

# Education

## IVHS students set to represent the Valley



(Courtesy photo for the Illinois Valley News)

Ari Dwyer, (left) Jenny Park, Owen Dwyer, Raymon Sutherlin and Quinn Dietz

The 34th Annual Academic Masters Final Competition will be held April 28 at North Valley High School. Starting at 6:30 p.m., 20 students from the four Josephine County public high schools (Grants Pass High School, North Valley High School, Hidden Valley High School, and Illinois Valley High School) will compete for cash prizes in one of five areas: english, math, music, science, or social studies. \$14,500 in prize money will be split among the top four individuals and the top scoring team. The public is encouraged to attend and support our academically excelling students at this very special event.

In 1984, a group of Grants Pass businesses joined together to recognize and honor local students for academic excellence through a county-wide competition. For over 30 years, thousands of students from the four high schools in Josephine County have competed for the honor of representing their schools in the grand Academic Masters Competition each spring. The Academic Masters Competition is a proud tradition unique to Josephine County, giving us an opportunity to show the value we place on academics. Spread the word about something very special that Josephine County is doing right!

## Merrill seeks to change the community through its youth

**Jason McMillen**  
IVN Contributing Writer

Gene Merrill, the college and career counselor for the Illinois Valley High School (IVHS), has been diligently working toward a better future for the young adults of the community. Tanner Smith, the new principal of IVHS, fully supports Merrill's efforts to both bring the program to life and to maximize its potential. "This is his first year of being principal and my first year with college and careers and so we've had a lot of learning to do," Merrill admitted.

One of the tactics Merrill utilizes is to meet up with every senior one-on-one and discuss what they're interested in. From there, Merrill gives them a host of information as

to what kind of job or college opportunities are out there as well as what to expect in the pursuit of them and how to make it financially possible. "The focus is really on year 13 and preparing the students for that 13th year in real life," Merrill said, summarizing his ultimate objective.

Merrill made a point to express that his program doesn't just focus on people going to college like many programs have done in the past. "We don't just say 'We're going to show you guys colleges and universities and if there's something else out there you need to figure it out.'" Merrill pointed out that stepping into a college right away, or at all, might not be realistic for many students because it will likely cause crippling debt with questionable returns. However, and in these

cases, Merrill makes sure to give the students as much information as he can regarding other types of education like trade schools and certification programs.

In addition to one-on-one counseling, Merrill also coordinates as many career oriented field trips as he can. "We have, on average, three to four events a month that we're taking students out of the classroom and into the real world," Merrill said. In May, so far, interested students will be able to attend a lecture regarding social work and the entire freshmen class will take a tour of the Table Rock Rogue Community College campus. This particular location offers a wide range of vocational training and medical certifications.

This month, students attended a lecture on employment opportunities regarding

electrical work whose industry, according to the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, has 800 unfilled positions in Oregon. Students were also given the chance to attend an event about farming and take a tour of South Oregon University. "I think right now every student in the school has, since the beginning of the year, spent an average of 12 hours in some sort of a career related experience," Merrill said.

"If we change the youth as they're going into the community we can change the community," Merrill said before continuing, "Look at all the problems that happen, mostly the late teens, early 20s; all the theft ... so much of that is just young kids that are hopeless."

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