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Boarding School: Students Learn Science Behind Skateboards

By **MICHELE SAGER** The Tampa Tribune

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TAMPA - Students at Tampa Bay Technical High School lined the hallway just in time to see a flurry of blond locks whiz across the floor.

A man raced through the hall on a skateboard, jumping a flight of stairs before crashing to the ground. He repeated the jumps, ending with wipeout after wipeout. Finally, he landed perfectly on his skateboard at the bottom of the stairs.

Such antics normally would land a student in the principal's office, but Principal Chris Farkas was among the spectators cheering every leap.

This was no student, but professional skateboarder Tosh Townend. And his body-bruising stunts were a lesson in physics for the students. His visit was part of the launch of Create A Skate.

The program emphasizes academics such as mathematics, physics and reading comprehension through the process of building skateboards.

Program creator and skateboard manufacturer Paul Schmitt chose his alma mater, Tampa Bay Tech, to launch the national program because, he said, he wanted to give back.

"I've made millions designing skateboards and I'm paying it forward because of the teachers who helped influence me while I was here," he said.

Schmitt made his first skateboard while he attended Tampa Bay Tech. After graduating in 1982, he moved to California, where he helped found a skateboard manufacturing company that redesigned the skateboard of the time.

Spreading His Passion

Now, Schmitt wants to pass on his love for skateboard design.

His nonprofit program offers a complete curriculum through the Web site createaskate.org. Students are encouraged to go to the site to download the information and bring it to their teachers or PTA members. They also are responsible for collecting the \$15 per student needed to get the necessary supplies for the boards.

"I want the students to take the initiative to get the program started in their schools," Schmitt said. "That way, they'll be invested in this program from the start."

For his fellow Tampa Bay Tech Titans, Schmitt donated the supplies and spent three days helping about 100 art and wood shop students work on their boards. He started by inviting Townend to demonstrate the physics behind skateboarding.

Schmitt explained that with every jump, Townend had to bend his knees before landing; otherwise, he might break the board because of the force of gravity pulling down on his body.

Schmitt later showed the students how to build the perfect-size board based on mathematical equations to figure the scale proportioned to their body.

The lessons left an impression on 17-year-old Joseph Barnard, who already owns two skateboards.

"I've learned the importance of getting the right size," he said. "The board I'm building is going to be better than my others because it will be designed just for me."

A Gift For The Students

Teacher Bryant Martinez said the students were receiving a tremendous gift.

"We are so lucky that [Schmitt] is taking the time to come all the way back here and spend time with our students," he said.


Student Jennie Mantia admitted she was enjoying the class.

"I'm really excited to build my own board," she said. "I've learned so much and I'm applying it to something I'm going to use."

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