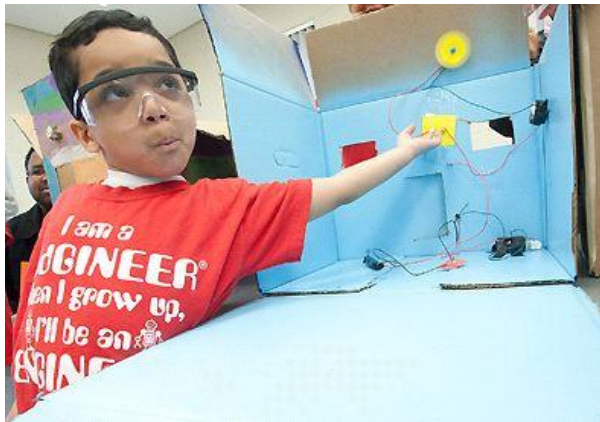


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Program sparks county children's interest in engineering

Mini engineers build mini houses at county community center

by Chidinma Okparanta | Staff Writer



Raphael Talisman/the gazette

Ian Carpenter, 6, of Glenn Dale shows how an electric fan works in his model home Saturday at the West Laurel Community Center during the final gathering of a new after-school engineering program for elementary school children called KidGINEER.

Laurel resident Nya Evans stepped back to examine the red shutters on the house she spent six weeks building.

She rang the doorbell to make sure it buzzed, flipped a switch to make sure the porch light glowed and the six-year-old engineer found everything in working order.

Nya was one of 30 children who were members of KidGINEER, a science, technology, engineering and mathematics program for students in kindergarten through fifth grade. Over a six-week period, each came to the West Laurel Community Center to learn about electricity and created a model cardboard house fully wired with doorbells, porch lights and ceiling fans. The last day of the spring session was Saturday, and the children came together to present their houses.

"I like it because you actually got to do it and in science class all you do is talk about it," said 9-year-old Tyrek Russell, a fourth-grader at Deerfield Run Elementary School.

Andrea Evans of Laurel started KidGINEER last year as an after-school program at Bond Mill Elementary School, where her daughter, Nya, is in first grade.

Although she is a lawyer, Evans has a degree in math and civil engineering and said she believes it's important to strengthen the math and science skills of children in the U.S. to create a more competitive work force.

"Programs like this can help us take the lead in inventing, science and technology from China and India, who are currently out competing us," said Andrea Evans' mother, Bernadette Hence, who also has a civil engineering degree and a doctorate in education.

KidGINEER has had three sessions. The first session, which met last year during the week at Bond Mill Elementary School in Laurel, was 10 weeks long, and was a mixture of projects in civil engineering, math, electrical engineering and chemistry.

The second and third sessions were six weeks long and focused on chemistry and electrical engineering, respectively.

Evans said she decided to meet on weekends to make it easier for working parents to drop off and pick up their children and moved from Bond Mill to attract children from a variety of area schools.

"Before this program, there weren't a lot of things I could think of science-related that I could take my son to besides museums," said Tyrek's father, Mike Russell, of Laurel. "But it's nice to have something hands-on like this."

The next session starts in September, and students will study math and robotics. Each session costs \$125.

"I think this is an excellent program," said James Pringle of Laurel, a Pepco electrical engineer who spoke at the event. "In my company, 30 percent of our work force is about to retire so we're going to need more future engineers."

Tyrek Russell said he can hardly wait to be one of those future engineers.

"I'm thinking about maybe building things for the Army one day when I grow up," Tyrek said. "I wish I could do it now."

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