



Happy Holidays from

St. Michael's Woodshop

"Building from the Inside Out"

Holiday 2021

Woodshop Operates at Full Speed Ahead!

Amazing things are happening at the Woodshop these days! For example, the parents of two of our current students are coming in weekly to help.

"I love this program," says Marianna Cruz, the mother of our student Sammantha. "James [Smith] is like a father figure to these kids. I really like that. My daughter absolutely loves it here. She won't miss a day."

Marianna is a family peer advocate at the Mental Health Association. "And, I volunteer for everything that my children are involved in," she says.

She enjoys both one-on-one conversations with students and speaking to the group as a whole. She recently gave a talk on job opportunities.

Marianna is grateful for what the students are studying in "Life Skills": save your money, use a bank account, be on time, work hard. "It's important that they hear these things from someone else," she says.

Another new parent volunteer is



Marianna, mother of Sammantha (top left), gives a presentation to the group.

Diane Diaz. "I've been through a lot myself," says Diane. "I've seen the struggle." Diane worked as a School Health Aide for eleven years for the City School District, and now is a barber. "I like working with the kids.

If they get frustrated, I like to say: 'You've got this.' And then I try to help them with the problem, whatever it is. I'm James's right-hand man when I'm here." Diane's daughter Maranda, a ninth grader, enjoys a challenge, and is becoming proficient on the lathe.

These parent volunteers have their fingers on the pulse of what's going on with the students. They can offer immediate feedback to Director James Smith, and they serve as trusted adults for all students to be able to confide in. "It's great to have Diane and Marianna with us," Smith says.

"To have parents on board is what I've been striving for. We're always looking for volunteers and mentors to join us and share the responsibility of building character in our teens."

Students are also enjoying Cornell Cooperative Extension's very active, hands-on "SNAP Ed" nutrition and healthy lifestyle awareness program (see below), presented to our current teens by nutritionist Illuminata Vilca.



Diane (left) discusses her daughter Maranda's lathe project with James.



Illuminata Vilca (right) teaches good nutrition and the importance of exercise. Here, they practice simple but effective moves.



From left: Matthew Bauer, Michael Terrance, Woodshop alum Treyshaun, Director James Smith, current Woodshop student Dayan, and Mercedes Vazquez Simmons.

Two Sister Pat Flynn-Era Woodshop Students Return to Volunteer and Engage with Current Students

Two new volunteers, both of whom were students of Sister Pat Flynn, are bringing us back to our roots.

- Mercedes Vazquez Simmons was just elected the new Monroe Cty. legislator representing District 22 in the city of Rochester.
- Michael Terrance, a Native American, had a very successful career and was president of Ironworkers Local 33 in Rochester.

Both Michael and Mercedes have been coming in to motivate our students.

Michael's father Kenneth worked at the Woodshop for 30 years—he helped Sister Pat to learn woodworking. "I've known Sister Pat my whole life," Michael said. "She showed love to our entire family." As one of eight siblings who were Woodshop students, Michael started when he was 12 years old, in the 1980s, and stayed in the program until he graduated from high school.

"What do you want to be?" he asked our current students. "Start trying to figure it out now. Talk to your guidance counselor. He or she should

be your best friend at high school. Don't be scared to talk to an adult about real stuff."

After high school, Mike chose to be a tradesman. "All you need is a high school diploma and a driver's license," he told the students, "and you will earn while you learn." He got into iron work at 18, right out of high school, and retired when he was 51 years old. "And I never missed a day of work," he said. "I used to arrive a half hour early. That's something Sister Pat taught us—to be reliable.

"When you start working, don't worry about the money. Worry about making your name known. Nobody will remember your name if you don't do something. The insignificant things you do can turn out to be the most important things. Be the best at whatever you do, whether it's mopping the floor or cleaning toilets."

And, he says, "The only ones who love you, and will always, are your parents." The students pay close attention to Mike's every word. "Take charge of your lives *now!*"

Mercedes Vazquez Simmons has very fond memories of Sister Pat, as well. "She was a strong, amazing woman. She was compassionate, and taught us what we needed to know. She was tough, but she was fair. She taught us responsibility." Mercedes explained that although her own mother was very strict, many of her peers at the Woodshop did not have structure at home. "Sister Pat would know if we had a problem, instantly, and she would work with us directly to try to help us solve it."

Mercedes and Michael were contemporaries at the Woodshop. When Mercedes brought in the identifying sign for St. Michael's Church on North Clinton Ave. to be repaired (see photo), Michael was right on board. St. Michael's is their home parish, where they were both born and raised.

The sign hasn't been up for five years; some people driving by might not even know that it's still open. "We want to rebuild the Church, inside and out," Mercedes says. "We've been cleaning up the campus lately. And this sign is really important to that rebirth.

