



Lindsay Szakasits, Heide Trask High School

Student Interest Plus Creativity Equal Graduation Projects

Pender County seniors are putting the finishing touches on their fall graduation projects. Their topics are varied, but they all agree that the work was worth it.

Saresa Hudson chose to research athletes with prosthetic limbs and the challenges they face. She invited a local wheelchair basketball team to play at Pender High School. Prior to the game, the coach spoke to students about the team. Afterwards, students and staff competed in wheelchair races to understand the special skill required for this sport. Hudson says the project has caused her to look at individuals with disabilities in a different way.

Sarah English has sung bluegrass her whole life, but she has never stepped out on her own as a soloist. She researched the way bluegrass has evolved over time and was surprised to learn that it is a fairly new form of music. After recording her own CD for the project, she says she now has confidence to do things independently.

Diego Camposeco studied modern marketing techniques. He was surprised to learn how much strategy is involved: "Effective advertising is really an art." This fall, he organized volunteers for a local election campaign. His group attended meetings, created and displayed signs, called voters, and helped with the candidate forum. He feels like he really developed leadership skills by facing the challenges that come with organizing a group of individuals.

Stephen Reece created working biofuels. He produced three types of diesel fuel and then took the fuel line of a Toyota truck engine into the fuel. In his research, Reece says he was surprised to learn that the first cars actually used biomass. "We're going back to what we started with." He was previously interested in pursuing an engineering

career after graduating from Pender Early College, but now he knows he wants to focus on environmentally friendly technologies.

Jasmine Padgett knows a serviceman who was based in Djibouti, a small African country. His description of the hunger and poverty there inspired her to organize a benefit concert that showcased three bands, two soloists, and a poetry reading. The programs included facts from her research, and the proceeds will go to a local foundation in Djibouti to help families there. She says her project has changed her and that she wants to continue on with her work by starting a foundation in this area to benefit the people of Djibouti.

Kayla Langley saw “too many classmates messing up their lives with drugs.” She researched the effects that drugs have on the brain. She learned that the physical effects often cause mental and emotional issues later in life. She restarted the SADD club at Topsail High which has planned a campaign prior to prom this spring. A drunk driving simulation, guest speakers, and other events are planned. Langley says she won’t stop after the project ends this semester; she wants to make a difference.

Silvia Robles has spent her life watching her mother struggle with diabetes. She organized a diabetes walk at the Heide Trask High School track to raise money for diabetes research. In learning more about the illness, Robles gained respect for her mother and also learned how to care for herself in her prediabetic condition. “The project has made a difference in my relationship with my mom and in my own future.”

Lindsay Szakasits fears that funding cuts jeopardize school art programs. She researched the importance of art in culture and in developing student skills. She is painting a mermaid mural at the United Cerebral Palsy (UCP) center. She says the project has been time consuming but that she has done things she would have never done otherwise. She has been surprised by the children’s response to her and her artwork. “They run up to me and hug me every time I’m there. I want to continue to work with the UCP center and decorate more walls with artwork the kids love.”

The graduation project includes a research paper, a product, a portfolio, and a presentation. Pender County requires that students successfully complete each phase of the project prior to graduation. Robles says, “I think everyone should find something to research that they love.” Community members will serve as judges for presentations in the next six weeks.

Persons interested in seeing the presentations for one night may contact one of the high schools:

Heide Trask High School, 602-6810

Pender High School, 259-0165

Topsail High School, 270-2755

Pender Early College High School, 362-7925



Saresa Hudson's project at Pender High School