

Kids Carry on a Favorite Tradition at Citizens

A favorite pastime of Citizens employees was revived this April when elementary through high school-aged kids hit the Citizens hallways to learn about how the organization serves the state and how their parents help drive its cause.

Approximately 100 kids attended Citizens' Take a Child to Work Day and Beyond in Jacksonville while about 20 joined their parents for the day at the Tallahassee event.

The Program

The children started their morning with a welcome message from Vice President of Human Resources Denise Bass in Jacksonville and Sr. Director Huw O'Callaghan in Tallahassee.

Following the welcome, the kids were divided into two groups based on age and participated in a Meet a Meteorologist session, and another in which they interviewed various employees about their role at Citizens.

In Jacksonville, kids got to meet CBS 10 Tampa Bay Meteorologist Mike Prangley for his presentation, while WCTV's Meteorologist Josh Green presented to the student attendees in Tallahassee.

"It's a big job, but it's a fun job," Mike said during his presentation. "... The main thing is to do what you love; to love what you do."

"It was very cool," said Kerron Higgins, 13, 7th grade student and son of Tameka Singleton, Administrative Services. "I feel like the weather is very cool. It's very complicated. I learned a lot from their experience; how they have to do it every day, getting up early, taking numbers, and going on TV."

Employees who participated as interviewees came from divisions around the company.

"Ken Tinkham is good at explaining what he is doing and how his job works," said Savannah Collins, 13, 8th grade student and daughter of Sara Collins, Insurance Operations.

In Jacksonville, Digital Communications Creator Gene Bednarek, who serves as Citizens' primary photographer and videographer, treated the kids to a trip to the photography studio.

"When I was 14 (years old), I made my first dollar with a camera," Gene told the students. "I was 18 when I got my first full-time job, and I've been doing it ever since ... That's how I started - I worked with the newspaper and then the yearbook in high school."

"He took a picture of us, and he told us about himself," said Annaleah Patry, 10, 4th grade student and daughter of Natalia Obuber, Insurance Operations. "He likes to take pictures. He likes to travel ... He likes his job."

Following lunch, the children participated in an IT workshop and toured a Citizens Catastrophe Response Center (CRC).

Jacob Hann, 12, 7th grade, and son of Jamie Hann, Financial Services, said he appreciated the CRC's practicality after touring the mobile pull-behind.

"I thought it was cool that they can go anywhere and help with the storms; how useful it was," Jacob said.

The Tradition

As in the past, the kids of Citizens' employees expressed their appreciation for the event.

"I really liked it," said Easton Bennett said, 11, 5th grade, and grandson of Cindy Bollinger, Insurance Operations. "I liked it when they talked about their experience and what they have done."

"I like how they talked about how smaller technology is getting better," said Arianna Patry, 12, a 6th-grade student and Natalia Oduber's daughter. "I think that's cool."

The children's sentiments echo those of the past, including those inspired to put their experience at Kids to Work Day into action.

Administrative Services employee Ed Sowers' daughter, Sophia Sowers, attended the event when she was in high school. She was paired up two years in a row with a fellow Citizens student who was visually impaired.

"Although the event was related to insurance, it inspired me to become a teacher of the visually impaired," said Sophia, now 23. "That day ultimately changed the trajectory of my life, setting me on a new and meaningful career path."

Sophia is set to graduate from Vanderbilt University in May with a master's degree in special education.

In continuing the tradition, Citizens is already looking forward to inspiring kids again next spring.