

In The News

Vocational students hear about STCC's landscape program

SPRINGFIELD – Felicia Hubacz gets paid to take hikes and look at trees and bugs.

"I love it," she said. "I get paid to do what I love. You can't beat it."

Hubacz, a forester with the state Department of Conservation and Recreation, recently returned to Springfield Technical Community College, where she received her associate degree in Landscape Design & Management Technology. She spoke to about 70 high school students in vocational programs about the value of getting a degree from STCC.

"This school gave me what I needed to get going," Hubacz told the students. "It was a small program. I was able to talk to the professors. I was able to get encouragement to continue with my education."

After graduating from STCC, Hubacz transferred to the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, where she earned her bachelor's degree before starting her job with the state. In her role, she examines trees and insects. Often, she's on foot, but she also gets to fly across the state on a small plane to collect data on the health of the forests.

Hubacz highlighted the benefits of getting a college education. "In the future, you will be able to claim a higher wage because of that knowledge," she said.

She told the students she hires people to work for the DCR. An assistant forester position pays \$3 an hour more than a laborer position. The difference? The higher paying job requires an associate degree.

Thomas Smith, chair of the Landscape Design and Management



Turley Publications Photo courtesy of James Danko

Shown are STCC faculty join landscape industry employers and students from the Lower Pioneer Valley Career and Technical Education Center (Career TEC) in West Springfield. Erik Harel, seated at left, a teacher at Career TEC, brought his students to hear about STCC's Landscape Design and Management Technology program.

Technology program, invited students in vocational schools from throughout Western Massachusetts to visit STCC on March 1 and hear from employers like DCR's Hubacz.

Smith said he wanted the students to know that college is a real option for them. He went to a vocational high school and at the time was told that he "wasn't college material."

"I ended up going to college, and now I'm teaching at a college," he told the students. "Don't let anybody tell you that you can't do anything or you're not good enough, because you are. You can get a degree and within two years

you could be a supervisor, making good money."

The students traveled on buses from Monument Mountain Regional High School in Great Barrington, Smith Vocational and Agricultural High School in Northampton, Roger L. Putnam Vocational Technical Academy in Springfield, Westfield Technical Academy, Chicopee Comprehensive High School and the Lower Pioneer Valley Career and Technical Education Center (Career TEC) in West Springfield.

Erik Harel, a teacher at Career TEC, brought 10 students to STCC to hear from the professors and the employers.

"A lot of them are interested in landscaping, so I wanted them to see what the STCC program had to offer, and I also wanted them to talk to industry professionals," Harel said. "That way, they can match their skills with what the industry wants them to have."

For students interested in a college education, Harel recommends they start at STCC rather than a four-year university.

"I tell them they will save more money by starting at STCC," he said. "They can always transfer from STCC into the Stockbridge School of Agriculture at UMass."

Students heard from another STCC graduate, Stephanie Nunez, a landscape designer who works for Beebe Landscape Services, Inc., in East Windsor, Conn. Nunez said she started working after receiving her associate degree from the Landscape Design and Management Technology program at STCC.

"The STCC landscape program is open to anyone. Whether you've been in the industry before or you're coming from a vocational school or it's something new to you, they cater to everybody," she said. "They give you a good background and set you up to get a job right out of college, whether you want to get the associate degree or transfer over to a four-year college and get your bachelor's degree. They really give you a good foundation to work off of."

Those interested in applying to STCC's Landscape Design and Management Technology program or have questions can call Admissions at 413-755-3333. They can also apply online at www.stcc.edu/apply.