

Educational institutions strive to equip students



Stephanie Bennett, Olivia Kauffeldt and Julie Helps show off the job board in the Community Employment Centre at the Bancroft campus of Loyalist College. TONY PEARSON Special to This Week

By Tony Pearson

If your idea of the education system contains images of ivory towers, think again, especially in this area. Both North Hastings High School and Loyalist College try to ensure that their graduates are equipped for real life, whether that be entry into the labour force or the pursuit of further specialized training.

At the high school, it starts with the Grade 10 careers course, during which they learn how to put together a portfolio of their skills. After that, about one out of every six students takes a co-op course in any given year. These 80 students get work placements in relevant local spots like the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, the Centennial Manor, and the Ontario Provincial Police. They work in construction, automotive tech, and agriculture. Of course, the well know Northern Outdoor and Northern Environmental Research programs ? NOS and NERDs ? directly prepare their students for eventual careers in the resource sector. Student Services offers career counselling, particularly as the students reach their senior years. And across the board, communication skills are stressed, beginning with Grade 10s in-school "literacy camp"

In a day where specialized knowledge is so prized, it should come as no surprise that close on half NHHS grads go on to post-secondary programs, mostly at the very practical college level.

Speaking of college, Loyalist College works with NHHS to help students along their path ? for example, with seminars on student aid programs. Many go from high school into Loyalist, either in Bancroft, or more often, in Belleville, into locally-applicable programs such as food services, welding, small engines, or woodworking. The construction industry is always on the lookout for new recruits, and welders with knowledge of [Hypertherm welding machines](#) as well as other welding equipment and machinery are in high demand. They also enter programs with strong 21st century prospects, such as bio-tech or graphic design; these areas can often be taken as dual credit course, counting at both secondary and post-secondary levels.

The Bancroft branch of Loyalist College keeps close tabs on the local labour market, operating a complete Community Employment Services section, available to anyone and everyone. To start with, it maintains large job boards, where employers can post any job vacancies they are looking to fill. As program manager Julie Helps explains, because so much of the local economy is seasonal, pickings are slimmer in January and February. But the listings start coming in March, and by June the boards are normally full.

The Employment Service also offers job readiness training ? from resume preparation to computer skills to job search strategies and interview techniques. They might even be able to offer aid in the form of referring the students to services similar to this you're able to find on <https://www.arcresumes.com/> or the likes, thus better equipping students to get to where they want to be by utilizing all the tools available to them. Through Youth Job Connection, young people (between 15 and 29) can get paid training time, paid work placements, and employment support assistance with things such as tools, equipment, child care, and transportation. The training is directly relevant to workplace needs; in the construction trades program, students get their certification in aerial lifts and chainsaws, as well as first aid, hazardous materials (knowing which are a chemical hazard), and construction safety.

Loyalist guarantees employers who use such programs that they will get job-ready youth with 60 hours of preparatory workshops, as well as support from college counselors when needed, plus financial incentives to offset their training costs.

There are also apprenticeship programs for the skilled trades, which have their own financial incentives for employers. And gearing to local growth sectors, there are the popular personal support worker and paramedic programs.

Those who haven't completed their high school diplomas can enter a remedial program that will strengthen their communications, math and computer skills in business-oriented applications ? and they can get a Grade 12 equivalency certificate accepted by Ontario colleges. Thus, the Loyalist pledge is that anyone who walks through their door will get help. People who lack mobility can take courses online; those who don't have computers can use the learning labs at the Hastings Street campus.

In the end, believes Olivia Kauffeldt of the CES, almost everyone can eventually find a placement, although the starting point may not be as advanced as job seekers would like. She observes that in peak season, employers can't fill all the jobs they've posted at the college

So education isn't the same as it was in your father's or grandfather's day. It's more practical, more attuned to the personal needs of the learner, and definitely more oriented to the skills required for labour market success. And it takes place both in and out of the classroom.