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Kaine wants technical education off the back burner

The governor kicks off his new training program at New Horizons as part of a daylong visit.

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247-4644

August 21, 2008

HAMPTON

— Gov. Timothy M. Kaine grew up working in his father's Kansas City welding and iron working shop. So he's the first to admit he has a personal interest in promoting technical training for Virginia's work force.

Kaine visited New Horizons Regional Education Center Wednesday morning as part of his Cabinet Community Day. He made remarks prior to touring the Hampton facility and watching a robotic demonstration.

Congressman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott and state Del. Mamye BaCote joined all six local public school superintendents among the guests.

"We really wanted to come to New Horizons to emphasize the importance of career and technical education, which is something that not just Virginia but all across American has kind of been put on the back burner for a while," Kaine said. "But we are really embracing it with a passion."

New Horizons is home to Kaine's Governor's Academy for Innovation, Technology and Engineering and is one of seven newly-established Governor's Career and Technical Academies. Beginning this fall it will focus on electrical and mechanical engineering with instruction provided at all six local high school divisions, online and at Thomas Nelson Community College.

After noting that most Governors' Schools were very focused on college prep, Kaine wanted a technical program that was good enough to have a Governor's label on it. The idea was hatched to set rigorous criteria for an exemplary program and allow schools to apply for the distinction.

New Horizons was one of the first six to receive it. Kaine and his Cabinet toured a few New Horizons' classrooms and its welding shop before a group of students demonstrated a robot they had built for a competition.

"We're fighting an all-fronts war to basically equip people with the skills they need to have a productive life and to earn a great living for their family, and to respond to market demands in

terms of the skills that are necessary for employers," Kaine said.

He stressed the need for well-trained workers in a variety of trades, including construction and welding.

"Employers in the state need this type of work force," he said. "I think we're now at a point where the precious commodity is not oil, but talent."

Joe Johnson, executive director of New Horizons, said the new academy's initial focus on engineering technology addresses a need in the local work force. Kaine and Johnson want to get information on the available training and career possibilities out to students starting at the seventh grade level.

"We are in the process this year of having a \$500,000 renovation to create a robotics and fiber optics lab," Johnson said. "The pathway also will go from the high school to the community college to the Apprentice School and to Old Dominion University, all of which offer programs in mechanical and electrical engineering."

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