

# SkillsUSA event to draw 15,000, boost economy

SHELDON S. SHAFER

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The SkillsUSA National Leadership and Skills Conference this week in Louisville is expected to draw more than 15,000 attendees and translate into about a \$14 million local economic stimulus.

The Louisville Convention & Visitors Bureau has made those estimates on the conference set for June 20-24 that is intended to showcase the ability of students and to help them develop skills to make a positive impact on the workforce.

It will be the 52nd annual national conference and the second consecutive in a six-year commitment to hold the event in Louisville. Among the attendees will be about 6,000 student contestants, along with hundreds of voting delegates, observers, SkillsUSA advisers or instructors, contest judges, and parents, VIPs and guests. Several thousand teachers, school administrators and business people also attend the sessions.

Activities will be held at the Kentucky Exposition Center and the nearby Crowne Plaza Hotel.

SkillsUSA is the world's largest showcase of skilled trades. The organization said in a release that "quality career and technical education will be the centerpiece of the conference. Students, teachers, education leaders, and representatives from 600 national corporations, trade associations, businesses and labor unions will participate in the event."

The highlight of the conference will be the annual SkillsUSA Championships June 22 and 23, with 100 hands-on skill and leadership competitions.

SkillsUSA, based in Leesburg, Va., has grown into one of the largest student groups in the country with almost 300,000 students and advisers as members. At the convention, high school and college students compete in such fields as carpentry, cosmetology, robotics, graphic design, and culinary and construction trades. Industry partners help develop the projects.

Throughout the event students and adults can take part in numerous workshops on developing a wide range of skills, from new trends in HVAC systems to architectural design drafting.

The student competition is also

widely varied, but focuses increasingly on technical subjects — including team engineering challenges, additive manufacturing, graphic imaging, robotics and app development.

The opening ceremony will be at 7 p.m. June 21 at Freedom Hall. Most of the activities, including competitions, are open to the public and free of charge, with the \$8 per vehicle fairgrounds parking fee.

SkillsUSA will partner with GOJO Industries on June 24, which has been designated a community service day. Nearly 700 SkillsUSA conference student participants are expected to join in organized service activities. GOJO Industries is a leading producer and marketer of skin health and hygiene products.

Local nonprofit organizations scheduled to benefit from the service include: Brightside (tree plantings); Falls City Community Bike Works (refurbishing donated bicycles); Falls of the Ohio park in Southern Indiana (removal of invasive plants, debris pick-up); Habitat for Humanity (work on house in New Albany, Ind.); and Louisville Grows (community garden projects).

Also, Louisville Metro Parks (weed removal, painting community centers); Shelby Park Neighborhood Community Center (cleanup); St. Joseph Children's Home (maintenance); University of Louisville (composting, help set up bike parts library, maintenance); and YouthBuild (street cleanup, gardening).

The closing awards ceremony will be June 24 at 6 p.m. in Freedom Hall.

"We really hope that people will come and bring their whole family for an entertaining and inexpensive experience," said Karen Williams, president & CEO of the Convention Bureau.

SkillsUSA announced in 2008 that it would leave Kansas City, Mo., where it has met each year since 1994, and come to Louisville. SkillsUSA, then known as the Vocational Industrial Clubs of America, held its annual convention in Louisville in 1982-84 and in 1991-94. It has been at Kansas City ever since but outgrew the available convention facilities there.

Reporter Sheldon S. Shafer can be reached at (502) 582-7089. Follow him on Twitter at @sheldonshafer.