

BUSINESS



THE STUDENTS WHO built a new shed were (front row, from left) Nikki Bast, Alex Bast, Katelyn Depies, Jorije Mejchar, Sydney Depies, Jessica Depies, (back row, from left) Tim Riemer, Alex Hendrik, Jayson Hahn, Amir Spangler, Josh Riemer, Paul Riemer and James Mejchar. *Photo by Sam Arendt*

The skills needed to construct a future

■ *4-H volunteer creates opportunity for teens to get a taste of the trades*

By JOE POIRIER

Ozaukee Press staff

With a waning number of young people seeking a career in the skilled trades, the Ozaukee County 4-H recently began a program called Workforce Development: Skilled Trades to provide students with lessons on construction, plumbing and electrical work.

"Kids 14 to 18 years old have no clue what our industry holds," said Jim Rychtik, an owner of a construction company in Port Washington. "I grew up in the profession and I'm seeing less and less people going into it. It seems like schools are pushing kids to go to college."

Rychtik is a volunteer for the 4-H trades program and has let 14 students construct a 9-by-14 foot shed on his property in Belgium.

The project began in November and since June, when school let out for the summer, the students have been working on the shed every Thursday. The project is nearing its completion and is furnished with windows, a cupola, plumbing and electricity.

"This is the first time this type of project has been done in the state," said Teri Mejchar, who is the project's leader through the Ozaukee County Executive 4-H Leaders Board. "It's a pilot project and we hope that it catches on and that other counties give their kids a chance to learn the trades and get some experience doing these type of things."

The project pairs the students with volunteer tradesmen who are builders, masons, electricians and plumbers. The students range in age from 12 to 17 years old who are considering entering the trade industry after high school.

"I've learned all my life through hands-



PUTTING THE FINISHING touch on the structure in the form of a weather vane were (from left) James Mejchar, Jessica Depies and Jorije Mejchar. *Photo by Sam Arendt*

on experience. Doing this I've gotten to the point where I want to go into a trade profession," said Mejchar's son James, who will be a sophomore at Cedar Grove-Belgium High School in the fall.

"The first day we built the floor and walls. I was surprised by how well we were able to work together and understand that it's fun to learn all the tools and equipment." The project aims to teach students traditional skills that are no longer being taught in TechED classes.

"Schools in the southern part of the county are moving those TechED classes toward engineering rather than the hands-on wood work, metals and welding," said Kathy Butler, the youth development educator for the Ozaukee County 4-H.

She also said she sees high schools pushing students toward more college prep

programs like Advanced Placement classes, which isn't leaving them much time to take the TechED classes.

"The schools are telling them that college is the only way for a good career path. As generations move on, we have more and more people that don't know how to do basic skills in their home and they end up needing to hire people," Butler said. "We thought this would be a great way to introduce them to those kinds of classes that they no longer have the time to take in school."

Mejchar recounted that she heard one student say, "I don't want to go to school to be a doctor. I want to learn how to build houses for doctors."

According to Butler, the motivation behind the project is not just to teach the students handy skills but also life lessons.

"The project is really a vehicle to develop life skills like resiliency, responsibility and setting goals. So they will become upstanding citizens in the community and have the skills to be successful," she said. Butler also noted that 4-H is not just for farm boys who work with cattle.

Approximately 85% of the youth don't come from farm families. Five of the 14 students working on the project are girls.

"It's not just for boys, there are girls involved, too," Mejchar said. "Two of the girls used the skills they learned and built a little trailer to haul their sheep to the fair."

After the shed is complete, it will be raffled off at the Ozaukee County Fair. Each student will also provide an individual presentation to a panel of judges.

"They have the autonomy to choose what they want to do for their presentation," Mejchar said. "They can make a poster or verbally tell the judge what they've done. They also can show a judge the list of tools and materials they used to build the shed."

Mejchar said she hopes the sales from the raffle tickets will raise enough money to cover the cost of the shed, which was about \$2,000 to construct. She also hopes there will be some extra money to go toward next year's project.

Rychtik said the shed would be perfect for a garden or storage shed or a children's playhouse.

Although the future use of the shed is to be determined, Rychtik knows the lessons the students learned from the project are invaluable.

"It's a good industry and it's going to be around forever no matter what," he said. "We're all going to need a house to be built or fixed or have concrete poured or electrical work done. I have a lot of friends that work in the trades and they can't find any help."

CEO of Allen Edmonds to retire

■ *Paul Grangard led comeback for Port-based high-end shoemaker*

**By JOHN MORTON
and KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM**

Ozaukee Press staff

Paul Grangard, who led Port Washington's Allen Edmonds out of the economic downturn about a decade ago, has announced his decision to retire.

Named as interim CEO in 2008 and later becoming full time in the role, Grangard turned the high-end shoemaker around quickly. Since 2010, the company has been reporting record sales and earnings each year and employment has grown to 750, according to the company.

Grangard, whose main residence is in Minnesota, said he plans to focus on family and has interests in music and the Minnesota Orchestra.



Paul Grangard

When I came to Allen Edmonds as 'interim CEO' in 2008, I never imagined that I'd be here for nine years, commuting between two homes with many nights in hotels and sacrificing much of my social life and not-for-profit interests.

"I wouldn't trade that time with you and Allen Edmonds for anything."

In 2013, Los Angeles-based private equity firm Brentwood Associates bought Allen Edmonds for \$200 million and in December 2016, they sold the company to Caleres Inc. for \$225 million. St. Louis-based Caleres is a footwear retailer and wholesaler that owns Famous Footwear and other shoe brands.

Grangard will remain an advisor to Allen Edmonds, the company said, and Malcolm Robinson, newly appointed as Caleres president of the Men's and International division of Caleres, will oversee Allen Edmonds.

"So, it's not good-bye, just see you around," Grangard said.

Port Washington Ald. Doug Biggs lauded Grangard, noting he has led the firm through three changes in ownership and, under his leadership, employment at the company has doubled.

"For him to do what he has done is phenomenal," Biggs said, noting Grangard has led the firm through "trying times," including the economic recession.

Allen Edmonds is one of the few companies in the U.S. that has actually discontinued overseas production, Randy Tetzlaff, director of planning and development, said. Biggs and Mayor Tom Mlada also commended Grangard's work with the city.

"It can't be overstated how big a partner Allen Edmonds is," Biggs said, crediting Grangard with that cooperation. "They, and Paul in particular, are generous supporters of the City of Port Washington."

Port chamber to host Aug. 23 networking event

A professionals networking event will be held from 5 to 7 p.m. on Wednesday, Aug. 23, at Schooner Pub, 114 N. Franklin St., in Port Washington.

The event's organizer is the Port Washington Chamber of Commerce. Musician Will Pfirang will perform at the event.

The cost is \$5 for members, \$10 for non-members, and includes one drink, pizza and the live music.

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