

The Way Back Up

Tennessee Economic Developer Capstone
Project

Stacey Kidd
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Tennessee has become a state to be envied in the realm of Economic Development being ranked #1 for foreign direct investment (FDI) job commitments in 2015 according to 2016 Global Location Trends report. Tennessee also found the ranking of #1 by the Brookings Institution among the U.S. States for advanced industry job growth. It is a state that displays much diversity in the terrain pertaining to Economic Development, from rural to metro, the hills of East Tennessee to flatter surface of the west. Tennessee is a right to work state and a retirement destination. This state also just gained the bragging rights of having an award winning team, the Department of Economic and Community Development, which helped obtain the statewide honor of being named two years in a row as the “State of the Year” for economic development by Business Facilities. Tennessee, as it stands in 2016, is a favorable place to start and relocate your business/industry. That is the snapshot of Tennessee today, but in 2010, when the harsh halt from a crashing economy stalled a growing state-wide momentum, the state as a whole was able to sustain.

Regrouping quickly was not the case at the beginning of yet another deep dip for a small county in East Tennessee consisting of 536 square miles and 22,228 residents. On February 4, 2010, a rural eastern community, strategically sitting in the center of the Southeastern United States, received the devastating news that was an all too familiar backdrop of their Appalachian footprint. Scott County, one of Tennessee’s twenty-one distressed counties, already calloused by



the rise and falls of seasoned manufacturing and industries, is a community that thrived in the coal industry felt burdened as federal regulations increased in opposition to mining. It was then industries such as cut and sew that became the sustain industries and families began to learn a new trade. Just as the economy in Scott County adjusted to being an indoor industry- minded community, the county experienced the loss of our two biggest industries, employing about 1,000 citizens, moving to Mexico, and the community was once again forced into a new skill.

While many metro/urban areas were able to carry the load of a changing economic future, rural communities such as Scott County prepared for another hurdle. Although, being rural doesn't always mean you are disadvantaged, especially in creating infrastructure. In many ways, although rural, Scott County seems advanced in some components. Scott County houses three city mayors, one county mayor, and three Industrial Development Boards. The Industrial Development Board of Scott County and the eight directors that echo the voice of guidance from a legal advisor is in fact very experienced on the detail and direction needed to make a community great. The Industrial Development Board of Scott County made up of a banker, an engineer, a workforce leader, small business leaders, and the watchful eye of the county mayor is responsible for all industry, business, and tourism. The Industrial Development Board works in close cooperation with the Scott County Chamber of Commerce, sharing the same Executive Director, but operating as two very independent entities. Through their partnership, the organizations can facilitate growth, education, and innovation for the whole of the county. Some of the responsibilities the organizations share are grant writing for the community, submitting the annual ThreeStar certification, and being the cohesive factor for industry and business to obtain incentives and funding to locate and grow in the community. Naturally, because of the services



these organizations provide to the county when February 4th ensued, it was to the Industrial Development Board of Scott County that the community turned.

What is it exactly that happened on February 4th in Scott County, TN? The economy had taken a horrible turn; families saw their homes foreclosed and companies were fleeing with negative bottom dollar lines. The rumors of an uncertain future were being felt throughout the country. As bad as it may have seemed in an urban setting, it seemed magnified in the center of one the most impoverished communities in the state. Scott County, on February 4th, lost 301 jobs, 260 of them being in the local flooring company that had once employed almost a thousand, and 41 being from the brutal caving of a government standing firmly against coal. That was the first blow in this sequence of events that crippled this beautiful place. Grandfathers, grandmothers, fathers, mothers, aunts, uncles, cousins, they all lost their jobs. Whole families had become unemployed, and in the midst of what seemed a winter storm, the county appeared frozen in fear.

