

SkillsUSA champions

SUMMER 2016

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building
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what's next
at nationals

a student's story:
the way to winning
in our largest contest

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SkillsUSA's National Leadership Center is located in Leesburg, Virginia, approximately 50 miles northwest of our nation's capital, Washington, D.C. The building houses the SkillsUSA staff and historical displays. Along with welcoming influential visitors such as industry executives, manufacturers and VIPs from education and government, it has meeting space for student, teacher and business conferences.



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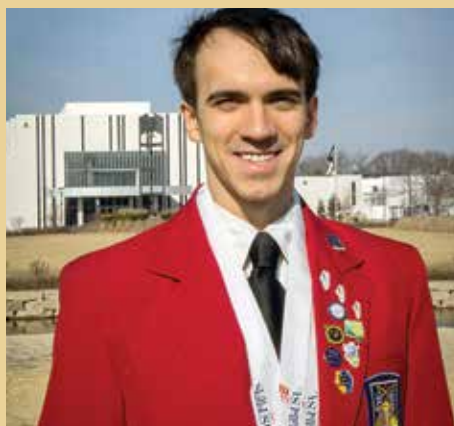


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SkillsUSA champions

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In keeping with a tradition of respect for the individuality of our members and our role in workforce development, SkillsUSA strives to ensure inclusive participation in all of our programs, partnerships and employment opportunities.



Emerging Victorious

Executive Director Tim Lawrence has known SkillsUSA as a student member, instructor, industry partner and state director. Got a question? He can help.

Q&A



Q: SkillsUSA members all seem to be doers and go-getters, not watchers. Yet I'm not sure of my goals or that I was born to lead. Any advice?

Tim: Leaders come in many shapes, sizes and personalities. The act of being a leader can be as simple as setting personal goals and pursuing them or as big as helping others reach theirs. SkillsUSA offers a rich platform for leadership growth in the classroom and through competition. Being part of it has a way of transforming even the quietest student into a leader.

Powerful testimonials in this magazine reinforce these growth opportunities. I can't recall any other issue so full of stories of personal change. There's the couple from Wisconsin who went back to school and became state SkillsUSA officers to make a better life for their son. There's the Georgia student who lost 285 pounds but gained the confidence to run for his own state office. And there's the student from North Carolina who competed in Louisville, Ky., 24 years after her mother. Every dollar she raised to attend nationals meant stepping out of her comfort zone.

Sometimes our students send in their own stories of personal transformation. Within these pages, you'll hear from an automotive student from Illinois. Battling clinical anxiety, social phobia and panic disorder, he not only went on to become

our national gold medalist in Automotive Service Technology, he also helped coach the high-school bronze medalist. Writing us from Maine, an active alumni member with autism tells how SkillsUSA has helped her succeed in college as a journalism and art student.

Each of these stories represents a personal struggle and a personal victory. When you read the whole issue, you can really see how the power to overcome life's obstacles comes when someone believes in you — or when you believe in yourself and pair that with hard work.

Albert Einstein said, "The person who follows the crowd will usually go no further than the crowd. The person who walks alone is likely to find himself in places no one has ever seen before."

This school year has been a record-breaker for SkillsUSA, with new programs, our highest membership and the most funds ever raised. But first and foremost, our program is about the number of individual lives changed for the better. Whether you are part of a chapter with five members or 500, SkillsUSA can help make a positive difference for you. ●

Got questions about SkillsUSA or other topics? Email aninfo@skillsusa.org or send a letter to the address on the facing page. Put "Ask Tim" in the subject line or mail address.

National Conference *Gearing Up* To Change Lives

A year ago at this time, SkillsUSA Nation was anxiously waiting to see what a move to Louisville, Ky., would mean for our National Leadership and Skills Conference (NLSC). Turns out, it meant the biggest and best conference in SkillsUSA history.

The NLSC returns to Louisville June 20-24 to rewrite those record books. The 2016 event will showcase a record number of competitors (more than 6,000) in 100

skilled, leadership and technical competitions. SkillsUSA TECHSPO — the largest career and technical education trade show in the nation — will feature hundreds of exhibitors from education and industry. DIY Network's "Rescue Renovation" TV show host Kayleen McCabe will offer the keynote address at the Opening Ceremony. And all that's just for starters! Come join us for a life-changing, future-shaping week of champions. ●

NLSC Atlanta-Bound in 2021

Let's make this clear right out of the gate: SkillsUSA's National Leadership and Skills Conference will be held in Louisville, Ky., through the year 2020. That's five more national conferences in Louisville, and all of them should be spectacular.

