

# 'TRYING TO FIT THE NEED'



TODD BERKEY/THE TRIBUNE-DEMOCRAT

Brother Marius Strom, St. Francis University engineering laboratory instructor, checks out a circuit board inside an adaptive children's toy car being built as part of the GoBabyGo program on Monday at the Loretto campus.

## Students create toy cars for kids with disabilities

### St. Francis program offers fun, mobility

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LORETTO – St. Francis University students from three departments have combined forces to provide adaptive toy vehicles to area children through the revived GoBabyGo program on campus.

"We're trying to fit the need in the middle," said Cassandra Movinsky, assistant professor of physical therapy. "A toy that is therapeutic, but fun."

Movinsky started her career at the university last year and

"It opens up a lot of different environments for them."

**CASSANDRA MOVINSKY,  
ST. FRANCIS UNIVERSITY,  
ON KIDS WHO BENEFIT FROM  
THE GOBABYGO PROGRAM**

wanted to restart the GoBabyGo program, which was postponed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

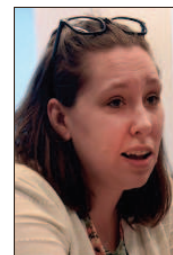
Last summer, the group

rolled its first adaptive children's vehicle off the assembly line and started another group of evaluations to provide fun and increased mobility to more kids with disabilities.

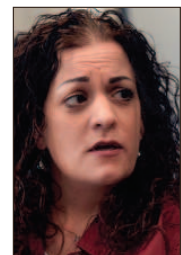
Occupational therapy, physical therapy and engineering students are working this semester on six vehicles, which they plan to present to area families in May.

"It's pretty awesome," said Julie Nagle, assistant professor of occupational therapy.

The idea behind the



Movinsky



Nagle

GoBabyGo program, which started at the University of Delaware and now has more than 40 U.S. chapters, is to make children's playtime more inclusive and to provide additional social opportunities for children with disabilities or limitations. Its mission is "increasing mobility and quality-of-life solutions for children whose access to such may be limited during their

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# CARS

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early developmental years for a variety of reasons,” according to the University of Delaware website.

In the program, children are evaluated by the occupational therapy and physical therapy students, who then create a report about the child’s needs and present it to the engineering students, who modify and create an adaptive vehicle for the child. Together, they explore how the child’s medical needs influence the design, Nagle said.

Brother Marius Strom, engineering laboratory instructor, said that includes everything from picking the right buttons to building custom circuit boards.

The engineering students also make custom controls for the vehicles – for example, the car they’re working on now will be steered by a joystick because that fits the child’s needs. They adjust acceleration, sound and music buttons and create wireless controllers so that parents can intervene if necessary.

Another aspect is a custom seat. Movinsky noted that most of the battery-powered toy vehicles come with hard plastic seats that don’t meet some children’s needs. Instead, the students work together to implement a seat that works for the child and has some therapeutic benefit.

“It has a whole lot of different pieces,” Strom said.

Strom said he enjoys working on the program with his students because it includes “bite-sized educational problems” that allow the students to create something beneficial for children.

Nagle said the interdisciplinary aspect of the project is a “really cool” element. She said the program helps her students learn to communicate with other students in different disciplines, while also providing hands-on training for working with patients.

Benefits of the accessible vehicle abound for the children as well, Movinsky and Nagle said. They pointed to improved self-confidence because of increased mobility, as well as increased social interactions because they can now take part in playtime.

Additionally, Nagle said, the vehicles provide different views and sensory elements that will help with therapies.

“It opens up a lot of different environments for them,” Movinsky said.

At St. Francis, the GoBabyGo program is funded through community donations.

Nagle said that there was a marketing campaign to help create the current batch of adaptive vehicles, and the departments would like to continue the program annually in the spring.

They plan to explore other funding solutions to keep offering GoBabyGo to the area community. It doesn’t and won’t ever cost anything for the families who benefit, they said.

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