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Student leadership abounds in PUSD's career/tech programs

By Jean Bihn

The Peoria Unified School District is not only a leader in the state in career and technical education, the district is also home to a whopping 10 state officers in various student CTE groups.

"That is wildly disproportionate for a single district," Peoria Unified School District CTE Administrator John Mulcahy said.

Student officers, their organizations and high schools are:

- Future Farmers of America: Jeff Dinges, vice president, Peoria High graduate
- Future Educators Association: Irene Arguello and Josh Honne, state ambassadors, Peoria High
- Skills USA: Kenny Ho, vice president and Chris Cronbaugh, treasurer, Peoria
- DECA (marketing): Erin Chavez, president, Sunrise Mountain
- Family, Career and Community Leaders of America: Joanna Aguirre, president, Peoria
- Health Occupations Students of America: Elizabeth Fair, Secretary, Mariana Davis, Historian, Sunrise Mountain; Stephanie Muller, vice president, Centennial

Student officers from Peoria High School met with The Peoria Times earlier this week to share their experiences in CTE.

Chris Cronbaugh, 16, is a junior and takes part in the school's culinary arts



Two Peoria High School students and a recent Peoria High graduate represent the Peoria Unified School District as officers in state career and technical education groups. Seated in the courtyard of the district administration center are, left to right, Peoria junior Chris Cronbaugh, treasurer for Skills USA; Peoria High senior Kenny Ho, vice president of the state's Skills USA organization; and Peoria grad and University of Arizona freshman Jeff Dinges, vice president of the state's Future Farmers of America.

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studies.

"The experience is a fun time in class," he said. "I get to meet people. Cooking has been an interest of mine since sixth and seventh grade."

Chris plans to attend Evangel University in Springfield Missouri to pursue pastoral studies. He hopes to focus on missions at the private Assemblies of God school.

Kenny Ho, 17, is a senior at Peoria.

"I want to go into law," Kenny said. "I'm just very interested in the legal system."

He plans to specialize in "corporate law, the business end of things." Kenny has been accepted to the University of Arizona.

"I think a great portion of Skills USA was learning how to communicate, how to present myself professionally, and how to speak publicly," Kenny said. "It provides great experiences. State officers get to travel around the country and meet prominent business people."

Jeff Dinges is a freshman at the University of Arizona, where he is studying agriculture education.

"I've been in FFA since I was a freshman," Jeff said. "Now it's my time to be an influence, my time to motivate students. I will most likely end up at Peoria High School."

FFA was organized as "Future Farmers of America" in 1928, the group's national Web site said, but was renamed "The National FFA Organization" in 1988 to reflect the broadening field of agriculture and its more than 300 related careers.

Jeff, a self-proclaimed "city kid," said. "You don't have to be a farmer, that's a common misconception, especially with how agriculture is moving technologically."

Patti Beltram, a district CTE coordinator and national 2005 CTE Teacher of the Year, came to PUSD from the Gilbert school district two years ago.

"Peoria CTE is known throughout the state," she said. "They have the model that other school districts want to emulate."

Given the number of student officers from the district, the program is also very successful in producing leaders to carry on the CTE message.

"Everyone is proud of these young men and women who represent their schools, school districts and local chapters with honor and dedication," Beltram said.

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