

Students learn more than sewing in family and consumer education classes

By Ivy Farguheson

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Family and consumer education was known as home economics years ago, but the subject has changed with the times, especially in central Wisconsin.

Also known as family and consumer sciences, the department teaches students at the secondary level not only about their role in the home but also about their roles in society.

"We're looking at creating a better society through families, not just making muffins or sewing tablecloths for our own families," said Carla MacArthur, family and consumer science teacher at Marshfield High School. "Because society has become more global, family and consumer education has changed to prepare families in a global society."

Across the area, the public high schools use these courses to educate students on parenting skills, buying a home and preparing their taxes. Students are also introduced to various career fields, such as health occupations and hospitality services, giving them a chance to see life beyond high school.

"In some of their other classes, they don't always see the use of it at the time," said Jane Menghini, family and consumer education teacher at Stevens Point Area Senior High. "(These classes) apply to their life and the families that they're living in now. It's very useful and they see that use."

The courses also are designed to give students a sense of what it means to be a parent and the dynamics involved between a parent and a child. Most students are aware of their role as a child, but giving them a sense of a parent's responsibilities opens their eyes to new skills.

"This is really the only area where we teach kids about the work of the family," Menghini said. "We're trying to counteract all the advertisement and the superstars and all the bad things that they're hearing about ... We just have so much to offer them."

With an emphasis on the whole person, area teachers believe family and consumer education as a subject matter will benefit the society as whole, creating strong community members who wish to improve the world around them.

"This is coursework stemming on the family and helping (students) build strong families, which our society needs," said Rachel Lent, family and consumer education department chair at Lincoln High School in Wisconsin Rapids. "Along with that component are skills that you develop in your family but you can use them in the work world to be more successful citizens."



Diana Bohman, an Golden Apple Award recipient, listens as Zane Green explains why it is better to tear as opposed to cut lettuce in her Family and Consumer Education class at Amherst High School.