**Get Ahead by Planning Ahead**

If you want to be successful in your education, one of the most important things you can do is to start planning and take action early. Springtime can be one of the best times to take inventory of what needs to be done in your life to reach your career goals and be successful. The first place you can begin is to talk to an Educational Opportunity Center (EOC) counselor about your career direction, apply for financial aid and select a college. The EOC program is designed to help you in each of these areas.

In this issue of the EOC newsletter, you will read about how to spring into action and move forward towards your educational goals. Readers will also read how to build a network for success. We also feature two Educational Opportunity Center participants who are on the move and are taking action now toward their goals. In addition, we are highlighting one of our partnering agencies, Tri-County Child and Family Development Council, Inc. Head Start and the valuable services they provide to the community.

As you are trying to make a decision about school for possible summer or fall attendance, do not forget that it is time to file taxes and complete the correct FAFSA form. For summer attendance students need to complete the 07-08 FAFSA and for fall classes the 08-09 FAFSA. The maximum Pell Grant award will increase from $4,310 (July 1, 2007 to June 30, 2008) to $4,731 for the 2008-09 award year (July 1, 2008 to June 30, 2009). It is very important that you file your FAFSA early to receive the maximum amounts that you qualify for based on your financial need, costs of attendance and your enrollment status. Remember financial aid, especially grants are based on need and the date received.

The counselors at the Educational Opportunity Center are happy to meet with you individually to talk about your educational goals, and to help you develop a plan that will make you most successful. The EOC counselors have a wealth of information and resources available to offer. Our goal is to inform, inspire and encourage you to fulfill your potential and make your dreams a reality. So if you are a potential non-traditional student, please do not hesitate to take advantage of the free educational services available to you through the Educational Opportunity Center program. Remember, the key is to start early to make plans for your future and your educational journey. Call us today for an appointment!

“Make the most of yourself for that is all there is of you.”

-Ralph Waldo Emerson
Spring has finally arrived! The snow is melting and the days are longer. The brains of recent spring breakers have returned to normal and the “tax man or woman cometh.” Often this is the time of year that people start to look for ways to improve or upgrade areas of their life. For most people, that will include some type of overhaul or spring cleaning. The first thought might be of people feverishly scrubbing floors, removing cobwebs, washing windows and ceiling fans and a host of other forgotten or overlooked chores. Typically these chores have been routinely done during the winter months but just on the surface. Spring cleaning is a deeper clean. It takes thought and there must be a plan of attack, including a check list. Before getting started, which is the hard part, you need to make sure that you have all of the necessary tools; brooms, mops, cleaning towels etc. It will also be helpful to enlist the help of cheap labor, i.e. sons, daughters, nieces, nephews. You get the idea, right? You also need to have cleaning supplies. Once you are ready to start the best policy is to clean from top to bottom. The process will be daunting and will take time. The results of the hard work will be well worth it in the end. In addition to finding ways to improve their surroundings, many people are looking to overhaul other aspects of their life. Sometimes this includes getting in shape, taking up a new hobby or considering a career change. The basic principles are the same. You must have a plan or goal, make a check list and gather all of the necessary tools. For those considering a career change, additional education may be a part of their plan. That’s where the Educational Opportunity Center (EOC) program comes in. The EOC program provides free assistance to adult students 19 and older that do not have a 4-year degree; this includes those that are seeking a GED. Those enrolled in the program are able to meet with an Educational Counselor for one-on-one assistance with developing a career plan, completing admissions forms and completing financial aid forms. This is also a time for students to ask questions regarding the educational process or simply explore their options. The EOC program also works in partnership with other community agencies to assist students as needed. If you or someone you know is interested in exploring educational opportunities, call today for an appointment at 319-433-1220. Now is the time to spring into action.

**FINANCIAL AID REMINDER**

If you are considering starting school anytime between now and the summer of 2008, and have not filled out a federal financial aid application (07-08 FAFSA) yet, you should do it right away. Simply call (319) 433-1230 to make an appointment with an EOC counselor and we’ll help you complete it. Also, keep in mind that beginning January 1, 2008, you can submit your FAFSA for the 08-09 school year which beings next Fall.
Statistics from the Federal Bureau of Labor indicate that 70 percent of all jobs are found through networking (personal contacts). A mere 15 percent are through a search firm, 10-12 percent through want ads, 4 percent have been found by people creating their own jobs, and 2 percent by blindly sending out resumes. With these statistics in mind, the benefits of networking are obvious. Networking is a great tool for college students, job seekers, and those that are currently in the work field. So how and who should you build a network with?

