Oneida County 2015 Summer Youth Employment Program

Members of the Summer Youth Employment Program's "Tiger Team" take a break after working hard beautifying Utica's City Hall. From painting fences, to interacting with area children, Oneida County's youth learned valuable skills to help them become members of the 21st century workforce.

Work Readiness Day Inspires Students to Work Hard

Each year, the Office of Workforce Development and Mohawk Valley Community College (MVCC) hold "Work Readiness Day" on the opening day of the Oneida County Summer Youth Employment Program.

Work Readiness Day helps youth understand what they will be doing over the summer, and stresses the importance of thinking ahead regarding education and employment.

Oneida County invites both private and public sector speaks to address the youth about the importance of success, to show youth that no matter where you go in life, the path to success begins through entry-level jobs. This year's speakers stressed the importance of setting high standards, and proving themselves to their employers.

MVCC provides extensive support for the even by showing the youth how programs at MVCC can help young people before, during, and after college.

"When you work with respect, you earn respect. When you show your employers and your fellow workers that you can do the job, you are changing attitudes. When you take pride in what you do, you become a person who is stronger than those who doubt you!" – **Patrick Johnson addressing SYEP Youth on Work Readiness Day, 2015**

Summer Youth Employment Program Creates Opportunity

By David Mathis
Director, Oneida County Workforce Development

Oneida County's Summer Youth Employment Program is the bridge to opportunity for our young people. Through a mix of programs designed to challenge these youth as well as prepare them for the future, the workforce of tomorrow is learning lessons that are essential in the 21st Century's workplace.

From our capstone trip to the College of Nanoscale Science and Engineering in Albany, to the nitty-gritty work of painting, landscaping, and refurbishing, youth learned about the world of work, about careers, and about the steps they need to take in their own lives. At their work sites, they learned lessons about respect, diversity, punctuality and productivity. In bringing home their first paychecks from what, for many, was their first job, they learned the pride that comes from having money that can contribute to their family's needs or be proudly spent in an exuberant spree of music, clothes and entertainment that helps shore up our local economy.

Having worked in the area of workforce development for 30 years, I can say without reservation that the Summer Youth Employment Program is the most important youth program the workforce system can offer. A strong Summer Youth Employment Program helps youth get their first job, and point them towards academic and career success.

Youth use the latest in technology to learn about physics during a program sponsored by Gear Up alongside MVCC and the Utica City School District.

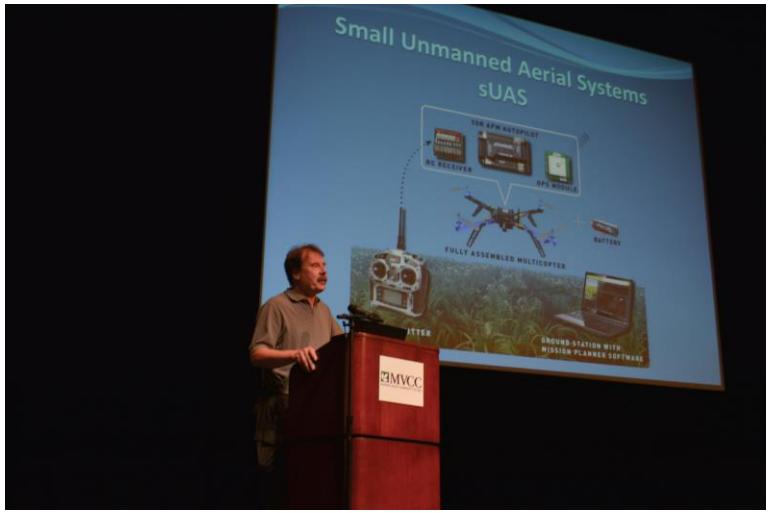
Picente Inspires Both Youth and Counselors

"This summer opens the door for youth to learn what work is all about, to learn lessons about what employers want, to learn what types of skills youth will need to achieve success, and to use this summer as a first step. Oneida County's Summer Youth Employment Program is an outstanding example of a long-term partnership at the state, county and community levels investing in our youth and providing opportunities." – **Oneida County Executive Anthony J. Picente addressing SYEP youth, right**

In addition to reaching out to youth, at Work Readiness Day 2015, Picente also gave a pep talk to the SYEP summer staff before the SYEP kick-off event, left. Picente told the counselors that they represent the county to over 400 youth this year. "As counselors with the program, you are the connecting point between the youth served through this program, and the government. These youth look up to you, and their interactions with you this summer will shape their lives."

