

**The Hanson Technology Center on the campus of Lake Michigan College in Benton Township, seen in August 2016, houses the Fab Lab, which had its grand opening Saturday.**

Don Campbell / HP staff



# Factory direct by you

Coming from miles around to check out Fab Lab

By **RALPH HEIBUTZKI**  
HP Correspondent

**BENTON HARBOR** — Nothing beats the thrill of creating an item you’ve just designed, especially if there’s a way of combining the artistic and the technical side.

That’s why Lake Michigan College students Michael Hettlinger and Hannah Bever spent a week at the Fab Lab’s 3-D printer – and worked out the details of creating pieces of a blue and yellow plastic sword for a superhero costume.

“Since we couldn’t be here 24-7, we could only print one or two pieces (of the sword) a day. It’s making everything easier, instead of buying a plastic sword, or an actual sword. It costs a lot less,” Hettlinger said.

“Plus, we couldn’t get the material and put in the effort – we couldn’t do that – for the \$30 we’re paying here (per month) to use all this stuff,” Bever said.

By Saturday, the pair’s creation – which they adapted from a website – was resting on a table near an Iron Man mask, one of many objects shown at the Fab Lab’s grand opening in the Hanson Technology Center at LMC’s Napier Avenue campus.

## Energy surge

The lab is a centerpiece of LMC’s efforts to stimulate local interest in design and manufacturing, and help train future generations of makers at the center, which opened in August.

Available resources included laser cutters, 3-D printers and vinyl cutters, as well as a wood shop,



Ralph Heibutzki / HP correspondent

**Amy Heinke and Steve Weaver came up from Bremen, Ind., on Saturday to take advantage of the open house at Lake Michigan College’s Fab Lab. They used the lab to help make this three-dimensional cross.**

CNC router, hand tools and design software, such as the Adobe Creative Suite.

A large table set aside for creating and decorating balsa wood airplanes also drew a steady stream of visitors throughout the event.

Bever and Hettlinger are working on associate degrees in radiology and science, respectively – and agreed that Saturday’s experience will stick with them for a long time.

“Maybe more for me because I’m trying to be a chemical engineer. It might just be a hobby,” said

Hettlinger of Berrien Springs.

“I don’t think it’s going to affect my career choice, but I do really enjoy things like this,” said Bever of Buchanan.

Those words sounded fine to Fab Lab Manager Andrea Oleniczak, who noticed a definite surge throughout the event.

“The coolest thing is we’ve had new members come in, who honestly don’t know what they’re going to do. ... Just seeing all of that come to life is so fun,” she said.

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## FAB LAB

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### Unlocking secrets

For Bremen, Ind., residents Amy Heinke and Steve Weaver, the chance to simplify the creation process for their 3-D objects – such as “The Living Cross of Christ,” a series of 44 interlinked wooden cross pieces – provided the big draw for coming Saturday.

The design “came as a vision” to Weaver at 3:30 a.m. one night, which he sketched on paper – and then he convinced a craftsman friend to finish 2.5 versions of that piece, he said.

“It’s like a craftsman trade secret, how you notch

these damn things out, and put them together,” Weaver said, laughing.

“Anyway, he (the craftsman) crafted it, but it’s too time-consuming, and didn’t want to reproduce anymore: ‘Here’s your prototypes, and good luck,’” Heinke said.

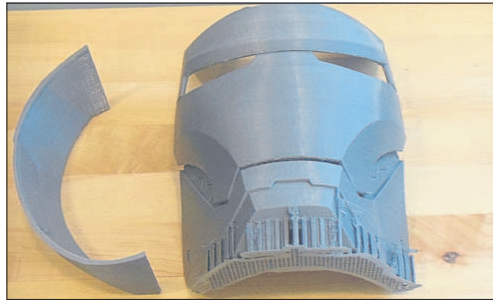
Heinke liked what she saw of the lab.

“The technology’s here, and we don’t have access to that technology, generally. We came to see what would

be the most cost-effective way to reproduce it,” Heinke said, smiling. “I think there’s possibilities.”

### Ahead of the curve

LMC physics and engineering technology instructor John Stahl was among



Ralph Heibutzki / HP correspondent

**John Stahl was among the Lake Michigan College faculty members making rounds at Saturday’s Fab Lab open house. He used a 3-D printer to make an Iron Man mask from plastic.**

the faculty members making the rounds on Saturday. He adapted from a website design.

He, too, logged time on the 3-D printer to create the Iron Man mask, which

is making that model from scratch, which is why we want to bring more people in,” Stahl said.

Having space dedicated to manufacturing and design should keep students ahead of the curve, Stahl said.

For example, “3-D printing is becoming more and more prevalent – so they (students) need to have that experience,” Stahl said. “And when you can do it an environment with different people, from different backgrounds, that’s when you see some really creative stuff happening.”

Stahl sees the Fab Lab’s presence as significant for one other reason.

“Makers’ spaces are

around, but you’ll usually find them in big cities, like Chicago or Detroit,” Stahl said. “Some place smaller, like this, you don’t have that – they’re expensive to run.”

Oleniczak said she looks forward to sorting through the feedback she’s heard – and where she hopes to see the Lab go next.

“I’m excited about some of the partnerships that are going to happen – (such as) working with Krasl (Art Center), Water Street Glassworks. It’s nice for us, for exposure, but it’s so great for them, to expand their program, and what they can do in their studio space. It just brings the community together again, on a bigger scale,” she said.