

SWCC Provides Unique Work Experience for Teachers

By Terri Higgins, Director of Marketing and Enrollment Management

Martha Boehlke, family and consumer science teacher at Orient-Macksburg Community Schools, is taking advantage of her summer break to soak up knowledge for the classroom through personal experience. Boehlke spent a week in June completing a 40-hour paid externship at the Henry A. Wallace Country Life Center in rural Orient.

A teacher externship is a paid professional work experience providing teachers direct experience in a business or industry work environment. During the externship, Boehlke worked side-by-side with Wallace Country Life Center Chef Katie Porter, prepping food for service, completing garden harvest and post-harvest work, preparing and attending a public gardening event, and learning about the overall programming for the Wallace Centers of Iowa.

The externship was made possible through Southwestern Community College's (SWCC) Workplace Learning Network (WLN), a statewide grant-funded program established to provide work-based learning activities to Region 14 school districts. In order to enroll in the externship program, teachers register through the Green Hills Area Education Agency (AEA) and pay \$200 to receive license renewal credits for their participation. Upon completion, the teachers earn a \$600 stipend from the WLN. Lindsay Stoaks, SWCC assistant vice president of instruction, provides instruction for the license renewal portion of the program.

Boehlke said she learned a great deal during the externship.

"I had the opportunity to learn about the farm-to-table movement and the nutritional rewards which go hand-in-hand; gained greater

knowledge of a working kitchen and the demands it faces daily; and learned the crucial details required to conduct a business, as well as the partnerships needed to sustain community programs," stated Boehlke.

Ann Schlapia, SWCC WLN coordinator, said by exposing teachers to real-life applications of what they teach, externships enable teachers to develop curriculum suited for project-based learning and that reflects the world of work in the classroom.

"The benefits of a teacher completing an externship are numerous," Schlapia explained. "Externships provide teachers with opportunities to gain 'real world' experiences, earn credits toward their license renewal, and bring new ideas back to their classrooms. Ultimately, students benefit through powerful learning activities that prepare them for success in the modern workplace."

Schlapia said teachers select host sites for their externships, but the WLN assists if instructors need help finding a host site. Externships are not geographically restricted to SWCC's Region 14. At this point, Schlapia said she has three other Region 14 teachers signed up to complete externships during the summer of 2015, however it's not too late for additional teachers to register.

Boehlke is confident her experiences will benefit her students in the long run.

"The WCLC [Wallace Country Life Center] along with the SWCC externship program has provided me a refreshing insight as to what it's like to be a hands-on student again," Boehlke explained. "I am confident these experiences will immensely benefit my classroom in the fall."

This is the second year teachers in SWCC's merged area have had externship opportunities through the WLN. Students in Region 14 are offered "real world" experiences through the WLN as well. These opportunities take place through job shadows, where students learn about careers or specific occupations by spending a day with a business professional at their workplace.

Schlapia may be reached at the SWCC WLN at 641.782.1573 or schlapia@swcciova.edu. Learn more about SWCC's WLN at www.swcciova.edu/wln. ■



Martha Boehlke (left) poses with Katie Porter, chef at Wallace Country Life Center, during her externship experience.