

## CMR seniors aim high with research projects

Great Falls Tribune - Great Falls, Mont.

Author: KRISTEN CATES

Date: May 20, 2010

Start Page: A.1

Section: A Section

Text Word Count: 715

---

### Document Text

---

Garth Mitchell and 88 of his classmates at C.M. Russell High School didn't want their senior English classes to just be about reading "Hamlet" and writing a paper.

They decided to tackle cake-decorating, make a longbow, learn to ski, sew a quilt and much more as part of the senior research program offered at CMR. The 89 students who participated had to present their findings to other students, as well as a panel of community judges and teachers, on Wednesday.

"I get kind of sick of the same English class environment," said Mitchell, who researched hunting and built a longbow for his senior project. "They told me I could build something, which got me excited."

Jamie McGraw, senior English teacher, isn't offended by students wanting to learn outside the box in their senior years. She helped craft the senior research project two years ago as a way to get seniors more engaged. She said the number of students participating this year nearly doubled the number participating a year ago.

"The big seller is that they get to choose their research project, and it's usually something they are passionate about," McGraw said.

Seniors are not required to participate in the program, but those who do must write a research paper about their topic and identify potential conflict in what they researched. They then have to create a product, complete 15 hours of community service related to their project with a community mentor, identify the process they used and complete the presentations on Wednesday. McGraw said students usually spend many hours outside of school working on their projects.

McGraw also said the program allows students to make their education relevant and personal to them.

To complete the requirements for his project, Mitchell volunteered with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks on its bowhunters safety course and worked with archery professional Craig Compher to build his longbow, a process that took a couple of practice rounds and a lot of precision woodworking to craft.

"I got quite a few blisters," he said.

After giving his presentation, Mitchell invited students and faculty to watch him shoot a target with his bow outside and explained the math and science behind its use.

"Hunting is a huge part of my life, and it's important to my family," he said.

Other students such as Kylie Barringer chose to try something for their senior project that they had never done.

Barringer learned how to bake and decorate gourmet cakes. She worked with Penny's Gourmet to Go to learn the craft, then made 52 mini-cakes that she helped distribute through Meals on Wheels. On Wednesday, she showed off a three-tiered cake she made and let her audience sample it.

"Part of it was that I wanted something that would challenge me and afford me the opportunity to do some community service," Barringer said. "My mom said it would be a good project and fun. It's made me, I think, more resourceful."

Thane Belnap had never learned how to ski before he took on his research project. So naturally ? or maybe not so naturally ? he applied for a job as a ski instructor at Showdown Ski Area. He worked with a mentor there to quickly learn how to ski and spent his winter working as a secondary instructor on the bunny slope.

He taught the basics of skiing to everyone from little children to adults. When his aunt brought a group of students from Valier to Showdown, Belnap volunteered as one of their chaperones.

"It taught me great social skills," Belnap said of the work.

Sarah Leo knew how to sew ? kind of ? before starting her senior year. But when she decided to focus her research on her family's Native American heritage, she ended up making a star quilt. She said it took her about 50 hours to complete it.

"It was just a chance to branch out and connect with my roots," she said. "I went through three sewing machines."

Though she's critical of her quilt-making skills, Leo said the project was a great opportunity for her to learn in a manner more suited to her personality.

"I'm the kind of person who needs to be doing something, always," Leo said.

Reach Tribune Staff Writer Kristen Cates at 791-1463 or [kcates@greatfallstribune.com](mailto:kcates@greatfallstribune.com).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction or distribution is prohibited without permission.

---

#### **Abstract (Document Summary)**

---

To complete the requirements for his project, Mitchell volunteered with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks on its bowhunters safety course and worked with archery professional Craig Compher to build his longbow, a process that took a couple of practice rounds and a lot of precision woodworking to craft.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction or distribution is prohibited without permission.