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Teens told to lend a hand

By KATHIE DICKERSON
Staff Writer

COSHOCTON - More than 70 young people heard Monday night that just because you come from a small town in Appalachian Ohio doesn't mean you can't do big things and make a difference in the lives of others.

Brittany Jordan, Miss Ohio International, addressed a group of Tutoring, Learning and Contributing volunteers gathered at the Coshocton County Career Center for a training session.

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Encouraged by her grandmother to get involved, Jordan began volunteering with her church youth group when she was in the seventh grade, and continues today tutoring adults in the Columbus area.

"I became involved in a lot of things and didn't have time to sit still," she said.

She encouraged those attending the event to do the same.

Growing up in Appalachian Ohio in Chesapeake, Jordan saw many friends pass up opportunities to attend college.

She graduated from Ohio State University with a bachelor of arts in economics and works with an investment and insurance firm in Columbus.

She started becoming involved in pageants when she was about 16 or 17 years old, she said, mainly

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KATHIE DICKERSON/Tribune

Miss Ohio International Brittany Jordan addresses Tutor, Learning and Contributing volunteers Monday at the Coshocton Career Center.



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because it was a good way to earn college scholarships, and while she finished earning her degree decided it would be a good way to become involved again.

After being crowned Miss Ohio International in May, she began using the opportunity to promote literacy in Appalachia.

"That gave me a louder voice," she said.

Jordan shared some of her tutoring tips with the Coshocton teens, then tested what they remembered at the end with a Jeopardy-like game she'd devised.

Her tutoring tips include: Pick some books that will be easy for the students or that they like; get to know your student at the first session; sit beside the student, not across the table from them; review what you will cover that day, summarize what you did and what needs done before the next session; and have a little fun.

Mercedes Fouch, 15, in her fourth year as a volunteer, said it was a beneficial session for the beginning volunteers.

"It was great to see how many kids showed up," she said.

Katrina Havranek, TLC county coordinator, said some of the tutors are still involved with other after-school activities or work, so they were not able to attend Monday's program. There's about 150 of the students who work one day a week for two hours with elementary partners in Coshocton County schools. It's a free after-school program for elementary students that are referred by teachers

or requested by parents.

Fouch said she became a tutor because she saw how her younger sisters struggled sometimes with homework, and she was able to help them.

"I know there are other little kids that struggle, and I knew I could help them," she said. "I'm not sitting at home watching TV when I can make a difference."

Ricky Baker, 17, a junior at Ridgewood High School, is starting his first year as a TLC volunteer.

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He thought the program by Jordan was informative.

According to its Web site, the focus behind Miss International is to showcase single women who are 19 to 29-years-old by July 1 of the competition year and are a resident of the state or a citizen of the country they represent. Each contestant competes in interview competition which is valued at 40 percent of their total score; evening gown valued at 20 percent; fitness wear for 20 percent; and fun fashion wear valued at 20 percent.

Miss Ohio International has the opportunity to spend the year promoting a platform of her choice, according to the Miss International U.S. Web site.

Jordan's appearance in Coshocton County was facilitated by Andrea Schweitzer with the West Lafayette Branch Library and T.J. Justice, executive director of the Coshocton Port Authority, Havranek said. Jordan interned with Justice when he was director of the Governor's Office of Appalachia.

Fouch said that Jordan's appearance sent another message to the students, too.

"It's great that someone famous can come to our community, someone that's from a little town like us and did what we're doing now, and made it big," she said.

TLC is a United Way agency, and receives a lot of support from board member liaison Erika Ricketts, Havranek said. It's also supported with Temporary Assistance for Needy Family funds from Coshocton County Job & Family Services.

It's also supported with office space by the Muskingum Valley Educational Service Center led locally by site manager Dr. Karen Brown.

Jordan said she looks back now on her high school years and realizes it wasn't being pretty that was important, but the memories and friendships she built through her many hours of volunteer work.

"I love kids and I'm still a big kid," Jordan said. "I'm so excited to see you guys and all your smiling faces."

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