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Contact: Melissa Orner
Philadelphia Youth Network
Desk: 267-502-3718



HUNDREDS OF CITY YOUTH SPEND THEIR SATURDAY GETTING “WORK READY”

Coach Martelli urges young people in training for summer internships to make the most of opportunities to learn and earn

PHILADELPHIA, PA, June 23, 2007 – For hundreds of eager Philadelphia teens, today was a very different kind of Saturday. Instead of sports, shopping or hanging out with friends, these young people reported to Drexel University’s Mandell Theater to learn what it takes to get and keep a good job.

Each of these young people is slated to be employed in a six-week workplace internship supported by area employers. These employer-paid internships will be available to hundreds of young people this summer as a part of WorkReady Philadelphia, the City’s coordinated strategy to provide high-quality career preparation for Philadelphia youth.

St. Joseph’s basketball coach Phil Martelli opened the day with motivational remarks that challenged the young people to make the most of their summer internships, and to learn from their supervisors and mentors how to be successful in the workplace. “Seize this opportunity,” Martelli urged the young people. “It can make a huge difference in your lives.” Martelli also directed remarks to employers about the importance of providing opportunities for students. “Young people today are looking for direction,” he said. “Mentoring is a resource that can touch many and each one of us has a responsibility to give back.”

The Conference offered a set of interactive and energetic exercises designed to help students understand how to be successful in the workplace. The aspiring interns participated in workshops and seminars that explored effective workplace communications and financial literacy and planning. They also heard from former WorkReady interns, who shared what it was really like to work in a corporate environment. In a rousing simulation activity, student teams worked through employment-related exercises based on the TV show, “The Apprentice,” complete with report-out to panels of adult volunteers who reviewed and evaluated their performances.

The Philadelphia Youth Network (PYN), an eight year-old non-profit youth intermediary organization, manages WorkReady Philadelphia on behalf of the Philadelphia Youth Council. “We developed these exercises based on businesses’ expectations of young employees,” said PYN President Laura Shubilla. In addition, since these exercises were intended for young people, they should be fun and engaging. “That’s one of the reasons we designed the ‘Apprentice’ simulation,” she said. “And in our version, no one gets fired!”

Hundreds of City Youth Get Work Ready

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More than 100 volunteers from the employer community, schools and universities, and non-profit organizations managed the Conference and presented the training sessions. Of particular note, volunteers from Citizens Bank delivered the seminars on financial planning, and 17 employees from Independence Blue Cross played a variety of key roles during the Conference. Meeting space for the conference was donated by Drexel University.

The United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania provided major financial support for the Conference, and also reached out to corporate board members to provide workplace internships. Reflecting on WorkReady and the Conference, President and CEO Alba Martinez said “the United Way is deeply committed to the region’s young people, who will become the employers, entrepreneurs and leaders of the new century. We are pleased to play our part in helping them to gain the skills they need for success in careers and in life.”

The Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce took the lead in developing workplace internships this summer as a part of the overall WorkReady Philadelphia system. Through the leadership of Chamber Chair Joseph Frick, CEO of Independence Blue Cross, and President & CEO Mark Schweiker, the Chamber launched an ambitious initiative, called Working Solutions, designed to significantly increase the number of employer-paid internships available this summer to Philadelphia youth.

WorkReady Philadelphia incorporates investments from government, foundations and employers that will provide more than 8,000 high-quality workplace experiences this summer. In addition to the leadership of the United Way and the Chamber, important new investments were made by the City of Philadelphia and the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, with the support of Representative Dwight Evans. These funds augmented existing resources available from: the federal Workforce Investment Act and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; regional philanthropies led by the William Penn Foundation; and the School District of Philadelphia.

WorkReady Philadelphia was established in 2003 by the Youth Council of the Workforce Investment Board. Tracee Hunt, Vice President for Human Resources for Philadelphia Coca-Cola Bottling Company, serves as Youth Council Chair. “Our young people need and deserve the best experiences we can give them,” she said. “Through WorkReady internships and conferences like this, we are offering them the tools they need for success.”

About the Philadelphia Youth Network: The Philadelphia Youth Network is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization founded in 1999. As a catalyst for collective action, PYN makes connections among individuals, organizations and systems. PYN increases capacity and resources in order to provide world-class preparation so our City’s youth can thrive in a regional and global economy. Visit www.pyninc.org.

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