

A LOOK INSIDE LCTI

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by Aaron Spikol and Dolly Malik

... hands-on work, students have some days where they are taught in regular classrooms, which is called "theory." In theory, they do worksheets and takes notes like in a regular classroom.

"There's more to it than you think," said Justin Hood, a Parkland senior, when describing the landscaping lab, explaining how he has to know everything from how to put in a pond to being able to design an entire outdoor area. "It's a great experience. You get to be outside and work in groups...but you can't be sitting [around]."

When students first attend LCTI, they go through a period of rotation between different labs they would like to do. Teachers from each lab watch how they work and after that period, the different teachers pick which students are fitted to the labs. Therefore, every lab consists of the cream of the crop – those who are motivated to do their best in a particular lab because it is what they are good at and are passionate about.

By the end of level three many students are ready to take their National Occupational Competency Testing Institute (NOCTI) tests, making them eligible to attain career specific licenses. Passing the NOCTI exams is not easy. For example, plumbing students need to be able to use measurements given by a packet to construct the framework of a wall in which they then lay the correct piping for a particular water using source, such as a sink or washing machine. This is in addition to their being able to pass a 200 question exam. NOCTI tests typically take several hours and act as the definitive test for all LCTI students.

For many students, though, learning does not end with the NOCTI but only begins there. Many level four students who have completed their NOCTI test then go on to attain specific career-related licenses before they graduate, allowing them to work on co-op. These students only attend LCTI a few days a week, with most of their typical day spent not in high school or at LCTI but at work, gaining real, invaluable career experience.

Besides the ability to eventually leave school behind altogether, classes at LCTI are quite different from those in a regular academic setting.

"It's better than regular school," said freshman Chelsea Graver. "You're interacting more instead of just being by yourself."

"It's fun, hands-on, you learn a lot and you see more people," said a freshman from Allen High School.

That sense of cooperation and camaraderie between students was obvious throughout the day and stood in contrast to the quiet, sometimes isolating atmosphere of regular academic classes. In various labs students were always working together or with a teacher, pursuing their various lessons enthusiastically. In the law enforcement lab, two students attempted to arrest and handcuff a third armed with a fake pistol, while other students energetically commented on their progress. In the

automotive lab one student gunned an engine while two others peered inside to identify the problem. For every student patiently studying alone, there were always two or three actively engaged in learning a new skill.

Another common feature of LCTI is how those skills are shared, as many of the different departments provide real products and services. Students can schedule an appointment to be seen at the cosmetology lab, order fresh baked goods from

exams, many students compete in annual competitions, such as Skills USA, a national competition for technical school students to compete in their respective fields. This year Parkland will be sending several students on to the state level competition, including Parkland senior Alyssa Homan of the cosmetology department. Her competition consists of a series of timed tasks that last more than three hours and which include, among other things, a randomly selected men's haircut, women's haircut, child's hair cut and coloring.

"I've been working on [preparing for the competition] a lot," said Homan. As for the rest of her LCTI career, "I'm just finishing hours for this year." Homan said she will be getting her license after graduation and that she hopes to open her own salon.

To accompany the dedicated corps of students is an equally motivated teaching staff, all of whom are former professionals in their field. Ms. Cindy Heil, who teaches the Dental Technology program, spent 18 years as a dental hygienist before getting her teaching degree

and coming to LCTI to teach. In addition to her responsibility for creating and teaching a curriculum to meet state standards for her program, Ms. Heil is also responsible for finding industry experts to come in and review the program every several years, as well as for helping her most advanced students find jobs for them to go out on co-op.

"I just have to cold call offices, asking if they will take an assistant," said Ms. Heil, describing the difficulty of arranging student working opportunities. "A lot of the offices decline, worrying about quality and reliability, but I wouldn't ever send a student that I wasn't sure of. Still,

hospitality program to pursue his goal of becoming a chef.

"I really want to become a chef," said Adwad, "but I'll always have plumbing to fall back on. It pays well and it's useful for my dad's company."

Other students cited parents as the reason for picking their respective courses.

"My dad always liked cars and I was interested," said Parkland senior Zachary Witman, explaining his decision to take the automotive technology lab. As for working on cars, "The more you do it, the more you like it."

