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Paul Schmitt, president of PS Stix Inc., shows the kids at Tampa Bay Tech how an "old school kickflip" is done during a break in his Create A Skate class. The program helps students apply math and science to making skateboards.



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Tampa Bay Tech students, from left, Joshua Rocamora, 16, Marck Johnson, 16, Jeremy Rivera, 18, and Elizabeth Margarito, 16, sand the boards they are working on as part of the Create A Skate program.

He's cool in school

The students at Tampa Bay Tech talk of kickflips, edge designs and skateboarding in a park. What they are learning is math, science and perhaps wood properties. All thanks to a program called Create A Skate launched by Paul Schmitt, a 1982 grad who made good. Schmitt made millions. Now he wants to help make learning fun. **Story, 3B**

Skateboard project melds fun, tech, math and art

BY EMILY NIPPS
Times Staff Writer

TAMPA — It didn't matter that most of the kids in Tampa Bay Tech High School's wood shop and commercial art classes didn't know how to nosegrind or ollie. Somehow, this seemed cooler than making a birdhouse or painting a cafeteria mural.

Last week, a hundred wood shop and art students became the first products of Create A Skate, a nonprofit outreach program started by 1982 Tampa Bay Tech grad Paul Schmitt. Perhaps one of the most interesting success stories to come out of the school's shop program, Schmitt made his first skateboard as a Tampa teenager, then moved to California in 1985, eventually making millions off the board manufacturing company he started there.

And now he wants to give back. He wants other kids to learn how

Learn more

For more information about the Create A Skate program, visit www.CreateAskate.org.

to make skateboards, and maybe learn about fractions and wood properties along the way. He's hoping other schools will catch on, allowing him to reach his goal of 5-million skateboards in five years. The kids get to keep the boards.

"I'm actually empowering kids to make something with their own hands," said Schmitt, who wore a lab coat embroidered with "Professor Schmitt" during his three-day visit to Tampa Bay Tech. "They think they're making a skateboard. They're actually learning something very valuable."

Jessie Klimala, a 17-year-old girl with chunky glasses and a pierced eyebrow, doesn't skate.

She doesn't dance or sing, either. But she loves to paint and draw and was excited about sanding down her board to make a smooth canvas for a tattoo-style design, or a nature scene. "I'm thinking about hanging it up in my room so I can say I did something interesting," she said.

Nearby, a shy sophomore in a Slayer T-shirt was waiting for a layer of polyurethane to dry on his board. Scott Driscoll, 17, said he hopes to one day create CD and book covers, and "this is kind of along those lines."

The design for his board was in his head, but hard to explain to a reporter. "Sort of a circular design with an unrealistic person figure in the middle and Celtic-esque designs right here and here," he said. It was in keeping with his artistic style of mixing real and surreal images. He planned to give his creation to a friend.

Senior Drew Kintop was one of the few who hoped to actually ride the thing, just as soon as his broken leg healed from a football injury.

A self-described tree hugger, the shaggy-haired 18-year-old once spelled out "God Bless America" in Dixie cups along a chain-link fence in Temple Terrace. He's a fan of downtown Tampa's widely criticized "exploding chicken" sculpture and loves street art.

It would be a shame, he said, to make something as edgy as a skateboard and not use the opportunity to make a political statement.

His design plans for the board?

A caricature of President Bush, sipping a teacup of oil while rainbows pour out of his ears. "I like making people think," he said.

Emily Nipps can be reached at (813) 269-5313 or nipps@sptimes.com.