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Gold Standard: Student Leaders
While “if it’s not broken, don’t fix it” is good advice in most situations, state legislators weren’t listening in regard to technical education — until a pair of students stood up in defense of their school.
BY CRAIG E. MOORE

Go, Diego, Go!
Three years ago, Diego Carvallo earned a stay in a youth detention center. Now he’s earned a spot on SkillsUSA’s national officer team, the admiration of his family, and a future full of promise. Find out how he made this remarkable turnaround.
BY TOM KERCHEVAL

From Invisible to Visible Children
A 17-year-old was struck by the sights of war-torn Uganda and its young victims. Her concern soon led to traveling there herself to make sure their story is told.
BY ANN P. SCHREIBER

On the Cover:
SkillsUSA Champion Alva Poulos of Cranston, R.I. Photo by Lloyd Wolf.
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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.

SkillsUSA 

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

Q: If you had to define SkillsUSA members in one word, what would it be?

Tim: Leaders. Above all else, SkillsUSA is a leadership organization — founded on the principle that good employees and citizens need not only technical skills but also a strong base of leadership ability.

There are many ways you can become a leader, but one of the most effective is by serving others. Through service, you learn how to work with other people, budget your time and finances, and manage projects. You gain skills in planning, organizing, speaking and writing.

In this issue, you’ll read about Alanna Ojibway, who didn’t let her age get in the way of going to Uganda to serve others. Now, that is a leader! There’s also the story of some Connecticut members who drew on their leadership skills to speak to their state legislators, helping to save career-tech programs for future students.

To showcase your own chapter projects, SkillsUSA has a National Week of Service each May. Now is a great time to start working on your event. We have resources at: www.skillsusa.org/events/service.shtml. SkillsUSA also provides support through partners such as Lowe’s, which provides grants for improving schools or conducting local service projects. For details, visit: www.skillsusa.org/educators/lowes.shtml.

It’s clear students have arrived as leaders when they can actually train others to carry on a project or activity. Recently we hosted a SkillsUSA Ohio conference in which state officers trained regional officers. After several days, the mantle of leadership was passed, and the regional leaders have gone home to train the local officers at their schools.

For many students, SkillsUSA is the perfect package to provide the goals and support structure needed to become a leader. Case in point: national officer Diego Carvallo, who’s also featured in this issue. He went from struggling to fit in to being an outstanding model of leadership.

If you want to be recognized for your leadership ability, SkillsUSA has many related contests. Ask your advisor how you can get involved, and go to: www.skillsusa.org/compete/contests.shtml for the full list.

Our SkillsUSA leadership model is based upon one person helping the next. Eventually, you create teams of leaders who believe in their own ability to get things done. That helps SkillsUSA and our local communities. Best of all, it helps America.

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.
Great **Slogans**

**Come to Life In Great Ways**

Lowe’s new slogan, “Never Stop Improving,” is rooted in values similar to another slogan you might be familiar with — “SkillsUSA: Champions at Work.” Maybe that’s why the Lowe’s Charitable and Educational Foundation grants have been such a hit with SkillsUSA chapters. These grants are designed to assist local chapters in campus improvement or community service projects, and the 2012 winners have just been announced.

Among them, students from Tennessee Technology Center in McKenzie will use their grant to build a playground for a local school. Students from Pine Forest High School in Fayetteville, N.C., will repair tornado damage, and students from the William N. Neff Center in Abingdon, Va., will buy safety equipment to use in their work with Habitat for Humanity.

For a list of all 36 winners, visit: [www.skillsusa.org/educators/lowes.shtml](http://www.skillsusa.org/educators/lowes.shtml).

Lowe’s grants and local staff make many unusual projects possible, such as this sustainable greenhouse at Fox Valley Technical College in Appleton, Wis., in 2011.

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**Now We’re in Business**

It didn’t take long for SkillsUSA’s latest Champion of the Year — Jim Lentz, president and chief operating officer of Toyota Motor Sales U.S.A. Inc. — to help our organization take advantage of the platform the honor provides.

Lentz recently was heard on a CBS radio program called “Unfinished Business” along with Tim Lawrence, SkillsUSA’s executive director, and Victoria Holbert, our high-school president. The hourlong interview revolved around career and technical education and how Toyota and SkillsUSA are preparing America’s skilled workforce.

Listen to the interview in its entirety at: [www.skillsusa.org/about/news.shtml](http://www.skillsusa.org/about/news.shtml).
OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEADERS READY TO ROLL

Another SkillsUSA National Leadership and Skills Conference is looming on the metaphorical horizon, and that means literal opportunities for members right now.

