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Oregon high school and Washington millwork company work together.

The cabinet manufacturing program at North Salem High School in Salem, Oregon, has created a partnership with Custom Source Woodworking in Olympia, Wash. According to a report in the Salem [Statesman Journal](#), the president and vice president of the company spent a day at the school recently interviewing prospective employees.

By the end of the day, Custom Source had committed to hiring five seniors from North Salem's woodworking program and a senior from the school's engineering program. Two underclassmen from engineering also received offers to work summers for the company.

At a time when many schools no longer offer wood shop classes, North Salem has found a way to evolve and expand. The foundation of the program was built by longtime teacher Dave Anderson, who retired after choosing teacher Dean Mattson to replace him in 2009.

"My vision is this is a farm club, this is a minor league baseball organization," said Mattson, who has nearly 30 years of experience in the industry. "Because I'm a businessman, I know exactly what a production company wants.

"They come help set the curriculum, work with students for four years, take cream of the crop from over 1,000 kids, and the risk is zero. When these kids graduate, they know this company and the company knows them."

Mattson operates the program like a business, or a company. He holds a production meeting at the start of each class, and then sends students off to work on their projects.

"Most beginning classes do a birdhouse," Mattson said. "We start out making a cabinet."

Word is spreading about the training offered and the opportunities presented, and more than 500 students have signed up for classes next year, including some from other schools in Salem-Keizer School District who are seeking a transfer because their school doesn't offer a woodworking program.

Mattson has room in his six classes for only 240 students, which means more than half of the hopefuls will be turned away.

Joe Wadsworth, founder and vice president of Custom Source Woodworking, obviously is impressed with the program. He is, after all, hiring some of these kids.

"What Dean is training, and what he's teaching in work ethic and integrity, that's what we're looking for," Wadsworth said.

Wadsworth had been looking to partner with a high school that was aggressively training students for a career in the industry. When he heard Mattson speak last fall at a woodworking conference, about his program and his students, Wadsworth knew that he had found it at North Salem.

Custom Source Woodworking is a new, fast-growing company that has a reported \$6 million in annual sales. The company currently employs 40 people and works on a variety of projects, including schools, hospitals, museums, stores and restaurants.

According to the Statesman Journal, each North student was required to come into the interview with a completed job application, cover letter, resume and letters of recommendation.

Back in the wood shop, senior Andrew White, wearing a blue shirt, dark-colored tie and slacks, told me what an awesome opportunity it was to get a job interview with Custom Source.

"I haven't ever heard of anybody or anything offering jobs like this to kids right out of high school," White said. "I'm excited to benefit from it."

Most of the equipment, a quarter-million dollar's worth, was donated. Some was purchased with grant money. Mattson has a \$3,500 annual budget for the program. His advanced students do commercial cabinet work, with proceeds returning directly to the program.

Wadsworth told Jacob Wood, one of the students interviewed, that he has been through 275 employees in five years, looking for just the right people.

"Do you think you can find the right people at North Salem?" Wood asked.

"I think I have an excellent opportunity to fill these positions," Wadsworth said. "Dean's teaching you right."

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