Scott County was no stranger to adversity; this is a community that qualifies for 100% free lunches in the county school system. Even though Scott County does know poverty intensely, it is a county that also knows prosperity. Being the place that a national leader called home, allowed us an advantage pertaining to positive growth. The leadership that called Scott County home worked mighty and hard to bring opportunity to rural Tennessee. Those leaders that worked united created an airport with a mile long runway that allows corporate jets to land, an airpark that planes can be taxi all the way to the owner's homes, and a \$67 million broadband expansion offering fiber to every single home/business in the county. Scott County was able to



see the building of a community college and sustain two TCAT (Tennessee College of Applied Technology) locations, just to name a few key amenities. Scott County was no stranger to growth and prosperity but this time, the whole country was suffering; the state had hiccups, so who would be there to bring the guidance and help to this rural, Appalachian community?

One thing about a forecast, it can't give you with all surety that the storm will end on a certain date, and for Scott County that was complete truth. It was only months later that the only hospital in a 30- mile radius closed, and hundreds more of Scott County citizens lost their jobs. At almost 24% unemployment, completely frustrated, Scott County had become the best at being the State of Tennessee's worst. A community so full of life now stood completely frozen from a storm that seemed to have no ending. At that moment, community leaders got angry.

Anger, if used in the right format can be a prod to move danger from an unshielded community. The Industrial Development Board, with the approval of the four mayors and support of the Scott County Chamber of Commerce, made a call to Nashville; the call was to ask state leaders to rally the troops and help develop a strategic plan of action. The call worked in attracting economic development leaders. In a board room filled to maximum capacity, leaders from all across the state and different organizations listened to woes of Scott County. Many valuable suggestions were made to us, but what community leaders took from the table were the words, grow your own. In a country that was feeling the pressure of a shaky economy; how could those state leaders give a community something they were struggling to find a way to produce? It was after the room emptied a single individual stayed waiting to meet with us, a representative from the



Department of Economic Development for the State of Tennessee. Scott County leaders were not promised anything except the dedication of that individual, teaching us what it exactly meant to grow our own and where to find seeds to plant.

Every rural community if they are not bragging, appreciating, and loving on the existing businesses, organizations, or industries are performing a terrible injustice to the current and future of the county. It is from the companies who can operate in a down economy that the community leaders needed to be seeking advice. After all, they were here surviving when a whole country seemed to flail. With the aid of TVA and ECD, regular and routine visits were made to local companies. As a county, there was not much to offer them, state incentives and TVA funding opportunities are mainly geared for those growing, but as a team, with the backing and guidance from the local mayors, IDB and Chamber of Commerce, listening sessions were initiated. It was hard to hear the frustrations and the negativity that spewed from a hopeless community because Scott County had been better than what it had become. It was then ThreeStar came. State leaders may never fully understand what the now Assistant Commissioner of Rural Development for the State of Tennessee accomplished in the role as ThreeStar Coordinator, but to this community who was absolutely sick of being named the worst, that ThreeStar coordinator authorized a purchase that may have been the saving of the 74th county in the State of Tennessee.

Enter Tennessee ThreeStar, a ThreeStar program that was revamped from a very complicated past that was full of regulations and rules. The new improved ThreeStar began a new focus based



on strengthening the areas in; Jobs & Economic Development, Fiscal Strength & Efficient Government, Public Safety, Education & Workforce Development, and Health & Welfare. Communities that participate in the program work on an annual evaluation of their community and submit an activity plan. The county and city mayors, along with a few key community leaders meet quarterly through the Joint Economic & Community Development group. It is in those meetings; they network and unite to better the infrastructure and growth of the county as a whole. Communities that work with the ThreeStar program are eligible for a discount on business development and community development ability to pay calculations each year that the county participating fulfills activities defined by the state. In return, in addition to having a stronger community that is more business friendly, the Tier 2 & 3 counties may receive a grant to plant seeds in a field to improve one of the pillars of defined sustainability determined by the State of Tennessee. In that newly revamped program, as Scott County leaders listened to guidelines and the rules to roll out to their communities and strategically, leaders formulated a plan.

There is no recorded date when the life-changing phone call to then ThreeStar Coordinator, happened, but it did happen. This community led again by business leaders and mayors, designated a spokesperson to find a way to spend the money from the seed grant, it was then the call was made to Nashville.