SkillsUSA’s Student Leadership Development Scholarship offers financial support for eight students who, while recognized as potential leaders, lack the resources to tap into national training opportunities. Established in 2007 with financial support from former Caterpillar executive and SkillsUSA board president Robert Flint, the scholarship grants four awards of $800 to support participation in the Washington Leadership Training Institute and four awards of $1,300 to attend SkillsUSA’s Activate and Leverage (formerly State Officer 101/201) Training at the national conference in Kansas City, Mo. For more, visit: www.skillsusa.org/students/scholarships.shtml.

Great leaders always consider the welfare of others, and CareerSafe’s National Safety Video Competition is one way student workers can watch out for their peers. Every seven minutes, a teenager is hospitalized because of a workplace injury. To raise awareness of this issue, CareerSafe is asking teens across the nation to create a video demonstrating safety in a work environment. First place is a $2,500 scholarship for the students, a $5,000 cash prize for the school, and a prize pack that will include travel expenses to SkillsUSA’s national conference. (Winners will be honored at the Opening Ceremony.) For details, visit: www.skillsusa.org/compete/safetyvideo.shtml.

Helping Your Skills Go National

Becoming a SkillsUSA national officer is a great honor, but it’s also a great responsibility that should not be entered into lightly. That’s why, on March 14 at 1 p.m., SkillsUSA will host a webinar entitled, “So You Want to Be a National Officer?” If you think you have what it takes to join this elite group of SkillsUSA members, make sure to participate. SkillsUSA experts will provide an overview of the candidate procedures and officer responsibilities, and a current national officer will provide firsthand insight into the experience. To join the webinar as it happens, visit: web.ganconference.com/?meeting=8705179.

Book a flight to the big show for less dough

Early birds get worms and the best deals on flight reservations. (Yes, we realize birds don’t really need flight reservations, because, you know, they can already fly, but no other idioms were available.) If you’re a SkillsUSA member flying to the National Leadership and Skills Conference in June, you can get those deals, too. SkillsUSA partners with American Airlines to offer members 5 percent off published fares — including sale prices — to Kansas City, Mo., site of the NLSC. Visit: www.skillsusa.org/events/nlscair.shtml.

The 2012 conference will run from Saturday, June 23, through Wednesday, June 27. Since Kansas City is hosting Major League Baseball’s All-Star Game, all NLSC events will be held two days earlier than in the usual schedule.
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Students’ Leadership Skills Prove Their School Works

When proposed funding shifts jeopardized technical education, a small group of students went to the state capital to defend it. Now they’re credited with helping to save the system.

A balanced-budget proposal that could have slashed state funding for Connecticut’s technical schools didn’t sit well with the students in Meriden. They decided to give legislators their thoughts about the plan — in person.

“We decided the only thing to do was to go to Hartford and voice our opinions,” says Anthony Tarantino, one of the students from H.C. Wilcox Technical High School who spoke to the state assembly last year.

Gov. Daniel Malloy had proposed turning over control of technical education from the state to local school districts. According to the students’ SkillsUSA advisor, Michele Leahy, “We all realized rather quickly that this would mean disaster to our Connecticut technical high school system, which is 101 years old.”

Especially distressing to Tarantino was that under the new plan, fees would be charged to students attending the schools. “No one charged me to obtain the skills I learned in the vo-tech system, and I feel that everyone should be granted that same chance,” he says.

Fellow student Julissa Antigua, who also testified, agrees. “This school is the reason I evolved into the person I am today. Therefore, I felt led to speak out against this bill and educate the governor as well as everyone else about technical schools.”

She and Tarantino arrived early at the capital but didn’t testify until 3 p.m. Classmates Samantha Roccapriore (pictured left, with Antigua and Tarantino) and Steven Dominguez went along for support.

Both Tarantino and Antigua made it clear to the legislators that the current system was already working well. Or as Tarantino succinctly put it, “If it’s not broken, don’t fix it.”

Antigua told the assembly, “In my experience, attending a technical high school with an annual yearly progress has enforced a more productive attitude in me. Since I began my journey at Wilcox Technical High School, I have grown closer to becoming the person I want to be and achieving my goals.”

The issue has since been tabled by the legislature, and some, including Leahy, are crediting these testimonies as instrumental in saving the state’s technical high school system. However, both students believe it won’t be the last attempt to cut funding to their programs.

