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## MiCareerQuest doubles down

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More than 2,000 ninth grade students attended the first MiCareerQuest Northwest at the Grand Traverse County Civic Center on May 22, 2019. Students from 30 northwest Michigan school districts interacted with 60 employers representing 100 occupations.



TRAVERSE CITY — MiCareer Quest had a successful first year — followed by a non-existent second.

Confident in the third iteration, organizers are doubling down in 2021 on the career exploration event.

The inaugural MiCareerQuest Northwest, at the Grand Traverse County Civic Center on May 22, 2019, drew some 2,000 ninth-grade students to the Grand Traverse County Civic Center. The COVID-19 pandemic canceled the 2020 event, but Susan Ward envisions the virtual event potentially drawing twice as many in 2021 as it did in 2019.

That's because twice as many students in the 10-county area are invited to the online event. Normally for high school freshmen, sophomores also will attend the May 12 event.

“Our ninth graders missed out last year, so it’s open to two grade levels,” said Ward, the Jobs for Michigan Graduates Manager.

Two sessions scheduled for the May 12 event on Zoom. There’s a morning session from 9:30-11 a.m. and an afternoon session from 1-2:30 p.m.

In addition to inviting twice as many students, Ward thinks the removal of another barrier could lead to a greater turnout in 2021.

“I’m estimating we’ll have more, though, because we’ll have two grade levels and we’re removing the transportation barrier,” Ward said. “I’m hoping we have 4,000 participants.”

The inaugural MiCareerQuest Northwest gave students from 30 school districts the opportunity to interact with 60 employers representing 100 occupations.

“It was a good deal,” Trimet Industries President Dan Mello said of the 2019 event. “It’s a great opportunity for freshmen in high school to see all sorts of different stuff. I had a blast.

“It’s just a great way to (to show students) all the different possibilities of things they could do.”

Mello said Trimet had a self-contained welding booth in 2019 to show people some of the things the company has manufactured in Traverse City since 1995. Mello said the chance to weld and take home their own trinket from the inaugural MiCareerQuest wasn’t just popular with students.

“I had teachers and administrators come through the booth,” Mello said.

While Mello said the 2021 event will lack the hands-on element, a video will do a better job highlighting all aspects of the metal fabrication company.

“I’d rather be hands-on, but the way they’re going about it is great,” Mello said. “We’re having a video of the business provided, so now I can open it up to other things we do in the shop rather than just limiting it to welding.”

Ward hopes the 2021 event will attract exhibitors. According to a release, employers from industries like agriculture, construction, health care, hospitality, information technology and manufacturing will be on hand at the virtual event.

“Our goal is to have 50 exhibitors,” she said. “Registration will open on the day of the kickoff.”

Even though the event is virtual, the focus is the same.

“MiCareer Quest is a hands-on event and will be again,” Ward said. “It’s an engaging event for ninth and 10th grade students to explore different careers. It plants that seed and hopefully helps them with their high school and post-high school planning.”

Data suggests, Ward said, that 37.5 million people will retire from the workforce in the next decade. She said the same data suggests only 21 million people will enter the workforce during that same timeframe. So the competition to retain employees could be fierce.

Ward said the career event is also a chance to show students the opportunities available not only in the state, but more importantly the region.

“There are more people retiring than entering the workforce in the country,” she said. “Obviously Michigan is impacted by that. We want to show them that there are great jobs in Michigan and specifically in northern Michigan, so they don’t feel they have to leave.”

The first MiCareerQuest was held in 2015 by West Michigan Works!

A Talent Investment Agency grant led to all 16 Michigan Works agencies hosting events in 2019.

The MiCareerQuest goal is to provide students with an opportunity to:

- Talk with experts from the region’s high-demand industries
- Work with the tools and technology of the trades
- Receive in-depth and practical knowledge of today’s workplaces

A video from the 2019 event is available at <https://tinyurl.com/MiCareerQuestNW2019>. More information is also at [www.nwm.org/micqnw](http://www.nwm.org/micqnw) or by emailing Ward at [susan.ward@networksnorthwest.org](mailto:susan.ward@networksnorthwest.org).