YTI Altoona prepares students for work force

Career institute's policies, courses provide students a look into their future job fields

By Brian Yermal Jr.

byermal@altoonamirror.com

One room resembles a doctor's office with examination tables, weight scales and blood pressure gauges.

In another section of the building, there is a technology lab filled with rows of computers accompanied by walls of servers and entanglements of wires

Keep going, and visitors will find a replica dentist office complete with dentist chairs, sinks and teethcleaning equipment.

What sounds like a business building or a medical center is actually the Altoona campus for YTI Career Institute.

The campus contains classrooms just like other schools. Many of the rooms at YTI, however, are also set up similar to the environment that the students will work in after thev graduate and enter the work force.

The building, faculty and courses are all part of the school's career-driven curriculum, which is why YTI Altoona stands out from neighboring colleges and universities, said Natalie Lombardo-Beaver, the campus president.

"We're different in the fact that we are a career school," she said. "We're extremely industry-mod-

The Altoona campus, at 2900 Fairway Drive near the Van Zandt VA Medical Center, formed after the purchase of the Computer Learning Network building by YTI Career Institute in

Work-like policies

The campus programs feature policies like those found in the work place.

dance, so if students miss classes beyond the allotted amount, they will see penalties to their grades, Lombardo-Beaver said.

Students also must adhere to a dress code based on their program. Those in the medical pro-



Rebecca Huber of Altoona and Tim Burkhart of Carrolltown, both students in the respiratory therapy program, perform an emergency procedure exercise on a practice dummy at YTI Career Institute's Altoona campus.

grams wear scrubs such as the ones worn in hospitals and doctors' offices. The color of the scrubs vary by program.

The students' courses are geared toward their programs, said Brandon Johnson, a medical assistant instructor at the cam-

Unlike four-year schools, YTI Altoona stays away from many of the general education courses that have little to do with its programs, he said. In addition to learning

through lectures and readings, students engage in hands-on work with groups, Johnson said. Respiratory therapy stu-

dents might do an exercise where they perform emergency CPR on a medical practice dummy. As another example, medical assistant students may practice dressing up an ulcer or other open wounds on a similar dummy.

Seeing the students work together is entertaining, Johnson said, because of

their unique backgrounds. Some students come to YTI Altoona fresh out of

high school, while others

arrive after being displaced from work after 20 or 30 vears. Certain students are old enough to be grandparents, he said.

"It's interesting to go to one of our orientation days because you don't know which (visitors) are the students" because of their age differences, Johnson said.

Diverse student body Sean Morgan is one stu-

for different

ways to help

give students

Altoona Campus

President Natalie

Lombardo-Beaver

a break."

dent who represents the diversity of YTI's student body. Morgan is a

44-year-old Army veteran living in Hollidaysburg and is enrolled in the computer systems technician program at the Altoona campus. His interest in computers

dates back to the early '90s, when he began his military service. Computers were just starting to gain popularity, and Morgan thought it was interesting how people could communicate

with one another using them, he said. Morgan enrolled at YTI Altoona after serving 20 years in the The small class sizes, per-

sonal interaction with instructors and the school's focus on career skills such as resume writing and jobinterviewing are some of the reasons Morgan enjoys YTI, he said. He also mentioned the school's emphasis on students working together.

times, we do a "We try to look lot of peer stuff because they teach you about how to be a member of a team, Morgan said. YTI Career Institute

'A lot of

YTI Altoona keeps its industry model in mind when hiring

faculty members, as well. People seeking a job as an instructor at YTI need to have at least three years of experience in their respective field, Lombardo-Beaver said. Some instructors previously worked in the field

YTI Career Institute: Altoona

Location: 2900 Fairway Drive, Altoona (near the Van Zandt VA Medical Center)

Phone: 944-5643

Website: http://www.yti.edu/campuses/altoona.asp

Programs: business administration; computer systems technician; criminal justice and first response; dental assisting; medical assistant; medical billing and coding; respiratory therapy

but no longer do, while others may teach at the school part time while holding a job in their field outside of the classroom. Johnson worked in the

medical assistant field while serving in the United States Navy for more than

two decades. He also takes medical classes himself while working as an instructor.

