

## SCHOOLS

# Finger on the pulse

AREA EIGHTH-GRADERS INTRODUCED TO HEALTH-RELATED PROFESSIONS THROUGH HEALTH INFORMATION PROJECT

Last Friday morning, 59 middle school students from J. Watson Bailey and M. Clifford Miller participated in a health careers conference at Kingston Library on Franklin Street. The forum gave students an opportunity to hear from a number of professionals in various health-related careers in the hopes that they might pique their interest at just the right time.

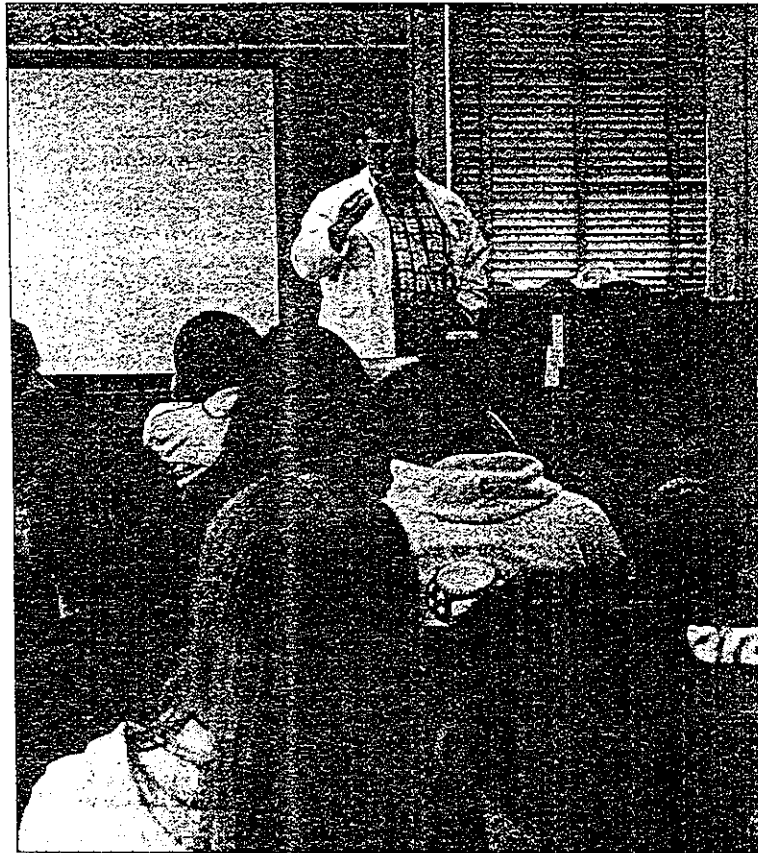
"We chose eighth-graders because they're just thinking about their high school program," said Barbara Lindsley, outreach consultant for the Health Information Project of the Mid-Hudson Library System. "We also chose professionals who represent two-year certification processes, because we thought that would be something which wouldn't overwhelm any students, especially at-risk students. That was one of our goals, to reach students who weren't quite sure what their futures hold for them."

The presentations by Ulster County health professionals focused on expectations and experiences in the workplace, as well as what the students can expect in terms of educational requirements. The conference, funded by grants through the Health Information Project and the Catskill Hudson Area Health Education Center (CHAHEC), was a fairly even cross-section of Kingston eighth-grade students, roughly half girls, half boys.

One of the more popular presentations, which generated genuine laughs, was given by the personable Joseph Huben, RN, a certified nursing instructor, who brought a pair of interns from Benedictine Hospital's New Visions program. Huben allowed EMT Nate Johnson and Aileen Persons, who is studying to become a nurse, to check his blood pressure and put him in a restrictive neck brace like the ones used in automobile accidents. Huben joked that his blood pressure was too high because he had to speak before the public and demonstrated how he had to move his body at the hips to see from side to side.

"It's really funny, because people have these crippling injuries and they're bleeding and whatever, and they complain about being strapped to a back board," joked Johnson while strapping Huben in.

Johnson, a senior at Rondout Valley High School, said he first became interested in becoming a paramedic at the beginning of his junior year



Respiration therapist Warren Swarhout from Benedictine Hospital talks to middle school students at the Kingston Library.

and was given an opportunity to learn first-hand through New Visions.

"They were doing a CPR class sponsored by the First Aid Unit, and they asked if I wanted to jump in," recalled Johnson. "I did a few, and it was something I liked. New Visions is a great program."

Karina D. Fischer, R.D.H., a periodontal therapist and oral health educator, offered kids a different perspective on health care, restating a theme that was popular on the day: What you put inside your body has everything to do with how healthy you are, teeth being no exception. "There is a very high de-

mand for dental hygienists," she added, pointing out a logical first step in a career in oral health.

At the end of the conference, students were asked to fill out evaluation forms in an effort to shape future forums throughout the Hudson Valley, assisted by Kingston High School student and library intern Kacie Giuliano, who gave a presentation of her own earlier in the day.

"One student gave us a wonderful comment," said Lindsley. "I learned more than a teacher can teach.' In other words, he or she experienced something above and beyond what they might have learned in the classroom.

"We're very pleased," she added. "It was a tremendous success."

The middle school students we spoke to seemed to agree.

Patrick Walton, a Miller eighth-grader, said he was most impressed with the presentation by radiology technician Janet Talbot. "I was looking into that [field] already," he explained.

Charles Relyea, another eighth-grade student from Miller, was impressed by Johnson's EMT tales. "My mom was telling me about it, and it sparked my interest," he said of the profession. "Seeing this, it's making me more want to move that way."

Bailey eighth-grader Phoenix Rodden has a different interest in the medical field. "I'd like to work in a morgue, because I have a fear of dead bodies, and I'd like to get over that," she said. As for what she gleaned at Friday's CHAHEC conference, she was most interested in learning about x-rays. "They do that in the morgue to see how people died."

Johnson was happy to hear that the students who attended the conference were interested in what they were experiencing. "I guess a lot of kids my age don't really know what they want to do," he said, adding that the earlier a student figures out what they might want to do with their lives, the easier it will be for them to succeed in that field down the line.

Lindsley said the conference was enough of a success that, should they receive the grants to make it happen, future forums in Kingston are a definite possibility.

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