

Huot Technical Center experiencing near-record enrollment

- By RICK GREEN, THE LACONIA DAILY SUN

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Erika Mosher and Madi Smith set up nurse/patient scenarios during Gina McGuire's Nurse Assisting program at the Huot Technical Center on Thursday morning. (Karen Bobotas/for The Laconia Daily Sun)

- Karen Bobotas



Students in Gina McGuire's Health Science-Nurse Assisting program practice nurse/patient scenarios during class Thursday morning. From left are Caitlin Beattie, Villy Ortiz, Morgan Romprey, Sara Chambers, Miah Bailey, Brooke D'Amica and Breyanna Hanson. (Karen Bobotas/for The Laconia Daily Sun)

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LACONIA — Madi Smith fed applesauce to a fellow student at the Huot Technical Center Thursday morning. Earlier, another student worked on Smith's nails.

It was all part of a class preparing students to work in the nursing field, including caring for patients at long-term care facilities who require assistance in eating and hygiene.

The 11th- and 12th-grade students were getting hands-on practice by working on each other and on life-like patient mannequins.

This and other classes at the center are popular this year. The center has a near-record enrollment of 430, including students from Laconia, Gilford, Belmont, Inter-Lakes, Franklin and Winnisquam.

This year, the center is also enrolling some students from Newfound Regional High School.

Smith, a Laconia High School student, already works at a long-term care facility, enjoys her interactions with the elderly residents and plans to eventually become a registered nurse.

"The people I work with are so happy to see me," she said. "They enjoy being around younger people and I treat them like friends. I try to bring some sunshine into their life."

The Huot program prepares students to become licensed nursing assistants.

The health curriculum at the center also allows students to explore – through guided lab activities – careers in dentistry, veterinary medicine, medical assisting, clinical lab work, diagnostic imaging and emergency medicine.

Instructor Gina McGuire, a registered nurse, said the Huot gives young people the opportunity of seeing what field appeals to them.

"They can dip their toe in the water and see what they like," she said. "It's less expensive than trying to figure it out once they get to college."

Huot Director Dave Warrender said the center is at the high end of enrollment figures experienced in recent years.

“We are back at the numbers we had when the new building first opened,” he said.

He also said the center is running more full-year programs, as opposed to semester long classes, resulting in more students being enrolled each day throughout the year.

“On any given day we have more actual students in our classes and we are also seeing a more even distribution of students across all programs,” he said.

Certain programs at the Huot Center, such as engineering and health science, remain consistently popular, but Warrender says other programs have also seen growth.

“Building trades and plumbing and heating have seen large bumps in enrollment,” he said. “Those industries are booming and students are walking out of our doors with good jobs and that message is spreading.”

Automotive technology is another popular program. Students who go on to take further instruction at Lakes Region Community College can earn a sponsorship by an automotive dealer and eventually have jobs that, with experience, can pay close to \$100,000 a year.

Students typically enter the Huot in their junior year and may reapply to come back for an upper level course in the senior year. Upper level students may choose to pursue industry certifications, college credits and even internships.

Katie Theberge is in her second year at the center. “I decided to attend the Huot Center because I wanted to develop techniques and skills that will ensure my future in the culinary arts industry,” she said.

Theberge has already earned her Serv-Safe Food Handler certification and has the opportunity to also earn college credits through Lakes Region Community College.

Last year, a total of over 240 college credits were earned by students attending the center. Students in other programs will work toward certifications in various fields.