In 2021, however, the conference moves to Atlanta. The reason for the move? SkillsUSA continues to grow, and planning ahead to make sure our national conference will always be as convenient and enjoyable as possible for our members is of paramount importance. For more on the move, view the official video announcement from SkillsUSA Executive Director Tim Lawrence at: tinyurl.com/NLSC2021. ●

SkillsUSA returns to Louisville, Ky., this June for its 52nd national conference. For full details, visit: www.skillsusa.org/events-training/national-leadership-and-skills-conference/.



Photo: Lloyd Wolf

SkillsUSA TRAINS WORLD SKILLS CHAMPIONS

Part of SkillsUSA's long-term vision is to be nationally *and* internationally known as an expert in workforce education and employment readiness. That vision is clearly coming into focus, evidenced by WorldSkills International's selection of SkillsUSA as the training organization for a new team of ambassadors: WorldSkills Champions' Trust (WSCT).

The nine-member WSCT team (pictured below) recently traveled to Washington, D.C., for a week of SkillsUSA-led training in public speaking, diversity, conversational skills and more. Representatives were Jenica Branscombe of Canada, Rachel Chua of Singapore, Gary Condon of Ireland, Barthélemy Deutsch of Belgium, Chirag Goel of India, Anna Prokopenya of Russia, Taylor Schou of South Africa, Victor Simon of France and Ricardo Vivian of Brazil.

Team members offered rave reviews for the training and for SkillsUSA in general. "SkillsUSA has been absolutely amazing," said Schou. "[After the training,] I am definitely going to be a good representative for my continent." To meet the team and hear more of their comments, watch the video at: tinyurl.com/WSCT-Team. ●



Photo: Craig E. Moore

Chapters Answer the Challenge

SkillsUSA recently announced the winners of its Lowe's Social Media Challenge, a campaign designed to help chapters improve their campus and community through service projects promoted electronically. In first place is Palestine (Texas) High School; in second, Capital Region Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) in Albany, N.Y.; and in third, Palm Beach Charter Schools/Inlet Grove Community High School in Riviera, Fla. The schools received, respectively, \$25,000, \$10,000 and \$8,000 community-service grants. For full details, visit: tinyurl.com/Lowes-Social-Media. ●

A 'hog' raffle even vegetarians can enjoy



Photo: Lloyd Wolf

Once again, a generous donation from Harley-Davidson Motor Co. has made it possible for SkillsUSA to raffle off a motorcycle at our national conference. The Harley in question this year is a Softail Slim S model, and the winning ticket will be drawn at the final night's Awards Ceremony.

The winner does not need to be present for the drawing, but it sure makes for a great moment if he or she is, as the picture at left shows. The SkillsUSA Alumni and Friends Association is the beneficiary of all funds raised.

Tickets for this revved-up raffle are \$5 each or five for \$20. Get them online at: <http://weblink.donorperfect.com/harleytickets>. For more, visit: www.skillsusa.org/win-a-harley/. ●



Mothers, daughters,
husbands, wives
and even entire
households are
proving a new rule:
the family that joins
SkillsUSA together
stays together

These FAMILIES' THREADS Are in Red

Mother and daughter Malinda and Danielle Silver competed in Louisville 24 years apart.

Photo: Lloyd Wolf

As a little girl, Danielle Silver had a favorite game. It was to wear her mom's old high-school blazer with the colorful patch on the pocket. Danielle loved the red coat with the bright enamel pins on the lapels but didn't understand what it represented.

Fast forward to 2015, with Danielle winning gold in SkillsUSA's Promotional Bulletin Board contest for North Carolina, earning her the right to compete in the national championships. Suddenly, she had a reason to wear a red coat. Her mom, Malinda, was excited — she'd had the same life-changing "red coat" opportunity two decades earlier.

Like mother, like daughter

Both Danielle and Malinda Silver were students at Heritage Mount High School in Burnsville, a small town in the mountains of western North Carolina. Both were gold medalists at their state conference. And both competed in the SkillsUSA Championships in Louisville, Ky. — 24 years apart.

As a drafting student at Heritage Mount in 1991, Malinda was the school's first student to go to the national competition. Looking back, she remembers it as an important experience for her and her instructor. "You know, it just stands out," she says. "It's an experience I never forgot in the 24 years I've been out of high school." And because she was its first, the school allowed Malinda to keep the jacket her daughter would eventually play with.

QUICK READ

- ➔ Mother and daughter Malinda and Danielle Silver grew through the same SkillsUSA competition, 24 years apart.
- ➔ Married couple Erica and Robert Rutter banked on going to technical college together. They say their SkillsUSA leadership positions are a good investment.
- ➔ Debra and John Newman's children inherited their love of learning skills, with all going to the same tech school.