Youth Told To Look To the Future

Speakers at the Work Readiness Day 2015 event told youth about the importance of looking to the future, and valuing the experience you receive from a summer job



Professor William Judycki, “Unmanned Arial Systems are about to take this world by storm. It is estimated that this new technology will create 100,000 new jobs and pump $82 billion into our economy. Most believe that these numbers are inaccurate -- underestimated by at least a factor of ten or even a hundred. Millionaires will be made! Are you interested?”

Investigator Mike Washington of the Utica Police Department, “This summer, you can see the rewards from the work of your hands. Recall how it feels to earn your own money, and to take pride in your work. Use this summer as a first step for college and for your career.”

Reaching for Success

Throughout the summer, area youth are given an opportunity to experience the diversity of jobs in Oneida County. Youth are not the only ones who benefit from the Summer Youth Employment Program. The money youth are given for working hard in the summer goes towards buying items the youth want, or need, which helps local business succeed during the normally slow summer months.

Youth also experience the benefit of serving as role models for the younger generations, cleaning up neighborhoods they visit, and making a difference in the city they call “home.”

Jonathan Guzman (left) and Kareem Jones (right) help clean up trash at Donovan Stadium at Murnane Field.

Kadie Lavare (left) and D'Shauna Boles (right) help weed out part of the Utica Zoo.

Youth Pitch in For Their Community

Summer Youth engage with children at the Vega center.

Daryun Prescod paints a fence at the Parkway Recreation Center.

SYEP Makes a Visible Difference

The SYEP makes a visible difference not only for the community, but for the youth as well.
The national employment rate among teens fell 40 percent from 2000 to 2010 for teens between the ages of 16 and 19.
Overall, the teen employment rate has declined annually since 1978.
Among Black and Hispanic teens, employment rates were far lower than among whites.
About 50% of White teens worked on average during this past summer, while only 27% of Black teens and 34% of Hispanic teens worked. Low-income teens fared worst of all. Only 17% of Black teens from families with incomes under $20,000 were working.
The SYEP makes a difference. Statistics show that for every year a teenager works, the income earned in their twenties rise between 14 and 16 percent. A recent New York City-based study found that getting a job in the SYEP in New York City (NYC) led to increases in school attendance in the following school year of roughly 1 percent overall and 3 percent for students who may be at greater educational risk.
A study of a summer jobs program in Boston finds that, compared to a comparison group of eligible youth from the program waiting list, program participants were significantly more likely to reduce risky and violent behaviors, including the use of drugs and alcohol, physical fighting, damaging property, and threatening someone with a weapon.

Youth Learn Constructive Skills

The construction trades program of the Oneida County Summer Youth Employment Program was developed by the Oneida-Herkimer-Madison BOCES School and Business Alliance to help students learn about a great career area, and to gain skills that will be useful no matter what career path they should choose.

"This program not only showed young people what it really takes to be successful in the construction sector, it also helped them learn about the things employers tell us over and over really matter – getting the math right, being precise on measurements, working with determination to get it right, and working as a team. SABA has long been part of the Oneida County Summer Youth Employment Program, and we are happy to help young people learn and earn through activities that help them and the community." **– Howard D. Mettelman, District Superintendent, OMH BOCES**

Building Skills for the Future

The construction trades program teaches youth more than just how to build a structure, or sand a piece of wood. We hear employers locally and nationally talk about their top needs – workers who can do the math, who can communicate, be problem-solvers, work as a team and produce quality work. This project met every need

