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Physics is fun at the Discovery Center



Written by Ashley Vasquez, Daily Vidette Staff Writer

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Everyone knows that physics is a big, scary monster that should be avoided like the plague, right?

Wrong. The ISU Physics Club has gone above and beyond its call of duty to refute these stereotypes of that field of study.

"It's important for [kids] to learn about science. It becomes more important in our everyday life as each year technology and science are becoming more important. It's good for young students to be aware of what science teaches so they can keep up with what is going on in the world," Jay Ansher, advisor of the Physics Club on the Road, said.

Once a month, since 2005, the club presents a "Physics Day" at the Children's Discovery Museum in Normal.

"We bring a whole bunch of fun physics presentations. Usually it has a theme, like 'electricity and magnets,' and we'll let the kids play with giant magnets. We teach the basics of physics to kids who are about 8 years old and younger. All the demonstrations are very interactive," Andrea Hesselbach, president of the Physics Club and junior physics major, said.

"The kids always enjoy it. I've never seen a kid leave mad," she added.

This month's Physics Day will be Jan. 21 with the first presentation from 10 to 11 a.m. and the second from 6:30-7:30 p.m.

"It's sort of an informal program. We're like an extra exhibit. People can come and ask questions and do hands-on activities, but it's not a formal presentation, which is a good format for that age group since they're mostly elementary students," Ansher said.

"We try to show them that physics is not hard and if you get into it then it really can be interesting. We really try to demystify it."

Physics Club on the Road, as they have officially named the program, has not only established a partnership with the Children's Discovery Museum, but works with other programs in the community as well.

"We do things in K-12 classrooms if teachers ask us to do a presentation. Sometimes it's just for a single class or for a school assembly. We also work with the Challenger Learning Center," Ansher said.

"This spring we have other events we're doing. We're working with the Alpha Phi Omega Boy Scout merit badge day, which they do every year and we've worked with them the past few years. We also do the 'Expand Your Horizons', which takes place at ISU and is meant to motivate young women grades 5 to 10 to get into science and technology fields. We do workshops coming up Mar. 20," he added.

"I enjoy doing it because the kids get so excited and then you get excited. It's nice to teach a 5-year-old the same thing you're learning in college," Hesselbach said.

Capturing the student's interest is the most important thing, according to Ansher.

"The nice thing is anyone in education or science is ideally suited to do this you don't need to do both especially when you're dealing with young audiences. You don't have to be a physics professor to get the idea across or engage the students and get them interested.

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"We just try to wow the little kids. We try to make it fun and interesting for them by showing them something maybe they haven't seen before," he continued.

Besides benefitting the children, Ansher explained that taking part in the Physics Club on the Road can also benefit ISU students.

"It's a mutual benefit for ISU and for students; giving the students a chance to experience that environment while we also perhaps encourage younger students to get into science and to have a good memory of something that they did when they met someone from ISU. It gives them the idea that going to college and maybe studying science is a good thing to do and they can do that at ISU," he said.

Students from any major interested in joining Physics Club can contact Dr. Ansher at jansher@ilstu.edu.

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