

Science is made fun through Evergreen's Science Carnival

By Amelia Dickson

Staff writer May 30, 2015

Dozens of children and parents crowded around tables Saturday afternoon in The Evergreen State College's Red Square.

A group of students in lab coats stood over the tables preparing their experiment: What happens when you add Mentos mints to a 2-liter bottle of Diet Coke?

The students dropped the mints into the bottles, and soon the air was filled with fizzing, bubbling geysers of Diet Coke. The eruption lasted several seconds as the crowd watched in amazement.

The Mentos-in-Diet-Coke experiment is a perfect way to attract children to science, said Allison Sbardella, president of the college's Chemistry and Other Sciences club. The reaction between the two materials is immediate and dramatic — that's why the club decided to use the tried-and-true experiment as their Science Carnival demonstration.

"The real reason we do this is because it's cool," Sbardella said.

Evergreen students and staff spent Friday and Saturday teaching children and college students about science as part of the annual event. Krishna Chowdary, an Evergreen faculty member who teaches math and physics, said about 700 children visited the carnival Friday with school groups. A smaller group of children visited Saturday with families.

The goal, he said, is to make science seem accessible.

"I'm hoping that kids will get the sense that science is alive," Chowdary said. "I want them to see that science is being done by people who look like their baby sitter or people they see on the bus. That's not the image you get of a scientist when you watch TV. The kids will notice that scientists look like them."

That's part of the reason behind using Mentos and Diet Coke as materials for an experiment, said Delores Sweeny, treasurer of the Chemistry and Other Sciences club. The materials aren't strange substances the kids have never seen before — they're familiar.

She explained that contrary to what many people believe, the result of adding Mentos to the Diet Coke isn't a chemical reaction — it's a physical reaction. The tiny holes in the Mentos increase the surface area of the candy, allowing carbon dioxide to form rapidly. The result is a geyser of soda erupting from the top of the bottle.

Micah Jordan, 13, of Rochester said the results of the experiment were even better than he predicted.

“I didn’t expect that much to come out,” Jordan said. “It was pretty cool.”

He visited the campus Saturday with the **Centralia College TRIO program**, a program that prepares students for college and trade schools.

And while visually stimulating experiments are one of the big draws of the Science Carnival, Chowdary said the annual event is also a great way for Evergreen students to show off work and research they’ve been doing for months.

“It’s a great way for the community to learn about the work that our students are doing,” Chowdary said.