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South Bend Tribune

February 8, 2002

The fun in learning

Girls encouraged to pursue math, science

Hometown
By **JOSHUA STOWE**
Tribune Correspondent

Harrison Elementary fourth-grader Whitney Williams, the pretend owner of the Lego "skyscraper" her team was building at the University of Notre Dame's Ms. Wizard Day, already has an eye for profit.

"That could have been a window," she said, explaining to her teammates how their building could maximize space for renters.

Whitney was one of 75 elementary students who came last Saturday to perform chemistry experiments, design buildings and hold business contests at Ms. Wizard Day, the eighth year for a Notre Dame program designed to encourage girls to pursue subjects such as



Jazzmine Ellis, a fifth-grader at Park Elementary School in Michigan City, laughs as her gumdrop bridge finally gives way under the weight of 13 four-ounce glasses of water during the Ms. Wizard science and engineering event for elementary school girls at the University of Notre Dame.

Tribune Photo/BARBARA ALLISON

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science, math, engineering and business.

Notre Dame student volunteers organized the event and supervised the various activities. The Notre Dame colleges of business, science and engineering sponsored the event along with Honeywell Inc.

Students from such schools as Coquillard, Eggleston, Harrison, Kennedy, McKinley and Tarkington elementaries in South Bend and from Park Elementary in Michigan City came to get a taste of college life and experience a variety of activities.

Putting on the event was important, organizers said, because girls tend to drift away from science and math-related activities toward the end of elementary school.

"This is the age when girls lose interest in math and science," said Tracy Blichfeldt, who along with Mary Lampe and Jessica Manske co-chaired Ms. Wizard Day. "We try to get new people every year as much as possible. We'd like to expose as many girls as we can.

"I just think that most of the time the girls have a really good time."

In addition to looking for new participants each year, Blichfeldt said, it's important to have male volunteers helping with activities to let the girls know everyone supports their forays into the sciences.

At a chemistry lab, girls mixed common substances to see what they could produce. They made a gooey, sticky substance by combining glue and laundry starch. Ryan Gwaltney, a graduate chemical engineering student and one of the supervisors, said the various experiments were designed to help the girls have fun so that they would learn more about science.



"Basically, what we want to do is have some fun with some chemical things you could do around the house and get the girls interested in science," he said.

Angela Hicks, a sixth-grader at Coquillard, enjoyed the lab and said she wanted to do more with science at her school.

"This is the best," she said. "I like science the best. If we have a science fair, I might do something."

Students in an engineering lab got to build Lego structures and have them tested. Lab supervisors attached the buildings to a table that shook them to simulate an earthquake and test strength.

Teams of students competed to see who could build the strongest, most profitable and most attractive buildings, with individual students taking on such jobs as architect, engineer and owner, each giving their own input as they built.

Tracy Correa, a supervisor, said the lab was designed in part to help the girls gain a better understanding of all the professions needed to make a large building. Team members took their jobs seriously.

"The bottom has to be stronger," said Yesenia Rios, a sixth-grader at Coquillard, who was on Whitney Williams' team.

Further discussions of profit abounded at a nearby business lab, where two teams competed to see who could make the most cookies with their resources.

Kristina Pickens, a fourth-grader at Tarkington, said the lab taught her "how to manage money, get as much stuff without using too much money."

Luis Molina, a junior business major who helped run the lab, said the exercises were helping students learn by enjoying themselves.



Coquillard School fifth-grader Angela Hicks examines the consistency of a mixture Saturday at the Ms. Wizard science and engineering event for elementary school girls at the University of Notre Dame.

Enjoying themselves

"They're having fun and at the same time they're learning good skills," he said.

Jump to a day:

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