

Posted Online: Sept. 24, 2010, 6:45 pm

## Q-C students see future at skilled-labor career expo

[Comment on this story](#)

By Nicole Lauer, [nlauer@qconline.com](mailto:nlauer@qconline.com)

DAVENPORT -- More than 100 area high school students got a taste of some local career opportunities and the education they require Friday at the Junior Achievement High School Advanced Manufacturing Careers Expo.

Friday was the first of two sessions organized for more than 400 students from 22 area high schools. The event, which will continue on Oct. 8, offered hands-on experience and classroom discussions on welding, machining, logistics and other advanced manufacturing topics.

Junior Achievement of the Heartland president Barbara VenHorst said the first-time expo is an answer to the local businesses who say they do not have enough skilled labor and it is also an answer to students who feel a four-year degree is not the right step after high school.

Ms. VenHorst said JA started offering career expos on building trades and has expanded that effort to include advanced manufacturing. This February it will branch out again to offer a health-care career expo.

Like the majority of students who participated Friday, Rock Island High School juniors Blake Ebert and Austin Eastman said they were most excited to try their hand at the Sim Welder, a virtual reality welding simulator.



**Photo: Nicole Lauer**

Austin Eastman, a Rock Island High School junior, tries his hand at a virtual reality welding machine while technical training coordinator Dennis Schnoor looks on at the Junior Achievement High School Advanced Manufacturing Careers Expo on Friday. Mr. Eastman was one of more than 100 students from 22 area high schools taking part in the expo that offered hands-on experience and lectures on career opportunities.



**Photo: Nicole Lauer**

Blake Ebert, a Rock Island High School junior, tries his hand at a virtual reality welding machine at the John T. Blong Technology Center during the Junior Achievement High School Advanced Manufacturing Careers Expo on Friday. Mr. Ebert was one of more than 100

By putting on a helmet that looks like one used in welding, students hold a tool that looks like a torch and practices the motion and angle of welding. Students receive instant feedback on how they did on a computer screen that alerts them to areas that need improvement.

students from 22 area high schools taking part in the expo that offered hands-on experience and lectures on career opportunities.

Both Mr. Ebert and Mr. Eastman have completed two years of welding classes at high school and said the simulator practice was very unusual.

"It's weird because you are not feeling the heat and the mask is different," said Mr. Eastman. "It's very different than what we practice at school."

Dennis Schnoor, technical training coordinator at Blong Technology Center where the expo was held, said the \$50,000-\$60,000 simulator is a great tool that can cut the time it takes students to learn the basics of welding by 30 percent compared to if they were actually welding, not to mention the savings on materials like steel and gas.

Students also got to work with Roger Johnson, lead instructor for the CNC machining department, who helped students use a CNC Mill machine to craft keychains. Mr. Johnson said students were very excited to make their own keychain and to learn more about the career path.

"We're just trying to get them involved in how it all works today," Mr. Johnson said.