



Second Chance Partners for Education student Joey Davis, center, graduates from Waukesha North. Shown is Sen. Neal Kedzie, right, and Rep. Stephen Nass giving recognition for outstanding performance in the completion of the Second Chance Program.

Getting “Second Chance”

Organization helps students earn diploma

By Dave Fidlin Special to the Freeman

WAUKESHA_ A decade ago, a group of business leaders and educators formed an organization with the express intent of giving high school students with little to no chance of graduating a second chance of obtaining a diploma.

That organization is the aptly named Second Chance Partners for Education.

Since 2000, more than 100 seniors from high schools throughout the Waukesha area have been able to graduate on time because of the nonprofit, which has forged relationships with 20 local businesses.

The most recent Class of 2010 Whitewater and Waukesha graduating group, consists of nine students. They were honored at a completion ceremony Thursday at Country Springs Hotel, earning a regular high school diploma and a youth apprenticeship manufacturing certificate.

Credit deficient students enroll in and earn their diploma by gaining on-the-job training at an assortment of hands-on jobs, including ones that entail tool and die, electricity, auto cad and plastic injection molding. Students enrolled in the 21-month program spend their day at a worksite, but do devote two hours each day to classroom work.

The curriculum, approved by the State Department of Public Instruction and many school districts throughout the Waukesha area, is designed to provide an alternative form of education and meet the needs of students who do not excel within the four walls of a traditional high school.

Generac, a Waukesha based manufacturer of power generators, has been one of the largest corporate contributors toward Second Chance. Dawn Tabat, chief operating officer of Generac, was instrumental in getting Second Chance up and running.

“I think it’s important for second chances,” Tabat said at Thursday’s ceremony. “A program like this teaches a number of life-long lessons, including cooperation, team building and responsibility.”

The seeds for Second Chance were planted in 1996 at a time when Generac had a shortage of qualified candidates in a number of very specific areas. The thinking at the time was to give hands-on students an opportunity to excel at a trade, using skills they naturally possess, and obtain a high school diploma.

“It’s never been more valuable than today,” Tabat said of meeting graduation requirements. “Not having a diploma almost guarantees failure.

Waukesha County executive Dan Vrakas concurred with Tabat’s assessment. Vrakas, who was the keynote speaker at the ceremony, said he proudly displays his diploma at his office.

The students graduating from the Second Chance program this month from the Waukesha –Whitewater area are Joey Davis, Derek Dercola, Corey Gamroth, Gage Ksobiech, Tony Agen, Jordan Vail, Brad Cude, Kurtis Hickey and James Mariscal.

Students from the Germantown, Menomonee Falls and New Berlin areas celebrated their graduation at a ceremony held at Davians in Menomonee Falls. The graduates are Ali Haefner, Jeff Kopp, Russell Kotajarvi, Jeff Kopp, Bryan Janke, Matthew Lutz, Robert Scheibe III, Cody Watson and Cody Wright.



Germantown student, Robert Scheibe III, receives his certificate of completion from Jonathan LaVoy,