



Tyler Elliott “got lucky.”

The New Hope High School senior admits he didn’t do any research about taking classes at the Lowndes County School District’s Career Technology Center.

In fact, Elliott said his primary motivation was a few of his friends were taking a class at the CTC and he wanted to join them.

These days, Elliott's willingness to try something new paved the way for him to complete two years of industrial maintenance and welding at the CTC.

"I wouldn't change it," Elliott said. "I have changed into a better person being here. I have built relationships with (Industrial Maintenance instructor) Mr. (Eddie) Hankins and (Welding instructor) Mr. (Jordan) Hawkins. That is something I wouldn't take back."

Elliott saw an additional benefit from his time at the CTC. Earlier this year, he applied for and then interviewed for an opportunity at Airbus Helicopters, Inc. in Columbus, which pays for him to go to school for two months and sets him up for a two-year apprenticeship. After that, Elliott will start as a full-time employee.

"No doubt it will be a long-term job," Elliott said. "That will be my main source of income for a long time. I have a passion for welding and, eventually, I want to have my own welding fab shop or welding repair shop."

The opportunity at Airbus is an example of how a student in welding or industrial maintenance can gain valuable experience that will help them after they graduate. Work-based learning (WBL) is another way Year 3 welding and industrial maintenance students can get jobs with local businesses and earn "real-world" experience.



Angus Soule, Preston Sanders, Brady Rickman and Tyler Jordan Spears are the latest soon-to-be graduates to take advantage of the WBL approach that places students in work-place settings. Culinary arts students at the CTC also took advantage of those opportunities, while Year 3 Health Science students were eligible to go through Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) certification at Aurora Health & Rehabilitation in Columbus.

Elliott said his experience working at Grassmasters and H&R Agri-Power, which are in Columbus, helped lay a foundation for everything that has followed. He thought it would be fun to work on tractors and excavators and thanked Hawkins for helping him get that job, where he said he “learned more at that job than any other job.”

“H&R definitely taught me a lot of things,” Elliott said. “You learned how to piece together information and do things step by step. It teaches a lot of responsibility and memorization.”

Elliott also said his work experience and entering welding competitions through the CTC helped teach him how to perform under pressure, which is another skill that will come in handy after he graduates from high school.

Soule (residential and commercial work at Weldon Electric in Columbus), Sanders (Allen’s Frame and Body Shop and Nissan), Rickman (structural welding at Industrial Fabricators, Inc. in Columbus) and Spears (HVAC work for his grandfather at Progressive Heating and Cooling and mechanic work at T&T Diesel Service in Columbus) also have capitalized on opportunities through the CTC to make money and to get a head start on their professional careers.

The hours vary from business to business, but the students are grateful for the opportunities and exposure to different paths while in high school.

“I didn’t expect it, but it feels more natural than coming to school every day,” Soule said. “I don’t like sitting in the classroom and doing schoolwork. I enjoy putting my hands on things and working on things and thinking about how to fix things. It came more natural to be working. It is also nice to have some money.”

Said Sanders, “It has me set up for life. I grew up doing mechanical work and now I have welding under my belt, so I have pretty much everything I need. My three years of welding experience will help when a welding job comes open.”

All five students are equally enthusiastic about encouraging others in the district to take a class – any class – at the CTC. It can’t hurt but try, especially if you find something you love and you get lucky.

“Trades are the way to go the way right now the way the economy is,” said Spears, who has a variety of future options, including work in HVAC or as an auto mechanics or going to East Mississippi Community College to earn his automotive certifications. “Trades are the smartest move because our parents didn’t want to do them and there are a lot of jobs and there is a lot of money. They are not hard jobs. All you have to have is a good work ethic.”

Elliott can attest to that. He is working with Ashton Budgins, another CTC student, who his own landscaping business, prior to going to Airbus. From wanting to hang out with his buddies to building relationships with his instructors to building professional connections, Elliott hopes other students take a chance on the CTC and get lucky.

“Definitely do some research,” Elliott said. “The CTC does tours for sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders at all the schools. Go through the tours, figure out which teacher you might like and which class you might be interested in.

“Do it. You have four periods in a day, so why not use one period to do something you think you might like instead of just sitting in a classroom learning a subject you may not feel inclined to learn,” Soule said. “If you come over here, you will find something you like. Anybody can find something they like over here.”