So what does hope buy? In Scott County, the leaders knew what was desperately needed because the teams had been listening. This community had heard local industries wanted to stay here and



grow, but the people had lost their desire to work. The Scott County School system reported that students in 2010 began wearing pajamas to school because unemployed parents were struggling with documented cases of depression and lack of hope about returning to work. Local leaders told the horror stories of foreclosing and repossessing possessions of a once dependable, financially-strong workforce. The community watched that graph of unemployment inch its way higher year after year. Leaders became skilled at finding a place to hide from the media as the unemployment numbers were announced monthly by the State, handing Scott County the Highest Unemployment County for Scott County. Community Leaders had been listening for almost three years, trying to be supportive and then the leadership realized; Scott County was her own worst enemy.

With just a small amount, \$15,000.00 from the State of Tennessee, the IDB and Scott County Chamber of Commerce united with local utility boards and a talented editor of the local paper came up with a plan. Why could Scott County not tell their story? Not the story of failure, the metro areas were faithful to capture the negative, but the story of the county's greatest assets, the people. The people of Scott County are unbelievable. They are resourceful and innovative; they had proven that through numerous winter storms, and it was high time that their leaders jumped started their generator of ingenuity. The mayors, the Industrial Development Board of Directors, the thirty-three (33) Directors of the Scott County Chamber of Commerce hired the local editor to write our story (See attachment). Each and every month, leaders took two full pages out in our local newspaper to tell the story of individuals like a local citizen, who was a Vietnam Veteran, and also a pilot. A citizen who one day just decided to quit flying and invented a mower attachment. That Scott County citizen with no help from anyone outside of the county, created



such a great product, that the company is now ranked 4th in the nation for mower attachments. Scott County needed to hear the story of our local rubber manufacturing plant owners, who started their dream with two employees, themselves. In the beginning, the couple would schedule meetings with potential customers around the lunch hour, excusing the fact their team and receptionist were gone to lunch so the customers would never realize that the company they were entrusting to make their product was being solely run by two individuals. Today that company is dipped into five different arenas, at any given hiccup of the economy, no more than 1/5 of the 150+ employees would have to endure a layoff at once.

Community leaders stormed social media; all thirty-three Chamber of Commerce directors joined Facebook, and were challenged to respond with a positive post to every negative one that was seen. The leaders told the citizens every single day that baby steps were being made. As advised, the county was precisely doing what the experts, the leaders of this state and country had instructed them to do and that was to grow Scott County. The leaders stood tall and told residents they mattered using the local radio station. Citizens were challenged to become better and support the stores and business that supported the sports teams, educational grants, and donations to local organizations. Small businesses were highlighted monthly in one of the newspaper ads which told of how each and every program worked within our community. The ground was saturated, along with the air, the ears, and the heart of Scott County with positive news. It was in an email on the report of our first year of spending the grant dollars from ThreeStar that leaders realized the community was stirring; the economy was thawing, and now, what to do with a workforce that needed to be retrained to be ready for the next boom of economic growth. So, what is to be done? Scott County would educate their citizens. Scott



County, if not already mentioned is home to three postsecondary training centers in the State of Tennessee. Located inside the county boundaries are, TCAT (Tennessee College of Applied Technology), Roane State Community College, and housed inside of Roane State, Tennessee Tech University. Training dollars were needed to get the adults retrained that had been receiving unemployment for several years, and the Director of TCAT and Roane State started working. Letters and calls were made to the Senators and Congressman. The directors even reached out to the Governor, asking for money to be made available for retraining. The Scott County workforce had been from the coal mines to the flooring companies and with the approval of funding was now back in the classroom. This unemployed workforce was learning how to work on cars, care for patients, become certified in heating & air, or getting a teaching degree. Our workforce was now attending classes with their children.

