Sweet! Students build a house from wood they sourced responsibly

When students are given the opportunity to work alongside professionals in their field and perform a community service, the rewards can be great. We could all learn a lot from the students in the Forestry Natural Resources Program at Stedfast Treeland Center in Rutland, Vermont. This is a two-semester class project, they worked toward building a sugar house and maple syrup! From crafting maple trees to processing the sap, students have learned about the entire process.

The sugar house will provide a hands-on experience for Stafford students, as well as local high school students, to learn about the cultural, scientific, economic, and ecological aspects of maple syrup production. The Vermont City Forester and arborist helped students identify a healthy planting location and site plan to the Rutland City Forest in Williston, Vermont. Threats from invasive insects and the need to improve wildlife habitat helped guide the forest management decisions to preserve a precious patch of sugar maple trees.

Students learned to estimate volume and area, completed logger safety training, and performed a small-scale timber harvest. They then cut and moved the logs to Northeast Timber Exchange, where they were sold as a local wood dealer purchase. Enough logs were left over for another class at a local elementary school and a local outdoor stream safety education to help nearby Blueberry Conservation area for young students. Students will complete the building of all three structures in the fall of 2023. The work of the students in the Forestry Natural Resources Program instructor, Mark Lindauer, has already been honored with the Outstanding Use of Wood award from the Vermont Forest Products Association.

According to Lindauer, “The program relies heavily on organizational relationships within our community to provide engaging opportunities for our students. While some of our projects generate income for the program, we prioritize projects that benefit the general public. This provides students with opportunities to work with professionals in the field to perform community service, and it provides a positive public representation of the program and Stafford Technical College.”

The sugar house project was funded by Protect Learning Tree (PLT) Vermont. PLT becomes a program of the Vermont Technical Education Initiative (VTEI) in 2013 to expand its reach to surrounding youth in the outdoor, forests, and green jobs.

VTEI is an independent, non-profit organization that works with the intention of sustainable forestry, thinking collaboratively, and responsible professional learning among many initiatives. VTEI supports education and community engagement to connect children to the natural world and inspires their future careers in forestry and natural resource management.

To learn more about VTEI’s Protect Learning Tree, and the power of youth working with forests, visit

http://www.plt.org