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Young chemists get up close with the natural world at McKenna

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Posted: Sunday, November 10, 2013 1:05 am

By Betty Taylor New Braunfels Herald-Zeitung | 0 comments



LAURA MCKENZIE | New Braunfels Herald-Zeitung

Young chemists investigated a hazardous materials spill at McKenna Children's Museum on Saturday.

The spill took place in a Lego city, where an overturned toy construction truck was leaking a mysterious white powder.

The event was part of the Science Matters program at the museum. Students and staff from Texas State University's Chemistry and Biochemistry Department set up several mobile science labs in the exhibit hall area.

Science Matters

Diego Barraez, 4, and his dad, Rair, listen as Dr. Todd Hudnall, assistant professor of chemistry and biochemistry at Texas State University, explains an experiment at McKenna Children's Museum on Saturday.



Dr. Todd Hudnall, assistant professor of chemistry and biochemistry, directed participants on how to test chemical reactions to determine the origin of the mysterious powder.

"What happens when you mix powdered sugar with rubbing alcohol? Nothing. Boring," Hudnall told the young students.

✕ But when Benjamin Black, 7, and his brother Oliver Black, 6, both of San Antonio, mixed baking soda with vinegar, they saw a reaction.

"It's bubbling," Benjamin said.

They had solved the mystery. The substance leaking all over the Lego city was baking soda.

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The experiment was part of several mobile labs inviting participants to take part in various science experiments. It was the first time the department had visited the museum with the mobile labs.

"This is part of our outreach program," Hudnall said "The goal is to get students excited not just about chemistry, but about math and science in

general."

Hudnall, a Canyon High School graduate, said he enjoyed being able to offer the program in Comal County and hoped to bring more labs to New Braunfels in the future.

"We would like to present more labs in the future that would engage all age levels," he added. "We would also like to get high school students involved in presenting programs."

At another station, biochemistry student Michael Villarreal taught students about nanofilm by having them write their names and draw designs on black construction paper bookmarks. Students then placed the bookmarks in water, added nail polish and watched as a film developed around the bookmark.

"It demonstrates to them how the film sticks to the bookmark," Villarreal said.

The junior added that he was interested in pursuing a career in medicine and appreciated the hands-on approach to learning at the department.

"I'm an undergraduate student, but I am already conducting research with Dr. Hudnall," he said.

Roberta Rodrigues, a graduate student, said she also appreciated the research aspect of the program.

"I get to work with a glovebox full of nitrogen. I would like to get my Ph.D. and become a chemistry professor," she said.

Eight-year-old Alanis Heller visited the work stations with her three siblings, Isaac, 6; Morgan, 3; and Selene, 1.

"I like how it (the water) changed to a bubble when we added the nail polish to the water for the bookmark," Alanis said.

"They are studying science right now in class," said Alanis' mom, Margaret.

She thought the mobile labs were a good complement to what the children were learning in school.

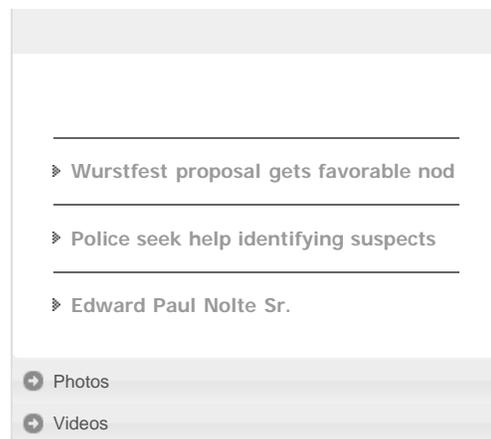
At another station, senior Antonio Torres, a biochemistry major, demonstrated chromatography by dipping coffee filter paper, with a black marker dot on it, into water.

"As the water rises up, the black separates into different colors," he explained.

Hudnall added that another experiment that was quite popular was the color changing milk experiment.

"You just pour a little bit of milk on a plate, add some food coloring and place a drop of liquid soap in the center. The colors separate and shoot out from the center," Hudnall said.

McKenna Children's Museum is located at 801 W. San Antonio St. For information or hours, visit www.mckennakids.org or call (830) 606-9525.



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