Helping kids find their path

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SANTA CRUZ — About 200 educators, students and business leaders came together at the Your Future is Our Business luncheon Wednesday in celebration of business and education partnerships helping students realize their dream jobs.

Your Future is a nonprofit agency based at Cabrillo College which offers career panels, job shadowing and internships for the county’s middle and high school students.

Bryan Wall, deputy superintendent of the county’s Office of Education, said the agency is unique across the nation.

“They are able to deliver a bring business and education together in a way we haven’t seen before,” Wall said.

The 10th annual luncheon at the Cocoanut Grove, featured several students speaking about how the program helped them decide upon a career path. The program often partners with the Regional Occupational Program at high schools.

One Watsonville High School graduate traveled from Washington D.C., where he is in graduate school at Georgetown University, to testify to how the program helped him. Daniel Rico said his first job was working alongside his mother in a raspberry field.

In a passionate speech, he said his mother was in school only until fourth grade, and that his father made it through middle school. But he said he envisioned a bright future despite that history, due in part to mentors he met at school and through school programs.

“My past did not stop me,” he said. “The community, people like you guys, are shaping the future so people like me can succeed.”

Lluvia Lopez told the audience her Administration of Justice ROP class at Soquel High helped her land a job with the Capitola Police Department. She works as a parking enforcement officer and hopes to promote to a community service or patrol officer, she said.

The class and other opportunities to learn about careers really boosted her respect for education, Lopez said.

“I’m harvesting the seeds I planted in high school,” she said. “And education is the key.”

Janie Sanchez, a senior at Harbor High, said the insight into the careers she got with Your Future and ROP helped her to pinpoint a specific career in the health care field.

An ROP health careers class and a job shadowing day at a local healthcare facility sparked her interest in ultrasound radiology, Sanchez said.

“That seemed the most interesting,” she said. “It really helped me decide where to focus.”

Another student, Anthony Daugherty, said he ended up with a job after taking advantage of a job shadow program.

Daugherty, a Delta Charter High School junior, is now working at Branciforte Auto and getting school credit for the hours.

“It’s great; I can’t complain,” he said.

Mary Gaulke Forster, principal of Delta Charter, said she also serves on the Your Future board.

“It works really well for us,” she said. “It would take us months to build the kind of partnerships they provide.”