

GREATER Kansas City BUSINESS

May 2008

Students and Teachers are Good for Business

Last fall, Beloit Solutions Group CEO Mike Thiessen made what many might consider an unusual hiring decision. Seeking a techsavvy, part-time employee to provide help-desk support and make enhancements to one of his company's Web sites (www.vistaconnection.com), Mike chose to bypass his usual hiring channels, opting instead to hire a high school student intern through UpLink.

"It's one of the best hiring decisions I've ever made," Thiessen said about student intern Josh Jagoda, a junior at Blue Valley North High School. "Josh is a major contributor to our company—not just because of the daily tasks and projects he completes for us, but because of the valuable insight he brings to our business. As a business owner, it's critical to stay in touch with younger generations."

Like Thiessen, employers throughout Greater Kansas City are finding that students—and teachers—are good for business. Companies of all sizes and disciplines have begun addressing some of their most pressing workforce needs by partnering with UpLink, a community "hub" that connects the workplace to the classroom in order to engage, excite and inspire K-12 students to explore real-world applications of math, engineering, technology, science and business.

Now in its second year, UpLink offers several programs that are helping businesses bring industry concepts to life for teachers and students. In addition to infusing classrooms with YouthFriends school-based mentors and volunteer classroom speakers, UpLink also helps link students and teachers to hands-on experiences outside of the classroom, including job shadows and classroom field trips, student internships and summer teacher externships.

“Kansas City is fortunate to have a resource that brings businesses and education together,” Thiessen said. “I think most companies agree that economic and workforce development begins in local schools, but what most don’t know is how or where to start—that’s why it’s great to have UpLink.”

UpLink is operated by YouthFriends, a nationally recognized leader in school-based mentoring.

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