Community excitement started building, the economy finally started steadying from a shaky environment, and Tennessee's ECD team along with others went aggressively into the charge of recruitment. What seemed almost instantaneous once started, resulted in local companies growing. Scott County started seeing expansions, and team players along with the community were ready to welcome growth with incentives and a growing workforce ready for the challenge. Neighboring carried some of our workforce until Scott County was stable enough to employ the unemployed workforce. Hope was coming back.

What happened to next, after sixty months of finding a path in the unstable economic conditions was the end of the storm. As the team from Economic & Community Development made monthly visits to video the rise of a struggling community and talk with our industries, leaders

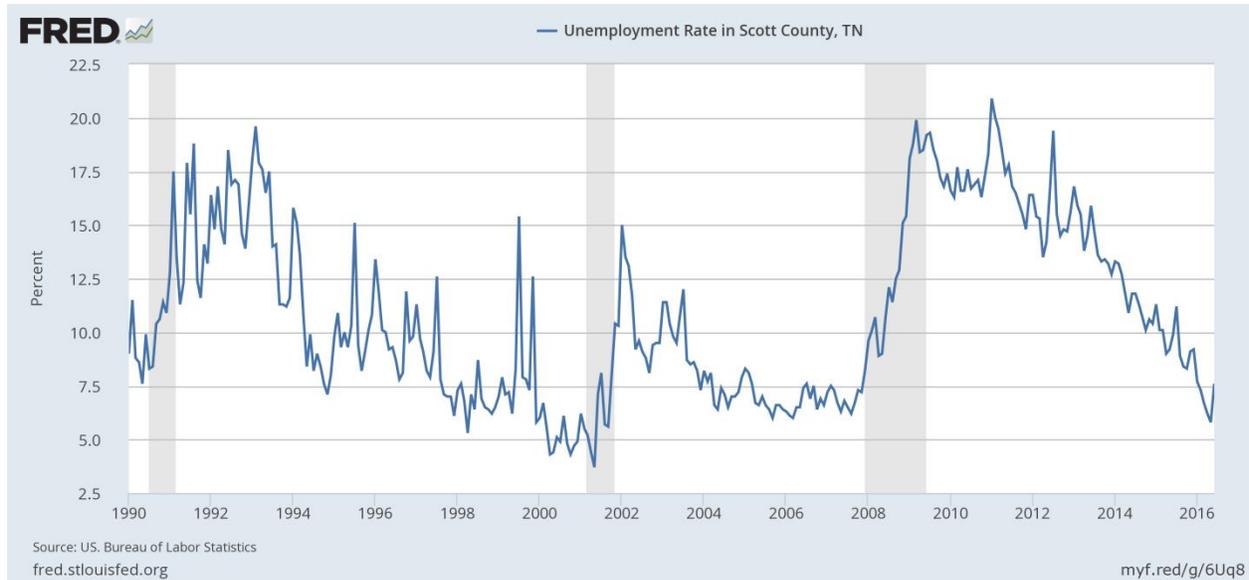


watched every month anticipating that the blue ribbon that was hated would be passed off to another community. March 26, 2015, the storm ended, and the long named, worst community had fallen to #2 in the rankings. It was finally over, five years later, Scott County had overcome, and the seed money from the ThreeStar grant had taken root! Scott County was harvesting the bounty. In June of 2016 what was once a county with an unemployment rate of almost 24% was leveling at a rate of about 6%.

Looking back, standing in a field of harvest, finds days where it still seems unbelievable that economic development planning could be so effective, but such is the story of this Appalachian Region. Recapping to leaders and news media what had been the strategic plan that brought a whole community from hardship, this was said... Scott County's success was because a team of people worked together and because community leaders would not quit. It was a team of state and federal leaders, a coaching team from ECD, and a ThreeStar Coordinator that approved the original purchase of hope to a beautiful, rural Tennessee county. This community listened to the experts, and planted a garden in the midst of the darkest winter night. Baby steps were taken daily to take our community back and the Scott County people, found the way back up.



This chart is to show the stiff rise of a struggling economy from 2008 and the hard work and effort of a community working together with the strategic plan of positive words.



