

ACES students prepare for the future during Career Day

By **DAVID YANKUS**, Enterprise Staff Writer | Posted: Wednesday, June 11, 2014 1:00 am

The Toltec Elementary School District put on its second annual Career Day May 15 at Arizona City Elementary School (ACES) welcoming all sixth, seventh and eighth grade students from across the district. The Toltec School, the Cambridge School and ACES all participated in the district-wide event.

Career Day organizer April Ortega said her goal is to help students realize that education is extremely valuable, and a necessity, if they want to reach their goals of attending college and/or having a good job that enables them to support themselves and their families.

A total of 18 guest speakers from various professions, including this journalist, set up in different classrooms and talked to the kids about his or her particular career. One class at a time visited each professional.

The presenters introduced themselves and spoke about their educational and personal backgrounds. They mentioned skills they need and use every day in their professions that they learned in school. They talked about rules they have to follow while on the job, how to properly prepare for each workday, and consequences of their actions done in a professional environment.

Ortega said she feels it is crucial for students to make the connections between expectations that they have at school with expectations that will be expected of them in the workforce.

“I just want our students to realize that education is important, and even though they’re in sixth, seventh or eighth grade, what they’re learning every day in class and what their teacher says matters,” said Ortega, a former writing teacher herself. “When we have rules for them to follow, it’s not because we’re being mean, it’s because there are always rules in life. There are rules in college to follow, you can’t be late for business appointments if you have a job, and you can’t be tardy to work and that’s why you can’t be tardy to class.”

The guest professionals also talked to the kids about their daily responsibilities, the type of students they were in school, how they ended up in their professions as well as explaining in detail the profession itself, and then answered any questions the students posed to them.



Career Day

Mr. Maldonado’s seventh grade class poses for a photo after spending 40 minutes learning about journalism and what it takes to become a reporter and photographer.

Speakers included Pinal County employee Mary Gonzales, Northern Arizona University (NAU) Outreach Coordinator-Signal Peak Campus Celina Salinas, Monica Sheridan from Central Arizona College (CAC), a gunnery sergeant and Vista Grande JROTC teacher, military members and a Pinal County Sheriff's deputy.

Some speakers were former students of Ortega, such as firefighter Ryan Brashier, University of Arizona graphic design student Stephanie Rusiecki, and Arizona State University (ASU) graduate and law school applicant Eleana Garcia. Garcia currently works at a law firm in Casa Grande and spoke about her experiences and duties there, as well as the grades and skills needed for a career in law.

"I wanted all the students to realize that the message their teachers are trying to give them is that there's a whole community that cares about them," Ortega said. "Education is important, you can go to college and this is how, it's OK to have a dream. These were the underlying themes of our presenters."

Two mothers, Mary Scott and Stephanie Cosand, also took time to speak to students. Cosand is a realtor as well and talked about balancing the responsibilities of her career and her family.

Wrestler and Olympic gold medalist Henry Cejudo told the kids it doesn't matter where you come from or who your family is, but that if you work hard enough you can succeed. He said if anything, growing up here would make someone stronger with tougher skin and help him or her get through life.

Cejudo invited students to come up and tell him and others their dreams. One young girl said she wants to be a gymnast, one boy said he just wants to be a good dad one day.

The school's IT director, Isaac Farm, spoke to several classes in the gymnasium, but not about his day job. Farm moonlights as a stand-up comedian and talked to the kids about being an entertainer, writing a joke, telling a punch line and the challenges of breaking into the entertainment business.

"Our students are eager to learn and have many goals such as attending college and having exciting careers," Ortega said. "Being that the majority of our students were born and raised in a rural community, they are at a disadvantage in terms of being aware of the possibilities that their future holds."

Ortega puts the career day together annually as part of her ongoing duties as GEAR UP coordinator. GEAR UP stands for Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs.

According to Ortega, the mission of GEAR UP is to significantly increase the number of students from low-income families who attend and graduate from college. The goals of GEAR UP are to significantly increase college preparation and college attendance.

GEAR UP focuses on increasing high school graduation rates, improving students' academic performance, and increasing knowledge of college options, advantages, access and financing.