By Karen N. Kitzel

"It says 'VICA' and has all the old pins on it," Danielle explains (referring to the organization's original name, Vocational Industrial Clubs of America).

Danielle was relentless in raising money for the trip to nationals, according to architectural drafting instructor Kimberly Higgins: "She sold candy bars at her brother's Little League games. She sold doughnuts. She washed teacher's cars. She sold catered lunches to teachers. Danielle knows you have to work and that you are not just entitled to amenities in life."

Higgins graciously stayed home during the championships; with Malinda filling in as chaperone, the mother and daughter could enjoy the experience together. Malinda even brought her old blazer.

It was life-changing for Danielle. "National conference was the highlight of her high-school career, too," her mom adds. But the trip wasn't about winning; the growing was in the going.

"We're from a rural, poverty-stricken school," Malinda explains. "You looked at these other bulletin boards and they were just so big and elaborate. Hers was paper, just the traditional bulletin board, because we couldn't even drive somewhere and have the [same] resources."

She saw a change in her daughter after nationals. "Danielle gained confidence. She became a Girl Scout leader and has to attend leader meetings, plan activities and field trips. I feel without her national conference experience, she would not have had the skills to take on such a large task."

Now a senior, Danielle, 17, is a local SkillsUSA officer and regional president. She has already enrolled at the University of North Carolina at Asheville. The straight-A drafting student belongs to other organizations but says SkillsUSA gives her what the others can't: "I get to show what I can do."

She wants to be an engineer, a career her mother once dreamed of but was discouraged from because it was not traditional for women. "I am proud of her accomplishments," Malinda says. "I can't wait to see what the future holds for her." ●

Photo: Donna Kenemamm. Used with permission.



Their drive to a bright future starts with CTE and SkillsUSA

By Ann P. Schreiber

Erica and Robert Rutter met, got married and had a son. Their American dream quickly centered on making a better life for Emmett, now 3.

When they met, Robert was a busy automotive technician, making good commissions. Then came an economic downturn. "I loved it for the first couple years, but when there was no work, I wasn't getting paid," he recalls.

Erica had left work at a metal die-casting company after Emmett was born. When he grew a little older and less dependant, she considered going back to school. At that point, the couple faced the question, "Do we struggle and [barely] survive, or do we struggle and go back to school?"

Career and technical education provided vital answers. Robert did some research and saw the need for diesel equipment technicians.

"We decided that not going to school and trying to find a job to make enough money to support a family was extremely hard," Erica explains. "So, we figured we'd buckle down on finances and both go to school so we could both get decent jobs to support our family."

Technical school, they determined, would get them in the workforce faster and with lower tuition expenses. While on a waiting list for the diesel program at Madison (Wis.) Area Technical College, Robert suggested Erica look at automobile collision and refinishing. Having worked in metals, Erica—who sees herself one day working as an insurance adjuster—took her husband's suggestion. A week before her classes started, a spot opened for Robert.

When they're not in school, Robert works as a diesel technician for a landscaping company, and Erica takes care of Emmett at home.

Hello, Newmans! School enrolls many members of same family

By E. Thomas Hall

For the Newman family of Topeka, Kan., the Washburn Institute of Technology is like a second home.

Debra Garcia-Newman followed her husband and children through its doors. The culinary arts student competed in Restaurant Service at the SkillsUSA Championships. She's married to John Newman, who advanced to the state competition in Collision Repair Technology. He accompanied Debra to the 2015 nationals, their daughter Alexis in tow.

The family's lineage at Washburn Tech dates back to second son Michael, who started with construction and graduated from a fast-track welding program at the same time as his dad. John moved on to auto collision, while daughter Chelsea studied to be a certified nursing assistant (CNA). Oldest son John Jr. took small-engine repair classes there through his employer, while Alexis plans to study early childhood development. "And McKayla," their youngest, "likes to go because they have free Wi-Fi" and helps out with the culinary arts program, Debra says.

It seems as if the family has boundless energy, but it wasn't always that way. Both parents have had gastric bypass surgery (see related story, Page 15). They met almost 27 years ago while working at a fast-food restaurant. John jokes that it started with making all those ice-cream cones.

"I almost weighed 400 pounds," he says, after dropping over half of that.

"If I still had that weight on, I don't think I would've gotten up and out to [go back to school]," Debra adds. She's lost nearly 150 pounds, half her weight on the day of her 2010 surgery. "Now she wears my clothes," Alexis chimes in.