“When that time comes, supporters of the technical system will need to make sure their voices are heard and do whatever it takes to keep the system under state control,” Tarantino says.

Antigua adds, “There is no need to change a good thing when there is nothing wrong with it to begin with.”

By Craig E. Moore
“O

e day, I just cracked and lost it. I did something I’m not proud of,” Diego Carvallo remembers, the pain still in his voice three years later. “I got busted for domestic violence. I ended up hitting my mom and started fighting with police.”

Incarcerated as a result, Carvallo began a lonely period of reflection that left him with one question: “How did I get here?”

Five years before the incident, he’d been living happily with his family in Mexico City. Then his father, Manuel, received a job transfer, and the family relocated to Atlanta. That’s when the problems began.

“I didn’t just lose the normal things you lose when you move. I also lost my language,” says Carvallo, now 18. “I was like a baby. I didn’t have a way to communicate effectively.”

An outgoing child, Carvallo had often been the center of attention, a position he relished (and admittedly still does). Suddenly, he’d become invisible in a strange land, a tough situation for a 10-year-old to grasp. “I started acting out,” he explains. “I ran away from school a couple times, bit the vice principal. I would get in fights and made having me in class horrible for my teachers.”

It wasn’t easy for his parents, either. Desperate for answers, they sent him to a psychiatrist. Carvallo was diagnosed with depression and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Months later, his condition changed for the worse. After an argument with his mother, Veronica, Carvallo overdosed on Tylenol and had to have his stomach pumped.

“I didn’t really want to end things,” he says. “I guess it was just a cry for help.”

Diagnosed as suicidal, Carvallo was admitted to nearby Peachford Hospital. The experience did not provide the hoped-for results, mainly because the precocious eighth-grader quickly figured out how to manipulate the system.

“When you tell the doctors what they want to hear, you get out,” Carvallo notes. “But you’re still depressed, and you haven’t changed that much. What made it even worse was that when I got back to school, no one even knew I’d been gone. That was a downer even more.”

However, there was one more fall to come: the domestic assault charge that landed him not just in a detention center, but in that fabled place where people either get up or give up: rock bottom.

“The first couple of days [in jail], I cried the whole time,” he remembers. “I wanted my mom. It was the hardest [time] I ever went through.”

Locked up and alone, a 15-year-old was forced to take a hard look at the path he’d taken. Not content with just turning around, he ran in the right direction.

By Tom Kercheval
Then, Carvallo adds, he began “a lot of silent thinking about what I’d done — going back and reanalyzing my whole life — and I think that’s what really helped.”

Later, as his release drew near, Carvallo found himself thinking back to his return from the hospital and the lack of concern he’d felt from his peers. This time, however, someone was waiting for him.

‘Go big or go home’

Starting as a freshman at Centennial High School in Roswell, Carvallo joined the criminal justice program and, by default, SkillsUSA. Thomas Washburn was his instructor and chapter advisor. “We sat down and talked about what happened,” Carvallo says, “everything that’d been bugging me, and we worked on a plan for how I could improve.”

Washburn, a 2011 finalist in the national Advisor of the Year program, adds, “As with all my students, I guided him through setting a direction in his career goals. Then I got him involved with SkillsUSA by having him come by my room in the morning to hang out, which is when most of the SkillsUSA leadership is hanging out. This gave him a great group of friends and role models.”

Carvallo quickly went from viewing SkillsUSA as “something I just had to show up for” to something he looked forward to. “SkillsUSA provided all the things I needed in one package … good friends, goals and a support structure.”

The student immersed himself in all aspects of the program, from social activities to leadership development. His metamorphosis was so impressive that Washburn encouraged him to run for state SkillsUSA office in 2011.

But Carvallo had another idea. “I decided to run for national office,” he says. “Go big or go home.”

The campaign was another milestone in Carvallo’s turnaround. “My name allowed me to make huge copyright infringements on the ‘Go, Diego, Go’ show,” he laughs, referring to an educational cartoon tied to the “Dora the Explorer” TV series. “I used the theme song in my speech and ended it with, ‘Will you be my Dora and go on this adventure with me?’”

That question was answered during the Awards Ceremony of SkillsUSA’s National Leadership and Skills Conference, where Carvallo heard his name called as the new Region 2 vice president.

“I was in shock,” he remembers, “I couldn’t move. My advisor looks at me and goes, ‘Diego, go!’ I got up on stage, and happiness swirled up inside of me.”

Today, that joy is shared by Carvallo’s parents through a restored relationship with their son, who is the oldest of three children.

