

The Power and Potencial of MU Alumni...is Instrumental!

The craftsmanship of about 400 Pennridge High School (PHS) students was on display the evening of May 18 at the school's Spring Arts Show. Also on display that night was the passion and innovation of their teachers, five of which began their professional journeys at Millersville University (MU).

Allen Androkites '79, Henry "Hank" Ward '85, Jim Rutkowski '85, Robert Miller '88 and Matt Peitzman '02 make up the entire technology education department at PHS.

"Collectively these men have created one of the most progressive departments I have worked with," says Pennridge Assistant Principal and fellow MU graduate Scott Hegen '96.

The various forms of art featured in the Spring Arts Show, including pieces from the school's industrial arts and advanced placement art classes, illustrated that progressive mindset. Rocking chairs, clocks, architectural models, ukuleles, skateboard rails, robotics and more filled the school Thursday night.

[Click here](#) to view more photos from the evening.



"I believe it is vital for all students to have a venue to show off their craftsmanship and creativity," says Ward, who began working at PHS after graduating from MU over 30 years ago. "This night is a very special night for everybody in attendance: the community, teachers, peers, families and especially the designers and creators of all that fine work, art and technology."

The event also showcased one of the most recent introductions to the technology education department: a guitar building class. The process began when Peitzman, Androkites and Rutkowski attended a STEM Guitar Workshop at Butler County Community College in the summer of 2015.

"It was an intense five days but incredibly gratifying," Peitzman remembers. "Each of us left with an electric guitar we made ourselves."

Androkites developed a pilot program that summer with the intention of running it as a club the following school year. The club met after school and on Saturday mornings.



"The response was overwhelming," says Rutkowski, who began working at PHS in 1993. "We had terrific support from administration and in the spring of last year, we were in front of the school board proposing a guitar building course."

The course was approved with three sections offered for the 2016-2017 school year and five sections expected next year. The student response was so high that the district decided to hire another teacher, which opened the opportunity for Peitzman to return after working at Pennsbury High School for eight years.

"I never really picked up a guitar until the one I made," says Peitzman, who has now worked at PHS for a total of five years. "I came into this from the woodworking and technology education side of things. Since that original workshop in Butler I have made five guitars and 16 ukuleles.

"The students have been super excited and have done a great job on their instruments," he adds.

In addition to developing a progressive new program for the students of PHS, Peitzman has received another unexpected gift. He and Rutkowski, a former teacher and current colleague, have developed a friendship while developing the course curriculum.

"It is such a neat thing to grow professionally with the guy who helped you pick a career," Peitzman says. "Allen has been a mentor in my life for 20 years since 1997 when I had him as a teacher. He helped me during my time at Millersville, a lot as a teacher while I was at Pennsbury and this year as we work on the guitar building class."

However Peitzman and Rutkowski are not the only teachers in PHS's technology education department who share an amiable professional relationship. "The five of us have a common vision for our students and the department," Peitzman explains. "We all get along really well. There are no ego trips or struggles for power."

Another of Peitzman's former teachers, Ward, also speaks to that comradery saying, "We push each other to be our best. We all still believe heavily in craftsmanship and traditional methods while allowing technology to assist in the learning process."

The reason for the cohesion of the PHS technology education department could be the result of one thing they share in common: a Millersville University education.

"With all five of us having graduated from Millersville, we all have the same general philosophy. To provide students with a positive experience with an emphasis on quality projects and safe, productive work habits," explains Rutkowski.

Ward credits MU for a well-rounded education and technical foundation. "The professors were tough but passionate about their content and demanded your best," he remembers. "I took this experience and, in turn, tried to be passionate and have always demanded the best from my students. I remember how proud I was at the end of each semester after looking back at what I had created in class and want my students to experience that same feeling."



With that mission in mind, the technology education team at PHS continues to add new courses such as green architecture, robotics and artistic woodworking, and new technologies such as 3-D printing, computer aided design and drafting, laser and CNC technologies. By exposing students to both new technologies and traditional skills, the MU alumni believe they are offering the best education to their students.

Ward says the high quality of PHS's technology education department is no accident. "It took leadership and five dedicated individuals who believe in what we are teaching and its worth to the student population," he explains. "Most importantly, we believe in each other to forge our classes to provide our students with the best content and experiences possible."

"I am excited and grateful to be a part of this program here at Pennridge, and I think it shows in how I teach," Rutkowski adds. "The students feed off of that and in turn, they become excited about the program."

Just as PHS's Spring Arts Show offers a glimpse into the talents and passions of Androkites, Ward, Rutkowski, Miller and Peitzman, these teachers exemplify the potential and power of MU alumni.

"Millersville University has prepared its students to push the envelope of expectations in our public school communities," says Principal Hegen. "The five alumni at PHS are doing just that with their innovative approach to industrial arts and technical education."



From left to right: Hank Ward '85, Jim Rutkowski '85, Allen Androkites '79, Bob Miller '88 and Matt Peitzman '02