

Walled Lake center offers trade learning

By HANK MEIJER

Clarencville High School juniors and seniors who want to be welders, keypunchers or even greenhouse managers can find training to suit their ambitions at the Southwest Oakland Vocational Education Center (SVOVEC) at Walled Lake.

Vocational training, long an afterthought in many districts, has achieved a new prominence here.

"The school is mostly for your average student who wants to learn a vocational trade," said Mrs. Janice Salisbury, a counselor at the three-year old facility on Beck Road.

SVOVEC's 900 students are divided into morning and afternoon groups. The afternoon contingent includes 56 Livonians from the Clarencville School District.

Each of the 12 participating districts, all in Oakland County, sends a number of high school juniors and seniors proportionate to its total student population. Farmington students comprise most of the morning section group, with about 300 future tradesmen and women enrolled.

Besides greenhouse management, welding and data processing, the center also offers training in printing, office procedures, architectural drafting, diesel mechanics, electronics, food service, and machine trades. Courses are also available in medical and dental office assisting, engineering design and illustration, floral design and sales, advanced display and auto mechanics.

"The image of the place is changing from a place for dropouts to a place where students can learn important skills," said Mrs. Salisbury.

SVOVEC stresses the relationship between training and actual job experience. Greenhouse and landscape students maintain their own greenhouse and with the help of floral designers even run a flower shop.

YOUNG PRINTERS produce supplies for the Walled Lake School District and occasionally take on outside jobs just as a print shop would. They also created and produced the center's colorful yearbook.

Although boys and girls tend to choose traditional job roles, there are some signs of change at SVOVEC. Males are beginning to take part in medical and dental office assisting programs which until recently were considered female domains.

Next year two girls will join the industrial machine classes. Mrs. Salisbury's only concern is that students don't take unusual courses merely as "frill" subjects.

"The one thing we ask students is: how are you going to use this course? Most of the time the kids are pretty committed."

Of the minority of students who don't go right into jobs, many, about 20 per cent of the school's total enrollment, go on to college for advanced training in such fields as dental hygiene and drafting.

SVOVEC has an active placement service which assists graduates for up to five years after they have completed schooling at the center.

According to Mrs. Salisbury, about 60 per cent of the graduates of the center's first three classes are now working at jobs related to their training at SVOVEC.

THE CENTER offers a two - week on - the - job work period where students get experience in shops and factories where their trades are practiced. Dental students spend the period assisting dentists in real work situations.

"That all enables an employer to have a free look at our youngsters," said Michael Willett, director of placement at the vocational center.

In January, all seniors participate in a seminar where they are instructed in resume - writing and how to handle the questions which may arise in a job interview.

According to Mrs. Salisbury, the job market is good right now for graduates of the school's medical and dental assisting, food service and engineering design courses. Most food service students were placed "well before graduation," Willett said.

The need for skilled craftsmen in the field of engineering design is particularly acute. "We will never be able to fill the need at this time."

Right now, Willett said, the machine trades are offering the best pay of any of the occupational areas in which SVOVEC students are training.

Welders command top money. Graduates of programs in electronics and machine trades have been placed at average starting wages of about \$120 per week. Retail sales trainees bring up the rear with average starting pay of \$85.

ABOUT 50 PER CENT of the school's graduates in the machine trades have found jobs. "The other 10 per cent don't want to work," Willett said. Most of these graduates start at about \$3.25 an hour.

"The placement here is great," said printing instructor Buck Rado. "A lot of the kids are already picky when it comes to choosing jobs. In most areas we have more jobs than we have kids."

The exceptions are students with ambitions in more restricted fields, such as photography, where the job market is limited.

According to Willett, counselors have difficulty determining whether jobs are found through their own placement efforts or through other contacts between students and prospective employers. He feels that vir-

tually all jobs reflect back on the school's overall effectiveness.

"If a kid walks in with an achievement record from here and gets a job, I imagine we can consider that part of our placement service," he said.

SVOVEC counselors schedule frequent visits for younger students to acquaint them with the variety of programs available at the center.

"We are involved all the time in recruitment," Willett said. "Every sophomore in all the feeder districts comes to the building on a field trip. Eighth graders come to learn about the background courses they should have to enroll here after."

IN MOST EVERY program there are several applicants for every spot available. Registration is completed by April 15 for the coming year. Each school is responsible for selecting its most qualified candidates.

According to Frances Edwards, who teaches advanced display at the center, the process doesn't always work out that way. "Some schools send me their driftwood," she said.

Along with some other members of the SVOVEC staff who have extensive contacts in the particular industry, Mrs. Edwards handles all her students' placement needs herself.

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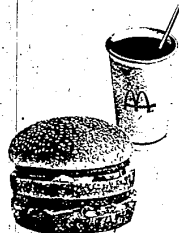
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