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Yampah students launch careers before graduation

Teens pursue stage lighting, fashion design while still in high school

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GLENWOOD SPRINGS, Colorado – The bright lights of the stage and the fashion runway have hit two Yampah Mountain High School students, who are succeeding in real-world endeavors as part of their education at the small Glenwood Springs school.

Both Tanner Jeffryes, owner of This Little Light of Mine Lighting Co., and Erik Hesselman, an intern at Prada in Aspen, are earning credit toward graduation for their pursuits outside of the school walls.

Stage lighting clients 'took a leap of faith'

Jeffryes, 17, of Rifle first became interested in stage lighting when he was a sixth-grader at Carbondale Middle School (CMS), where he was in charge of the basic lighting for the all-school assemblies and concerts.

“When I walked into CMS, a lot of things had to be straightened out,” Jeffryes said. “I read the manual to the light board, and I just understood it. It was easy from there. CMS put me in charge of all things relating to lighting in their auditorium. After that, I just started collecting clients.”

When he moved on to Yampah, he managed the lighting for the school prom. In 2011, writer-director Kether Axelrod was producing an original play as part of an after-school program at CMS and needed tech support. The play “Super Villain Comics” was a technical challenge, with black lighting, strobe lighting and high-energy action scenes, but Jeffryes accepted and it



- Kelley Cox Post Independent

launched what would become his business, This Little Light Of Mine Lighting Co.

Jeffryes' parents and grandparents were business owners, and he gleaned help from them. He also credits CMS Principal Rick Holt for encouragement, and the “amazing staff” at Yampah for allowing him to have a flexible schedule “in order to be there 100 percent for productions.”

“Everyone at Yampah has helped me so much, mostly with the scheduling part of things and making sure my education comes first, no matter what,” he said.

Yampah Principal Leigh McGown says Jeffryes loves to engage in new experiences and has gained a positive, solution-based mindset in overcoming obstacles.

“He has learned to take risks and learn from both his success and failure and then turn that learning into his next level of understanding,” McGown said.

Jeffryes' largest client is SoL (Stage of Life) Theatre Co., which produced the recent “Charlie Brown Christmas,” and he will do the lighting for SoL's upcoming spring production, “James and the Giant Peach.”

“I love SoL and all of the people there,” Jeffryes said. “They took a leap of faith in me, a 17-year-old high school student, to do the lighting for their productions, and I am so grateful I can't explain it.”

Although Jeffryes has proven himself in the theater arena, his real dream is to work in the medical field to fulfill his “need to make people feel better.” Whether the challenge is a technical one from the lighting booth or looking toward a career in medicine, Jeffryes takes his jobs seriously.

“I'm very young, so I try my best to look as professional as possible.”

Prada internship 'a dream come true'

Hesselman, 17, of Glenwood Springs began his competitive five-month internship with Prada in October. He makes the commute to Aspen four days per week, Saturday through Monday. He attends school Tuesdays through Fridays. (Yes, this teenager is out of bed early every day.)

Working at Prada is “a dream come true” for Hesselman. He has followed Miuccia Prada's designs for some time now, and Prada was his first choice for an internship.

His responsibilities at Prada are that of a sales assistant, and he works closely with the sales associates, managers and other employees. The job also affords him a peek into the bright, bustling fashion world.

“My favorite aspect of the actual internship is being able to see some of the most creative pieces that have been shown on the runway in Milan, Italy,” Hesselman said.

“I also appreciate being able to assist the West Coast's visual team when they fly in from Los Angeles to change the look and feel of the boutique. I'm quite interested in what they do.”

And although he hasn't personally met any celebrities, he wouldn't mind rubbing elbows with someone like Charlie Sheen, Mariah Carey or Paris Hilton.

However, fashion design is not Hesselman's ultimate goal. He is interested in fashion editing for publication, as well as freelance styling and consulting. He plans to attend college in fall 2013 in New York City to study visual communication.

“I aspire to move up as far as possible in Prada, but I also intend to work towards creating images for magazines like ‘W’ and ‘Vogue Italia.’ I've got a long way to go, but I believe I've got a good start.”

Hesselman believes his success is connected to his experience at Yampah, where he has been able to complete his high school education and prepare for his future at the same time.

“If you have motivation and determination, you can definitely accomplish a lot at Yampah. The flexibility and support provided by the school and the teachers is unmatched. I wouldn't have my internship if I wasn't attending Yampah,” he said.

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