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features

9 Structure and Strength
Protecting buildings from earthquakes and children from bullying are two goals student Kevin Waita has brought here from Kenya.
BY ANN P. SCHREIBER

11 The Ties that Bind
Meet the Groovers, whose drive to succeed in serving others knows no limits.
BY TOM KERCHEVAL

14 ‘I Am Living Proof’
A young man tells his own story of picking up the pieces of a shattered life and using them to spread a message of hope.
BY RICKY JORDAN WITH CRAIG E. MOORE

17 Energy to Burn
With an electricity-generating incinerator next door to their school, students take action to reduce any negative health effects.
BY ANN P. SCHREIBER

19 Gold Standard: Competitor
For an ex-Marine in Texas, the perfect way to help honor fallen troops was creating a welded sculpture. Its imperfections made it even more powerful.
BY E. THOMAS HALL

departments

5 Ask Tim
BY TIM LAWRENCE

6 What’s New
BY TOM KERCHEVAL

20 Toolbox
BY TOM KERCHEVAL

21 Spotlight
BY ANN P. SCHREIBER

22 Image
BY E. THOMAS HALL

On the Cover:
SkillsUSA Champion Yarian Colón Álvarez of Arecibo, Puerto Rico. Photo by Lloyd Wolf.
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Respecting Perspectives

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

Q: How can SkillsUSA make sure all its members’ views are respected?
Tim: The real leaders in SkillsUSA are the students, who have a say in everything from running their local chapters to electing their national officers. It’s always been our members’ individual right to voice their opinions. But an important part of being respected is listening to the viewpoints of others and being open-minded to new ways of thinking. That’s why we’ve developed a new theme, “SkillsUSA: Respecting All Perspectives.”

In this issue of SkillsUSA Champions, you’ll meet people who share their diverse backgrounds and views. One student, born in Kenya, is passionate about protecting others. Another young man, by taking a nontraditional career path, was able to turn his life around. Then there’s an ex-Marine who made a personal statement by creating a unique metal sculpture. I hope reading about them inspires you to create your own life story worth telling.

It’s always wonderful to see such diversity in our members. Our elected officers represent a variety of training programs, cultures and perspectives, but they come together to learn and grow as a group. SkillsUSA has a process to involve any member who chooses to seek a leadership position. If you’re not sure how, ask your chapter advisor for suggestions.

Right now, we’re seeking qualified candidates for national office. In June, delegates at our national conference will elect 15 student ambassadors to represent SkillsUSA next year. Being a candidate is the experience of a lifetime — win or lose. It’s an opportunity to network with students from across America and with industry and education leaders. The delegate process is also fascinating if you like politics and elections. The qualifications are posted on our national website. I urge you to take a look and decide if you’re ready for an awesome experience.

Whatever role you serve, SkillsUSA has always been about providing a positive leadership experience to each individual who desires it. Being active in your own leadership and character development means being a champion for your future.

Traveling across the United States recently, I’ve seen many students preparing for their local and state SkillsUSA competitions. I’ve also met many district and state SkillsUSA officers and candidates. I hope to meet you in Kansas City this June or in my travels nationwide sometime soon.

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.
In the ongoing battle of reality vs. hype, the latter usually reigns supreme, but not when it comes to SkillsUSA’s National Leadership and Skills Conference. The 47th NLSC comes to Kansas City, Mo., June 20-24, promising to be the best ever. Tuesday night’s Champions Festival, a huge hit last year, will once again rock the fabulous Power and Light District. The Opening Ceremony, featuring Air Products CEO John McGlade as keynote speaker, will stoke the excitement on Wednesday. Thursday’s SkillsUSA Championships, arguably the week’s main event, will showcase nearly 6,000 state champions competing in 94 contests. SkillsUSA TECHSPO, community service, SkillsUSA Night at a Kansas City Royals baseball game, the Awards Ceremony ... it’s all part of the show. Will you be? For info on all things conference, visit: www.skillsusa.org/events/nlsc.shtml.

Each May, to commemorate the founding of SkillsUSA and showcase the strength of its mission, all chapters are invited to conduct or promote a community service project during SkillsUSA’s National Week of Service. This year’s event is May 2-8. Time may be short, but you’ll find plenty of direction for planning your event — including a community service guide, customizable media releases, and more — at: www.skillsusa.org/events/service.shtml. Oh, and let us know what you’ve done! The first 50 chapters to submit a report will receive a free item from SkillsUSA. Send those reports to: nclausen@skillsusa.org.

