SCCTC students were busy constructing the house in the background, which will be completed next week. Those at the scene included Gary Fenton, James Kerchner, Alan Michael Strohl, Gary Grochal, Paul Freeman, Alex Peyton, Jack Bishop, and Alice Davis, executive director at SCCTC. On the roof are students Isaiah Sincavage and Aubrey Heise.

For SCCTC students, building houses is a dream come true

BY C.J. MARSHALL
Wyoming County Press Examiner

Students at Susquehanna County Career and Technology Center are building a dream house.

However, this house is not the dream of the person who will ultimately own it. Instead, it is the dream of the students constructing it, for it gives them the opportunity to put the knowledge they gained in the classroom to practical use.

SCCTC Executive Director Alice Davis said that House Project gives the participating students the opportunity to collect all prior knowledge they gained in the classroom and apply it in real life. Once constructed, the house will be sold, and the proceeds used to fund the next House Project. The current project is the fourth house SCCTC students have built through the years, and the school has lots to have four more constructed. It takes about three years for each house to be completed.

Students from two programs participate in the program. "Students must be at least 18 years old, " Davis explained. "Beard collar and plumbing and heating and carpentry."

The project is overseen by teacher Gary Fenton, who serves as the work site coordinator.

"It's been the best experience," Davis said. "The building inspectors come on the site, and they are very impressed with the work performed. It's not just how fast we can build a house. It's the learning process so they go through every phase of building a house."

At the site, located along Hunter Road in Dinsmore Township, Fenton barks out orders and provides advice to the students, who are busy working on the roof, putting up siding, and putting the finishing touches on the electrical system. Once completed, the house will be a traditional two-story structure with three bedrooms and two-and-a-half baths, that will be sold via a bidding process.

"It's a little bit longer process, obviously," said Fenton, who has worked on houses as a professional contractor. If constructed by professionals, the house could be completed in one and a half school years, but the purpose of building it is to provide a learning experience for the students.

There are 12 students working at the site in the morning, and Fenton explained that a second shift of 12 more students will take over in the afternoon. A total of 60 SCCTC students will have worked on the project by the time the house is completed.

All the students wear safety glasses and sport special harnesses when they go up to work on the roof. "We follow all of OSHA's safety procedures," Fenton said. "All our students are OSHA certified. The kids use harnesses that are attached to the building to provide fall protection."

"The only thing the students do not do is excavation and lay the foundation, which is performed through a subcontractor."

Everything else - the construction, the siding, the roof, the electrical work, the heating and the plumbing - is completed by students from the knowledge they gained in the classroom at SCCTC.

One such student is Aubrey Heise, who graduated from Punxsutawney Area High School in 2010. However, she decided to continue her education in carpentry at SCCTC as an adult.

"I like it," she said about working on the house. "I helped finish the previous house, and I'm learning a lot, like how to put on the shingles. One of my favorite things is putting down tile in the bathroom."

"It's fun," said Jay Dennison of Montrose, a senior who is a carpentry student. "You get to do different things that some of the other kids don't get a chance to do. I was nervous at first, but once you learned how to do it, it was fun."

Another student benefiting from the House Project is Junior Paul Freeman of Montrose, an electrical, plumbing and heating student.

"You get a lot of experience here - things that you wouldn't learn in the classroom," said Freeman, explaining that he learned how to install traps used on tubs to catch waste material, while working on the site.