

CCT! promotes Graduation Project success

By Forrest Greenslade

Chatham County Together! mentors helped 48 high school seniors pass their requirements for the Graduation Project this fall, providing expertise and coaching toward success.

"We plan to assist more than 100 students by the end of this school year," said Gwen Overturf, Graduation Project Coordinator for CCT.

With the help of Chatham County Together! mentors, students have completed projects on such topics as careers in nursing, coaching basketball, creating fine furniture, learning to cook and cater Italian dishes from scratch in a professional kitchen, home well baby care, educating Hispanic residents about the H1N1 flu shot, designing cars of the future with handicap access, making an ESL book for children, baking and decorating cakes, learning to play instruments from guitar to flute, and training dogs — from pit bulls to Chihuahuas!

Last summer Northwood High School student Nathan Creel was just one of the anxious rising seniors in Chatham County worried about passing the Graduation Project.

Creel chose to learn about ceramic sculpture — something he had never tried. The project presented a daunting task. Chatham County Together! introduced Creel and his father to me. As a local sculptor and President of the Chatham Artists Guild

(www.chathamartistsguild.org), I was someone they thought could help. Nate and I mapped out a plan and got to work in my studio in Ferrington Village. Under my watchful eye, the student began sculpting a mustang charger, the



Nathan Creel and his sculpture Charger Pride.
PHOTO BY FORREST GREENSLADE

Northwood mascot. While we worked, we listened to jazz on the radio, and discussed how modern clay sculpture developed from classic pottery, a North Carolina tradition.

The Graduation Project requires each student and mentor to meet for 12 hours, but Nate and I were having

so much fun that we worked together for more than 60 hours. Nate crafted two ceramic horses. When I showed Nate's final product to her, CCT Coordinator Marjorie Hudson told me, "Nate's two horse sculptures are just beautiful! We think Nate has a great future in the arts,

possibly as a career choice." I was so impressed with Creel's work that I submitted photos of his sculptures to the Carolina Design Craftsmen Guild for their High School exhibit. Creel's piece, called "Charger Pride" was selected to be exhibited at their 2009 show the weekend after Thanksgiving at the NC Fairground.

When Creel presented his Graduation Project to a panel of judges in December, they passed him with flying colors! I am so proud of him, and I know all the other Chatham County Together Mentors feel the same about their students. We know we are making a big difference for our students, getting them on the road to graduation and success with these challenging projects.

As CCT Coordinator Gwen Overturf told me, "Nate and you are just one of the pairs of students and mentors that we've seen succeed this year. We are so proud of you, and of all the rest!"

If you are interested in assisting Chatham County Together! with the Graduation Project, contact them at www.chathamcountytogether.org, or call 919.542.5155.

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