Career Tech opens internship, training hub in central Guam

By Jojo Santo Tomas
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Career Tech High Academy Charter School took its first major physical step beyond its Hågat campus Thursday, opening a new Career Tech Center in Tumon that school leaders envision as a launching point for students headed into internships - and for an education model they eventually hope to take beyond Guam's shores.

School officials, students, alumni, and supporters gathered Thursday morning for a ribbon-cutting ceremony at the new center at the Wyndham Hotel on Ypao Road.

The center is a relatively small operation for now, but Career Tech Principal William Castro said that is almost beside the point.

"For me, it's important we can take baby steps," Castro said. Students and teachers, he added, can now see "something material, significant, but real" as Career Tech inches toward a much larger vision.

And there is a lot the school intends for it to do.

The Career Tech Center will serve primarily as an internship and training hub where students can prepare before reporting to participating businesses in Tumon and return afterward to debrief with school staff.

Instead of simply sending teenagers off to a workplace and calling it career training, Castro said students will begin their day at the center learning the habits and skills employers expect, from grooming and customer service to writing memos, answering phones, and communicating professionally.

They can then report to internship sites for several hours before returning to the center to talk about what they experienced and what they learned.

The center is strategically located in Tumon, home to much of Guam's hotel and visitor industry and a major concentration of potential internship sites.

It also tackles another problem Career Tech has encountered as it has grown: distance.

Castro said the location has been one of the biggest barriers for students interested in Career Tech and one of the reasons some students leave.

Having a central location also helps Career Tech employees who live in central and northern Guam, Castro said. Staff members can stop at the center to mentor students returning from internships rather than having to travel back to the school's main campus.

The center is expected to generally operate during school hours, from about 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., with alumni and other services available until about 5 p.m.



NEW FACILITY: Career Tech High Academy Charter School Principal William Castro, center, talks to the crowd following the ribbon cutting of the Career Tech Center on Thursday in Tumon. *Photos by Jojo Santo Tomas/The Guam Daily Post*



STUDENTS: Career Tech High Academy Charter School students celebrated the opening of the new Career Tech Center in Tumon on Thursday. From left, Micah Lane, Korey Babauta, Tristan Flores, Caylene Babauta, Josiah Perez, and Raziah Quintanilla.

Bigger plans

Thursday's opening represents Career Tech's first physical expansion, but Castro said the school sees it as one piece of a much broader plan.

The Tumon operation could eventually help pave the way for additional academic offerings, including expanded advanced placement courses and, potentially within about two years, the international baccalaureate program.

Career Tech also has discussed developing a larger college-level and technical education presence in the Tumon area.

Beyond Guam, Castro said the long-range vision includes taking Career Tech's education and training model into neighboring islands, including Rota and Chuuk.

The Tumon center is the first small, physical step toward that larger footprint.

The school also plans to expand services for people who no longer fit the traditional high school model, including adults who did not finish high school and want another path toward completing their education.

Online education has made learning more accessible, Castro said, but it does not work equally well for everyone. That hands-on approach is what the new center is intended to provide.

Students won't necessarily see a traditional classroom packed with 30 students at desks, Castro said. Instead, learners will have more flexibility to come in and get direct assistance.

Alumni coming back

Another piece of the center will involve Career Tech graduates.

Alumni will be encouraged to return as mentors and help operate programs at the facility, allowing current students to learn from people who went through the same school before entering college or the workforce.

Castro said the alumni component was not an afterthought. It was built into the concept for the center from the beginning.

For Career Tech student Micah Lane, that makes sense.

Lane said students may find it easier to connect with graduates who once sat where they sit.

"They've also been in it, too," Lane said. "It's nice to get the same; like, they would give you advice on things."

Lane sees the internship program as an opportunity to begin exploring careers before graduation rather than waiting until school is over to find out what the working world is like.

The new center gives students such as Lane a place to begin connecting classroom lessons with that future while they are still in high school.

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