



Ontario High School graduate Miguel Valerjano, 17, rotates tires Friday in the service department at Crown Toyota in Ontario. Part of the federal stimulus is a program that pays for low-income young adults to earn money in career training.

Photos by Jennifer Cappuccio Maher Staff Photographer

## Stimulus pays for internships

By Diana Sholley Staff Writer

By the end of the summer, Gino Saltalamacchia will have earned more than \$2,000 thanks to one of his favorite relatives — Uncle Sam.

Gino, an incoming senior at Ontario High School, along with about 1,800 other San Bernardino County young adults will be paid for internships at local businesses.

The money comes from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, part of what is commonly referred to as the stimulus package.

Gino is interning at Crown Toyota in Ontario as a service technician making \$9 an hour.

He and 16 of his classmates received the opportunity through The Career Institute, an organization specializing in career education and life planning.

"It gives us the feeling of being real mechanics," said Gino, who is saving money for his own car. "I've gotten experience that I would have never learned from a textbook."

Many of the Ontario High students are from the school's auto-mechanic class, taught by George Root. The class is offered through Baldy View Regional Occupation Program.

Its students have been placed with such dealerships as Mark Christopher Auto Center; Jeep, Chrysler, Dodge of Ontario; Savage BMW; Empire Nissan; and Subaru Puente Hills.

Also recruited from Ontario High were three students for placement in dealership offices and two at Bledsoe Masonry in Riverside.

Jesus Conchas graduated in June from Ontario High and is interning in the office of Empire Nissan.



Mike Sanchez, left, directs Ontario High School graduate Miguel as he checks for muffler leaks on Friday. Intern service technicians at Crown Toyota — including many Ontario High students and graduates — make \$9 per hour.

"My parents are so proud of me," said an emotional Jesus. "My mom told me I was making her dreams come true. She always wanted to work in an office."

Jesus has learned skills in computers, customer service and communications. He has saved a good portion of his earnings and plans to attend college.

"I am first-generation American and the oldest of three children," he said. "I want to be a good role model for my little brothers. Getting paid gives me a positive feeling. I feel taken seriously. This has been biggest life change I've ever had."

The government stimulus money of \$7 million became available through the county's

## INTERNS

From A1

Economic Development Agency on April 30.

"This program came up so quickly," said Teresa Taylor, CEO of The Career Institute. "The county contacted providers who knew where to find kids and employers. We wanted to get the word out and share the information as soon as possible."

Fliers were sent to schools and youth organizations. Qualifications included being a low-income resident of San Bernardino County between 17 and 21 years old.

Those eligible could earn \$9 an hour for 180 hours.

Sue Alanis, who works in Ontario High's Career Center, saw one of the fliers.

"I thought Mr. Root's students would be perfect for this," Alanis said. "They had the money, we had the kids. It was the perfect match, and it all came together. This is the best kind of work experience you can do."

The Career Institute placed 417 of the 1,800 students in industries all over the county.

Root has been teaching auto mechanics at Ontario in partnership with Baldy View ROP for more than seven years. During that time, he has built up successful relationships with local dealers who've used interns from his classes.

"These kids have a great foundation and complement our employees perfectly," said Gil Perez, general manager of Crown Toyota. "It's hard to find great part-time technicians. We've been taking on interns from this program for years. We've even hired on three full-time technicians from it."

Many students credit their dedication and work ethic to Root, referring to him as their second father.

Root, who returns the feelings, said he tries to prepare his students for life.

"I want to help these students gain their independence," Root said. "That's what I would want for my own children as a parent."

He sheepishly also mentioned he gives each of his students a special gift that will take them a long way through life.

"I give them the gift of hard work," he said. "With hard work, you can go anywhere. These kids are being paid. They learn something very, very important. In auto mechanics, they can earn a decent wage and not have to buy into the drug and gang lifestyles that may live in their neighborhoods."

## Editorial: Contemplating the Social Worker's Experience

Stacy Bouchard

This article is a reflection of my observations while serving as a Career Mentor for the Career Institute's Summer Work Experience program this past summer. While I was only there a short while, I had the chance to work with, and observe, seasoned professionals that every day went beyond the scope of their job description to make a difference in someone's life. Quickly, I found that serving as a Career Mentor meant that I was mother, friend, counselor, life-coach, accountant, advisor, case manager, and teacher. Jumping into the field of social work, as that is what this work falls under, was beyond anything I could have expected – a life-altering educational rollercoaster where I received more insight than I probably gave.

