

Jobless rate shrinks for vocational graduates

By MARY GNIEWEK

A dozen years ago some Oakland County parents became concerned that their high school graduate children were entering the work force ill-prepared.

uates last year was under 6 percent." Compare that to 21 percent, which was the jobless rate for 16 to 19 year olds as computed by the Michigan Employment Security Commission for 1980.

Part of SWOVEC's success is that it

The other two-thirds of SWOVEC's graduates enter the work force full-time.

"In the next 20 years, the greatest demand will be in the technical fields," Briggs said.

"Those are the people who will keep the system going. We produce young technicians."

SWOVEC drew 1,800 visitors last Sunday to its annual open house, held in conjunction with National Vocational Education Week (Feb. 8-14).

Parents and guests saw students repair cars, perm hair, prepare food, run diesel engines, work computers, and sell plants grown in the school greenhouse.

Instructors stress the world of work. Everything is geared around it, according to Briggs.

Data processing students punch a time clock and are docked break time if they're late to class. Cosmetology students give haircuts, perms and manicures to customers three days a week.

MEDICAL ASSISTANTS help doctors and dentists with baby clinics and dental checkups.

In fact, SWOVEC offers about as many services as any town. There's an auto repair shop, a bump shop, restaurant, florist, medical offices, print shop and various industrial shops that provide services at discount rates.

"The philosophy here is that every student should have a salable skill when they graduate. The unemployment rate for our graduates last year was under 6 percent."

— Counselor Richard Briggs

Enough taxpayers agreed with them that county voters approved a ¼ mill levy to finance a vocational education program. Four centers were begun in each quadrant of the county.

The centers have been churning out mechanics, cooks, medical technicians and beauticians ever since.

"The philosophy here is that every student should have a salable skill when they graduate," explained Richard Briggs, counselor at the Southwest Oakland Vocational Education Center in Walled Lake, which services the Farmington school district.

"We have over 1,800 employee contacts for job placement," Briggs said. "The unemployment rate for our grad-

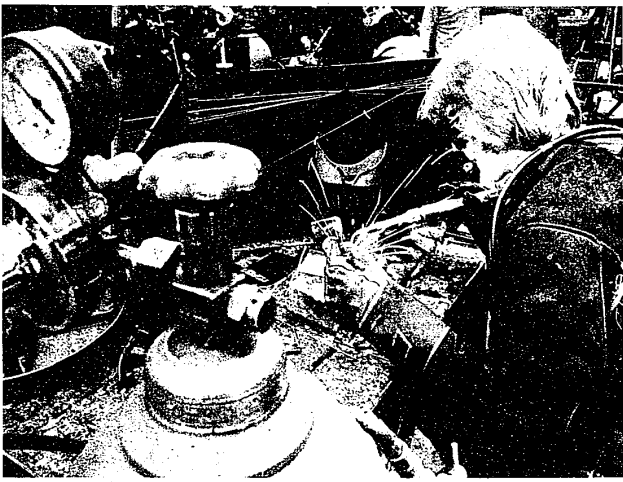
keeps current with the changing job market. It keeps an ear tuned to specialists in a myriad of fields.

Today it offers high school juniors and seniors 19 programs ranging from architectural drafting to welding.

One third of SWOVEC's graduates go directly to college, according to Briggs. His own son plans to do that when he graduates from the machine trades curriculum at SWOVEC.

"HE WANTS TO pursue a medical career, but if anything happens to mom or dad and financing gets tight, he can work his way through school," Briggs said.

"He's learning a skill that's in demand."



Gordie Gordon (above), a senior from Harrison High School, works on a welding project at SWOVEC. Rick Moran (right), a senior from North Farmington High, is in the electronics curriculum at the Walled Lake vocational center. (Staff photos by Randy Borst)



Ann Strickfaden (seated), a North Farmington student, has her blood pressure checked by medical technician student Ann Matheson of Farmington High. Both are seniors in the program.



Data processing students Dale Roumayah (seated) of North Farmington and Julie Farnell of Farmington High, both seniors, go over a day's workload. Below, diesel mechanics students Terry Roberts, a Harrison junior (left), Dan Ward, Farmington High senior, and Joe Cordes, North Farmington senior, work on an engine.

