

Greater Lowell Tech students build towering stage for Boys & Girls Club

Project sets the stage for school, community and life



Students from the Greater Lowell Technical High School stand on the multipurpose stage they built for the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Lowell during a celebration on May 8, 2024 at the club on Middlesex Street. (Courtesy GLTHS)



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LOWELL — What's 16 feet high, 20 feet wide and 8 feet deep and has a three-sided wraparound stair?

For Greater Lowell Technical High School senior Marisol Antongortee, those dimensions add up to what she described as a challenging but fun construction project for the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Lowell on Middlesex Street.

About 30 students in the carpentry, painting, and electrical classes built the towering plywood stage that sits in the newly renovated space that used to be home to the

club's pool area. A steel-frame floor anchors what is now used as a community room with the stage as the centerpiece.

"This is one of the biggest projects I've done in my four years," Antongortee said, during a pizza celebration hosted in the space by the club on Wednesday afternoon for the students. "It brought us together as a group. Definitely more challenging, but a great learning experience for us."

The club plans to project movies onto the 16-foot-high backdrop during club movie nights, and the stage recently hosted a club kids fashion show.

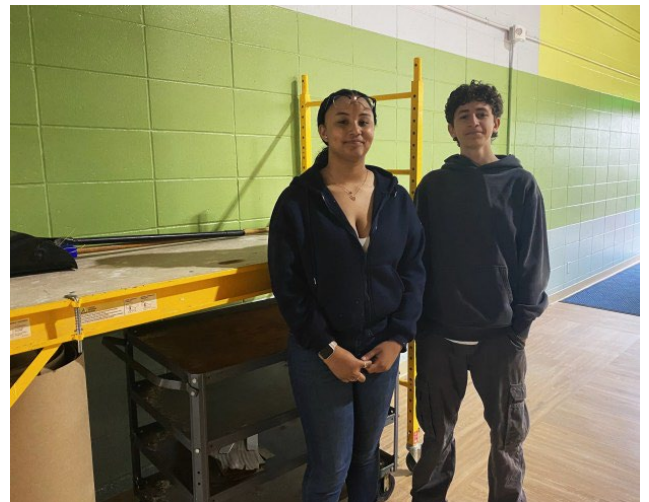
"This is part of a whole capital campaign — we're renovating the whole space," Boys & Girls Club Deputy Executive Director JuanCarlos Rivera said. "This is now a multipurpose space. When it's not used as a café, it will be used for performances, conferences and movie nights. It's already worked out for a number of reasons."

The collaboration between community groups and the school is a point of pride for the staff and students at GLTHS, many of whom are also club members.

"This was an opportunity to pay it forward," GLTHS Superintendent-Director Jill Davis said.

It's just one of many projects in the community that the students have brought to their studies at the Tyngsboro-based school that is the largest technical high school in the state, serving the communities of Lowell, Dracut, Tyngsboro, and Dunstable.

On a warm summer day in 2022, students from the school's construction and carpentry program unveiled the [Centralville neighborhood sign](#) that they built as part of their junior year studies. The project provided in-house training before they went out into the community on co-op jobs to gain real-world experience in their senior year.



Joining the Indoor Football League's Massachusetts Pirates in a March media blitz were a group of students who designed, manufactured and painted the [Pirates' field goal posts](#). At the ceremony the students were able to sign the posts, which stand prominently in the end zone.

And this spring, students from the computer aided drafting and design, carpentry, and painting and design programs combined their talents to create two new signs for the [Lowell Fire Department's](#) West Sixth Street Fire Station.

“Doing projects allows our kids to practice their technical skills and get experience with live work at the same time as giving back to their community,” Davis said.

The club hired the architect to design the stage and it paid for all the materials. GLTHS students did the rest under the watchful eyes of their instructors, such as senior carpentry instructor Patrick Couillard, electrical instructor Eric Weed and Mike Donahue, the painting and design instructor.

The teachers spoke to the scale of the project and the determination of the students to master the intricacies and challenges it presented.

“It’s been a heck of the project,” Couillard said. He walked the perimeter of the stage with a reporter, pointing out the three-quarter inch plywood walls mounted in 8-foot sections and secured with stainless-steel screws.

“It had its challenges — there are two 8-foot walls, one on top of the other,” he said. “When you get up that high with students, I had to think a lot about scaffolding and safety — it changes everything.”



Weed said the students had input to the project, such as adding electrical outlets to the design.

“We loved it,” he said. “We cut six outlets — three in the front, three in the back — ran the wires and tied it all in.”

The wires run underneath the stage and bring power directly to the structure, eliminating the need to run floor-length electrical cords.

Dozens of Donahue’s students were present, wearing their painter pants to the celebration. They applied the protective clear coating to the entire surface area of the stage.

“The back is higher than the front, so we had to use scaffolding,” he said. “There are seven coats on the stage and steps. There’s four on the other surfaces.”

The teamwork, discipline and satisfaction of creating something grand helped senior Landon Murray decide what he wants to do after graduation. He plans to work on union carpentry jobs.

“I found my passion,” he said. “Carpentry is something that I love.”