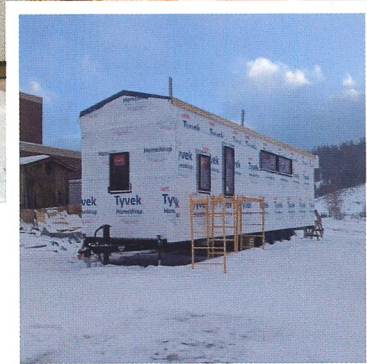
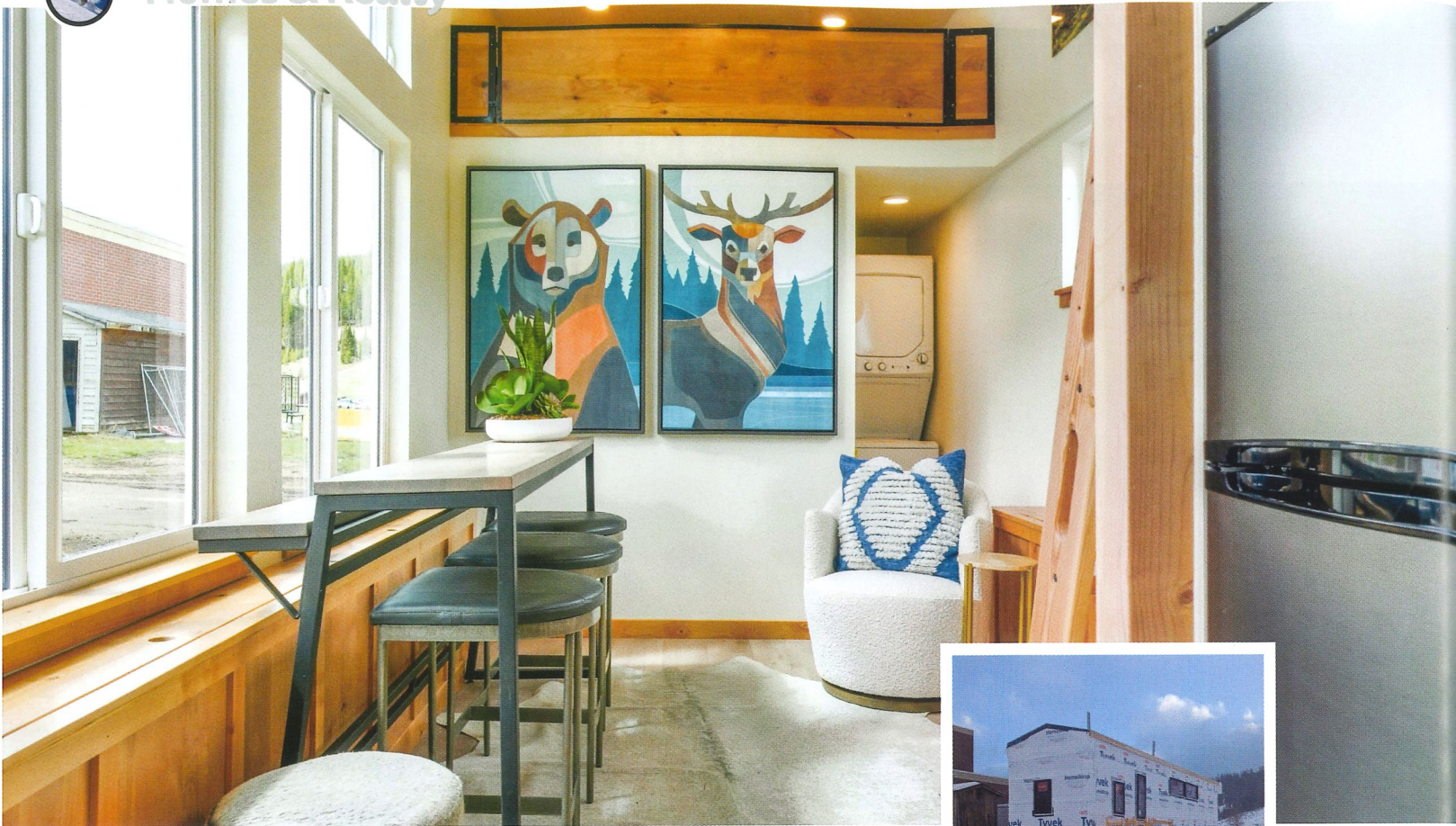


# Breckenridge

MAGAZINE





## Summit High School Students Are Becoming Homebuilders

By Shauna Farnell

### The shop class is going big these days, and hopefully building the future of local trades

In most high school shop classes, kids build picture frames. If they're lucky, maybe it's birdhouses or wooden boats. In Oakley Van Oss's class at Summit High School, they build tiny homes.

About four years ago, Van Oss got a call from Summit Builders Association encouraging him to launch a Careers in Construction class. The Association donated resources and lined up lessons with local tradespeople – contractors, plumbers, electricians, etc. Then, last year the school connected with Colorado River BOCES EPIC, a nonprofit aiming to improve the workforce by providing trade skills to high school students. The project? A tiny home.

Van Oss's class (15 juniors and seniors) embarked on their first home build last November. Working outside wearing donated snow boots, bibs and jackets, the one-bedroom, one-bath, 300-square-foot home features a loft, living and dining area, full (mini) kitchen with all-electric stainless steel appliances, stackable washer and dryer and solar system.

"We ended up having 60 community volunteers, donating time or money, furniture, parts, material. It was this outpouring of support; me and five adults with the kids for every hour-and-a-half-class, two days a week. You're making these huge gains every day – getting the framing done, getting the windows in. It was great teambuilding."

The students showcased the tiny home in last summer's Frisco Fourth of July Parade. It won first place for best float. More than half the class was so fascinated with the home-building process that students spent the summer interning with plumbers, contractors and construction companies.

"We hope to open kids' eyes to the trades," Van Oss says. "How cool to have something like a clogged drain and our kids are like, I can figure it out. I've built a house. There's a labor shortage here, a scarcity of on-call tradespeople. We want these kids to stay in the community and have fulfilling work and great lives."

Summit High's first tiny home was shipped to the Western Slope and placed on the real estate market. The second tiny home, with improved insulation and cold weather features, is under way. Van Oss has grand visions about the program's community reach.

"Finishing that first home felt like the pinnacle of my career," he says. "Every day I come to work, I feel like I won the lottery. The idea of continuity year after year is incredible. We'll have one tiny home after this year, maybe two or three next year. It's a pipe dream, but how cool would it be if we could start a tiny home community on school district property? Just think. The kids are building a home for the bus driver, the custodian, the people we need here who need a place to live."

