



News Release

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District 916 and Century College Students Making Progress on House Construction

An abandoned home in a quaint, quiet North St. Paul neighborhood provided the inspiration for Fire Chief Community Service Manager Scott Duddeck to pioneer a collaborative program involving Northeast Metro School District 916, Century College and the City of North St. Paul.

“We had a home at 14th Avenue and Helen Street in North St. Paul that had been foreclosed and was becoming a problem for the neighbors with vandalism and property devaluation concerns,” said Duddeck. “This was the perfect opportunity to take a negative concern and turn it around into a positive experience for our entire North St. Paul community.”

Deanne DeGraff, principal of the District 916 Career and Technical Center, contacted Duddeck and proposed that the District 916 Construction Occupations Program assist North St. Paul in rebuilding the home from scratch. As a result, the City of North St. Paul demolished the home and area businesses agreed to help with materials and professional services. All partners agreed to work with students through the home construction process. An agreement was made that the profits from the sale of the home would be split between with the City of North St. Paul and the 916 Career and Tech Center. In addition, some of the money from the sale will be set aside to keep the student project going.

Longtime 916 Career and Tech Center construction occupations instructor Tom Spehn was brought on board with his class of high school students, most of whom had no experience with construction. The idea was to build a home from the ground up with students playing a major role in every part of the home construction, including the interior design, which was a cooperative venture with the Century College Interior Design Program.

Century interior design students, under the guidance of Prof. Sandy Anderson, visited the construction site several times and came up with plans for lighting, flooring, wall covering, cabinetry, countertops and color. “It has been excellent hands-on experience for my students,” said Anderson. “They have been right out there on the job site, solving problems and working with the contractors.”

Local businesses in North St. Paul have been helpful in bringing the project to fruition. City officials have been active and supportive of the project from the get-go.

“This was just an excellent partnership opportunity,” said Spehn. “The home is in a convenient location for our students and just a great opportunity for them to be exposed to the different skills needed to build a home. We teach the kids everything from plumbing to putting up the studs to framing a room. They are exposed to all of the work needed to build a home. It’s a chance for them to learn some skills that will carry them through life, whether they chose to stay in construction or not.”

The rebuilt home will have four bedrooms and 3,000 square feet. It has some cutting-edge features, including an indoor sprinkling system, in-floor heating in the garage for car repairs and a plan for hardwood flooring throughout.

“Our students take incredible pride in their work and it shows,” said Spehn. “This is a perfect fit for the student who is bright, but doesn’t enjoy sitting behind a desk in a classroom all day. I guarantee that the students use more math here than they would during a typical school day. We know our students are inspired and motivated – they bring their parents to the site to show the progress they’re making on the home. The sense of pride and accomplishment is incredible. It’s also great to see the pride the neighbors

have and the enthusiasm they are showing for this project. It's just a win-win all around.”



Photo: Century College Prof. Sandy Anderson (second from right) confers with students Peggy Herzog, Andrea Mbali and Tess Bartmann.