

Conference explores career possibilities for deaf

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At a recent workshop in William Costick Center, applause was enthusiastic but silent.

Instead of the hearing world's customary clap, many teenagers raised and shook their hands earnestly as a token of appreciation for the speaker who, like themselves, is deaf.

More than 50 students from around Oakland County attended the first-ever workshop, which is designed to inspire and

inform deaf children about their career choices.

Students, including those from Farmington, attend Bloomfield Hills School District's county-wide program for deaf and hearing-impaired.

Before, people who were deaf were largely consigned to manual labor jobs. Today, their ranks are just as likely to include engineers, computer analysts, journalists and accountants.

Many like retired General Motors engineer Winston Acromb — who is also deaf — met with students to explain hurdles

he had overcome.

"This is an opportunity for them to have a deaf role model," said Linda Booth, Deaf and Hearing Services executive director.

Farmington Hills-based Deaf and Hearing Services of South-east Michigan hosted the conference.

"With many of them having hearing parents, they never get to see this," Booth said. "One 8-year-old child told me he'd never seen a deaf adult. He thought he'd either learn to hear or die."

Farmington Hills student Sean Forbes, 17, appreciated their trailblazing ways.

"It makes you feel like ... you can do it," said Forbes, who attends Bloomfield Hills Lahser.

Forbes has been deaf since age 2 after a severe bout with spinal meningitis. He speaks and is able to read lips as well as use sign language.

He also works as a busboy at his father's restaurant, Mister Be in Troy, where he sometimes meets customers who are deaf or hearing-impaired.

Forbes plans to attend either Western Michigan University, where he would have an interpreter and a note taker, or the National Technical Institute of the Deaf in Rochester, N.Y. He hasn't decided on a major yet.

That's where the conference helps. "It gives me an idea," Forbes said.

Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 has done much to open job prospects, Booth said. For people who are hearing-impaired, change is slow in com-



Sign on: Brad McFarlin tells the audience about his job at Ford Motor. Al Kettinger, at left, interprets for audience members who sign.

ing at the workplace.

"We still have to advocate more and more," Booth said. "Because (deafness) is an invisible disability, it passes by many companies in terms of what's required by the ADA."

"They know they have to increase the size of bathrooms to allow wheelchair access, but they're not sure about how to deal with people who are deaf."

That said, an increasing number of attorneys, social workers

and police officers are learning American Sign Language in order to communicate with people who are deaf.

Through a voice interpreter, Chris Hunter of the state division on deafness gave students an overview on what awaits them in the job world.

Hunter focused on the basic do's and don'ts of job searches and interviewing, which in itself may be a sign of progress.

"In a job interview, the

employer will ask how are you doing? The deaf person says, 'fine,' Hunter relayed to the group. "The deaf person just gives one-word answers."

"If you continue to do that, this employer is not going to think you're very smart."

In terms of reminding them of their own potential, Hunter left with a quote from Gallaudet University President I. King Jordan, who said, "The deaf can do anything but hear."

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