their program. Each week, winning advisors’ names will be drawn and posted on SkillsUSA’s Facebook page. Exceed last year’s membership by at least 10 percent and get your name entered twice! For all the details, visit: www.skillsusa.org/join/megaprize.shtml.

Moments worth remembering should be relived

Winning a medal at SkillsUSA’s National Leadership and Skills Conference is a world-rocking event. Don’t believe us? Just look at the faces of the medal winners on the next page and all over the SkillsUSA website.

Better yet, check out the 2012 Awards Ceremony DVD. Clocking in at over two hours, it’s the same footage of the big night that was broadcast on the big screens at Kemper Arena and streamed live online. (Note: for copyright reasons, some speakers and performances had to be cut, but the medal presentations are all there.)

If you won a medal; if your student, son, daughter, relative or friend won a medal; or if you just want to witness this amazing, inspirational event, order the DVD at: www.skillsusa.org/store/dvd.html.
SkillsUSA’s BIGGEST WEEK DELIVERS BIG

Summer may be over, but many are still basking in warm memories of the biggest and best national conference in SkillsUSA history.

Let’s talk numbers first: registration exceeded 10,000 for the first time ever, and overall attendance was estimated at more than 15,000. More than 5,900 competitors — another all-time record — showcased their amazing talents at the SkillsUSA Championships, competing in 94 skill and leadership contests.

More than 300 business and government VIPs attended, the most ever, and Champions Night at the Kansas City Power and Light District was teeming with the largest throng of dancing SkillsUSA members the event’s ever seen. SkillsUSA experienced more news coverage than ever, too; for the first time, three of the four local television networks hosted simultaneous live broadcasts from the largest contest floor.

Those are just some of the numerical highlights, but, let’s face it, numbers are, well, faceless. What really matters are the individual lives positively affected — some forever changed — by the experience.

From the seismic energy of the Opening Ceremony to the majestic pageantry of the Awards Ceremony, from the community service effort (where 500 volunteers planted trees and served the needs of a local food bank) to the first wildly successful sessions of the new Activate and Leverage leadership training program, those individual lives were in abundance all week long. Were you one of them? If not, there’s always next year.

To review daily photos and video from this historic SkillsUSA event, visit: www.skillsusa.org/events/nlscphotos.shtml.
2012 CONFERENCE HONOREES

Honorary Life Members: Robert Abitz, Collision Repair competition chair in Wisconsin; Marlys Bucher, SkillsUSA board member, Minnesota Department of Education; Steve Phillippi, SkillsUSA Kentucky director; Joseph Pietrantonio, SkillsUSA board member and Air Products executive; Jill Van Weelden of Florida, influential college/postsecondary SkillsUSA supporter

Advisor of the Year: Donald Runyan, Cleveland High School, Reseda, Calif. (see story, Page 21)

Outstanding Career and Technical Educators: Monika Leasure, Macomb (Ga.) Intermediate School District; Millie Pérez, SkillsUSA Puerto Rico; Wayne Rhodes, J. Harley Bonds Career and Technology Center, Greer, S.C.; Gayle Silvey, SkillsUSA Georgia

Pat Dalton Outstanding Achievement Award: Bill Maddox, N.E.W. Customer Service Companies LLC

President’s Volunteer Service Award: (lifetime award) Dara Dubois, Sacramento, Calif. (Due to the rapid growth of this program, there are too many gold, silver and bronze award recipients to list in this space. For the full list, go to: www.skillsusa.org/students/volsvc.shtml)

Professional Development Program International Degree: Brice Harader-Pate, Tulsa, Okla.

Student2Student Mentoring Grand Prize Chapter: Cross Keys High School, Atlanta

Torch Carrier Award: Kent Gilchrist, Fremont Interiors Inc.; Bryan Light, Brick Industry Association
MEDALS STAND

2012 SkillsUSA Championships

3-D VISUALIZATION AND ANIMATION: Zachary Fletcher/Michael Orr, Meridian Technology Center, Stillwater, Okla.; Mark Ebbelle/Hunter Rhodes, A&M Consolidated High School, College Station, Texas

ACTION SKILLS: Jaynie McMillan, Sarasota (Fla.) County Technical Institute; Andrew Acededo, Bethlehem (Pa.) Area Vocational-Technical School

ADVERTISING DESIGN: Lexie Helwig, Augusta (Ga.) Technical College; Marissa Ebanks, Tampa Bay Technical High School, Tampa, Fla.

