In today’s economic climate, it is not always easy for graduating seniors in high school or college to find work in their desired field. Often, graduation day is a celebration that is quickly followed by a period of job hunting or working in an area outside one’s expertise. But in a time when few students are able to go straight from graduation to work, one recent graduate was able to do even better than that — starting work in his field just prior to his graduation.

Cameron Smith, a 2015 graduate of the carpentry program at SSD’s North Technical High School, earned and started a position with Waterhout Construction Company on the day before he received his diploma.

What’s equally unique is that one of Cameron’s first jobs was doing carpentry work on SSD’s new Northview High School and renovated Ackerman School — both located right next to his alma mater, North Tech.

“I went back to visit a few times on my lunch break,” Cameron said. “To get my OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) card, to pick up my varsity letter and to tell people there how much I missed them and how much I missed school.”

In addition, he also brought with him a bit of advice for future students in the carpentry program, expressing the importance of taking tests seriously and knowing that the workday out in the field is much longer and challenging than a school day.

“It hit me pretty quickly,” said Cameron when asked about moving right into the workforce. “There’s a lot more required of you when you’re working — the pace and expectations. Eight hours per day, it’s a lot more work.”

But even so, the training he received at North Tech prepared him to be ready on day one. “You don’t feel overmatched when you get out there. When I go to each site, I know how to do the jobs because I learned them in class,” Cameron said. “I’m a younger guy, but they treat me like I’ve been there many years.”

“Let’s make a job before you graduate — that’s an awesome thing,” said North Tech carpentry instructor Byron Lane. “We usually place a few into the field each year, but it’s not usually that fast.”

Lane said one of the other major benefits of the carpentry program at North Tech is that graduates finish with multiple certifications and six college credits toward a construction management degree.

“It gives them a leg up,” Lane said.

Lane also has helped facilitate meet-and-greet visits between construction companies and students. This was integral in Cameron landing a job so quickly.

“They came in and targeted him,” Lane said. “Then they were able to mentor him and help him stay on track.”

In the future, Cameron has his eyes on “journeying out,” which means continuing to further his skills and education in the trade through more schooling and certifications to reach the level of journeyman.

But already he’s made a mark through his work. If you happen to be traveling through the new Northview High School, two of the most distinct features are the unique panels along the walls and the large amounts of natural light coming through the windows. Cameron helped with the installation of both.

“There are a lot of benefits and lot of pride in it,” Cameron said. “It’s a prestigious job for me, being 19. A lot of people are impressed where I am already.”
MAKING WAVES:
Standout Swimmer Sets Records

When she began swimming competitively at age 7, the idea of meeting the president just seven years later for her accomplishments as an international competitor must have seemed unimaginable for Colleen Young. Yet, as the youngest member of the United States squad, that was exactly the case following the 2012 London Paralympic Games.

But for Colleen, who is legally blind, being a member of the 2012 U.S. Paralympic Team and meeting national dignitaries was just a steppingstone to further success.

At the top of her list of accolades is the world record she set in the 200-meter breaststroke in her class at the IDM (Internationale Deutsche Meisterschaften, or International German Championships) in Berlin in April. She also earned a silver medal in the women’s 400-meter individual medley for her classification while competing in Germany.

Travel, both domestic and abroad, is a big part of Colleen’s life as a top-level competitor.

“I have been to Greece, England, several cities in Canada, several places in Germany,” she said. “I like communicating with people in different parts of the world.”

For her family, it’s a lot to juggle. In addition to long-distance and overseas travels, her parents also coordinate traveling to practice six days per week — twice a day.

“When Colleen chose to focus on swimming, it had to be her choice,” said her mother Bridget Young. “There is way too much time involved with practice, paperwork, travel, exercise and nutrition to force her to do it.”

Colleen, a senior who receives services from SSD at Lindbergh High School, competes in the S13 classes of events, which are for competitors with low visual acuity.

