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ACE Program Teaches Design, Teamwork

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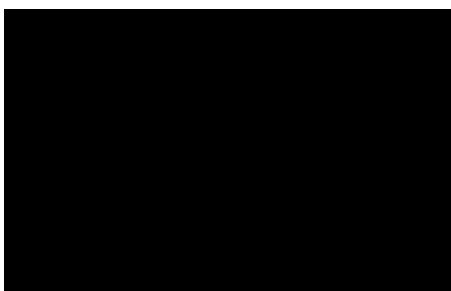
PHOTO BY Bethany Ziegler

ACE Team

PHOTO BY BETHANY ZIEGLER Students in the ACE Mentoring Program at St. Michaels High School have spent the semester designing an aviation museum and pedestal for an F-104 Fighter Jet for Easton Airport. On March 6, the students will make their final presentation.



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By Bethany Ziegler Community News Editor

EASTON - March 6 is going to be a big day for Shane Fisher and his team.

Fisher, 18, is a senior at St. Michaels High School and is the team leader for the school's Architecture, Construction and Engineering program students. March 6 is the day the team presents its designs, the culmination of a project it has been working on since October.

This is the ninth year of the ACE program in Talbot County, which also runs at Easton High School, and the seventh year it has been at St. Michaels. Each year, program students work together to design a project, usually of their own choosing. In the past, students have designed things of interest to them, like a park or recreation center.

"Nine times out of 10, they want to do a project for young people, because there's not really a lot for young people to do around here," said Jack Dempsey, one of the program mentors. Dempsey, a retired energy engineer, first became involved with the program after seeing an article about it.

Dempsey, with Jennifer Martella, the program's other mentor, has spent this school year working with the students on designing a project that was suggested to them by Mike Henry, the manager of Easton Airport. Henry approached the club, asking it to help design a pedestal for the airport's latest addition.

"What kind of precipitated this was that Tom Blair donated a F-104, 1950s era Air Force fighter to us," Henry said. "It doesn't fly, but we decided that we needed some way to display it rather than having it sitting on the ramp."

When Henry brought the idea of designing a stand for the fighter jet to the club, the members were excited about the project, but also worried it was not enough. So the student team, consisting of Fisher, Ethan White, Max Reedy, Hannah Hughes, Joe Prettyman and Ross Wojcik, took it a step further, designing an aviation museum that could be added to the airport to display some of its history.

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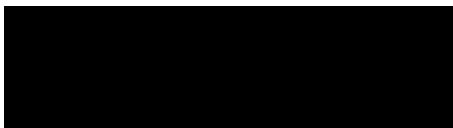


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"They came up with everything," Dempsey said. "We tried to give them an opportunity to see all aspects of the building process, but they have been free to do these very imaginative things."

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The goal of the ACE program is to let the students learn the ins and outs of building and design, and it helps students considering a career in those fields. Hughes, 16, a junior at St. Michaels, said she is considering a career in architecture and being involved with the program has been a real benefit for her.

"It has showed me a lot of what the process is like," Hughes said.

Dempsey said the program tries to cover every aspect of the process of designing a building, from brainstorming and sketching to calculating and budgeting.

"We try to simulate the real design process, especially the team work aspect and an exposure to a lot of disciplines," Dempsey said. "And the ideas have seemed to spread very well. The kids have various interests but the opportunity to use the same skills, to use problem-solving. It gives them a lot of confidence."

Though the group is required to meet after school only about 15 times per year, the design process and extra work its members put in brings them together as a team, Fisher said. And the whole team is anxious to unveil its final designs.

"I'm definitely nervous for the presentation," Fisher said. "Right now, we need to start practicing our presenting skills."

For Dempsey, however, the end of the year is one of his favorite steps in process.

"I get very excited about the end of the year," Dempsey said. "They really do well during their presentations and step up to the challenge."

And for the folks at Easton Airport, who have yet to see the designs, March 6 is a day they are thrilled for.

"I can't wait to see what they have come up with. We want to build this thing. In the future, we will have to fund it, but we think we'll be able to do that once they get the design done," Henry said. "I think it will kind of show the connection between the airport and the community, and maybe even get some kids interested in aviation."

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