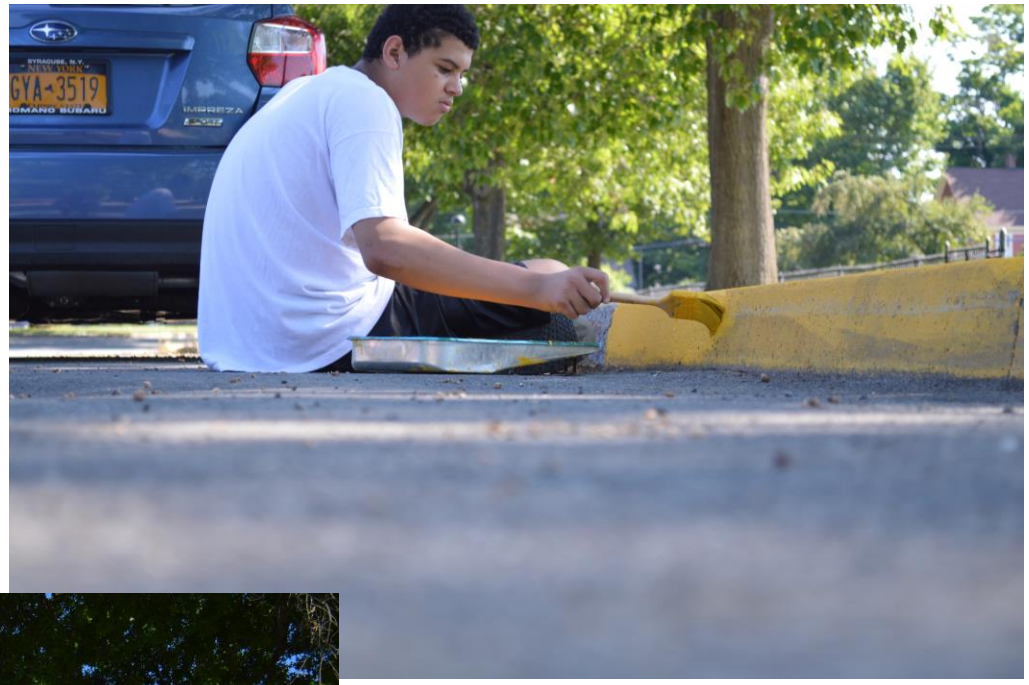
Math: Students had to do all the measurements, decide how much material was needed, how much all of this was going to cost and make choices to live within a budget.

Communication: The students were polished, professional, responsive and enthusiastic. They represented themselves far beyond the image of "kids," that fills the media.

Problem-solving: Students were challenged to adapt and overcome problems they did not anticipate during construction.

See Lee, left, works on his project for the construction trades program.

Youth at the New York State School for the Deaf (NYSSD) in Rome helped beautify the campus grounds for the upcoming school year.
Youth helped pull weeds and clean up litter from the grounds, in addition to repainting driveways to improve traffic conditions.



Trevan Watkins, above, repaints a curb at the NYSSD.

Summer youth pull weeds and paint along the bus loop of the NYSSD.

Giving Back to the Community

In a partnership with Utica's Municipal Housing Authority (MHA), summer youth helped clean up the grounds of Adrean Terrace.

Jordan Daughtry, above, says that helping an area in need gives him a sense of pride. "Through the SYEP, we can give back to communities that we have grown up in. We have a chance to be a part of something positive. We have a chance to improve an important part of Utica, and that is a really unique opportunity."

Health Care Experience Gives Youth Hope for the Future

Members of the 2015 Health Careers Program pose for a group photo at the annual banquet hosted by Faxton-St. Luke's at the end of the program.

It is essential that SYEP participants come away from their work experience with the feeling that they accomplished something. If their work assignment has no real value, they figure it out pretty quickly. In Oneida County, most youth work through programs that guide them toward outcomes and ensure they address Job One – preparing these young people for the future.

Students in the health careers program spent time shadowing staff at local health care employers, and learning not just what goes on every day in a hospital, but also all of the varied types of career opportunities available.

Health Care Experience Gives Youth Hope for the Future

Neila Rekic was one of many youth whose lives were forever change by the Health Careers program. “Being a part of this program made me realize that my dream of being a pediatrician can come true,” she said. Rekic, who will be a senior at Thomas R. Proctor High School this fall, told her fellow youth at the end-of-year banquet that seizing opportunity is vital to success. “We have to learn everyday. Everyday is an eye opener, with unlimited potential. We have the ability to do what we want. Being participants in the Health Careers Program has helped all of us along the path to success.”

Neila Rekic gives her address to the Health Careers Program participants.

“This is Where You Learn”

David Mathis, director of Oneida Country Workforce Development reminded the participants of the Health Careers Program of the importance of working hard. “This is one of our finest programs, because it provides youth with the tools to begin a career.” Mathis stressed that the SYEP not only can change the lives of individuals, but can also change the community. “This is the beginning of the most important pathway in your life. This is where you can learn. This is where you can begin to grow into members of society. The future will require each and every one of you to take responsibility, to work hard and make this world a better place. You are the future, and you will shape the remainder of the 21st century. That is a tremendous opportunity.”