“I swim and try to follow the large black line on the bottom of the pool and count my strokes so I can know where the end of the lane is,” Colleen said. “If I hit the ropes or walls, it’s okay. I just try to adjust.”

In 2014, Colleen took first place in the 100-meter breaststroke and backstroke at the Pan Pacific Para-Swimming Championships, along with two second-place finishes in the 400-meter freestyle and 200-meter individual medley, and a third-place finish in the 50-meter freestyle. Along with her laundry list of medals, Colleen has broken numerous Paralympic American records in her class.

When it comes to keeping her grounded amid all the success, her mother said typical parent-teen interaction usually does the job.

“We always talk about day-to-day responsibilities and, just like most parents do, get on her about homework, house cleaning, and date deadlines.”

During the rare occasions she does have to relax, Colleen enjoys time with friends and unwinds by reading or watching Netflix.

This summer, her schedule included a trip to Scotland for the Para World Championships, and an invitation to London to participate in the British National Paralympic Day at Olympic Park with four other U.S. athletes.

Looking ahead, Colleen plans to maintain a good grade-point average in school while selecting a college to attend. She also hopes to qualify for the 2016 Paralympic Games in Rio next year.

“I want to be able to get an international gold medal and keep improving my times,” she said. “I really want to be the best I can be.”

SSD Earns Missouri Quality Award

The Excellence in Missouri Foundation has recognized SSD as one of three recipients of the Missouri Quality Award for 2015. A site team visited SSD in September to learn more about how the District’s continuous improvement efforts support student success and had the opportunity to speak with SSD staff at many sites throughout St. Louis County. Read more at http://bit.ly/ssdmqa
As a parent/guardian, you may be asking yourself, how can I help my child become a better reader? The answer is easy and can be achieved at home. Sitting down each evening with a book between you and your child can be a very comforting ritual that helps your child increase their reading skills. Here are some ways that reading at bedtime can be beneficial.

- **Creates a bonding time between child and family members.** You can get a peek into how your child sees the world through comments he/she makes about the plot, characters, and the setting.

- **Helps to develop stronger reading skills.** When you read to your child, they learn reading strategies that you are modeling for them as you read. For example, they will hear you read with expression, pause for punctuation, raise and lower your voice in tune with the action from the story, and speed up and slow down to the degree of tension in the text.

- **Children will develop new perspectives.** Reading aloud to your child teaches them to analyze and reflect on the text. You can also think aloud as you read and comment on the text. By doing so, you may add to your child’s knowledge of a topic.

- **Get a head start on their future.** If children hear good writing on a regular basis, they will begin to appreciate author’s craft.

Don’t feel the need to limit shared reading to just bedtime. Shared reading can happen anywhere at any time. Just pick up a book and begin the bonding process.

COMING UP @ SSD

POSITIVE BEHAVIOR INTERVENTIONS
Dec. 14, 6-8 p.m.
SSD Central Office, Room 61
Participants will be taught to think about problem behavior as a form of communication and will learn the importance of a functional behavioral assessment, how to reinforce positive behavior and how to develop a positive behavior support plan.

MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID TRAINING
Jan. 26, 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. (one-hour lunch break on your own)
SSD Central Office, Room 61
The Mental Health First Aid program is an interactive session that introduces participants to risk factors and warning signs of mental health problems, builds understanding of their impact and overviews common treatments.

The course is appropriate for anyone 16 years and older who wants to learn how to help a person who may be experiencing a mental health-related crisis or problem. Topics covered include anxiety, depression, psychosis, and addictions.

TRANSITIONING TO HIGH SCHOOL
Feb. 1, 6:30-8:30 p.m.
SSD Central Office, Room 61
The transition to high school can be a confusing and stressful time for families. Participants will learn tips to help them and their student prepare for this big transition.

For more information about these events or to register, visit http://bit.ly/ssdworkshops or call 314.989.7807 or 711 (Deaf/HOH).