

PMCS Employees Teach Children about Construction and Safety

By Katherine Kahlke

During a demonstration at Summitt Elementary in north Austin on March 23, The University of Texas at Austin Project Management & Construction Services (PMCS) Director Bill Throop and Laura Burrows of PMCS Construction Services Carpenter Shop visited kindergarten teacher Heather Brannies' class. They talked to the children about construction and safety and to show how to use various construction tools.



Throop was invited to Summitt by Brannies' student teacher, elementary education student Danielle Manack, who wanted to incorporate construction into a project for her "Guiding Young Children" course at UT. Her goal was to connect what the children learn in the classroom to the world in which they live. Manack chose to focus on construction because her students enjoy learning how things are built and what materials and tools are used in the process.

Throop began the demonstration by asking the students if they knew what a construction worker does. "Someone who makes buildings," one child responded. "A person who can make a room into something else," another answered. Throop explained that both answers are correct: the former is called construction; the latter renovation. He then described the various trades that make up construction – plumbing, electricity, carpentry, and painting, among others – and demonstrated cutting a piece of wood with a handsaw and hammering a nail.



The students then learned about jigsaws. Burrows, a carpenter, pointed out the various parts of the tool and passed around a jigsaw blade for the kids to hold. Throop explained that the blade moves rapidly back and forth to cut through wood, so the students would not hurt themselves just by holding it. Burrows then showed the class a piece of wood with an animal penciled on it and explained how she would "trace" the animal using the jigsaw. Throughout the presentation, she stressed the importance of safety, even giving the students their very own earplugs to protect their hearing while the jigsaw was running.

After the kindergartners inserted their earplugs, Burrows turned on the jigsaw and began cutting out the animal, reminding the students to “always be careful to keep fingers away from the blade.” She then showed the class her finished product: an elephant! Throop and Burrows surprised each student with a cut-out wooden animal of his or her own. The youngsters were able to choose from elephants, whales, rabbits, and giraffes. To



add a hands-on dimension to the demonstration, Throop gave students a square of sandpaper to smooth out the edges of their own animal. The children enjoyed sanding so much that a light sound of sandpaper on wood continued throughout the rest of the presentation.

After the demonstration, Throop asked the students what they had learned. They gained understanding that it takes many tools to build something. The wooden animal, for instance, required a pencil to trace the animal, a jigsaw to cut it from the block of wood, and sandpaper to smooth its edges. Throop and Burrows then offered to answer any questions the students had. Hands shot into the air.

One student asked, “What do you wear when you work?” Throop pointed out Burrows’ uniform: a PMCS-issued tan shirt, blue jeans, and heavy, steel-toed shoes. Burrows also stated that while on an actual construction site, people always wear hardhats.



Another child asked, “How long does it take to build a building?” Throop explained that the time needed depends on the size. “A dog house may only take a week to build, while a house can take six to eight months. A building the size of Summitt,” he added, “can take two years or more,” a statement that seemed to amaze the kindergartners.

Manack says the students’ favorite part of the demonstration was having experts visit and teach them. They enjoyed listening to Throop and

Burrows talk about construction, carpentry, and tools. The interactive presentation, hands-on activity, and souvenirs only added to the excitement of having guests in the classroom. Manack predicts the students will be talking about the lesson for weeks.