



# Career Connects

## Jeremy Ly helps launch JJC's new workforce development program, Career Connects by Kristen Rivers

As a former teacher who has worked in inner-city Chicago, Jeremy Ly knows the challenges students face when it comes to finding a career path, especially in a struggling economy. His commitment to strengthening the local community and workforce is what led him to become a part of piloting the new Career Connects program at JJC.

Career Connects Will and Grundy Counties is an online tool produced by CareerCruising.com, an interactive career resource that connects students and job seekers with businesses through a virtual environment.

"This project is truly an amazing example of how we need to break down the walls of our departments and all work together for the betterment of our community," Ly said.

The initiative is funded by grants that include a JJC Student Success grant, a \$5,000 Award for Excellence grant from the JJC Foundation, a \$3,000 grant from the Grundy Community Foundation help to launch the program, and most recently, a \$1,000 grant from the Grundy, Livingston, Kankakee Workforce Board.

"Career Connects is a one-stop electronic portal where students, teachers, administrators, job seekers, and adults can go to find out about

careers within the JJC region... [And see] Will and Grundy Counties as a great place to work and live," Dan Kreidler, JJC dean of community and economic development, added.

Partnering with local high schools and colleges like the University of St. Francis, Career Connects is currently available to over 60,000 students. Nearly 70 area businesses are currently involved, but Ly and Kreidler hope to reach a goal of involving 150 area businesses.

For businesses, the benefits of Career Connects are many. Career professionals in the local community can play an active role in connecting with the future workforce. Mentors can inform students of the best classes to take for their future with local companies. Never before has there been such a strategic link between supply of workers and demand for their talent, Ly said.

Using Career Connects as a guide, students can obtain real world information about their career options, making them well informed and well trained before they enter the workforce, he added.

Drawing from his three years of teaching fourth grade through Teach for America, where he had to act as

parent, nurse and often probation officer for his students, Ly said he has learned the value of community involvement in education, and uses his position within the program to give back to the community that gave him his start.

"I love the community aspect of my job. I'm not a desk job kind of guy and I love to be out in the community, making a difference. Our area has a high unemployment number and the only way we are going to rebuild our economy is by everyone working together to solve problems," he said. "One business, one school, one high-school, one politician alone can't solve anything, but working together for job growth and connecting businesses to students early on in their educational career will only prove fruitful down the road."

Additional partners on the project include the University of St. Francis, Community Foundation of Grundy County, Joliet Junior College Foundation, Three Rivers Education Partnership, Workforce Board of Grundy, Livingston, and Kankakee, and the Will County Workforce Investment Board.

For more information about the Career Connects program, visit [www.jjc.edu/info/career-connects](http://www.jjc.edu/info/career-connects) or contact Ly at (815) 280-6831.