

Newberry High student earns master level industry certification

Alachua County students are expected to earn about 2000 national industry certifications for the current school year, meaning they've proven they've got the skills to head straight to the workforce in their certification field. But one local student has probably swept up more than his fair share.

Newberry High School freshman Jackson Thomas has earned seven certifications in Microsoft Office to become a Microsoft Office Master, the highest certification level.



The certification means he's instantly employable in a wide range of high-demand positions in IT and business. It's also estimated that as an entry-level employee, he'd make as much as \$16,000 more per year than uncertified colleagues.

To earn Master level status, Thomas had to take multiple exams in topics ranging from Access to Excel Expert. Thomas easily passed each one on his first try (applicants have three shots at each exam), scoring a perfect 1000 on his PowerPoint exam and in the 900s on three others.

"These are the same exams any adult would have to take to become certified, and they're very difficult," said Thomas' digital information technology teacher Linda Byrd. "They make them really rigorous and even change them around to make it more challenging."

Thomas says he didn't prepare for the exams outside of school, but rather focused on what he needed to do during class.

"I just went to class and did the requirements," he said. "The first few exams were easy, but it got harder as I went down the line, especially the expert exams."

Besides digital technology (business), Byrd says Thomas is a high-achieving student in several other subjects, including writing and World History. He's also a first degree black belt in Taekwondo.

Even with multiple certifications under his belt, Thomas says working in the IT industry is not his primary goal.

"I really want to go into astronomy, and from what I've read, many people who do go into astronomy complete a minor in computer science," he said. "This is going to help me get to that."

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