



“Agriculture ... is our wisest pursuit, because it will in the end contribute most to real wealth, good morals & happiness.

- Thomas Jefferson to George Washington, Aug. 14, 1787

PBL in the classroom

Project Spotlight: Community House

Each month, Project Spotlight will focus on a certain aspect of Project Based Learning (PBL). This month we take a look at the Community House Project and highlight the entry event.

St. Johnsville’s Community House is a restored 1869 Victorian mansion that houses the village offices. It was named to the National Register of Historic Places in 1989.

On a mild fall day, Ag PTECH students walked two blocks down the road for a field trip to the Community House. This isn’t the culmination of a learning experience; it was just the beginning. Project based learning launches with an entry event aimed to hook the students’ interest and spark curiosity.

These events can be anything, from a field trip, a video or guest speaker to a high interest current event or even a letter of request from the principal. Launching events are limited only by the creativity of the teachers. An entry document accompanies the event, outlining the project requirements and learning objectives. Students refer often to the entry document as they work through their project.



From left: Chris Mayton, Ashlee Cotton, Taten Thompson, and Ethan Harding present their landscape design plan for St. Johnsville’s Community House. An important element of PBL is the public product. The public product encourages high quality work, gives students the opportunity to discuss what they have learned and serves as way to communicate with families and the community about what and how students are learning in PBL.

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REPORT Giving back

By Madison Blood, FFA Reporter



As the season of giving ends once again, the Ag PTECH FFA chapter reflected on their contributions to the community. Within the last couple of months, FFA chapter members thought about different ways they could give back to their community. In the beginning of the year, the chapter gave a variety of breakfast treats to the American Legion in St. Johnsville. The American Legion offers help to veterans and simply advocates the value and honor

that each veteran deserves. The veterans were pleased with the thoughtful act, and the students were humbled by the character-building experience.

However, that was just the beginning of the chapter’s acts of kindness. The chapter arranged a clothing drive hosted at Ag PTECH on Dec. 20. Until the date, students were busy collecting clothes and spreading the word about the event. The day of the drive, several students stayed to organize the clothing and to assist anyone who may need help. Clothing left over from the drive was donated to the New York State Children’s Foundation.

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Student profile

Jack Robinson

It was on a trip to a Florida aquarium that Jack Robinson discovered the pathway to his future. Jack loves the ocean and all the animals in it, so when asked about his future, he will tell you he wants to be a marine biologist.

“I would like to do research and photography of ocean animals, Jack says. “I also would like to help clean up the litter in the oceans.”

A first-year student from Gloversville, Jack applied to Ag PTECH because of its focus on STEM and agriculture-related studies.

“I know that I will need to earn a bachelor’s degree to become a marine biologist, but Ag PTECH is a great starting place,” he said. He is considering the two-year program at SUNY Cobleskill as the first step toward his goals, and then hopes to return to Florida for additional study.

Math is one of Jack’s strongest subjects, but ask about his interests and right away, everyone will say “turtles.”

Jack lists a domestic animal project as one of the most interesting so far this year, one where he chose the Eastern Box Turtle as his creature to study. He explains that project based learning, a cornerstone of Ag PTECH’s learning model, was difficult at first, but he is getting used to it.

“Working with people you don’t know can be hard, but after a while we get settled in and it is okay,” Jack said. “Getting used to the block scheduling and the differences between



Ag PTECH student Jack Robinson

Ag PTECH and my home school took time to get used to.”

Ag PTECH students have only been in class five months, but have advice for students applying for the coming year.

“A good attitude about learning is important to do well at Ag PTECH,” Jack said. “An interest in finding out what kind of career you want is important too.”

Jack says he wouldn’t change anything about Ag PTECH, and has an open mind about what is going to happen next. He is excited about summer though. Jack plans to attend Sea Turtle camp, a week-long marine biology program in North Carolina.



Project Spotlight

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At the Community House, Marty Callahan, a St. Johnsville trustee, greeted the students and their teachers. He explained the need for updated landscaping around the building. He challenged them to create a landscape design that would help beautify the community landmark.



Ag PTECH students are presenting their three-dimensional models of a landscape project to the Town of St. Johnsville council members. From left, Michelle Joyce, Maddison Kilmartin-Gugliemelli, and Noah Kocjan.

Challenge accepted!

The students began walking the grounds, brainstorming ideas with their teams, taking measurements, capturing photos and jotting notes for their landscape projects. This was the start of a four-week collaborative project in agriculture and algebra.

