

Seymour JAG students win awards

By January Rutherford - 2/14/17 7:52 PM

On the third Thursday of every month, a small group of six to eight students at Seymour High School spends time organizing and setting up a food pantry to help their fellow classmates in need.

They unload a delivery of canned and boxed food items and stock the pantry shelves. They set out products on tables to show people coming in what is available. They take order forms and get them ready so students or their families can pick up food quickly.

Although the pantry fulfills a community service requirement for the school's Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) program, it has a much more personal meaning for some of the students.

Senior Tori Miller said it's a way for her to give back for the assistance her family has received and to show support for her classmates.

"With my mom basically being a single parent, we've used the food pantry too," Miller said. "It's a great service, and I'm glad I have been able to help others."

JAG students have operated the pantry, called The Owl Market, since the fall of 2014. It's a partnership with Gleaners Food Bank of Indiana, which provides the school with a monthly monetary budget to order food.

In its first year, the pantry was open only to Seymour High School students and their families, but that has since changed to include all of Seymour Community School Corp.

"We're serving probably between 25 and 35 families a month," JAG instructor Celeste Bowman said.

With the recent closure of Human Services food pantry in Seymour, Bowman said she expects the need to increase and that the pantry will see more customers.

Although Miller's not been able to help out with the pantry as much this year as last year due to having a job now, she still supports the pantry and wants to see it succeed.

"I just like helping the community every chance I get," Miller said. "And it

makes me appreciate our community more, because I realize that there are people that need help and there are people that want to help them."

Miller said she loves interacting with the students and families that come to the pantry by being friendly and helpful.

"I get to know them and what they want," she said.

Besides learning about community service, being a part of the pantry has helped her develop skills she can use at school and at her job at Walmart, including customer service, time management, planning and organization and getting along with others.

Those are a few of the "soft" skills students need to be employable after graduation, Bowman added.

"It lets them develop and practice those skills and be leaders," she said.

The JAG program focuses on each student's unique obstacles and needs both in and out of the classroom and

helps them build the skills needed to transition into life after high school.

Through community service, job shadowing, workplace tours, guest speakers and other activities, students, some of whom are at risk of dropping out stay more involved and interested in school, work and the community, Bowman said.

JAG has been offered at Seymour since 2010. There are around 60 students enrolled. This is Miller's second year in JAG having transferred from Columbus.

"It has helped me have a better perspective on life, and a better grasp on reality after high school," she said.

By being in JAG, Miller said she has more confidence and a stronger concept of what is expected of her as an adult, including financial responsibilities.

The main purpose of JAG is to help students graduate, nationally, the goal is for 90 percent of JAG students to graduate from high school. Seymour's JAG typically has 100 percent.

The second goal is for 60 percent of students to have a job within a year after graduating and Seymour JAG is usually higher than that, Bowman said.

Because of the program's success, it has expanded this year, adding a second teacher who speaks both English and Spanish in order to better serve the Spanish-speaking population.

The JAG program is offered to Seymour students both at the high school and through the Jackson County Learning Center.