

Huge accomplishment Senior projects are complete at East



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Crowded around a gleaming replica of a 1969 Indy 500 pace car, dazzled judges marveled at Columbus East student Cameron Wilson's senior project restoration.

The 18-year-old said he thought completing the convertible that had sat in his father's garage since he was born would be a great way to finish his high school career.

"If it wasn't for my senior project, I don't know that we would've ever gotten around to it," Wilson said with a laugh.

"But the car is definitely still not mine!"

About 300 East seniors last week completed the 10th annual round of senior project presentations. The students, who spent a year on the in-depth endeavors, explained their projects to judges in half-hour presentations.

Owning their learning

Launched in 2000, senior projects require research, a term paper and completion of a constructive, creative or educational activity. Many students select projects that showcase their creative talents, benefit the community or explore a career.

This year's topics positioned students to complete a medical mission to Mexico, organize swimming lessons for students with special needs, recruit volunteers for Volunteers in Medicine and create an ethanol-powered lawnmower.

Anne Edds, senior project coordinator, said projects flourished with creativity this year as students took ownership of and pride in their

work.

"I attribute a lot of the projects' success to the fact that students come up with their own topics and make the projects theirs," she said.

Aspiring author Kylie Hutchinson used her senior project as motivation to launch her career.

Before her senior year, Hutchinson said she never had pursued a story past 10 pages. For the project, she initiated a creative writing club at East and completed the first 50 polished pages of a book she plans to finish and publish during college.

Bill Jensen, BCSC's director of secondary education, said East's senior projects teach students to take ownership of their learning and to develop important life skills including persistence, problem-solving and oral and written communication.

"It's a great, different way to let them show what they know," he said.

"It also allows them to develop and explore their passions."

Ready to graduate

Senior Phillip Swaim, known as "The Tie Guy" among his peers, toted a colorful assortment of ties Thursday and scoured the crowd of waiting presenters for students in need.

Swaim created a new tradition at East: Tie Thursdays. Swaim said he did not want any of his fellow seniors to receive point deductions in their presentation for failing to dress appropriately.

"I wanted to make sure we all graduated, and no one was left behind," he said.

Friends Corey Funches, Ronald Miller and Fredrick King breathed a collective sigh of relief after completing their presentations — but quickly realized how close they are to the end of high school.

King, who for his senior project taught Spanish to elementary students at Children Inc., said he found himself teary-eyed exiting the presentation room and again while picking out cookies at the event's reception.

"I'm happy, I mean it's such a huge accomplishment, and we're all about to start this whole next phase of our lives," he said.

"But it's sad to realize that high school's almost done."

Miller said he thinks senior projects helped prepare him for college and life. He said the project helped him gain skills in time-management, public speaking and responsibility.

"It teaches you that in any challenging situation, you can step up," he said.

"I know in the real world, anything can be thrown at you, and this gave me confidence that I'll be able to handle it."



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Senior project pictures wait to be picked up.

WHAT: Columbus East High School students recently completed senior presentations.

HOW MANY: About 300.

REQUIREMENTS: A proposal, written paper, the project, a final portfolio and a presentation.

FOCUS: Split almost equally in thirds, students this year chose projects focusing on community service, careers and talents.

TOPICS: Ranged from planning fundraisers and coaching sports teams to renovating flood-damaged homes and organizing a dance ministry.



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"That is a powerful knot," said Phillip Swaim, left, as he and Derek Anderson helped friend Blake Trepanier with his tie Thursday before delivering his senior project presentation. In addition to helping classmates tie their knots, Swaim brought a rack of ties to swap with those who didn't like what they were wearing.

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