

Students learn about county government

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WILKES-BARRE – Area high school students got a crash course in county government Wednesday as part of “Student Government Day” at the Luzerne County Courthouse.

Hosted by Commissioner Greg Skrepenak, who started the event last year, the day informed the teens about careers in public service and the responsibilities of a county commissioner.

“I want to explain to kids how county government works and spark some interest in them,” Skrepenak said.

Skrepenak explained how commissioners balance budgets, oversee many departments and agencies, administer the county code and follow a purchasing policy, which he admitted is “under great scrutiny right now.”

Shannon Stanski, 18, of Pittston Area High School, listened as Skrepenak spoke, but doesn’t necessarily know if she’d like a career in government. She enjoyed learning about it, though.

Last year, Skrepenak said, a student who attended e-mailed him with a recommendation, which led to the development of a helpline to report gang or peer problems. Skrepenak wants more student suggestions.

The day featured presentations by County Manager/Chief Clerk Doug Pape, Deputy Prison Warden Sam Hyder, who also led a prison tour, Director of Elections Leonard Piazza, who gave a voting machine demonstration, and Sheriff Mike Savokinas, who gave students an overview of his job.

The nearly two dozen students listened intently as Savokinas talked about his job responsibilities – from carrying out court orders and transporting prisoners to weapon licensing and posting tax claim sales.

And with the upcoming April 22 primary approaching, Piazza encouraged students to vote and make informed decisions, as well as fielded questions about ballot placements and the Electoral College.

But Stanski didn’t need any encouragement – she’s already registered and planning to vote for her first time this April.