



# St. Michael's Woodshop

**"Building from the Inside Out"**

**Spring 2020**



## **Our Response to COVID 19: We're Still Here for Our Teens—Online!**

When the Rochester city schools were forced to close in mid-March 2020 due to the COVID 19 Coronavirus, the Woodshop also closed. But since then, we've remained in contact with our students through our Facebook page. We've been uploading "Life Skills" videos and posts, enabling students to comment and interact with Director James Smith and each other. After all, the Woodshop is their home away from home. We are mindful of our mission and we are supporting our students.

Two days before we had to close, Smith anticipated what was coming and taught a Life Skills session about quarantines (see the March 12 photo above). He gave every student a chance to share his or her feelings and plans for that possibility. Students became more comfortable with the idea and were free to laugh and bond over it.

Now Smith is continuing to help

them stay calm and comfortable. Our teens respond to every new Facebook lesson and post. The recent lesson on getting along with siblings was a popular topic, as was the post on winners and losers in life. These topics are part of our regular Life Skills program, but they've taken on new meaning now.

Another recent Facebook post was a short video made by the U.S. Surgeon General, explaining how to make a mask from rubber bands and a T-shirt. Our students are used to wearing masks because they do so in the Woodshop.

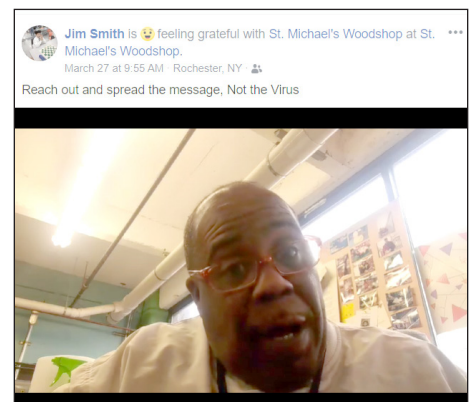
A 24-minute video originally posted by the University of Rochester Medical Center called "Empowering and protecting your family during the COVID-19 pandemic" is also on our page for students to watch. This type of high-quality information is critical for them to stay up to date.

There are many things for our teens

to look forward to. Before we had to close, we were planning to host a table at the Rochester Woodworkers Society's April 25th Showcase at the Main Street Armory. We were excited about showing our expandable trivets, an old favorite from the days when Sister Pat Flynn ran the Woodshop (see photo on page 3, Mentor Spotlight). The Showcase was postponed, but we'll be there when it does happen in the future.

We'll also bring back the toddler stepping stools that were a Woodshop staple years ago. Mentor Tim Kearney helped us to organize this project. Two other new products in the works are a "traffic jam" game for children and a trivet made out of wine bottle corks.

Our students will learn and grow in many ways by safely living through the current crisis. In the meantime, they have a safe place to gather online, to express themselves, and to learn new, positive things, all so important for them in this down time. We're working hard to make it all happen. Our mission stands, and we're still here for our students and their families!



*Executive Director James Smith teaches a Life Skills lesson on Facebook.*



## Helping Our Teens

### **Our New Focus: "Financial Literacy for Urban Teens"**

Before we had to move our Woodshop program online, we were planning to add a new focus to the Life Skills portion of our summer session. Up until now, students and their parents have been happy with *Character Camp*, our extended-day summer program that emphasizes Life Skills. Now we want to go above and beyond that curriculum, to stress something we've already introduced to our students: financial literacy.

We'll need to be flexible with our teens, however, as they process all that's happened this spring. As we roll out our new Life Skills focus, we'll keep plenty of room available in our schedule (as we always do) to address the immediate concerns and problems of our students.

Whether we interact with students online or in person this summer, they'll need time to digest the concepts we plan to cover. Forming good habits takes time.

We'll be calling our new focus *Financial Literacy for Urban Teens*. "We need to create scenarios that can engage them," said Director James Smith. "Our students know what their parents' wages are. It's not a big secret. But we need to teach them why they don't necessarily have cable at home. Why they shouldn't let the water run too long in the shower, why they shouldn't waste

food, why they need to turn the lights off."

"I need to bring them out of the dark," he continued. "They need to take what they learn here home to their mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters. They need to understand why, sometimes, there's no food on the table at the end of the month. They can teach their families about budgeting and saving."

Smith emphasizes that it's a process. "I need to start them now, before they develop bad habits," like paying to have their checks cashed on the corner instead of opening a bank account.