“He’s accomplished a small part of what he will be able to in life,” Manuel says proudly. “[SkillsUSA provided] a positive source of happiness that reinforced him as a person.”

Carvallo now plans to go into nuclear and radiological engineering. Out of nearly 9,000 students, he was recently one of 500 chosen as a semifinalist for the Georgia Institute of Technology’s presidential scholarship.

The wide-open paths before him are miles away from the dead-end, barren roads he used to wander. Yet to Carvallo, the scope of his ongoing journey is best described by a folder his mother keeps. “She has a folder of all my court papers, my detention slips, my life,” he explains. “After I won national office, there was an article about me in the newspaper. She had it laminated, and I’ll never forget watching her open that folder, put in that newspaper article and close it back up. I didn’t have to sit and reflect on how far I’d come. I saw it and was like, ‘Wow!’”

SkillsUSA provided all the things I needed in one package … good friends, goals and a support structure.”
Most of us would be moved by a documentary like “Invisible Children,” about tens of thousands of children who hide in the night to escape being killed or abducted by rebels in northern Uganda. High school student Alanna Ojibway sprang into action.

“What struck me is this population of children who are being left unnoticed,” says Ojibway, who attended Hartford (Vt.) Area Career and Technical Center.

According to the “Invisible Children” website (www.invisiblechildren.com), three young filmmakers traveled to Africa in the spring of 2003, planning to document the genocide in Darfur. Instead, the little-known war in northern Uganda caught their attention. If abducted, the children are forced to become soldiers for Joseph Kony and his group, the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). His forces have abducted as many as 30,000 children to fight against government forces as well as civilians.

Ojibway says her involvement “started as a fundraiser and evolved into this bigger thing. The more I got involved, the more passionate I felt about the issue.”

For a human services project in her junior year, Ojibway put together a “Walk the Walk” event through Teens Connecting Continents, a program of the Change the World Kids organization (www.changetheworldkids.org). The symbolic walk supported sustainable education and included speakers from Uganda. More than $4,000 was raised.

With her senior-year project, Ojibway wanted to raise awareness in her community “so it didn’t seem as distant for people to understand why we do something for kids in a completely other part of the world instead of locally,” she explains.

“When people ask why I work internationally rather than locally, it’s because there is not that kind of poverty here. There’s poverty, but there are resources and places that help. There, if you’re a homeless child, who’s going to feel bad for you when there are thousands of other ones like you in your community? It’s a deeper rut to be in.”

What started as a fundraiser for Alanna Ojibway has become a life’s passion. This teen’s efforts are helping the invisible children of Uganda have a chance at survival.

By Ann P. Schreiber
Ojibway looked into programs that would enable her to travel to Uganda, but her young age and lack of a degree were a barrier. Through a friend, she met a Ugandan student at nearby Dartmouth College who invited Ojibway to spend the summer at her home.

“If I hadn’t met her, there’s no organization I can think of where a 17-year-old can go and get that much hands-on experience without the liabilities, without the degree,” Ojibway says.

After arriving in Uganda, Ojibway and her new friend teamed up with two locals and used the money from her fundraiser. In the Kampala area, she taught, provided supplies and was part of a group that built a new home for orphans.

“I was literally thrown into working as a mom, as a counselor, as a doctor, for 47 kids,” she says. “The philosophy was, ‘You’re who we’re relying on. We don’t care if you have a degree or not. You’re who’s here to help.’”

**Health and safety concerns**
Traveling to war-torn regions of the world can be risky. Fortunately, Ojibway says her experiences were without incident.

“I think going anywhere, being that big of a minority — being white, being female, being young — I knew I was going to be a target. I don’t think there was anything really beyond just people yelling comments. It got old, but it wasn’t anything ... no one was ever really aggressive. People there, by and large, were very welcoming, very accepting.”

Others might also worry about getting sick, but Ojibway says she was really lucky.

“I had to get about four million shots, for everything you could imagine. And then I got there and everyone was like, ‘OK, you’re going to need your malaria pills every day, because you’re going to get swarmed with mosquitoes.’

“I definitely had fewer mosquito bites there than I’ve ever had in a summer in Vermont. I was amazed that nothing set me off. New food, new climate, new whatever ... I never had an upset stomach. I was actually healthier when I returned, because the diet was a lot better for me, and I was walking every day.”

Health and personal safety issues aside, Ojibway says the conditions are challenging in Uganda but don’t overshadow her passion to work there.

