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Bonita Unified Students Receive Cutting-Edge Instruction in Jewelry Making Class

SAN DIMAS/LA VERNE – Bonita High School students who want to augment their creative design talents with handiwork skills are taking advantage of the school’s longtime jewelry career technical education (CTE) courses, which teach them the ABCs of manufacturing jewelry while also giving them the opportunity to make their own accessories as they learn the meticulous and precise art.

Bonita High’s jewelry pathway consists of two elective classes: a beginning class that acquaints students with the tools and methods used to make handcrafted jewelry, and an advanced class that allows students to take their skills to the next level and can be taken more than once for credit. The classes are limited to juniors and seniors for safety reasons.

“Jewelry making is a popular addition to our visual arts curriculum, and many of our students take the class to expand on their artistic skills,” Bonita High art and jewelry teacher Brian Harrison said. “This is definitely a class for students who enjoy working with their hands and creating three-dimensional works of art. This course will also develop and fine tune their acute dexterity, and observational and problem-solving skills.”

Jewelry 1 consists of learning the basics: designing jewelry for a metal surface, using basic tools and equipment such as a jeweler’s saw, V-blocks, C-clamps, and buffing and grinding machines. All students learn flat-sheet fabrication, metal-layering, stone-setting and, if the student is ready, light casting. Students begin with flat work, making nameplates and keychains, then transition into creating rings, pendants, and other flat sheet fabricated work.

Jewelry 2 builds on these skills as students get introduced to advanced methods of jewelry making, including facet stone setting, casting, and metalsmithing.

Bonita High senior Jade Caceres is in her second year of jewelry making and said she loves the class because, as an artist who likes to sketch her own designs, she can bring her creations to life, such as a ring with the letter “A” inscribed on it, which she made her aunt Annalisa for Christmas.

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"I love this class because it is so therapeutic. I can put on my headphones and use the process to de-stress," Caceres said. "Mr. Harrison is a great teacher because he is always there for you when you need help. Also, he plays music in class and really sets the mood for being creative."

Harrison notes that jewelry making is just as much about repetition and the ability to file, sand, and buff a ring or nameplate repeatedly as it is about creative design. In jewelry making, practice not only makes perfect, but also can set up a student for success, whether as a jeweler or in any number of professions where accuracy and grace under pressure are required.

Among Harrison's former students who have gone on to work in the industry is a Bonita High Class of 2010 graduate who continued her education at Pasadena City College, and then received a scholarship to attend the prestigious Gemological Institute of America (GIA) in Carlsbad. After completing her studies, she returned to La Verne to do bench work at a high-end jewelry shop and currently has her own direct-to-consumer online jewelry shop.

Harrison has also seen former students use their metalworking skills to find work as welders, paramedics, stagehands, and as presentation platers in the culinary industry. Even Harrison's dentist is a former Bonita High jewelry student.

"The beauty of CTE in high school is the opportunity for students to find professions that speak to and inspire them, and unlock talents they may not know that they have," Bonita Unified CTE coordinator Vanessa Tilford said. "Even if the student goes a different direction, they have still acquired life skills that they can use anywhere they go. Brian Harrison has an excellent program and students are eager to work with him."

PHOTOS:

BUSD_JEWELRY1: Bonita High School senior Emiley Revils hones her skills in Jewelry 1 class, using a U-block and U-clamp. Bonita's career technical education (CTE) pathway consists of two elective classes: beginning and advanced, giving students the opportunity to make their own accessories as they learn the meticulous and precise art.

BUSD_JEWELRY2: Bonita High School Jewelry 1 students show off nameplates they created in class. The visual arts class teaches students to create their own jewelry and develop their acute dexterity, observational, and problem-solving skills. Jewelry class alums have opened their own jewelry shops and have found work as welders, paramedics, and stagehands.

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