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EDUCATION

'HEY, WE BUILT THAT!'

Forest Lake students get paid work experience through Career Launch class

By Mary Divine

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Sara Frasl thinks that one of the coolest part of her job — building fire trucks at Rosenbauer America in Wyoming, Minn. — is seeing her work out in the community.

"We just had one for Forest Lake come through," said Frasl, 19, of North Branch. "Like, we literally just built one that is going to save our neighborhoods. It feels good."

Frasl came to work at Rosenbauer America, one of the world's leading manufacturers of custom fire trucks, after graduating from Forest Lake Area High School in 2022. She applied for the job using a cover letter and résumé she developed in Mike Miron's Career Launch class.

The class, which provides experiential learning opportunities to better connect students with workforce demands, is funded in part by a Youth Skills Training grant from the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry. The grants are intended to offer meaningful career exposure and paid work experience for students 16 years of age and older.

Grants are given in high-growth and in-demand occupations in the **CAREER LAUNCH » PAGE 10**



JOHN AUTEY — PIONEER PRESS

Sara Frasl, left, and Nicole Oelker program a new emergency light for a fire truck at Rosenbauer America in Wyoming, Minn., this month. Frasl, a 2022 graduate of Forest Lake Area High School, applied to work at Rosenbauer, a manufacturer of custom fire trucks, using a cover letter and résumé she developed in the school's Career Launch class.

Career Launch

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industries of advanced manufacturing, agriculture, automotive, health care and information technology. In addition to paid work experience, students get related classroom instruction, safety training and industry-recognized credentials.

Frasl started at Rosenbauer in pre-electrical, which included wiring the bodies of fire trucks, and was then promoted to pump electrical, where she works on pump appliances and communication boards. On a recent weekday, Frasl programmed an upper rear warning light of a rescue truck to alternate red and blue flashing lights, per the Reno, Nev. Fire Department's specifications.

"We don't see these sets of lights too often, so I'm going through the instructions to figure out how to program it," she said. "We need to sync all the lights to the flash pattern they want."

Frasl said she didn't know what she wanted to do after graduating from high school, but she said she knew "that trades make good money, and I knew that I was capable of doing it."

"I took shop classes, and I really enjoyed them," she said. "Automotive is what really interested me, and I ended up getting introduced

to this place and just kind of went, 'You know what? If they can do it, I can do it.' So I just kind of went into it blindly. Honestly, I came here not knowing much of anything and got completely trained on the job."

Fruitful partnership

Rosenbauer has been an important partner for Forest Lake Area High School as the company, which has 530 employees, takes a number of student interns each year, Miron said.

Two of those interns are now working for the company, which builds advanced custom and commercial pumps, heavy and light rescues, tenders, mini pumps, aerial ladders and platforms, and electric fire trucks.

The internship program is a win-win for the students and for the company, said Don Anderson, a production supervisor.

"It gives the students a chance to work in the field and see if they're interested before they actually go and spend a lot of money on education that they may not need," Anderson said.

It also gives Rosenbauer a chance to test out future employees and see if they would be a good fit, he said.

The internship program gives Rosenbauer "another way to access a talent pool for employment in a tight market," said Leah Schulz, who works in the company's human-resources department.

"If a student decides they



Ray Bjork, left, a senior at Forest Lake Area High School, talks with teacher Mike Miron while working at Rosenbauer America in Wyoming, Minn., this month. Miron teaches Career Launch, a professional skills class.

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have other plans after graduation, we still have the benefit of exposing them to our company," she said. "One day in the future, when they are looking for career opportunities, they may remember Rosenbauer and the different opportunities we have. There is so much value to this type of engagement with young people. I wish programs like this were around when I was in school."

Raymond Bjork, 18, is a senior at Forest Lake Area High School. He started his paid internship at Rosenbauer last fall. He goes to school in the morning, and then spends his afternoons at the plant.

"It's a good job," he said. "It pays pretty well for my age. I can learn pretty much anything here. I'm learning a lot of stuff on the job. I'm getting paid to learn, yeah, it's pretty

awesome."

The Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry awards grants to local partnerships to create, implement and expand Youth Skills Training programs throughout Minnesota.

Forest Lake is a great example of the types of partnerships that are being created between schools and employers across the state to provide opportunities to students, said Rich Wessels, program manager for Youth Skills Training at the Department of Labor and Industry.

The program was approved by the Minnesota Legislature in 2017, and the first grants given out to support the development and implementation were awarded in 2018. Grant funding totaling \$1.5 million is awarded to school-and-employer partnerships around the state each year; the maximum award per partnership is \$100,000, and it is spent over a two-year grant performance period, Wessels said.

Schools can participate in the program with or without grant funding. About 60 schools currently have Youth Skills Training programs; 28 of those are receiving grant funding, Wessels said, including Stillwater Area High School and the Roseville and Edina districts in the metro.

The program has been instrumental in terms of addressing workforce challenges by connecting industry with education to provide students with opportunities to learn about and gain hands-on experience in key industries, he said.

'Ready for a grown-up job'

Forest Lake Area High School has received three Youth Skills Training grants since the program started, said Miron, the school's career and technical education/work-based learning coordinator.

