Dj Lombrana, a senior at Goose Creek Memorial High School and a student in the Automotive Practicum at Stuart Career Center, works as a service technician at a local KIA dealership and is eager to be a full-time employee after graduation. See story on Page 3. (Photo by Carrie Pryor-Newman)
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GOOSE CREEK CISD

Student serves as asset to local Kia dealer

BY SUSAN PASSMORE

Dj Lombrana, a senior at Goose Creek Memorial High School, has discovered her dream job in a field typically dominated by males. Through her Automotive Practicum class at Stuart Career Center, she works close to 20 hours a week as a service technician at Community KIA. She changes oil and filters, rotates and balances tires as well as makes minor mechanical repairs. Serious about her job, Dj is learning more every day from her teacher Steve Barron, her co-workers, her supervisors and through online KIA training.

“Dj came to us from Pasadena last year,” Barron said. “She’s a hands-on person, and when she does something one time, she knows it. I knew that the best thing I could do for her was to get her involved in the industry.”

Dj, which stands for Darrien Joy, has earned her student certification in Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) Maintenance and Light Repair and is working on ASE certification for brakes. She recently won 2nd place in the Regional SkillsUSA Maintenance and Light Repair competition at San Jacinto College Central, qualifying for the state competition.

“If you asked me what she does wrong, I wouldn’t have an answer,” said Sammy Campos, service manager and her supervisor at KIA. “She stays busy even when she’s not busy. If she doesn’t know, she asks. She’s good with customers. We’ll be happy to have her full-time when she graduates.”

With maturity beyond her 18 years, Dj sees her job as a challenge and tackles problems like a pro.

“I want to make this my career. You’ll never know everything about a vehicle, and I like learning new things and problem solving. I don’t mind trying and failing and then doing it again,” Dj said.

Her inspiration for a career in the automotive industry came from watching movies, such as “Transformers” and “Fast and Furious,” in which females worked with cars.

“I was about 8-years-old and I was looking up how to fix cars on YouTube,” she said.

While Dj is not the only young lady who has worked for Community Toyota, Honda or Kia, business partners with Goose Creek CISD, but she is certainly one of the best.

“She has a strong work ethic and a good personality,” said Doug Shipley, parts and service director. “As for her ability and knowledge, she’s way beyond the curve.”

This program is now a part of the Advanced Automotive Academy at Stuart Career Tech High School. Eighth-graders interested in a career as an automotive, diesel or collision repair technician can apply via the website. Four years in the Advanced Automotive Academy will lead students to a Business & Industry Endorsement, a college associate degree or certificate, along with Performance Acknowledgements for earning Automotive ASE and ICAR certifications. Seniors may participate in internships, and scholarships are available to graduates.
GOOSE CREEK CISD

REL students develop business skills through enterprising project

“Our goal is to make the store a success and learn something along the way”

BY BETH DOMBROWA

Students walking through The Commons at Robert E. Lee High School are often enticed by the smell of freshly baked cookies. The sweet treats are among the selection at YEL, an in-school store managed entirely by REL students.

YEL, which stands for Young Entrepreneurs at Lee, is a project of the Entrepreneurship class at the school, a combination of culinary arts and business acumen. Students prepared for several months to open YEL, and much of the class has an assigned role to make it a success.

“The students have been learning how to run a business. They researched and selected the merchandise and decided on pricing. We had meetings with vendors and they designed the menu,” said Chef Ginger Zoidis, who teaches the class. “They handle marketing, keep inventory and track what sells.”

Among the offerings at YEL are Otis Spunkmeyer cookies baked fresh onsite, pre-packaged snacks such as muffins and chips, and “spa water,” water infused with fresh fruits and vegetables.

One unique specialty item in the YEL rotation is macaroni and cheese, made from scratch by Favyon Russell, a senior who enjoys cooking but plans to go to school for pediatric nursing following graduation from REL. The secret to Fabian’s exceptional mac and cheese, he says, are bread crumbs and cream cheese.

Senior Josiah Bruton is the store manager.

“We’re in charge of all the inventory, stocking, cleaning, organizing, marketing and advertising,” he said. “Our goal is to make the store a success and learn something along the way.”

Proceeds from YEL go directly back into the store, to purchase new inventory and make the store sustainable.

Photos by Carrie Pryor-Newman
Robert E. Lee High School senior Josiah Bruton, above, serves as YEL store manager. At left: Favyon Russell makes his signature macaroni and cheese dish with the assistance of Eric Ortiz. Both are cooks for YEL, which stands for Young Entrepreneurs at Lee.
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Hospital offers virtual urgent care

“A patient can get help for minor illnesses from the comfort of their own home”

BY ROD EVANS

Houston Methodist is now the only health care system in Houston to offer consumers 24-hour access to virtual urgent care visits, meeting the growing appetite nationwide for virtual medical care.

The Advisory Board’s 2017 Virtual Visits Consumer Choice Survey, which included over 5,000 patients across the country, found that 77 percent of patients are interested in virtual care visits, and 19 percent of patients have already done so.

