

## Teacher, students reunite at IEC event

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A group of Dundas residents who provided the spark for Specialized High Skills Major programs in Hamilton schools reunited recently to celebrate the program.

St. Mary Catholic High School alumni Nicole Gordon, Sarah Meagher and Leslie Smart joined teacher Nancy Castura at the Industry-Education Council's 2010 Partners in Education Breakfast.

The event recognized the SHSM program in both of Hamilton's school boards, and it was this group of Dundas residents who set the stage for it in Hamilton.

"They were the important hinges in the program," Castura said.

Seven years after St. Mary High School introduced a specialized new health care coop program, twenty Hamilton high schools in both boards offer a variety of SHSM programs.

The long list includes aviation and aerospace at Ancaster High, arts and culture as well as construction at Westdale, and horticulture and landscaping at Stoney Creek's Saltfleet Secondary School. Six Catholic schools and five public schools now offer the health SHSM that originated with the cutting-edge St. Mary class.

But before the province's Ministry of Education even introduced the popular program, it was Grade 12 St. Mary student Nicole Gordon who, in 2004, sought a co-op learning placement in health care.

"It started with her interest in matching up her interest in nursing with courses," Castura said.

Co-op teacher Colleen McPhee worked with Gordon and tracked down a little-known health-care technology course never before taught in Hamilton. McPhee approached then St. Mary principal Mary Cipolla about offering the course.

Castura was identified as the new program's teacher and developed a hands-on learning program for health-care students at St. Joseph's Villa long-term care facility in Dundas, with the help of Villa employee Jennifer Banks, who also joined the four Valley Town residents at the IEC breakfast.

After a year, three other Catholic schools wanted to offer the special health-care experiential learning program created at St.

Mary's. A two-year, four-school, pilot project was the result.

When the province introduced Specialized High Skills Major programs, the local class fit perfectly and began to receive provincial funding.

"Now universities are asking if (applicants) are SHSM students," Castura said.

She said staff from both McMaster University Medical Centre and St. Joseph's Villa were pleased to see the St. Mary alumni at the IEC event, all of whom went on to higher education and careers in health care. They've gone from students to peers.



From left, Sarah Meagher, Nancy Castura, Jennifer Banks, Leslie Smart and Nicole Gordon.

“It was a good celebration of what the program is about,” Castura said.

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