

Chippewa Valley students build home for Habitat

By Nicole Tuttle, For The Macomb Daily 05/31/16



Austin Ball, a Dakota High School junior, displays cabinets he installed in a house through the construction trades program located at Dakota High School. The cabinets are part of a house built by students for Macomb County Habitat for Humanity and displayed during an open house on May 20. Nicole Tuttle — For the Macomb Daily



Ethan Franz, a sophomore at Dakota High School, displays doors and trim that he worked on through the construction trades program located at Dakota High School. The room pictured is part of a house built by students for Macomb County Habitat for Humanity and displayed during an open house on May 20.

The May 20 open house at Dakota High School boasted the unusual aspect of two open houses in one: The construction trades building on the Macomb Township school's campus and a house built by students for Macomb County Habitat for Humanity.

The open house included a raffle to raise funds for the student chapter of the Home Builders Association of Southeastern Michigan and allow students to attend the National Association of Homebuilders International Builders Show, , according to construction trades teacher Joe Churches.

There are 66 students in four Churches' construction trades classes comprised of students from Dakota and Chippewa Valley high schools. The students build a house each year from October to November for Macomb County Habitat for Humanity. They learn job safety, go through OSHA training and machine safety as they build the house entirely inside the construction trades building, Churches said.

In the course of building the house, students learn plumbing, electrical work, siding, framing, roofing, windows, doors, painting, trim work, flooring and more.

“We want to get them completely exposed to everything that is going on,” Churches said.

Although some freshmen and sophomores are in the program, it is primarily comprised of juniors and seniors. Churches said he regularly gets calls from professionals looking to hire students. One example of a Dakota graduate placed in the field is 2006 graduate Scott Ransom, who went through the program and is now a master electrician, but donates his time after work to assist current students.

Chippewa Valley Schools Director of Career and Technical Education Claire Brisson said construction trades students are in high demand for apprenticeships, jobs or work learning experiences.

“I don’t think a single week has gone by in the last three or four months that I have not received a phone call or e-mail from a company looking for kids to groom into the kind of employees they want,” Brisson said.

Construction trades, drafting, tool and die have all been in demand.

“Our kids have had some experience or foundational skills,” Brisson said.

Dakota junior Austin Ball, 17, has been in the construction trades program for two years and will have a job with a home builder this summer, which he expects will carry on once he graduates.

“I have always liked working with tools. I like seeing a finished product,” Ball said.

Brisson said the partnership between the district’s construction trades program and Habitat for Humanity was initiated by Churches years ago, beginning with Habitat for Humanity Detroit and evolving to Macomb County Habitat for Humanity.

Hosting an open house event allows construction trades students to promote their program, promote Habitat, and showcase their work through tours and public speaking, according to Brisson.

The Macomb County Habitat for Humanity house displayed at the May 20 open house will be located in Clinton Township. It has three bedrooms and a full bath, Churches said. Macomb County Habitat for Humanity President and CEO Helen Hicks said that the homes that Churches’ students work on typically are 1,250 square feet with three bedrooms, a pre-manufactured base and a hingeable roof.

Macomb County Habitat for Humanity Construction Manager Paul Owens estimated the house could be moved to its site in approximately a month.

“We finish it up, we put in the basement and all the water taps and sewer taps and everything else, and then once it gets to the site we finish up with volunteers,” Owens said.

Habitat for Humanity families select their homes on site, according to Hicks. To qualify for a Habitat home, families must demonstrate need, put in 250 hours of public service and meet other criteria, Hicks said.

“The process takes time. It is not an overnight thing. It is close to a year for a family to get all the things done and be trained,” Hicks said.