Utica's "Tiger Team" Get's the Job Done

This year, the Summer Youth Program had a special team of Youth, nicknamed the "Tiger Team" who would work at various sites around the city.
These youth, and their counselor Francis Cherry, worked extremely hard all summer long to improve their city.
From City Hall, to the Parkway Recreation Center, to Liberty Bell Corner, summer youth pitched in to help improve Utica's image.

Kalika Gaters, above, focuses on every brush stroke painting a fence along side Utica's City Hall, while Rasiem Brooks, below trims bushes around City Hall.

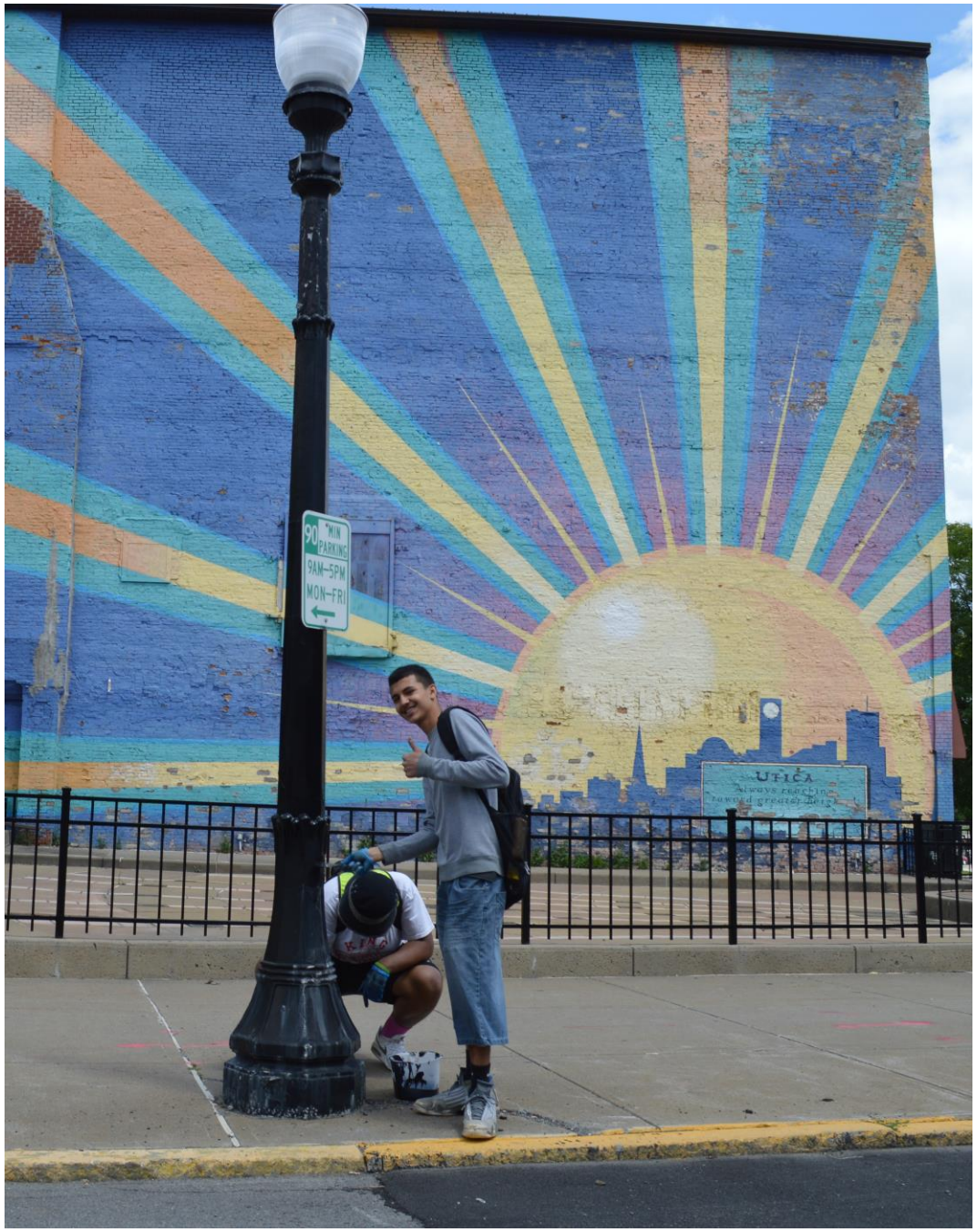
Tyrese Lanier, below, prepares the fence for painting by removing rust and dirt.

