News > Business (/News/Business/)

ConVal, NHBB join forces

By BRANDON LATHAM
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As ConVal High School and New Hampshire Ball Bearings celebrated the end of the inaugural joint Manufacturing Principles and Processes course, it felt more like a beginning.

Of the six students who completed projects to present at the Peterborough Community Center recently, five are seniors. For the program itself, the pilot was a success and the collaboration will continue and expand in coming years.

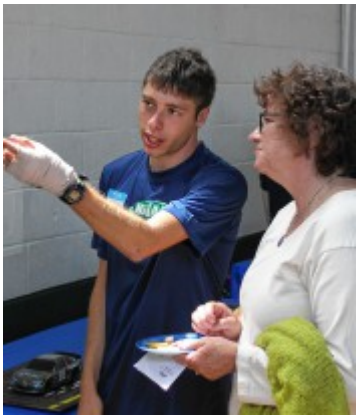
The course, which lasted the semester from January to June, was developed to strengthen the partnership between New Hampshire's strong manufacturing industry, and local school districts..

"Students don't know much about manufacturing," Beth Wallace, the ConVal instructor who taught the course, said. "It'd be helpful for them to know something about manufacturing to even be interested in going into manufacturing."

The class traveled to NHBB twice a week to work closely with production staff, as well as participating in classroom-based learning. "It's been an interesting process getting them involved in different things," Wallace said.

Students were drawn to the practical experience the course offered.

"It's a really hands-on class," Valerie St. Amand, a junior, said about why she was interested in the program. "It's a really small class where you get a chance to really do a lot of stuff on your own."



At the year-end celebration, the students demonstrated their independent projects, ranging from working machines to poster presentations, with topics from ski factories to workplace safety.

One of the more idiosyncratic projects belongs to Dalton Coyne, a senior track star who broadly has a penchant for racing.

"I'm a big NASCAR fan," he said, surrounded by images of Dale Earnhardt Jr.'s number 88.

Coyne did research on the evolution of the NASCAR pit stop, which he said no takes less than half the time it once did, through innovation and specialization, concepts that are linked intimately to manufacturing.

“You change all the time; you get faster and get new ways to improve and do stuff faster,” he said.

That students are gaining skills and experience in the field works to benefit both them and area manufacturers.

Sheila O’Brien, who faciliated the program within NHBB, said, “We’re continually looking for entry-level production help that have employable skills and are somewhat knowledgable about how manufacturing works.”

Coyne intends to study horticulture at Keene High School next year, embracing another practical science.

St. Amand hopes to pursue a career in patent law, and said this class was valuable to her to see how things get made. “It’s helpful to know where it’s gonna go from what I have to do,” she said.

She plans to get an undergraduate degree in engineering before going to law school. Her brother Joshua, a senior in the class who plans to get a job and take a gap year before going to college, also has interest in engineering.

Joshua had the most physical of the class’s final projects, building a machine that slices paper by automatically unspooling it through a blade.

“I didn’t realize how much engineering there was in manufacturing until this class,” he said. “It’s really opened me up and shown me how many engineering opportunities there actually are.”