

Fair teaches science concepts

By [Staff Reports](#)

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The sound of a fire alarm blared through John F. Kennedy Middle School on Wednesday afternoon.

Fortunately, however, it was not because of an accident, but was rather a demonstration by Bradley T. Meirs, the fire safety officer at the College of William and Mary.

That afternoon, Amy Wilkerson, the laboratory research manager at William and Mary's Applied Research Center, had set up a science fair for the children of the Boys and Girls Club of Suffolk, gathering several of her colleagues to demonstrate different types of scientific equipment and hands-on learning environments.

Several tables were set up, each emphasizing a different type of science or equipment. Subjects ranged from fire safety and CPR demonstrations to showing the children how to work a microscope or how a marshmallow reacts to being put in a vacuum chamber.

Children watched in awe as a marshmallow tripled in size inside the vacuum chamber as Norfolk State University research associate professor Dr. Jonathon Skuza sucked the air out.

"You remove the air around them, and they expand," he explained to the children.

Other teachers and students demonstrated different fun, hands-on experiments, like Brandt Robertson showing the dispersion of light using a computer program and his cell phone camera, or Samson Worrell teaching children how to use a microscope.

On the other side of the room, children congregated at Sandra Prior's table, where she taught practical lessons to the students about clean habits, first aid and even how to save somebody's life in emergency situations.

Prior, the director of environmental health and safety at William and Mary, used life-sized medical mannequins to show the children how to do CPR correctly, perform the Heimlich maneuver, and use an automated external defibrillator, or A.E.D.

According to Prior, even though A.E.D.s are required to be in schools and other public facilities, not enough people know how to use them to save somebody's life.

"They might be right there, but people are afraid to use it," she said, explaining why she chose to teach children how to use emergency equipment.

Wilkerson said she proposed the idea of a science fair to Reggie Carter, director of the Suffolk unit of the Boy and Girls Club, to demonstrate the importance of science to children in the Suffolk area.

Carter had never done something like this before in his seven years working with the club, but he knew how positive this science fair would be.

Wilkerson, a Suffolk resident, saw that the best way to make science attractive for children is to show how interesting

it can be.

“The science, I want them to see that it’s fun,” she said, citing the hands-on demonstrations that engrossed the attendees. As well as entertaining and teaching them, it also showed how to react in tough situations.

“It takes the fear away,” she said.

These demonstrations served to educate children about the world around them and the science used to analyze it, but, more importantly, it taught them how science influences people’s lives.

Samson Worrell told the younger kids that he did not predict he would go into the sciences when he was younger, but he said that the classes and summers spent under the direction of Amy Wilkerson had increased his love for science and made him eager to give back to the community by teaching it to younger children.

A former Suffolk Boys and Girls Club Boy of the Year, Worrell’s presentation on how to use a microscope showed what various things looked like under different levels of magnification.

Leroy Bennett, co-chair of the Suffolk Boys and Girls Club, said that “there has been so many great things and lives changed,” by the club.

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