

City leads in apprenticeship training program

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Hamilton is an acknowledged provincial leader in Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP) apprenticeship signings, and this year its provincial leadership has soared to new heights with the recent apprenticeship signings of the 100th OYAP students from both the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic and Hamilton-Wentworth District School Boards.

"I am overwhelmed with the fact that in the year 2000 we had very little interest in the skilled trades, and we did not have one signed apprentice. The growth has been outstanding!" said Leo Paone, Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board OYAP coordinator. "We only had 154 students participating in an apprenticeable trade in cooperative education in 2000-2001, and 18 were registered as apprentices. In 2004-2005, we hit the milestone with 571 cooperative education placements in an apprenticeable trade."

"With the recent signing of our 100th Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board student, it gives me hope that our youth will find rewarding careers; we have mountains to climb, but it is also encouraging to realize that the word is getting out about skilled trades," added Reece Morgan, Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board OYAP coordinator. "Employers are taking a chance with high school students in apprentice areas. Students are also realizing the benefits of getting a head start and that a career in the skilled trades is just as worthy as going to university or to college ñ now we must convince many parents."



Derek Burton, apprentice automotive service technician at Tri-Us Auto Service was the 100th OYAP student to be signed from the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board

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Funded by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, OYAP was introduced in an effort to provide students with greater career opportunities in the skilled trades and to provide employers with a new source of workers to address current and projected skills shortages.

"The process entails students enrolling in cooperative education, and any student in an apprenticeable trade is an OYAP student," said Morgan. "They then have the opportunity to get signed by a sponsor as early as Grade 11. They can accumulate hours towards their apprenticeship while they are in high school, and the employer gets a lead on a possible future employee. Thus the benefits are numerous, and this is a win-win situation because the student can accumulate hours while working towards their Ontario Secondary School Diploma."

In addition to allowing students to accumulate hours while working towards their Ontario Secondary School Diploma, OYAP enables students to gain valuable work skills otherwise not available to the average high school student by putting them in a professional environment.

"It's a good way to get hands-on skills and the theory aspects all at once," said Ryan Farina, apprentice automotive service technician at Upper James Toyota and 100th OYAP student to be signed from the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board. "It also teaches you to be punctual and so on."

"It provides you with a great deal of experience in the workplace," added Derek Burton, apprentice automotive service technician at Tri-Us Auto Service and 100th OYAP student to be signed from the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board. "There's a great deal of knowledge and skill that needs to be involved in learning a trade, and OYAP provides students with that much-needed knowledge and skill."

In turn, OYAP also provides employers with a number of benefits and an opportunity to assess and recruit future employees.

"The program works well because as an employer, despite all aspects of what we do in this industry to provide excellent service, it almost always comes down to the bottom line," said Michael Park, Farina's supervisor.

"The ability to train an individual with little or no expense is truly a benefit. It also provides the employer with an opportunity to 'test drive' a potential new employee to ensure he or she is a good fit with other members of the staff as well as an opportunity to determine their skill set."