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Front Page News

Friday, March 21st, 2025

Glendale students partner with RCC on certified nursing assistant program

By Chrissy Ewald of the Daily Courier

GLENDALE — In a small classroom at Glendale High School, students took turns washing each other's hands, cleaning under the fingernails and toting bins of warm water back and forth from the sink.

Two anatomical models surveyed the room, and a lifelike health care mannequin, dubbed "Barbara Plastic" by the students, occupied one of two hospital beds that took up much of the room's floor space.

The lesson plan Thursday was a bit different from typical high school classes: along with the hand washing, the lab included a lesson about oral health care.

"She brushed my teeth today," Kirsten Brown laughed.

"I think that I was the only one that practiced that," her lab partner, Anna Stromberg, mused.

The two juniors were two of 10 students in a semester-long class based at Glendale High School that guides high school students through becoming certified nursing assistants, a certification that opens up job opportunities and sets the stage for continuing education.

Brown said she plans to become a veterinarian, which takes years of schooling. For her, being a CNA represents a fallback plan while she continues her education.

"I'm doing the CNA program so that I have work throughout 10 years of college," she said.

Stromberg said she plans to become a radiology nurse. "CNA class is just kind of baby steps for anyone in the medical field," she said. "If you pass a test, you go straight into the hospital or a nursing home. So it's really cool."

The high school's CNA program is taught by Misty Morningstar, a longtime Glendale resident who is an instructor at Rogue Community College.

It's open to a wide variety of students; Brown is one of six students from Glendale High, Stromberg is homeschooled, another student is from Azalea Country School in Azalea and two others are from South Umpqua High School in Myrtle Creek.

Online coursework for the class can be done remotely, but all the students come to the campus on Thursdays for the lab.

Brown said the class is really positive.

"I don't feel judged for, 'Oh, I messed up.' They're just going to be like, 'OK, well, you did that wrong, so this is what you can do,'" she said.

"Normally, it would be intimidating to be the first one and try to do things, but actually, it's not," Stromberg said. "Everybody's pretty positive and encouraging. ... When we mess up, we just joke about it. We don't make fun of anybody."

"They're just a real cohesive group," said Rebecca Clark, an adviser at nonprofit Project Youth+. "They're so focused, and they're just excited."

Project Youth+ is one of the program's partners, and provides up to \$2,000 in tuition per student, a total of \$20,000.

Other partners include RCC, which provides \$5,000 toward tuition for students; AllCare Health, which provided a \$10,000 grant for the lab equipment and supplies; \$1,000 in tuition per student from the Healthy Rural Oregon Grant; and \$3,500 from the Roundhouse Foundation for expenses, including a defibrillator for the lab. The Glendale School District provides transportation, the building and the instructor.

The program is free for the students to participate.

Morningstar said seeing students understand new concepts is "very exciting."



JULIE ANDERSON / Daily Courier Certified nursing assistant student Maya McMillen has her hands washed and nails tended to by fellow CNA student Haley Twyman during training at Glendale High School on Thursday. The school has partnered with Rogue Community College to bring the CNA program to high school students in the region, allowing them to earn a certificate.

Advertisement for ROE (Rogue One) with text: POWERED BY TRUST, DRIVEN BY VALUE, WE BUY CARS

Advertisement for RCC (Rogue Community College) with text: Get into the groove. Spring term starts March 31, 855-GOROGUE

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"When they get a skill like today, we talked about why oral care is important. One comment was, you know, there's a lot of homeless people, and if they don't have the means to get to a dentist, then they're suffering from chronic pain" and other issues, she said. "They're like, 'Whoa, I never thought about that.'"

This is the school's second time offering the CNA program in the past three years. Out of seven students in the first iteration, three are now working toward more advanced nursing degrees at Umpqua Community College, while two others are now working in the medical field.

Because the high school now has a lab, the students only had to travel to RCC for an orientation and to Grants Pass for things like clinical tests at the hospital.

Glendale, a tiny mill town just across the Josephine County border in Douglas County, is the third most medically underserved community in Oregon, according to a 2024 report from the Oregon Office for Rural Health at OHSU. The closest hospital is 27 miles away in Grants Pass, and a community clinic in Glendale is only open part-time. It has no dentist or full-time mental healthcare provider.

Though students who go through the CNA program may not stay in Glendale, or may leave for continuing education and not come back, the certification should help them find work and open opportunities for the future.

"It's pretty exciting. It's just a lot of common-sense stuff," Morningstar said. "But also going to get them into a job that they can learn basic stuff and progress to more advanced skills if they want. The CNA is a highly sought-after position."

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