

Makers Mill nurtures STEM learning

By Brian McGonigle

Wednesday, October 21, 2015



NORTH ANDOVER - Students both young and old can enhance their knowledge of math and science locally while having fun.

The Maker Mill, which opened last October, is a STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) enrichment center located at 4 High Street, Suite 128, in the East Mill building, that fosters creative learning with technology. The business serves as a drop-in destination for kids after school and on weekends that gives students challenges in a creative work environment.

Owner Holli Baggs began her career in software products and then was a stay-at-home mom for a few years.

"I actually love going to school, so I went back to school and was a respiratory therapist," Baggs said. Baggs' love of school would also guide her next life decision.

"I have a 12-year-old and a 9-year-old, and we were doing projects like the ones we do at the Maker Mill now," Baggs said. "We were lighting off rockets in the front yard, doing experiments at home. Or neighbors saw and said, 'We want our children to be able to do things like this. Where can we send them?' I was looking to go back to work because my kids are older, and I decided to not go with traditional franchises. I decided to open my own business and make a go of it."

Baggs' husband Tim is a partner in the business. He works for Microsoft and directs most of the technology and robotics workshops and projects at The Maker Mill.

Business has been good, and reception has been great.

"Our summer program was wonderful," Baggs said. "We had a lot of kids in for our full-week workshops. We have our fall workshops up and running now, and we have really good attendance." Time spent at The Maker Mill can help with academics as well.

"We get a lot of kids coming in with school projects and looking for help," Baggs said. "It could be help with sewing, help with electronics, pretty much anything. We just love doing the school projects with the kids."

Membership is \$45 a month per child. That membership allows the child to go into the center for two hours a day when the center is open. And some workshops are free for members.

Drop-in hours are Monday through Thursday from 2:45 p.m. and Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Fridays and Sundays are for workshops and special events only. The center also has special holiday hours and special hours on election days.

Lessons and challenges are crafted by fellows and mentors. And there's an added incentive. People who complete workshops or challenges can win Maker Bucks, which can be used to purchase kits, t-shirts and other items.

"Both the parents and the kids really love the programs that they've been enrolled in," owner Hollie Baggs said. "We've added programs that the public has asked for as well. So if we're missing something, we'll put together a new class and find someone able to teach it. We're able to do that by approaching the community and finding people that have that skill and allowing them to come in and provide the class for us."

You can check the place out yourself any time, and The Maker Mill will celebrate its one-year anniversary Saturday, Oct. 24, with an open house. The party will run from 1 to 3 p.m. and will have free crafts, demonstrations and cake.

The Maker Mill offers staff-lead workshops for kids and parents, including Junior Lego League, Battlebots, Advanced Minecrafting, Soldering and Circuits Saturdays and more.

For more information, visit www.themakermill.com