Once again, the opening and awards ceremonies will be streamed live online during this year’s national conference. Look for daily photo and video coverage throughout the week, too.
The recipients of the 2011 Lowe’s SkillsUSA Grants have been announced. In fact, by the time you read this, 34 schools and colleges across the nation will have already received checks — a total of $324,800 in Lowe’s donations — for a variety of exciting projects to be conducted in the coming months.

What are these grants of which we speak? Since 2007, Lowe’s Charitable and Educational Foundation has been providing grants of up to $10,000 for community service or campus improvement projects conducted by SkillsUSA chapters. Would-be recipients apply for the grants each year, and winners are chosen based on uniqueness of the project, quality of planning, and measurements of success after the project’s completion. It’s also a way for Lowe’s to engage SkillsUSA students with staff and contractors from local Lowe’s stores.

This year, service grants were awarded in 12 states and campus improvement grants in 16. For the full list, as well as details on past recipients and application guidelines, visit: www.skillsusa.org/educators/lowes.shtml.

Leadership Goes National at NLSC
Every year, after the final gavel of the Awards Ceremony brings an official end to SkillsUSA’s National Leadership and Skills Conference, the outgoing national officers form a tearful circle, sharing a sense of bittersweet awe at the year of amazing experiences they’ve shared. Want to be part of that circle next year? Then consider running for national office. Not only is it one of the highest honors a student can achieve in SkillsUSA, it’s also one of the most rewarding, as you represent the organization you love on a national level. For full details on how to apply, visit: www.skillsusa.org/students/officerapp.shtml.

Arrive on an airplane, leave on a ‘hog’
Few things can be adequately described with one word, but just say “Harley” and most people smile knowingly. (They might even break into an impromptu verse of “Born to Be Wild.”)

Harley-Davidson Motor Co. feels the same about SkillsUSA, having once again donated a Dyna Super Glide motorcycle for the national conference’s popular raffle. SkillsUSA’s programs and Alumni and Friends Association are the beneficiaries. Your state alumni can be, too; for every $5 ticket sold, your group will receive $1. For information or to order tickets, telephone 703-737-0639 or email nclausen@skillsusa.org.
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Kevi Waita is fascinated with structure — whether it’s buildings and highways or words and music. Originally from Nairobi, Kenya, Waita attends Tulsa (Okla.) Technology Center’s Lemley Campus and plans to own a masonry or construction business. “My grandpa has quite a number of buildings, and some of them are not finished,” he says. “So, that’s sparked an interest in the field.”

Waita came to the United States for his brother’s graduation and ended up staying. He believes educational opportunities are better here than in Kenya, where nearly 40 million people live in an area about the size of Texas. Its government provides a free education through the primary level, but schools are crowded and the competition to attend is great. To go beyond that educational level, the costs are high. “What you would pay in my country — to go through some of the courses that we go through here at a fair price — that would be very expensive,” Waita explains.

As he studies construction, Waita is particularly interested in the reinforcement of buildings. “It’s a career with global potential,” he says, due to the frequency of earthquakes worldwide. “In Kenya, we don’t have very many earthquakes. We do have them, but very mild,” Waita points out. However, when he competed in the SkillsUSA Championships, the aftermath of the Haiti earthquake was very much on his mind. In the national Job Skill Demonstration A event, he showed how to strengthen buildings with anchors, wire and rebar. “I have done some research on why there were so many fatalities in the Haiti earthquake, which was lesser in magnitude compared to the ones that hit Chile and Japan, and found out that there was very little reinforcement used in this country [Haiti] that had more than 200,000 lives lost,” he says. “In Japan, the buildings were better prepared for earthquakes than in Haiti. However, the sweeping effect of the ocean made it a whole different ball game.”
“He’s hungry for knowledge. He’s always had a positive attitude. It rubs off on the other students.”
— Waita’s instructor, Chauncey Kila

Waita’s mood lifts when he talks about construction in the United States. “I’ve told people about the infrastructure you people have,” he says. “The roadwork, it’s organized. You people are way ahead. I talk with my friends from home. We believe we’re more than 100 years behind.”

