

SMILE hosts 11th Annual Family Night

By
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IVN Contributing Writer

Evergreen Elementary's gym was full of science and mystery last Thursday. The 11th Annual SMILE (Science and Math Investigative learning experiences) Family Night was held from 6 to 7:30 p.m.

SMILE was started to help fill an educational gap that seemed to be occurring through-out Oregon for underprivileged students. According to SMILE's website, in 1987 Dr. Miriam Orzech began forming alliances with poorer, rural Oregon school districts to help fill that gap. In 1988, some 80 students from four middle schools joined SMILE after-school programs to learn about the benefits of math and science. Today Southern Oregon University sponsors 17 different programs around the state in different school districts.

The family night is a hands-on experience, allowing not only kids but adults to gain knowledge, joy and excitement while learning what math and science can bring to everyday life.

"SMILE family night is a way to bring families and the community together to have some fun with science and math," said Mr. Talty, a science teacher at Lorna Byrne Middle School (LBMS).

Each school had tables that provided challenges rather it be as simple as making slime or examples of engineering challenges the students in the program work to try and solve. The challenges presented at each table were meant to be a sort of grab-bag type of activity — something that people could do quickly, but were also able to take home and enjoy later.

The high school provided tables with robots and showed visitors how to make snow (similar to the kind found in snow globes). They also showed folks how to make Oobleck, which those familiar with Dr. Seuss may recognize from the book "Bartholomew and the Oobleck." Oobleck acts like a liquid but when a force is acting upon it becomes a

solid.

Lorna Byrne had an optical illusion challenge and showed how to make paper helicopters. Evergreen had tables where you could learn how to make ooze and work out a series of challenges on how electricity works. There were three challenges. The first challenge was to get all three light bulbs to turn on located on the circuit board, the second was to get two of the switches to turn on and off. The third challenge, which involved trying to get two of the bulbs to turn on independently while using different switches, stumped most visitors.

Other booths included the Siskiyou Field Institute which had several different displays of native plants and insects. They were also talking about the native plants around the Valley and the benefits of the plants and insects. Firefighters had bunker gear that kids could put on and learn what it takes to wear all the gear while fighting a fire. Firefighters also demonstrated how different types of equipment work, gave information on what to do if a fire should occur in the house and had a display about fire prevention.

The SMILE program would not be possible if it weren't for the teachers who are dedicated to encouraging students to further their education in math and science. Between Mr. Talty and Ms. Trammell, both science teachers at LBMS, they have been running the SMILE program at Lorna Byrne for the past 11 years. Mrs. Creek and Mr. Flaherty are the teachers for the program at Evergreen Elementary School, while Mrs. Farmer instructs the program at the high school.

"The purpose of the SMILE program is to encourage kids to eventually major in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) field when entering college, which is desperate for people in those fields. The kids that are involved with the program are more likely to go on to major in the STEM field. The program shows them that they can go to school and make a difference," said Mr. Flaherty. "We've been able to watch a few students go through the program and go off to college. Students are extremely likely to gradu-

ate with good grades and move on to study math and science."

The program starts with fourth-graders at Evergreen and continues to fifth grade. Once at Lorna Byrne, the SMILE students continue with the program as an after-school class. Once they reach the high school, the class is in the morning before school starts.

Over the summer, the high school was fortunate enough to receive a grant to purchase two different kinds of robots, thirteen of each, to help further the kid's knowledge in the math and science fields. The first type of robots is NXT, which are similar to connecting Legos together and is more of a beginner type of robot. Tetrix, although a more high tech type of Lego, are more geared towards high-school students and simulate what real robots are like. There are three robotics classes offered this year at the high school, one per trimester. The class offers a chance for students to build and create a unique robot that has to perform some sort of task.

Skylar McLanahan and Aundera Miller, who are in the robotics class, were able to create reindeer; two of them were suspended in mid-air by support wires. There was also a Santa robot and each time the Santa cracked his whip the reindeer would move.

"Building the robots and seeing them move is the best part. I don't like the programming of the robots much," said Miller.

"The robots can be programed to follow a certain line or using a light sensor that is attached to the front of the robot can hit a certain colored ball," said Alia Parker, who is also in the class. "You can also program the robots using other sensors, like sound sensors. A robot can be programed to perform a task just from a clap. I like getting to see what I programed the robot to do. The down side is not seeing this one little part not attached properly which can make the robot do something completely different."

Each year all the students involved with SMILE from all 17 different programs go to a challenge day. The students are paired with

other students from different schools and have to work out challenges, similar to some found at the family night. The challenges vary depending on the student's ages and grades. This year the challenge day will be held at Southern Oregon University during the spring.

Although attendance was down from past years, many who attended last Thursday's event were enthusiastic about the activities that were available.

Landon Mann, a first-grader, learned how to make Oobleck.

"It was fun!" said he said.

"My favorite was making the fake snow and learning how to make the ooze," said Hannah Evans, a fifth-grader.

The night concluded with a raffle drawing, with several great prizes awarded to many attendees that received a raffle ticket when they signed in upon entering.



(Photo by Dale Sandberg, IVFD Media Dept)

Justin Mason (left) suits up Devyn Spivey during the SMILE event at Evergreen Elementary. Fire fighting equipment were some of many exhibits on hand Nov.7.

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