

Educational Speakers' Bureau

Austin Donovan

Josh Finch

with guidance from Rob Parker, Kosciusko Chamber of Commerce

Kosciusko Leadership Academy, 2017-2018

Our guide, Allyn P. Decker, Ph.D.

The typical KLA student is employed in a professional career field – banking, accounting, sales, engineering, etc., and is on the right path in life. Have we ever thought of how we arrived at this point in our lives, rather than looking in our rearview at Police Chief Scott Whitaker’s cherries and berries flashing, on Judge Michael Reed’s docket, and ultimately behind the bars of Kosciusko County’s jail (which doesn’t even have a basketball hoop). What about the adults in our community who are in the wrong occupation and are living unhappy lives? Or the increasing number of students who begin college and do not finish with a degree? Perhaps we have stayed on the right path due to our personalities or even luck, regardless, there were plenty of forks in the road, and as we know the best time to make decisions and begin planning is sooner rather than later. The questions are: how we make those decisions, who we can trust for solid guidance, and, ultimately, what we want to do with our lives for the next 30-50 years.

Looking back to my years in High School, a guidance counselor did little more than issue a locker and sign us up for a list of classes based on level of past academic performance, with the goal of getting one more student to graduate with “Core 40” or “Honors” designation, which did little more for the student and more for the future funding of the school system. There was little to no discussion of what we wanted to do with the next 30-50 years of our lives, or what was even available. There are courses available outside mathematics and chemistry, but both I and Josh knew we would not become the next Elvis or Bob Ross, so music and art were out. If we had known that “...more than 60 percent of the skilled-trades labor force is 45 or older,” (“America’s Skilled...”), Josh and I understood supply and demand and can realize those under-filled positions would provide a good living. There was a stigma we perceived around trade skills that these careers were best left as a last resort, and our best option was to go the four-year college route. Was there a conflict of interest between what was best for our futures and what the Department of Education wanted to see? That is a difficult question to answer, and neither of us could say we would have chosen to pursue trade skills instead

of professional education. We do both agree that a person needs to be responsible for their own actions and decisions, but it is difficult for a young person who has had little exposure to the “real world” to know what decision to make when we are not fully aware of the truths of all of our options.

Professional education has worked out well for us, but many are funneled down that route and, “56% of college students who started at a 4-year college drop out by year 6 of their college career,” (“US College...”). I believe everyone can be successful, given they are on a path they are passionate about, properly prepared for, and rewarded fairly. Opportunity cost refers to the benefit a person could have received but declined in order to pursue an alternate route. The opportunity cost of these dropout students is the opportunity to plan for a career path in high school that they are passionate about and trained for from an earlier age, rather than leaving college and starting over, which by that point they are years behind their peers who have gone down the trade skills path, which turned out to be the best fit for them after all.

If these students, bound to fail on the path of professional education they really had no true passion to venture down in the first place, had found a career that did inspire them, this would save them years of failure and despair, society from individuals who fall off their path and lack resources or confidence to hop back up on another good path, and governments and universities dollars that dropouts are never going to repay because they never became a doctor or lawyer and were never paid the half-million dollar salary they were told to expect. There is more to choosing a career path than simply taking someone’s academic performance and intelligence and placing them on a career path that requires that level of performance, the path also needs to be a good fit. Mentoring and shadowing can be a great way to provide insight to individuals curious about what the job is really like in the real world; actually hearing from an experienced professional who is currently in

the workforce and learning from them what their career is really like is far superior to the high school guidance counselor's personal opinion on a career they have never actually worked. Rob Parker, Kosciusko Chamber of Commerce, has developed a vision of connecting students who are not fully aware of what the real world has to offer and experienced industry professionals. This enables the students to learn what the real world has to offer, but also provides the satisfaction of passing down knowledge to the next generation to the industry professionals. Rob has made clear the need for a software system that will streamline meeting and matching these two groups of people, but has ran into some cost issues and understanding the realm of software development. Josh and I have worked with Rob to understand his criteria and offer suggestions to those criteria for a system, as well as sourcing a developer and resolving the hurdles that come with meshing a system to Warsaw Community Schools' technology.

Peakey Enterprises, located in Warsaw, has been selected to meet the Community's needs, keeping the software development and funds local. The software has been designed and the logistics of launching a portal to mesh students with industry professionals has been worked through, and Rob is working with the Dekko Foundation to finalize capital funding of the project. This project has been solidified, and a soft launch of the software is projected in four to six weeks, approximately May 2018. However, great ideas and tools are only useful to the end user, therefore our future goal is to gain momentum with a strong marketing strategy in order to capture a large group of early users, which is essential to any technology's success. Continued efforts and funding would be best used on training teachers and marketing the software not only in schools but also to groups of community leaders and the workforce. The final goal would be to spread the need for skilled workers within Kosciusko county to other areas outside the county in an effort to attract

outside skilled workers, in addition to helping students in our own county follow their passion and path to success.

## References

1. "America's Skilled Trades Dilemma: Shortages Loom As Most-In-Demand Group Of Workers Ages." Joshua Wright, 7 Mar 2013. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/emsi/2013/03/07/americas-skilled-trades-dilemma-shortages-loom-as-most-in-demand-group-of-workers-ages/#20a043d66397>.
2. "U.S. College Dropout Rate and Dropout Statistics." 9 Jan 2018. <https://www.collegeatlas.org/college-dropout.html>.