

SILOAM SPRINGS

Herald Leader

SATURDAY, MARCH 2, 2019

Students get hands-on at career fair

by *Janelle Jessen*



Professional Speaker Paul Vitale encouraged Siloam Springs Middle School students to chase their dreams when considering their career fields.

Eighth-graders got a chance to explore career education programs at the high school and interact with local employers on Tuesday.

The hands-on career fair was developed through a partnership between the school district and the Siloam Springs Chamber of Commerce, according to Ross White, assistant high school principal and the district's vocation coordinator.

Around 340 middle school students attended the event at the high school. In the morning, they

heard motivational speaker Paul Vitale and a presentation from the Siloam Springs Chamber of Commerce about the Arkansas Scholars Program. In the afternoon, students got a chance to tour 18 interactive booths, including eight booths showcasing career and technical education programs in the school district and 10 representing local employers, according to Nathan Reed, vice president of the Chamber of Commerce.

Each booth offered students interactive activities to help them

connect with the employer or school program, White said. For example, students got to draw at the DaySpring booth, get strapped onto a backboard or watch high school medical professions students draw blood on each other at the medical professions booth, and see firefighters demonstrate tools at the Siloam Springs Fire Department booth.

"Hands-on is just our way of connecting our students with industry by really demonstrating what they do, rather than just talking about it, showing them skills, and features that are needed to be successful," White said.

The diverse set of employers were handpicked to represent career and technical education programs

available in the school, Reed said.

"We do have La-Z-Boy, we also have DaySpring for the creative side, we have Arvest for the finance side, we have Gates for the industry, we have the vet clinic, so we just tried to hit a broad spectrum of different possibilities," he said.

As part of the district's career and technology education program, the school has a goal of connecting students in grades 8 through 12 with local businesses and industries, White said. High school juniors and seniors connect

through a reverse career fair, where students set up booths and market their skills to employers, and freshman and sophomores do industry tours and have lunches with human resource managers.

"For eighth-graders, it's really exposure and exposing them to what's here in our community as they start to get ready for high school and plan ahead," White said.

Another benefit of Tuesday's career fair, was that it allowed eighth-graders to visit the high school, where they will be attending school next year, he said.

"They are coming here, (we) welcome them to the high school, give them a tour of the school and just kind of pump them up for next year," he said.

Reed said he hopes the career fair helps students realize the opportunities that are available in the community and motivates them to work towards goals for their future.

"I want the students to realize that college is a great opportunity but there are other opportunities," he said. "I want them to realize that (the opportunities) are right here in their own community, that they never even have to leave, and I want them to know that they shouldn't feel bad or feel less-than for not going to college if they decide that's not what they want to do. I want them to see the other opportunities out there."

Student Ethan Galkiewicz said that after touring booths hosted by the Siloam Springs Fire Department, Police Department and several local businesses, the Career Academy of Siloam Springs caught his attention. CASS prepares high school students for careers in industrial maintenance.

"Them telling us some of the possibilities we could do when we get older lets us start thinking

about what we want to do when we get older," he said. "I think all schools should do this, I think it

participated in the career fair to teach students about career opportunities in health care as well



Siloam Sunday Middle school student Brennen O'Brien tried out one of the high school's video cameras used to create footage of games in the Panther Athletic Center during the hands-on career fair on Tuesday. *Photo courtesy Janelle Jensen.*

helps a lot and I've found out that I really have an interest in CASS." Reed said that local employers were eager to participate in the career fair.

"They see the benefit of starting them young because if you start them at eighth grade when they're going into the ninth grade and they realize the opportunities that are out there from 9th through 12th instead of at 12th grade when they graduate, you've just got four years on them and if you can sell them at ninth grade, eighth grade, that they want to come work for your company, then that's going to be a much more loyal employee as well, and so it's just been nothing but positive feedback from industries and companies," Reed said.

Maria Wleklinski, chief nursing officer at Siloam Springs Regional Hospital, said the hospital

as to give them important information about hands-only CPR and stroke symptoms. Both heart attacks and strokes have high mortality rates, she said. Layperson CPR has been shown to save lives, and if laypeople can learn to recognize the symptoms of a stroke, they can help victims get to the hospital more quickly so they can receive medication that can be lifesaving if it is given within a certain amount of time, she said.

"We know that in health care there are great opportunities for additional professionals, there's just not enough of us, so we have to start very young getting people interested in the health care professions and start steering them in the right directions where we can," she said.