

Pendleton senior named Indiana's outstanding Jobs for America's Graduates student

By Rebecca R. Bibbs | The Herald Bulletin Apr 8, 2018

PENDLETON – As Sidney Shoaf looked for an additional class to add to her junior year schedule at Pendleton Heights High School, her brother suggested the Jobs for America's Graduates class.

That decision paid off for Shoaf, 18, after she was named the outstanding student in the state and won a \$3,000 scholarship.

“JAG has allowed me to do things I would not have been able to do before,” the senior said. “I feel I have advantages over other seniors who haven't taken the class.”

Administered and funded through the Indiana Department of Workforce Development, the elective

class JAG is intended to prevent students with barriers to graduation and employment from dropping out. Also offered at Anderson High School, the 30-year-old program teaches students life, job and leadership skills.

Pendleton's JAG program includes 34 students who are learning resume building, job interviewing and workplace conflict resolution skills.

Participating in JAG has led to a variety of leadership experiences for Shoaf. On Tuesday, she will be in Indianapolis to present before the national Jobs for America's Graduates board at a luncheon hosted by Gov. Eric Holcomb in Indianapolis.

As a junior, Shoaf also was one of 15 Indiana students selected to attend the JAG national leadership conference in Washington, D.C.

Shoaf, who plans to study marketing next fall at IUPUI's Kelley School of Business, has received several scholarships, including one from 21st Century Scholars. But the JAG scholarship is special, she said.

Her first year in the program, Shoaf competed and placed third in public speaking at JAG's annual Career Development Conference. She hoped to place higher this year but didn't.

“That gave me the courage to compete for the

biggest award, the senior student award,” she said.

Competing to become the state’s top JAG student required her to be accepted to a college or university, submit a resume, write a personal essay, seek out three people as references and perform a minimum of 400 community service hours.

“I had over 420 with my church alone,” she said.

In addition, Shoaf had to complete three interviews. That’s where her competitive public speaking experience gave her an edge over the other dozen finalists.

“It wasn’t that hard, and now I enjoy doing it,” she said.

In fact, Shoaf said she sees a big difference in her personal growth between her junior and

senior years in high school.

“I think I’m way more confident now,” she said.

Adam Ritz, who is in his fifth year teaching the JAG class at Pendleton, is a career counselor.

“My job is to make sure they are placed in a positive outcome after high school,” he said. That includes post-secondary education, a job or military enlistment.

Ritz said the skills learned by the students in the JAG class are those from which every student in the school would benefit. However, only 42 students can be accommodated at this time.

One reason students rarely are exposed to these soft skills is the emphasis on high-stakes testing, Ritz said.

“They just get the basic skills a lot of classes don’t offer,” he said. “I have seen a lot on social media where people post, ‘Well, I didn’t learn this in school. These skills slide under the rug. People take for granted those type of skills, and a lot of kids don’t have those type of skills.’”

One component that makes the class attractive to students, Ritz said, is they are paid to go to school. Those who graduate from the program receive \$100. Those who have a grade point average of 2.5 or higher receive an additional \$50.

“It’s an incentive because they have to work to get that money,” he said.