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## **Spanish facilitator program flourishes**

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By Neil Offen

[noffen@heraldsun.com](mailto:noffen@heraldsun.com); 419-6646

DURHAM -- Samuel White Jr. works in the apartment management industry. Since he speaks Spanish fluently, he frequently had been called on to interpret at meetings between a property manager and a Hispanic resident. He'd been asked as well to translate correspondence and advertisements from one language to another.

A little more than a year ago, "it dawned on me that I actually enjoyed the challenge of utilizing my bilingual skills," Smith said. "And I wondered if I could possibly serve as a professional doing this kind of work."

Thanks to Durham Tech, he can.

White enrolled a year ago in the school's Community Spanish Facilitator Certificate program. The program was just honored by Excelencia in Education, a national initiative that recognizes efforts to improve Latino student success, as one of its 2009 "Examples of Excelencia." It was the only community college in the nation to be honored.

The program, which began with just five students in 2003, now enrolls more than 100 students who are looking to use and enhance their bilingual skills and become paraprofessional interpreters in the community.

They work now in hospitals or community agencies, or have returned to their previous employers and do interpretive work in banks or legal offices.

"With the growth of the Spanish-speaking community here and across the country, they can work almost anywhere," said Marianela Manana, program director.

To enter the one-year program at Durham Tech, a student must already have at least college-level English skills and intermediate-to-advanced Spanish skills. The certificate requires 18 credit hours and gives students work in Spanish conversation, reading and composition, and grammar, along with both translation and consecutive interpretation.

Already growing in popularity, the program saw a growth spurt last fall with the introduction of a medical interpretation sub-specialty.

"There's a huge need, particularly in this area, for that," Manana said. "There's so much interest in that, we are helping to pilot a national certification test for medical interpretation."

When the facilitator program began, Manana said, most of the students were native English speakers who were already fluent in Spanish. But in recent years, "we began receiving more native Spanish speakers, but ones who are fully bilingual," she said.

Around 50 percent of the students are now native Spanish speakers.

White was one of the native English speakers, but he had a bachelor's degree in Spanish.

Still, "at the time I had some doubts about my ability to communicate fluently" in Spanish, he said. "But through the facilitator program, I was able to gain confidence, get answers to grammatic and linguistic questions that I could never figure out otherwise and work on several projects with native Spanish-speaking classmates. Most of all, I acquired translation and interpretation techniques that improved my ability to communicate accurately."

White is applying to graduate school at UNC Charlotte to pursue a master's degree in translation studies.

His dream, he said, is to have his own language business and the facilitator program was "the first big step for me to achieve that dream."

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