According to The Free Dictionary, a network is defined as “an extended group of people with similar interests or concerns who interact and remain in contact for mutual assistance and support.” Knowing that, now one has to know how to build a successful network. The best way to start a network is to simply be involved. Establish relationships with many people. It always helps to be a curious friend. You never know who will be able to help you or who you may be able to help. An important aspect of networking is to make sure you are genuine. Don’t be a fake. Get to know people because you genuinely care about their success and your success. Always deliver more than you expect to get back. Others will appreciate your support and be much more willing to help you succeed. A great saying I’ve heard is, “It is not what you know, it is not who you know, it is what you know about who you know.”

Volunteering is another great way to build your network. There are many local agencies that are in need of volunteers. The Volunteer Center of Cedar Valley offers a listing of opportunities in the Cedar Valley. Visit www.vccv.org to see how you can help. Attention college students’, volunteering is a great way to gain work experience for your resume and potentially increase your chances for scholarships. Volunteering can also improve your communication skills, help you explore a career, help establish new relationships, enhance your confidence and leadership skills. It is also a great way to really bring about change in your community.

Joining professional organization will also help build a solid network. Join an association that you are passionate about. The Cedar Falls and Waterloo library has a reference entitled “Encyclopedia of Association.” It is a guide to more than 1300 associations in every industry and functional specialty. Also, be in contact with professionals in the field in which you are currently working or plan to work in. Having a mentor is always a great idea.

College students that network have a huge advantage. Consider all the socializing that a typical college student does, crank that up a few notches and you have networking that can truly help students land their dream job upon graduation. College is a great time to form lasting relationships with college professors and other students. Make sure to introduce yourself to guest speakers that come to your class. It is also a great time to do an internship to form excellent contacts for the future.

In conclusion, networking is a great way to cultivate relationships throughout your entire lifetime. Remember to keep in contact with your network; create a rolodex to keep your contacts organized and always on hand. Just think of all the interesting people you could meet. Be sure to make time for networking, it will pay off.
Agency Highlight

Tri-County Child & Family Development Council Inc.
Head Start Program

By Shanteisha Bruce

As we spring into the arrival of fresh flowers and clothe ourselves with a fresh attitude, The Educational Opportunity Center (EOC) wishes to acknowledge one of the agencies with whom we have worked closely with over the past years. The EOC program has also partnered with this agency to assist many of their participant parents in furthering their education.

This article is an overview of the services available at Tri-County Child and Family Development Council, Inc. Head Start Program.

Tri-County Headstart goes beyond the ABC’s and provides quality, healthy growth opportunities for children as well as their parents. Established in 1965 to help low-income families provide their children with developmentally appropriate education, health and social services to better prepare them to achieve in school and society, Headstart has proven through research to reduce child anti-social behavior, and increase parent involvement in later years. Initially, serving preschool children ages 3-5, Early Head Start (EHS) was created in 1994 to target the needs of pregnant women and infants and toddlers, thereby fostering positive development at an earlier stage.

Head Start Services are immeasurable services that partner with parents to equip our children of tomorrow with the building blocks they need for success!

**Children's Services**

**Academic.** Head Start prepares children for school by teaching them to listen, speak clearly, follow directions, solve problems, and use numbers and words.

**Social.** The program teaches children to respect others and how to cooperate and resolve differences.

**Health.** Head Start teaches personal and dental hygiene and provides daily nutrition and health screenings and follow-up care by medical and dental professionals.

**Disabilities.** Children with disabilities are welcomed and receive services from specially trained teachers. At least 10 percent of Head Start participants have physical, mental and emotional disabilities.

**Family/Community Services**

Through personal counseling and resource-sharing, Head Start helps family members with academic, childrearing, job and housing issues.

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Parents and grandparents volunteer in the classroom, assist on field trips and on Policy Council, which guides each local program.

Head Start partners with community groups such as the Educational Opportunity Center, and businesses to link children and families with resources such as medical/dental care, child care or job training.

**Funding**

Head Start is funded by the United States Congress and administered through the Department of Health and Human Services. Local centers are in Black Hawk County as well as Grundy County.

The EOC program has worked closely with Headstart and has assisted staff and parents of children to return to school to pursue post secondary education. EOC would like to acknowledge Tri-County Child and Family Development Council, Inc. for the exceptional job they are doing! Keep up the good work; the impact is remarkable.

If interested in enrolling your child please call 319-235-0383 to get more information.

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**Inspirational Corner**

**Life is What You Choose**

The choices you’ve made have brought you to this point. Where do you choose to go next?

You have learned many things from the journey that you've taken. What do you wish to learn now?

From a vast array of possibilities, you have selected certain specific ones and successfully followed through with them. What are the possibilities that most interest you now?

It may sometimes seem that life is what happens to you. In truth, it is exactly the other way around.

Life is what you choose, what you do, what you think and what you create in each moment. All the other things going on provide the space and circumstances in which you make your life happen.

What do you choose to do with this day? Now is when you can bring your favorite dreams to life.

