



MANDY SMITH/COURTESY PHOTO

Bouwens works with students in the physics lab. His wife, Kyle's, artwork featuring the space shuttle can be seen on the wall behind them.

Sharing a love of physics

BY MATT MARKOVITCH
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He can be seen on the NTCC Frisbee golf course. It has even been rumored that you might catch a glimpse of him walking through the halls as the grim reaper around All Hallows Eve.

However, where you will find him most of the time is in his lab teaching students about the finer points of physics.

Dr. Mark Bouwens is no novice to the world of science. Although he has only been at Northeast Texas Community College since 2011, he brings an extensive background in higher education and the study of physics.

He graduated with his bachelors from the Florida Institution of Technology and received his masters and PhD from Florida Atlantic University (FAU) in Boca Raton, Fla.

Besides teaching at Palm Beach Community College, Bouwens also worked for six years as a health physicist and inspector for the U.S. Nuclear

Regulatory Commission.

Along with teaching, Bouwens has also been busy helping the Math and Science Department build up enrollment in the physics courses.

In the short year and a half since he arrived at NTCC, the number of students enrolled in the program has effectively doubled.

Bouwens said he personally went from class to class explaining to students how they would need to take physics if they planned to pursue a degree in fields like engineering.

As the numbers continue to grow, Bouwens has developed a strong relationship with many of his students.

"He is patient," NTCC student Tyler Beadle said. "I think he enjoys working with students. Most every teacher knows enough about their subject matter to teach their subject. But not every teacher cares enough to teach effectively. He does."

Fellow student Michael Rhea agreed saying, "He makes learning physics easy and fun."

The increase in students led the Math and Science departments to pursue a Whatley Employee Enhancement Grant that would allow Bouwens to purchase some high tech equipment for the physics lab.

The grant was awarded in the amount of \$2,700, which is being used to buy optic bench lenses and lasers.

Bouwens said he plans to use the lenses in experiments that will allow the students to build telescopes.

The lasers will have a more futuristic use with students creating holograms, holographic plates and 3-D images.

"That is the cool thing I want to do with them," Bouwens said. "The lasers will demonstrate how to use a simple concept of physics and make it exciting and cool."

The professor's love for the physics department has brought his wife, Kyle, onto campus as well. The artist and architect is helping her husband transform



ANDREW TOBIN | STAFF PHOTO

Dr. Bouwens' wife, Kyle, works on painting a Mars Rover on one of the walls in Bouwens' lab.

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his lab into a space odyssey.

"We wanted to make the room presentable and interesting, so we did some brainstorming," he said. The couple, parents to 6-year-old daughter, Kaelyn, decided to highlight Bouwens' Florida college connection to what he called the "space coast."

In her spare time, Kyle is using her artistic talent to create space-themed murals that include the Mars rover, the space shuttle, the Apollo spacecraft and the International Space Station.

Besides his love for physics, Bouwens has another side to him that most people wouldn't quite expect. His playful antics have earned him a reputation around Halloween. Although he has never confirmed nor denied the claim that he is the grim reaper roaming the campus around the holiday, he would only say, "I have been known in the past to partake in Halloween in a joyous manner."

In addition, students have spotted him waking though the halls with Frisbee in hand. He enjoys playing on the newly-built Frisbee golf course on campus. Wouldn't it be interesting if one day students saw the grim reaper playing Frisbee golf?

And while Bouwens has a passion for his field, he also has a sense of humor that allows him to connect with his students on a level that makes them see him for more than just a physics professor. They see him as a guide, a mentor and a friend.