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[HTTP://WWW.TNECD.COM/BLOG/26/SCOTT-COUNTY-THE-WAY-BACK-UP/](http://www.tnecd.com/blog/26/scott-county-the-way-back-up/)

Above is the video link that State Leaders worked on to encourage our efforts of positive reinforcement.



PROFILES OF A 3-Star Community

PRESENTED BY THE INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT BOARD OF SCOTT COUNTY

SECTION B

Thursday
August 7, 2014



TCAT: training workers and winning awards

By BEN GARRETT
Independent Herald Editor

HUNTSVILLE — You'll have to forgive the folks at the Tennessee College of Applied Technology campus here if they're puffing their chests out just a little these days.

Fresh off not one but two national championships in welding, and recognition as one of the Top 5 nursing programs in the State of Tennessee, TCAT's Oneida/Huntsville campus is carving out an identity as one of the state's top TCAT campuses.

On the front lines of the fight against unemployment, the instructors and administrators at TCAT Oneida/Huntsville are charged with helping prepare the work force for the ever-changing needs of employers — offering training programs and technical certifications both for high school graduates looking to enter the work force almost immediately and adults already in the work force who are looking to change course.

For Scott County, just having a TCAT campus is a feather-in-the-cap. There are only 27 TCAT campuses across the state, enough for only one campus in roughly every four counties — and not many rural counties like Scott have access to a TCAT campus.

But to have a TCAT campus that consistently wins awards and receives recognition as one of the best in Tennessee is extra-special, say those who are at the forefront of efforts to recruit new industry to Scott County.

"It's a huge asset to have a facility here that has won state and national honors," said Stacey Kidd, secretary of the Industrial Development Board of Scott County. "It's an asset that gives us an edge on other communities."

Amy West, assistant director of the local TCAT campus, called her instructors' recent accomplishments a "true testament" to their goal of training TCAT students to be "the best work force available."

■ Welding Titles

Under the direction of Chris Chambers, TCAT Oneida/Huntsville's welding program has quickly become one of the most recognizable in the state. Not only did local TCAT students sweep the sculpting awards at the state-level Skills USA competi-



PAINSTAKING DETAIL: Casey Allen uses a hand-held grinder to work on the steel sculpture of a rattlesnake that he used to win a national championship in welding sculpting last month.

tion this year, but they took both national championships in Kansas City this summer.

Casey Allen won the national championship in the adult category, while Zach Watson won the secondary student category. Kidd is quick to point out that a lot of focus within the world of industry — at least in Tennessee — is on automotive ... a category with which welding goes hand-in-hand.

While the national championships were for sculptures — welding art — the awards are a sign of a strong welding program at TCAT Oneida/Huntsville.

Chambers, who has served as TCAT's welding instructor for the past couple of years, says that while welders are in demand in the current industrial climate, stick welders — those with basic welding skills — are not. In order to be considered for the best jobs, advanced skills are needed. And that's where TCAT comes into play.

Tim Smith, TCAT's director of student services, says that there are immediate openings in the school's welding program.

■ Nursing Program

Tennessee has 19 practical nursing programs. And TCAT Oneida/Huntsville's is among the best of

them.

At the local campus, 94.5 percent of LPN students pass the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX), the test that essentially determines whether nursing students are prepared to begin practice as an entry-level nurse.

That's the fourth-best pass rate in the state — behind only LPN programs in Nashville, Knoxville and Hobenswald. And placement rate for LPNs who complete the TCAT program is very high; students are virtually guaranteed a job.

"This is a difficult program, it's not for everybody. And we tell them that during orientation," Smith said. "But those who complete the program, almost all of them will be placed."

TCAT Oneida/Huntsville's LPN program combines traditional coursework with distance learning, ensuring that the program is economically feasible not only for students from Scott County but also for students outside Scott County who choose to enroll in the program.

■ More than just welding & nursing

At TCAT's Eli Lane facility in Oneida — the original technology center in Scott County, and the

one that keeps "Oneida" in the Oneida/Huntsville campus designation — Austin Davis was a Tennessee state champion in the Skills USA competition this year. There, he's a part of instructor Wayne Todd's auto collision repair program. That program, too, is an award-winning program for TCAT. And, like welding, the collision repair program has immediate openings for new students.