Their energy levels today are "off the roof," as John says. He's involved in the school's service program that recycles vehicles and donates them to the needy. The couple has raised about \$120,000 for their church, mainly through monthslong food sales, according to Debra.

"Going to culinary," she begins, "it got me a little more familiar with the food side, helping with these campaigns and the church kitchens —"

"Her cooking tastes a lot better, too —" Alexis jumps in.

"Definitely got her out of her 'norm box,' her comfort zone," John says.

Smiling, Debra quickly clarifies that her SkillsUSA experience has had similar benefits, "because I'm not one to get up in front of people and compete."

Laid off from a job in the health insurance industry, she took care of the family for 13 years before returning to school. "If you enjoy what you're doing, the people you're working with, your bosses, that type of thing, it's a lot easier," she reflects.

"Yeah, and not only work, but school also," says John, who suggests they enroll together in the auto mechanics program. "I love my teachers ... just like a big family. It's huge." ●

Asked about maintaining their busy schedule, Erica alludes to energy drinks. They live nearly an hour and a half from school and see a lot of late nights and early mornings.

"Our son basically is what keeps us going," she adds. "We're trying to do good by him. It's hard to explain. We're doing this not only for ourselves but for him as well, so we can make sure he has a bright future."

"[Tech school] gives us our associates' and our certificates that we need to go into the field. And, after being in the field for however long we want, if we want to continue on, bump up our associate's to bachelor's, then we could probably just go back at that time."

Educational plans in place, stand-out résumés became the couple's next goal. Enter SkillsUSA. Robert joined, then convinced Erica to do the same. Both made it to their state competition. Then, just before their contests, Tom Wozniak, SkillsUSA Wisconsin's college/postsecondary director, talked to them about running for state office. They both decided to give it a try.

"The day before the competition," Robert remembers, "we had that interview, and then two days later, at closing ceremonies for the state competition, we were both elected state officers. I guess I couldn't have really asked for anything better."

He was elected state parliamentarian; Erica, historian. In their competitions, Robert took third and she placed sixth, pretty good for first-year students.

"SkillsUSA has definitely made me more motivated," Robert now says. "It's made me more motivated in the classroom. It's made me more motivated at work. Just being a part of SkillsUSA has made me just be more motivated everywhere."

"It's been a little bit of a struggle, but we're giving it our all," Erica points out. "To me, I don't know why anyone wouldn't join." ●



Photo: Lloyd Wolf

The family that learns together: (from left) Alexis, Debra and John Newman

2016 NLS C COUNTDOWN

100 : 23 : 45
DAYS HRS MINS

Are you ready for another spectacular
year in Louisville, Kentucky?



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SkillsUSA Store and bring home the goods.


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'A SWEET TOOTH FOR SUCCESS'

For some, profession and passion are unacquainted strangers. For many career and technical education students, however, the two are tight-knit friends. That's certainly the case with Austin Jenks, an entrepreneurial 18-year-old senior at Lyndon (Vt.) Institute, who's finding that sweet spot where "earning a living" and "loving what you do" are one and the same.

For the last nine years, Jenks admits he's been addicted to "sugaring." Don't worry; that's not some shady youth ritual you've never heard of. It's actually the process of turning the sap from maple trees into that delicious syrup you may have poured on some pancakes this morning. "It's a lot of fun," the student says. "Something that I don't ever want to stop."

It all started on Jenks' ninth birthday, when his step-grandfather — who'd once operated his own sugaring operation — gave him a five-gallon sap bucket. "I asked him, 'What do I do with this?'" Jenks remembers. "He said it was for making maple syrup. You tap the tree, hook the bucket onto it, then collect the sap. I went, 'Oh,' and I haven't looked back since."

Jenks began with two taps and started filling that sap bucket. More taps followed quickly, and a neighbor taught him the boiling process that turns sap into syrup.

"Sugaring is a science," he explains. "Sun, wind, temperature ... it all has an effect on how the sap runs. Big operations have vacuum pumps to lower the barometric pressure in the tree and let the sap run more freely."

"Sap is about 80-90 percent water, but the temperature it takes to make it boil is higher than water because of the sugar. It usually takes about 40 gallons of sap to get one gallon of syrup."

If it sounds like Jenks knows what he's talking about, it's because he does. You could say the proof is in the "pudding," but it's really in the syrup he sells through word of mouth under his self-created "Country Hill Maple" label. "I double my sales every year," Jenks says. "I've been able to build a real good customer base."



Austin Jenks loves the process of turning raw materials into something with a beneficial purpose. After joining SkillsUSA, he realized that same process was happening to him.