- Ralph Marston
Robin Wilson is in the Educational Opportunity Center spotlight as an adult learner returning back to college at Hawkeye Community College. She is married and recently bought a house, so rather than being on a beach for spring break, she is updating her kitchen and staying home with her husband, too. She has an adult daughter who is married with 2 boys. She decided to go back to school a year ago when she left her job of 15 years as an insurance investigator and was thinking of relocating. She needed to get her degree to become more competitive in any field.

Robin attended HCC in the 80’s then moved to Arizona, worked at North Arizona University and took some classes. She also took a course that provided a designation in insurance fraud claims law. With this great background she decided to pursue a degree in criminology that begins here at HCC. Once graduating from HCC in the fall, she will be transferring to the University of Northern Iowa.

She has always loved school; she just has not had the perfect opportunity to return full time until now. The single challenge in school has been due to the amount of snow days this semester and trying to learn the same amount of material as in previous semesters. She would like to compliment the instructors on their ability to cover the material and teach with this accelerated pace.

Kathy Martin assisted Robin with the FAFSA and also with transfer guidance. This allowed her to move forward more efficiently with her student loan and Kathy was also good at being available to answer any additional questions that she had regarding scholarships.

Robin also gained some valuable knowledge from the Academic Support Center with regard to tutoring. She states this is an awesome advantage to HCC.

When asked what advice she would give someone considering going back to school, Robin stated, “The advice that I would give someone that is considering returning to school is to do more than consider it. You just do it. Your degree is something that you will have no matter where you go.”

No matter what your level of ability, you have more potential than you could ever develop in a lifetime.

-Anonymous
The Educational Opportunity Center program works with 2,000 participants in a year. Some have a story that they are willing to share with others. They have found value in education and would like to assist others in deciding to reach for education.

We are spotlighting Malcolm Thomas as a student who faced obstacles in life but tackled going back to school with strength and determination. Malcolm tried college, then left not only college, but the state. He is a single dad of 3 children and holds custody of one child. He works about 30 hours a week at a pizza restaurant and balances school and parenting. He enjoys reading all types of books and has been a “self-learner” for years, reading everything he was interested in learning. He came back to Iowa with a strong determination to go back to school when he felt dissatisfied with his life and wanted greater meaning and satisfaction in a career instead of a job. Setting an example for his children is important to him and they will see he is always willing to learn.

Malcolm’s background was much like others. He played basketball at Waterloo East High School, graduated, went on to college straight out of high school. Malcolm admits he did not know how important college was at that time. The lure of working and making money presented itself. He became the manager of a pizza restaurant and issues arose in business that made Malcolm realize how important an education is. He learned that with a degree, he could start near the top, not ground floor up. He faced a 6-year gap between high school and college, but his determination eased his transition back to college.

His assessment of college is very positive and Malcolm shares that it feels great to learn something new constantly along with the satisfaction of completing class successfully, especially to achieve a long-term goal. He has found HCC to be a valuable educational experience. It really has prepared him well to go on to the University of Northern Iowa.

Malcolm received help with filling out his college application and FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) from the Educational Opportunity Center program. The EOC also directed him to key people at both HCC and UNI that were able to assist him in succeeding in school and transitioning from community college to the university. He was also given assistance with scholarship searches that may assist in affording his education.

When asked what advice he would give to someone considering going back to school, Malcolm responded, “Always tell themselves that they can do it and that the work is well worth the sacrifice. Surround yourself with positive people. Going back to school is one of the best decisions I have made.”

Our aspirations are our possibilities.

-Dr. Samuel Johnson
Providing You The Opportunity To Succeed

The Educational Opportunity Center program has provided quality service to the Cedar Valley area since 1988. EOC is sponsored by the University of Northern Iowa and funded by the U.S. Department of Education to recruit and assist 2000 non-traditional students with obtaining a secondary and/or postsecondary education.

The EOC program provides a wide range of comprehensive service to the participants. However, our primary focus is assisting students with the admissions and financial aid process, providing career and academic counseling, and assisting students with rehabilitating defaulted student loans. We also work closely with various community service agencies to assist our clients with other needs.

All of the services provided by the EOC program are free and in order to qualify for services, you must be 19 years of age or older and not have a completed baccalaureate degree. If you or someone you know has a desire to obtain a secondary and/or postsecondary education, call us for an appointment and we will be happy to assist you.

The University is an equal opportunity employer with a comprehensive plan for affirmative action.

Contact the EOC

College Access Program
Center for Urban Education
800 Sycamore St.
Waterloo, Iowa  50703-4730

Phone: 319.433.1230
Fax: 319.433.0160
Email: Educational-Opportunity-Center@uni.edu

Office Hours Monday-Friday:
8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.
Summer Hours: 7:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.