



## Career and Technical Education Students Celebrated as 'The Future of Our Workforce'

The Students Were Recognized At SkillsUSA Council's Annual Signing Day

By Paul Muschick

LEHIGH VALLEY - Sixty students with skills learned through career and technical education were honored recently as they prepared to fill in-demand roles in the Lehigh Valley's growing workforce, continue their education, or join the military.

The students were recognized at SkillsUSA Council's annual Signing Day on May 15 at DeSales University.

Modeled after the popular events where high school athletes sign with colleges, the students from Lehigh Career & Technical Institute, Bethlehem Area Vocational-Technical School, and Upper Bucks County Technical School signed with their future employers, institutions of higher learning, and military academies as their parents and other supporters watched.

"The room right here is filled with people that know how to build, repair, solve, create, design, weld, code, organize, protect, heal, and innovate. And no matter how crazy the world becomes, society will always need people to do things," said Andy Hammer, Executive Director of SkillsUSA Council District 11.

One of the students is Bridget Roberts, who studied welding at Bethlehem Area Vocational-Technical School and twice qualified to compete in the state SkillsUSA competition.

She said being accepted into a fast-track program to sample the school's many career pathways was like being accepted into an Ivy League college.

"It felt like a whole new world, so many different opportunities," she said.

After considering culinary arts and electrical roles, Roberts landed on welding: "I found out that you got to infuse metal using heat and electricity, and I thought, 'Wow, that's pretty cool.' And it's pretty lucrative."

SkillsUSA is a partnership of students, teachers, and industry working together to ensure America has a skilled workforce. A nonprofit national education association, SkillsUSA serves middle school, high school, and college/postsecondary students preparing for careers in trade, technical, and skilled service occupations.

The Lehigh Valley boasts the only SkillsUSA Council that not only offers all the benefits of SkillsUSA national, but also professional development conferences and interest clubs year-round here in the Lehigh Valley.

The graduating students recognized at Signing Day will be entering fields including manufacturing, building trades, welding, plumbing, health care and sports medicine, culinary arts, graphic design, web development, and automotive technology. Many of the businesses and colleges where they are headed attended Signing Day to support them.

"These are high demand careers that offer strong wages, long term stability, and growth opportunities," Hammer said.

Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corp. (LVEDC) was the Title Sponsor of Signing Day. Promoting and coordinating a skilled and prepared workforce is one of the priorities of LVEDC, which works with partners to uncover regional occupation and skills demand and build strategies to ensure that our workforce is prepared for the career opportunities at local employers.

Karianne Gelinis, LVEDC's Vice President of Talent Strategies, told the students there is a demand for their talents. She said businesses repeatedly tell LVEDC that a skilled, dependable workforce is critical to their success: "They want people who are ready to work hard, solve problems, and keep learning. And that's you."

Hammer offered students this advice:

"You are stepping into industries to keep your community running. You represent the future of our workforce and, more importantly, the future of our community ... Don't chase being impressive. Chase being useful. The world is full of people trying to look successful, but the people who change industries, communities, and lives are the people who become valuable. If you can solve problems calmly, communicate clearly and consistently, and do your work, opportunities will find you."



## Supporting Our Mounted Police Force

By Senator Lisa Boscola

Senator Boscola proudly supports the Bethlehem Mounted Police and was excited to hand over a check for \$50,000 in state funds to allow critical improvements for the Mounted

Patrol Unit. The grant provided necessary funding for the construction of a round pen -a dedicated training space which was designed to enhance the safety, readiness and performance of the mounted police horses and officers.

This round pen also provides a controlled environment for foundational training, conditioning, and skill development. The Mounted Police Unit plays a unique role in Bethlehem by offering a highly-visible (& approachable!!) presence at festivals, parades, parks, and simply while on patrol.

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