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## Delaware schools: Helping, learning come together

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Students at <http://stgeorges.nccvt.k12.de.us/>>St. Georges Technical High School near Middletown not only learned about home renovation this month, they learned how to refurbish the human spirit.

Tracy Skrobot, program manager for [http://www.middletownde.org/welcome\\_to\\_middletown\\_main\\_stree.htm](http://www.middletownde.org/welcome_to_middletown_main_stree.htm)>Middletown Main Street, which seeks to revitalize the town's historic district, helped make the dual lesson possible when she approached the school to ask for students' help in an exterior makeover of a downtown house.

"It was gray and raw wood," she said of the weathered structure at 100 Main St. "It was in bad shape. It's a lower-income house that needs a roof desperately."

Skrobot contacted the U.S. Department of Agriculture to help the homeowner secure a low-interest loan to fix the roof. That work is still to come. An exterior makeover also was well overdue. So the St. Georges students worked with other volunteers this month to scrape and paint the building. They also removed the shutters to work on them back at the school.

"I think they did a great job," said Skrobot, as a handful of students worked Friday to re-hang the shutters and finish off the project. "They kind of got a taste of preservation with working on these shutters. They used wooden pegs. They didn't use nails when they put the shutters back together. They learned that you could take something old and make it new again."

The circa-1880s, Gothic revival house was painted ivory, contrasting nicely with the olive-colored shutters.

Len Graves, a construction teacher at the school, said the shutters were removed from the building and sent out to be stripped. When they came back, the students worked on them in the shop at school.

"There was a lot of wood damage," he said. "The shutters are over 100 years old. Some of the slats they had to make by hand, because some of them were missing. The hardware was taken off and was cleaned up and repainted. I'd say we have about 40 man-hours in just repairing the shutters."

Students from several departments helped with the work, including would-be tradesmen in the electrical, plumbing and HVAC, or heat, ventilation and air-conditioning, fields.

"We do a lot of cross-training at St. Georges," Graves said. "We push a lot of employability skills."

Community members also pitched in on the project. Local merchants donated food for the workers. And Associated Builders and Contractors provided some outreach with its nonprofit arm, ABC Cares, to donate supplies and pull together some of the specialists, such as an electrician.

John Young Sr. of Interstate Aerials in Bear provided two boom lifts to reach the upper levels of the house.

"My son goes to St. Georges and I just want to get involved with the kids," he said. "We're just trying to help out, that's all."

The student workers appreciated the opportunity.

"We got to use our trades that we learned in shop and test them out on the real world," said junior Collin Towner, 16, a carpentry student. "It's a good learning experience."

Junior Cheri Harmon, 16, an electrical-trade student and president of the ABC student chapter, concurred.

"I've never been up on a lift before," she said. "Now I've been up four or five times. It's kind of like second nature now. The wobbles don't throw me off."

"I just think it's cool all our trades can work together," she added. "There's a lot of teamwork, a lot of things that have to be done. You have to help out people who can't do it themselves."

Homeowner Sally Keys, who works in the housekeeping department at the Christiana Hilton, said she appreciated all the support.

"I'm speechless. It just happened so fast," Keys said. "I'm just shocked. It looks so good. There for a while, it really looked terrible."

Keys turned the favor around, donating the 40-foot evergreen that was encroaching on the sidewalk in the front yard of her house to Middletown to cut down and use for the town-square Christmas display.

"Her life's been a roller coaster," friend and Smyrna resident Leonard Paz said of Keys. "She lost her husband about nine years ago. For the most part, she hasn't had the time or ability to do it herself, and attention to the house is well overdue. She's had some hard times."

St. Georges junior John Young Jr., 16, an HVAC student, was only too glad to help.

"Everything you do to help out, helps you out in the end," he said.

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