AMERICAN SPIRIT: (teams) College of the Ouachitas, Malvern, Ark.; Buckeye Hills Career Center, Rio Grande, Ohio

ARCHITECTURAL DRAFTING: Rutger Hill, Utah Valley University, Orem, Utah; Ryan Verpooten, Shadow Ridge High School, Surprise, Ariz.

AUDIO-RADIO PRODUCTION: John Reece/Samantha Sharp, Forsyth Technical Community College, Winston-Salem, N.C.; Maria Pham/Winnie Liu, Benson Polytechnic High School, Portland, Ore.

AUTOMATED MANUFACTURING TECHNOLOGY: (teams) Northeast Wisconsin Technical College, Green Bay; Watertown (Wis.) High School


BUILDING MAINTENANCE: Gabriel Chavez, Kymberli Lampl, Manatee Technical Institute, Bradenton, Fla.

CABINETMAKING: Bruce Randall, Eastern Maine Community College, Bangor; Jacob Wozniak, Cattaraugus Board Of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) North, Ellicottville, N.Y.

CAREER PATHWAYS SHOWCASE: (teams) Colleen Sellers, Manatee Technical Institute, Bradenton, Fla.; Gloucester County Institute of Technology, Sewell, N.J.; Georgia Piedmont Technical College, Clarkston (two medals); Vanguard Career Center, Fremont, Ohio (two medals); Hillyard Technical Center, St. Joseph, Mo.

CarPEnTRY: Jesse Bolt, Williamson Free School of Mechanical Trades, Media, Pa.; Brandon Hicks, Vanguard-Sentinel Career and Technology Center Sentinel Campus, Tiffin, Ohio

CHAPTER BUSINESS PROCEDURE: (teams) Manatee Technical Institute, Bradenton, Fla.; Pocahontas County High School, Dunmore, W.Va.

CHAPTER DISPLAY: (teams) Central Georgia Technical College, Macon; Greater New Bedford (Mass.) RVTHS CNC MILLING: Sean Johnson, Renton (Wash.) Technical College; Trey Smith, Apollo Career Center, Lima, Ohio

CNC TURNING: Justin Paulson, North Dakota State College of Science, Fargo; Nicholas Parente, Diman RVTHS, Fall River, Mass.

COMMUNICATION REPAIR TECHNOLOGY: John Stanton, Kaskaskia College, Centralia, Ill.; Jason Lucius, Vanguard-Sentinel Career and Technology Center Sentinel Campus, Tiffin, Ohio

COMMERCIAL BAKING: Lauren Lue, McFatter Technical Center, Davie, Fla.; Michaela Richardson, Northwest Career and Technology Academy, Las Vegas


COMPUTER MAINTENANCE TECHNOLOGY: Jacob Hampton, Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College, Jefferson

COSTUMER SERVICE: Casey Scott, Hillyard Technical Center, St. Joseph, Mo.; Sara Bryson, Waynesville (Mo.) Career Center

CUSTOMER SERVICE: Johna Howard, Ogden-Weber Applied Technology College, Ogden, Utah; Jonathan Candido, Diman RVTHS, Fall River, Mass.


ELECTRICAL CONSTRUCTION WIRING: Jonathan Maragni, Alfred State College School of Applied Technology, Wellsville, N.Y.; David Senko, Bucks County Technical High School, Fairless Hills, Pa.

ELECTRONICS TECHNOLOGY: Austin Parker, North Central Kansas Technical College, Beloit, Benjamin
Shreela McFadden first picked up a hammer when she was 3 years old. Her family was helping to build a cabin for her grandparents. The little girl just went for it and started hammering away on whatever she could find.

“When I was little, I always had the cars to take apart or put together, all those little kits that you get for little boys,” she remembers. “I always had that. I never had girl toys.”

McFadden graduated from Rocky Mountain High School in Meridian, Idaho, in June and is now a construction management student at Boise State University.

She completed two years in the residential construction program at the Ada Professional-Technical Center, formerly Renaissance Professional-Technical Center, in Meridian.

McFadden’s accomplishments include the student council, National Honor Society, Key Club and German Club, to name a few. While her aptitude for academics is strong, her passion for construction is stronger.

