

DAUPHIN COUNTY TECHNICAL SCHOOL

Horticulture students put skills to work

BY PHYLLIS ZIMMERMAN
For The Patriot-News

On the day before Dauphin County Technical School's Nov. 3 open house, business was booming in the school's ornamental horticulture classroom.

Under the tutelage of instructor Matthew Arnold, horticulture students were creating arrangements and displays to impress impending visitors.

Aylin Acero, 17, of Linglestown, was putting the finishing touches on a fireside bouquet that would greet open house visitors in the school's lobby.

The 11th-grader already spent 90 minutes that morning arranging the bounty of deep pink snapdragons, pink-edged yellow calla lillies, bright sunflowers and ferns.

"It was interesting to make, but lots of hard work," Acero said.

After graduation, Acero said she hopes to study business and horticulture in college, perhaps running a flower shop in the future.

Chelsi Myers, 16, of Lingelstown was working on her own fall floral arrangement.

The 11th-grader transferred this year to horticulture from the graphic arts course because, she said, "I like weddings and I figured I could do a lot of weddings in this shop."

She aspires to become a wedding planner, she said.

Students in grades 9-12 begin the horticulture course by studying plant growth and learning general horticulture skills, then advancing to specialized studies: floral, landscaping or greenhouse.

For floral study, students create flower arrangements for weddings, banquets, senior sports nights at the tech school's sponsoring school districts and other events. Students learn to how estimate orders and make calls to suppliers.

Landscaping students practice mulching, planting, pruning and related skills.

They also learn how to operate a tractor and skid loader and create walkways and patios.

To place an order

To order flower arrangements, holiday wreaths, centerpieces and other products from the ornamental horticulture class, call 717-652-3170.

For the open house, landscaping students built a cement-block wall and prepared potted plants for a patio display.

Greenhouse study involves growing vegetables and flowers from seed in the school's computer-controlled greenhouse.

The shop sells its produce to faculty and staff each spring, Arnold said.

Students also work on propagating plants using cuttings and grafting.

The greenhouse recently was furnished with a new aeroponic unit that grows plants in air with fertilized water sprays instead of soil.

This not only makes plants grow faster, but "people say it makes the vegetables tastes better," Arnold said.

The shop's other facilities

include a 1/2-acre outside nursery, a 2-acre forestry area and a plant-identification garden.

Arnold has taught horticulture at the school for five years.

"I love working with the kids. I love explaining things to them and seeing the lights come on. I like seeing them get it," Arnold said.

And they do get it. At the 2011 Farm Show, six of the horticulture students' entries earned placements. Plus, 2011 graduate Kaitlyn Gutshall was awarded a \$500 scholarship at Lingelstown Garden Club's annual flower show last spring.

Tech school landscape students build a display each year at the Pennsylvania Home Show with the tech school's carpentry and ma-



PHYLLIS ZIMMERMAN, The Patriot-News

Dauphin County Technical School 11th-grader Aylin Acero puts the finishing touches on an ornamental horticulture shop display on Nov. 2 for the tech school's annual open house.

sonry shops, plus they've done work for the Antique Auto Museum in East Hanover Twp.

In the future, Arnold hopes to see students construct a display for the Farm Show's Garden Expo, he said.

With the approach of winter holidays, things aren't likely to slow down for the

horticulture students.

Christmas and Valentine's Day are among the shop's busiest times, right up there with Easter and Mothers' Day.

Flower arrangements, holiday wreaths, table centerpieces and other products are available for purchase for only the cost of materials.