BY TOM KERCHEVAL

Jenks' sugar house for Welding Sculpture

Something else Jenks built earned him a trip to last year's SkillsUSA Championships in Louisville, Ky., where he competed in Welding Sculpture. His project was a miniature replica of a working sugar house, a building where the

sap-to-syrup boiling process takes place. The experience has only made him more passionate about his sugaring.

"My cousin competed in Welding at nationals in 2014," Jenks explains, "and he encouraged me to join SkillsUSA, too.

Photo: Janet Cantore-Watson



I did some research and really liked what I saw. I thought if I could learn to weld, I could make or fix things used in sugaring."

'A real big jump-start'

As Jenks learned more about the competitive opportunities SkillsUSA provides, he decided to veer slightly from his cousin's path and try Welding Sculpture.

"I always liked art, drawing, taking photos," he says. "So I wondered what I could build using my welding. Something in my mind just popped, and I decided to build a model of the sugar house I'd like to have in later years."

The process wasn't nearly as easy as Jenks imagined, but he believes the lessons he's learned are invaluable.

"I realized pretty fast I couldn't just throw something together," he notes. "You have to design it, lay out the dimensions correctly, make sure there's enough space inside to move around. I think that's given me a real big jump-start for when I actually do build a real sugar house."

Jenks didn't earn a medal at the national competition, but he's rightly proud of his creation.

"Everyone in Vermont knew immediately what it was," he laughs. "But at nationals, some people thought I'd made a [moonshine] still."

While the project needed some explaining, what Jenks has gained through SkillsUSA is obvious, and not just from a technical standpoint.

"It also helped in leadership," he says. "I was an officer in my chapter, and it really helped me to see what natural leadership is all about."

Jenks is currently focused on precision machining, a natural progression in his view, which he'll also apply to sugaring. He plans to attend college next year with an eye toward engineering. Whatever his future holds, something sweet is bound to follow. As sappy as that sounds. ●

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He Lost Big on the Outside But Gained Inner Strength

Lifelong weight issues led this young man to take drastic steps. Two-hundred and eighty-five pounds later, he's using the experience to enrich the lives of others.

Danny Coleman likes to say he's half the man he used to be. This would be a bad thing in most cases, but it probably saved his life. Through a combination of lifestyle change, therapy, hard work and surgery, he has shed 285 pounds.

The Midville, Ga., native says he's struggled with weight and other health issues for most of his life. After reaching 527 pounds, Coleman knew he needed to get healthier.

After researching the options, he settled on gastric bypass surgery to lose the extra pounds. Before he could get the operation, the medical facility told Coleman he needed to drop some weight on his own.

"Because [I was] so large, they wanted me to lose 40 pounds," he explains.

Not content to do the bare minimum, Coleman more than doubled that amount.

"I lost 100 on my own, so they knew I was serious and dedicated," he says. "They set me up and did the surgery."

He officially "declared independence" from his unhealthy lifestyle on July 3, 2012, when he underwent the surgery at Live Healthy MD in Augusta, Ga., which also took charge of his pre- and post-surgery care.

"They had two nutritionists, the surgeon, a medical weight-loss doctor, and then they had a reconstructive surgery person all in house," Coleman says.

Coleman is now serving as secretary/treasurer for SkillsUSA Georgia's college/postsecondary division. He was introduced to the organization in 2013 while attending Southeastern Technical College in Vidalia, Ga.

"I started tech school in business management," Coleman says, "and my college success and survival skills teacher announced there was a club on campus." He decided to check it out.

Coleman liked what he saw. As he got involved, the student saw how SkillsUSA is much more than a club and integral to career and technical education.

He sees his state leadership position as an opportunity to represent the views of fellow students. "Being a state officer is not about a title or position, but about serving others and helping other voices to be heard," he explains.

Given what he's already been through, Coleman is also using his weight loss as a way to inspire others and to gain public-speaking experience.

"I share my story at churches and everything," he says, stressing that the experience has "definitely" helped him with his confidence.

"It's all leadership," Coleman adds, and serving as a state officer is a "very rewarding and humbling experience that I will never forget for the rest of my life." ●



Photo: Lloyd Wolf

By Craig E. Moore

SkillsUSA has made a huge impact on my life. My family is comprised of blue collar-workers and musicians. My grandfather started his own carpentry business called Family Craft Builders in Chicago. He and my grandmother had seven children within a time span of about 10 years. So, our family has never been the wealthiest, but for the most part it's been comfortable.