“I get my work done, for sure,” she says. “I do what needs to be done. I do it on time, but it’s not like I spend hours upon hours studying. Academics is something I enjoy while I’m learning, but from a young age, nothing like writing or reading or being a doctor has ever fascinated me. But construction — that whole building a building or a house — it just fascinates me. I love it.”

McFadden seriously considered becoming an architect. But it was with some apprehension that she took one of the architecture program’s prerequisite classes, Residential Construction 1. Surprisingly, she loved it.

“I signed up for architectural drafting the next year,” the student adds, “but I lasted about a week in that class. I dropped it and ended up switching into the Residential Construction 2 class.

“I was out there on the job site working every other day with school, and I loved the hands-on part, and I loved being able to work with a group of people putting up a house.”

“I know that if I go full forth with my best effort, that I’m going to be able to succeed with what I want to, regardless of what anyone else says.”

ON THE WEB

View the Community Service contest PowerPoint by the Meridian, Idaho, Ada Professional-Technical Center students at: www.skillsusa.org/downloads/PPT/Meridian.ppt

The core purpose of the National Association of Women in Construction is enhancing the success of female workers in the field. Learn more at: www.nawic.org
At 4 feet 11 inches tall, McFaddan says she quickly realized that construction management might be a better match. “I am a small lady, and stuff does get tough sometimes. I knew that the construction trade would probably be tough for me ... working on a job site. So I decided on construction management, because you still get to be on site, but you’re not having to do all the building.”

In that side of the business, she explains, “you plan the project, and you build it on paper, and you subcontract. But you’re still on the site, you’re managing everything, making sure everything is getting done.”

‘I’ve always stuck out’

McFaddan says being a petite female on the job has had its moments. “I know I’m little, but I can get the job done. I might need help with lifting something or getting wood off of a truck.

“My very first semester in residential construction was a little difficult because I was the only girl, and I was always asked, ‘Why are you not in the kitchen?’ I’d respond, ‘That is so offensive.’ I’d say, ‘I have an interest in construction, and that’s why I’m here.’”

On the job sites for the technical center program, SkillsUSA members are building homes for Habitat for Humanity, which is the focus of the tech center’s Community Service contest team.

SkillsUSA taught McFaddan a lot about herself and her capabilities, she says. Being a competitor on the team improved her public speaking skills. It also helped the student better understand her strengths and weaknesses when it comes to teamwork.

“In the construction management business, building and creating a project is a collaborative effort,” she explains. “You can’t do it by yourself, so you need to be able to work well with a team and group of other people.”

While building homes, students at the tech center are learning about Energy Star standards. Training in green construction is imperative, McFaddan says.

“I personally believe that it is a very important skill and knowledge base to have due to the current economy, as well as the current push for energy efficiency. We, as high school students going onto higher education and into careers, need to know how to build according to and work with these standards, because that is what the world today is doing.”

Born in Kolkata, India, McFaddan was adopted by her American single mother when she was 5 months old. While not a blood relative, her younger sister was also adopted from Kolkata (formerly Calcutta).
“Sometimes people think it’s weird, I guess,” she says of her unusual background. “They’re like, ‘You’re adopted from India?’ Yes, I’m adopted from India.’

“It’s also different because I don’t have a dad. I haven’t really had any problems with getting any grief about it. Sometimes people try to be funny about it, but I just don’t take things like that to heart.”

McFadden’s experience thus far should help on future construction sites where she doesn’t look like the typical manager.

“I’ve always stuck out,” she says. “I’d wear my construction pants, sweatshirts and jackets and boots through the hallway at school, with my hot-pink hard hat that I’d carry. I’m proud of who I am, and I have confidence in myself and my dreams. And, I know that if I go full forth with my best effort, that I’m going to be able to succeed with what I want, regardless of what anyone else says.”

**Hands-on experience attracts recognition for school program**

At the Western Idaho Fair, residential construction students from Meridian joined other volunteers to help get a house off the ground for Boise Valley Habitat for Humanity. When the fair ended, the house was taken apart in big sections so it could be put up in a subdivision.

Besides the attention the Meridian School District program received at the fair, the program was noticed by U.S. Rep. Raul Labrador, who visited one of its construction sites. In addition, the program’s been featured on local television stations and is the subject of a video produced by buildidaho.com:

- [www.youtube.com/watch?v=3fityeD5Rvw&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3fityeD5Rvw&feature=youtu.be)
They’re gearing up for a banner year. Meet SkillsUSA’s freshly elected student representatives.

