

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS EXPLORE LOCAL OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH DAKTRONICS REDWOOD FALLS

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Figuring out what you want to do and where you want to go after high school graduation can be a daunting task. A program Daktronics Redwood Falls put together aims to help students with that decision by giving them the chance to explore various career options without looking too far.

The Redwood Valley High School student program, started in 2015, offers internships to seniors attending Redwood Valley High School. This internship gives individuals a real-world workplace experience and the opportunity to explore numerous careers offered throughout the company. Through the duration of the spring semester, students come in during two scheduled school hours and work in different areas of the company. At the end of the semester, students give presentations to the company and the school.

Deb Schmidt (Materials/Logistics Supv, Redwood Falls Mfg, MN Redwood Falls), program supervisor, pointed out that not only is this a great opportunity for the students, but it benefits the Redwood Falls community, as well.

"We want to bring more interest into the local community with our young people to let them know that there are opportunities here and not just necessarily working on the production floor," Schmidt said. "We want to make sure we have young people coming into our community and staying here."

This year the program gave internships to four seniors: Nathaniel Passe, James Pendleton, Jesse Prechel, and Amanda Tersteeg. Coming into the company, they each had different expectations—some were unsure what to expect at all. After months of getting hands-on experience learning processes, procedures, and the inner workings of a business, they are leaving with a better understanding of the company and what they would like to do in the future.

"Coming into the career internship, I didn't know what career I wanted to go into, but now I chose business because I like how businesses run and Daktronics has helped me realize that," Pendleton said.

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Pendleton worked as a buyer/planner, determining what parts needed to be ordered for the company. His mentor, Malorie Kral (Buyer/Planner, Redwood Falls Mfg, MN Redwood Falls), commented on how all the students' confidence grew during the internship, saying by the end of the semester, Pendleton was able to do the ordering by himself.

"Half the time I didn't even know he was here and he already had the stuff done," Kral said. "It has helped me learn more about my job because I usually just go through a routine—it is nice to get a break because it makes you think of how you can do your job better."

Mentors are volunteer employees who do one-on-one work with a student they are matched with. They go over what needs to be done each day and answer questions that arise.



Robin Beske and Ally Carlson, teachers from the high school, put in hours of behind-the-scenes work—spreading the word at school, helping set up interviews, and going over paperwork. They also meet once a week with the students and mentors to discuss progress and participate in team-building activities.

Beske and Carlson see many benefits for students participating in this program. Not only do they get work experience, they are able to apply what they have learned in the classroom to the workplace.

"They don't necessarily know or see what a business is like," Carlson said. "Some of the skills they are learning in their classes, like the Excel spreadsheets, they might not understand that those are skills you need to use every day in the workforce setting."

Beske added,

"They also learn some of the basic soft skills—being on time and being responsible, those types of things. It is easier to teach that in a business setting than in a school setting."

It was hard to pick one experience, but Prechel recalls the trip the students took to Brookings as the most memorable part of the internship. While visiting, they toured the quality lab, transportation department, and viewed indoor and outdoor displays.

Daktronics RWF looks forward to bringing students into the company and showing them the possibilities they have within their community. The current students encourage others to take advantage of this opportunity to learn and grow like they did.

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"This is a good experience for students," Passe said. "School is fine, but you don't actually know what the real applications are until you have that real-life experience."

Students are encouraged to try new things within the company to help find the right fit and prepare them for success after graduation.

"Because there are so many different areas, there is a place for everyone to work at Daktronics and figure out what they want to do," Tersteeg said.