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Progress being made on engineering lab project at Helen Keller; Contributions still being sought



Written by Brad Durrell

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Ethan Fearn has been hired to teach in the new Engineering and Innovation Lab at Helen Keller Middle School.

Helen Keller Middle School Principal Joan Parker has a dream to "turn young students on" to science, technology, engineering and math — one project at a time.

With this goal in mind, and a desire to address the weakness in math and science among American students, Parker applied to the Easton Learning Foundation (ELF) for a \$115,000 grant.

The funds would allow the antiquated wood shop to be converted into an Engineering and Innovation Lab, part of a Gateway to Technology program that would be fully funded by ELF for the first five years.

A walk by Room 105 at Keller shows that the dream is becoming a reality. The lab is being built; a new teacher has been hired; training is taking place; and computers, modules and building materials are being purchased.

The lab will be the home for a pre-engineering Gateway to Technology program created by the national nonprofit organization, Project Lead the Way.

Ethan Fearn, a Sacred Heart University graduate student who is finishing his student teaching and earning his master's degree in education, has been hired to teach in the new lab. Fearn has been interning at Keller for the past year and will receive special training this summer at Worcester Polytechnic Institute.

All middle school students will go through this lab and learn from modules such as Design and Modeling, Automation and Robotics, and Rocketry.

Barbie Powell, an ELF founding member, is upbeat about the program. "Engaging, hands-on activity motivates kids immensely," Powell said. "As evidenced by the success of the Lego and Machines Mechanics Lab that ELF recently funded at Samuel Staples, kids just cannot get enough of this type of thing. I feel that ELF is meeting a real need."

ELF must raise approximately \$27,000 by the end of May to ensure that the new lab will be up and ready for students when school begins this fall. Donations can be made at eastonlearningfoundation.org or by sending a check to ELF, P.O. Box 437, Easton, CT 06612.

E-mail ELF President Bernadette Waterman at watermanta@aol.com for details.

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