

Carpentry Students Learn Skills Through Community and Charitable Projects

Students recently built a gazebo that raised \$6,500 at auction to benefit The Tomorrow Fund.

By [Lauren Costa](#) | December 3, 2012



How often are teenagers given the opportunity to add an addition to a family home, construct a two-story lighthouse-shaped playhouse or build a gazebo that can comfortably fit more than a dozen people?

In Scott Leavitt's carpentry and construction classes at the Coventry High School Regional Career and Technical Center, chances like these come up on a regular basis.

Leavitt, who has been teaching the trade for 12 years while operating his contracting company, [S. Leavitt Carpentry](#) for 10, currently has more than 50 students among the three levels of Carpentry courses that he instructs.

In Carpentry 1, a one and a half hour class held every other day, the students focus primarily on safety, basic techniques and tool operation while working on small projects. The class, consisting of primarily tenth graders is the first of three levels in the carpentry curriculum that readies them for the contracted work and projects that will come their way in the future.

The Carpentry 2 and 3 classes meet for three hour periods and receive additional real world, hands on experience. Students in these classes, generally juniors and seniors respectively, work on larger projects, often times at nearby locations for clients who have commissioned them.

Leavitt's students have built home additions, sheds, garages, barns, play structures, dog houses and more. Clients pay for the materials needed to complete their project and also make a donation to the carpentry program which typically pays for fuel to and from the work site along with replacement saw blades or other small pieces of equipment.

"The customer has to be willing to let that project take a while longer than it normally would but they're also paying a fraction of the cost," explained Leavitt. "It benefits both sides when we do these kind of jobs."

Students also interact with customers throughout the entire process, from discussing order specifications and reviewing plans to occasional on-site interactions during construction.

The program is currently booked by clients through the remainder of the school year, but interested parties can contact Scott at leavittscott@coventryschools.net for more information.

Since 2006, Leavitt's students have created a project for The Tomorrow Fund that is auctioned off at the organization's annual black-tie [Fantasy Ball](#) at Rhodes on the Pawtuxet. Donations of project materials are secured by The Tomorrow Fund's Lisa Abbenante, also a Coventry resident, who provides the job specifications to Leavitt's Carpentry 2 and 3 students. Construction begins within the first few weeks of the school year and needs to be completed by the ball that is generally held at the end of October or beginning of November.

Nov. 3, 2012 marked the 25th Fantasy Ball, themed "Breakfast At Tiffany's", which raised more than \$400,000 for the organization - and Leavitt's students played a part in the event's success.

"This year, we built a large gazebo for The Tomorrow Fund that raised \$6,500," he said. "It's been the biggest contribution that we've been involved with so far."

Apart from carpentry projects, students occasionally meet with Leavitt's contractor colleagues to learn the basics of energy efficiency testing, such as air leakage and blower door tests and have been able to walk through construction projects using infrared cameras to identify the presence of hot and cold spots. They are also shown how to utilize various types of insulation like cellulose, fiberglass and spray foam. These lessons are important as modern building codes are frequently being updated to include more requirements and specifications for energy efficiency.

"We like to make sure that the kids are introduced to these kinds of things and know the importance of them because nowadays, they will be put on their plate at a job," said Leavitt.

Students are instructed using the National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER) curriculum and receive OSHA 10 certification by the time they finish the program. Leavitt also

guarantees that any student who graduates from the program and wants a job, will be offered one through his various colleagues across the state.

"Right now I know of a few students that have been working in Jamestown and several more in North Kingstown for contractors," he said. "There are actually more contractors calling me looking to hire than there are kids ready to jump into it right now."

Regardless of whether or not his students intend on pursuing carpentry as a profession after high school, Leavitt believes that they leave the program with important skills and knowledge that will prove useful to them in the future.

"There are always a few kids who enroll because they have a friend or relative who is a contractor, but then there are some who are just curious and enjoy learning the trade," he said. "This program definitely opens doors for the ones who want to do this as a career, but we get all different kids for all different reasons and that's a good thing."