

Schools Update: Vernonia High School College Credit Opportunities

By Peter Weisel

During the 2014-15 school year Vernonia High School (VHS) began offering more opportunities for students to earn college credit. A pilot project was launched and about 25 students earned Portland Community College (PCC) credits at no cost to them, a value of \$500-600 per class. English Composition – WR 121 was the most popular, followed by College Algebra (Mth 111) and a smattering of other courses. Usually a college course can replace a high school course requirement – a situation referred to as earning Dual Credit.

This year (2015-16) VHS set

out to increase the number of college course offerings, and a program called Willamette Promise was a significant help with that. Several VHS teachers completed trainings which upon completion allowed them to teach our students at the college level. College credit is then granted from Western Oregon University.

Mrs. Willard's Spanish students were a smashing success, earning over 200 credits in 5 different college Spanish courses! Mrs. Riley's students were also successful, with several earning credit in General Biology (BI 101). Next year we plan to expand Willamette Promise supported college courses in the areas of Language Arts, Science, and Math.

Students will be notified of all existing and new Willamette Promise related offerings when they return in the fall.

In addition to Willamette Promise courses, several of Mr. Lower's Digital Arts students seized the opportunity to earn college credit in PCC courses he delivered at VHS. Mr. Lower taught PCC courses on Video Production and Digital Multimedia. Mr. Lower has also been working hard this year in preparation to greatly expand the PCC courses students can take from him beginning in the fall of 2016.

These new courses will include: Introduction to Web Design, Beginning Website Design, Beginning Photoshop, Beginning Keyboarding, Keyboarding

for Speed/Accuracy and Basic Computer Skills/Microsoft Office.

We are excited to be able to better compete with larger districts, both by offering more college level rigor and by having our graduates enter college with several credits already earned. Doing so reduces their college costs and moves them toward earlier college completion.

Please stay tuned to The Voice for more college news as it unfolds at VHS in 2016-17.

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Community Action Team: Making Homes Safer continued from front page

few months before becoming quite ill. As her health declined so did her mobility. It wasn't long before she was limited to moving through her home in a wheel chair. For three years the wheel chair prevented her from getting to any part of the house except the kitchen and living room. Because the door opening was too narrow, Rogers could not get to her bedroom, and more importantly, the bathroom. She recalls that her home, "was not livable before CAT came in to help me."

Rogers' therapist at Columbia Community Mental Health reached out to see if there was something CAT could do to help make the home livable. Through the Lend a Hand program, Rogers' life and health was transformed. The CAT team took out a cabinet, linen closet and ancient gas furnace so the hallway and bathroom entrances could be widened to accommodate the wheel chair. They also installed a raised toilet and grab bars that help Rogers navigate the bathroom safely. Because they had to remove the furnace, they installed a ductless heat pump that also cools the home in the summer. Rogers is comfortable and no longer feels trapped in her home. She even has creative plans for the newly opened space. Because of her health challenges Rogers still spends the majority of her time at home. However, now she can enjoy watching the countless birds that visit her feeders and beautiful flowering bushes from every room in the house. She has reconfigured the kitchen a little so she can reach the important things: her teas and spices, and her vast supply of bird seed.

While the Lend a Hand program was able to help make Rogers' home wheel chair accessible, CAT also called in its Weatherization program team to address issues with the home's ineffective heating system. In the winter the home stayed so cold that there was ice on the inside of the windows; in the summer it felt like an oven. After conducting a thorough energy audit, weatherization specialists installed insulation under the home and above the ceiling, added a highly insulating roof, repaired the electrical wiring for the water heater, replaced all the windows, and sealed the home tightly. They even added a fan in the back of the house that automatically keeps the air circulating throughout. The goal of the Weatherization program is to increase health and safety while reducing energy costs for low-income households. Of the weatherization upgrades Rogers says, "There is no comparison. Now I'm always comfortable, day or night, summer or winter. I am so very grateful for the work CAT did for me."

Most of the home-related services offered by CAT are available to low-income households, whether they rent or own their home. This is true for Lend a Hand, Weatherization, and Healthy Homes. For the Housing Rehabilitation program however, only home owners are eligible to receive assistance with health and/or safety-based repairs or upgrades.

Just in the last 20 years of rehab projects CAT has served over 500 homeowners.

One of those clients is Gene Hoffman* who purchased his St. Hel-



Gene Hoffman

ens house about three years ago. He went through the conventional home purchase process, but the inspector missed several important problems that have made home life difficult and unsafe for him. He shared that before CAT's help he was afraid to touch anything attached to the house for fear of it breaking off in his

hand. The entire plumbing system had been cobbled together under the house without proper drainage; the toilet was not connected to the plumbing, so he had to bring in a portable toilet; the water heater was dangerously old and the furnace didn't work at all; there were tears in the worn carpeting that were a trip hazard; and the front porch was missing steps. He had already stretched his fixed income to purchase the house and was not in a position to pay for the necessary repairs.

CAT's Housing Rehabilitation team came in and, according to Hoffman, "put the house like it should have been to begin with." Hoffman financed the work through a zero percent interest loan. Repayment of the loan is deferred until the title of the house is transferred due to sale or refinance of the home or

the homeowner dies, so it doesn't add a monthly burden to a client's bills.


CAT's team completely gutted the bathroom and remodeled it with all new plumbing, fixtures and flooring. He also got a new kitchen sink. The team replaced the carpet with a sturdy and attractive laminate floor that has also relieved some of Hoffman's breathing symptoms. In addition, CAT constructed a ramp at the front door that allows Hoffman to enter and exit his home more safely. Similarly to the weatherization assistance also provided to Rogers, Hoffman's water heater and furnace were replaced, a new roof was installed, and insulation was added. Hoffman is happy to say his house is, "worth living in now."

There are two more related Community Investment programs to help make homes safer and more affordable to heat. Furnace repair or replacement is available to households that meet the energy assistance requirements. The Healthy Homes program provides repairs and remediation measures that improve a home's environment for high-risk low-income families and individuals who have respiratory conditions or mobility issues in their home.

To find out more about CAT Housing Rehabilitation, Healthy Homes and Lend a Hand programs, please contact Dayle Shulda at (503) 366-6552. For Weatherization program information, please call Kim Buhrer at (800) 325-8098.


** Names and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals featured.*

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