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Touch a Trade event draws crowd in Kent

BY LYNN MELLIS WORTHINGTON Republican-American
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George McCann of Kent snaps a blue chalk line guided by Kevin Ireton, left, one of the presenters at the Touch a Trade event Saturday in Kent. George's grandmother, George-Ann Gowan, right, watches along with his sister, Charlotte. Children and adults were given opportunities to try out a variety of tools and experiences connected to trades. All of the presenters donated their time. Lynn Mellis Worthington Republican-American



Charles Fields, right, of Enfield, guides Owen Crumlich of New Milford at the hanging and taping station during the Touch A Trade event Saturday on the grounds of Connecticut Antique Machinery Association in Kent. All of the presenters donated their time and admission was free. Lynn Mellis Worthington Republican-American



Ian Roepke of New Harford gets hoisted into the trees by Don Lawson of CT Green Tree during the Touch A Trade event Saturday in Kent. Attendees got a chance to try out a variety of tools and experiences connected to trades. Lynn Mellis Worthington Republican-American

KENT — Watching his children put tile on a wall was a great experience Saturday for Mark Aakjar, Jr., of Beacon, N.Y., during the Touch a Trade event on the grounds of Connecticut Antique Machinery Association (CAMA).

“This is great,” Aakjar said as his son, Mark, and daughter, Lorelei, spread mastic adhesive and placed tile on the wall. “We were at the CAMA show a month ago and heard about this event and decided to come back. We love this town.”

The tile booth was one of many offering children and adults an opportunity to try their hand at using tools and understanding a wide variety of trades. Trades and craftspeople donated their time to display their skills and talk with people about what they do.

The hope is that the event will inspire entrance into this kind of work. Mason Lord, who is a partner at Hudson Valley Preservation, a general contracting firm in Kent, and the founder of Touch a Trade was busy with logistics on Saturday but noted there were at least 250 people in attendance before noon. He wanted to offer this event because of the severe decline in the number of people in the trades. He was also motivated to create the Touch a

Trade initiative to make the trades more welcoming to marginalized social groups, including those who learn differently.

Electrician Chris Harrington of Kent, owner of South 7 Electric, was pleased to share information about his profession.



Lorelei Aakjar of Beacon, N.Y., spreads grout over tile that she installed on a wall at the Touch A Trade event Saturday in Kent. Children and adults were able to try out a variety of tools and experiences connected to trades. Lynn Mellis Worthington Republican-American
"We need to get young people involved," Harrington said. "The average age of an electrician in Connecticut is 56 years old."

George-Ann Gowan of Kent was delighted to introduce her grandchildren, George and Charlotte McCann, to some of the tools. Both tried out laying a blue chalk line on a board.

Other stations included carpentry, woodworking, masonry, welding, plumbing, wallboard hanging and taping, furniture repair, dovetail joints, hand planning of wood and basket weaving.

CT Green Tree attracted quite a line of participants who wanted to be pulled up into the treetops to experience what arborists and tree specialists get to do. Ian Roepke of New Hartford was excited as Don Lawson attached him to ropes and hauled him overhead and back down.

Author and humorist Tom Bodett, founder of HatchSpace, a popular NPR storyteller and of Motel 6 fame, hosted the event. Touch A Trade partners and sponsors also include Nicholas Tobin Insurance, HatchSpace, Connecticut Antique Machinery Association, Eric Sloane Museum, Northeast Building Supply, Preservation Connecticut, Northeast Sustainable Energy Association and Keep Craft Alive, an initiative of Fine Homebuilding Magazine.

More information is available at touchatrade.org.