

Madison Spirit

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Students are four-star employees at the Westin

Eleven from Bob Jones take part in special program at the hotel

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For the Madison Spirit
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Huntsville's only four-star hotel has been welcoming some special stars from Madison.

The Westin Huntsville has placed 11 students in the developmental program at Bob Jones High School in non-paying jobs throughout the hotel.

"The work program helps our students learn valuable skills in various settings and also provides multiple opportunities to try different jobs and tasks," Jacqueline Wilson-Bradley said.

She is a special education teacher and with community-based education for Madison City Schools.

David L. Lance, the Westin's human resources manager, has had a key role since the program started several years ago.

"I worked with another local hotelier at the time. When I came to The Westin Huntsville, I made sure the Bob Jones students would also be a part of the culture here," he said.

"The hotel fully under-

stands what a great opportunity this is to make a difference in our own community. We look forward each year to having ... this super group of young people."

Thanks to the program, The Westin has hired two Bob Jones alumni.

"We've learned so much as a management team from the students," Lance said. "This is truly a 'win-win' situation for both parties."

The students are willing to tackle any assignment, he said.

"There's no limitation when you support the students and offer the opportunity," he said. "We love finding the 'perfect fit' for new students."

Students work Fridays from 9 to 11 a.m. "They are all smiles," Lance said. "It's contagious."

Folding clean laundry, building sales and key packets, doing kitchen prep work and baking cookies are among their tasks. Building pizzas is their favorite job.

"They polish silver and serving equipment, vacuum and strip laundry in guest rooms," Lance said.

Teachers and support personnel from Bob Jones are "spot on" in their dedication to every student, he said.

The goal is placing students in competitive



Special education students from Bob Jones High School are learning job skills by working at The Westin. Brian Michael with the Westin, left, watches as Christopher Wessling second from left, and Chris Pate right decorate cookie dough. Kim Lund with Bob Jones assists from the middle. (The Huntsville Times/Dave Dieter)

employment by age 21, Wilson-Bradley said.

"The Alabama Transition Standards require students to demonstrate employability skill in a work-based learning environment.

They build positive social interactions and demonstrate appropriate work ethics," she said.

By working with employees, the students observe

appropriate behavior in the workplace. They hear conversation topics and see "how to 'take a break,'" Wilson-Bradley said.

Skills that they learn include reasoning, conflict resolution, time management, task completion, self-advocacy, teamwork, working independently and checking personal appearance, she said.

Speaking to Wilson-Bradley, student Chris Pate asked, "Did Mr. Lance ask about me?" Chris Wessling hoped to return to the kitchen for work.

"I really did a great job with those pepper shakers," Susie Hannan said. "I am the best with polishing the silver. I had to get in there and speed things up."

The students know they're

in good care, and the Westin staff wants them there, special education teacher Shannon Humphrey said.

"Students love that the adults remember their names and show such excitement," she said.

"They also look forward to starting jobs they're somewhat familiar with."