

# SkillsUSA Championships Connects Lehigh Valley Students With Future Employers

By Paul Muschick

LEHIGH VALLEY - Hundreds of students representing five Career & Technical Education schools, Colonial Academy, and Northampton Community College showcased their skills in dozens of trades as professionals looked on at the annual SkillsUSA Council District 11 Championships recently. The event plays an important role in workforce development in the Lehigh Valley and opens the door to job opportunities and further career development for the competitors.

About 450 students vied for an opportunity to win scholarships and advance to state and national competitions later this year. They competed in 60 events related to hospitality, architecture, automotive services, culinary arts, health care, building construction, cosmetology and esthetics, criminal justice, cyber security, education, firefighting, graphic communications, information technology, mechatronics, and web design, among other fields.

Participating in the Jan. 24 event were students from Bethlehem Area Vocational-Technical School, Career Institute of Technology, Lehigh Career & Technical Institute, Monroe County Technical Institute, and Upper Bucks County Technical School, Colonial Academy, and Northampton Community College.

SkillsUSA is a partnership of students, schools, and industry working together to ensure America has a skilled workforce. A nonprofit national education association, SkillsUSA serves middle school, high school, and college/postsecondary students preparing for careers in trade, technical, and skilled service occupations. The Lehigh Valley boasts the only SkillsUSA Council that not only offers all the benefits of SkillsUSA national but also professional development conferences and interest clubs year-round here in the Lehigh Valley.



(Photos courtesy of SkillsUSA Council District 11)



Andy Hammer, Executive Director of SkillsUSA Council, said it's never too early to introduce students to the trades. He said the competition is a big deal for the students who competed.

"Championships are one example of professional development opportunities students receive through their participation in SkillsUSA. This is the first chance for many competitors to work with and demonstrate their skills to industry representatives," Hammer and SkillsUSA Council Chairman Ron Jerdon, President of Jerdon Construction Services, said in a message in the event program.

Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corp. (LVEDC) was a sponsor for the event and has been a long-time supporter of SkillsUSA, which aligns with LVEDC's partnerships with educational institutions and employers to ensure Lehigh Valley maintains a competitive workforce and talent supply.

"This championship is always one of my favor-

ite events of the year because these kids out there are showcasing their skills, they're showing that they know and they have the experience to be ready to be employed at your companies after graduation," said Karianne Gelinas, Vice President of Regional Partnerships and Talent Strategies at LVEDC.

The event was held at multiple locations, including Agri-Plex at the Allentown Fairgrounds, Delta Hotels by Marriott Allentown LV, Lehigh Career & Technical Institute, Cedar Crest College, Northampton Community College, Greenawalds Fire Co., Bethlehem Area Vocational-Technical School, Pocono Mountain Harley Davidson, Lehigh Carbon Community College, Welder Training and Testing Institute, and Universal Technical Institute.

This was the 38th year of the District 11 Championships, and the largest to date. The event is a community effort, with more than 400 volunteers and contributors involved. Some judged the competitions. Some provided materials. Providing scholarships totaling nearly \$200,000 were the Automotive Training Center, Universal Technical Institute, D'Olimpio Memorial Fund, and Northampton Community College.

"It's just inspiring to see the professional work ethic and critical thinking skills demonstrated by all the students today. Today, more than ever, we as business owners and executives must support the development of our bright future students," said Keith Muir of Star Buick GMC Cadillac & Star Pre-Owned.



Totts Gap Arts Institute (TGA) is now accepting grant proposals from organizations presenting arts programming in the 10 municipalities of the Slate Belt region.

Founded in 2006, the mission of TGA is to nurture artists of all ages, and to awaken the excitement, passion, and possibility of the fine and performing arts by supporting classes, helping to showcase talent, and supporting events that will infuse our community and the region with a love and respect for the creative process.

Grants will be awarded to qualifying organizations for programs that provide educational opportunities, or support cultural events, such as performances.

Granted programs can be for any age group, and are open to any federally-designated (501)(c)(3) non-profit organization that agrees to follow the grant requirements and stipulations.

Individuals seeking to present programs are advised to seek a partner organization to host the event.

Program requirements:

- i) Program must be open to any resident of the Slate Belt.
- ii) Program must comply with TGA's mission and values of inclusiveness and accessibility.
- iii) Program must be hosted in an ADA complaint facility.
- iv) Classes will have no fee.
- v) Performances will have reduced rates available for students and seniors.
- vi) Preference will be given to group activities over serving individuals.
- vii) Programs will not promote any religious or political agenda.
- viii) Program staff, performers, etc. do not need to be residents of the Slate Belt, but the event must take place in the community.

Grant value: up to \$5,000. To apply, follow the link below, and email the completed application to [arts@tottsgap.org](mailto:arts@tottsgap.org).

<http://tottsgap.com/apply-for-funding>