

Wrenshall students raise new Mahtowa recycling shed

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By Josie Flatgard, Carlton County Minnesota GreenCorps member

For the second time, Wrenshall high school students took on the project of constructing a new recycling center in Carlton County. The building, expected to be completed this spring, will replace two, twenty-year old sheds in Mahtowa.

Chris Gustafson teaches the construction class responsible for the task.

“It’s a wonderful project – a collaborative project between the county and the school,” Gustafson said. “It’s a symbiotic relationship.”

He led a small group of students last year as they built a new recycling center for Blackhoof Township.

This year, about 26 students were able to work on this real-world project.

The class started going to the work site the third week into the school year and went once or twice a week, barring weather and road conditions.

“It’s nice to get out and not be stuck in school all the time,” senior Ryleene Osowsky said. “The only bad thing is when it’s cold, but otherwise, it’s really fun, and



A construction class student measures and marks siding before it is cut. About 26 students were able to participate in the construction of the new Mahtowa recycling center this winter. (Photo by Karola Dalen)

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- Chris Gustafson, Wrenshall construction class teacher and YES! Team adviser

we learn things, I guess, like how to build an actual building and not just little chairs or something.”

Students have been exposed to a variety of learning experiences within the one project.

Students said they learned that a two-by-four does not actually measure two by four. Others said

they learned how to hammer a nail, put up trusses, build a wall, and how to measure lumber before making a cut.

Gustafson said the students do all of the work; he doesn’t put anything up.

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“Sometimes they mess up and I make them redo it, but sometimes it gets too expensive to redo it over and over again,” Gustafson said. “But I would say they do a pretty darn good job.”

Grant Hall, a senior, admitted they had made a few “rookie mistakes,” but they were able to fix them and kept learning each time they worked at the site.

“We kind of put up all the siding and then had to take it off and put it back on ‘cause it didn’t go on right,” he said.

In light of those mistakes, students were able to experience the pride in seeing the project take shape.

“When we got the roof up, that was probably one of the best (accomplishments) that I felt, getting the roof up, right before we got all this snow, we got it done,” sophomore Kaden Oleson said.

Junior Gavin Trettel said he and other students look forward to being recognized for a project that will benefit the community for years to come.

Gustafson echoed a similar sentiment.

“I personally look forward to going outside every day,” he said. “I personally like getting kids out of seats that are back to back to back and into something that is gonna be there in 35 years - what they would say would be ‘real world education.’”

Note: Many of the students who were involved in the class are part of the school’s Youth Energy Summit (YES!) Team, of which Gustafson is the adviser.



Above photo: Construction Class Teacher Chris Gustafson advises students as they work on the new recycling center in Mahtowa. **Below photo:** Students work together to attach siding to the shed. (Photos by Karola Dalen)