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Seven years in, Exeter Job Corps center thriving

Recent ranking, expansion shows center is one of

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EXETER —Joseph DiPina has seen firsthand what type of success students who graduate from the Exeter Job Corps Center have had in achieving their goals.

"They've been served well here and have succeeded in what they set out to do," said DiPina, the Center's Director.

DiPina isn't the only one who's noticed. So, too, had the national office.

Exeter's Job Corps Center was recently ranked No. 11 out of the 124 Job Corps throughout the country. Each Job Corps is evaluated monthly and this ranking is an accumulation of the months beginning July 2010 through January 2011.

Rankings are based on 13 criteria including how students do while on campus and what happens after the

leave and, every July, each center gets a clean slate and the process begins again.

A third party company contacts students six months after they graduate the program to see if they've gotten a job, and if so, how much they are making, as well as other aspects. A fairly high percentage of students are contacted and complete the brief assessment.

"In addition, we also are able to keep in touch with former students who've moved on from the program," DiPina said. "Strong relationships are made during their stay here and they continue long after they leave. So we get updates from them quite often."

Those students, DiPina said, are also the best marketing tactic for the center.

"Once done with the program, they're back interacting with their peers and families and

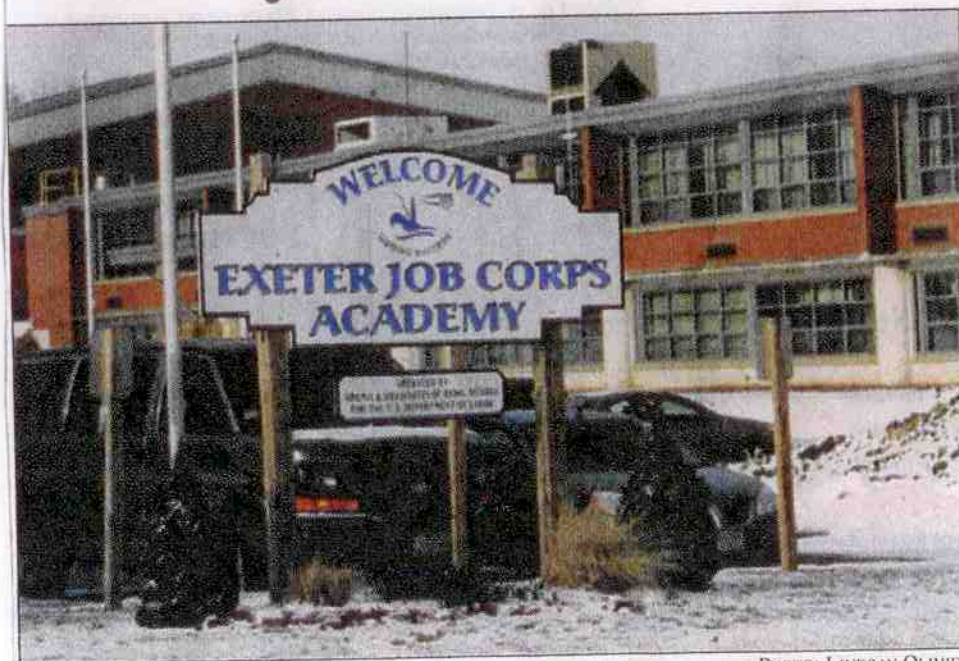


PHOTO: LINDSAY OLIVIER

A recent evaluation of Job Corps centers around the country ranked Exeter's center 11th nationwide.

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Exeter Job Corps receives praise

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a good portion do end up coming here because of the changes their friend or relative experienced."

There are two main portions to Exeter Job Corps: academic and career technical training. Not every student needs the academic portion, they may already have their high school diploma or General Education Diploma (GED) and just need to prepare for a better paying job or training in a certain career field. But those who do need either of those diplomas, can earn them in addition to the career training aspect.

"We've really gained a positive reputation in the state," said Assistant Center Director Linda Soderberg. "We work with guidance counselors and local businesses and the partnerships have proved to be invaluable."

DiPina stressed that he doesn't have a magic wand in transforming the students. If they struggled during high school, they're going to struggle at Job Corps. He said the change comes from within the student.

"They want to be here," he said. "They want to be successful. They want to make a change. It's not going to be easy and they know that when they walk through those doors. There's a clear understanding of what's expected of them. There's structure, discipline, they wear uniforms and they eat at the same time every day. All this to get them ready for the working world."

Exeter has change the screening process for admitting new students. Currently, in the state alone, there are between 16,000 and 20,000 eligible students based on age and income criteria. The student interviews with a senior administrator which is in the form of a job interview and their file folder is looked at with great detail.

This new process, DiPina said, has increased the center's retention rate.

And, if this wasn't enough, the center is expanded.

Recently, Exeter began a brand new, exclusive advanced culinary program. The center currently has a culinary program but now students have the opportunity to move on to a more integrated and "master" level. Currently, only three other Job

Corps in the country have this advanced program. Out of the 10 seats available, only five remain. Two students are currently in the program and transferred from the Brooklyn, N.Y., center and three more out of state students are due to arrive at the end of the month.

"We're in the final stages of working out a partnership with Johnson and Wales," Soderberg said. "We're hoping to build this program long-term in that after students graduate from us, they can go directly to Johnson and Wales. Our chef-teacher is a graduate of the college too."

Dipina and Soderberg both agree the center, which has only been open for seven years, is doing extremely well and are excited for the upcoming programs and what the center has to offer.

"The kids are great," DiPina said. "They're hungry for all the opportunities that'll be coming their way and they genuinely appreciate everything. The students push us to do better."

Exeter Town Council member and liaison to the center Cal Ellis is extremely proud of the Exeter Job Corps for their high ranking and said that it speaks volume to their leadership and staff.

"We've seen first hand the success," Ellis said. "Our tax assessor's clerk is a graduate and she's doing an excellent job. I can tell you her skills in organization, computer and communication are valuable. She's truly contributed to a better work environment at the town hall."

Exeter Job Corps is a no-cost education and career technical training program administered by the United States Department of Labor.

It is overseen by the Boston Regional Office of Job Corps and is operated by Adams and Associates, Inc.

The Center is a member of the Chamber of Commerce in North Kingstown, South Kingstown and the Greater Providence area.

Eighty-three percent of the 200 current students are from Rhode Island. Since opening in 2004, students from every city and town except Block Island have attended the center.

For more information on Exeter Job Corps visit www.exeter.jobcorps.gov.