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## 'These kids are the best': Glenbrook South students design, build walls at Habitat for Humanity home in Waukegan



Students from Glenbrook South High School team up on May 2, 2018 to lift a wall for a Habitat for Humanity Lake County home in Waukegan that they helped design. (Habitat for Humanity)

**Frank Abderholden Contact Reporter** News-Sun

A high school class that combines geometry and construction is giving students hands-on experience.

“This is the only class that lets you use power tools,” said Leone Justice, a junior at Glenbrook South High School in Glenview, who was in [Waukegan](#) Wednesday morning to help build a Habitat for Humanity Lake County home on McAree Road.

The course, in its second year, built 14 exterior walls and 23 interior walls for a home being constructed for LaTonya Stamps. The walls were delivered to the site, and about a dozen students were busy getting the sections ready by removing some pressboard that had been placed on the wrong side.

“This was a big surprise,” Stamps said of the students showing up to work. “And this is part of their geometry class — that’s super cool.”

Stamps, as part of her agreement with the organization, was on site to help where she could. Home recipients have to work 500 hours on their own homes.

Justice said that at first she wasn’t that into the Geometry in Construction class. But her father is in the carpenters union, and he started teaching her a few things to improve.

“My dad was jealous of my class,” she said. “We’re like a big family. I had a Japanese exchange student and she couldn’t believe this was a math class in school.”

Payton Townsend, a junior, said she had a hard time studying math, “but to see it applied to the real world, I just love it.”

“I’ve worked on our family’s lake house, and I’m more handy now than my dad. It’s lots of fun,” she said, adding that helping the community was also a draw.

Both of the teachers were on site with the students. Dan Liepert handles the construction/technology instruction and also teaches architecture and civil engineering.

“This helps bridge the gap between the two fields. It’s very visual,” he said.

Brian Schmalzer, the group’s mathematics teacher, was very enthusiastic about the effort and was hammering away alongside the students.

“It’s really fun,” he said. “It shows that math has a purpose. Now we have a connection. Here is the hands-on version of that word problem. That’s the sweet spot — everything is applied.”

Julie Donovan, executive director for Habitat for Humanity Lake County, said that since the group started in 1988, it has served more than 200 families by building 159 new homes, rehabbing 26 and repairing another 28.

She said the lifeblood of the organization is its volunteers, from general construction to construction manager. They are the ones that make things happen.

“These people are huge to our organization,” Donovan said. “I love when the kids are involved — it excites me, (and) some of the kids are getting pretty good.”

She recalled how a Carmel High School student started volunteering and, after awhile, she was put in charge of a siding installation team because she had done it so many times. She later became an architect.

“There’s a shortage in the construction trades, and maybe some of these students will consider it,” she said.



A Glenbrook South High School class that combines mathematics and construction built the exterior and interior walls for a Habitat for Humanity Lake County home in Waukegan and then installed them May 2, 2018. (Habitat for Humanity)

Wednesday’s home is next door to another Habitat home. The two lots were donated by retired dentist Glenn Mitchell.

“He wanted to put them to good use,” Donovan said.

According to Donovan, students from various high schools — including Grayslake North, New Trier, Lake Zurich, Lake Forest, Lake Forest Academy and Glenbrook South — and area colleges have not only raised money for homes, but they also show up for workdays.

“There have been 28 homes built because of the youth of our community,” Donovan said. “New Trier (High School) has built 14 homes.”

Alinne Merida, a Glenbrook South junior, said she was just really curious about the class when she signed up.

“I didn’t think I’d do much,” she said. “But, once I got in, I actually learned about the tools I was using. I really like (the class) — it’s been a life-changing class.”

Gary Urban, a sophomore, said he likes the course because “it’s very hands-on.”

Klarissa Charo, a junior, said she wanted to try something new, and she liked that they were making a difference.

Making a difference is real. Just ask Joy Brown, whose Habitat home was built with the help of New Trier students. She was visiting the site Wednesday just to give encouragement.

“These kids, they have been phenomenal,” she said. “It’s all about helping each other, and these kids are the best. It’s a lot of work. I hated building my basement. Now I love my basement.”

Sometimes she has to pinch herself when she looks around her home.

“I could not ask for anything better. This program is amazing,” she said.

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