Crossing the Digital Divide (v81)

"Adulthood"

By Joseph Feigon

For the Observer

I was invited to join the Career Technology Education Advisory Council Meeting this week, a twice annual meeting with the school administration, counselors and local business interests. The program is designed to provide our students with career specific technical education, and leverages training available at Mendocino College while working with State funding programs to ensure adequate funding is in place.

Local programs include: Culinary Arts, Building Trades, Graphic Arts, Information Technology, and Emergency Medical Training. Learning to cook, build, design, manage or save a life – all valuable skills, all potential career paths. College is not the answer for every child; learning self-sufficiency is.

Each trade sector represents growth opportunities for our children. Many Americans can't cook for themselves, there will always be a demand for food service professionals, in and outside the hospitality industry. Information systems play a key role here: menu planning, food and labor costing, market analysis, yield analysis and more. The arts have moved heavily into the digital realm. Rich media (sound and video) is present everywhere; from web page to display board, training, education and medicine. While sculpture or oil on canvas may not reward a young adult with an income stream, "content" managers, designers and training personnel often use, create and manipulate digital media which requires more than basic computer skills.

The building trades all benefit from Information Technology. Math and science play key roles when applied to materials, structures and remodels. Electricians, plumbers and draftsmen can and often do use engineering resources when building. "Measure twice, cut once" suggests basic math skills are important, and project management, vendor management, and production management can all benefit from a multitude of Information Technology based solutions.

Health care, first responders, EMT, fire/rescue; the medical field demands IT skills, at all levels. Patient medical records, patient monitoring, patient care, all use advanced computer software and advanced technology. Not everyone in healthcare needs college and medical school, but almost all need to be comfortable using a keyboard.

We need to support technical education and encourage partnerships with local business so that our young people can gain real-world work experience. Information Technology may not result in a better grilled cheese sandwich, or a more spirited digital billboard, nor will an Apple or Windows PC create a successful plumber or electrician, but those students who embrace the trades, and take advantage of the technical tools available via the Internet (and computer), will be better positioned to complete and succeed in a world where competitive forces are constant, and come from many directions, near and far.

Broadband services (high speed Internet), access to a computer, and basic problem solving and math skills can reward a non-college bound student with a promising career and pathway to self-sufficiency. Isn't that our job as parents?

Control those things you can, and keep the surprises to a minimum!