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'You can do whatever you want to do'

Archway Schools host 12th Annual Career and Technical Education Luncheon

By ZANE CLARK
The Sun

It was one of the biggest events of the year for Archway Schools last week with the 12th Annual Career and Technical Education Luncheon.

The annual event was held at the special needs school's upper school gymnasium to celebrate the collaboration between Archway's working students and the local businesses that offer on-and-off campus jobs to help students prepare for their post-graduation lives.

Since 1965, the nonprofit Archway Programs organization has served the needs of thousands of South Jersey families with students who have physical, neurological or emotional disabilities.

Through the Career Education Program started in 2007, which serves Archway's Upper and Lower Schools, there are about 110 students who are working on-campus and about 25 working offsite to gain firsthand work experience.

On campus offerings include Archway's broadcast studio, café, T-shirt press, school store or greenhouse, as well as programs such as candle making,



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Former Archway student Sam Toney, now enrolled at New Jersey City University, returned to the school as the event's keynote speaker. Behind Toney is student Nicholas White, who served as one of the event's masters of ceremonies.

woodworking, auto detailing, floral arranging and more.

Off-campus jobs include opportunities at Archway partners such as ShopRite, BJs, TD Bank, iHop, Marshall's, Dunkin' Do-

nuts, Voorhees Virtua Hospital, Modell's Sporting Goods, Dambly's Garden Center and other local retailers.

Susan Lafferty, executive director of education, said the stu-

dents in the Career Education Program not only learn skills for work, but they also continue their academic skills while also growing their social skills and daily living skills.

"It's not just somewhere they go during the day," Lafferty said. "It really is a meaningful experience for them."

Last week's luncheon also featured two alumni sharing words of encouragement with the schools' current students.

John King, who graduated in 2015, landed a job at Shoprite in Hainesport pushing carts and bagging groceries. King later moved to Atlantic City and took a similar job at another Shop-Rite in Somers Point.

Sam Toney, a 2010 Archway graduate and product of dozens of foster homes in his life, told students of his struggles growing up and the perseverance that eventually led to him enrolling at New Jersey City University where he currently studies criminal justice and plays basketball for the Gothic Knights.

Speaking to the students before him, Toney said he was once where the students are now, but the students have plenty of staff members to help them tremendously as staff once helped him.

"You can do whatever you want to do as long as you put your mind to it, work hard, strive hard and set goals for

yourself – you can do whatever you like," Toney said.

In closing remarks, Archway Upper School Principal Mark Letiziano said last week's luncheon helps recognize student and staff efforts from throughout the year, as well as recognize the employers who give students

that "first shot."

"Somebody has got to give you a chance, and I really do have to recognize and really appreciate all the employers that work with us, because they're giving our kids a shot to really get a leg up on everybody else and get a little experience that will help them with their transition when they graduate."

ARCHWAY, page 12

continued from page 1