"Skills USA has been an integral part in providing our students with the confidence to step outside their comfort jobs and compete at both state and national levels," West said. "These students have been very successful over the years in these competitions. They are a true testament to what our instructors are accomplishing."

Back at the Huntsville campus, immediate openings are also available in the machine tool technology program. There, instructor Jared Terry received all Level I credentials in the National Institute for Metalworking Skills certifications this past spring.

Things are winding down on a Friday afternoon as Terry shows off a display case of items that his students have turned out — including a miniature steam-driven engine. The products are proto-

types of the ingenuity that Terry's students display.

"Watching our students achieve their goals and being part of a college system that is recognized for providing high-quality and skilled workers is such a rewarding part of my job," West said.

Across the hall, Nicholas Gill instructs automotive technology students who are learning engine repair. At a recent conference in Kenosha, Wisc., Gill picked up several additional certifications that are put into play at the Huntsville campus.

■ Cosmetology, too

TCAT isn't all about nuts and bolts and getting your hands dirty. The softer side of the campus's programs is on display in Jayne Roysden's cosmetology program. There, students learn the ins and outs of personal beauty — and many go on to establish their own salons, or obtain work as licensed cosmetologists in existing salons.

There is a move afoot in the work force, Smith said; one that is seeing more women looking for the skills necessary for gainful employment.

"There are more women entering the work force

Winning gold with steel

What started as an in-house competition among students at the Tennessee College of Applied Technology's Huntsville campus ended with a national championship for the school's welding program.

Two post-secondary students wanted to represent the school at the Skills USA competition in Nashville. But there was only room for one.

"We told them they would just have to hash it out," said welding instructor Chris Chambers.

Taking a lead from the school's cosmetology program, which has mannequin head competitions, Chambers had the students design welding sculptures and TCAT staff members voted for the winner.

Casey Allen's steel sculpture of a coiled rattlesnake awaiting a field mouse's emergence from a hollow log was selected the winner. Allen went on to win gold at the state level Skills USA competition in Nashville, then won the national championship at the Kansas City national competition last month.

Two years ago, none of the students at TCAT had even attempted a sculpture. But the level of creativity has quickly escalated.

"You can kinda see the creativity when they're working on their personal projects," Chambers said. "You can kinda tell if they can do (the sculptures)."

From that creativity comes detailed projects, involving hours of

See TCAT, page B2

See GOLD, page B3

HEY KIDS!

Want to be featured on our billboard?
Have your mom (or dad, or grandparent)
drop off receipts for back-to-school
supplies or clothing purchased at local
retailers. We'll randomly select four kids
(one per family) to be featured!

Receipts may be dropped off at the Scott
County Visitor Center (U.S. Hwy. 27,
Helenwood) or the Independent Herald
(Alberta Street, Oneida). But hurry! The
deadline is August 15!

LAMAR



TCAT

Continued from page B1

now," he said. "They're no longer relying on their husbands to be the family's primary breadwinner."

Cosmetology — and practical nursing — offer avenues for those women to pursue a career. Generally, women are unlikely to seek a career as an auto mechanic, a welder or a machine tool operator, but TCAT's wide variety of programs offer something for everyone.

Just down the hall from the cosmetology program, the Administrative Office Technician program offers training for men and women alike who are seeking to enter the field of business.

There, the classroom isn't centered around a welder showering sparks, and the sounds of air wrenches don't pierce the air. Instead, the environment is quieter as students center their days in front of their computers, focusing on the skills that will make them tomorrow's office leaders.

Smith credits instructor Janet Watson for staying on top of employers' ever-changing needs.

"This program is somewhat different than some of the others. Welding is what it has always been, and it is what it will always be. It isn't going to change," he said. "But office technology is changing every single day and it's a chore to stay on top of the latest changes."