The Tiger Team Tackles It All

Tiger Team Members Hae Thoo, bottom right, and Patrick Tuyizere, top left, paint fence posts at Kopernik Park, located in downtown Utica. The posts had been in need of painting for many years. The SYEP's Tiger Team painted all the fence posts, improving the looks of one of Utica's most visible parks.

Members of the “Tiger Team” helped paint trail markers white at the Southwood’s Switchbacks and Roscoe Conkling Part. These trail markers help keep walkers and runners safe while enjoying Utica’s scenic woods.

The SYEP “Tiger Team” also helped beautify Utica’s famous Liberty Bell Corner by repainting the gate around the park, as well as the lampposts around it. The paint had become chipped and rusted over the years, and the Tiger Team helped repair this jewel of Utica.



Utica's "Tiger Team" A Huge Success

The "Tiger Team" was on of this year's most successful ideas. SYEP Counselor Francis Cherry stated that the members of the Tiger Team were hard workers who always gave 100%. "These kids have been great. They show up on time everyday, ready to work. We've been able to accomplish so much this summer thanks to these hard working kids. The Tiger Team was a great idea, and I hope to see it continue in the future."

Youth gained valuable work experience from their assortment of jobs.

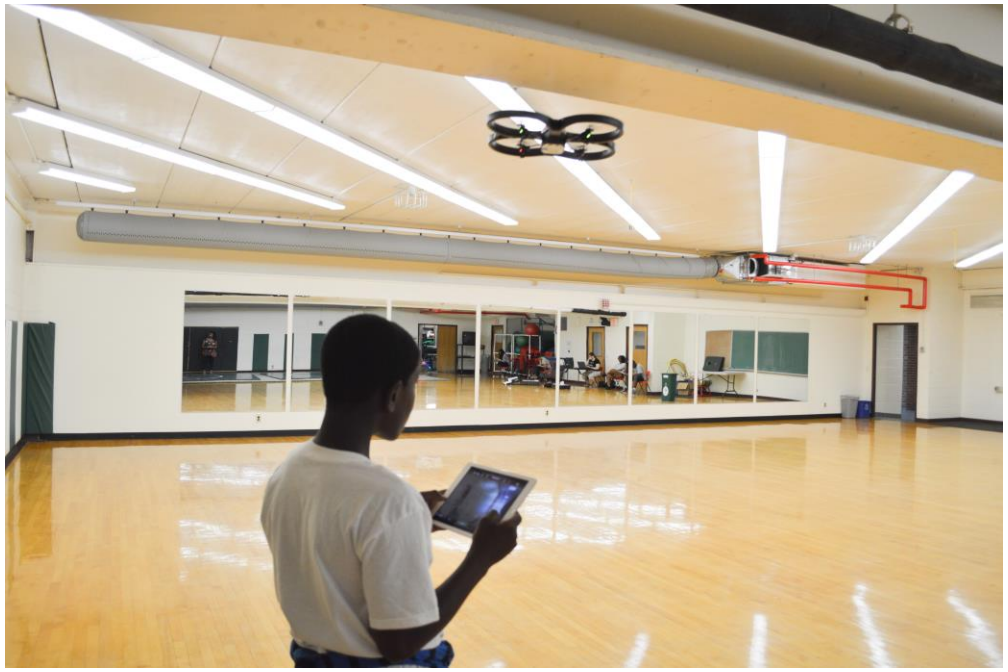
Here, summer youth help beautify the Parkway Recreation Center by repainting the fence, and helping to weed out the gardens in the back.

Youth Given Skills to Succeed

From serving as role model's for Utica's younger children, to learning how to fly the latest in drone technology, the 2015 SYEP gave youth the skills and experience they will need in today's ever changing world.

Above: SYEP Counselor Vincent Galaway enjoys a game of Frisbee with youth.

