

SUPERINTENDENT'S BRIEF

Together, We are the Champions for Children in Poughkeepsie City School District

ISSUE NO 52 | February 22, 2023

VOLUME 4



McKayla Smith, Danasia Powell, Consuela Edwards, Shakaila Smith and Kimara Smith from the Career Action Center listen to Pam Gunther talk about packaging Fit and Fun's products. Fit and Fun's creative design manager Jessica Maskey is behind Pam and production associate Sandra Escobales is behind the table.

would engage him and others like him who may struggle with interacting with others.

The demand for the playground stencils and items that create sensory pathways indoors and outside to engage students and help them develop motor skills, spatial awareness and hand-eye coordination led to the birth of Fit and Fun Playscapes.

"We want to make schools a more fun place," she said.

Gunther ran Fit and Fun from her home, then an 800 square foot space and then a 1,200 square foot space through the COVID-19 pandemic. Gunther outgrew the space and in 2021 moved into a 5,000 square foot space she and her team designed at 220 Overocker Road, Building 2 in Poughkeepsie.

Now, 12 years later, with 10 employees and even more demand for Fit and Fun's stencils, stickers, rollout mats and large-scale games and accessories, she is looking to expand and tapped into the Career Action Center at Poughkeepsie High School to share the opportunities that exist with students.

One of the first things Gunther shared is that students shouldn't be afraid to change careers or direction.

"I had a lot of changes - especially during COVID - material and labor shortages - it's hard to run a business in that environment. Fight and don't give up. Believe in what you do," she said.

Gunther also told students Danasia Powell, McKayla Smith and Shakaila Smith that in today's world, not everybody needs to go to college to get a good job. In fact, she said Fit and Fun has positions that don't necessarily need a degree.

"You need to have good knowledge, technical skills and some ability to do physical work. Take your time with your career path," she said.

Fit and Fun's products are in about 8,000 schools in the United States along with some in Australia, the United Kingdom and Europe. It holds 40 copyrights and 15

Company tour shares local opportunities with students

Pamela Gunther went from being an architect for a firm in New York City and consulting to designing products that help schools help students stay active and monitor their social-emotional state for her own company.

Her transformation started because she saw a need to help her young son at the time. He had Attention Deficit Disorder and Gunther wanted to develop outdoor activities that



Fit and Fun's production manager Todd Walsh explains how the laser cutter works to Edwards and the students.

trademarks. Gunther said the company just started a partnership with Abilities First to learn more about children with special needs and find out what types of products would help them.

Looking over some of the products, Powell said, "They need to add these to our playgrounds."

This was the first of several company tours scheduled through the Career Action Center this year.

"The whole idea of this is for the youth to think outside the norms for their careers, to explore different careers including Fit and Fun - things that are local in the community," said Consuela Edwards, Career Action Center youth mentor.

Gunther said Fit and Fun has graphic designers, salespeople, a social media manager, technical (IT) personnel and administrators, along with physical laborers.

Powell appreciated the opportunity to see Fit and Fun.

"It was very interesting and gave me insight into how a small, growing business works and how it takes lots of years to get there," she said.

While Powell plans to pursue a career in cosmetology, she said the knowledge of other possibilities will stay in the back of her mind.

Students learn Black History through art

Art teacher Megan Rowland helped bring Black History to life for pre-K and kindergarten students at the Early Learning Center through a series of hands-on projects centered around the artwork of Black artists.

In pre-K classes, students learned about Kente cloth, a colorful, woven cloth which originated in Ghana. Students viewed examples and then created their own using multi-colored paper, drawing on it and adding string. The students' work will be featured as a backdrop during a presentation Kelly Faulk's class will do for Black History Month.

Meanwhile, kindergartners are learning about Jacob Lawrence, an American artist known for his paintings of African-American historical figures as well as his home in Harlem.

Students got to see some of Lawrence's paintings and then were taken on a slideshow tour of Poughkeepsie to help remind them of sights in their city. They saw the Bardavon, Hudson River, Main Street, different restaurants and their school. Afterward, Rowland asked what they need to show in the drawings of their hometown, Poughkeepsie.

One by one, students gave answers: buildings, cars, a bus, streets.

Recently, the classes had gone on a field trip to the Bardavon to see "The Tortoise and the Hare" and Rowland was able to bring that experience into the lesson.

"I had the students do a directed drawing of the Bardavon. Then we added buildings on the side so they



ELC art teacher Megan Rowland teaching a kindergarten class about what their school looks like before they finish their drawings of their hometown. An example of the Kente cloth pre-K students made hangs in the background.



A student outlines their pencil drawing using a marker during class before being given crayons to color it in.

were touching like they saw on Main Street," Rowland said. Students were then given worksheets with different types of doors, windows and other building elements they could add to their drawings.

One student's building had a heart-shaped door. Asked why she drew it that way, she said, "I drew a heart-shaped door because I had an example." She also said that she drew a car for the person to use."

Rowland planned to have the kindergarten students look at works by Alma Thomas, who did color field paintings (an abstract style) and had some of her work hung in the White House under President Barack Obama. Pre-K students were going to explore works by Jacob Lawrence and make crowns in his style.

Rowland, who has been teaching in PCSD for five years, said she tries to touch on as many different mediums as possible with the students throughout the year. They've already used pencils, markers, crayons, paint, sculpture and collage.

In May, thanks to a grant obtained by a local philanthropist, Rowland was able to get a grant to bring in the nonprofit Fall Kill Creative Works to teach students how to make items with clay, which will be brought to one its studios, fired and then returned to the students for them to keep.

Free bed program touted at Morse movie night

Morse Elementary School families were treated to a movie and information on a program that provides a free bed and accessories to children Feb. 16, thanks to the Morse PTA.

Before Disney's "Turning Red" played, the PTA invited Ashley Furniture's Jeffery Jordan to speak to parents about Ashley's Furniture Hope to Dream initiative. This program gives children ages 3-16 a twin size mattress, frame, bed sheet, comforter, and a pillow for free.

"The best thing about the Hope to Dream Program is that it helps families in need by providing a bed for their child, because every child deserves to be able to get a good night's sleep to help their minds and mental health develop."

After Jordan's presentation, students and their families watched the movie and enjoyed items from the concession.

Parents and caregivers interested in learning more about Ashley Furniture's program should contact their school's Community Schools liaison.



PTA President Jaquana Ashley, Ashley Furniture's Jeffery Jordan, Assistant Principal David Feliciano and Gilbert Colon, PCSD community schools liaison, hold Hope to Dream brochures before the movie begins.



District honors transportation team

The Poughkeepsie City School District would like to take this opportunity, on National School Bus Driver Appreciation Day, to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of our school bus drivers and transportation department. Thank you for ensuring our students arrive at school safely each day! You are appreciated. Thank you for being a Champion of Children!