

All in a holiday's work – baking cookies

Students are enrolled in Upper Bucks W.O.W. program

Brenda Lange

"Cookies are our life!"

For weeks, that exclamation was the daily mantra of the students in the W.O.W. program at Upper Bucks Vocational Technical School.

The 20 members of "We're Outstanding Workers" collectively baked 330 dozen cookies, beginning to prepare batter the week after Thanksgiving. Pecan tassies, chocolate macadamia nut, Russian tea cakes, criss cross ... nearly 4000 of them ... were baked before winter break.

Proudly wearing bright red and white sweatshirts emblazoned with their logo, six members of the group played like jolly old St. Nick and delivered cookie orders to staff of the Bucks County Intermediate Unit 22 Thursday.

Wearing Santa hats and big grins, they wished everyone a "Merry Christmas," as they made their way through the building, distributing the goodies.

JoAnn Perotti bought 12 dozen. "I buy everything they make," the strategic planning-communications director said with a laugh. "They are all wonderful."

The W.O.W. program consists of 20 students, ages 18 to 21, who have graduated from the Life Skills programs at Pennridge, Palisades and Quakertown high schools. W.O.W. is a part of the Transition Services Department



Students in the W.O.W. program join instructional assistant, Pat Konigsbauer, far left, at the Bucks County Intermediate Unit No. 22 to deliver Christmas cookies.



Samantha and Susanna deliver cookies to JoAnn Perotti, director of strategic planning and communications and executive assistant Joyce Frazier.

Photos by Brenda Lange

of the I.U. that helps students prepare for work experiences. The program was started in 2000 when Joanie Dantzig joined the staff at the VoTech.

"We try to teach the kids about working. We help them with general job skills, but also with things like working until the job is done, meeting deadlines, always doing your best, and producing a good product," she said. "We show them how the job goes faster, and is more fun, when everyone contributes and is supportive of one another."

The students operate four distinct businesses out of one 1,600-square-foot building on the school's campus in Perkasio. We K-ter provides catered breakfasts and lunches, cakes and other snacks for groups,

including the Intermediate Unit, and for birthdays and other parties for individuals.

We're Blooming is a popular yard care business. The students rake leaves in the fall and spread mulch and plant in the spring. We're Scantastic has been operating for about two years. Here the students scan photos and documents, preserving them on CDs.

We Care was started last year to help the students improve their social skills by volunteering to help out area senior citizens with small jobs around the home.

The activity rarely slows down in the W.O.W. building,

where five staff – teachers Dantzig and Doreen McNamara and instructional assistants, Shirley Pike, Casey Summers and Pat Konigsbauer – supervise the students, who also manage clerical duties such as answering the phone, manning the fax and computer and producing a weekly newsletter. They also do the laundry for the school's tech school and culinary students.

"Many of our students have jobs (outside of W.O.W.), but most don't go on to work in the catering or lawn care fields after graduation," Dantzig admits. "The pace required in those businesses often just proves too overwhelming."

Students who are able also learn how to manage the pro-

gram's money by keeping checkbooks that mimic the actual class books. All money earned is put back into the program, buying equipment and supplies, providing the sweatshirts and other imprinted clothing, and for trips such as overnight camping and other outings like the two-day special education conference in Hershey last fall.

When the last box of cookies was handed over to an I.U. staff member, the W.O.W. workers accompanied by Konigsbauer, piled back into their van, with smiles for a job well done, and one more joyous "Merry Christmas!"

For more information, call the W.O.W. program at 215-857-2476.