Waita explains that under British rule during the 1920s and ’30s, Kenya’s cities were planned for 50 years out. Now the highways are so congested, it once took his mother from 5 p.m. to 1 a.m. to drive three miles. She could have pulled over and walked, but she was warned there probably would be no car to return to.

“They are trying to build more roads, to bring in highways,” Waita adds. “That was one of the shocks that I had when I came here: the highways that you people have, four cars going one direction. The maximum we have is two.”

Building with words and music
Besides buildings, Waita constructs songs. He plays guitar and has been interested in music since the age of 11.

“That’s when I began to start to try to imitate people and write down lyrics. A few years later, I started to write my own songs,” he says. “I used to perform in places in Kenya.”

Visiting Tulsa’s Victory School as a guest speaker, he was asked to write a song. The result, “Kool 2 Be Kind,” is geared to younger audiences and addresses bullying. (To see his music video online, visit YouTube and search for “Kevin Waita 1010.”) He’s also working with a studio to record an album.

Waita’s masonry instructor, Chauncey Kila, likewise builds with words. He discovered a talent for poetry when asked to write something for a class.

“I was reading up on how to write a poem, and most of the things that I read said to write something that you’re passionate about,” Kila says. “Well, I’m a bricklayer, so I’m passionate about bricklaying and what I do. So I wrote a poem about bricks and mortar. I had to get in front of the class and read it. The teacher said, ‘You missed your calling.’” (Read samples of Kila’s poetry at: www.skillsusa.org/champions/poems.html.)

It’s been a blessing to have Waita as a student, Kila adds. “He’s hungry for knowledge. He’s always had a positive attitude. It rubs off on the other students. He’s become a mentor to some in the class. That’s why I was able to get him a job. I hear comments from his boss all the time.”

Waita works for Advance Masonry in Tulsa and also hosts an international radio program broadcast at 107.9 FM in Tulsa (www.kfmyradio.com). “We have different languages from all around the world and have done a special on Japan,” he says.

Word by word, brick by brick, Waita and Kila are building strong futures, whether it’s for youngsters learning to be kind or for those who need sturdy roofs over their heads.

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“Business as usual,” says Debra Groover, her voice unmistakably tinged with pride. Her son, 19-year-old Rickey, has just returned from his third SkillsUSA Georgia competition. Three trips, three medals.

Considering the obstacles Rickey has faced since birth, the “three-peat,” as he calls it, is even more impressive. But with his family’s support, it’s no wonder.

At 3 1⁄2 years old, Rickey wasn’t speaking at all. “Fluid in his ears had gone undetected,” Debra explains. “We got tubes put in his ears, and within a month, he was talking. But then he started having seizures, which we came to find out were nearly constant, split-second seizures.”

These continued when Rickey started school, keeping him from hearing parts of instructions. “He’d be in a math class,” Debra remembers, “and he’d say, ‘7 plus 7 is 14,’ and they’d say, ‘Write the answer...”

SkillsUSA is often described as one big family: a support system that helps its members realize their full potential. But what sorts of things happen when an already supportive family takes a very active role in the organization? In the case of the Groovers, amazing things — from overcoming physical challenges to making major achievements, all in a quest to serve others.
down,’ and he’d write a ‘4.’ His brain would seize out as he was writing and not realize that he didn’t write the ‘1.’"

To help deal with the condition, Rickey entered a special education program. Understandably, the youngest of five became shy and withdrawn, especially around groups. But by the time he entered Centennial High School in Roswell, Ga., all that was about to change, thanks in part to the example of older sister Holly.

Holly, now 21, is about to finish Georgia State University’s four-year program in criminal justice a year early. Meanwhile, she’s working full time at the Roswell detention center. While she won a gold medal in Criminal Justice at the 2008 SkillsUSA Championships, the bronze from her regional competition two years earlier made a bigger impression, she says.

“I competed in Job Skill Demonstration A. I literally figured out what I was going to do and practiced it the night before the competition. I ended up winning bronze, but I realized that if I had actually worked at it, I would’ve gone further.” Holly hasn’t made that mistake again.

“She’s just amazing,” Debra says, her pride coming through once more. “She’s gone to school nonstop since graduating. She’s gone during the summer, all while working a full-time job. I wish more people could see what somebody with the right mindset can accomplish.”