BY TOM KERCHEVAL

BRIAN BRADLEY (1; SEE KEY, FACING PAGE) began as “a casual member,” but now SkillsUSA is part of his DNA. “It’s changed me completely as a person [into] a new person I really like,” says the criminal law and justice student from Centennial High School in Roswell, Ga. Bradley’s goal is to become a judge. Other goals for him involve nets, as part of his longtime involvement in tournament soccer.

As difficult family problems mounted, motivation became a scarce commodity for SERGIO CAVAZOS (2), a criminal justice student at Veterans Memorial High School in Brownsville, Texas. When he joined SkillsUSA, “it motivated me to get up in the morning, because I had something to look forward to,” he says. Big changes led to big plans — Cazavos hopes to become a criminal defense attorney and, one day, a congressman.

ALYSSA ERWIN (3) has always excelled on courts of the sports variety. She joined SkillsUSA at Homer Hanna High School in Brownsville, Texas, to help her reach goals in another court that values mental over physical dexterity: law. “I wanted to learn public speaking skills, but then it became a passion for the organization,” the law enforcement student testifies. Erwin plans to become a civil attorney.

JONATHAN GARCIA (4) studies computer programming, which could explain his structured 10-year plan to become a stem-cell researcher. Hope doesn’t exist without action for Garcia. When he entered the University of Texas at Brownsville and couldn’t find a SkillsUSA chapter, he helped start one. What’s he gained most from his involvement in SkillsUSA? “The ability to give back,” he says.

Being bullied at a young age drove JONATHAN IRIZARRY (5) to change schools and, after joining SkillsUSA, his life. (Read his full story on Page 18.) “I found an organization that doesn’t judge you but rewards you with so many opportunities,” he says. The architectural drafting student at Doctora Maria Sororico Lacot Vocational High School in Guayama, Puerto Rico, will pursue a master’s degree in naval architecture, plotting a hopeful course for a career designing cruise liners.

Beauty is more than skin deep for MARY KAMIRU (6). As a little girl in Kenya, she dreamed of “coming to the great land” of America for a better life. Now, the registered nurse and esthetics student at Tennessee Technical Center at Chattanooga hopes to better others through her career. Specifically, Kamiru hopes to combine her skills in esthetics and nursing “in a medical spa setting to help people feel better about themselves with skin and holistic medical care.”

“Nerdy and introverted.” That’s how BEN MORRIS (7) described his existence before SkillsUSA. “Now I’m a person you’d want to sit next to on a bus,” he says with indisputable confidence. Although Morris is an automotive technology student at Green River Community College in Auburn, Wash., he’s also been in computer maintenance and screen printing programs. His hope is to become a high school teacher and help “open other introverted students to greater things.”

“I’ve always been a girl among guys, always had to prove myself,” says KAILA O’FARRELL (8), an electrical trades student at Plymouth (Mass.) South High School. Her declaration doesn’t just relate to
her career path; she’s also an avid motocross rider, a sport typically dominated by dudes. “It’s my complete passion and hobby,” she credits her other passion, SkillsUSA, with helping to get “connected with something bigger than myself.”

When he was 5, Mayokun Ojo (9) and his family moved to the United States from Nigeria. He’s lived here for 12 years but finally became an official citizen in April. That celebratory milestone made winning a national office even sweeter for Ojo, a health care student at Dr. James A. Forrest Career and Technology Center in Leonardtown, Md. Saying he hopes to become “a successful and respected general surgeon,” Ojo credits the opportunities he’s had in SkillsUSA with “changing my life.”

Becoming an emergency physician is a fitting goal for someone who performed emergency surgery on her future as a third-grader. “I was in a special education class for reading,” says Natasha Osborne (10), who studies medical technology at Upper Valley Career Center in Piqua, Ohio. “One day, I realized I wanted to make a difference in the world. I took initiative and stepped up my game.” Once in danger of being held back, Osborne eventually skipped seventh grade, an ongoing transformation enhanced through her time in SkillsUSA.

A diesel equipment student at Tennessee Technology Center at Elizabethton, Mark Roark (11) no longer has a goal to open his own diesel-related business... because he’s done it already. Born into a farm family, he started working when he was 8. When Roark joined SkillsUSA, he realized what he’d been missing. “It was amazing for someone shy like me to become outgoing,” he says. With a national gold medal in Opening and Closing Ceremonies, he’s excelled in both technical and soft skills.