"I've always been involved in my community," she continues. "But I think it took the Covid lockdown for me to realize how important Church was to my life. There's something about being there. I remember the first Mass I went to after Covid—I cried!

"Having St. Michael's Woodshop repair our sign is so important to us. This is where it all started. Our neighbors were Woodshop students with us. Sister Pat grew this program out of our community at St. Michael's."

These days, Matthew Bauer, another friend of Michael and Mercedes, is a youth mentor at the church. He is tuned in to our young people, too. "Be proactive, not reactive," Matthew says to our teens. "You'll be able to fall back on the skills you're learning here."

Thank you to all of our wonderful donors, volunteers and mentors!



Don't miss our Holiday Sales!

Saturday, December 4, 10 am to 4
at Bishop Kearney High School
Sunday, December 5, 9 am to 1:45
at Blessed Sacrament Church

Meet our students! All your purchases will support our mission.

Helping the Community Teaches Students Compassion and Fosters a Good Work Ethic

Two local churches have asked our Woodshop students to help them with repair work on their respective church properties. Both jobs will be important to the members of these church communities, and both jobs will also give our teens a sense of community history.

Stephen McBride, a parishioner at Holy Cross Church on Lake Ave. in Charlotte, has been working on repairing a shrine on the church grounds. Over the summer, he asked the Woodshop for help with a new kneeler to replace the one in disrepair that was at the shrine at the time.

One of our new, regular Mentors, Al Kupchella, the chairman of the Rochester Woodworkers Society, took on the project. He and Woodshop student Randel selected the wood to use and then cut the pieces and finished them for McBride.

The new kneeler is already in place on the Holy Cross Church

campus—you can see it as you drive by on Lake Ave. Look for the bright blue pad (see photo).

More recently, our student Yaqub (pronounced Ya-kú), and Mentor Jack Cargill have been working on repairing the shrine's rotted out wooden parts. "There is already a concrete, curved curb in place," Jack said. "We need to cut top and bottom wooden rails at the same curvatures. Then, wooden slats will connect the wood rail on top to the wood rail at the bottom, on top of the concrete. It's a tricky job!"

The photo below is a "before" version of the project. As you can see, several of the vertical wooden slats are missing—they will be replaced. The new top & bottom rails will also come soon. Members of the Knights of Columbus are going to assemble the parts made by McBride and the Woodshop students when they are ready.

The other church repair job was brought in by Mercedes Vazquez Simmons for St. Michael's Church on North Clinton Ave. (See page 2.)

"We are thrilled to help with these community projects," says Director James Smith. "Working on behalf of others helps our students grow in compassion, it gives them a real sense of purpose, and it's fun!"



Jack Cargill and Yaqub measure the template for the curved top and bottom rails that will hold the shrine's wooden vertical struts in place behind the statue.



The shrine as it is now, in need of repair. (Notice the missing vertical struts.)



The new, bright blue outdoor kneeler.

Our email address at St. Michael's Woodshop is: stmichaelswood@live.com (notice: no -shop!)



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"Building from the Inside Out"

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.

Advisory Board:

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

A Note from an Advisory Board Member

It's hard to believe that 5 years have passed since I started serving on St. Michael's Woodshop Advisory Board! I was first introduced back in 2016 when my business was located up the street, on St. Paul. Our first project was integrating a CNC Shopbot machine into the program.

There is a huge need in the U.S. these days for skilled craftsmanship, so young people learning some of these skills, while also learning life skills, is really invaluable. I am so proud of what the Woodshop has been able to do for the youth of the community. And it's exciting to see other local businesses taking notice of the Woodshop: ESL Federal Credit Union for one, and its recent

partnership with us via its "Community Impact Initiative." Thank you, ESL!

The Woodshop's greatest need continues to be financial support, in order to continue to serve the students of Rochester. Every dollar helps!

Thank you to all of our wonderful volunteers, board members, and director, James Smith, for continually shepherding the Woodshop and its students.

—Benjamin Pearson



Benjamin Pearson

A Unique Project to Help a Student's Family

Every once in a while, a student will have a woodworking need that we can address right during our class time. Tekiyah's mother purchased a house in 2016, and since then her whole family has been working on fixing it up. "My father works on the

house in the mornings, before he goes to work," Tekiyah says. "The rest of us help however we can."

For a trim on the four corners of the front door, Tekiyah cut out new wood rosettes to replace the old, rotted ones that were still there in

the original door. She will sand them, fit them into the four holes that were drilled to remove the old rosettes, and then paint.

"We still have to do the plumbing," she says, "but hope to be able to move in there in about 6 months." When she's 18, Tekiyah wants to join the Navy, like two of her older brothers.



Tekiyah uses the band saw to cut out a wooden rosette.

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

Thank you for your much-needed support!