Holly explains, “It’s the drive to want more. That’s the one thing SkillsUSA has taught me: that I don’t have to settle.”

The student passed that lesson on to her little brother, who decided that a career in law enforcement appealed to him, too. So did membership in SkillsUSA.

“She’s really my motivator,” Rickey says. “If it wasn’t for her, I wouldn’t have gotten this far.”

In SkillsUSA, Rickey’s shyness grew into confidence. One of his friends, Zac Snyder, noticed the change immediately. “Rickey thrives in small group settings, and he used to shut down when speaking in front of crowds,” says Snyder, a fellow student who served as SkillsUSA Georgia’s vice president. “But through SkillsUSA, he learned to speak to the judges and to control his nerves.”

The newfound skills served Rickey well at his first national competition, where he won his own bronze medal in 2009. “In Action Skills, you demonstrate something in the field you’re interested in,” he points out. “I’m interested in law enforcement, so I showed how to handcuff a suspect.”
Give new meaning to Motor-head

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I started my journey by learning the democratic process and by experiencing and understanding our country’s politics. I learned to conduct meetings as well as organize and host conferences. I interacted with students, teachers and business and industry partners, all in a positive and productive way.

Following the SkillsUSA creed, I learned to honor and respect my vocation, cosmetology, in such a way as to bring distinction to myself. Further, I spared no effort in upholding the ideal that being Hispanic and a minority was not an excuse to fail.

Being a nontraditional student in cosmetology, I suffered a plethora of difficulties, such as being called all sorts of names that weren’t appropriate or true. I dealt with teachers who judged my personality and doubted my path to excellence.

I never used the negativity as a roadblock; it made me the young man I am today and helped me with my goal in life.

I went to Bay Path Regional Vocational Technical High School in Charlton, and everything was opened for me. My freshman year, I didn’t really care about too many things, but then my advisor told me she wanted me to go to the state SkillsUSA conference as a delegate.

After that, I began to acquire values, such as high moral and spiritual standards, and pride in my work.

I Am Living Proof

A once troubled young man tells his own story of how he learned to respect himself and others. Now he wants to spread the message there’s always hope.

By Ricky Jordan

as told to Craig E. Moore

WEB RESOURCES

Do you have what it takes to be a national officer? Get details on what you need to run here: www.skillsusa.org/students/officerapp.shtml

Meet the rest of your 2010-11 SkillsUSA national officers at: www.skillsusa.org/students/officers2.shtml

“It Gets Better” is a prevalent anti-bullying message. For resources on this issue, see: www.stopbullying.gov

Photo: Lloyd Wolf
From a follower to a leader

I am now serving as the national Region 1 vice president for SkillsUSA. Winning a national election in June 2010 assisted me in completing my goal to motivate other students to excel, no matter their ethnicity or gender.

I competed for a position to represent an organization with more than 300,000 members in 50 states, the nation’s capital and the territories of Guam, U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

The opportunity to become a leader and positively influence others, including minorities, demonstrates the importance of diversity to me.

I have a name tag that says “National Officer.” You can’t get any better than that! People don’t even know what it’s all about where I grew up. I have to explain to my family members what it is, and they’re like, “Whoa!”

SkillsUSA helps you think about things so totally differently. You see how other people live in other states. You see that adults don’t judge us as immature, because we are all the same. You conduct business meetings.

I also use etiquette now. I never knew about etiquette my freshman year, but I learned it from SkillsUSA. You learn from it, and it does change you.

I have excelled beyond what I could have ever imagined. Now I want the same success for everyone. I have removed myself from the list of names of those who don’t want anything out of life and added my name to the list of people who want to change the way they live.

Believe to achieve

I may not know what my future holds, but that is the beauty of it. I want to anticipate all the possibilities of where my journey will go next, because that’s what happened when I moved to Massachusetts.

People who believe that minorities can’t succeed are wrong. I am alive and well, and I will spread that mindset to all students who believe they can’t achieve — and let them know that there is always a choice, and that choice is theirs.

For those of you out there that have gone through a lot or are still going through a lot, I will tell you this: With hard work and a determined soul, life will get better. I am living proof.
Detroit’s Academy of Arts and Sciences sits in the shadow of one of the nation’s largest energy-generating incinerators. While burning waste may keep the lights on, the students worry about the effects of air pollution.