The Career Institute is an organization funded primarily through grants. It serves dis-advantaged youth by providing two years of educational and career counseling. Many of these youth were at one time living in foster care. Many have little family support. I discovered that family support (emotional and financial) is an integral component that can shape a person's ability to become self-sufficient. How can you be expected to have a work ethic that will encourage you to seek and sustain higher education or a good job when you have not been exposed to it?

This past summer, the Career Institute partnered with the San Bernardino County Workforce Development District to place 400 youth with a Summer Work Experience. This program was a job placement and training opportunity to put youth ages 17-24 to work for the summer, giving them much-needed employment skills and income. This brief description does not do the work of the Career Institute mentors and staff that supported these 400+ youth justice; as it fails to capture the entire range of employment skills education needed for this unique youth population. In just a few months, participants of the Summer Work Experience with little to no work experience had to learn how to behave professionally, dress appropriately, be timely, fill-out timesheets, interview, integrate into a foreign work environment, etc. Really, it meant that the Career Institute had to teach positive behaviors to youth many of us take for grant it as common life knowledge.

The biggest realization I had was that the small things are often the most important skills to coach dis-advantaged youth on. For these individuals it is these small "common sense" skills they never had the opportunity to observe and learn from others. A young man I placed with a store to help stock their warehouse called me at 4 am on a Saturday frantic because he forgot his timesheet. He was not sure if he would be paid. Helping him think through a solution where he could track his hours and pick up the timesheet later may seem simple enough, but he needed the initial guidance and encouragement to problem-solve for himself. Another participant, a single mother, had her father and only family member, pass away while she was working in the program this summer. She needed help adjusting her work schedule and finding an employer that would be flexible and supportive. Sometimes, being a Career Mentor means giving hugs, being understanding, and helping those through life's difficulties while reminding them they are not alone.

Most importantly, guiding youth to pursue education and career is a very serious business. It is easy to experience an array of emotions when you invest so much. I found, within weeks or even days of meeting my individuals I was mentoring that when they stumbled or took a step in the wrong direction, I fell even harder. Each youth participant's failure was my failure and each success I shared with them too. Finding a balance between the highs and lows, because when working with dis-advantaged youth

there are some lows, needs an incredible sense of humor. The Career Institute and its staff created a working environment that encouraged me to laugh at those silly things beyond my control. Such as a youth participant showing up to work in their pajamas complete with slippers. But, it is those other times where someone brings their guitar to sing and write lyrics while working on a project, or the group of youth that came to show me their first work suits. At the end of each working day, what makes it all worthwhile are the smiles, the "thank yous", their hopeful attitudes; and watching in such a short time these youth take inspiring steps that will hopefully guide their adult lives.

## Summer Work Experience Success Stories

### Pleasure Point Marina, Big Bear Lake

Christina Shepherd is 21. She was adopted from an orphanage in the Ukraine by parents who are now retired. Christina has been in the United States nine years. She wants to be an interpreter. Currently, she speaks fluent Russian, Ukrainian, English; and she is studying Spanish. She worked 180 hours at the Marina's bait shop renting boats, running the cash register, and helping recreation activities run smoothly at the lake. The Pleasure Point Marina has hired Christina and seven of the other Summer Youth workers from the program.

### Galerie Mistral, Arrowhead

Kirby Erlanger, 20, will be entering Humboldt State as a junior this fall. He was an accounting major that recently switched to art emphasizing in small metals. He has been working as an apprentice to Joanna Gainberg the professional jeweler and shop owner of Galerie Mistral. Kirby has been learning how to work metals, casting, polishing, and soldering. He has even begun to design his own jewelry and construct it from scratch; choosing the metal, using wax to create a model of the design, ordering the stones, and setting the jewelry. He has also learned what it requires to run a small business: tracking orders, submitting and organizing invoices, and working with customers. Kirby has had to overcome incredible challenges in school. He has been diagnosed with dyslexia and dysgraphia. Joanna hopes business will improve so she can hire him back next summer.

