

## Temple donates pews for SLPS students to carpenter into desks

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By Chris King Of The St. Louis American

Kenyon Robinson, 16, a sophomore at Roosevelt High School in the St. Louis Public Schools, has a desk and bookshelves at home. But he knows that many students do not, and that is why he was eager to work on a project that the Home Works organization brought to his school on Friday.

Home Works, a teacher home visit program that works with SLPS, facilitated the delivery of a truckload of pews that were donated to Roosevelt's shop program by Temple Israel in Creve Coeur, which also paid the movers. Robinson and the school's other shop students, under the direction of teacher Bart Aadastra, will carpenter the pews into desks with bookshelves.

Starting next term, Aadastra said, students will work in teams to turn the pews, which vary in length from 10 to 30 feet, into what he estimates will be 30 new desks with bookshelves. They will be donated to elementary school students working with the Home Works program that lack desks and bookshelves at home.

The Roosevelt students were well aware of the purpose of the project, as Karen Kalish of Home Works, who came up with the idea and organized the donation, met with them and explained the project in detail.

"That's why it's so important and such a great idea," Robinson said. "This will help younger children in St. Louis Public Schools. If we supply desks and bookshelves, it will increase their reading skills."

Robinson, clearly, is an attentive student, as this was exactly what Kalish had explained to his class.

"I read an article that said that families that have bookcases have children who do better in school," Kalish said. "We know from teacher home visits that many of our families don't have bookcases, and some don't have tables for the kids to do their homework on."

Kalish, an active volunteer in the public schools, secured the cooperation of SLPS Superintendent Kelvin Adams, Roosevelt Principal Crystal Gale and Aadastra, who said he "jumped at the opportunity."

Lois Caplan, who writes a column in the Jewish Light, received an email from Kalish seeking donations of lumber. Her blurb in the paper was noticed by Rabbi Amy Feder at Temple Israel, who came forward with the donation of the pews. When alerted of the source of lumber, Aadastra and his students built a mock-up of a desk with bookshelves, starting with pews. The pews were delivered on Friday and stored in an unused classroom for next semester.

Robinson and his classmates are looking forward to the work experience, as well as helping younger students with materials that will benefit their studies. Robinson sees construction as a possible career path.

"My daddy often asks me what I am going to do with myself," Robinson said, "and I tell him this is why I am taking this class."

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