“One of the things I noticed, and I did some research on my own,” says Tranice George. “I attended a lecture at Wayne State [University] and learned that people closer to the incinerator have higher rates of asthma, bronchitis and sinus infections. People further away do not.”

One way to cut down on pollution is to recycle trash that can be toxic when burned, such as plastic. Recycling paper can save trees, which helps clear the air. But since the city doesn’t offer curbside recycling, George and other students in Mary Groesbeck’s class decided to create their own program, calling themselves Environmental Defenders.

First, they had to find a suitable recycling company, Groesbeck says. “We found certain companies tell you they’re recycling, but then they go and burn the stuff. It really bothered the kids.”

Together, they chose one that met their ethical standards and was only a quarter-mile from the school. Then, once a week, the students collected, sorted and cleaned paper, plastic, glass and metal from classrooms for delivery to the facility.

WEB RESOURCES

- Delmar, Cengage Learning wants to make www.TheGreenDestination.com the building trades industry’s place to go. Submit a video showing how you would promote this website to potential customers. Visit: www.skillsusa.org/compete/green.shtml
- Visit environmentalist David Suzuki’s website to learn more about sustainability: www.davidsuzuki.org/
- Start planning Earth Day activities for next year. Visit: www.earthday.org

The efforts of teacher Mary Groesbeck (center) led to the SkillsUSA Environmental Defenders Recycling Program.
We can teach others

According to the students’ calculations, they’ve already saved 6 square yards of landfill space, Groesbeck says. Just from recycling paper, 1,300 gallons of oil were also saved.

“The ripple effect is amazing,” the teacher points out. “And, I think for [students] to recognize that one person can make a difference was huge. My goal is really to get them to recycle for the rest of their lives.”

One of them, Tanaeja Davis, says learning how recycling paper can save trees made her feel good. “When I was a kid, I used to climb trees, so when I thought about how many trees were being cut down, I’m like, ‘Oh my God, what can we do?’ ”

After a brief shutdown, the waste-to-energy plant looming over the school is under new management. Tranice George, the student who researched its health effects, started out wanting to motivate younger students to recycle. “I never knew how much of an impact a bunch of us collecting paper once a week could do. When I learned that we saved 34 trees, I thought that was outstanding,” she says.

George motivated her family as well. “Now we recycle just about everything that we can — phones, electronics. Most of the time, with electronics, you just throw them away. We understand now the importance of recycling them.

“We can teach others, and others can teach others,” the student explains. “As easy as you can throw something in the trash, you can throw it in a recycling bin and save so much, and help your environment so much.”
Imperfections Enhance This Sculpture’s Impact

After finding one calling as a welder, John Hoyt found another. “I wanted a project that had a meaning to me. I’m very proud of my country and of serving it,” the former Marine says.

When SkillsUSA tried out a competition in Welding Art Sculpture last year, most entries had whimsical themes: cowboy boots, a dragonfly, a fisherman or an array of stars. A sturdy black box stood out among them, starkly displaying a symbol associated with prisoners of war.

“I just wanted to honor the fallen brothers in arms that we’ve had in the past campaigns and any future campaigns,” says former Marine John Hoyt, who created this project as a student at St. Philip’s College in San Antonio and where he’s now an adjunct faculty member.

Hoyt was inspired by the iconic logo of the National League of POW/MIA Families (www.pow-miafamilies.org), which seeks the release of Vietnam War prisoners and a full accounting of those missing in action. When contacted for permission to use the art, the nonprofit organization replied it was “delighted” and “honored,” leading to talk of displaying Hoyt’s work at its headquarters or at a military base.

Welding was not Hoyt’s original career goal. After an honorable discharge in 2002, he continued to use his Marine training in logistics, then entered college to become an X-ray technician. Taking a welding class “was more of a fun thing,” Hoyt says, but he liked it so much, “it was the profession that actually chose the welder” and not the other way around.

It took Hoyt four days to weld the illuminated sculpture, which is 3 feet high and weighs almost 50 pounds. SkillsUSA advisor Cornelio Ontiveros provided work space and guidance, and Hoyt’s employer, Southwest Signs, donated scrap material.

“When we spoke about the project, we all took it to heart. Any military person would,” says Ontiveros, a fellow veteran.

Hoyt explains, “People don’t remember the ones that are missing. They don’t see the families who are in distress from not knowing where their loved ones are.”

