

Saanich School District Jumpstarts Student Careers with Apprenticeship Program

by Devon MacKenzie

For much of 2011, 15-year-old Jorge Costa's trek to school each day began before most people were even out of bed. He walked and transited from his home in the Western Communities to get to the Independent Learning Centre in Saanichton before classes started.

Why did he go to all the trouble? Because the Saanich School District had something Costa wanted. He'd long dreamed of becoming a hair stylist, and last year he got a chance to sign on to do just that, for free, and all while still earning high school credits toward graduation.



Costa is one of 16 students accepted into Saanich School District's specialized trades program in hairdressing and cosmetology. Offered in partnership with Vancouver Island University and the Industry Training Authority, it's comprised of comprehensive technical training and a gradual introduction to working in a community-based salon. The program includes a full-time apprenticeship for two months and ultimately leads to continuing full-time employment in the field.

The school district's partnership with VIU and other post secondary training institutions has allowed District 63 to be able to offer almost any trade to almost any student who is interested – all free of charge.

"We work with the student so each program is tailored

specifically to the individual student and his or her desired trade," said Stu Rhodes, the apprenticeship coordinator.

Costa is now an indentured apprentice and working full time at Verde Eco Salon and Day Spa in Langford – something he is very excited about. "I love my job. I love making people feel special. You can work anywhere and there's always new stuff to learn," Costa said, speaking passionately about his career choice.

"Jorge is a very talented young stylist who has a passion for hairdressing," said Costa's instructor from VIU, Anastasia Antoniadis.

Costa's advice for those interested in any of the Saanich School District's trades programs? "You have to just show that you want it and be prepared to commit to it and the school will organize everything else for you. It's such a great opportunity."

With his sights locked firmly on his future, and School District 63 ready and willing to help him achieve his goals, Costa is looking forward to a career in the trade he always knew he wanted to do.

If you want to see Jorge in action, contact Eco Verde Salon and Spa at 250-474-8999 for an appointment. Studio 63, the district's teaching salon, will be open to the public beginning April 2012 with a new set of students. Call 250-652-5381 for more information.

For more information on how to get involved as a student apprentice, or as an employer sponsor in the career program, contact Stu Rhodes at srhodes@sd63.bc.ca or at 250-415-9211. For an overview of the trade training opportunities offered by the Saanich School District, be sure to view the promotional Youtube video, "Jump Start Your Career" at <http://www.youtube.com/user/saanichcareers>.