

Blacksburg company helps with hands-on education

By Marty Gordon

News Editor

CHRISTIANSBURG — A group of eighth graders at Christiansburg Middle School believe the town of Christiansburg desperately needs a new recreation department. Recently the group looked back on a survey they took as part of a math project at CMS. Following the survey, they literally helped plan and even design their own recreation facility with the help of a Blacksburg engineering firm.

Zach Kennedy said right now it is tough for everyone because of the lack of space. "There is no place to do a lot of things for kids. It's needed," he said.

The project was in cooperation with Anderson and Associates of Blacksburg which received two awards for their part in helping education. Two engineers worked with the class for over three months in planning their own rec center.

The idea was that of Rosary Beck, the math coordinator at the school for gifted students in the Christiansburg Strand. She said the students wanted to do some type of project associated with

sports. They then chose the recreation center.

"They looked at parks and interactive museums," Beck said.

In the survey, the students asked 6th, 7th, and 8th graders what they thought the facility should have in it. They also surveyed staff at the school, faculty and parents.

Statistics were broken down in both age and gender groups.

"They weighed the different items to see if every area was being served," Beck said.

Again basketball topped the overall list with volleyball second and weight room third.

Robbie Poff, a student, said most of the survey results were similar except for a few differences in genders. "Girls were high on volleyball, while boys wanted a weight room," he said.

A snack bar ranked right behind the weight room, but ahead of ping pong and billiards. A computer room and raquetball was sixth and seventh respectively. Then came gymnastics, arts and crafts, aerobics, music classes, a library, interactive museum, day care and a meeting room.

The survey results have been posted on the bulletin board in the school's cafeteria and show the

compiled breakdown of the groupings.

Surprisingly the survey showed that many people are willing to pay a membership to help offset costs.

Ryan Bowles, a student, said the group wanted to create a multi-purpose center.

That is just what they did. Thanks to the survey, the students determined that over 50 percent of the center should be for basketball and multi-purpose activities.

Anderson's Chris Hornung said while most of the things have already been planned for the design work of the new center, maybe the students' work will help with programming and scheduling. Plans had also been for the students to meet with the "real" recreation designers, Mills Oliver, architects. "But we were able to meet with them," Hornung said.

A pool didn't come into play for this project, but the students said they hope one will be added to the recreation facility. They also are hoping for a roller hockey area.

The fun part of the project was when the students got a chance to literally go to the current site, put on hard hats and plan the interior design of their rec center.

The 12 students jumped at the chance but had to maintain an A or B average before being allowed to leave school.

Lanie Pallalay, one of two Anderson engineers that worked with the students, said when on the site the students were allowed to look at the specs of the building and figure how to accommodate what their survey showed.

Students also learned something about computers via the project. Computer spread sheets were used to develop and assemble the survey results.

Two algebra teachers, Jennifer Burke and Gini McCoy, said the project was great because students were able to combine math and fun activities.

McCoy said, these students compacted curriculum into a shorter time so they needed something else to do so the project filled a void. "They were able to connect math to the real world while using both math and computers."

Burke agreed, saying it was pure math and fell right in line with the standards of learning with the use of stats and graphs.

"Those guys are the leaders of tomorrow, and will be doing this later in life," she said.