



Youth Career Expo Comes to Citrus County, Highlights Opportunities in Own Backyard



By Laura Byrnes, APR, CPRC

Kierstin Walitynski was dressed for success, well-spoken and appreciative of being able to meet myriad employers and talk about the importance of soft skills in the workplace, loan-forgiveness options and the value of early retirement planning.

Pretty grown up conversation for someone who is just 14.

Or is it?

Understanding what career opportunities are available in their own backyard, the training and skills needed for those careers, and how to land and keep good gainful employment with pathway for advancement, is a message Citrus County employers want today's rising high schoolers – and tomorrow's talent pool – to hear.

And the Citrus High School sophomore got just that opportunity during Citrus County's first-ever Youth Career Expo. An estimated 250 students from Citrus, Crystal River and Lecanto high schools attended the expo which took place on November 1 – a bright, perfect, no-cloud-in-the-sky autumn day – at the College of Central Florida's learning and conference center in Lecanto.

"It was a lovely experience and we're thankful they (employers) put in their time to talk to us," Kierstin said while waiting in line for lunch with classmates Madison Jackson and Harley Fiorentino, both 15.

Harley said the part of the experience that most resonated with her was learning about soft skills, or people skills, such

as communication, punctuality, teamwork, self-direction and conflict resolution.

"I mean, I kind of knew what they are but didn't know how important they are," she said. "You need soft skills in order to keep the job and to excel."

The Citrus County Youth Career Expo is an outgrowth of expos held the last two years in Marion County (more are slated in the neighboring county in February 2018). Partners for the Citrus County event, in addition to CareerSource CLM, were the Citrus County Education Foundation, Citrus County Schools, Junior Achievement, United Way of Citrus County and Withlacoochee Technical College.

Officer Timothy Palmer with the Florida Department of Corrections said his team handled questions from a steady stream of students during the event.

"We must have had five or six students at our table at all times," Palmer said. "They seemed very engaged and asked a bunch of questions, good questions. One kid came up and asked what our 'benefits look like.' That's fantastic."

Tamika Clayton, human resources director for the Citrus County Clerk of Court started at the clerk's office right out of high school, something she said she's happy to tell students.

"This expo is an awesome opportunity for kids to see career opportunities in their backyard... and that they don't need to have years of experience or a college education."

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The following employers attended representing Healthcare, IT, Manufacturing/ Logistics, Public Service, Construction and other industries: Brannen Bank, CHAMPS Software, Citrus County Clerk of Court, Citrus County Fire Rescue, Citrus Hills Construction, Citrus County Sheriff's Office, ClosetMaid, Cypress Cove Care Center, Florida Department of Corrections, LifeSouth Community Blood Center, Nature Coast EMS, SECO, The Middlesex Corp., and the United States Army.

Education and other partners that took part were College of Central Florida, Eckerd Workforce Development, Pasco-Hernando State College, North Campus; Rasmussen College and Withlacoochee Technical College.

To view the expo album, please visit <https://www.facebook.com/CareerSourceCLM/> and choose the photos link. For more information about talent pipeline development efforts, call 352-242-3278 or 800-746-9950.



Grandma's Christmas Gingersnaps



By Madison Farkas

These lightly spiced cookies are the perfect combination of crispy and chewy, and they always remind me of my grandmother, who made them every year. In the unlikely event that you end up with extras, they freeze well.

Ingredients

- 1/2 cup margarine
- 2 cups sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1/2 cup molasses
- 4 cups flour
- 2 tsp cinnamon
- 2 tsp ground ginger
- 2 tsp ground cloves
- 2 tsp baking soda
- 1 tsp salt
- 1/4 cup sugar, for garnish

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Cream margarine, sugar and eggs together, then stir in molasses.
3. In a separate bowl, combine all dry ingredients.
4. Add dry ingredients to wet ingredients, stirring only until combined.
Do not over-mix.
5. Roll dough into 1-inch balls, then coat them in the extra sugar by rolling them in a small bowl. Add more sugar to the bowl as needed.
6. Place onto ungreased cookie sheet and press lightly with a floured fork.
Bake for 12 minutes. Makes about 4 dozen cookies.