

Launching a New Appreciation for STEM



Pam Peiper, a member of U.S. Rep. Jaime Herrera Beutler's staff, gets some hands-on practice with DNA testing.

Flanked by a pair of three-story-high yachts, more than 150 people gathered inside the Christensen Shipyards warehouse in Vancouver to have their DNA tested and taste hot ice cream during an interactive event that demonstrated how Clark College is preparing students for jobs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

Clark College Foundation, in partnership with Christensen Shipyards, held the special event on the evening of March 15. The gathering showed local businesspeople how Clark matches the community's workforce needs with training, education and internships in STEM.



Biology instructor Ryan Kustus describes Clark's participation in Yale University's Small World Initiative, in which students do research that could help discover new antibiotics.

Jim and Kelly Maul, from the Vancouver environmental engineering firm Maul, Foster & Alongi Inc., stood transfixed as Clark engineering student Jesse Bosdell described how a water clock worked and that the clocks were part of a campus-wide competition.

"You've got to put the fun into science and engineering first, and then the passion will come later," said Jim Maul. His wife, Kelly, said she was "fired up to go back to school" after seeing the student demonstrations.

The couple has two daughters whom they hope to steer toward a STEM education. Clark is on their list of higher education options.

Guest Tim Kraft, a civil engineer and principal at the water resources company Otak Inc., said Clark College offers critical programs that aren't available at other community colleges. "I see what Clark does, and it's impressive," said Kraft, who mentors youth with interests in science and engineering in the Southwest Washington area.

Clark College President Robert K. Knight addressed the guests by acknowledging the regional businesses present and how in partnership, they drive the region's economic prosperity. "It's vitally important that the community and Clark College work together to provide an educated workforce to meet the 17,000 jobs that regional economists predict will require education in STEM by 2015," he said.



The event was part of the Ensuring a Bright Future: Campaign for Clark College. Funds raised during the campaign are aimed at enhancing scholarships, faculty professional development, technology infrastructure, STEM, and dental hygiene education.

Lisa Gibert, president and CEO of Clark College Foundation, said it was exciting to see guests clearly fascinated with the student achievements. "This evening brings me so much pride to showcase the great work Clark is doing and how that education translates to jobs in our region and beyond," she said.



Engineering professor Carol Hsu and Clark student Jessica Molner explain to guests how water clocks work. Molner is a member of Clark's NERD (Not Even Remotely Dorky) Girls, a student club devoted to promoting STEM among women and girls.

Guests had the opportunity to learn about water clocks built with coconuts and bamboo; a rocket that is part of a national NASA competition; software for mass-identifying license plates; the weight distribution of a package of Chips-Ahoy! chocolate chip cookies; DNA sampling; and more.

Some of the business community members represented included Portland Plastics, Corwin Beverage, Wells Fargo Advisors, Columbia Credit Union, Legacy Salmon Creek Hospital, Sterling Bank, Mekos Corporation, Silicon Forest Electronics, and SEH America Inc.

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