



the good news series

For Columbus Public Schools (CPS), “discover” isn’t just a part of its mascot. It’s a highlight of its curriculum. Regardless of the area, students are encouraged to discover their passions, interests, and develop their skills, and for those Columbus High School (CHS) students in the Behlen apprenticeship, their



future. Jefferey Soto, the first student to graduate from the apprenticeship and hired full-time after completion, did just that. “[The apprenticeship] helps you choose what you want to do in your future and helps you pick the best college for you if you are interested in manufacturing,” he said. “Behlen has helped me find what to do in my future.”

Behlen Manufacturing Chairman and CEO Phil Raimondo emphasized just that. “The key is finding out what they enjoy,” Raimondo said. “They get exposure to manufacturing, welding, CNC (computer numerical control) and with those opportunities get to make a choice if it’s for them.” Having his own internships in the 1980s, Raimondo knows first-hand that experience is important. But he sees the apprenticeship as a step further. “They are more formal and recognized for the experiences they provide. There are OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) classes and training.”

Behlen’s talent development manager Tyler Bertsch said that critical step, exposure, is important to youth regardless of the program. “I wanted to be a teacher and I was so happy to get out there and see if it was for me,” he said. “It didn’t turn out, but a lot of kids don’t get to know until they’re in a couple of years.”

For students who may not be aware of the field, the apprenticeships offer a discovery of the field itself. Manufacturing has evolved, Bertsch said. It’s likely not what it looked like just 10 years ago. “Our industry, manufacturing as a whole, is opening its doors to kids so they can actually see what it is. It’s not the same as it used to be decades ago,” he said. “It’s becoming much more advanced, especially in robotics. It’s not a hammer at the end of the line.”

Chase Paczosa, a junior, is one of six students currently in the program. Paczosa is excited to get to use some of the latest technology available. “They have some real fancy welders there,” he said. “There are two types of wire welders, they’re new. It’s pretty exciting.” Technology may have changed but certain skills haven’t. “Soft-skills, responsibility, respect, those are valuable, not only here but with any job they will have,” Bertsch said.

Paczosa said Behlen has a high standard for anyone on the floor. “You’re expected to work while you’re there. Pretty quick they expect you to keep up and meet their numbers. It’s exactly the same as any other employee,” he said. Soto agreed but said Behlen was flexible with scheduling, allowing him to keep up with homework. “The only difference, being apprentice they cut some slack with me because I was still in school,” he said of being able to adjust his schedule. “Being full time is having one hundred percent responsibility. As a full-time worker, you have to do your 40-hour week, which I don’t mind personally. I love working here.”

Student apprentices, as with any inexperienced hire, go through training stages before migrating into different departments at Behlen’s. “A lot of what you are doing you have to learn by doing,” Paczosa said. “We have to do so many hours of training, so much of the same thing before we’re ready to move on.” Paczosa said he began as an apprentice welder and has worked in gates and

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