**Students’ dreams grow in career classes**

Countywide program prepares students to tackle the future

By DEBBIE JONES

SANTA CRUZ — Joseph Deitrail, 20, didn’t know where he was headed before he enrolled in a photography class at Renaissance High School. He only knew he was behind in his studies and needed the credits if he wanted to graduate.

Shannon Swanson, 18, aimed for a career with a focus on international law, but wasn’t sure how to get there when she signed up for a business and marketing course to fill up her schedule at Harbor High School.

Edith Rosal Garcia, 15, also looked for earning job skills that could help her father, whose own education ceased short, realize his entrepreneurial dreams.

For all three students, the classes through the Santa Cruz County Office of Education’s Regional Occupation Program turned out to offer much more than they had imagined. They described their experiences to an audience of more than 200 business and education professionals at the annual Your Future in Our Business/Education luncheon at the Coastline Grove on Wednesday.

Grow, Deitrail, who graduated from Renaissance in 2012 and plans to enroll at Cabrillo College, said the classes changed the trajectory of his life.

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“My dream is to be a professional photographer and videographer,” he said. “I want to enjoy the things I love to do.”

Garcia, 15, is a sophomore at Cabrillo College. She credits the marketing class for her decision to pursue entry into the UC Berkeley Haas School of Business to study international business.

Garcia, the first in her family to go to college, said she’s gained the confidence to expand her horizons, to forge a path her younger sister and brother can follow.

A marketing class made me parents feel honored by having their first daughter make it to college,” Garcia said. “‘Here I am at Cabrillo. Now I want to grow the dream even bigger. My dad’s dream is to attend and graduate from UC. I know I can do it.’

More than 3,000 students are enrolled in Regional Occupation Program classes at 23 locations throughout the county. Classes prepare or train students for a wide range of careers, such as automotive services technician, welding, culinary arts, business management and dental assisting and graphic design.

Your Future in Our Business is a nonprofit that seeks to encourage young people to think about careers and reach their goals. Through career panels at area schools and mentoring, the organization has reached thousands of county students.

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