When my grandfather passed away, my father took over the family business. With my mother working with him in the office, things were going pretty well for the whole family. I was born in 1994, and by about 2004 my father decided he wanted to start a subdivision in Homer Glen, Ill. With the hope that the property and his beautiful townhomes and single-family homes would attract many poten-

'Like the brightest star in the galaxy' **Shining at nationals wasn't easy for the top champion in automotive**

Photos: Monica Schrank, Joliet (Ill.) Junior College



"I can remember a time when I couldn't even leave my bed because I was so afraid of the unknown." There are many individual paths to the SkillsUSA Championships, but **Tom Hahn's** was particularly stressful. In his own words, Hahn tells how he overcame his clinical anxiety to earn a gold medal in the biggest of the national competitions.

tial buyers, it seemed as though it would be a very lucrative business move. Things went on without much of a hitch until 2008 [when the market faltered].

I was about 13 years old and hadn't really figured out what I was going to do with my life; not surprising for a young boy. A few years prior to this, I was diagnosed with clinical anxiety, social phobia and panic disorder. It was a huge struggle in my life, and the family business being impacted by the failing economy didn't help the stress my parents were experiencing, either.

However, life kept going, and soon I was in high school. Not many people liked me, as I wasn't the best at socializing and often had to leave the classroom to try and calm down. In my sophomore year, I took an automotive technology class. I didn't think much of it; I just knew I would be driving soon and wanted to be able to take care of the maintenance myself to save money.

Unfortunately, there was a lot of bullying, making the environment a bit stressful, but I kept going with it because I very much enjoyed working on the motors.

That same year, one of my friend's parents told me about the SkillsUSA automotive competition. I didn't look much into it, as the very thought of competing terrified me.

Senior year rolled around, and I had a car, a license and a longer lunch break. My guidance counselor informed me that I could take Automotive Technology III at another high school in my district if I was willing to go there in the morning and drive back to my high school during my lunch break. I took her up on that offer, and that's where I met Ron Morris. That was the first semester Ron would be teaching Auto Tech III, and it was his first year at Carl Sandburg High School. His class was excellent: It had good structure and content, and I just soaked it all up.

A decision that changed everything

One day, Ron announced he would be taking anyone who was interested to the qualifying test for the SkillsUSA Illinois competition in Automotive Service Technology. I contemplated it, as I had come very far with my anxiety, but decided that because I was about to start a new job, I wouldn't have had time for the training it would take to succeed.

Ron, who was very excited to get started in SkillsUSA, signed up other students but hadn't heard from me. So, on the last night of registration, he signed me up in case I wanted to go. The next day, he pulled me aside and asked if I would want to compete. I explained to him my situation, to which he responded, "Well, Tom, that's fine, but since you're already registered, there's a \$40 withdrawal fee." I did not want to spend \$40 — that was a lot of money to me at the time — so I took the test. (Later, I found out there was no withdrawal fee, but Ron saw much potential in me and wanted me to compete.)

A week later, we got the results. I was the only one in the entire district to qualify! I had a decision to make: Do I decline and focus on my job at the quick lube, or do I give this a shot? Being that I was the only one who could go and I didn't want to let Ron down, I decided to compete.

We trained hard, usually three times a week for two to three hours. It was the



Hahn (left) and Marneris both earned medals at their state and national championships. “This was such a huge success for me, as I worked very hard to ensure that we all did our best,” says Hahn, who helped train the high-school student.

first time competing for both of us, so we had no idea what to expect. The state competition came around, and I was very nervous. I barely got three hours sleep the night before. I did my best, and that Friday morning, there I stood, with a gold medal around my neck and a huge smile on my face.

After the awards, we had our briefing on the nationals and were just buzzing with excitement. All that summer we trained three, sometimes four, days a week, a minimum of three hours a day.

I was so nervous the night before the national competition, I was lucky if I got two hours’ sleep. I did my absolute best, but this time, it did not get me a medal. I finished 18th in the nation. At first, it was very depressing. But when you think about it, that’s still very impressive.

Before SkillsUSA, I was just going to settle for an automotive technician position and do that for the rest of my life. I have been in the field for about four years now and am so glad I decided I could do more and attend college to become an automotive engineer.

At Joliet Junior College, I met several amazing instructors who all helped me achieve great things, including another state gold medal in automotive. During the 2014 national conference, I placed second at the college/postsecondary level. That was the highest rank my college has ever received, so everyone was very proud.

Because college-level students can only compete twice, I decided 2015 was going to be the year to take it all. But I knew I had to do more, so I met with Ron Morris, who I knew was just as dedicated as I am to SkillsUSA. What we came up with

was a great thing: He sent his top three students to the college to train with me for the state-level qualifier. It was a very good symbiosis. I already knew quite a lot but still needed to review the things that might seem mundane. A good deal of the information was new to his students, so teaching them the basics kept it fun and interesting, if not sometimes challenging for me.