There were a few literal bumps in taking the sculpture to SkillsUSA’s new contest demonstration in Kansas City, Mo. On arrival, Hoyt learned it was larger than the rules allowed. And, “in a van with a bunch of luggage and a special-needs scooter, it bounced around,” scratching the sculpture, Ontiveros says. The two discussed making last-minute repairs but ultimately decided the scratches would enhance the message Hoyt was trying to get across.

“Those MIAs, those POWs, they’re not in perfect condition. They’re scratched up, they’re hurt and they’re beaten,” Ontiveros recalls telling Hoyt. “Your sculpture shows in itself that even though all these things have happened, it’s still there to be illuminated. And the illumination for us is to wake up and say, ‘Hey, we need to remember.’” (For more photos, click here.)
SkillsUSA recently hosted a webinar titled “Respecting All Perspectives,” and students and teachers from 18 schools nationwide joined the lively discussion.

How about a lively discussion of your own? As a group, discuss what the word “respect” means. What doesn’t it mean? Can you show someone respect without agreeing with their views? How?

Next, think of an experience where your beliefs or culture was disrespected. Describe the experience and your feelings in writing. Have you ever caused someone else embarrassment through disrespectful conduct, even if it was by accident? Write that down, too. Now, come together as a group and discuss some of these examples. How could things have been handled differently in each situation?

Learn more about respecting diversity in Level 1 of SkillsUSA’s Professional Development Program, and download the webinar mentioned above at: www.skillsusa.org/educators/skillsusaweek.shtml.

We may have come over on different ships, but we’re all in the same boat now.

— WHITNEY YOUNG JR.

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 water bottle (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 Aug. 1. Congratulations to last issue’s winners: Claude Climer of Cleveland, Tenn., and Linda Johnson of Sayre, Okla.
Getting a charge out of technology

Seniors at the Scotch Plains, N.J., campus of Union County Vocational Technical School converted a Chevrolet S-10 pickup into an electric vehicle.

According to their instructor, Gregg Force, the pickup has zero tailpipe emissions and is charged by plugging it into a standard household outlet.

The electric drive train and battery system were provided by curriculum specialists Electric Auto Shop Inc.

Now all accessories, including the lights, horn, wipers, radio and heater, run off 12-volt batteries. While the truck, donated by General Motors around 1995, can’t be driven on public roads anymore, it can be demonstrated on campus to encourage community use of electric vehicles.

Partnership yields new squad car

In North Dakota, police and public schools are partners in Project Blue Thunder, in which students from Fargo North, Fargo South and Davies high schools are transforming a vehicle into a squad car.

Besides designing and outfitting the car, which the Fargo police department seized in a drug arrest, students are committed to ongoing maintenance. Local businesses donated funding, paint and new body panels, rims, tires and brakes, as well as a new sound system with digital video.

Fargo South automotive instructor Tom Cross and his school’s student resource officer came up with the project idea. The only cost to the police department is licensing and insurance, which helped gain its buy-in.

CHEF CHALLENGE TAKES A PINCH OF TEAMWORK

At the Career and Technology Institute in Victoria, Texas, students in a new culinary arts class must focus on teamwork as well as cooking.

The instructor and chef, Jason Gray, has students practice these skills through in-class “Iron Chef” competitions. As in the television show, students — who must work in teams — are given one secret ingredient to include in a meal. For example, starches were the ingredient in a recent event, when students had to create winning meals from scratch, in one hour, with bowls of noodles, rice and potatoes.

Through the competition, Gray hopes his students will learn to understand the creative aspects of cooking.

Picture-perfect fundraiser

To raise travel funds, photography students at Coeur d’Alene (Idaho) High School took family portraits for a suggested donation of $40. The students set up lights and cameras, then senior Essex Prescott took the photos. Others helped organize families, and everyone had a hand in editing the photographs.

(From left) Future “Iron Chefs” Chris Smith, Bianca Hosler and Beatrice Ramirez team up with secret ingredients.
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.

Team USA is once again beginning to flex its muscles on the world stage, and it is beginning to demonstrate what a great skilled nation you are. My challenge to you is, come to London and prove it.

Simon Bartley of WorldSkills London 2011, where the SkillsUSA WorldTeam will compete Oct. 5-8
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