

Northwest Iowa ACE program concludes inaugural year

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By Joseph Hopper - NWIA Publishing



Students from the northwest Iowa ACE chapter stand in front of their presentation during a regional event earlier this month. The group, led by Mackenzie Barton and comprised of high school students from Spirit Lake and Spencer, gave an impromptu presentation on their work in front of 500 ACE peers.

Area mentorship program plans to continue and grow

Led by ACE mentor Mackenzie Barton, intern architect at CMBA Architects, and comprised of high school students from Spirit Lake and Spencer, northwest Iowa's chapter of the

national Architecture Construction and Engineering mentor program has completed its inaugural year. The program allows students a chance to get hands-on experience in their field of interest and learn from area professionals. Barton said she was excited for the program to grow and continue in the area.

The group recently returned from a regional event in Ankeny, where the chapter presented their project in front of 500 of their ACE peers.



Mackenzie Barton, ACE Mentor for the northwest Iowa chapter of the national Architecture Construction and Engineering Mentor Program, also known as ACE.

"At regionals, we were definitely the smallest group because it was a bunch of Des Moines schools that we were competing against," Barton said. "They asked us if we would give a short presentation, and I was thinking that it was going to be in front of maybe 20 or 25 people. It was in front of 500. We had to go on stage and everything for it. I had to give a presentation and so did the kids. They rocked it.

She continued, "We really weren't in competition this year because we had a different project, next year we're hoping to be able to work to get to that point."

The chapter began working on their project in the fall of 2018.

"We started off with a little bit larger group. I think we started off with 12," Barton said. "Then, as the year kind of dwindled down, people got busy. We ended up having I think seven from Spirit Lake and two from Spencer High School."

Barton said the combined team spent their first meeting discussing their project's topic.

"They ended up choosing the project 'envision your ideal school,'" Barton said. "They went through and chose the Spirit Lake High School. They identified the problem areas within the high school."

The group continued to meet over the course of the year.

"Approximately every two weeks we would have a meeting — just going over the ideas they had for their floor plan," Barton said. "We also met with engineers from the area and down in the Des Moines and Sioux Falls area too, so they got a little idea of how the collaboration and communication between architects and engineers work."

During the year-end event, Barton was surprised a second time after receiving an award from the program.

"I had no idea I was getting an award," Barton said. "They called my name again for being the lead mentor of the northwest Iowa region, that was pretty cool to be recognized."

Preparing for the program's second year, Barton said she hopes to get more students involved and is already examining activities for the program this summer.

"We're actually trying to work with a church up in Spirit Lake, doing this sort of design-and-build sort of project," Barton said. "We're starting to get a little more information about it. Really, I want the students to come and be an architect, interview the client, see what they're looking for in their project and, hopefully, we can get people from the chapter board and everyone else to help create that project. I'm pretty sure it'd be like a summer project. After we get that done, we can start looking at the competition for next year at regionals."

For more information about the northwest Iowa ACE chapter or how to get involved, email barton.m@cmbaarchitects.com.