All of us qualified, and so the training continued. We would meet usually two days a week for about three or four hours a day. We all worked extremely hard, and last year at the state level, Alex Marneris and I both took the gold medal in Automotive Service Technology [in the high school and college/postsecondary divisions, respectively]. John Kumerer, one of the other three students, placed second.

This was such a huge success for me, as I worked very hard to ensure that we all did

our best, and it paid off tenfold. Alex and I continued to train together, this time three to four days a week, three to four hours a day. Neither of us missed a single training session.

Soon the 2015 national conference was upon us, and we were ready. We had a great time the few days before the competition, with a bit of last-minute cramming. To our delight, I placed first in the nation, and Alex placed third. This combined effort allowed us to achieve amazing things, which will be a boon to us always, and has brightened my future like the brightest star in the galaxy.

I can remember a time when I couldn’t even leave my bed because I was so afraid of the unknown. So for expanding my horizons, getting me over my fears and helping me mature, I thank the entire SkillsUSA organization from the bottom of my heart. ●



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In her own words

Faced with autism, a student finds an open door to a productive life

Cynthia Thielen of Surry, Maine, is on her college dean's list and an enthusiastic volunteer for SkillsUSA at the state and national levels. She shares how her membership has given her a shot at a successful future.

My path toward SkillsUSA started out different than most. I have had autism my entire life, and I had several therapy sessions and resource room classes from around the time I was in second grade up until my last two years of high school. During that time, I thought for sure I was not going to get a job.

I did not think I was going to make much of my life until I learned about the Hancock County Technical Center through my guidance counselor at Ellsworth High School. I knew I liked taking photographs and hearing about movie-

making since I was younger, so I decided to give the media program a shot.

At first, I thought it might be a bit too much for me to handle because there was a lot involved with it, but after a few months, I realized it was the kind of thing I wanted to do. My instructor was very patient with me and made sure I understood the material and did not get too stressed out with it, which was a huge help in the long run.

Thanks to that, combined with my experience with photographing and participating in the Community Service competition at the SkillsUSA Maine conference four years ago, I am now a successful college junior pursuing a bachelor's degree in journalism and studio art at the University of Maine, with my mind set on a career.



Photo: Lloyd Wolf

I am hoping to keep an active role in SkillsUSA as an alumni volunteer for states, as well as the Job Skill Demonstration contest and various areas at nationals, to give back and to let other students know they can do anything they want if they put their mind to it.

SkillsUSA is the best student organization you can find, and the people in it are the kindest and most helpful people you can meet. I owe them big time. ●

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FROM ACTIVATE TO LEVERAGE, FIND YOUR WAY

When it comes to being a leader, are you still looking for your “start” button? What if you’re already a state officer and want to share what you’ve learned? SkillsUSA’s hands-on, high-energy training may just be the answer.

Activate, open to all SkillsUSA students, will help ignite your leadership potential. Participants learn how to work on teams, accomplish goals and present a positive image. You’ll expand your skill set in project and time management, conflict resolution, communication and facilitation, and other areas.

For state officers, **Leverage** explores values-based leadership through these four pillars: trust, stability, compassion and hope. Whether high-school or college/postsecondary, officers will learn how to better serve their state SkillsUSA associations. They’ll come away with materials to help with state fall conferences and help them confidently lead workshops.

These two training programs are held over the course of two-and-a-half days just before the National Leadership and Skills Conference. Held concurrently is **Engage**, a professional development conference for SkillsUSA advisors. Teachers will gain a better understanding of the many leadership materials and interactive resources the association has to offer.

All three events will be held June 18-20 in Louisville, Ky. Register online at: skillsusa-register.org. For more information, visit: www.skillsusa.org/events-training/national-leadership-and-skills-conference/training-opportunities/. ●

See a video of this training at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XE_azkPkqKk&feature=youtu.be



Photos: Craig E. Moore



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Share Your *Success* Stories To Help *Others* Write Theirs

Making your SkillsUSA chapter an active and engaged success takes work, but many members forget to access an important resource that can make things much easier: the success stories and best practices of other chapters.

As a class, discuss some of the activities your chapter excels at. Examples could include fundraisers, social events, service projects or even chapter meetings.

Choose one example and dissect the process of that activity from planning to completion. Write down the general steps first, then add specific details under each. Do it as if you're writing instructions for a new chapter to follow. Make note of what to focus on and avoid during the process based on your past experiences. Archive your document for the benefit of future chapter members.

