

High School at Harley-Davidson: Career and Technical Education opens a world of possibilities for Wisconsin students

By: DWD Secretary-designee Amy Pechacek

Milwaukee teenager, Sarah Klein, never imagined she would be spending her senior year working at a world-famous Wisconsin company, let alone picking up cutting-edge job skills that will take her far beyond high school. But that's exactly what happened, after seeing youth apprenticeship information posters around her school at Ronald Reagan High, Sarah attended a meeting about the Department of Workforce Development's Youth Apprenticeship program. Curious about potential opportunities, Sarah went to a youth apprentice follow-up meeting, where she learned about specific opportunities at Harley-Davidson. Before long, Sarah found herself learning and earning as a Manufacturing Basic Industrial Equipment youth apprentice at a multimillion-dollar corporation.

"The youth apprenticeship program truly helped me explore and feel secure in making decisions about my future while teaching me valuable lessons like how to manage money, maintain professionalism, and how to use every resource to become successful," she says.

As the title suggests, DWD's Youth Apprenticeship program is a work-based learning program for youth, specifically for high school juniors and seniors, that started 30 years ago. Conversely, Register Apprenticeship is a 150-year-old program reserved for adults. DWD bridged the two programs together in 2016 to create a solid talent pipeline to tie school room to work room.

Under the DWD youth apprenticeship to registered apprenticeship Bridge Program, Sarah smoothly transitioned into her rank of registered apprentice at Harley-Davidson after completing her youth apprenticeship program and graduating from high school in May of 2020. This put Sarah one step closer to fulfilling her professional goal to become an industrial electrician. In the coming years, Sarah will complete 8,320 hours of training (approximately 4 years) that will include both on-the-job training and classroom related instruction. Best of all, she will be *paid* for all the hours she is training and studying, and after she completes her registered apprenticeship program, she will have a journey-level industrial electrician card.

Every February, DWD celebrates students like Sarah during Career and Technical Education (CTE) Month. CTE Month raises awareness about the important role career and technical education has in preparing students for success. These programs provide Wisconsin kids with the academic, technical, and employability skills they need to thrive in the workforce.

In his Biennial Budget, Gov. Tony Evers is providing an additional \$250,000 in each year to expand youth apprenticeship opportunities, exposing more high school students, like Sarah, to employment in the trades and helping them transition from the classroom to the workforce.

As CTE Month winds down, DWD is ramping up, developing even more Youth Apprenticeship pathways in the arts, audio/visual technology, communications, agriculture, food, and natural resources areas. The agency also continuously reviews and refines its five fundamental pathways for construction—carpentry, electrical, masonry/concrete, mechanical/HVAC, and plumbing/sprinkler fitting.

DWD's commitment to Career and Technical Education goes beyond youth apprenticeship. Last year, the agency awarded more than \$840,000 in tech ed equipment grants through its Wisconsin Fast Forward program. Grant money went to 69 school districts across the state and provides students with vocational training and technical education in advanced manufacturing.

For Sarah, the decision to attend that first apprenticeship meeting turned into, "one of the best opportunities." Her story is the reason why DWD diligently works to bolster CTE programs for all Wisconsin students; their success is Wisconsin's success.

As Gov. Evers always says, "What's best for the kids is what's best for Wisconsin."