“We live in a technology-driven age where people want easy access to services and they are open to seeing a provider via video. With virtual urgent care, a patient can get help for minor illnesses from the comfort of their own home,” said Roberta Schwartz, executive vice president, Houston Methodist Hospital, and chief innovation officer for the Houston Methodist Center for Innovation.

Virtual urgent care is available in the new MyMethodist app, which includes access to medical records through MyChart, physician communications, test results, bill payment, prescription refills, and wayfinding maps for Houston Methodist facilities across the greater Houston area.

Fewer than 35 percent of U.S. hospitals offer their own apps to improve patient access, according to a recent survey by the Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society.

Anyone with access to the iOS or Android app stores can download the MyMethodist mobile app. Urgent care video visits allow patients to have a face-to-face conversation to address certain medical issues without the need for scheduling an in-person appointment, unless otherwise directed by the medical provider.

Conditions that may be appropriate for virtual urgent care video visits include cold/flu symptoms, pink eye, skin infections/rash, allergies, cough/fever/headache and upper respiratory infections.

For more information about Houston Methodist virtual urgent care, visit houstonmethodist.org/virtual-urgent-care.

Myriad benefits of speech therapy at an early age

Early in life children begin to build critical skills in thinking, observation, problem solving and communication. Communication becomes one of the most obvious competencies since it can be measured based on direct interaction. Communication is critical to enhancing other developmental skills.

Many parents neglect to encourage their child’s interpersonal skills. Without this critical development push, pre-literacy education, preschool, meeting new people and even achieving partial independence are more difficult. If children do not receive the communicational stimulation required at an early age, they may face a difficult future.

Speech therapy can become an integral part of a developing child’s life. Through speech therapy, a child can strengthen their relationships with the people around them and begin building a pathway towards deep learning and maturity. Outside of reading, verbal communication is the only access to language available to a young child. As a child begins using language verbally, they assign names, shapes and values to certain hard-to-grasp concepts. Forming words or sentences around these concepts enables a child’s brain to process thoughts better. Imagine not being able to express that you feel cold, wet or hungry because your vocabulary and thoughts are limited. A child may feel this way, but appear inconsolable as they cannot express themselves.

Beyond complex thought capability, speech therapy can enhance problem solving abilities. Constructing sentences or selecting words is an early introduction to choice. As children make more choices on the words they use, they also assemble comparisons using those words to build a problem solving template. If this level of thinking sounds too complex for a three-year-old, consider that a child who is able to think a sweater is warm but a jacket is warmer will be better equipped to articulate or independently decide how to dress. When a child improves their communicative skills, they gain confidence and learning strategies. These strategies evolve and become reinforced as children are introduced to early learning. They stand a greater chance of keeping pace with lessons in preschool and beyond.

There are three primary reasons for intervening early with an exceptional child:

- Enhance the child’s development
- Provide support and assistance to the family
- Maximize the child’s and family’s benefit to society.

These benefits provide a greater quality of life for young children. This is why speech therapy makes a critical difference in the lives of children.

Bay Area Rehabilitation Center has been providing outpatient occupational, physical, and speech therapy services since 1948. Located at 5313 Decker Drive in Baytown, the Center is conveniently located on the south side of Spur 330 between Bayway Drive and Wade Road. It is your choice where you receive outpatient therapy services regardless of any other recommendations. If you are in need of occupational, physical, or speech therapy services for your disability or injury tell your physician you want to come to Bay Area Rehabilitation Center, or simply contact us after you receive your prescription for therapy from your physician. For more information, visit our website at www.bayarearehab.org, or contact us at 281-838-4477.
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Rey Villanueva, a Chevron Phillips Chemical operator, talks to two Goose Creek CISD students about career options in the petrochemical industry at the annual GCCISD career fair. Operators from the company’s Baytown facility talked to hundreds of seniors and their parents about careers in industry.
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With unemployment down to levels not seen in decades and reduced immigration squeezing the supply of workers, businesses are looking beyond traditional workforce sources — and one large Texas homebuilder services company is looking squarely at the Lee College Huntsville program as a source of workers.

Wisenbaker Builder Services provides specialty services to homebuilders across the state, creating cabinets, countertops, flooring and window coverings.

This kind of detailed work requires craftsmen who have been well trained and have hands-on experience — the kind of craftsmen who graduate from Lee College's cabinetmaking program.

Company executives have visited classes inside the Ferguson prison unit to meet students who are nearing graduation and parole eligibility. They have also shared their insights with students about what employers will be looking for.

James Babineaux, director of talent management for Wisenbaker, said the company has turned to ex-offenders as potential labor for both business and social responsibility reasons.

"From a business standpoint we are simply trying to throw a wider net in sourcing labor and sourcing subcontract labor. We have made the conscious decision to explore both traditional and non-traditional channels."

Company owner John Wisenbaker Jr. got interested in ex-offenders as potential workers through an acquaintance in Florida who is in a similar business and has established contacts with prison ministry groups.