### Barstow Community College, Barstow

Angelica Stewart, 21, was left quadriplegic from a car accident. She worked this summer with the Barstow Community College in the Office of Student Support. Angelica was so successful at her jobsite she will continue on under Federal Work Study. She recently graduated with her Associate's degree in Administration of Justice. She will be attending Cal Baptist University in the fall studying Political Science. She will go to law school after she earns her Bachelor's degree. In the Office of Student Support, Angelica directed students in finding various services. She would also act as receptionist and aide writing and delivering correspondence throughout the college. She became the "go to" girl for the students seeking academic advice, financial aid assistance, disabled student programs, etc.

### San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools, Hesperia

Mercedes Garcia, 18, comes from a large family. She had a difficult family life and was placed into foster care at a young age. Her older sister was able to take custody of her and her siblings and the family is recovering from challenges they have had to overcome. This bright, sweet girl is college bound studying for a degree in education. Mercedes loves to read English literature and hopes to teach high-level English courses some day. For her summer work, she was a teaching assistant at a county-run summer pre-school for special needs children. The children and staff love her. She is patient and understanding. Mercedes shared how appreciative she was for the summer work and the opportunity to learn from the children more than what she has taught them. When interviewing Mercedes on the playground, kids

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Stimulus Money is Having a Positive Impact**

Rancho Cucamonga, California, October, 2009 – When President Obama signed The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act into law on February 17, 2009 funds began to flow across the country. There have been mixed reviews on how taxpayer dollars are being spent and whether the stimulus money is actually working. Within San Bernardino County, California, there are young adults, small business owners, corporate employers, and government agencies that would optimistically agree that, for them, it is working.

The San Bernardino County Department of Workforce Development received some of the stimulus funds, using them to partner with the Career Institute to place over 400 dis-advantaged youth age 17-24 in paid summer work experiences from May to August 2009. This experience, which includes hourly wages, financial assistance for appropriate work attire, and transportation assistance, comes at no cost to the employers. A majority of those that are participating in this summer employment experience include emancipated foster youth, low-income independents, and single parents, those most often in need of this type of employment opportunity. With this experience these youth are now able to contribute to their struggling families and funnel their earnings back into the economy.

Prior to their summer work, many of these youth had little or no work experience and some had just begun secondary education. Without this Summer Youth Employment Program, these young adults would probably have stayed at home, unemployed, struggling to make ends meet because they were unable to compete for the few entry-level/ low skill jobs available in this economic climate. In May, the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics reported an unemployment rate of 12.8% for San Bernardino County, over 3% higher than the national rate.

The beauty of this federally funded program is that employers stretched thin from the poor economy have been receiving employees without having to strain their payrolls. But, there is one valid condition to receiving a youth worker; employers must offer a skill-building experience without replacing a permanent job. The stimulus money is meant to expand employment and funnel money back into the economy, not as a means of replacing one job with another. While not replacing jobs, this summer work program has opened up new jobs by allowing employers a free "trial" period to train and work with potential future employees. Since the completion of the Summer Work Experience, over 50 of Career Institute's 422 youth that participated in the program were permanently hired by their summer workplace.

In addition to on-the-job training, youth were given a work orientation to better understand what it means to be a good employee, and a work packet with tips and activities for searching for a job, interviewing properly, and dressing appropriately. Each youth participant was given personal guidance from a career mentor that assisted them in writing resumes, writing cover letters, and filling out job applications.

As for employers, the mountain town of Lake Arrowhead is one of many examples of where this stimulus-funded program is having a positive impact. Local business owners and even government agencies are singing praises for the Summer Work Experience. Joanna Fainberg, jewelry designer and owner of the jewelry store, Galerie Mistral, spoke about her decision to participate in the program, "How long did I have to think about [taking on a summer worker]? Seconds! I've been so pleased." Kirby Erlanger, 20 years old, recently changed his major at California State University Humboldt from accounting to art, specializing in small metals. Gaining an experience of a lifetime, Kirby has been mentored by Joanna learning everything from running a small business, working with customers, to designing and creating his own jewelry. And for Joanna, she has had an opportunity to get her shop more organized and even learn new computer skills from Kirby. Kirby found so much more than an employer. With Joanna, he found a mentor and colleague. Kirby had the support and guidance from Joanna to grow as an artist, while finding an employment opportunity that met with his interests. In an interview with Mrs. Fainberg, she shared how her business was affected by the economy. She noted that Lake Arrowhead was hit particularly hard and that Kirby's assistance was mutually beneficial and rewarding. Without the Summer Work Experience, Career Institute that helped match her with Kirby, or the stimulus funds that supported the program, Joanna Fainberg could not have taken on an employee at all.