

Jacobs students attend leadership conference

BY KATE BRASER

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Four Jacobs High School students joined 170 students from 45 high schools across northern Illinois Friday for U.S. Rep. Don Manzullo's, R-16, fifth annual 21st Century Leaders conference in Rockford.

Michelle Fippinger, Cagney Kruz, Mitch Morrison, and Jennifer Weldon were selected by their teachers to attend the day-long conference with government and U.S. history teacher Steve Stukenberg.

"We got a letter inviting us to the conference and I talked it over with several teachers who recommended these students to attend," Stukenberg said. "For the most part, these kids have shown either a great capacity for leadership skills or expressed a vocal interest in government."

The students spent the day at Rock Valley College's Stenstrom Center with other participants from McHenry, Boone, Ogle, Winnebago, Stephenson, Jo Daviess, DeKalb, Carroll, and Whiteside counties.

The day began with a speech by Manzullo, then students chose to attend workshops covering global responsibility, homeland security versus individual rights, hot careers in the 21st Century, the future of U.S. space exploration, and role playing as a U.S. Representative for a day.

Jacobs junior Mitch Morrison said this was not the first leadership conference he has attended, and he was pleased to find Manzullo remembered him from previous conferences.

"I own a skateboard business and Manzullo remembered me from that when I asked some questions during his opening speech," Morrison said. "That was really cool. He put no limit on the number of questions or amount of time we had to talk to him at the beginning so it was great."

Morrison said he thought the conference was well worth a day out of class.

"I walked away from the conference with an increased knowledge about government functions," Jacobs junior Mitch Morrison said. "I particularly learned a lot about the legislative branch and how setting goals and sticking to them will help me become successful with anything I want to achieve."

Morrison said he would like get into politics after college.

"I am interested in law enforcement, White House communications, and the creation of laws," Morrison said.

Jacobs junior Jennifer Weldon said she attended the workshop about hot careers in the 21st Century.

"The speaker told us that there was a study done at Yale that showed the two percent of students who wrote down their goals were more successful than the other 98 percent of Yale grads," Weldon said. "I found that so interesting."

Weldon said she also watched a debate about the details surrounding the Patriot Act.

"I would really like to go into law and business after I graduate and go to college," Weldon said. "I found everything at the conference so interesting. It was a valuable experience for me."

Following lunch, students re-convened for an hour-long discussion with motivational speaker and Guinness World Record holder Ken Blackburn. Morrison said Blackburn's speech was a highlight of his day.

"Ken Blackburn holds the world record for having the longest paper airplane flight," Morrison said, admitting he already knew how to make paper airplanes before the conference. "I learned how to make the airplanes much better than before, and afterwards Ken Blackburn autographed my airplane."

Manzullo released a statement that said he looks forward to visiting with young people at the leadership conference every year.

"I am amazed at their thirst for knowledge and eagerness to interact with their peers from other communities on issues they will face as adults," Manzullo said.

Stukenberg said his role in the conference was really just that of a chaperone, but he was impressed with the level of interaction between his students and Manzullo.

"It was really neat how many questions the students got to ask the congressman," Stukenberg said. "I think they got a lot out of this."