SkillsUSA's online "Training Resource Library" features many videos and archived webinars your chapter can learn a lot from. You'll find it at: www.skillsusa.org/events-training/training-resource-library/. ●



Photo: Lloyd Wolf

Knowledge has to be improved, challenged and increased constantly, or it vanishes.

— PETER DRUCKER

Find the photo, win a prize



No, the picture on the left isn't abstract art. It's actually a distorted part of another photo in this issue. Find the original photo and send us the page number where it appears to win a SkillsUSA special "sackpack" (first prize) or travel mug (second prize). To enter, email your answer, name, address and phone number to anyinfo@skillsusa.org (include "Photo Contest" in the subject line). Or, send to SkillsUSA Photo Contest, 14001 SkillsUSA Way, Leesburg, VA 20176. One first- and one second-prize winner will be drawn at random from the correct entries. Entries must be received by Aug. 1.

Congratulations to last issue's winners: Dai'Sha Curlin of Pittsburg, Texas, and Tony Elliott of Ripley, Miss. ●

MAKING WAVES WITH A BIG WIN IN HONOLULU

Graphic communications students at Admiral Arthur W. Radford High School won first place in the Student Print Project Design, Planning and Production category of the Print-ROCKS awards. Sponsored by Pacific Printing Industries (PPI) Association, an affiliate of Printing Industries of America, this award qualifies them for the student category of the Benny Awards, part of the International Premier Print Awards competition.

The entry included designs for a poster, program cover and volunteer T-shirt for a basketball invitational, says SkillsUSA advisor Lane Yokoyama.

They also won Best of Division, Student, and the Mad Props Award, a special judges award for 3-D printing.

Jules Van Sant, PPI's executive director (*pictured below, far right*) traveled from Portland, Ore., to the Honolulu school to present the awards to the class. ●



Access to water, hope for life

When people collect drinking water in developing countries, their journey can cover many miles to and from rivers or streams, sometimes in perilous conditions. At Frederick (Md.) Career and Technology Center, CAD-engineering students have been testing new designs to more easily move water collection barrels. They plan to send their handle design prototype to the Hippo Water Roller Project in South Africa by year's end. ●

Photo: Maria Olney, SkillsUSA Maryland state reporter. Used with permission.



Student Brittainy Sechler tests a design to more easily move a water barrel.

They bagged it for the needy

At Niagara Career and Technical Education Center in Sanborn, N.Y., SkillsUSA advisor Scott Brauer asked members to collect food and organize it in bags.

Students made the rounds at school,

shared the importance of helping the pantry and asked for donations. Each grocery bag represented a meal for a needy family. The result was 1,000 pounds of food in bags for 150 meals delivered to the local food pantry. Pictured above, students shared a sign of their hard work. The class that collected the most was rewarded with a pizza party. ●



Photo: Niagara Career and Technical Education Center. Used with permission.

SkillsUSA Champions features our members' photography. We're looking for images of SkillsUSA chapters in action, or ones that show individual members' concentration or perseverance. For details, email thall@skillsusa.org (put "Image Photo" in the subject header) or write SkillsUSA Champions, 14001 SkillsUSA Way, Leesburg, VA 20176. The photographer's chapter is awarded \$150. ●



A culinary arts student, Alyssa Solimena, focuses intently on her task at the Center for Applied Technology South in Edgewater, Md. This photo was taken by Samantha Shevitz, a student under advisor Chris Jacobs.

Photo: Samantha Shevitz

EVERYTHING SKILLSUSA BELIEVES IN IS SOMETHING THAT YOU WANT TO SEE IN AN EMPLOYEE, SO I DEFINITELY BELIEVE IT PLAYS A PART IN CLOSING THE SKILLS GAP.

TOM WOZNAK, STATE DIRECTOR/
INSTRUCTOR, MADISON, WIS.

I'd like to consider myself as a role model. I'm married, I have a 3-year-old, but guess what? I'm still going to school. I'm still trying to better my life, and I'm hoping people look at that and see, "OK, well, if she can do it, then I can do it."

ERICA RUTTER OF WONEWOC, WIS., AND HER HUSBAND ROBERT RETURNED TO SCHOOL AND BECAME SKILLSUSA STATE OFFICERS

Workplace Readiness

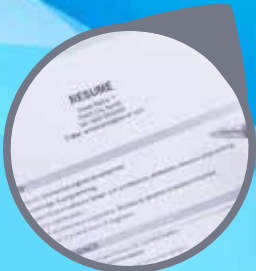
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