

Beyond the cutting board



By DANIEL MOFFATT special to The Guide

“At the end of the day I simply want students to challenge themselves. That has been and probably always will be my favorite part of this job.”

— Chuck Boyer, woodshop teacher, Alcona High School

ALCONA HIGH SCHOOL – One teacher steps out of the groove to engage students beyond the classroom and introduce them to the local industrial community. Chuck Boyer has come a long way from his days as a student taking high school shop classes.

“For a long time it was all about the year-long project students created that eventually landed in a family living room,” Boyer says.

Although a great hands-on opportunity to develop skills and challenge the individual, this model can be isolating.

Now the Woodshop Teacher at Alcona High School, Boyer knows the constant requests for shop classes to help with numerous school and community projects, which can take away from valuable shop time to devote to individual projects.

Striking a balance between the two is a challenging and regional issue.

“When dealing with the secondary projects

I never like to tell people no, so I have always tried to help with what we can,” Boyer said.

With the encouragement, guidance and partnerships through the Northeast Michigan Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative, the Alcona Industrial Arts program is shaping into a class

model that serves both the student and the community.

Out of this, the Regional Industrial Arts Collaboration was born.

Awarded a start-up grant from NE MI GLSI and lead by Boyer, the collaboration communicates about successful projects and strengthens the ability to write and receive even larger grants.

The Collaboration jump started both new and existing place-based education projects for schools involved. Inland Lakes

students built benches that now sit along the local Burt Lake trail, Rogers City students built bluebird houses to encourage nesting at Thompson’s Harbor State Park, and Alpena students welded gates to protect

the seasonal hibernacula for bats at Rockport State Recreation Area.

Each year every industrial arts class in the state is invited to enter individual student projects in the regional Michigan Industrial and Technology Education Society competition known as MITES.

Some of Boyer’s past students have taken home first prize.

Recognizing the benefits to students, schools and communities, Boyer has possibly created his most beautiful dovetail yet – that is WAMIT, or Woodworkers Achieving More through Industrial Technology.

WAMIT is an after-school, student-led group whose goal is to support their community through place-based education and projects, fundraise, promote, and enhance their Industrial Technology Program while having fun in the process.

While some students hold officer positions, each member has specific project tasks at the monthly meetings that include a dinner.

“At the end of the day I simply want students to challenge themselves. That has been and probably always will be my favorite part of this job,” Boyer said.

Some of WAMIT’s community projects include: teaching and leading elementary students to assemble a pre-cut “bug box” for personal exploration, drawing plans and meeting with the director of the schools butterfly garden to create the informational kiosk, and building rustic furniture for the local State Park.

Using grant funds awarded over the last six years, Boyer has purchased a number of high-quality machines and various other hand tools and supplies – each allowing him and his students to offer more to their community.

The MITES organization likes what they see in Alcona and wants to replicate the student leadership group model in schools across the state. They have asked Boyer to present a



Teacher Chuck Boyer instructs his Industrial Arts students in the shop at Alcona High School. His student-lead group WAMIT meets after school to address project needs of the school and community.



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Steve Rizzotto displays two intricate pieces of art created through Computer-aided Design (CAD) and cut by the computer controlled cutting machine known as a CNC router. The machine was purchased with grant funding.



Ray Richardson and Ben Galyon of WAMIT pose for a photo while in the shop working to complete the structure for the memorial butterfly garden's informational kiosk located outside of Alcona Elementary School.

breakout session about engaging students as leaders during the annual statewide convention in May.

"I had always been reluctant to ask a student to build something that won't go in their living room," said Boyer, "but it has surprised me how these kids are willing to give up their time in support of a community project or something that will benefit our program ... and they have fun doing it!"

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The Northeast Michigan Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative

The Northeast Michigan Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative is a regional partnership of schools and community partners working to promote place-based, community-based learning experiences. This network serves to engage youth as partners in protecting our Great Lakes and natural resources of Northeast Michigan through hands-on, feet-wet learning in (and with) the community.

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