

Tiger Manufacturing

By Janet Murphy, Tri County News

Students who take Steve Bartel's Tiger Manufacturing class at Chilton High School are provided real-world opportunities to put their newly learned skills to work for customers in the community.

During spring semester last year, Terry Criter, president and owner of Global Recruiters Chilton and member of the Chilton School Board, was able to hire students from the class to help remodel his new office space, and in the process give them practical experience using the basic carpentry skills they had learned in their earlier classes.

With his business office space needs expanding, Criter said he learned about the commercial space available at 509 N. Madison St. from his neighbor Steve Austin, who owns the property, while at a neighborhood gathering. The location, which used to house a video rental shop and tanning salon, was going to need some remodeling to create the office space that Criter wanted.

Criter said he also recalled learning about the work that Steve Bartel's students had been doing in their Tiger Manufacturing class during an earlier School Board meeting, and he became interested in the possibility of getting the Tiger Manufacturing students to help out with the remodeling project.

Criter said because there were still six months left on the lease at his old location, there was going to be ample time for the students to get the work done and they could treat the space as a lab of sorts. He said Bartel was interested because the class would run from February to May, so the timing worked out, adding, "Steve liked it because this project was in town, a mile from the school, and it's inside, so the elements didn't matter.

Criter said that in addition to assembling two by four studs for the new walls, putting up drywall, mudding, and taping, he had a couple of additional challenges for the students that included building a large, eight-foot long conference table and a rustic sliding door for the conference room. The table top is made out of solid hickory that the students pieced together, and they designed and welded the metal table legs. Criter said the sliding doors were designed and built by the students as well. Bartel said they used eastern white pine for the doors, noting, "Our kids actually cut the metal and welded the metal so we made the handles ourselves."

Criter said he gained about 1,000 square feet of office space with the move to the new location. He said he would highly recommend Tiger Manufacturing to folks who have enough time to let the students build something for them. "I mean they made mistakes, but that's what school is, and they would learn and then they'd fix it. They were good kids, they were all dependable, they were here to learn, and Steve does a nice job. I'd do it again in a heartbeat."

Bartel said Chilton offers Basic Woods, Advanced Woods, Construction, and then Tiger Manufacturing, where they take all the things that they have learned in the first three classes and start actually building for a customer. He explained the grading for the class is "mostly based on the effort they put in, because we're all working together in this project." He said he watches to see that the students are on time for work, do a quality job, and clean up their work space before they leave, adding, "It's that last step before that student goes out into the real world, so those are all job pieces that we're teaching."

Bartel stated there is definitely crossover between his Tiger Manufacturing class and another program he is involved with called Career Capstone, which is more like a Youth Apprenticeship Program. He noted one of his students who had been working at Christel and Heiberger also took Tiger Manufacturing, "so he brought his experience and expertise over to work on Terry's project."

Bartel noted that Tiger Manufacturing does charge a modest fee for their work, based on how many hours the job will take and how many students will work on the project. He said the money they make goes right back into buying new machinery for the shop, noting that the school budget is always real tight and new machinery is expensive. He said, "This year with the money that we got for Terry's project, we actually used some of it to buy some of our welders, and that's really the way that we can support our pieces."

Bartel said he felt that Criter was a great customer to have because he understood the work was not going to be professional quality because the students were still learning on the job, adding that he believes the kids had fun with the project while learning to see Criter as their customer and treat the course like a business.

Bartel said last year was the first time he ran Tiger Manufacturing, and he has found out about projects for his students mostly by word of mouth. He said they already have plans to build a shanty for sturgeon fishing that was designed by one of the students when the next Tiger Manufacturing class starts up in January.

Bartel said when the class is not working on an outside project, he also has a number of items that the students build and sell to the public, including Adirondack chairs and small, eight-by-eight sheds. In that case, the class is set up more like an assembly line and the students can make up to 20 chairs at a time.

For spring semester, Bartel said he hopes to have more information posted on the school website about Tiger Manufacturing that will include drop-down menus where people will be able to select Adirondack chairs, sheds, tables, or custom projects, and then contact him at the High School for more details.

In 2018, the Tiger Manufacturing course was recognized by the Northeast Wisconsin Manufacturing Alliance Brighter Image Awards for providing the opportunity to learn hands-on manufacturing skills.



Chilton High School students in the Tiger Manufacturing class who helped with an office space renovation last year included (front, from left) Markus Suttner and Hayden Woelfel; and (back) Wyatt Schmitz, Jon Karls, Mike Karls, Brayden Mueller, Kaiden Mikalowsky, Joe Boehnlein, Cameron Owens, Collin Anhalt, and Bryce Kobriger.



Tiger Manufacturing class students from Chilton High School worked on creating office space for Terry Criter's business last year. The students put up walls, built tables, created a sliding door, and more for the expanding business.