

## Top Stories

### Macomb students take classroom to the dunes

By: By John Cavanagh, Herald-Journal Assistant Editor

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#### **What do the military; the original Hummer manufacturer and a Macomb County high school group have in common? They've all used the Silver Lake sand dunes as a proving ground for vehicles.**

This past week, 15 students from Chippewa Valley School District Dakota High School were in the area with three dune vehicles they built in class. They set up their work camp at Arlene and Delos Thaler's XTC Motorsports on Polk Road west of Hart.

"Our program has set up a relationship with Delos and XTC Motorsports," said instructor Scott Mitchell.

The students are the elite 15 in Dakota's engineering and design research and development program. Mitchell said he came up with the idea of working dune buggy chassis a couple of years ago so students could apply classroom lessons. XTC helped the group develop a frame. It is the second year he's brought students to Hart.

"What we do is a lot of reverse engineering," Mitchell said. "What we found out is XTC has an awesome product."

There's 500 students in the four-year program which has won several state and national awards.

"My students have won over 700 awards in the last seven years," Mitchell said.

The group brought two dune buggies and a one half-scale monster truck the school received from Ultimate X Motor Sports of Stoughton, Wisconsin. Mitchell said the vehicle was a \$60,000 prototype.

Thaler and staff take time to work with students, starting with the design end and taking it through to the final product.

"You can't get this in a school environment," Mitchell said.

The kids get hands on experience in lots of areas. They not only learn welding, machining and tooling, but they also work with computer-aided design.

"That's our main focus is design, but we take it a step further and we build," Mitchell said.

Dakota senior Angela Colosanti, a four-year student and the only girl in the program, said the class has given her a foundation for life. She said she's learned social skills, and how to be a team member. She wants to enter a mechanical engineering program after graduation, and she just loved the sand dunes. She also learned another skill last week.

"I never knew how to use a stick shift before," Colosanti said. "It's definitely an experience I'll take with me." Most students continue in the field. "About 90 percent of students move on to an engineering school," Mitchell said. The school instructor wants to continue the relationship with XTC, but he's not sure if students will build another sand rail.

Thaler also enjoys the relationship. "They've been real good to us," Delos said. "We've done five projects with them. I think the kids have really learned a lot by being here, and they really seem to enjoy it."