UH Engineers, Chevron Introduce Houston-area Girls to STEM Fun

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By:
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The Cullen College of Engineering at the University of Houston was a happening place this weekend ? rockets launched into the sky with great puffs of smoke, robots performed amazing feats, and propeller-powered cars raced down corridors as happy shrieks filled the air.

About a thousand Houston-area girls, from grades 4-8, flooded the Cullen College and its surroundings on Saturday, March 24 for the third annual ?Girls Engineering the Future Day: A STEM Event,? sponsored by Chevron.

?Is it going to explode? They always explode in the movies,? asked Isabella Tinnin, 12, watching a carbon-dioxide-based oil recovery demonstration involving two jars, marbles, tubing, oil and water, and denture-cleaning pills.

The denture-cleaner turned the water a frothy sea-foam green as it released the carbon-dioxide, which eventually pushed out drops of oil into a waiting cup.

?No, no?in the movies, yes, but not here. That would be very bad if they did,? said Tony Nowak, a UH student volunteer and president of the student chapter of the Society of Petroleum Engineers. Then he launched into an explanation of the chemical reaction, pressure at work and the importance of petroleum in today?s world.

Tinnin, who wants to be a NASA engineer, was part of Girl Scout Troop 28030 brought to the event by troop leader Meaghin Sliman, who graduated from the UH Cullen College with a bachelor?s degree in chemical engineering in 2010.

?This was a great opportunity to bring our girls back to my old school and get them more interested in STEM fields,? Sliman said, pausing to look around the engineering courtyard with a fond smile. ?This is where I met my husband. We both went here.? 

About 150 volunteers ? representing Chevron, UH Cullen College of Engineering student organizations, individual Cullen College students and professors, as well as alumni ? worked the different stations at the event.
Minuri DeSilva, a petroleum engineering junior, decided to wrap up a stressful week of midterms by volunteering at the event.

“This was a fun opportunity to work with kids and the experiment is fascinating,” said DeSilva, who was helping girls with the non-Newtonian fluid station, also known as the “slime” experiment. She and the girls were mixing up an electric blue cornstarch concoction and enjoying scraping and squishing it with gloved hands to demonstrate how pressure tended to harden the fluid.

“There are not a lot of girls in my classes,” DeSilva said. “So it’s good to be out here inspiring girls to get interested in engineering.”

Sarika Gandhi, a computer engineer with Chevron, brought her daughter and two of her daughter’s friends to the event.

“I thought I’d bring them since Chevron is sponsoring this and it’s good to expose them to more STEM fun,” Gandhi said. She was impressed by the number and diversity of activities all around.

Her 11-year-old daughter ran off to test drive her propeller-powered car.

“It’s amazing how they’re making this car with just popsicle sticks, rubber bands and some plastic,” Gandhi said holding up her own.

Click here to learn more about the Girls Engineering the Future: A STEM Event.

Click here to view more photos of the 2018 Girls Engineering the Future!

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