

Welding sparks interest of high school students

By Leslie Mitts
Spilyay Tymoo

"It feels really good to see some model students. It feels better and better every year."

Foster Kalama
Cultural Liaison

The projects created in the advanced metals class at Madras High School speak for themselves.

That's lucky for the students creating them, as the young men behind the projects aren't prone to brag about their work.

In fact, it takes some convincing for them to even begin speaking about their creations.

Atcity Begay, a 17-year-old junior, is one of several students from Warm Springs working on large projects in the class.

Begay recently completed a project close to his heart. He created small fences to place on each side of his late grandmother's grave in the Simnasho Cemetery.

It took him several months to build, Begay said, and he is about to complete his second year of metals classes.

One fence features a small piece with a feather etched into it, while the other features his grandmother's name: Fern.

"It was actually my uncle's idea," Begay said. As for what his family thought of the project, "They thought it was a good idea."

Guff Thorpe teaches the class at MHS and will be retiring at the end of the school year.

Thorpe offered praise for Begay's project readily: "In my 30 years of teaching it is the closest projects I've ever sent that was truly from the heart," Thorpe said.

In his opinion, "It was a product of love and admiration for his grandmother."

It also helped the other students to see what could really go into a project.

"They could see how driven Mr. Begay was when he was building it," Thorpe said. "He was very meticulous about building it."

That included re-building the

entire project when Begay decided he didn't like the way it was turning out. While at first the metal was twisting in opposite directions, Begay decided to have them twist in the same direction instead.

"He had a really firm idea of what he wanted to do when he started," Thorpe said.

Other students are working on a project that's more connected to their stomachs: Kip Culpus, Ronald Smith and Josiah Thompson, all 17-year-old juniors, have been working to create three charcoal barbeques with a fire box for smoking.

While the project originally began as one student building barbeques for himself, Thorpe, and a janitor at MHS, the three students will now each be taking home their own barbeque—much to the disappointment of Thorpe, of course.

There's still quite a bit of work left, however. The students said they will probably be working to finish the project up until the last day of class.

As for the students, Thorpe said, "They've developed welding skills and they've developed fabricating skills."

"These guys have been working together," Thorpe added. "It's been a lot of fun to have them around."

The three agreed that welding is the best part of the project. "Welding is easy and quick,"



Leslie Mitts photos

Atcity Begay recently built two fences that will sit on the sides of his grandmother's grave. Guff Thorpe, who teaches the metals class, described the project as spiritual and "truly from the heart."

Suppah said—but the three just laughed at first when asked who did most of the work.

Jasper Smith, a 17-year-old junior, has also been hard at work in the advanced metals class. He's teamed with fellow students Samuel Figueroa, 17; Edgar Mendez, 17; and David Debiaso, 16.

Their group is nearly finished with a project two trimesters in the making: 20 chairs, four benches, two small table and one large table that will be placed in the courtyards at Madras High School.

All they have left to do is finish coating them with blue paint, the students said.

In Mendez' opinion, "It was a good experience."

Smith agreed. "It was a good learning experience, and fun," he said.

Foster Kalama, cultural liaison for MHS, spoke highly of all the students currently enrolled in the course.

"It feels really good to see some model students," he said. "It feels better and better every year."

It's only a small part of what MHS is striving to achieve, Kalama added.

"The school is working very hard at everything we do here," he said.

Kalama credits Thorpe with helping the students succeed.

"He's one of the few teachers that comes to see me about a student," Kalama explained. "That says a lot in itself."

As for Thorpe's impending retirement, Kalama said, "It's really hard to see great teachers leave, especially when students come to care and respect the teacher."

As for the projects students have created recently, Kalama said, Thorpe's involvement was evident when speaking with him about Begay's project.

"He almost brought us both to tears, talking about it," Kalama said. "These boys have been working very, very hard."

In Kalama's opinion, "I'm pretty certain the parents and grandparents are going to be very proud of these young men."



Jasper Smith (left) worked with David Debiaso, Samuel Figueroa and Edgar Mendez to create chairs, benches and tables that will soon be permanently located in the Madras High School courtyard. They have worked for two trimesters to complete 20 chairs, four benches, two small tables and one large table.



Ronald Suppah, Kip Culpus and Josiah Thompson have been hard at work to complete three charcoal barbeques that they will be able to take home to enjoy.

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