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## RIT students assigned to save the squirrels

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HENRIETTA — About 120 Rochester Institute of Technology students are working on a nutty assignment.

They're designing and building wooden houses where squirrels will live while they recuperate from injuries or until they're moved to a new location.

Professor Amos Scully dreamed up the assignment for students in the 3D design class he teaches with Rod Northcutt.

Wildlife rehabilitators will use the houses when they care for squirrels and relocate them.

While they are healing, the squirrels will live in the structures, which can be installed in trees when the animal is ready to return to the wild.

The assignment called for a design that is both functional and attractive enough to garner some sympathy for squirrels from humans who might spot them in the woods. The students have been working on their projects about four weeks. Northcutt examined the nearly completed rodent residences in class on Monday. Scully will see his students' work today.

"I was pretty surprised. The students had a fairly positive reaction from the start and I thought it would be sort of indifferent or negative," said Scully.

For the sake of art, Grace Smith played along.

"It's a little ridiculous trying to save squirrels," said Smith, 19, of Avon, Livingston County, a sophomore fine arts student.

Her partner, Lauren Kerwell, 19, of Montgomery, Pa., pointed out that "it's pretty cool they're actually going to be used for something."

The students paired off to create about 60 shelters, each one a unique creation. Some look like large birdhouses. Some are abstract forms and others have angular, geometric styles.

"I was pretty excited. This was pretty zany, so I liked it," said Abby Aker, 19, of Chemsford, Mass., a freshman industrial design student.

Aker and partner Kristin Pitoni, 22, of Rochester, a senior fine arts major, used triangular pieces of wood laced together with wire and decorated with small glued-on pieces of wood cut into various shapes and sizes.

"It kind of reminded me of like a Chinese (food) takeout box," Aker said.

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