Our students receive a modest stipend, based on attendance and cooperation. This has been an important part of our program ever since Sister Pat founded it in the late 1960s. The stipend is a tool to help our teens learn how to handle money. After they leave us, they will need the skills and maturity they develop here to use the wages from their jobs wisely. This will help them escape the too-common cycle of poverty.

Continuing to provide for student stipends and the salaries of our director and part-time administrator remain critical to our mission. Please consider making a donation to support these Woodshop needs.

*Mentor Gene Swain (right) explains the dangers of credit card debt to students in a Summer 2018 Character Camp "Life Skills" session. The new Financial Literacy for Urban Teens focus will build on the foundation that we've been laying down for years. We've already covered budgeting, but we need to take our "money talk" a step further and help our students to develop a healthy, responsible attitude toward money. We're excited about our new Life Skills focus!*







# Around the Woodshop

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## Director's Corner

Greetings Friends,

Thank you so much for all that you do for our program. Our students are growing into responsible and trustworthy young adults and we're very proud of them.

During this challenging time, we feel confident that they will do the right thing. We're staying closely connected with them and helping them navigate this unprecedented situation. They look to us for stability and comfort, and we offer both.

As we continue operating (from home) for our students, we also need to continue asking you for your support. We had a wonderful response to our holiday letter regarding a matching opportunity from an anonymous donor: thank you, everyone! At present we are very close to meeting the goal. As you start to make your summer plans, please think of us and our mission.

We're excited about *Financial Literacy for Urban Teens* (see page 2). Learning how to be smart with money and avoid debt will make a huge difference in the lives of our students and their families. This new focus will enable us to help our students grow in integrity and responsibility. We will let you know how the program progresses.

Thanks again all for your support,

James Smith,  
Executive Director



*Nina, a new volunteer, teaches students the basics of knitting to help them de-stress.*



Photo by Woodshop student Shaylene Alvarez

## A Student's Point of View

"I like the Woodshop because it makes me smarter. Our Life Skills talks with James show me how to get ready for my adulthood by not making fast decisions. I never realized these things before. I don't want to lose my trust in people, but also, I don't want to give just anybody my heart. I used to feel less focused but now I've changed my ways and it's easier for me to pay attention to school assignments and work at the Woodshop. Paying attention, following instructions and learning basic skills are important." —Maya Spence

## Mentor Spotlight

"I find working with my hands relaxing, and I think the students do too. It's a stress reliever," says Mentor Deacon David Kepler, a retired electrician who has been with the Woodshop since about 2006. David updated our lighting a few years ago, changing from the old T12 fluorescents to new T8 lamps, and replacing the sockets and ballasts. He enjoys working one on one with our students, who like the individual attention. Thank you, Deacon!



*We need Mentors! Would you be willing to share some time with our students?*



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**"Building from the Inside Out"**

Advisory Board Members:

- Jack Cargill
- Patrick Clancy
- Andrew Hislop
- Deacon David Kepler
- Sr. Janet Korn, RSM
- Gerald B. Korn
- Benjamin Pearson
- Sr. Jacquelyn Reichart, RSM
- James Smith, Exec. Director**
- Rev. Robert Werth



*Above: Students interacted with potential customers at our holiday sales. Top right: Working as a team. Beneath: Introductory lesson on the woodturning lathe.*



*O God, grant us peace in our hearts and love for each other. Teach us your ways and keep us close to You.*



Our student marketing team was documenting all of the products and the goings-on at the Woodshop when we were still working in the shop. Shaylene (left), 17, taught Kamai, 14, how to use a camera. They worked together to photograph daily life at the Woodshop, and then put their posts up on Facebook. Here, Kamai photographs one of our "gumball machines" in our mini photobooth. Today, we continue to use Facebook to be with our teens, posting about Life Skills, woodworking safety, etc. We're glad we had it all in place!

**Our Mission Statement:**

St. Michael's Woodshop is a ministry that offers life skills to urban youth through the art of woodworking. Tutors and Mentors are committed to accompanying young men and women as they learn a trade, enhance their sense of self-worth, master a good work ethic, and demonstrate mutual care for one another.

**SMW Graduates Thrive in the "Real World"**

Three years ago, NextGen Building Components, Inc., hired four of our Woodshop graduates. After about a year, one of them joined the Marines, and another got a different job. But Andre (left, below) and Berto are still at NextGen, and on March 12, 2020, their foreman took them and the rest of his crew to one of the sites where their prefabricated wood wall panels are being installed in a 900-unit apartment building in Henrietta. Congrats, guys!



*Thank you for your much-needed support!*