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County says 'yes' to YES

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Schuylkill County recognized on Friday the first students to complete a curriculum designed to prepare seniors for the working world.

The Your Employment Skills program offers 33-module, 120-hour, one-credit training, including videos, guest speakers and field trips designed to show students what is needed to be employable in the real world beyond the classroom.

"Whether you know it or not, you are Schuylkill County's most valuable resource," county commissioners Chairman Frank J. Staudenmeier, a Republican, told 12 students at a recognition breakfast honoring the program at the Pottsville Club.

Thirty-four business and community leaders, including the commissioners, were in attendance.

The students who completed the rigorous YES program, which included a 95 percent attendance requirement, were Schuylkill Haven seniors Kris Shaup, Adam Morgan, Christina Bailey, Heather Powanda, Jessica Saunders and Robert Demmy.

The Schuylkill Haven Area School District served as the pilot for the program this year with four additional school districts, Minersville, Blue Mountain, Pottsville Area and Mahanoy Area, joining in fall 2007.

Demmy, 18, of Lake Wynonah, addressed business and community leaders, saying he had already landed a job following his graduation as a forklift-operator for Binney & Smith, Fredericksburg.

Schuylkill County Economic Development Corp. President Frank J. Zukas told those gathered that increasingly the quality of a workforce ranks above economic incentives and permitting issues on the list of most important factors for a company planning a move to the county.

"Without employment, without jobs, a community has no way to grow and expand and become a place where people come to live and raise a family," Zukas said.

"To be honest, this is something we should have been doing a long time ago," said Schuylkill Haven School District Superintendent Richard Rada.

Business leaders say 78 local employers have already committed to preferences for YES graduates in interviews and hiring.

Northeast Pennsylvania Manufacturers and Employers Association president Darlene J. Robbins said the county has become the third in Pennsylvania to implement the program and would be joined by school districts in Luzerne County soon.

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