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A Win, Win: Scholars Gain Valuable Experience, MC Community Gets the Coffee

With fall upon us, there is only one place for Montgomery College students, staff and faculty to get a hot cup of Starbucks-brewed coffee on Montgomery College's Rockville Campus: the student-run MBI Café.

Since its opening in 2003, the MBI Café has been operated by Macklin Business Institute (MBI) Scholars, who have been responsible for the front line functions of the café and a number of managerial functions as well. For example, students are in charge of inventory, placing the product orders and even creating and implementing marketing strategies. Overseeing the entire operation is Montgomery College staff member Marie Gentile, who works as the Café manager to guide the students through the challenges of operating a business.

"It's unique in that [the MBI Café] runs



Crystal Quinones puts the finishing touches on a grande medium roast.



Sylwia Szczepanek flavors a customer's coffee.

strictly for their benefit from a learning experience all the way through to the profits going back into the program," Gentile said. "It's all for, and about, the Scholars ... the students get to work in a real business."

Located in the Campus Center cafeteria, next to the bookstore, the Café sports a "We Proudly Brew Starbucks Coffee" sign above the doorway. The MBI Scholars rotate through the various positions at the Café while coordinating their own schedules with other College students who work at the Café.

"I think the biggest things I've learned while working in the cafe are simple tasks such as cash-handling skills and improved communication skills," said sophomore Crystal Quinones, who also plays on MC-Rockville's soccer team. "I believe that every

job is a learning experience and there is always room for improvement. I also believe my experience working at the MBI Café is the building block for the fundamentals in business that I will be learning throughout the Macklin program."

Sylwia Szczepanek, a sophomore from Rockville says, like any new job, it took some time to learn the skills necessary to run the Café.

"In the beginning, I thought that I should be as fast and know everything, like the [current employees] do," Szczepanek said. "Well, it doesn't always work that way. I think this [experience] is going to help, especially in our communication."

It's been just over two months in the MBI Program for Aquilah Nixon, but the freshman from Damascus is well aware how her



Joan Hudson shines the cooler.

newly learned skills will benefit her for future projects.

"I see my experience in working at the MBI Café translating to my overall experience with the Macklin program because it makes me more open and comfortable in front of my peers," Nixon said. "It especially helps me to speak in front of people because I usually get nervous giving presentations. Working at the Café and interacting with different customers has helped me get over being nervous or talking in front of others."

Gentile hopes the students that come through the MBI Café each semester take away some valuable lessons, about business and about life.

"The first thing that comes to mind is the ability to work with all types of people, at all levels. This is critical for success," Gentile said. "And I would like for the scholars to get a general base knowledge of how to start and run a business. You cannot put a price on experience... it's with you always to be used accordingly."

For information, visit www.macklin.org or contact Steve Lang, director, Macklin Business Institute, 240-567-1707; stephen.lang@montgomerycollege.edu.