Ever since middle school, when he was invited to get involved in a high-school broadcasting program, Hans Rodriguez (12) has known what he wants to do. He now studies television news production at Cibola High School in Yuma, Ariz., crediting SkillsUSA with “giving me the perspective that you need to work for your success.” If Rodriguez gets his way, he’ll earn a position as a “news broadcaster for a major news network.”

While others might use a difficult childhood as an excuse for failure, Marial Ryan (13) has made it fuel for success. The criminal justice student at Warren County Career Center in Lebanon, Ohio, considered herself an “underdog until SkillsUSA showed me I can lead the pack.” The dog motif continues with her goal to become a canine unit police officer working on a drug task force. Ryan, whose own adoption recently became happily official, also plans to become a foster mom to teenagers one day.

The lure of free ice cream brought Teddy Shim (14) to SkillsUSA. What he calls “avenues of opportunity” have kept him here. As a child, Shim regularly traveled the international avenues between North America and Asia, living with his South Korean grandmother while his parents worked on their Ph.D. programs. He’s now an economics student at Bay Port High School in Green Bay, Wis., and after college, Shim hopes to return to South Korea and start a consumer electronics business.

“SkillsUSA membership absolutely means everything,” Craig Swanson (15) says without a hint of hyperbole. “Growing up, I was around gangs and drugs. I saw that path led nowhere. I realized that you don’t leave your footprints on the path to success while you’re sitting, so I chose to get up and start walking.” The computer information systems student at Oconee Fall Line Technical College in Dublin, Ga., hopes those steps will lead him to a computer information position with the federal government. For more on the national officers, visit: www.skillsusa.org/students/officers.shtml.
By Craig E. Moore

Jonathan Irizarry made SkillsUSA history on June 27 when he became the first student from Puerto Rico to be elected as a national officer. Being called on stage with the other winners was a moment he’ll never forget, but it almost didn’t happen. Just a few years ago, Irizarry was ready to give up.

“Since elementary school, through junior high, I was bullied,” he explains. According to Irizarry, some of the other students resented his success in academics and as a leader in the classroom. “I was considered by the group as a threat. They thought I might be the person who would steal their spotlight and that I wouldn’t let others succeed.”

The situation became so difficult, Irizarry decided to stop excelling in the classroom and participating in extracurricular activities. “I got to the point where I literally shut down,” he remembers. The student became withdrawn and shy. He thought it was easier to fail and earn the acceptance of his peers than to succeed and become their target.

Irizarry’s life finally changed for the better when he went to a new high school in Guayama. He decided to study architectural drafting at the Doctora Maria Socorro Lacot Vocational High School. Advisor Yolanda Vazquez introduced him to SkillsUSA. Irizarry was intrigued, but his previous experiences made him fearful of being targeted again. “At first I was hesitant,” he says. Nevertheless, he believed he would benefit from participation. He remembers thinking, “This might be the organization for me. I can develop myself.”

“Don’t give up. Even if you think the world may misunderstand you or mistreat you, have faith. There will always be someone to help you. “Just believe, and you will achieve great things.” — Jonathan Irizarry

Rediscovering the courage to lead

Then for the new SkillsUSA member, something totally unexpected happened. “It was like a sign that came,” Irizarry says. “I just stood up and said, ‘I want to run for local president.’ ”

Finding that courage changed his life. Irizarry decided he had to live his life for himself instead of trying to please others. His desire for success returned.

Life immediately improved for him. He met new people, made new friends and learned important new skills. Later, after being elected to a regional office, Irizarry attended SkillsUSA’s Washington Leadership Training Institute. While there, he was impressed by SkillsUSA’s national officers. Seeing these students on stage inspired him to run for a leadership position like theirs.

“I wanted to represent Puerto Rico in a way that no one had ever done before,” Irizarry adds.

Running for national office can be a grueling process, but the student says he was already prepared. “SkillsUSA made me a strong leader.”

After his successful campaign at the organization’s national conference in Kansas City, Mo., Irizarry now says he can take criticism and learn from it rather than give up. He has this advice for other students: “Don’t be afraid of success. It’s hard to fail, but it’s worse never having tried to succeed.”

