

Miami Herald

Posted on Sun, Jul. 13, 2014

Internships give high school students a glimpse of banking world

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DANIEL BOCK / FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

Starting summer vacation for most students usually means sleeping in, binging on television shows or hanging out with friends.

For Cameron Harel, 17, it meant waking up at 6:45 a.m., putting on his iPhone headphones and taking three buses to get to his summer internship job at Popular Community Bank.

Harel was among 45 students who participated in Future Bankers' Camp – an intensive four-week, 150-hour internship

focused on teaching high school juniors how the financial industry works.

“I learned what banking can really be,” said Harel, who graduated from the program on June 26, at Miami Dade College’s Wolfson campus alongside his peers.

“It’s like a bunch of gears to a big machine that make a bank work together.”

Now a senior at Coral Reef Senior High School, Jada Alexis McGill, 17, interned for two weeks at Community Bank of Florida.

“I’ve learned about public speaking, networking with other people and getting to know them,” said McGill, who dedicated a month of her summer.

This was the kind of outcome Connie Laguna was looking for when she helped start the camp in 2008 with the Center for Financial Training, a nonprofit organization that serves as the educational branch for the American Bankers Association.

“We tried to provide a curriculum that students could immediately apply,” said Laguna.

The camp required students have a 3.0 grade-point average, be enrolled in Miami-Dade Public Schools’ Academy of Finance program, and have two letters of recommendation from their lead teachers or counselors.

Students first trained for two weeks at Miami Dade College and then were placed within one of the 15 partnering banks for the remaining two weeks.

Upon completion of the program, participants were awarded with a CFT Bank Teller certificate, which would allow them to apply for a customer service representative or teller position at any bank.

“We’ve had students who have been employed by the banks they interned at,” said Laguna.

Winy Delcin, 18, a former student at Coral Gables Senior High who graduated from bankers’ camp in 2013, is now a full-time employee at Espirito Santo Bank.

“Future Bankers’ Camp made the difference between me and another teenager applying for the job because I had a better résumé and the camp taught me interview skills and on-the-job training,” said Delcin, who began studying finance at Miami Dade College and was asked to be a guest speaker at the graduation.

“I now work in the credit department, while my friends are at McDonald’s flipping burgers,” said Delcin, as applause filled the stage.

For Juan Del Busto, Ocean Bank and CFT board member, the main goal of the camp is to inspire graduates to seek higher education in finance.

“Hopefully it gets them into college and to start a career in the financial industry,” Busto said. “Ultimately it’s to get them on the right path and expose them to things they have never been exposed to and make them see there are things out there for them.”

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