Overall, the atmosphere at LCTI is very calm and relaxing. It is just like Parkland, but since students are with the same group of kids for an extended period of time, everyone gets to know each other well. Most people at LCTI are very passionate about what they are doing, and it is evident in how hard they work. People at PHS often say that those who attend LCTI are simply "slackers" and those who "don't want to do any work," but that is not the case. LCTI labs on the whole require students to be more responsible and self motivated than their Parkland counterparts. In general students seem to work at least as hard as most Parkland students, handling both regular and classes and lab sessions.

"Kids say LCTI students do drugs or slack off, but the truth is those things go on a lot more at Parkland than here," said Hood. "At LCTI, there is no tolerance for that stuff. If you do drugs, you get kicked out. If you get in a fight, they call the cops."

The rules at LCTI remain the same as at Parkland, but in some areas the strictness differs. In certain labs, like those in automotive, teachers are particularly strict with cell phone and iPod usage as well as hat wearing, but in others, as long as it does not interfere with learning or paying attention, minimal electronic usage is permitted. On the other hand, at lunch, all students are allowed to listen to their iPods or to text.

Parkland senior Kaitlyn Weaver emphasized that students at LCTI are no less intelligent than regular students.

"We still get the same education and take the same classes as other students. The difference is that we're also learning a skill. I feel good knowing I have something substantial after high school. Before I came to LCTI, I didn't know what I was going to do. Now, I know exactly what I want to do."

LCTI is a great place for students to get a head start on the career they would like to continue with after high school. It provides students with hands-on experience and helps them decide what they would like to pursue earlier than most high school students. Interested students should talk to a guidance counselor.

When asked about the job prospects in the current economy, Weaver did not express any worries, instead pointing out various students on the bus ride back to Parkland. "She's studying computers, he's studying wiring, I'm studying dental technology," she said. "I don't see computers going anywhere. People are still going to need electricity. And people are always going to have teeth."

LCTI Word Search

Find these LCTI labs in the word search!

(Answers on Back Page)

K M C U Y R Y I Q Q S F S P O U V N X Y
 Z J G H X R A H J M B E B L J W G H I J
 C E A N E O N G R M T P D M R I I O O Y
 L Y L I G S P O L U R E I P S A F I Z Q
 I D J A S N T O S S D L E E M R I N W M
 F I E T J O G K B A L R D A S W G H U V
 V L W G A I Y P W W M L G N I T F A R D
 B G M Y W T C M O K A B U V N Q U A C M
 K T H N G A P R Z R E C T Q V K D W A L
 Z Q U L V P K W O M A R K E T I N G R Q
 O H J D D U S L E X L N O J G A X E P L
 R F N V J C F W V B O Q Y H D C G D E K
 E Q N D R C I D N A D W X E O D W E N B
 M N L R I O C P Y Y K E M B K S Q P T Z
 Y O E K F H H S Y K J O S F H A H N R M
 K G H F L T A Z S M H Y L I R X V B Y F
 G Z B A S L H J Q S E H H M G V V M T T
 A K Z N Q A X M W F U G T G X N O C O A
 E M C S Q E B V H U Z Z L U T L T Z E O
 O H E Z F H W G X I U T Q O H Z B J Z W

Carpentry

Drafting

Floral Design

Health Occupations

Marketing

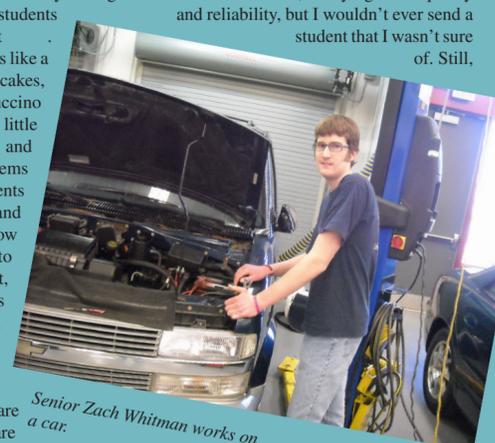
Masonry

Millwork

Web Design



photo by Dolly Malik
 Students in culinary arts learn in a theory room.



Senior Zach Whitman works on a car.

Make a Match!

Match the pictures of different labs at LCTI to the correct career.

(Answers on Back Page)



Advertising Design/Commercial Art

Cosmetology

Commercial Baking

Dental Technology

Early Child Care and Education of Young Children

Marketing and Business Education