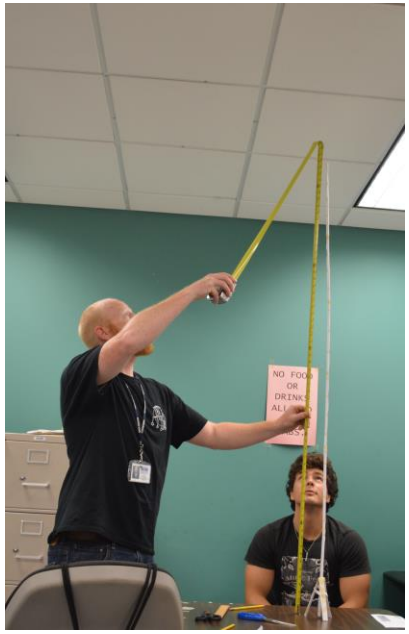
Below: Jahiem Bowman gets hands-on experience flying a drone at MVCC.

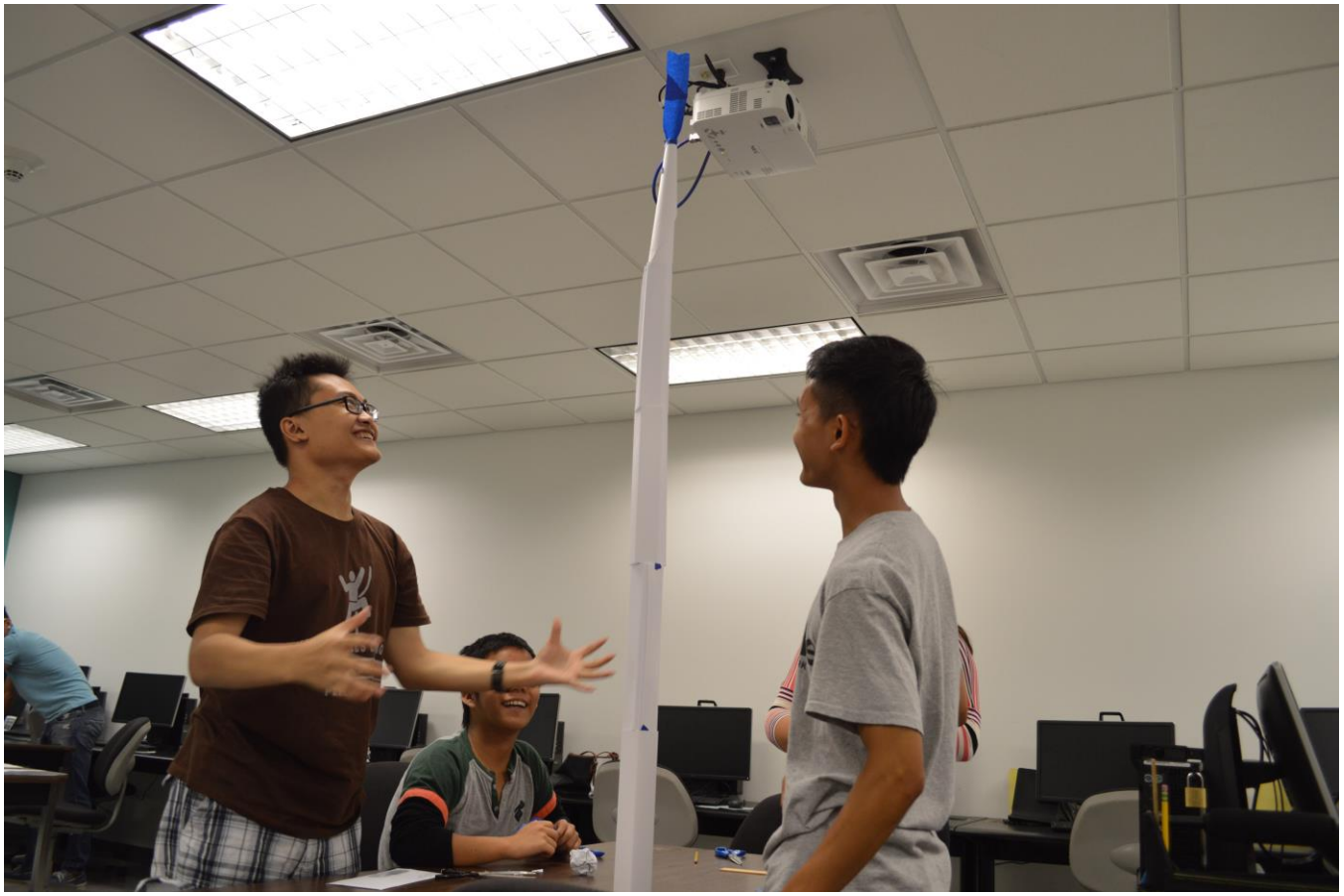


Building our Future

"A good summer job puts money in a teen's pocket, provides invaluable life experience and helps neighborhoods grow stronger. Businesses that employ young people create a talented workforce that resonates for decades to come. Our Summer Jobs program furthers our mission of job creation by giving businesses the resources to hire, train and foster growth in youths from underprivileged communities, creating a sense of pride for both workers and employers."**- Gov. Andrew Cuomo**

As part of the Gear Up program, youth learned about nano-technology, and how something as simple as building a paper tower involves precise calculations.





Small Technology, Big Potential

A New York State Higher Education Services Corp. (HESC) grant allowed the Oneida County SYEP to join a WIB project to take 10 busloads of local students to the SUNY College of Nanoscale Science and Engineering Empire in Albany. Thanks to a partnership with SUNY Institute of Technology, Utica College, Mohawk Valley Community College, and the Utica School of Commerce, local colleges were represented on the trips. Staff from the Working Solutions One-Stop Career Centers also made the trips, ensuring that students received career and college guidance that can help them understand the vast potential Nano Utica is bringing to this region and to their lives.

When the SYEP youth toured the College of Nanoscale Science and Engineering in Albany, including the facility's clean rooms, it was a hands-on experience that engaged them in science as well as showing them the future of nanotechnology.

The CNSE tours gave students an overview of the science behind nanotechnology through some demonstrations and hands-on activities.

During each tour, one student would don the full gear need to work in a clean room, and groups would present ideas for uses of nano-technology.

"The promise of high-paying nanotechnology jobs at Nano Utica becomes real for our youth when they can see themselves in these jobs, and when they can experience nanotechnology for themselves. They need to believe in possibilities. The CNSE trips are designed to get them thinking about the future, to get them thinking about colleges, and to show them that the economic growth taking place in Oneida County can and will include them."
