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Apprenticeships develop careers and work force

Will Jessop works as an apprentice at ProStar Geocorp in Grand Junction as a participant in the CareerWise program. Jessop plans to study math and computer science at Colorado Mesa University starting this fall and continue working at ProStar. (Photo by Phil Castle)



Apprenticeships develop careers and work force

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Will Jessop initially decided to participate in an apprenticeship program because he thought the experience would look good on a college admission application.

What Jessop discovered over the course of the following two years was he enjoyed working on computer software at ProStar Geocorp in Grand Junction — and was good at it. Moreover, the experience prompted him to apply to Colorado Mesa University to study computer science and math. If everything goes as planned, Jessop will keep on working at ProStar.

That's exactly the goal of CareerWise, said Jammie McCloud, program manager in Grand Junction: to help high school students develop careers and businesses develop a local work force. "It's really a win-win for both."

Page Tucker, chief executive officer of ProStar, said Jessop constitutes another good addition the company has obtained through internships and apprenticeships with college and high school students. "Will has become a valuable resource and has grown from testing our software into an actual developer. ... We are delighted to have him."

Jessop is among a total of 10 high school students who joined the CareerWise program in 2017 and 2018. But participation has more than doubled with 11 students joining this year, McCloud said.

The CareerWise program matches high school students and businesses in three-year apprenticeships, McCloud said. Students work 12 to 16 hours a week during their junior year and 16 to 24 hours a week during their senior year. Students can continue to work part-time their third year while attending college or go to work for the business on a full-time basis.

In addition to skills specific to certain jobs and industries, students can earn credentials and college credit. They also receive training in such soft skills as communication and stress management, McCloud said.

CareerWise helps participants develop careers whether they want to go to college or directly to work, she said. "It's a options multiplier for students."



Page Tucker, CEO ProStar Geocorp

Jessop said he applied for apprenticeships with manufacturing and information technology firms and was happy to land a position with ProStar Geocorp, a company that provides precision mapping software and services to manage underground infrastructure.

Jessop said he's worked in quality assurance in testing and assessing software, but also has been involved in developing software and automating some of the testing processes. "It's something I look forward to — coming to work. That's a good thing."

Jessop said the apprenticeship confirmed his interest in software development and motivated him to stay in the Grand Valley following his graduation from Central High School. He plans to continue working at ProStar while he attends CMU and perhaps after earning degrees.

Tucker said ProStar has hired five CMU graduates, three of whom went through internships. Two interns currently work for the company. It made sense, he said, to extend that kind of effort to high school apprentices. "I believe we need to start to nurture the work force at a younger age than just college as it will help guide and encourage them to excel in their chosen field of endeavor."

McCloud said the CareerWise programs offers companies a cost-effective strategy for attracting talent rather than poaching employees from competitors or recruiting outside the market. "They're creating their own pipeline of workers."

CareerWise bolsters the Grand Valley economy, she said, by creating high-paying jobs and retaining talent.

Tucker agreed. "In order to create and sustain strong economic growth in the Grand Valley, it will require the creation of high-paying jobs, including for the high school and university students. Higher wages will be a key component to keeping them here once they graduate. As business leaders, I think we owe that to the community and to the students who would prefer to stay here."

Jessop said his apprenticeship convinced him to stay and recommended the program to students who want to explore their career options. "I would definitely recommend it for anyone who wants to get your feet wet. It's definitely worth it."

For more information about the CareerWise apprenticeship program in Grand Junction, contact Jammie McCloud at 263-2913 or jammie@gjchamber.org. Information also is available at www.CareerWiseColorado.org.