

MEET THE PROFESSOR

SLUG queen brings some slime to science BY JORDAN TICHENOR



PHOTO BY ATHENA DELENE | TINYURL.COM/ATHENADELENE



n a Tuesday afternoon in the Springfield Library, a small group of science-curious “kiddos” wait for a session of the Science Program to Inspire Creativity and Excellence (SPICE) to start. A few of the librarians and teachers hint that a celebrity may be in their

midst today.

Suddenly the door swings open and a professor walks in. Or she might be a doctor. She wears green hair, combat boots and a long white coat with slits on the side for “high ninja kicks.” As the class starts, she “calibrates” the audience by testing their “evil scientist” laugh.

She is Professor Doctor Mildred Slugwak Dresselhaus, the 30th “raining” queen of the Society for the Legitimization of the Ubiquitous Gastropod, aka the SLUG queen.

While most of Eugene now knows the distinct green hair and lab coat that the professor wears, many others know her as Brandy Todd, assistant director for administration at the UO’s Oregon Center for Optics. She is also the director of SPICE, the main outlet of her yearlong “rain’s” outreach work. Although she has been in the SPICE post since 2008, it wasn’t until last year that the Professor considered running for SLUG queen.

“It was something in the back of my brain at the time. I was looking for a way to get more support for science education,” says Dresselhaus/Todd. “We had no notion we would win last year. We decided three weeks before the competition to go for it.”

Even with little preparation time, the professor and her crew made it to second runner up in 2012. But this year was different. Dresselhaus/Todd spent over a year campaigning and bribing past queens with science-based confections and various other goodies. She also spent a fair amount of time collecting a team of devoted “minions,” including Professor Husband and Doctor Minion (her 8-year-old son).

Although the experience started out as a promotion tool, she is now realizing the celebrity of her position. “We were walking to Davis after the coronation, and Queen Sadie was showering glitter and announcing me down the street. Cooks and customers were leaning out their windows. People wanted pictures. I just thought, ‘Wow, they know who I am,’” she says.

At the 30th coronation of the SLUG queen, Professor Dresselhaus used her team of minions to wow the audience with a series of real-time experiments set to the theme from *Weird Science*. Instant ice cream and mysterious liquid smoke were the main highlights. They also kept a “science booth” throughout the coronation, aimed at what Dresselhaus/Todd calls the “kiddos.”

Although she puts SPICE at the forefront of her campaign, she was also looking for a way to advertise all science-oriented programs in Eugene, naming ThinkerSmith, Eugene Maker Space and the Science Factory. Her passion, however, is promoting female role models in science. “Girls don’t have a sense of themselves. They aren’t exposed to female science figures. We want to give them and any of the underrepresented kiddos a chance to form really strong identities with science.”

She encourages her female students by calling them “scientistas,” although she says now that she’s a queen, they will have to be “science princesses,” despite some negative connotations with princess culture.

“I realized we need to embrace some of these images, rather than distance from them. I used to hate pink; now I kind of like it. I’ve used it on everything,” she says.

In the next year, SLUG Queen Dresselhaus is excited to “bring glory and honor to the name of SLUG queen. We’re going to raise it to the level of science-awesomeness.” ■

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