

# A healthy dose of jobs

## BOCES pharmacy tech course launched in three centers

By LEAH BULETTI  
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**A** new 450-hour BOCES course offered in all three of St. Lawrence-Lewis BOCES's Career and Technical Education centers is aiming to launch students into pharmacy careers, prepare them for college pharmacy coursework and fill demands in the local work force.

The pharmacy technician course began this September at Northwest Tech in Ogdensburg, Southwest Tech in Gouverneur and Seaway Tech in Norwood after BOCES administrators were last fall approached by officials from ProAct Inc., the benefit management company launched by Kinney Drugs Inc., Gouverneur, in 1999.

The one-year program prepares students to take the national certification exam administered by the Pharmacy Technician Certification Board and will position students to work as pharmacy technicians in hospitals, nursing homes, health care clinics, retail stores and outpatient centers, or Internet pharmacies, mail-order pharmacies or pharmaceutical manufacturers, immediately after completion, according to BOCES administrators. Students could also pursue a bachelor's or master's degree in pharmaceutical science or a doctorate in pharmacy.

"Students are getting the background should they choose to go on to the work force or go on to college," said Rachelle E. Romoda, BOCES supervisor of instruction. "Students are getting the basic skills to work as a technician, in clinical pharmacy or in other types of pharmacy, so they would be able to use this knowledge for a full-time or part-time job."

Completion of the PTCB exam is not a requirement for work as a pharmacy technician in the state nor for students in the BOCES course, but gives students a leg up in finding a job, according to Renee J. Langtry-Green, BOCES director of career and technical education.

The course started out teaching basic pharmacy skills, such as anatomy, physiology and math and students have already completed an orientation to retail lab, with inventory set up as it would be in a real pharmacy, according to Diane B. Scott, who is teaching the course at the center. The students will also go out into real pharma-



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Diane B. Scott, center, a pharmacy technician instructor at St. Lawrence-Lewis BOCES's Northwest Tech Center in Ogdensburg, poses for a portrait with students, from left, Scarlett M. Cameron, Monica L. Arquette, Brooke E. Oshier and Kristin B. Kuca during BOCES's new pharmacy technician course.

cies for "work-based learning" and job shadowing experiences, she said. About half of the 11 students enrolled in the course at Northwest Tech, three of whom are juniors, intend to pursue further studies in pharmacy in college, she said.

BOCES administrators said they could offer the course on such a short time schedule because of the relatively low cost of equipment — at Northwest Tech the class is taking place in an existing classroom, part of which was converted to a mock retail lab. Kinney Drugs is also providing support in the form of ideas, materials and supplies based on their in-house training course, Ms. Romoda said.

Administrators also visited a career and technical center in Suffolk County on Long Island that offers a pharmacy technician program before launching it in St. Lawrence County. Ms. Romoda said it was nice to see that that tech center was similar to those in the north country, and that the course would not require very expensive equipment.

"The teachers and staff were very open — the students were wearing lab coats and were very proud to show off what they were doing," she said. "It just re-enforced that we wanted to bring it back here."

With such impressive enrollment num-

bers for the first year, building principal Jane S. Akins said her goal is to offer the program full-time next year, with a target of 12 students per class.

"I was very pleased with our start of 11 students for the first year," she said.

BOCES Superintendent Thomas R. Burns also said he was pleased with the enrollment numbers; initially BOCES had hoped to pilot the course in a minimum of one of BOCES's three CTE centers. In addition to the 11 at Northwest Tech, 13 students are enrolled at Seaway Tech and eight at Southwest Tech. As well as being able to offer the course to students from all of BOCES's 18 component school districts, BOCES was able to hire three new "very qualified" teachers, he added.

"Moving forward, this program should serve an important function — providing a rigorous curriculum that upon completion would allow students to use as a platform for acceptance and success in demanding college health fields, or as a direct pathway to a career with an established business such as Kinney's or ProAct," he said. "It's a win-win for students, schools and the community regardless of which path a student elects to take following completion of the program."

## ST. LAWRENCE COUNTY

ProAct's mail order business, which is handled at the company's Gouverneur facility, has grown from three employees eight years ago to 40 today, ProAct President David B. Warner said. He estimates that could double within the next two to three years as ProAct plans to expand its pharmaceutical mail order service.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics pegs the rate of change in employment for pharmacy technicians in the state at 26 percent from 2010 to 2012, and 32 percent nationwide over the same time frame, well above the average national growth rate of 14 percent for all oc-

cupations. It also reported the hourly mean wage for pharmacy technicians statewide at \$14.91 in May 2012; ProAct says average starting pay is \$12.25 per hour, and generally higher for employees who have the technician certification.

Senior at Huevelton Central School Monica L. Arquette, a student in the course, said she intends to take the exam and work as a pharmacy technician this summer. She intends to pursue a degree in pharmacy at Albany College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences.

"I was thinking about being a pharmacist

and this program reassured that I do want to be it," she said, adding that she has enjoyed the course so far and thinks it will help with college coursework.

About half of the 11 students enrolled at Northwest Tech, three of whom are juniors, intend to pursue further study in college, according to Ms. Scott, including Huevelton senior Scarlett M. Cameron who said she too wants to go to Albany College of Pharmacy, but take the exam and work as a technician in the interim.

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