



Building Aspirations Throughout Rural Idaho

The High Desert College Collaborative expands educational opportunities

WORDS AND PHOTOS WINSLOW BROKAW

Ask a middle school student: What do you enjoy doing today that might make a great career for you in the future, and why? You might be surprised by their earnestness and vision.

"I want to be an Imagineer for what is known as 'The Happiest Place on Earth' ... Disneyland. This career excites me. I have a creative mind ... When I make machines and rides, I hope that they will encourage kids and families to follow their dreams and use their imagination."—sixth grader, Gooding Middle School

"I want to be a chicken rancher. I want to supply the world with high-quality food. I have grown chickens from a young age. I have

raised my chickens naturally. I give them herbs, meats, grains, and gravel ... I am going to MSU or Texas A&M and will get my degree in animal science and veterinary."—seventh grader, Wendell Middle School.

"My dream is to become a chemist ... I am going to be a student at MIT because I like robots and engineering ... My mom told me when I was a little girl, 'If I can dream it, I can do it.'"—Sixth grader, Shoshone School

These excerpts capture the aspirations of the nearly 400 middle schoolers who applied for a High Desert College Collaborative (HDCC) scholarship this spring.

HDCC is an educational nonprofit in its seventh year, working across rural Idaho

to inspire, connect, and celebrate the innate excitement and enthusiasm of students in fifth through eighth grades, building aspirations for college across the spectrum of trade, vocational, two-year, and four-year programs. Founded and directed by Bayard "Bags" Brokaw, a longtime educator, HDCC presently collaborates with 10 school districts: Bliss, Shoshone, Camas County, Carey, Dietrich, Glenns Ferry, Hagerman, Gooding, Richfield, and Wendell. HDCC partners with the Sun Valley Community School, which allows it to operate under its 501(c)(3) status, as well as with Boise State University, College of Southern Idaho, and the Idaho College Savings Program.

This spring, I had the unique opportunity

HDCC HIGH SCHOOL SCHOLARSHIPS

HDCC recently extended its reach beyond fifth through eighth grade to support the MC-HDCC High School Senior Scholarship, which is in its second year at Bliss and Wendell schools, thanks to a generous family fund. The scholarship, which is among the largest available, provides \$2,500 per year for two seniors and is renewable for the duration of the student's post-secondary academic program, up to four years, if the student remains in good academic standing.

HDCC Scholarship Awards can be put into a 529 Education Savings Plan or an existing education account. They can be used to help with tuition and/or books in a vocational, trade, two-year, or four-year program after graduation, or for a special program, camp, or relevant purchase during middle or high school connected to one's dreams.



HDCC founder Bags Brokaw presents an award to a young student.

to oversee HDCC's scholarship process and attend year-end assemblies where 209 students were honored with scholarships. (In six years, 1,109 students have been recognized). It was a joy to witness the excitement and awe in each student and to see how much is possible when a child's effort is seen and celebrated. As one mother stated, "I made sure to get out of work to watch my son receive his HDCC award. It's a huge deal for him and us, especially because he has an Individualized Education Plan. This is going straight on his wall."

HDCC believes that supporting earlier and equal access to educational information beyond high school helps students connect their schooling to possible future goals. By encouraging students to be active participants in their own education through aspirational workshops, HDCC gives children the chance to reflect on what they enjoy doing now, while introducing them to a broad range of educational opportunities available after high school.

Crystal Gillette, a sixth-grade teacher at Gooding School, reflected, "My students really enjoyed this experience, and it was very cool to

listen to them research and think about their future! I have not had students do this kind of thinking before, and I definitely see the benefit of it!" Students agree, stating, "The workshop has sparked my thinking about the future. Since then, I have thought about my interests and options a great deal."

HDCC believes that when it invests in the young people of our region, we all benefit. Blaine County is one of the most resourced counties in Idaho, supported in part by a workforce that commutes into the county daily. Roughly 40.2% of Blaine County jobs are filled by commuters from HDCC's collaborative communities. Yet far fewer resources flow back to the communities these workers call home. HDCC is building a bridge, investing directly in the aspirations and education of students in these neighboring communities, one student and one school at a time.

As former Superintendent Tim Perrigot of Wendell School District noted, "The greatest benefit of HDCC is that it creates opportunities ... that were not available prior or previously considered by students. The belief

they can go to college someday or a technical school. The idea that they have a chance."

No matter what a student wishes to do in the future, most aspirations will require a credential or degree of some kind. Bags Brokaw has called for broadening our perception and definition of college: "It is time to move beyond the traditional adage that college is not for everyone. Instead, let's broaden our perspective and affirm that college is indeed for everyone if we are willing to embrace the fact that colleges come in all varieties. It is time for the national dialogue to advance a broader definition of college and help build a bridge across the college-versus-non-college and rural-education divide."

HDCC is doing just this: Opening doors for students to pursue their aspirations across the spectrum of college-level opportunities and recognizing that Blaine County's vibrancy will continue to be linked to the aspirations and future education of our wonderful neighboring communities. ✨