SANTA MARIA Sun

The Santa Maria Valley's Weekly Newspaper • November 6 - November 13, 2008 • Vol. 9 No. 34 • FREE • www.santamariasun.com

Porno is forgettable [26]

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SCHOOLSCENE

Local students get a chance for grant money

High school students building remote-controlled submarine robots and third graders learning about bats are just two examples of ways in which grant money from an education initiative is being used to encourage local students to choose careers in math and science.

The Education Collaborative, an outreach program of the Society of Petroleum Engineers of Santa Maria, awards the grants on behalf of the oil and gas industry. The collaborative also recently began a series of contests aimed at promoting creativity in lesson plans and student activities.

The contest asks students to present an overview of California's energy landscape from 1955 through 2015, and to analyze the state's energy history and come up with energy solutions for the future.

The grant programs are offered throughout the year on a quarterly basis, which allows for more flexibility on the teacher's part.

"We want the teachers to be able to communicate with us. If something comes up during the year, we want to be able to work with them. We want to align with what they're doing," said Gayle Pratt, a representative of the Education Collaborative.

The group has awarded $25,000 to date this year. The money has been spent on field trips to the Santa Paula oil museum, thermal engineering lab equipment, laptops for classrooms, and more.

Pratt, who's been to most of the classrooms that won grants, said she's been "blown away" by the students. There were third graders from Ida Redmond Taylor Elementary "calling out bat species just like you or I used to know about dinosaurs." She also pointed out the marine robotics program at St. Joseph High School and "what amazing work they've been able to do with off-the-shelf components."

In addition to providing financial support, the collaborative also provides physical and logistical help. They put the marine robotics program at St. Joseph High School in touch with Jeff Kowalishen of Divecon, a subsea service company.

"At first, [Kowalishen] was able to help them with the umbilical to their digital cameras, and accomplish neutral buoyancy," Pratt said. "It was during this time that hurricane Ike hit and [Kowalishen] was sent offshore, but was still available to the students via cell phone and online."

The current awards were set to be announced on Nov. 5, with one classroom selected to view advanced oil and gas engineering technology at work through a televised live view of a water well being drilled in a Third World country. The well project is in partnership with the Manhattan-based Charity: Water.

The students will get to pick the well location, as well as learn about how oil drilling technology was adapted to provide a portable unit that can produce drinking water in arid and impoverished parts of the world.

"This is just one grassroots approach that our industry is taking to encourage students to study math and science, and our way of showing them how their efforts combined with advanced technology can make a real difference in people's lives," Pratt said. ○

Intern Nicholas Walter compiled this week's School Scene. Information should be sent to the Sun via fax, e-mail, or mail.

What Kids Are Reading

Marveltown
by Bruce McCall
recommended for ages 5 to 8

Marveltown is a gleaming, retro-futuristic city of wonder. Flying vehicles soar over, under, and around suspended roads and improbable towering buildings. Daredevil antics, such as sky-skiing and elevated marlin fishing, are commonplace. And every Saturday, all of the kids in the town get access to the giant dome where the adults spend the week inventing. The children create bully-tripping rugs, homework-eating mechanical dogs, and hypnotizing goggles—all of which come in handy when a group of adult-built robots goes haywire (thanks to a mouse gnawing through some wires) and threatens to destroy the town.

Bruce McCall's imaginative kids' book is mostly a wacky invention gallery. When the crisis that drives the plot finally develops, it feels a bit tacked on to give the bizarre contraptions and devices some context. Still, the book as a whole is a lot of fun, filled with colorful painted illustrations and packed with little visual details on every page. ○

"What Kids are Reading" is a regular feature in the *Sun*, highlighting children's books available for young readers in Santa Maria. This week's recommendation was made by Executive Editor Ryan Miller.