

STEM internships benefit Worcester students

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MARYLAND COASTAL BAYS PROGRAM

Three years ago the Worcester County Economic Development Center began STEM enrichment programs. Their goal was to attract students from middle school, high school, and college to STEM related fields.

STEM is an acronym for "Science, Technology, Engineering (sometimes replaced with Environment) and Mathematics." STEM programs allow students interested in these fields to expand their knowledge on these topics and pursue relevant work in their specific fields of interest.

For example, there is an 8-day "Reach for the Stars" aerospace engineering focused summer camp that was made specifically for middle school students. A total of 20 local 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th graders attend this camp taught by educators and professionals to enhance their knowledge and get first-hand experience in this field.

For high school and college students the Step-Up STEM Internship Program is a unique opportunity for students of Worcester County. The Step-Up STEM Internship Program allows local high school and college students to intern at a local business in a STEM related field of their interest. This internship is designed to help them expand on interpersonal, technical, and professional

skills that can be used in high school, college and eventually a career.

This year more than 60 students applied for the 20 spots available. In order to choose from such a large group of qualified individuals, students are asked to provide a letter of recommendation and to write an essay. After the first round of reviews, all students have a 15-minute interview with the directors of the STEM internship program. This allows the students to demonstrate professional and interpersonal skills that might otherwise be hard to showcase in writing.

This year's internship sites include Bungalow Seven, EA Engineering Science and Technology, Hardwire, Ocean City Today, and the Maryland Coastal Bays Program.

As a student involved in this program for two years I have had the chance to see the array of opportunities that Worcester County has to offer. Both last year and this year I was very lucky to be placed with the Maryland Coastal Bays Program, a local environmental nonprofit organization and National Estuary Program charged with protecting and helping Marylands Coastal Bays. Being interested in environmental law and policy, the opportunity to work with the Maryland Coastal Bays Program was a perfect fit for me.

The Maryland Coastal Bays Program has provided me with many

unique opportunities and I have been able to enjoy both the office and field work that comes with working in the environmental field and this job in particular. They have taught me so much, like about the islands in the bays, and restoration sites around the watershed and why they are important for improving water and wildlife quality.

This year I was partnered with LuAnne Mottley, a junior from Pocomoke High School and another STEM intern. Together, we have been able to develop interpersonal skills while engaging with co-workers, people out in our local communities and more. LuAnne and I have visited both Lizard Hill and the Bishopville Dam to help and learn about these projects.

One of the most educational experiences we have had with the Maryland Coastal Bays Program was putting together a brochure and poster about the islands in the bays. We were able to inform the public on the importance of the islands. Many people were surprised when we told them the endangered Black Skimmers and Royal Terns were using these islands as nesting habitat.

Apart from getting hands-on outdoor education, I am also interested in environmental policy, and I really enjoyed attending the Implementation Committee (IC) meeting. This meeting is focused on bringing together the Mary-

land Coastal Bays Program, Department of Natural Resources, Environmental Protection Agency, Worcester County, and local towns including Ocean City and Berlin. These partners work to implement the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP). This plan puts forth the goals of the Maryland Coastal Bays Program for the next 10 years in order to improve the Maryland Coastal Bays and their watershed in a variety of ways with help from the aforementioned organizations and other partners.

The partnership between the Worcester County Economic Development Center and the Maryland Coastal Bays Program is unique. Worcester County has noticed the potential in students and worked with businesses to provide this experience to benefit everyone involved.

Being able to have this internship in high school and seeing the opportunity right in my backyard has opened my mind to what a great place we live in.

I would like to give a special thank you to the Worcester County Economic Development Center, the Maryland Coastal Bays Program and all the partners who help to make the Step-Up STEM Internship Program possible in Worcester County.

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