

First class completes Huntley High School, Centegra Hospital's residency program

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[HUNTLEY](#) – If it weren't for Huntley High School and Centegra Hospital – Huntley's residency program, senior Ashlen Pickett might have chosen a different career path.

Pickett said she was thinking of pursuing a career in biomedical engineering, but after shadowing a nurse, she realized she enjoyed the patient contact that comes with the job.

"You could tell she made a difference in their lives," Pickett said.

Pickett was among 24 Huntley High School seniors who participated in the residency program at Centegra Hospital – Huntley, which [opened in August](#). She and other seniors were recognized Tuesday at the hospital for being the first class to complete the inaugural program.

Residency students spent two and a half hours every week shadowing mentors at the hospital in more than 20 units, including the pharmacy, sleep services, personal training and the cauterization laboratory. To apply for the program, students had to have been in [Huntley High School's Medical Academy](#), completed a job shadow program in the field and have a 3.5 GPA.

The program exceeded expectations and made students more prepared for college and a future in the health care field than any other high school, Huntley Community School District 158 Superintendent John Burkey said at the ceremony.

"Every one of you has just told me incredible stories about what you've seen, about what you've learned," Burkey said. "And I can tell you it is so much more valuable than what you could've just gotten out of a book or what you could've just gotten from people telling you about what was going on in the hospital."

Centegra nurse Bonnie Bayser said both students and staff learned through the residency.

“I think it challenged our associates,” Bayser said. “The questions [students asked] made them think again and re-enlightened them. [Students’] enthusiasm, it just sort of spilled over to our associates.”

At the ceremony, students sat with peers and parents, many sharing post-graduation plans that included pursuing a health care-related major in college.

Pickett will be pursuing nursing at Drexel University in Philadelphia.

Students Javier Guerra and Nico Tolentino have plans to pursue a career in the medical field and attend the University of Iowa and the University of Illinois-Chicago, respectively. Both said they felt lucky to be part of the program.

“This is something that you’d usually experience as med students, but we’re actually doing it as high school students,” Tolentino said. “So it’s a huge step forward.”

The program will continue with Huntley High School next year.

As for whether it will grow to include other schools, Centegra Health System CEO Michael Eesley said the hospital has talked to other groups, but as of now, there are no plans to expand.