



## Celebrating Our Staff

"As a teacher, you just want to give your students as many opportunities as you can."

-Alison Clinton, W.F. West CTE teacher

**Alison Clinton: Building Skills and SkillsUSA**

### Alison Clinton

Though she is well-known for her photography skills, many may find it surprising that W.F. West Career and Technical Education teacher Alison Clinton never took a photography class until her senior year at W.F. West High School.

"I wasn't a bad student but I didn't have a place. I liked ASB a lot but it wasn't until photography that I was like 'you're really good at this.' As a teacher, I like my students to know that," she said.

For Clinton, teaching high schoolers gives her an opportunity to mentor students, many of whom are still searching for their niche like she was in high school. She said she hopes her experiences will show students there is no one right path and no one right way to success in school and life.

"Alison brings an enthusiasm and passion for her craft that resonates deeply with her students. That, in turn, motivates and inspires her students to express themselves artistically in a way that allows them to shine as they do what they do best!" said W.F. West Assistant Principal and CTE Director Mark Westley.

After graduating from W.F. West High School, Clinton said she originally believed the only real next step for her was to attend a four-year university. But she quickly learned that was not the right path for her. She next attended [Spokane Falls Community College](#), a two-year technical program, and found the right match for what she wanted to do.

After her photography training, Clinton returned to Lewis County to work. She and her husband, Joe, met each other in high school and have been married for almost 20 years. They have two daughters, Ellie, a W.F. West Junior and Charlie, a W.F. West Freshman.

"Both of our families live in the area and it's a great place to raise a family," she said.

Clinton worked at Centralia portrait studio Horizon Photo for five years before purchasing the business, which she owned for a total of 10 years. During the time she owned Horizon Photo, she never forgot about her alma mater. She served on a W.F. West CTE advisory board and coached for the Girls Basketball C team. Her former youth soccer coach Tim Touhey, today Principal of Lewis County Alternative/Turning Point but then W.F. West CTE Director, recruited her to teach photography at W.F. West from 2005-2007.

In 2016, she was asked to consider returning to teaching at W.F. West, but this time full time. At the time, Wendie Balmer was the CTE director for the high school. Clinton said Balmer was very influential in helping her become a CTE teacher and she was also drawn to the idea of being a positive influence in the lives of teenagers.

"I love this age group. I had always loved senior pictures and all that," she said.



### Building Skills and SkillsUSA

This year, Clinton is teaching three photography classes, entrepreneurship and personal finance at W.F. West.

She created the entrepreneurship class in 2017 because at the time, there were no business classes being taught at W.F. West. The course is unique in that students learn how to start their own business, including branding and marketing, and many students actually do go on to start their own business. Clinton will have entrepreneurship students selling their items at the W.F. West Home & Garden Show May 2-4, Spring Blender at the Jester Auto Museum April 20-21 and at Centralia College Spring Fest May 22.

"I truly believe that you can start a business at any age and I work with some of the most creative students you'll ever meet. To help them realize that there are many ways to make a living and earn an income is really important to me," she said.

Around the same time, Clinton also brought SkillsUSA to W.F. West. Her original interest in starting a W.F. West chapter of the Career and Technical Student Organization (CTSO) was because it would allow her photography students to take part in state and national competitions.

Today, Clinton is part of a team of SkillsUSA advisors that includes Jessica Elder, Nancy Alexander, Deede Young and Mark Wagar. She said she loves watching students gain confidence, learn to talk to adults and find something at which they can excel.

"As a teacher, you just want to give your students as many opportunities as you can," she said.

In the 2021-2022 school year, W.F. West had 4 SkillsUSA students qualify for state and 1 go to nationals. In the 2022-2023 school year, 12 W.F. West SkillsUSA students went to state and 9 went to nationals. This year, W.F. West had 36 SkillsUSA students qualify for the state competition, which will take place March 21-23 at Clover Park Technical College. Students qualified for state in the following categories:

- Quiz Bowl Team
- Photography
- Screen Printing
- Graphic Image Sublimation
- Customer Service
- Pin Design
- T-shirt Design
- Community Service
- Early Childhood Education
- Cabinetmaking
- Promotional Bulletin Boards
- Health Knowledge Bowl
- Job Skill Demo Open (a job skill you learn outside of school)
- Job Skill Demo (a job skill you learned in a CTE course)
- Medical Terminology

It is the wide breadth of areas of competition that Clinton said she loves about SkillsUSA. There are 115 different categories in which students can be evaluated in authentic skills demonstrations by actual experts in the field.

"It's really eye opening to kids to see what's out there. You can compete in everything from nail tech and barber to culinary and baking to HVAC system and motorcycle repair and robotics. It's really a big umbrella," she said.

Since W.F. West SkillsUSA had only budgeted for 12 students (the same as last year) to go to state this year and triple that number qualified, they have been feverishly fund-raising to keep the impact on families to a minimum. SkillsUSA students have been selling Lotus drinks at the recent basketball tournaments hosted by W.F. West and have been brainstorming other ideas. Eventually, Clinton would like to create a revenue stream to support the SkillsUSA program by creating a mobile trailer store that could be opened during school events and would also make selling the items created by students at outside events much easier.



W.F. West SkillsUSA students and their advisors.

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