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TALENT CARNIVAL

The WorldSkills talent sharing competition that began in 1950 has proved to be an international source of inspiration and learning for vocational education. This year the WorldSkills Hong Kong 2014 event paved the way for next year's "skill olympics" in Brazil. DANIEL JEFFREYS reports.

Mixing mocktails, making LED circuits and changing tires were among the skills that the public could try at the Kai Tak Cruise Terminal in late June, as Hong Kong's latest landmark was transformed into the venue for the WorldSkills Hong Kong Competition 2014.

This year the organisers decided that demonstrations of skills by accomplished competitors would be complemented by "hands-on" opportunities, so that visitors could compare their skills with young professionals. This gave the event a carnival motif, which pointed participants toward 2015, when the 43rd WorldSkills Competition will be held in Sao Paulo, Brazil, the global home of carnival.

The WorldSkills Competition occurs biennially, attracting more than 1,000 young talents from 67 countries and regions to test their skills against international standards. Hong Kong first took part in the WorldSkills Competition in 1997 and has won two Gold, one Silver and 32 Medallions for Excellence.

As one of the organising institutions, HKDI played a significant role in this year's competition, providing venues for two competition trades and hosting a seminar at Kai Tak by graduates from HKDI on product and technology, which helped to draw more than 25,000 participants to the vibrant two-day event.

"Vocational education and skills training plays a significant role in nurturing the talents needed for the development of Hong Kong," says Cherry Tse, Hong Kong's Permanent Secretary for Education. "The WorldSkills Hong Kong Competition enhances the understanding of vocational training, and strengthens the productivity and competitive edge of Hong Kong."

The WorldSkills Competition covers 25 trades in six

major areas: transportation and logistics, construction and building technology, manufacturing and engineering technology, information and communication technology, creative arts and fashion, and social and personal services.

With the theme of "Discover Skills", the 2014 WorldSkills Hong Kong Competition attracted some 300 contestants to showcase their talents and skills, breaking previous records for attendance. The WorldSkills Hong Kong Competition has become a cradle for nurturing young tradesmen, providing opportunities for them to exchange professional knowledge and broaden their horizons. Winners of the competition are undergoing further training, with a view to becoming representatives of Hong Kong in next year's Brazil WorldSkills Competition.

The WorldSkills Competition has its roots in 1940s Spain, where José Antonio Elola Olaso, who was General Director of the Spanish Youth Organization OJE, became concerned about the lack of skilled workers in his country. Olaso believed that "...it was necessary to convince young people, as well as their parents, teachers and employers, that their future depended on an effective vocational training system."

Olaso's brilliant idea was to inspire young apprentices and their families by holding skill competitions, and in 1947 the first Spanish national concourse took place with 4,000 competitors. The event was deemed a success and soon spread to Latin America, and then throughout Europe. It now has over 70 member countries and major international sponsors like Samsung and 3M.

The WorldSkills Hong Kong Competition has become a magnet for attracting potential talents and the 2014 event, with its "hands-on" component was a perfect platform for enhancing public recognition of the role played by vocational training.

"Evolving with the times, vocational skills will become increasingly important," says Matthew Cheun, Hong Kong's Secretary for Labour and Welfare. "Young people equipped with relevant skills will enjoy a head start in the employment market." And maybe even a trip to Brazil, to compete at next year's skills olympics. ☺



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« ELEGANCE IS ALWAYS IN STYLE FOR MEN. THERE ARE ALL DIFFERENT KINDS OF ELEGANCE. IT CAN BE SILK, IT CAN BE A T-SHIRT. »
DONATELLA VERSACE