

A-B event showcases science, technology

By Kathryn Riley

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Acton, Mass. - If you ever wanted an opportunity to redesign Kelley's Corner, you had a chance at a recent technology fair at Acton-Boxborough Regional High School.

Thanks to Tufts University and The Discovery Museums, students and adults could try their hands at remaking the Acton landmark.

Tufts University graduate student Amanda Garfield helped participants use the computer simulation "Second Life" to explore a virtual Kelley's Corner and understand the effect of their suggestions. Denise LeBlanc and the Discovery Museums encouraged novice architects to consider the environmental impact of their designs for Kelley's Corner.

"I wish we had something like this when I was in high school," said Garfield at the Nov. 2 event. "Kids are really getting involved."

The exhibit was one of many at Discover STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math), an interactive technology fair hosted by the Acton-Boxborough Parent Involvement Project (PIP) with support from Acton Boxborough Regional Schools, the Middlesex West Chamber School Business Partnership Committee, the Groton-Dunstable STEM, and The Discovery Museums.

Acton-Boxborough PIP is a collaboration of parent, student, and community volunteers who work to promote science and math activities to families in Acton and Boxborough.

Discover STEM, a biannual event, is designed to ignite student — and adult — interest in science, technology, engineering, and math as well as to encourage careers in these fields. And while Discover STEM was aimed at residents of Acton and Boxborough, some came from Westford and Groton to participate.

"It's for everyone," said Karen Herther, co-chairwoman of Acton-Boxborough PIP. "[It illustrates] how technology impacts your life."



Orlando Claffey/Wicked Local photo

Radhika Jangi, 13, looks through the scope of a surgical tool while sister Rohini, 8, and mother Neela work the pincers on the end of the tube during innovation event at Acton-Boxborough Regional High School Monday.

“This is a great way for [students] to see a lot of careers. It’s one-stop shopping,” said Kay Steeves, A-B’s student-faculty support coordinator.

Herther described Discover STEM as “a real collaboration” between PIP and Acton-Boxborough Regional High School. Acton-Boxborough PIP makes an effort to tie the school’s science and math curriculum into its events. Strong community involvement led Acton-Boxborough PIP to receive \$3,500 in sponsorship and \$3,500 to \$4,000 in in-kind donations. Many of the participating organizations and sponsors also had a local connection.

“Many of the parents work at these companies,” said Herther.

It was that strong parent, school, and community relationship that led Acton resident Mary Ann Smith to choose to live in Acton after a move from Idaho.

“We picked Acton-Boxborough because of its strong parent involvement,” said Smith as she viewed the exhibits. “One of the things that sets this district apart is parental involvement.”

Visitors viewed exhibits ranging from green technology, sponsored by Acton Toyota, to A-B’s Environthon Team’s biodiesel fuel presentation. Some exhibits were tied together by the “green” theme of environmental awareness, such as the Kelley Corner’s presentation and Gro Solar’s exhibit on solar energy. There was a compost display and recycling containers, and reusable and recyclable cutlery and plates from Preserve Products were used for refreshments.

Every exhibit aimed to show the practical applications of science, math, and technology in daily life. Over at a table sponsored by In-Control Driver Training, A-B student Mitchell Willis explained the physics behind stopping, skidding, and staying in control behind the wheel of the car. Willis, a junior, signed up for Discover STEM through the school’s career exploration program.

“I think this is a really cool event,” said Willis. “It gives people a chance to see all the different aspects of science and engineering. It’s hands-on too.”



Orlando Claffey/Wicked Local photo
Nicholas Chafy, 7, and Anjana Bharadwaj, 6,
play with a “One Laptop per Child” computer at
the Acton-Boxborough High School Monday.

Seniors Diana Miao and Joy Liang, who participated in Discover STEM as part of the A-B science club, were fascinated by the variety.

“I think it’s really great,” said Miao. “There are a lot of things we usually don’t see. It’s interesting to see [concepts] put into use.”

“There are some pretty cool things here,” agreed Liang. Liang was particularly impressed by Tufts Veterinary School’s exhibit, where she learned about the process of a biopsy, complete with a hawk’s foot with a tumor as a visual aid.

“That’s not something you see every day,” said Liang.

Discover STEM also served as the debut of the A-B Robotics Club, whose members were selling HexBugs, small mechanical “bugs” that respond to touch and sound, to raise money and awareness for the club.



Orlando Claffey/Wicked Local photo
Marie Hoff, left, and Zuzana Giertlova use thermal telescopes to try and identify hidden objects during an event at the Acton-Boxborough High School Monday.

“I’m just really excited to be here,” said Naman Bharaduj, who co-founded the club with Prateek Sahay. “People are really interested.”