

High school students learn about careers in business, politics

By Mary Niederberger / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Tara Douglass, 17, a senior at Keystone Oaks High School, had been feeling stressed out about applying to colleges and choosing a profession.

“How are you supposed to know what you want to do with the rest of your life when you are our age?” Tara queried.

But that pressure started to ease as she participated in the U Can B program that was brought to Keystone Oaks last year, exposing students to presentations from business and government professionals and community leaders.

“They tell you how they didn’t entirely set out to do their jobs but that they followed a path that bounced around,” Tara said.

U Can B is a program of Building Bridges for Business, a 4-year-old Pittsburgh nonprofit whose goal is to provide educational opportunities for small businesses, said founder Linda Handley.

U Can B started last year when the Building Bridges program moved into the education arena by partnering with Keystone Oaks to offer presentations to students that were modeled after the Building Bridges online video series, “Coffee With,” which shows interviews with business and political leaders sharing their secrets of success.

The second season of U Can B kicked off Thursday at Keystone Oaks, but this time it included students from Propel Braddock Hills, Pittsburgh Allderdice, Oakland Catholic and Winchester Thurston high schools. The group of about 50 students heard about careers as elected officials from Pittsburgh City Council members Corey O’Connor and Dan Gilman.

Mr. O’Connor said he was a senior education major at Duquesne University when his father, the late Mayor Bob O’Connor, died in office. Corey O’Connor took a semester off and during that time ran into U.S. Rep. Mike Doyle, who offered him a community representative job in his office.

It was that job that helped Corey O’Connor decide he wanted to run for office and work to make the city a better place.

Mr. Gilman said he felt out of place as a liberal arts major at Carnegie Mellon University. His first foray into politics was as student body president. He did an internship on Capitol Hill in Washington and came back to Pittsburgh, where he started to work for then-City Councilman Bill Peduto. When Mr. Peduto ran for mayor, Mr. Gilman ran for his council seat.

“It’s not about finding a job, it’s about finding a passion,” Mr. Gilman told the students.

Keystone Oaks High School principal Scott Hagy said he wanted to bring the program to his school because it helps teens to envision careers they may not have considered.

“Too often kids are told things they shouldn’t do. Through this program we want them to learn ‘Don’t let people tell you can’t do it,’ ” Mr. Hagy said.