

STAYING THE COURSE



RGV Careers partners with local school district

By Lori Houston

Photos by Jose Antonio Peña

The sound of Pomp and Circumstance and the cheers of proud parents, families and friends are deafening as high school seniors cross the stage to receive their diplomas. Whether or not the students enjoyed their time in high school, or are glad to see it end, it is a turning point in their young lives.

But the next question is, what happens now? Some students from the Rio Grande Valley are making that decision before graduation by participating in job certification programs while still in high school.

RGV Careers has partnered with Donna ISD, offering an opportunity for select high school students to complete their Medical Assistant program during their senior year. Seventeen students from both Donna high schools will be registered Medical Assistants upon completion of their training. “This is our first partnership with a school district, and we envision more,” says Dr. Annabelle Palomo, the School Director of RGV Careers.

“We give them the same curriculum as the adults. We don’t water it down.” Instructor, Daniel Lopez points out. These students will need to master this

information because they will have the same certification everyone else receives when they complete the program. The students attend every work day from 1 PM to 7 PM. Donna ISD busses the students to the RGV Careers campus and their parents pick them up after classes. RGV Careers provides food for the students because they understand the students are going non-stop all day. They are missing out on pep rallies and football games and many of them also work on the weekends.

These are students who have an interest in the medical field and want to use this program to gain experience while they pursue it further. Many of them will need to work their way through college and this gives them the opportunity to get a good job in the medical field as they study in their chosen area. Some of the students have expressed an interest in becoming RNs or EMTs; others are still in the figuring it out stage. Stephanie Aguirre already knows what she wants for her future. “My goal after RGV Careers is to become a Radiologist. I would like to get a bachelor’s degree in Radiology.” Beginning their adult lives with this head start on a career in the medical field will have a great impact on their lives later on in the form of having developed a level of discipline that will carry them through their future goals, whether it is more schooling or getting established in their career. “This partnership may be the only opportunity at a higher education for some of these students,” says Ari Vela, the Director of Admissions at RGV Careers.

Other school districts have approached RGV Careers and they have plans to partner with them in the future, but they wanted to start small with Donna ISD as they piloted the new program. Donna ISD pays for the students to be in the program so the students don’t have to pull out student loans for this course, allowing them to save their Federal Financial aid for further studies.

RGV Careers hosted a very successful parent night to explain the program and what they were doing and it’s importance to the students. They wanted to express their desire to do what they can relieve any hardships in the way of the students finishing their course. With one hundred percent attendance, the parents were able to ask questions and express concerns about



their child’s participation in the program. Even though the students are sacrificing a lot to finish this program, they know it is worth it. Janeth Salas wants everyone in her community to know that there is “no barrier to achieving their goal.” She sees herself as an example of this because she hasn’t let being a teen mom stop her from continuing her education. She has plans to become a Pediatrician.

This partnership between Donna ISD and RGV Careers will ultimately have a positive impact on the communities here in the Rio Grande Valley. These students are being given the chance to make something of their own lives that they may not have been able to do before, but educating them in the medical field will also increase the care given to Valley residents. Aspiring Physical Therapy Assistant, Melissa Perez, is also developing her interest in elder care. These students will be able to affect others’ lives for the better as a result of this opportunity.

At the beginning of the program course, Mr. Lopez always asks his students to write down why they are there. “I typically have

in every class have one to three students that says ‘there are people that don’t believe in me and I want to prove them wrong.’” He describes one of his students as “extremely involved in every way. She has her school, our school, and band. She leaves directly from here to go march. She has a lot of responsibility, a lot of food on her plate, so to speak, but she is one of them that is proving them wrong in my opinion.” ■

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