

DeLaSalle

Steve Rees and the career ambitions of the high school students in his Creative Studio class at DeLaSalle, a private, tuition-free alternative school at 3740 Forest Ave. in Kansas City, are a good example of serendipity, or looking for one thing and finding another.

Rees, an architect and Kansas City automobile enthusiast, racer and collector, worked with students to create a half-size model of a vehicle that has a see-through skin shrink-wrapped around a 9-gauge wire frame. The wire frame is a work of art in itself because its lines resemble the path that air might take as it passes over the vehicle.

The model was inspired by BMW's GINA, a concept sports car whose skin is a water-resistant, man-made fabric stretched over an aluminum wire structure.

Last year, Rees and his students shaped a full-size foam model of a car.

The serendipity? In the process of learning to design and construct a model of a car, students discovered new visions for their futures.

The project began as a classroom exercise with students carving three-dimensional models and culminated in an after-school program with Zack Knighten and Andrew Deckard working with Rees to complete the finished model.

So what has Knighten learned from the project? "I want to be an architect," he said, "so I have learned how to build and make sculptural shapes."

Deckard said working on the model has piqued his interest in problem solving, and he would like to apply those skills to testing video games.

Rees said the process also gave the students tools that allowed them to break down problems and build solutions.

"We wanted to give the kids a reason to learn," Rees said. "Many didn't even think they could draw at first. By acquainting them with various business people, they are beginning to have a vocabulary of success."

Along the way, various Kansas City volunteers helped with ancillary aspects. Tom Corbin, sculptor, helped Knighten and Deckard make bronze sculptures of the model. Matthew Shepherd taught the students to weld the wire frame, and Nick Vedros photographed the finished product.

When I asked Knighten what it felt like to see an idea take three-dimensional form, he smiled and said, "When we first began, I thought we were going to use foam like last year, but then we put the metal through the foam, like ribs. The way it turned out was beautiful."

Rees said his ambition is to acquire a full-size race car chassis for next year, install an electric propulsion system and have the students design another flexible-skin body that would result in an urban-oriented car just large enough for one or two persons.

The model of the DeLaSalle car, and the students who made it, will be at today's Art of the Car Concours at the **Kansas City Art Institute**.

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