



## **PRESS RELEASE**

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# **Norwalk High Collision Repair Teacher Garners Industry Recognition for Commitment to Special Needs Students**

Ethan, an 8-year-old child with special needs, can freely ride a bicycle adapted to his physical needs, thanks to Norwalk High School's collision repair students and teacher Ken Cook.

Cook's commitment to his special needs students, who make up 40 percent of his classes, earned him recognition from collision repair industry print and online magazine Fender Bender.

"This is a tremendous honor, but I owe it all to my students," Cook said. "The kids come to class and are ready to work on a project, whether it's an adaptive bicycle, a mobile catering unit or seeing what's under the hood of a 2005 Corvette."

Cook's students took an existing bike apart and examined the project from different angles to build Ethan's bike, which was customized with a shorter frame to decrease the distance between the pedals and the seat, a passenger backrest, safety harness and training wheels. To top it off, the bike was decorated in a "Minions" theme, Ethan's favorite movie.

"It was my students who told me, 'Hey, Cook, this has to be the coolest looking bike in the neighborhood'," Cook said. "My students with special needs came up with the best ideas, because they wanted to build a bike they would ride."

Backed with the support a \$97,000 State Farm Youth Advisory Board grant, Cook created Inspired Inventions in 2015 as a service learning project to build customized mobility devices, including wheelchairs, bicycles and walking apparatuses for special needs students.

Cook's students used class materials in addition to \$60 in parts to renovate Ethan's bicycle, which took six weeks to complete. Cook's students plan to create 10 more adaptive bicycles by the end of the school year.

Cook continues to inspire his students to generate more projects based on their needs and the needs of others. As an example, in March he took 45 Norwalk High students – 20 from his class, and 25 from the Functional Academic Skills Training (FAST) program – to the Abilities Expo, which focused on assistive technology. His students met with exhibitors, attended workshops and networked with numerous businesses in the field of adaptive mobile technology.

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“Ken Cook is an inspiration to us all, a teacher who is devoted to his students and uses his ingenuity and dedication for our students who need extra support,” NLMUSD Superintendent Dr. Hasmik Danielian said. “We look forward to seeing what inspired inventions he and his students design and create in the next year.”

**PHOTOS:**

**110216\_NLMUSD\_FENDERBENDER1:** Norwalk High School collision repair instructor Ken Cook (right) explains how to use a miter saw, including safety protocols, to his students.

**110216\_NLMUSD\_FENDERBENDER2:** A Norwalk High School collision repair student uses a miter saw to cut a piece a metal.

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