

Getting a *head* start

Apprenticeship prepares student for career in the business world, raises questions about pushing all students down the college track

Maia Donahue
Beginning Journalism

College is the celebrated societal path of high school students. In the 21st century, many high school seniors leave for college whether or not they want to, because to opt out of a tradition of higher education held in such esteem would somehow signify personal failure. With all of these students going to college, it's easy to forget the other half; the students who decided that the university experience wasn't for them, and decided instead to follow their childhood dream.

Katelyn Bejcek, part of the graduating class of 2014, has decided, unlike her peers, most of whom are headed to college, to take an apprenticeship in Tennessee working with horses. She said that it's always been her dream to have horses be a part of her life. "One way or another, I was going to work with horses," said Bejcek.

For as long as she can remember, her family has owned, showed, and trained horses. At one point, Bejcek moved to Montana to live with her grandmother on the family ranch with their 18 horses. When she moved back to Michigan, Bejcek started giving horseback rides to special needs kids down the road from her house. It wasn't for money, but Bejcek discovered her passion. "The kids love it, and I love kids," said Bejcek.

Through a friend, Bejcek met a woman named Barb Mack, who opened the door for her future career. Mack runs a barn near Bullock Creek where she gives horseback lessons to children, often ones with special needs. Currently, there are ten kids who come for weekly lessons. After school ends, Mack and Bejcek will both travel to Tennessee where there is yet another lesson barn. Once she's learned the ropes of managing a barn that doubles as a business on her own, she will be left in Tennessee while Mack comes back to manage the Michigan barn. She'll be living without any family present for the first time in her life, but it doesn't daunt her. Most students will be living in dorms surrounded by their peers. Bejcek has a house set up for her, and her alone, while she learns to be a licensed instructor.

It sounds like a lot of work for a student fresh out of high school, but in reality, Bejcek is getting a head start in the real world. While other students sit in college classes and listen to lectures about the business world, Bejcek will be thrown into the business world where she'll inevitably have to deal with everything that comes along with managing a business: angry customers, liability, and property management. Anyone in the business world can affirm that there is a sizable difference between learning about how to work in the real world, and actually working in the real world.

Bejcek claims that she always felt supported in her decision to pursue her dreams, but while there is lots of information about college options for students, there is much less attention given to alternative options. Luckily, Bejcek learned about her opportunity through a friend.

Schools that only prepare students for a college track can be very limiting to the students who seek to move immediately into a hands-on environment. It's important that there is a diversity of options for high school students. With a clear layout of what the options are, students who don't want to pursue a college education can make more informed decisions about what they'll do in the future.

It's students like Bejcek who remind us that there are other options and pathways in life. Hopefully, she will inspire her peers to go into alternate fields that may be better suited for their skills set, and keeping their dreams in view. Respecting and learning about the decisions of others is an important thing for highschool students to learn. These people will go on to work the hands on jobs that keep society functioning. Starting her apprenticeship young opens up so many opportunities for Bejcek. Having this experience will ultimately make future employers more inclined to hire her. Eventually, it will also provide her with the skills to start her own business. If more students understood the benefits of going into apprenticeships and trade schools, they would be able to affect the work force positively.

“One way or another, I was going to work with horses.”

*Katelyn Bejcek,
Senior*”

