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TOP STORY

Education

## Internships in wine, hospitality back in full force for Napa high schoolers

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High schoolers across the county interned in vineyards and wineries for Fields of Opportunity 2018. The program is returning again for summer 2019.

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A summer-long steeping in all things wine industry is open again to high schoolers from Napa to Calistoga.

Fields of Opportunity, a partnership between the Napa Valley Unified School District and the Napa Valley Grapegrowers, will again take high school students from both the city of Napa and Upvalley through the ins and outs of the largest industry in their backyards.

In years past, high school interns, who are paid a starting wage, have blasted barrels, managed cover crops, had a hand in hospitality and sales, and even witnessed drones at work in the vineyards. Former interns have credited the program with sending them down the path toward careers in agriculture.

Ericka Madrigal, who interned in the summer of 2018, volunteered for the Napa Valley Grapegrowers' Pruning Contest earlier this month. Now a senior at Napa High, Madrigal told the Grapegrowers she had applied to the agricultural business program at Fresno State after her rotation for the internship last summer at Napa Wine Company.

“It was a behind-the-scenes rotation that covered HR, compliance and business administration,” Madrigal told the group. “After working at Napa Wine Company, I could see my future in the grapegrowing industry.”

As of this week, plans are for Napa Wine Company to return as a host company, joined so far this year by V. Sattui winery and Piña Vineyard Management, with more companies expected to come.

Kendall Hoxsey–Onysko of Napa Wine Company told the Napa Valley Grapegrowers, “Youth is where we are going to find the people of tomorrow. They are the minds that will bring forth new opportunities, ideas, and solutions to the Napa’s wine industry.”

Instead of rotating between four different companies for the program’s eight weeks, as in years prior, students this summer will trade off between only two companies, each for four weeks.

“We really wanted them to be able to form deeper connections with their mentors and their peers that they were working with,” said Amber Cleveland, work-based learning coordinator at NVUSD.

Organizers last year brought on a job coach who met periodically with students to work on soft skills like work readiness and how to navigate Napa’s public transportation to get to the job. This year, in addition to the job coach, organizers plan to bring in advisers to add topics like financial literacy to the summer’s curriculum.

As for the county’s other staple industry, a counterpart program to Fields of Opportunity is also returning to take students through eight weeks of rotating roles in the world of Napa hospitality.

Five hotels, up from two last year, will serve as the training grounds for students for this year’s Resorting to Opportunity program, including Meritage Resort and Spa, Vista Collina, Silverado Resort and Spa, Carneros Resort and Spa, Hilton Garden Inn and Embassy Suites.

Organizers are also hoping to more than double participation, opening the internships to 27 students, up from 12 last year. The program opened to applications last Friday, while Fields of Opportunity began taking applicants this month.

Although created in part as an answer to the ongoing labor shortages within the local wine and hospitality industries, Fields of Opportunity began as a special education program, before expanding to all learners, said Stephanie Solberg, vocational specialist with NVUSD.

Stressing the programs' emphasis on its inclusive roots, Solberg said, "When we're speaking to the employers, we're very aware of their labor needs. So we want to kind of preface their participation with the expectation that this is a mentorship, not just a job fair."

"We expect this to be inclusive of all students, those with special needs, those that are coming from at risk or underserved populations," Solberg added. "So while they're interviewing our students, it's not just the best interviewer that should be selected; we'd like to see a cross-selection of ability and interview success."

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## Henry Lutz

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Henry Lutz covers the local wine industry. He has been a reporter and copy editor for the Register since 2016.