Being an instructor and a student at the same time has its advantages, Johnson

"I know what it's like to sit at the desk, but I also know what it's like to give a lecture," he said. "Once students know that you're still going to school ... it kind of makes you a little more approachable.

Sometimes the students manage to teach the instructors, Johnson said. because some of them work externships at places such as UPMC Altoona and Nason Hospital and bring new ideas and experience back to the classroom.

Plans for the future

YTI Altoona started almost 10 years ago. In the next decade, the school will look at adding new programs in addition to the seven it already offers, Lombardo-Beaver said.

The school also plans to look at new technology for its students, she said. One approach YTI Altoona took in January was setting up a learning program known as Moodle.

The program allows students to complete assignments, take tests and read books online using

iPads. Moodle is being used by the dental assisting program right now, Lombard-Beaver said, and it is in the school's interest to make it available to all students in the future. Lombardo-Beaver envisions a day where the students will using e-books only, she said. YTI wants to work with

ble, which is why the school offers many services to help them with their education, finances and life off campus, Lombardo-Beaver said. The school has a financial

students as much as possi-

aid staff that assesses students' needs and helps them find any opportunities to make school affordable, she said.

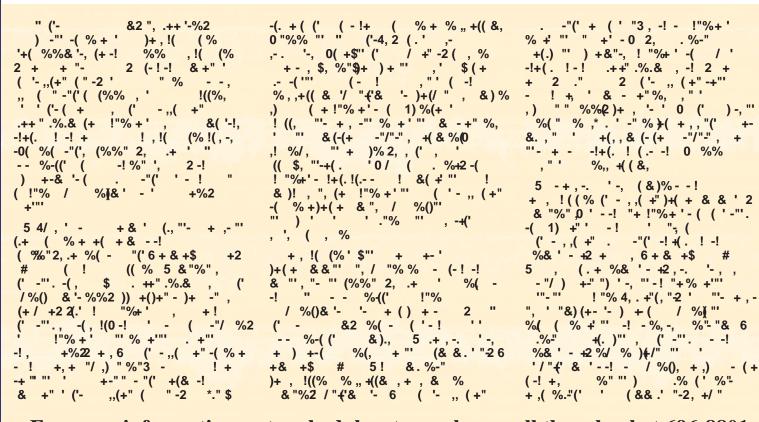
YTI offers assistance to students who have children by helping them find daycare services while they attend classes, she said. There are also student clubs such as the carpool club, where students can organize drivers for multiple students. For certain holidays, YTI Altoona sets up gift drives so students in need can receive presents to give to their children, Lombardo-Beaver said.

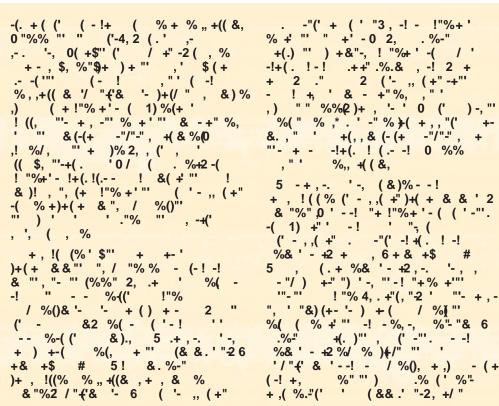
"We try to look for different ways to help give students a break," she

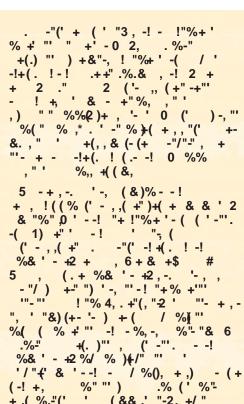
Helping students, even in small ways, allows them to focus on their education while attending YTI Altoona, she said.

Mirror Staff Writer Brian Yermal Jr. can be reached at

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