

PAM @ Loften High School earns national recognition

The Professional Academies Magnet@Loften High School has been awarded a Bronze Medal under the Best High Schools ranking published annually by *U.S. News and World Report*.

The medal is awarded based on three criteria—state test scores, graduation rate and the academic performance of minority students.

“At PAM we live by our mission statement of ‘Every Student, Every Day, Engaged and Experiencing Success,’” said principal Bill McElroy, who is also the district’s director of Career-Technical Education (CTE). “That applies to all students, whatever their background and whatever their goals.”



PAM@Loften is entirely a magnet academy high school, which means all the students have chosen to attend the school. Students participate in a career cluster based on their interests and in an academic schedule that provides them with a strong foundation for post-secondary education and/or the workforce. The career clusters available at PAM@Loften include automotive technology, gaming and mobile apps, graphic art and design, robotics and engineering and fire and emergency medical services. All of the programs offer students the opportunity to earn valuable industry certifications that give them a leg up on college and careers.

The Bronze Medal is just the latest of several noteworthy achievements at PAM@Loften. Several students in the Academy of Robotics and Engineering recently became the first in the county to earn industry certification in Autodesk Inventor, a computer-aided application for 3D mechanical design and development. The very first student to pass the required exam was freshman Miles Mossa-Kohler, who also earned industry certifications while attending Howard Bishop Middle School’s Academy for Technology and Gifted Studies.

Mossa-Kohler says the program is preparing him for what he expects will be a career in either mechanical or electrical engineering.

“I’ve always enjoyed taking things apart and putting them back together, seeing how they worked,” he said. “I wanted to get into robotics because that would give me a perfect opportunity to do something I liked.”

Robotics instructor Luigi DiFranco says the program gives students a chance to explore their interests

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“A lot of times students go to college planning to be an engineer but without getting any hands-on experience beforehand, so they don’t really know what’s right for them,” he said. “This program gives them exposure to electronics, electrical concepts, mechanical concepts, and computer science, and from there they can decide if they want to go into one of those fields or not.”

PAM@Loften students are also earning recognition at regional and state competitions. Just last month two students from the Institute of Graphic Art and Design and one from the Academy of Fire and Emergency Medical Services brought home awards from the Florida SkillsUSA competition, which is organized annually by educators and industry representatives.

Next year the school will begin offering a new manufacturing program, an offshoot of the Academy of Robotics and Engineering. It’s a program that students could even begin in their junior year and would give them a foundation for a wide range of fields, from automotive to medical.

“They’ll be learning about quality control, safety and the different processes that can be used in a manufacturing facility,” said DiFranco. “It gives them a chance to have a career straight out of high school, or they could take it and go into college with a much better understanding of how the manufacturing industry works.”

McElroy and his CTE team work closely with employers and industry representatives to stay up-to-date on the hot jobs and the requirements for those jobs. Industry experts also serve on advisory boards for all of the district’s career-tech magnet programs.

“Workforce needs drive everything we do here,” said McElroy. “We’re constantly looking to provide our students with new opportunities to step directly into a job here in Alachua County or go on to post-secondary education for a high-needs, well-paying career.”

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