

VHS Seniors Present Projects

By Scott Laird

The presentation of Senior Projects is an annual rite of passage at Vernonia High School.

Each year, as a precursor to graduation and the end of their high school days, students dress themselves up in business attire, head to school in the evening and nervously step in front of a panel of community judges to make an eight to ten minute speech. Following the speech the looks and sighs of relief are evident as the students realize they have taken one more big step towards graduation day.

The Senior Project is a hands-on and experiential learning opportunity for students to work side-by-side with a career mentor. The students spend at least twenty hours working and observing while "on the job," then must prepare a visual display and public speech which outlines their experience and what they learned. It is the only required public speaking that students must complete at VHS, so their nervousness is understandable.

The Senior Project presentations are the end of a long road. In their junior year, students sign a Letter of Intent, describing the job shadow they plan to complete. In recent years, students have gathered, on the day of presentations, in the school gymnasium to present their projects in a more informal "arena" setting. Students have a chance to talk about and explain their projects to visitors and under class students under less stressful conditions.

For the evening presentations,

Senior Project advisor Rachel Wilcoxon introduced several minor changes to the structure this year. First, she allowed the students to self-choose the groups they would present in, allowing students to be with their friends and support each other. Wilcoxon also informed the students in the morning who would sit on their panel of judges, which also seemed to help relax the students.

According to several of the judges, (most of them do this year after year) this class of students seemed to be extremely well prepared and more relaxed. "These were some of the best Senior Speeches we have seen," seemed to be the consensus.

Here is a brief description of some of the Senior Projects this year:

Brooke Johnson did a job shadow with the Timber Patrol. "I want to work in law enforcement and I also want to do something in the woods, and this involves both of them," explained Johnson.



Brooke Johnson

son. Johnson rode on patrol, checking locks on gates, looking for vandalism, and checking permits. Johnson explained that sometimes the Timber Patrol has to confiscate items collected in the forest, like mushrooms, and that they also investigate logging accidents or criminal activity on timber property.

Stephanie Castro worked with local Message Therapist Heather Lewis as well as Physical Therapist Brian Lange in Portland. Castro is interested in pursuing a career as a Physical Therapist. She became interested after suffering a serious sports injury. "That was my inspiration, because after my ACL surgery I really liked what they did in Physical Therapy," said Castro. As part of her Senior Project Castro also created an education plan for herself which included researching college choices. Castro says she plans to enter a community college Registered Nurse program at either PCC or Mt. Hood, then attend Linfield College to get her Bachelors Degree in nursing so she could start working as a nurse. She would then attend Pacific University to get her degree in Physical Therapy.

MaCayla Fennell did an internship at Tuality Hospital in the Labor and Delivery unit. Fennell says she was able to do many things while on the job



MaCayla Fennell

for twenty-four total hours, including performing hearing and PKU tests, and weighing some babies. The most exciting part of her experience was being in the operating room and observing a live birth during a cesarean section procedure. "It was different, but it was really great to watch because I am a very visual learner," said Fennell. "It was great to see how it was done and how to take care of the baby afterwards." Fennell says she "...absolutely" wants to pursue a career in OB GYN, which involves four to six years of college.

Nikita McCord was interested in a career in Emergency Medical Services. McCord experienced two sides of this field by doing a job shadow with both a paramedic and a dispatcher. McCord traveled to the Warm Springs Reservation for her shifts in the dispatch center. She said the dispatch was especially interesting because that center handles emergency medical calls as well as police and jail calls. She also rode with paramedics in Jefferson County where

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