Westhope Public School Builds on 3D Printing Program with $1500 in SRT and RDFC Grants

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SRT presented checks to Westhope Public School. Left to right: Cassidy Hjelmstad, SRT CEO and General Manager; Casey Mills, Westhope Public School Teacher; Tom Jespersen, SRT Director for District 2; and Kristi Miller, SRT Board President.

MINOT, N.D. – Westhope Public School students have new technology and new STEAM learning opportunities, funded in part by a Rural Development Finance Corporation (RDFC) grant matched by SRT Communications.

RDFC awarded a $750 grant to Westhope School, which SRT matched with an additional $750, to use toward new printers, filament, and related supplies to grow and sustain the school's 3D printing program.

The program began when teacher Casey Mills and his 5th grade class started putting an available 3D printer to use. The 5th graders set up their own 3D print shop to sell their items, researching sustainable pricing and the most effective packaging. All proceeds go back into purchasing supplies so they can keep printing in the classroom.

The students' creations grew so popular that the program needed to add printers with newer technology. Mills also wanted to introduce 3D CAD software, so the students could progress from using downloadable templates to designing their own products. Soon they were creating original items such as headphone holders and a clock with a battery.

Branching out from the classroom setting, students visited local businesses to ask what challenges or needs they have. Then they headed back to class to create solutions, which

included a napkin-and-condiment holder, a magnetic paperclip holder, custom-sized shelves, and signs displaying store hours.

Through this school-based enterprise, the students practice technology, creative design, small business operations, marketing, and advertising. “It’s been an amazing experience seeing how excited kids are about these skills,” Mills said. “We appreciate this opportunity and SRT’s support of our vision. These students will be able to take the problem-solving, innovation, and business acumen they develop today into their future careers.”

Mills also credits the application of 3D printing to deepening interest and enjoyment in other coursework. For example, students learn about the Renaissance and Shakespeare by creating 3D prints of Michelangelo’s Pietà sculpture and a Globe Theatre replica.



SRT had a chance to see the students’ 3D prints.

Kristi Miller, SRT Board President, said about SRT’s donation, “We are so impressed with the variety and ingenuity of the work these students are creating. As a technology company, SRT is proud to support STEAM in our local schools. It’s inspiring to see the entrepreneurial spirit of Casey’s class and how technology is sparking their creativity and opportunities for the future.”

Mills was named the 2024 Bottineau County Teacher of the Year, and one of his 3D printing students has been recognized as a STEM All-Star Student. Since achieving his goal of sustainability, Mills is looking at drone technology for the next evolution of his program.

SRT Communications, headquartered in Minot, North Dakota, is the state’s largest telecommunications cooperative. Established in 1951, SRT employs roughly 160 people and serves more than 26,000 customers across north central North Dakota. SRT earned the distinction as a

Certified Gig-Capable Provider in 2017. Services include high-speed fiber internet, phone, and security/surveillance systems for home and business. Learn more at www.srt.com.

The Rural Development Finance Corporation (RDFC) is a nonprofit corporation that encourages economic diversification and community vitality through the generation of funding that supports sustainable asset building. Funding for RDFC programs comes from fee income generated by Dakotas America LLC, a community development entity providing New Market Tax Credits in economically distressed census tracks across the United States. The North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives provides support to RDFC.

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