"We've built it over time," Miron said. "We tried to go slow to go fast. We were deliberate about putting the right foundation in place, to try to make sure that we were putting our students and, quite frankly, our businesses in a good cooperative position to be successful."

The school has partnered with a number of local businesses, including Rosenbauer, Velocity, South Shore Veterinary Hospital, Midwest Machinery Co., Westfall Technik, Regal Machine, Waterjet and Aggressive Hydraulics.

Students can choose from a number of electives: manufacturing, automotive, agriculture, health care and information technology.

In order for students to be considered for an internship, they have to have taken at

least three Pathway courses, he said. Once they decide what field they want to pursue, they take Miron's Career Launch class, a professional skills class. "It's about getting them ready for a grown-up type of a job, skilled employment," he said.

Students learn how to create a résumé, write cover letters and fill out applications. They also earn an OSHA-10 safety certification, which teaches students how to recognize and prevent safety hazards in the workplace.

The class includes attending Career Exploration Day at the high school, where students learn about possible careers by attending sessions hosted by community members representing a variety of fields, Miron said. Students also are able to go on tours of different businesses, he said.

"We really do a deep dive in helping them figure out what it is they want to do and give them opportunities to go explore that a little bit more, so that by the time we're talking about getting an internship, we've had an opportunity to get to know each other, and we can vet them a little bit," Miron said. "So when I reach out to a company like Rosenbauer, I can say, 'I have a student who is interested in electrical. Is there an opportunity on your electrical team? We really try to find the right fit with a company.'"

Employers must be approved before student learners are placed.

"We can place 16-, 17- and 18-year-old students, but there's a lot of prohibited work under child-labor laws — work that they can't do — so a company like Rosenbauer has to agree to a vetting process from the Department of Labor and Industry," he said.

Said Molly Bonnett, the school's career and college coordinator: "We tell students it's like an opportunity to access a bypass lane because they have been developing skills and because they have the OSHA-10 safety credential, they then have the opportunity to work in a position that they would never have the opportunity if they walked in off the street. That's the exciting part: to see them develop those skills."

Academic, technical, employability skills

About half of the Class of 2023 from Forest Lake Area High School went on to a four-year college, and about 20 percent went to a two-year college. The rest of the breakdown was: military, 5 percent; apprenticeship, 5 percent; and going right to work or taking a gap year, 23 percent, she said.

Some high schools have either a college track or a career navigator track, but not Forest Lake, Bonnett said.

"That is not our model at all," she said. "We are there to serve students, regardless of their plan. We very much hold dear the philosophy that it is a marriage of academic, technical and employability skills that needs to be developed through high school. So it's not technical skills for kids going to work, and academic skills for kids going to college. No, it's all three for everybody."

The more credits a student has, the more time they can spend at work, Miron said. Students also receive credit for taking Miron's class, "so they're working, they're getting paid and they're receiving credit towards graduation," he said.

The program isn't just for students who are planning to go right to work after graduation, Miron said. "We have students who want to be engineers, but they're getting some practical hands-on experience on a production floor before they go to school," he said.

Students interested in becoming veterinarians have a chance to be placed at South Shore Veterinary Hospital, Miron said. "I have a student now who wants to go work on a large-animal farm because she knows she's going to need exposure to working with those types of animals before she becomes a veterinarian," he said.

'We built that!'

Frasl said she is not sure how long she will continue working at Rosenbauer. She's gotten really interested in electrical theory, so she might go

back to school to study residential and commercial electrical technology, she said.

"I've been training some of the new people who come in," she said. "Everyone who typically comes in has been put on my team to kind of learn with me. I want them to understand how our trucks get put together and where things go, but I also want them to understand the theory behind it, and why it works, so when something goes wrong, they know what to look for and know how to fix it."

Frasl has memorized most, if not all, of the colors and numbers of the dozens of wires that go into each fire truck.

"Every wire goes to a different thing," she said. "We've got the right door, the left door, the horn, the dome light, the alarm, the side-warning light. ... If somebody says, 'OK, Sara, we need a dome-light wire,' I know it's going to be gray, so I'm like, 'OK, it's right here.' Certain trucks have the same wires in every one: Every truck is going to have a backup light; every truck is going to have turn signals. I got used to seeing those colors so often that I memorized them."

Frasl's favorite fire truck to work on to date has been a portable hazardous material truck for Orange County, Calif., that had "slide-outs in it like a camper," she said. "It was easily one of the most complex wiring jobs I've ever had to do. They had tens of hundreds of feet of wire that we had to run on it. I've never seen another one like that."

When the school holds its next Career Exploration Day, Bonnett is hoping that Frasl will be among the Rosenbauer contingent.

"It's so much cooler to hear from A) somebody younger and B) an alum," Bonnett told Frasl during a recent tour of Rosenbauer. "It's way more interesting for students to have that connection. They would be riveted hearing your story."

Frasl offered to bring in photos of some of the jobs she has worked on. "Everyone just thinks it's so cool," she said. "It's so colorful and stuff, but in reality, once you get down to it, your brain just, like, simplifies it. It's like math equations."

Frasl said she is especially proud that the fire trucks she helps build are being "used for good." Rosenbauer trucks generally have an "R" on them.

"It's cool when you're out, and you see one of our own fire trucks out at a scene," she said. "I think, 'Hey, we built that!' That's why we are here. That's our mission."



Sara Frasl