– **David Mathis, Director,**
Oneida County Workforce Development

Developing Leadership

Every year, Oneida County college students fill the crucial roles of counselors, helping youth with all aspects of their summer employment – from understanding and abiding by work rules to making sure everyone gets their time sheets in on time to get paid. The counselors perform outreach and intake, working with youth and families to ensure that all the documentation needed for the program is secured

"The program builds our leadership skills because we are the ones who really work with the kids and help them when something happens," said Kaila Booth. "For the kids who have never worked, there are a lot of questions. They start out very uncertain, but by the time the summer is over, they are a lot more confident. So are we!"

Counselors Cory Williams, top left, and Vincent Galaway, bottom left, help youth apply for the SYEP at Thomas R. Proctor High School. Below, counselor Kaila Booth speaks on the phone with an applicant for the SYEP.

Taking Pride in the Summer Youth Employment Program

The Summer Youth Employment Program is all this:
Young men and women getting all hot and dirty and sweaty as they forge teamwork amid blistered hands and aching backs;
Grinning summer youth employees clutching little pieces of paper - the first paychecks of their lives - with pride;
Refugee teenagers who may not have the least bit of interaction with other cultures in their regular lives learning to team up with Black, Hispanic, Bosnian, Russian and native-born Utica children learning the lessons of tolerance that will be essential in the 21st Century's workplace;
Kids, exuding pride because they built the project, discovered that they really can accomplish something after all.
SYEP is also things unseen. Beginnings. Doors opening. Over the years, hundreds of young people have taken their first step on the ladder of opportunity through the experience they had in the Summer Youth Employment Program. I am proud of our student workers. Their efforts taught all of us a lesson we need to remember: Our Mohawk Valley workforce of the future is not the one of the past. It is a mixture of color and speaks various languages. But when there is work to be done, the workforce of the future can do the job.
-David Mathis, Director Oneida County Office of Workforce Development

A Job Well Done!

Members of the "Tiger Team" pose at Liberty Bell Corner.