“I saw raw sewage in the streets, trash everywhere, stray dogs, stray kids. That...
“I love the kids that I worked with and the people that I worked with,” Ojibway says of her private trip to aid Ugandan children. “They are some of the happiest and most genuine people I’ve ever seen.”

was the most disturbing thing to me. To see little naked babies, literally babies, infants on their own.

“A lot of times, the parents can’t afford to have a kid. They need jobs, and they’re not going to pay for child care,” she explains. “If [the family is] homeless, they’re living on the streets, so their kids are living on the streets. It was very strange to me that the animals, the kids and everyone were on the same level.”

Ojibway is reluctant to paint a negative image, fearing it might prevent people from helping a population where a little help goes a long way. “I did see a lot of negative things. I saw some pretty scary things. And when I’ve told people about that, they ask, ‘Why would you ever go back?’” she says.

A career in serving others
SkillsUSA has helped with telling the whole story. Ojibway competed in 2010 and 2011 in the national Prepared Speech and Extemporaneous Speaking contests, respectively. With stronger communications skills as a result, she’s been able to spread the word about the plight of the Ugandan children.

Likewise, through competing in the championships, Ojibway says meeting many different people has really helped her in getting accustomed to different people and populations. It’s also piqued her interest in a wide variety of skills.

“I now appreciate all of the jobs that are going on around me,” she adds.

Now a freshman at the University of California, Santa Cruz, Ojibway is majoring in social work. She hopes to work in the human services field, serving the impoverished.

That one decision to do something for Uganda’s children led to a crash course in what will likely become her life’s work.

“I’ve never had quite the same feeling as I’ve had being able to help these kids who are not getting any other visibility in the world. It’s a lot more obvious to see the changes that are made for these kids and how significant that is for them.”

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Building a **Home Online** Helps a Chapter **Shine**

You love the official SkillsUSA website. We know, because the hits just keep coming. But what about a site for your chapter? It’s a great publicity and recruiting tool, and — best of all — there are many free resources to help you build one.

As a class, talk about how a website for your chapter should be organized. What information should be featured? What areas of your chapter would you most like to promote? Who will be responsible for writing content, taking pictures and maintaining the site?

Next, see who offers free website creation and decide if one feels right for you. Weebly (www.weebly.com) offers a custom domain name and templates to build simple sites with cool features. Wix (www.wix.com), Blogger (www.blogger.com) and Wordpress (www.wordpress.com) are other great alternatives.

Choose a tool and start building your site. You’ll be building your chapter’s strength and reputation in the process.

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With public **sentiment**, nothing can fail. Without it, nothing can **succeed**.

— **Abraham Lincoln**

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**Find the photo, win a prize**

No, the picture on the left isn’t abstract art. It’s actually a distorted part of another photo in this issue. Find the original photo and send us the page number where it appears to win a SkillsUSA 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 March 15.

**Congratulations to last issue’s winners:** Theresa Pulvano of Jackson, N.J., and Rachael Johnson of Martinsburg, W.Va.
FINDING FUNDS TO HELP YOUNG, YOUNG AT HEART

Students at Lumpkin High School in Dahlonega, Ga., received a Lowe’s grant through SkillsUSA to help renovate a local nursing home and assisted living facility. When Lowe’s associate Mindy Loudermilk presented it, she informed instructor Jeff Bearinger that since gift cards were purchased and used like debit cards, a store promotion would add 10 percent, or $1,000, to the grant amount.

Bearinger had an idea. His daughter Elizabeth, who teaches at Lumpkin County Elementary, had a student, Matty Melton, who battled but lost his fight with cancer. Bearinger’s students knew about Melton and his love for trains. So, when the nursing home renovations were complete, Bearinger approached his students about building a train-shaped playhouse in the boy’s honor. The extra $1,000 from Lowe’s funded the project.

The train was dedicated with Melton’s former classmates, friends, teachers and family taking part.

Lunches of champions

To support the Special Olympics, students at the Southern Adirondack Education Center in Hudson Falls, N.Y., volunteered their time and expertise. More than 75 students in the culinary arts program, as well as career connections and service-level health and human services, prepared 1,200 boxed lunches for the participating athletes and coaches.

Chef Charlie Jones, the culinary instructor, explained, “We’ve been involved with the regional Special Olympics in years past, so when the state competition came to our area, we wanted to do what we do best — and that’s preparing and providing food.”

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I have always enjoyed watching the excitement and pride students exhibit during SkillsUSA competitions. ... I have confidence in the future of our country because I am confident in their abilities to lead us all.


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