The same is true with Rodney Stephens' Computer Information Technology program. There, students learn the ins and outs of Microsoft programs, server maintenance and related technologies; things that will allow them to be on the cutting edge of tomorrow's high-tech computerized systems.

■ Still Growing

In addition to the eight areas of study currently offered by TCAT Oneida/Huntsville, three new programs are slated to be in place by February. Industrial Maintenance and Mechatronics will skill students on such things as electrical wiring and HVAC systems. A new pharmacy tech program will train technicians, and Power Line Construction technology will train linemen for utility companies and contractors.

The new programs will further diversify the work force that TCAT's instructors are turning out.

"With this facility, there's no reason why we can't have an educated work force that's skilled to meet the demanding needs of new industry," Kidd said.

■ Striving to place students

In order to keep programs open, TCAT must place 70 percent of the students who complete study programs. That isn't always easy, Smith said, but instructors strive to make sure that happens.

Last year, for example, 88 percent of the students who completed the welding program at TCAT Oneida/Huntsville received jobs in the field.

"It doesn't matter what they're doing or what their goal is, my number one thing is to help (the students) all I can," Chambers said. "Sometimes we have students who don't want to leave the county, and that can be a little tougher bill to fill. But if they're willing to drive to Clinton, we can usually place them over there."

At the end of the day, though, the majority of students will receive jobs in their field. That's by the very nature of the school's accrediting process. If 70 percent of students aren't placed, the programs are shuttled.

Currently, 126 adults are



TOP PRIZE: Pictured after the Skills USA national championships in Kansas City are, left to right: Skills USA national officer Tony Hamblin, welding instructor Chris Chambers, post-secondary national champion Casey Allen, secondary national champion Zach Watson, TCAT Oneida/Huntsville welding instructor Amy West and Oneida/Huntsville director Patrick May. Independent Herald | ihoneida.com

enrolled at TCAT Oneida/Huntsville. Most of those will receive jobs in their areas of study.

"I don't think a lot of people know how impressive the things they can do here are," Smith said. "And our programs are quality programs."

Smith said the staff at TCAT take a hands-on approach with their students.

"When they come in, we don't go, 'There's your applications, there's your choices, just read that,'" Smith said. "When they come in, they come into my office and we sit down and go over their choices. We talk about what they want to do. We can do that because of our size."

Staff members also assist students with every step of the financial aid process. Nancy Botes walks each student who wants the extra help through each step of the process of applying for financial aid.

"Not every school has that," Smith said. "And that's a big plus for our students."



WORK IN PROGRESS: TCAT Oneida/Huntsville welding student Zach Watson sculpts a grizzly bear. The 70-lb. sculpture went on to win both the state and national championship among secondary students.

Gold

Continued from page B1

time. Allen's sculpture was detailed right down to tiny whiskers on the ill-fated mouse.

"The main thing I usually ask those guys is if they're willing to work on one little part for two or three hours, decide it's not good enough, and throw it away and start again," Chambers said.

"Most of the ones so far that have said yes

have done good." Allen's sculpture wasn't the only gold-winner in Kansas City. While he was winning the national post-secondary competition, his fellow TCAT Oneida/Huntsville student Zach Watson, a student at Scott High School, was winning the secondary student competition.

Watson's sculpture was a grizzly bear catching a fish in a waterfall. Over the course of 70 hours, Watson sculpted pieces of scrap metal

from bins behind the TCAT facility into a work of art.

"I was looking at internet pictures and found one that I liked (of a bear in a waterfall) and that's where the idea came from," said Watson, who said he can make "almost anything" from pieces of scrap metal.

In addition to actually doing the shaping, the Skills USA competition requires students to prepare a portfolio of the work in progress, and to present an oral account of the

work. Judges award the contest based on all three areas.

In addition to Allen and Watson, TCAT Oneida/Huntsville student Austin Davis won the Tennessee state championship in Skills USA's auto collision repair competition. He accompanied TCAT staff, Allen and Watson to Kansas City for the national competition, where he placed among the upper tier of students from across the nation — 12th overall.