He also knows representing SkillsUSA as a national officer is more than travel and being in the spotlight. “It will be hard work and dedication,” Irizarry explains, calling his elected position “a dream come true. It’s an achievement and dream I will fight for. I have prepared for it.”

Being the first officer from his home is another thing he’s excited about. “I plan to represent Puerto Rico and SkillsUSA to the best of my capability,” he says.

Looking at him now, it’s easy to forget how far he’s come since his days of being a withdrawn middle-school student. Does Irizarry have any advice for others who are being bullied?

“Don’t give up,” he stresses. “Even if you think the world may misunderstand you or mistreat you, have faith. There will always be someone to help you. “Just believe, and you will achieve great things.”

Don’t be afraid of success

Once bullied and shy, this student is stepping back into the spotlight

“Don’t give up. Even if you think the world may misunderstand you or mistreat you, have faith. There will always be someone to help you. “Just believe, and you will achieve great things.” — Jonathan Irizarry

Photo: Lloyd Wolf
All Priscilla Creswell wanted was to focus on a career, even if it meant leaving her familiar high school. Even though her academic counselors advised against it, Creswell made the move so she’d be allowed to complete a program at her local technical center.

As a bright girl in a computer animation program, Creswell soon became the brunt of name calling and jokes. Her old school, which catered to the gifted and talented, was “like a bubble,” she remembers. Suddenly she was in a different culture where “I’m the girl who came from the school for smart kids and is now going to this inner-city school where not a lot of people are saying, ‘Oh yay, academics!’” The student had been attending City High School in Grand Rapids, Mich. But after a few months, she was given an ultimatum: drop technical training from her schedule and stay in a strict college-prep program, or leave all her friends and transfer to Creston High, from which she’d be allowed to go to Kent Career Technical Center (KCTC).

“I’d never really been a new kid, but I’d just heard stories that being the new kid is difficult. My dad kept pressuring me, ‘You’ve got to make a decision,’” Creswell says. “It was on my mind for so long. So, finally, I decided that my career was more important than just my social life.”

WEB RESOURCES
- SkillsUSA members at Blackstone Valley RVTS describe their Respect YES program at: www.skillsusa.org/downloads/PPT/Bullying/Blackstone.ppt
- View PowerPoint presentations that Sidney Lanier High School students use to train peers and teachers in how to deal with bullying at: www.skillsusa.org/downloads/PPT/Bullying/Lanier.ppt
- Learn about Rachel’s Challenge, dedicated to the memory of Rachel Joy Scott, a victim of the Columbine (Colo.) High School massacre: www.rachelschallenge.org

As reports of bullying in schools increase, students who stand out tell how an unlikely partnership gave them the strength to stand up.
The transfer wasn’t easy. “Being in animation prep or just having red hair automatically gives me the stigma of ‘nerd girl.’ I love my red hair,” Creswell clarifies, but “before I went to Creston, I was considering dying my hair just so I wouldn’t stand out.”

Creswell found the strength to endure the bullying. “People say, you know, be yourself, be different, be diverse, and that can be so difficult sometimes. It’s no walk in the park to just pretend to hold your head up and just walk past it,” she adds.

“To be able to maintain who you are and what you like and what you want to do, beyond what people want to say about it, is the strongest thing that anyone can do.”

At KCTC, Creswell met Peter Lantz, who’d successfully learned to fit in after being home schooled. Because he has Asperger’s syndrome, Lantz says he’s an introvert, but “when I got out into the world, where there are all these people to talk to, you have all this wisdom that your parents have given you. Also, I’ve been able to grow up and deal with the bad things that come up, meeting people.”

According to SkillsUSA advisor and graphics instructor Deb Riolo, the technical school provided an “environment that’s safe” for Lantz and one that was “really welcoming” for Creswell. After the students tied scores in a classroom competition, they were put on a two-person team for SkillsUSA’s events in 3-D animation.

“We both sort of freaked out,” Creswell says, adding how one advisor wasn’t sure the two should be paired “because we’re both pretty socially awkward. They were afraid that we’d panic at competitions.”

But the students didn’t panic. They made it to the national competition and earned the high-school silver medal.

“Something SkillsUSA did was help me learn how to perform under pressure,” Lantz explains. “You relax and do it — and enjoy it. It’s helped me understand what kind of a work environment 3-D will be.”

