WATSONVILLE HIGH SCHOOL
SCHOOL PLANTS THE SEEDS FOR AGRICULTURAL CAREERS

Suncrest Nurseries manager Jim Marshall talks with Watsonville High School students during an Agriculture Careers Day fair in the school’s gym Wednesday.

Presentations showcase jobs on farms and related fields

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WATSONVILLE — For many Watsonville teens who grow up watching family members and neighbors pick berries, the only career they see in agriculture is in the field.

With two days of presentations dedicated to agriculture and related careers, Pajaro Valley school officials aimed to dispel that notion.

Wednesday, in a gym crowded with representatives from farming companies and associated businesses, Watsonville High School students had the opportunity to learn about the cornucopia of professions the Pajaro Valley offers.

“They only know the jobs they see as they drive to school,” said Principal Eleane Legorreta. “My goal is to get all of our kids thinking about careers in this valley. Anything you want to do, you can do, genetics, engineering, law.

There’s something for everyone, even if they don’t know it.”

Broker Chuck Allen talked about jobs in real estate, leasing and selling farmland and cold storage facilities. Mark Silverstein, executive director of the Elkhorn Slough Foundation, spoke about how conservationists help preserve the water and soil critical to maintaining agriculture.

CAREER » PAGE 3

Career

FROM PAGE 2

Junior Joseph Guerrero, who aspires to an environmental career, said he was impressed with Elkhorn Slough’s work and surprised to hear about post-mining habitat restoration work from a Granite Rock Co. representative.

“That really captured my attention,” he said.

Natalie Solares also was interested in working for the environment when she graduated from high school in Riverside and enrolled at UC Berkeley. As a research associate at giant berry producer Driscoll’s, she’s doing just that, she told students, working on projects that seek to control pests and disease without chemical pesticides. It’s work that brings in biology, chemistry, even physics, she said.

“I love my job,” Solares said.

Shanti Wertz teaches landscape design as part of the Santa Cruz County Office of Education Regional Occupational Program.

She told students she had a less than stellar high school career and little idea about what she wanted to do when she enrolled at Cabrillo College. But she figured it out as she improved her academic performance and saved money at the community college. She took a variety of courses but it was a horticulture class that put her on the path a career and a degree at Cal Poly — a university she didn’t have the grades for after high school.

“I love plants and it’s artistic,” she said.

Her talk and designs intrigued Brian Cisneros, a senior who hopes he too can improve his grades at Cabrillo to gain admittance to Cal Poly’s computer science program.

“My hobby is drawing,” he said.

Shanti Wertz talks with students about a career in her field of landscape design Wednesday at Watsonville High School.

SAMUEL THALER — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL
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