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# in focus

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## Cobb's Women In Technology

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# Proud Partners

Chattahoochee Tech & A.G. Rhodes team up for needed nursing home experience.

By Haisten Willis

Job security isn't an issue for certified nursing assistants, better known as CNAs. The job is in high demand for anyone up to the task, so leaders at Chattahoochee Technical College are hard at work getting students ready to pursue a career as a CNA.



Merle Houston, a resident at A.G. Rhodes, talks with students Elijah Branche and Abby Fishman.

Classroom teaching can only do so much when it comes to strenuous CNA jobs, which include tasks such as caring for the elderly. Thus, career development is a key goal in filling the demand. To help meet this goal, Chattahoochee Tech has partnered with local nursing home operator A.G. Rhodes Health & Rehab to get students into clinical settings at Rhodes' Marietta facility. "It's important for anyone who is going to pursue a career in healthcare to get exposure while they're young to really see if this is the kind of work they want to do," says Mary Helton, director of human resources at A.G. Rhodes. "You really can't get that in the classroom."

A.G. Rhodes helps fill needed healthcare roles through partnerships with not only Chattahoochee Tech, but also Kennesaw State University and Wheeler High School. Next year, Marietta High School will join up as well. Students visit the Marietta A.G. Rhodes facility for clinicals as part of their career development and as a way to get real-world experience. Roughly 100 Chattahoochee Tech students

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visit each year, of which five to 10 will be hired directly and working at Rhodes.

Both sides see major benefits from the partnership. For one, Rhodes and other nursing home operators want to make sure potential employees gain on-site experience before being hired. The nursing home residents enjoy it too, getting to spend time with these enthusiastic young people. From the student standpoint, it's a chance to experience the ups and downs of working in a nursing home. Some will learn early on that the job isn't for them and can move on toward other pursuits. Others will realize just the opposite — they enjoy and excel at caring for the elderly and can begin building

both real-world experience and a network of professional contacts.

"The students transfer patients from the bed to a wheelchair. They take them for walks, help them get dressed, brush their teeth, put them on the toilet or the bed pan, feed them, comb their hair," says Linda Ferrick, associate dean of applied health science at Chattahoochee Tech. "They get right in the 'trenches,' put their hands on the patients and take care of them."

A.G. Rhodes is one of the oldest nursing organizations in Georgia, named after furniture mogul Amos Giles Rhodes, who donated the land and funds for the building that opened in 1904 where the current A.G.



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- **Smyrna Birthday Celebration and Fireworks** - Sat., August 3 - 6:00 p.m. to 10:00



Mary Helton, corporate HR director at A.G. Rhodes, gives students an overview of person-directed care and explains the critical role that CNAs have in care delivery.

Rhodes location near Grant Park sits. The company now operates three locations in metro Atlanta, serving more than 400 patients in total. For more than 15 years Rhodes has partnered with Chattahoochee Tech to bring students into its facilities. “Our organization has always been open-minded and forward-thinking,” says Helton. “We’ve always seen the value of having students come to our communities and partnering with schools.”

With 14,000 students across eight campuses, Chattahoochee Tech is the largest technical school in Georgia and plays a major role in helping fill important jobs across the state. A.G. Rhodes makes a strong partner for the school for several reasons. Not only is it an Atlanta-based company, but the Rhodes location in Marietta is just over three miles from the school’s Marietta campus. Rhodes also is innovative in that it creates care plans customized to what patients are interested in. When students visit, the company makes sure they’re assigned to a variety of different patients and tasks so they get a full picture of what CNA work entails. Students also visit hospice care and, in some cases, help take care of patients there.

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Guerlande Samedi (right), CNA at A.G. Rhodes, shows Mahsan Sadigh (student) how to chart (document information about residents).

Typically, CNA students need 24 hours of clinical work to graduate, and Ferrick describes CNA tasks as being about the fundamentals of healthcare. “It’s the ‘get your hands dirty’ part of the job,” she says. “They need that experience, and a lot of times students will come out of clinicals and realize they don’t want to be a nurse anymore.”

Some Cobb high school students are able to get the experience even earlier. Wheeler High School and, soon, Marietta High School will send students interested in healthcare to A. G. Rhodes as well, enabling them to learn about healthcare careers first hand, even before entering college.

For those CNA students who do well, Rhodes is known to make job offers on the spot, hiring several Chattahoochee Tech graduates each year. They’d like to hire even more, but Helton said the company tends to keep its employees for a long time and thus has little turnover.

But students who aren’t hired at Rhodes don’t need to worry. Certified nursing assistants remain in high demand, and will likely continue to be for decades to come. There are nearly 500 assisted living facilities in Georgia and new ones fill up quickly.

### Chamber commitment

Workforce development is an area the Cobb Chamber of Commerce plans to place a big focus on going forward. Currently, the Chamber is involved with 59 projects concerning companies looking to relocate or expand in Cobb County. According to 2020 Cobb Chamber Chairman of the Board, John Loud, one of the biggest topics to tackle is workforce development.

“It’s not about economic incentives,” says Loud, who also is the president of LOUD Security Systems. “It’s about the workforce that is in Cobb County and metro Atlanta getting these companies to move here from California, Texas, or other places.”

The story the Chamber wants to tell businesses is not only one about the major companies already operating here, but also how the county is investing in the future of workforce development. “Our community is investing to make sure we’ll have a strong workforce for decades to come,” says Loud. “With unemployment being so low, we’re struggling to find quality workers.”

One great example of Cobb workforce development is a pair of new college and career academies. A \$13.75-million college and career academy is expected to open at Marietta High School in 2020, to be joined the same year by the \$14.5-million Cobb Career Academy on the campus of Osborne High School.

In today’s world, every job is a technical job. Formerly analog roles, such as security

system installation or automobile repair, now involves quite a bit of technology — which Cobb Chamber leaders are helping the next generation prepare for through technical education.

“Not everybody has to send little Johnny to college anymore,” says Loud. “There are plenty of high-paying jobs that don’t require a four-year degree.” ■



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