Asperger’s syndrome actually contributes to his success, Lantz adds. “Once I have a set task, I go straight at it. It’s a trade-off; I may not make the best decisions. But, when it comes to [SkillsUSA] competitions, it’s a good trade-off.”

Creswell says their strengths make for a great team. “If I had partnered with anyone else in the classroom, I don’t know if I’d have gotten this far.”

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In more than 28 years as a SkillsUSA advisor, Don Runyan has touched many lives. Case in point: his last 7 a.m. class in drafting, architecture and urban planning. There were 31 seats in the room, but Runyan had 92 students — leaving two-thirds of them to learn standing up.

You see, Runyan has never been someone who turns people away. “I’d say, ‘I’ve got more than enough room for that individual,’ and we’d welcome them in,” explains the recently retired instructor who is SkillsUSA’s advisor of the year.

Runyan credits his success with instilling a “hunger” for education. “Once a student has that desire, there is no limit.”

As proof, his SkillsUSA members in Reseda, Calif., earned four national medals in leadership and two in skill competitions. “Without that leadership component, you can’t get the job, you can’t move up the ladder, you can’t communicate, and we need to instill this in all our students,” Runyan stresses.

Many of his students at Cleveland High School also medaled in state and regional competitions, and he never missed a national conference. But contrary to these accomplishments, “I’ve always been an underdog,” Runyan says, having struggled academically as a high school student and not becoming successful until in college.

Growing up in Los Angeles with his twin, Dave, “I had a rough time at the start,” he adds. “I always took on the challenge that if somebody said, ‘You can’t do it,’ my goal was to prove them wrong and that nothing could get in my way.”

That philosophy was put to good use over a 40-year teaching career. When funding was cut, “our school went from eight technology education programs down to one. I survived many years on $250 a year.” As a result, “I went to industry,” he says. “I got tremendous support from the Boeing Corp. and builders like Swinerton Builders, and they supported the program. We successfully found a way to make the ventures happen, even if we had to dip into our own funds.”

If Don Runyan’s students were willing to stand up for an education, he was willing to take them in. Overflowing classrooms are just one challenge among many that he’s been willing to take on.

By E. Thomas Hall
“This has been a team effort,” says Runyan, whose wife, Ra Jeanna, has attended almost every state and national conference in his 28 years as a SkillsUSA advisor. Twin brother Dave (right), also a longtime advisor, encouraged him to start a chapter in the 1983-84 school year. “Dave helped me by sharing ideas and being there as we both built our SkillsUSA chapters and educational programs.”

Runyan’s students also raised funds through service projects and speaking to community organizations. “If I had my own kids, I would have them pay a part of their way. You have to have some involvement personally in your own education. It can’t be a free ride,” he explains.

Another lesson learned in his younger days is that “people are No. 1.” His woodworking and drafting teachers “took care of my twin and me. They had the capability of listening rather than talking to us,” Runyan says. After becoming an instructor, he took care to listen to and not pre-judge new students, even if they came in looking tough or dejected.

“I made them feel at home by listening and then educating them,” Runyan says. “One of my attributes is that I educate individuals one on one, not as a group — knowing very well, being a twin, that no two people on this planet are the same. “There are some things that can be communicated as a group, but I think real education takes place when you’re working with an individual. It’s almost impossible for one instructor to take care of 240 people a day, but if you walk by students and simply touch on their desk, they know that you have witnessed their presence. It makes them feel like they’ve been noticed. It’s extremely important in education.”

Runyan’s influence continues to be felt beyond the thousands of students who passed through his door. With Boeing, he developed the largest job-shadowing program in the state. He created an earthquake preparedness program for the school, which sits on a fault line, before it was mandated by the school district. Having developed curricula for the Urban Land Institute, he has served on its board.

Runyan often told his students, “Build a wall in front of me; I’ll get around it and I’ll teach you how to do it.” He recently made his second trip to China to learn more about our nation’s competition.

“I feel one of the best ways to learn is with firsthand experience,” he explains.

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“My goals now are to change the way we view career and technology education in this country and to bring industry and education closer together.”

Soon after returning to the United States, Runyan was at the SkillsUSA National Leadership and Skills Conference. Even after 28 straight years of attending, he was still able to be inspired. “To come to a national event and see the best of the best in the country going at it, doing well and happy, it makes me want to walk right back into the classroom.”

