

Eye on Community

ACE Mentors: High School Students LEEDing The Way Toward Green

By Madeleine Foster

Every weekday morning, the typical high school student checks his or her daily schedule—and, from my experience, this is rarely an exciting event. But the Architecture, Construction, and Engineering (ACE) Mentor Program of America, Inc., seeks to change that attitude. The notion that getting an education is a privilege and not to be taken for granted is firmly believed by those involved with the program. ACE's mission is: "...to engage, excite, and enlighten high school students to pursue careers in the integrated construction industry through mentoring; and to support their continued advancement in the industry through scholarships and grants."

Operating as a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) organization, the ACE Mentor Program is a unique partnership of industry professionals that helps students develop a mindset that will propel creativity and lay the groundwork for a promising future. In preparing these kids for what lies ahead, it promotes the ideals of original thought and structured planning.

Since its formation in 1994 for the purpose of attracting kids to these professions and filling the void left by future retirees, the program has assigned students the task of working with teams of architects, engineers, general contractors, subcontractors, construction managers, skilled craftsmen, ironworkers, and mechanical engineers. A mentor oversees these teams and lends guidance as teams devise plans and build models for student projects over a nine-month period. This is no small feat, many hours of hard work and dedication go into these projects. After completing the program, students are eligible for ACE scholarship opportunities.

While ACE is a nationwide mentoring program, the Eastern Shore affiliate has thus far awarded \$60,000 in scholarships, inspiring program participants to pursue further education in their chosen field(s) of architectural studies whether in college, or through architectural internships.

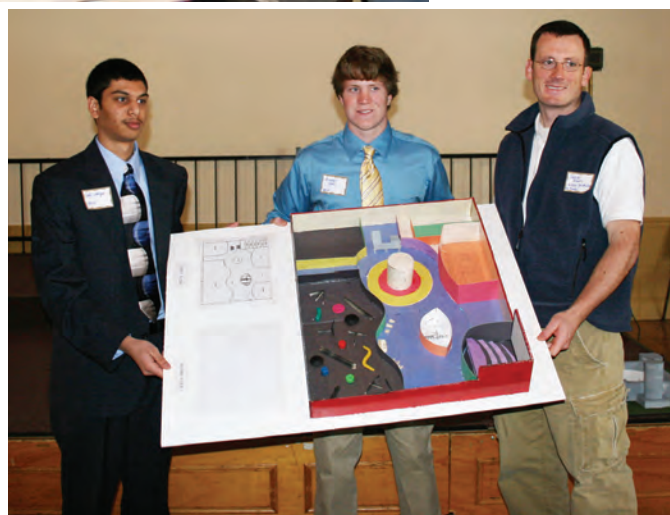


Dr. Charles Thornton, a structural engineer and founder of the ACE Mentor Program, explains a structural plan to students from both Easton and Saints Peter and Paul high schools.

Mentor Daniel Bowen from Willow Construction with Easton High School students. This project involved renovating the now empty former Lowe's building in Easton.

Jack Dempsey, director of Easton's ACE Mentor Program, relates what it's like to work with high school students: "Every one of us remembers one person who took us in and said to us, 'This is how it's done, and I'm going to give this kid a shot.' We all remember that."

In 2008, students from the ACE Frederick (Md.) Affiliate's design team won the coveted \$3,000 Construction Industry Round Table (CIRT) championship, a national competition, for their energy-efficient, commuter-friendly "Re-Routing Transportation" project design for Maryland's I-270 corridor. The team exceeded all expectations of the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standard, which creates a friendly, "green," competitive spirit. Last March, students participating in the ACE Mentor Program of Maryland's Eastern Shore were awarded scholarships, including The Purple Submersible group—a team of students from St. Michaels and Saints Peter and Paul high schools who designed a floating sea school. Consisting of two boats, one focusing on marine life and the other offering hands-on interaction, the team's goal was to engineer and construct a creative way for people to learn about the Chesapeake Bay and its problems, first-hand, in an effort to promote environmental concern.



ACE makes it a point to seek out students classified as "minorities." In general, over 82 percent of the bright-minded individuals in the program fall under this category, and for some of these kids it's time and experience they may not get otherwise. Dempsey also had this to say about his role with ACE: "I get enjoyment out of giving these kids a quicker start than I had. I want the kids to participate in our careers and enjoy it as much as I have."

Simply put, a basic high school education prepares you for what to do each day; life, on the other hand, does not. ACE's Eastern Shore affiliate makes every effort to ensure that participants and volunteers make something extraordinary of themselves and their environments.

Interested in building a future of your own? A 2009 survey reveals that 90 percent of former ACE Mentor Program participants say their experience gave them an edge over their non-ACE counterparts! Contact Jack Dempsey through the ACE Mentor Program of Maryland's Eastern Shore website at Acementor.org/560.