

Stanley 'Stem-inists' are Building More Than Boxes

By Cathy Dausman



From left: Samantha Swan, Marielle Riesner-Hansson, Caili Raymond, Sophia Brown, Juliet Jones, Stella Heo, Sydney Paulsen, Isabella Salinas, Lydia Osborn, Larkin (last name w/h by request), Samantha Louie, Maddie Wilson Ruby Koehler, (Name w/h by request), Catherine Vojta and Teacher Michele Murphy Photos Cathy Dausman

Lighthearted banter rises above the sweet smell of sawdust in the woodshop, along with sounds of scratching sandpaper, the tap-tap of hammers, the buzz of cordless drills and the occasional whine of a chop saw, but this is not your father's workshop. This is your father's daughter's... or granddaughter's workshop, where teacher Michele Murphy oversees an all-girls woodworking club new this year at Stanley Middle School.

The group of sixth- and eighth-graders call themselves the "wood-be STEM-inists," a tongue-in-cheek nod both to feminism and the educational emphasis on science, technology, engineering and math. They've thrown in a bit of philanthropy for good measure as well. The students are building wooden boxes for Break Out EDU; the company donates \$10 per box to a charity of their choice, in this case the Malala Fund. The fund was established by Malala Yousafzai, the young Pakistani student who survived a Taliban assassination attempt in 2013 and subsequently won a Nobel Peace Prize.

"After reading her biography as a school-wide project in January the girls decided that donating their proceeds to the Malala Fund was in keeping with the spirit of their

club," Murphy said. "The company (Break Out EDU) pays for the supplies," said Murphy. "I pick up the lumber on weekends and the girls come in every Monday during lunch and build the boxes."

Since its November formation, the club has produced 50 boxes, meaning the Malala fund will receive a check for \$500. It's a business model that comes complete with video conferences, a chief financial officer, an artistic director and quality control oversight.

Stella Heo designed a name stamp to mark the bottom of the boxes. The club designed a T-shirt, built a Twitter account (#wbstem-inists) and has a website under development.

Sixth-grader Caili Raymond says the STEM-inists club is a chance for people "to get past that sexist thing, and see that girls can do it [woodworking] too." Another member, Ruby Koehler said the club lost some income because a few boxes broke in transit, so the students switched from using screws to nails.

The girls say cutting the wood was the easiest part of the assembly, and aligning the box edges and latch hardware the most difficult. Half the group enthusiastically admitted to having gotten splinters

while building the boxes; something they obviously regard more as a badge of honor than an annoyance.

Murphy is proud of the work her students have done. "I think they are a great representation of the caring culture here at Stanley and STEM education," she said.

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