

Student-led 'ACE Williamson Team #3' proposes state aquatic conservation center

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Turtles, snakes and endangered species of aquatic life indigenous to Tennessee could one day have a special home and breeding ground at the Nashville School at Grassmere, with some initial groundwork laid by a group of 19 Williamson County high school students.

One of nine teams of high school students from throughout Middle Tennessee planning to pursue architecture, construction or engineering careers and involved in the ACE Mentor Program of America, ACE Mentor Team #3 Wednesday presented their ideas to officials of the zoo about how a possible Tennessee Aquatic Conservation Center could look and function.

Their recommendation, developed as a part of a school practicum experience, is hoped to help the zoological park raise funds for the educational exhibit if the zoo one day pursues the project.

"This has been a great partnership for the students," said team leader Brittany Shepherd, an Estimating Engineer with Turner Construction Company and representative of the Nashville ACE affiliate.

"It's a fantastic opportunity for the students to serve their community, be held accountable for their work and learn all the facets of the industry while addressing a real-life challenge."

"If the Zoo goes forward with their concept, the thinking these young professionals-to-be have done, as well as the detailed preliminary narratives, site plans and 3-D model they've created, will hopefully help better refine the educational exhibit and aid in securing the funds necessary to build it."

High school members of the team include: Lukas Barr, Independence High School; Nicholas Buhl, Centennial High School; Jack Butler, Franklin High School; Jonathon Cole, Independence High School; Matthew Crispi, Summit High School; A.J. Fekete, Centennial High School; Ryley Fodra, Independence High School; Kyra Frank, Franklin High School; Stedman Howard, Independence High School; Jacob Hunter,



Future professionals take classroom knowledge to the field

Matthew Crispi, from Summit High School, second from left, shows Dale McGinnity, Curator of Ectotherms at the Nashville Zoo, right, layouts of how the Zoo's planned Tennessee Aquatic Conservation Center would look and operate. The plans, narrative and 3-D model Crispi and his fellow students developed are hoped to help secure funding for the exhibit. Standing with Crispi are, left to right, Lillian Powell, Page High School, Jacob Hunter, Franklin High School, and Matthew Yeomans, Franklin High School, who represented all 19 members of a student team from Williamson County that developed the recommendations for the new exhibit. Their work was a practicum portion of the ACE (architecture, construction, engineering) Mentor Program, a national program to inspire high school students interested in pursuing a career in the building industry. Participating high schools include Centennial, Independence, Franklin, Page

Franklin High School; Francis Nunez, Franklin High School; and Summit.

Lillian Powell, Page High School; Austin Pytleski,

Franklin High School; Claudia Santiago, Independence High School; Elijah Slaughter, Independence High School; Seth Thomason, Independence High School; William Woods, Centennial High School; Cross Yang,

Independence High School; and Matthew Yeomans, Franklin High School.

Students attend meetings every two weeks to learn about these professions during their first semester, then apply what they learn in a project during the second.

The students work with mentors on assignments that are either actual — or conceptual — tasks addressing true-life needs.

The Williamson County Team #3 is composed of nineteen students from Centennial, Franklin, Independence, Page and Summit high schools. Mentor companies on this Middle Tennessee team include Turner Construction, Envision Advantage, Johnson Johnson Crabtree Architects, Littlejohn and Stanley D. Lindsey & Associates.

The ACE Nashville theme for the year was "shelter."

Working with Shepherd, the Williamson Team #3, with the help of Johnson Johnson Crabtree Architects, approached the Zoo in the fall of 2014

inquiring about a possible design project that the young people might pursue.

The native Tennessee wildlife exhibit, which zoo officials have been considering for some time, seemed a natural opportunity.

The exhibit would address what Tennessee was like before the first European immigrants arrived and focus on how re-introductions of endangered species can help maintain ecological balance.

It would additionally be a breeding and head-start facility for scientific study, as well as a demonstration exhibit for zoo patrons to view.

"I've been impressed with the depth of thinking and professionalism of these young men and women," said Dale McGinnity, curator of Ectotherms at the Nashville Zoo, who would oversee such an exhibit and breeding ground. "Over the semester, we've worked together on how this exhibit might look

and they've been exceptionally adept at taking our discussions, details and desires for this scientific exhibit and transform them into tools we might use to hopefully acquire funding. These young folks will be fine professionals!"