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Tiny house, big rewards

Tipp City students build tiny house



By Cecilia Fox - cfox@civitasmedia.com

Anthony Weber | Troy Daily News Students of Jim Kitchen's Home Building class including junior Matt Taylor work on constructing a tiny house Wednesday at Tippecanoe High School. According to Kitchen the house is expected to be completed in late May.

TIPP CITY — Amid piles of sawdust and the noise of power drills, a tiny house is taking shape at Tippecanoe High School.

Under the guidance of art teacher Jim Kitchen, students have taken on the challenge of constructing a 24-foot by 8.5-foot tiny home.

In his first year of teaching in the district, Kitchen wanted to find a project that would give students in his homebuilding classes an opportunity to actually work with their hands. The course falls under the art department, teaching elements of design and aesthetics, but it

appeals to students you might not typically see in an art class, Kitchen said. Students started work on the project in November and plan to have it completed in May.

“It’s great hands on experience,” senior Alex Hornbeck said.

Kitchen said at least one of the students in the class plans to pursue a career in the construction field. The class also teaches the kind of skills that will be handy to have around the house someday, junior Matt Taylor added. Students like seniors Thomas Fischer and Michael Senseman students will have a chance to try their hand at all the aspects of homebuilding — from flooring and wiring to plumbing and roofing — over the course of the project.

“We teach a lot of theory, but this is tangible,” Kitchen said.

The district funded the purchase of the trailer the house will be mounted on, Kitchen said, and the project has received grant funding from local foundations. Several local businesses, organizations, and individuals have also made donations. The students have received donations of wood, windows, and a front door. Much of the material has been recycled from other items.

“This generation really has grown up with recycling as normal,” Kitchen said. “Even if it’s recycled things that we are using here in the school that used to be thrown out, we’ve been able to salvage and make use of it. Sometimes it’s parts of furniture and different items like that.”

Using some of the donated materials, students built a sliding barn door for the bathroom.

Kitchen waited in line on Black Friday to get a good deal on the appliances for the tiny house’s kitchen.

“When we started this, we really didn’t have anything,” Kitchen said.

The house will be sold to pay back the district for the trailer and to help fund the project next year.

“In order to teach these skills, get them to learn how to do the plumbing and the electricity, ventilation, insulation, roofing, flooring, everything, we need to secure that funding,” he said. The tiny house is also providing learning opportunities for students in other classes. Kitchen’s graphic and digital design students will work on marketing and advertising materials for the house.

Tiny houses are growing in popularity — with several shows on HGTV — and appeal to empty-nesters looking to downsize as well as millennials in search of less expensive housing options, Kitchen said.

“It’s growing and it’s catching on,” Kitchen said. Most tiny houses — like the one Tippecanoe students are working on — are mobile, so owners feel like they can pick up and go whenever they want. The homes are also more environmentally friendly and are typically made from salvaged or recycled materials, Kitchen said.

“There’s a whole green aspect to it. You’re recycling, there’s a smaller footprint, you’re not using as much energy,” he said. “And it forces you to think about what you truly need on a daily basis. What are you willing to give up?”

This tiny house is on the larger end of the spectrum, Kitchen explained. At 24 feet long and about 8.5 feet wide, it is the maximum size that can be pulled by a standard pick-up truck. The bathroom will be larger than those in many other tiny dwellings and the kitchen will have full-size appliances.

Currently students are building the frame of the house in the wood shop/theater production space. The frame will soon be carried outside and bolted onto the trailer, where roofing, siding and interior work can begin.

The community will have a chance to see the completed house on May 23 at the district’s Elevate the Arts event.

For more information or to donate to the project, email Kitchen at jkitchen@tippcity.k12.oh.us. Reach Cecilia Fox at cfox@civitasmedia.com.