

Students Demonstrate Building Skills *Courtesy of the Mining Journal*



Negaunee High School students Travis Allen, 17, and Tim King, 18, try to beat other construction students in building a storage shed at the first Upper Peninsula Construction Skills Challenge at Northern Michigan University. (Journal photo by Miriam Moeller)

The sounds of wood saws and the smell of freshly cut wood filled the halls at the Jacobetti Center at Northern Michigan University on April 20th.

Eight teams of five high school juniors and seniors from across the Upper Peninsula were busy constructing storage sheds in the inaugural U.P. Construction Skills Challenge.

“This has brought together a lot of different groups; all brought together by the construction industry,” said Mike Andary, NMU professor of construction management who helped coordinate the challenge.

Event coordinator Tony Retaskie of the Upper Peninsula Construction Council said students had to build sheds under the pressure of time and judgement. After the completion of one half of the shed, the students were judged on the criteria of electrical construction, framing, general carpentry, construction safety and time.

“I think everybody’s performance has been exemplary,” Andary said. “I think it’s a building block. It’s both educational and it helps them with the skill trade.”

The 8-foot by 8-foot storage sheds were finished by members of the University’s club, NMU Constructors, on Saturday with the goal to have them donated to Habitat for Humanity. Maria Krawczak, a member of the club, has been helping with the planning of the event since December. She also was a judge of the high school students’ work.

“They’re surprising us,” she said. “They’re doing it a lot quicker then we thought they would.”

She added that the challenge was a great opportunity for her to learn about planning — one of the most important skills in construction management — and leadership.

Joey Mattfolk, 17, of Baraga High School was sitting on a stool in front of his four teammates who were busy building the angled roof of the shed. Since only four students were able to work on the structure at a time, the five took turns, taking a break and overseeing the project.

Mattfolk said he practiced building this type of shed prior to the challenge in his vocational construction class.

“We’re not doing bad,” he said Friday afternoon. “(We’re) in third place right now.”

Mattfolk was not too much off with his estimation, his team ended up in second place overall.

The toughest part in constructing the shed was to put on the roof, Mattfolk said. “(It) was the biggest challenge so far, trying to get each piece to match evenly,” he said.

A total of 40 students worked hard to build sheds, but only three teams were able to take home medals. First place went to Delta-Schoolcraft Intermediate School District - Escanaba High School; second place to Copper Country Intermediate School District - Baraga High School; and third place to Negaunee High School.

Retaskie said he hopes to make the challenge an annual event. For more information and a list of donors, go to <http://www.upcsc.org/>