

# Valley News Dispatch

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## Summit Academy students put skills to work

By Jodi Weigand

A group of students in Summit Academy's trades program put their skills to work to build a deck at Derailleur Bike Shop Café along the Butler-Freeport Community Trail.

Summit Academy is a residential school for teen boys who have been assigned there by juvenile court as an alternative to detention.

The school is on a 125-acre campus within walking distance of Derailleur cafe in the Herman section of Summit Township.

The four students, with the help of four of their teachers, built the deck in a week. The students are enrolled in the school's carpentry and building maintenance trade program.

"I think it's time for them to get some credit," said Derailleur co-owner Dee Stephen. "They did a super nice job."

She and her husband, Gavin Archer, hosted a luncheon Friday to thank the students.

They also attached a plaque to the deck acknowledging their work.

Stephen said they wanted to give the students special recognition so they feel more embraced by the local community.

"They're doing good work over there," she said.

The school is under the umbrella of The Academy Schools, which includes a girls residential school just outside Baldwin Borough; a day/evening program for juvenile offenders; a drug-and-alcohol treatment program; and a charter school that focuses on at-risk students

The deck project helped the teens fulfill some of the 50 hours of community service they're required to complete before graduation.

They did such a good job that the Butler-Freeport Community Trail Council has asked the school if students could build a small picnic pavilion in a grassy lot by the trail near Derailleur cafe, said Chris Ziegler, president of the trail council.

"That's a resource we're not using, whether it's picnic tables, bulletin boards or whatever," Ziegler said of Summit Academy students. "I thought we should use them and let them have a learning experience, and they like doing community service."

Derailleur cafe is on Dittmer Road, about 100 feet away from the trail, between the Sheetz Road and Bonniebrook Road trail heads.

It's become a popular stop for trail users since it opened.

Stephen and Archer spent four years renovating the 129-year-old former J.J. Dittmer Mercantile and the adjacent Dittmer home, where they live.

The deck is behind the original façade of the former railroad ticket booth/post office that was attached to the store.

Stephen said when they were ready to start the deck, she researched local businesses, then thought to see whether one of the vocational technical schools wanted to be involved.

"We thought that might be a good fit for us," she said.

Summit Academy industrial trades supervisor Jeff Harshman jumped at the chance to get his students involved. All Derailleur had to do was supply the materials.

Summit Academy junior Tyler McDonald, 16, of Philadelphia, said he enjoyed being part of the deck construction team.

"I felt really good about it because I was helping out the community and showing that we were doing it for the fun of it," he said. "It was a fun project because we got to meet new people, and because I learned something new."

Miles Davis, 18, of Reading, who graduated but is at Summit completing other programs, said he enjoyed being out doing something he's interested in as a career.

"The owners of the bike shop, it was nice to see their smiles while we were working on it and when we were done," he said.

The teens took the initiative to do landscaping work around the deck.

"That was my favorite part," Davis said. "They let us do what we wanted to do, and it turned out really nice."

Harshman said the deck project was a unique local opportunity for the students, who do much of their community service in Pittsburgh neighborhoods.

"For us, that's real community service," he said. "I feel like a lot of times when it comes to community service, at first, they don't totally get what we're doing ... that they're giving back to the community."

"At the end of a building project, when they see it done, it's like instant gratification for what they've accomplished."

*Jodi Weigand is a staff writer for Trib Total Media. She can be reached at [jweigand@tribweb.com](mailto:jweigand@tribweb.com).*

