

Acton PIP's Sci-Tech Fest Connects Classroom & Careers

By Kim Feinstein

The Acton PIP (Parent Involvement Project) hosted its first Sci-Tech Fest at the Jr. High last Thursday evening. More than 30 exhibitors including local businesses, community organizations and student-led groups participated. The Sci-Tech fest, inspired by the Douglas school's new principal, Dr. Christopher Whitbeck, was aimed at students grades 6-12 and was developed so that student participants could make a tangible connection between their class work and prospective careers. More than 50 students assisted with the exhibitor demonstrations while attendees had a hands-on opportunity to explore myriad technologies.

Concord-based SolidWorks Corporation displayed their Cosmic Blobs creativity software designed for children ages 7 to 14. The software acts as "virtual clay" enabling kids to create cartoon-type characters and thus introducing them to 3D modeling and animation. With its easy-to-use interface, students at the event were quickly creating their own Cosmic Blobs. iRobot, Inc. of Burlington showcased their consumer-based Roomba vacuuming robot, providing a peek inside the world of robotics.

The Acton District of Mass. Wildlife displayed ways in which technologies are used to track and map wildlife, and Acton EMS and geocacher Bettina Abe showcased ways in which Global Positioning Software (GPS) technology is used for both function and fun. For those muggles not in the know, geocaching is an outdoor "treasure hunt" involving hikes of varying difficulty. Using a handheld GPS unit, geocachers research caches in the desired area via the web and program coordinates of the location into their device. They then proceed on their hike with the GPS unit which indicates the direction and proximity of the treasure. Treasures are typically found inside plastic-waterproof containers. Once the cache is found the person chooses a "treasure" and leaves one of their own for the next person. Log books are included in the cache so that visits can be recorded and reviewed. Geocaching is a growing phenomenon and there are many caches in the metro-west area, including Acton.

Other participants included Aerial View, an Acton-based company specializing in aerial photography using small remote control airplanes and helicopters, Mad Air House who conducts home energy audits, and MIT Lincoln Labs who displayed a variety of astronomy instrumentation and image processing technologies. The medical field was aptly represented by Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine, Emerson Hospital Radiology, and the Lahey Clinic who displayed the extensive use of x-rays in the field.

According to Carlie Krakoff, co-chair of the event, there were an estimated 350 attendees. "Our first ever Sci-Tech was another success for Acton PIP. Our main goal was to involve high school students in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) activities with an emphasis on school to business connections," remarked Krakoff. "Parents, teachers, community members and businesses stepped up to make this a successful event. Students showed their love of the challenges, grabbed the opportunities to explore and found endless ways to satisfy their insatiable curiosity. In a

time when teachers are overloaded with testing requirements and parents are restricted by time constraints the Sci-Tech fest showed that as a collation parents, educators, and community/ business partners can work together to bring more meaning to the concepts introduced in the classroom and show their relevance in the real world.”

Acton PIP is a coalition of parents, the A/B schools, community and business partners who offer math and science enrichment activities for students and their families. For more information about PIP and future PIP-sponsored events please visit www.actonpip.org or email actonpip@yahoo.com.