Advisor of the Year finalists

James Berman calls SkillsUSA “a way of life.” Since 2003, he’s made it part of the culture at Delcastle Technical High School in Wilmington, Del. Berman’s students rack up more than 4,000 service hours a year, often using their culinary arts skills to benefit their community.

Debra Peabody makes sure students find the job they want. A national presenter on this topic, she’s been a SkillsUSA advisor for 23 years. At Union Grove High School in McDonough, Ga., Peabody’s 80 students run an annual job interview fair and meet monthly with architects and engineers.

Angela Haley describes herself as a “balcony educator,” propelled by high levels of enthusiasm. Cosmetology students at Oakland Technical Campus Northeast in Pontiac, Mich., tell her, “You always come in with a smile.” In return, the 17-year advisor notes, “You become their lifelong friend.”

Larry Batson always finds time to work leadership training into his electrical technologies program at Tulsa (Okla.) Technology Center. Every one of his students for the past 16 years has been a SkillsUSA member, and many of them have been elected to state and national office in the organization.
Learning to Break the Ice Fires Up Group Potential

Whenever we find ourselves in a group setting such as a classroom or meeting, the first instinct may be to tense — and clam — up. It’s human nature to “protect” ourselves from potentially awkward social interactions. But where’s the fun in that?

Here’s a great icebreaker to build a sense of comfort and community in your group. Have someone stand at the front of the room and call out something he or she enjoys doing. Keep it specific: Don’t just say, “I like listening to music,” but give the name of your favorite band instead.

If others have the same interest, the first to raise their hand must link arms with the first person selected. The cycle is repeated as the “arm linker” calls out something he or she likes to do, hands are raised, more arms are linked, and eventually everyone is standing at the front, linked together.

This icebreaker, and many more, can be found in SkillsUSA’s publication Jump-start, available at: www.skillsusa.org/store.

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 sport duffel bag (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: Sarai Najera of Vancouver, Wash., and Trudy Amatulli of Westbury, N.Y.

— JOSEPH CAMPBELL

The cave you fear to enter holds the treasure you seek.
IT ONLY TAKES A MINUTE TO GET SCHOOL EXCITED

Frederick (Md.) Career and Technology Center kicks off the school year with a fun event involving all its students. Based on the NBC program “Minute to Win It,” the center holds “In It to Win It,” a series of competitions pitting technical program against program. Complete with single elimination tournament “bracketology” posted in a school hallway, students pair off to finish minute-long challenges.

Using a raw spaghetti noodle, competitors stack empty soda cans during Frederick’s “In It to Win It” tournament.

Enthusiastically received by the students, the event is also an opportunity to inform them about SkillsUSA. The tournament begins with an assembly held at a community college auditorium across the street from the school. SkillsUSA officers present the program of work with a PowerPoint presentation detailing their activities from the previous year.

Four rounds take place at the kickoff assembly. The remaining rounds occur throughout the semester, culminating in a viewing event with refreshments and video prepared by the television/multimedia production program. The winning team gets a trophy filled with candy.

A friend’s longtime commitment builds to funding, donor drives

While in middle school, Sarah Killian learned that her friend, Christian Arreguin, was once again battling leukemia. He was first diagnosed at 2 years old and had been in remission until he was 13. Killian, of Hope Mills, N.C., organized fundraisers at the school and continued her efforts after starting at Grays Creek High. She approached fellow members of SkillsUSA, and they decided to hold a bazaar to raise money for Duke Children’s Hospital, where Arreguin was treated. Students made fliers advertising the bazaar, helped arrange for vendors to come and sell their wares, and volunteered at the event itself. The bazaar raised more than $1,000. In addition, approximately 20 people were tested during the bazaar to determine if they were viable bone marrow donors.
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.

My first true thought about SkillsUSA was, “What did I get myself into?” Now my thoughts on SkillsUSA are, “It’s a fantastic organization that everybody should be in.” SkillsUSA gives you valuable qualities and skills that every student should have.

Tyler Willey, first-year member and national competitor, Adairsville (Ga.) High School

I tell our new teachers who want to get involved with SkillsUSA, “It is a commitment. It’s time that you get, and you give it unselfishly. And when you give it unselfishly, you’re blessed back.”

SkillsUSA Advisor Angela Haley, Pontiac, Mich.
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