

McCann students shadow early

By Jennifer Huberdeau, North Adams Transcript

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McCann teacher Fran Kruzel has students tour a home he is building for his family on Country Road

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ADAMS — Groundhog Day doesn't happen until Saturday, but carpentry students at McCann Technical School were able to get a first-hand look at how building code standards are applied in the real world, as they toured a partially-built home on Country Road on Tuesday.



"We've brought them here to see how the building codes are applied, and to give them an understanding of why the codes are so important," Francis Kruzel, teacher and owner of the house, said. "We're also giving them a look at some of the latest technology being used for insulation, framing and heating."

Kruzel and fellow carpentry teacher Lawrence Koch brought about 20 sophomore and junior students to the construction site, where Kruzel has been building a new home over the past two years, as part of the school's week-long Job Shadow program.

"We get to see a lot of this in the classroom, but today we're really seeing how it's applied," said David Prime, 17, of Cheshire, as the class viewed a wood gasification furnace. "We're really getting to see why the codes are created, and why they're enforced. It's easier to see why these codes are in place with a real-life visual."

As the students stood in the garage of the house, Kruzel explained the long-term benefits of the wood burning furnace versus the initial cost of \$7,000 for the unit and \$5,000 for a hot water storage tank housed in the basement.

"This furnace is 85 percent efficient, which is more efficient than an oil burning furnace," he said. "The water in the storage tanks will stay hot for up to 48 hours. But you can't be scared by the initial price. You have to look at the long-term. In my case, I own land with wood on it. All I have to do is cut the wood. This will pay for itself in 10 years."

In the basement, Kruzel pointed to two large pipes in the middle of the room that were bolted to the ceiling with large silver plates.

"This is another part of the building code," he said. "These Springfield plates are required, along with one single pipe that is three and a half inches in diameter. I put in two pipes that are four inches in diameter. I went one step above the building codes on everything. People have to understand that building codes are the minimum standards." Koch said that those pursuing a career in carpentry or construction after school or college, it would be their responsibility to know where to find all of the building codes.

"The two of us just went to a seminar in Springfield, where we purchased the new code-book and went to a six-hour seminar on it," he said.

Kruzel also questioned the student on why there seemed to be so many windows in the basement.

"It's part of the building code," he said. "For every so many feet of basement you have, you have to have a window for ventilation. You have to have enough windows for cross ventilation because basements tend to be damp."

For Prime, who wants to go into the construction business after high school, the walk-through was a valuable lesson.

"You just can't get this experience in a classroom," he said.

Classmates Ben Lambert, 17, of Lanesborough, and Matthew Bak, 17, of Cheshire, agreed.

"You're really getting to see what you learn in a text book applied right here," Lambert said. "You can read about something like the need for a Springfield plate, but then you see it and really understand the need."

Bak said the on-site tour, which also explained the codes for building stairs and showed off foam insulation, really gave new meaning to work done in the classroom.

"A lot of people don't get this experience," he said. "We're taking what we've heard in the classroom and really seeing real-life examples. It makes things we've read about suddenly easier to understand with these visuals."

While "job shadow" day is usually held on Groundhog Day, guidance counselor Sarah Avery said McCann was giving its students and mentors a variety of options this year, including group tours and individual shadowing.

"We found it was a great option to give mentors more time in which to schedule time," she said. "We have over 100 sophomores and juniors going out this week to a variety of locations."

Students have already job shadowed at the North Adams Police Department, Hoosac Savings Bank, Williamstown Savings Bank, General Dynamics, North Adams Regional Hospital and Berkshire Medical Center, among other locations.

"On Thursday, there are several students who will tour Mass MoCA and be able to see how they prepare for an upcoming show," Avery said.