To get the ball rolling, they turned to Wisenbaker employee Lena Gibson who already had a strong interest in prison ministry outside of her professional life.

Paul Calfee, director of subcontractor recruiting and relations, said, "Prior to [Gibson's] retirement, John let her pioneer what this would look like for Wisenbaker Builder Services. She really combed the Texas Market and built a lot of relationships and contacts."

"The thing that's been so encouraging with Lee College is you guys have had a very receptive ear to ask 'What are your needs? We can develop courses and classes to help more strategically prepare these men and women in our programs to be more of a perfect fit.'"

Calfee said that with the potential tile program, as with woodworking, the company not only looks to hire graduates, but also helps out the program by providing expertise and donations of material to use in training.

Calfee said there was no resistance within the company to working more with ex-offenders, but at first there were a lot of questions. They have now adopted the program as one of their strategic initiatives and regularly report to senior management.

Babineaux said the owners of the company are very faith-based and very vigilant about giving back.

"This is simply an extension of their personal desire to reach out and help people. It's a mix of a business decision and also comes from the heart of the owners," he said.
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GCM Technology Student Association headed to state

After competing in area and regional competitions, the Goose Creek Memorial High School Technology Student Association members are state-bound to compete in Video Game Design, Board Game Design, Structural Engineering, Software Design, Engineering Design, Engineering CAD, Flight Endurance (Engineering) Systematic Control Technology, Technology Bowl, Graphic Solutions for Marketing and IT, Forensic Science, Chapter Team, Music Production, Video Production (Mockumentary) and On Demand Video Production. They also are first alternates in Dragster Design and Technology Debate. GCM teachers Shonda James and Sean McGregory have coached the first-year team, culminating in the state competition to be held in Fort Worth April 25-27. “As a brand new team, there is a lot of trial by fire and problem solving for both coaches and students alike. We hope to attract industry and business partners interested in mentoring students in our GCM Engineering/IT departments and building a stronger team through mentoring TSA projects and establishing a local competition,” James said. “Next year, we hope to add tour competition list with VEX Robotics, Drone Racing, RC Racing (Flight and Ground), Animatronics, CAD Architecture, Architecture Design and several other speaking and team events.”

A hot US job market is coaxing people in from the sidelines

BY CHRISTOPHER RUGABER
AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON — A surprisingly strong burst of job growth over the past year has led many economists to wonder: Where are all the workers coming from?

As recently as last spring, analysts had worried that hiring would slow as the pool of unemployed shrank. Many employers have complained for years that they could no longer find enough people to fill their open jobs.

Turns out they were both wrong.

The pace of hiring in 2018 was the most robust in three years, and for a surprising reason: Many more people have decided to look for work than experts had expected. The influx of those job seekers, if sustained, could help extend an economic expansion that is already the second-longest on record.

The growth in America’s workforce — made up of people either working or looking for work — has helped reverse an alarming consequence of the recession: The exit of millions of Americans from the job market.

For five years after the Great Recession ended in 2009, many Americans gave up on their job hunts. Some suffered from disabilities. Others enrolled in school or stayed home to raise children. Still others were stymied by criminal pasts or failed drug tests. Some just felt discouraged by their job prospects. Because they weren’t actively seeking work, they weren’t even counted as unemployed.

Economists had speculated that millions of these people lacked necessary qualifications or were otherwise deemed undesirable by employers and might not work again. That meant stronger hiring wouldn’t necessarily help them.

Yet for the past few years it has. The proportion of Americans ages 25 to 54 who have a job has reached nearly 80 percent — the same as before the recession. Economists refer to this age group as “prime-age” workers. It excludes older Americans who have retired and younger workers who may be in school.

“The U.S. is a very diverse and dynamic economy and can often surprise us,” said Julia Coronado, chief economist at Macroeconomic Policy Perspectives. “This is a positive surprise. We’re due for one.”

Other factors that have held some people back from seeking work have included the high cost of child care and a lack of paid leave. Research suggests that such costs have held back the workforce participation rate of prime-age U.S. women, a rate that trails those in most other industrialized countries.

Many companies are relaxing their education or experience requirements, according to economists and staffing agencies. They are considering more applicants with disabilities. Businesses are expanding their training programs. Some, analysts say, are also looking with a more open mind at people with criminal backgrounds.

The rebound has confounded many experts’ projections. In 2014, the Congressional Budget Office forecast that the proportion of people ages 16 and up either working or looking for work — often called the participation rate — would be just 62.5 percent by the end of 2017 and would decline thereafter. Instead, the figure reached 63.2 percent in January, a five-year high.

“We have learned this year that there’s more slack in the labor market because people are coming back in,” Fed Chairman Jerome Powell told Congress last week.

The influx of people, Powell acknowledged last year, had come as a “surprise.”

Women, it turns out, have returned to the workforce in greater numbers than men. The proportion of prime-age women in the labor force is now higher than before the recession. And for women ages 25 through 34, participation is at an 18-year peak. The participation rate for prime-age African-American women also exceeds its pre-recession level.
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