

# Centralia College Lends a Hand at STEM Camp

STEM: Lewis County's Highest Educational Institution Hopes to Inspire Youth to Pursue Degrees in Science, Tech, Engineering and Math Fields

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## STEM Academy



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**Centralia College Lends a Hand at STEM Camp** By Christopher Brewer / [cbrewer@chronline.com](mailto:cbrewer@chronline.com) | 0 comments

Centralia College is in the middle of its summer quarter, but some of the students on their campus Thursday were noticeably younger than college age.

The college hosted students from W.F. West High School for one day out of the school's five-day summer STEM academy delving into science, technology, engineering and mathematics, or STEM, training. It was only a fraction of the entirety of the camp, but staff at the college gave the students — including many freshmen and sophomores — a glimpse and a hands-on preview of what they could study in college.

Steve Norton, associate professor of biology, anatomy and physiology at Centralia College, headed up the college's effort and brought together several of his fellow instructors to serve the youth for a day.

"It's a great environment because here you have students unencumbered, interested in what they're doing," Norton said. "They're more comfortable with the learning environment."

Centralia College hosted the students for the duration of a school day for the second summer in a row, offering several sessions that included the opportunity to program robotic equipment, dissect pig hearts and take a tour of the Chehalis River watershed — all in the name of a buzzword that's become big for several area schools lately.

"We think we're a big part of the solution to provide STEM degrees," Norton said. "As students come up from middle school to high school, there are a lot of social dynamic changes. We want these students to know they're not isolated and they're not alone in pursuing this."

Two students who became intensely involved in their workshop, sophomore Caleb Ross and freshman Tyler Mason, pored over directions to create a chemical reaction as they poured a solution into a beaker that transformed the properties of the aluminum in a pop can.

Both said they love studying science and want to pursue career fields in engineering someday.

“You have to take the steps to get to a challenging career,” Ross said. “It’s an opportunity to see what direction I want to go.”

Mason said he didn’t mind spending time in a lab or classroom setting during the summer — “what am I going to do at home?” he said — but instead jumped at an opportunity provided by both his school and Centralia College to begin the first steps to become either an electrical engineer or architect.

“The trips we’ve been taking and these labs are pretty cool,” Mason said. “It’s given me a lot of insight.”

Centralia College electronics professor David Peterson spent a good portion of his time giving students a crash course in the BASIC programming language, which in turn enabled pairs of students to collaborate and build a miniature robotic device they could control by commands they specified.

It was a major change from what Peterson normally does, but he told The Chronicle he enjoyed changing it up to get younger students interested in programming.

“The majority of students I get are in the workforce development field,” Peterson said, “so it’s great to be able to offer this sort of a different dynamic.”

College staff hope they can someday lend their services to more students across the area, broadening their efforts to get more youth interested in career fields involving a good deal of brain work.

“I’d like to get more high schools across the area involved,” Norton said. “I say this all the time and I mean it: there’s talent everywhere.”

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