BHS students build footbridge in Marden Town Forest as 'community contribution'

BELMONT — The Jeff Marden Town Forest needed a bridge to cross over some muddy spots along one of the more popular walking and running trails. First noticed by the High School cross-country running team members Alexandra Lugar and Chayleigh Cadarette, along with social studies teacher and cross country Coach Elizabeth Tardugno, the three thought building a bridge would make a great project as the community contribution portion of the girls' effort to earn a "diploma with distinction".

"The runners either had to jump over it or get their shoes muddy," said Tardugno, who noted that wet, muddy shoes aren't very conducive to a good run.

Both girls wrote a letter of intent telling administrators that they intended to graduate with a diploma with distinction. To accomplish this each students must complete a community service project that has a direct benefit to either Belmont or Canterbury, along with meeting some strict academic requirements.
"We thought it would be a neat contribution that would be helpful for the school and for the people," said Tardugno.

Both Alexandra and Chayleigh admitted neither had any previous experience with carpentry or building.

"Our fathers helped a lot," said Chayleigh, who added it was a great experience to work with her dad, Matt, on a project.

Alexandra said she felt the same and her step-father, Tom Russo, was a huge help also.

"We didn’t know how to build a bridge in the forest," said Alexandra whose said their first stop was Ron Mitchell — the groundskeeper for Belmont High School.

"Mr. Mitchell got us two used telephone poles," she said.

Once those were in place, the team — that also included Belmont Land Use Technician Rick Ball, who assisted them with building and with going to the Conservation Committee for their approvals — started laying the bridge.

Chayleigh said they first had to take measurements and within one day they had put down the decking. She said they learned how to go to a building materials store and buy the proper strength lumber — in this case pressure-treated pine — and how to shop for the right type of fasteners.

For the first time, the girls used measurement levels, squares, chalk lines and drills in a real and permanent project. All of the decking is attached by screws and not nails. Both said their fathers and Ball used the power saws.

As to logistics, some of the materials that were too long to be hauled by a tractor had to be hand-carried into the woods and that was one of their jobs.

They learned how to operate drills without immediate access to electricity, quickly learning that the battery life of a cordless drill is limited.

"At one point we had to run up to the school and recharge," said Tardugno.

The next task was for the girls to design the railings and between designing them and building them, they worked nine straight hours one day.

Chayleigh said her family donated half of the money for materials while the Belmont Rotary Club donated the balance, meaning they had to present their plan to the Rotarians.

Even Chayleigh’s black Labrador retriever "Lily" helped by sitting on the new bridge continually and making sure it was strong enough, said the group while laughing. Many of their photos have Lily right in the heart of the action.

Now that the bridge is complete, Chayleigh and Alexandra said they have one more task to finish — making a sign to dedicate the bridge to Elizabeth Roach of Canterbury, a former teacher and dedicated volunteer to the Booster Club who passed away last month.

"Her and her husband were so involved," said Chayleigh, who noted that for her four years at Belmont High "Miss Roach" was always a friendly face who worked the concession stand for the Booster Club.

When asked how they felt about the project, both said it came out "a lot better than they thought".
"We hope the community enjoys it," said Alexandra. "We were happy to do it."

"And to everyone who helped us, thanks," said Chayleigh. Alexandra will be attending Plymouth State College in the fall and will be studying psychology and criminal justice.

Chayleigh will be attending the University of New Hampshire and hasn’t decided on her major field of study as of yet.

CUTLINE: Chayleigh Cadrette, Alexandra Lugar and Belmont High School senior class adviser work on the bridge they made to cross a muddy spot in the Jeff Marden Town Forest. (Submitted photo, Belmont High School.)
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