

Prairiefire project draws help from local students



Education

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Blue Valley Center for Advanced Professional Studies student Brady Crites surveys land as part of his civil engineering and architecture class. CAPS students are working with developers on the Museum of Prairiefire.

As work on the Museum of Prairiefire moves forward, Johnson County students have a hand in the process. Students from Shawnee Mission, Blue Valley and Olathe are collaborating with professionals at the Merrill Cos. on the 58-acre mixed-use development.

In addition to helping with the design process, students will eventually collaborate in the operation of the museum, **Fred Merrill**, Merrill Cos. president, said.

The museum to be constructed at 135th Street between Lamar and Nall avenues, will present 20 exhibits over a 10-year period from the American Museum of Natural History.

One of the collaborating student groups is the Blue Valley Center for Advanced Professional Studies civil engineering and architecture class. They have been granted permission to visit the site, take soil samples and survey the property.

The students are verifying some of the topographical maps created by the company, Merrill said.

The process is an “exciting opportunity” for students to learn along the way, CAPS instructor **Scott Kershel** said.

“(It) simulates what the real professionals are doing rather than some fictitious thing out in space,” Kershel said.

Senior CAPS student **Luke Spaich** said he has appreciated the chance to photograph and get a feel for the layout of the land. He hopes to become a civil engineer, he said.

“I enjoy it and it’s different than a regular class where you just sit down and take notes,” he said. “...To get to be able to see that kind of preferential information is kind of – definitely a fun, new experience.”

On March 2, several students from Shawnee Mission, Blue Valley and Olathe were invited to assist the company in the selection of the architect for the museum.

The students heard presentations from three architecture firms.

Those firms provided their qualifications and their approach for the building of the museum, and students were allowed to ask questions of the firms. Students then helped debrief the selection team about their thoughts.

Senior **Josh Moore**, a CAPS student, said he felt honored to have such a rare opportunity as a high school student.

“They all had different styles of presenting their firm,” Moore said. “I got to learn how professionals carry themselves in front of everyone else.”

The project manager for the museum, Project Explore Inc., is helping to identify the collaborative opportunities among students, teachers and the project developers, **Linda Segebrecht**, Project Explore partner, said. The “sky is the limit” for opportunities for student learning and input as the process move forward, she said.

“I’ve seen teachers involved in focus groups, but this is far more than a focus group,” Segebrecht said.

This is where we actually listen and have student advisory groups and a process where kids can realize how something like this is actually built and constructed, how a business plan works.”

Students in business classes will likely be involved in the museum’s business planning.

Students studying hospitality might eventually be involved in learning about guest services at the museum.

“In education today (it is) relevancy that every teacher is trying to get to, but rarely does when dealing with a textbook,” Segebrecht said.

“Every step of the way we’ll be calling upon students to be our sounding board and be part of the process.”

It was important to those working on the project to have students involved from the beginning, Merrill said.

“It really builds community loyalty and excitement, and that is something that is a byproduct of the education these kids are going to receive,” he said.