Bearcat Builders: Students Construct Their Own Futures

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With about three months until graduation, job offers keep coming for senior Nathan Myers.

“The other day, I got an offer from PM Design, Mike Briggs for CNC and AutoCAD work,” he started off. “I’ve had a couple other AutoCAD drafting jobs that were offered...Oh! Texas Instruments, too.”

A magician with the AutoCAD software used to draft buildings, Myers deftly uses CNC routers, the cutting edge technology of the construction engineering, to handle the most intricate of designs.

And he owes most of his experience to the Sherman High School Construction CTE Program and its machine shop.

“My freshman year was the first year we were working with the CNC, so we had to learn everything from scratch,” Myers said as he nodded over to the machine.

“It was a lot of fun to do. It was probably one of the most fun things because you didn’t know anything.”

Construction teacher Robert Jewell remembers coming into the program four years ago when the CNC router was new, and he believes the construction industry is adopting it.

“It hasn’t taken over everything yet, but it’s the future,” Jewell said. “Once they have it programmed in there, you can cut it over and over again perfectly without human error.”

However, you can’t take on the future without first knowing the basics, and Jewell covers everything from reading a tape measure to framing.

“I teach them a bit of basic electrical, too,” he added. “To keep them safe so they know what to do, what not to do.”

Once students learn how to navigate the shop, they start their own projects, and Jewell allows a lot of leeway in choosing what to make, as long as it’s school appropriate.

“I’ve got students who have built everything from benches and tables to skateboards and foosball tables and everything in between,” he said.
As one of those students building a foosball table, senior Luis Perez-Paniagua leads the group project and has experience in constructing one in previous years. The project stems from the group’s love of soccer, and Perez-Paniagua thinks it will turn out better than one made by the group previously.

“Everything’s leveled out, and it’s cut out the parts inside the table,” Perez-Paniagua said. “We’re going to put it all together and then wait for the paint.”

The old table was built solely by hand, and now he’s using the more exact CNC router to cut out parts. The group plans to sell it, Perez-Paniagua said, and a high-quality foosball table can fetch quite a good price.

With top-notch talent and projects coming out of the SHS construction shop, Jewell remembers back to the old high school campus and its own shop. While it housed a CNC router, much else needed updating, and students now have access to the latest in the field.

“It’s what you see in an industrial setting,” Jewell said. “They’re getting hands-on with what’s current. Everything is brand-new and industry-standard, even better than what most carpenters have.”