Students worked with their team members for weeks to learn how plants grow, hardiness zones, soil types and symmetry in landscaping while developing their landscape design. In addition, they learned how to create scale drawings and build a budget proposal. Midway through the project, students got feedback on their landscape designs from Ag PTECH business partner Jared Gotterie, of Gotterie’s Tree Farm.

The completed projects were presented to St. Johnsville’s Board of Trustees. The students will help landscape the Community House in the spring and see their projects come to life.



Staff profile

Heather Leo

What is your role at Ag PTECH, and what special skills, talents and passion do you bring to the school?

I am the Math Teacher at Ag PTECH. I have a passion for using technology in the classroom and exploring new teaching strategies. I was excited to find an opportunity where I could use Project Based Learning with my students. I would like to see Ag PTECH become the place where students develop a passion for learning while they learn about themselves as they pursue a career in agriculture.

Tell us about your career background.

Besides teaching 8th grade and high school math in New Jersey, I once was a systems engineer (computers) at Lockheed Martin.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

I choose teaching because learning and discovering new ways of learning fascinates me. I love seeing students build their confidence in math and become successful.



Ag PTECH math teacher Heather Leo

What are some of your interests outside of work?

I enjoy spending time with my family. I like skiing, running and reading.

If today you were able to talk to your 15-year-old self about life, careers and happiness, what advice would you give?

I would say, do something that you love to do. 



Ag PTECH kicked off Pathway Panel Discussions on Jan. 30, where our business partners speak to students and answer questions. Business partners Randall Implements and K.C. Canary joined us to speak on the careers in the Agriculture Engineering Machinery pathway. A huge thank you to both for the great information shared with our students.



Giving Back, *Continued from page 1*

When the FFA chapter put on a fresh fruit fundraiser, they decided to order extra fruit to donate to a retirement homes and facilities throughout our tri-county area, including the American Legion and St. Johnsville Community House.

These are just a few of the many contributions the Ag PTECH FFA chapter plans to make throughout the school year, all of which will be beneficial to not only to the community, but to the FFA members as well. 



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Questions?

**Contact Ag PTECH Principal
Kristy Shafer
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(518) 568-7023.**

Ag-PTECH is centrally located in New York's Mohawk Valley Region, providing easy access to higher education opportunities and developing technology centers in Albany and Utica.

Students will spend their ninth- and 10th-grade years at the former D. H. Robbins Elementary School building (Oppenheim-Ephratah-St. Johnsville Central School District) in St. Johnsville. Their 11th- and 12th-grade years will be spent at HFM BOCES and one of our participating colleges. Years 13-14 (if needed) take place at a participating college.

Pathways to the future.

Nine associate's degrees that Ag PTECH students can earn through SUNY Cobleskill.

- **Agricultural Business**
- **Agricultural Engineering Technology: Agricultural Power Machinery**
- **Agricultural Science**
- **Animal Industry**
- **Biological Technology**
- **Culinary Arts**
- **Environmental Studies**
- **Fisheries and Wildlife**
- **Sustainable Crop Production**

Become a Business Partner with Ag PTECH

Ag PTECH allows students to gain real world experience from their first day at the school through business partners throughout the region. Business partners form a strong

partnership with Ag PTECH and its students by providing real-world experiences for the students with workplace visits, mentorships, job shadowing, and internships.

The Fulton Montgomery Regional Chamber of Commerce has become the "one-stop shop" for connections between both PTECH programs, school districts, and businesses. The Chamber and HFM BOCES have made an investment in these partnerships by hiring Nicole Walrath as the Business and Education Partnership Coordinator. Nicole educates business owners about the innovative program at Ag PTECH, and shows them how vital their involvement is with these students to help forge a new regional workforce for the 21st century.

This month, Ag PTECH is introducing Pathway Panel Discussions, where students are encouraged to explore careers through panel discussions lead by business partners in various fields. Ag PTECH students are offered nine different associate degree options from SUNY Cobleskill including Agricultural Business, Agricultural Engineering Technology: Agricultural Power Machinery, Agricultural Science, Animal Industry, Biological Technology, Culinary Arts, Environmental Studies, Fisheries and Wildlife and Sustainable Crop Production.

To learn more on how to become a business partner at Ag PTECH, contact Nicole Walrath, Business and Education Partnership Coordinator, at the Fulton Montgomery Regional Chamber of Commerce at nicolew@fultonmontgomeryny.org.

