

## **Student interns and workers creating change within their communities**

The partnerships are a 'win-win' for students and area businesses



Ryan Oxenreider, a Conrad Weiser High School senior, has teamed up with Gov. Mifflin students to work on the architectural drawings for students without permanent housing during his internship at Muhlenberg Greene Architects. (BILL UHRICH – MEDIANEWS GROUP)

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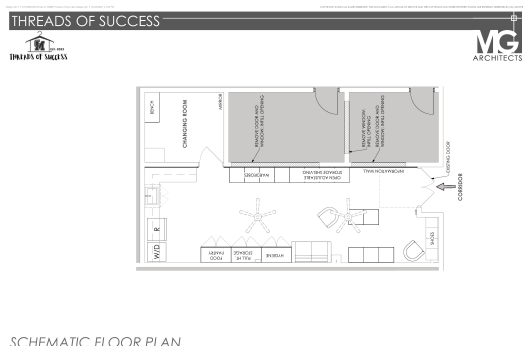
Area high school students are out and about in their communities during the school day — serving as interns or student employees at various businesses throughout the region.

Numerous school districts in Berks County offer internship programs for students, who either travel to area businesses or work within their schools, doing anything from helping out in the school store to working on a ground-penetrating radar system with an engineering firm.

Juniors and seniors are eligible for internships, most of which are unpaid. Students participate as interns instead of taking electives at school and earn course credits for their efforts.

Lynne Angstadt, career internship coordinator at Conrad Weiser High School in Heidelberg Township, Berks County, said the program is a win-win for students and area businesses.

“Our program has grown every year as more and more businesses learn about it and want to place an intern,” she said. “A lot of times the internships will lead to summer jobs or even an apprenticeship or full-time position.”



## A Conrad Weiser, Gov. Mifflin Partnership

Ryan Oxenreider, a Conrad Weiser intern, currently is partnering with three student interns from Gov. Mifflin High School in Cumru Township, Berks County to develop plans for space within Gov. Mifflin High School for students who are dealing with housing or food insecurity or other issues.

They eventually hope to form a nonprofit organization to oversee their project, which they call Threads of Success.

“Most people don’t realize it, but we have more homeless students than almost any other school district in the county,” said Emma Strunk, a Gov. Mifflin senior who is working on the project along with seniors Hamir Foster and Braeden Ruth. “The idea of Threads of Success is to provide basic necessities and community for students in need.”

The students got connected after Suzanne Cody, director of business development at Muhlenberg Green Architects in Spring Township, met Kristi Jo Bonanno, internship and school-to-work program coordinator at Gov. Mifflin High School, at a Berks County women’s networking event.

Bonanno shared with Cody that she and three Gov. Mifflin students had recently toured a food and clothing pantry at Reading Area Community College that Robert Conklin, vice president and principal at Muhlenberg Greene, had designed.

As she described her students’ vision for their Threads of Success project, Cody got the idea to offer Muhlenberg Greene’s student intern to help.

“It seemed like a lot of pieces were falling into place,” Cody said. “Bob Conklin had worked on the pantry at RACC, and we had Ryan as our intern who was available to help.”

Everyone agreed that the plan was a good one, and Oxenreider met with Strunk, Foster and Ruth, who shared their thoughts of what the space within their school should look like.

Oxenreider came up with three variations of design for the room and the Mifflin team selected the one they liked the most.

Plans for construction are underway, with Bonanno and her students reaching out to community members for help.

“We’ve worked so hard on this project, but we can’t do it all by ourselves,” Foster said. “We’re grateful for the support we’ve gotten so far, but we’ll be looking for more help.”

For Oxenreider, the experience has been beneficial in that he’s gotten hands-on architectural experience while working with peers to make a difference.

“The situation of homeless students is concerning to me,” Oxenreider said. “So, to be able to help Hamir and Braeden and Emma come up with plans for Threads of Success was rewarding. I’m glad I’ve been able to help a little.”