



Jade Schnauber, left, Eric Kerns and Shannon Zayac, Shannon Zayac, manager for industry relations on the Berkshire Workforce Board, prepare to announce the intern awards on Wednesday.

Berkshire Business Interns Recognized for Summer Efforts

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NORTH ADAMS, Mass. — They say that doing is the best way to learn. So for 10 weeks, 44 college students have had a chance experience how their education can be applied to real-world settings.

The Berkshire Business Interns, winnowed from more than 500 applications this past spring, worked in 20 different organizations, businesses and municipalities throughout the county this summer. About two-thirds hail from the Berkshires.

For Steven Luciano of Boston, who is studying international business at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, it was a chance to learn how to "cohesively" connect, communicate and work together with a diversified work force at LTI Smart Glass; for Jade Schnauber of Pittsfield, entering her senior year at MCLA, it was an opportunity to the last two summers to work behind the scenes at Lever Inc., the catalyst for the BBI program and numerous other local economic initiatives and startups.



Lever's Jeffrey Thomas gives a T-shirt to intern Jade Schnauber because she's kind of a big deal.

Not only an opportunity but a promotion: When Schnauber returns next year, she'll be running the BBI program.

"Everyday I'm impressed at what she can do and by extension, what young people can do if you put them in the right situation, and encourage them and they have the right mentality. And certainly Jade exemplifies that," said Lever Executive Director Jeffrey Thomas on Wednesday night at the program's awards dinner at Norad Mill. "She interned last summer and she supported the BBI program. And by the end of summer, she pretty much was running the program."

The intern program, operated in conjunction with the Berkshire Workforce Board, was created in 2018 to place college students in "mission central" positions that could benefit both business and student. The interns were paid at least minimum wage for 10 weeks and also provided a number of networking, recreational and cultural activities during their Berkshire stay.

"We have surveyed supervisors, I spoke to many of them in the past few weeks, and it's just amazing how much, in such a short period of time, these young people are able to contribute," Thomas said. "You know, we talked about mission central projects. And that's what we're hearing is that these young people are helping move the needle in these businesses in their time here."

He thanked the organizations willing to take a chance on the program, particularly Berkshire United Way, MCLA, 1Berkshire, MassHire, Berkshire County Arc and other local banks and companies.

"This is a little bit of a risk-taking thing when we try to persuade companies the first time to host an intern," Thomas said. "So you all took a chance and we appreciate it and we're hopeful that it's paid off for you."

Supervisors who came up to present certificates of completion to their interns extolled their work ethic, communication abilities, research, team work, skill sets and personalities. Awards for things like team player, attendance, initiative, research and other factors were also presented.

Candace Winkler, the new CEO of Berkshire United Way, said she wasn't here last year when the United Way signed a three-year agreement to the program but is fully supportive.

"We really see this work presenting opportunities for young people, paid internships for young people, as critical to attracting talent to the area," she said. "What an early supervisor once said to me was, you know, you learned so much in your first internship or job about what you don't want to do as what you do want to do. And so I am sure that all the interns have had fabulous experiences. And I hope some of you will decide to come back and consider opportunities at some of the places where you spent the last 10 weeks."

That theme of "come back" was expressed several times during the evening as attendees dined on fare supplied by Grazie restaurant.

"It's so great to see young people such as many of you coming to this area," said David Moresi, owner and developer of the Norad Mill. The mill, now nearing 50 businesses including several that have moved to North Adams from outside the area, point to the opportunities available here, he said. "I want to encourage many of you now that you've done your internships around here, and you go off into your future challenges, always hold a little spot for the North Berkshires in this area that many of you have called home ... now you don't need to be in a certain area to really have a big impact in business."

Eric Kerns, co-founder of Bright Ideas Brewing and partner in Tourists inn and resort, offered some advice for the interns: get nerdy, get dirty, use your phone as a phone and pay attention to people and things large and small.

"Every day is a school day — do the homework, do the research, know the history ... Real mastery of something is still a distinction in this world," he said. "Don't distance yourself from any part of your project. Take stuff apart, learn how it works. Learn how to fix it. Use the telephone as a phone — every minor and major miracle we've pulled off as part of our [Tourist] project has come from reaching out and making a personal connection with a specific person. ... re-injecting humanity and nuance into communication is the new black ..."

"Make a conscious decision to work with people who share your values and will get nerdy and dirty with you. And not send you to voicemail when you call."

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