

NEW FACES OF ENGINEERING

Kids pack tech workshop

Conference focused on opportunities

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New Paltz – Risa Pomerseleg has met the future of engineering, and it is she.

Inspired by a NOVA miniseries that ran in 2003 about string theory, the eighth-grader at New Paltz Middle School wants to become a physicist. String theory – a theory that makes grown-up scientists scratch their heads – holds that the building blocks of nature are strings rather than particles.

"It's kind of like the theory of all theories," Pomerseleg said.

So it wasn't surprising to find the shy 13-year-old at the New Faces of Engineering conference held yesterday at SUNY New Paltz for middle and high school students. In its fourth year, the conference is organized by local tech companies – including IBM and Philips Semiconductors – to spark students' interest in technology and help ensure a future work force of engineers.

For students like Pomerseleg, it's not so much creating interest as nurturing it. For fun, she recently wrote a paper about string theory and gave it to her teacher. She has also expressed interest in atom smashers.

Coinciding with National Engineers Week, the conference attracted more than 1,000 students from Orange, Ulster, Dutchess and Rockland counties – double the number who attended last year. And that doesn't include the teacher from Staten Island who found out about the event and just showed up with her students. Perhaps that's a tactic more than 400 students who were put on a waiting list for the conference should have adopted.

Next year, the attendance number is expected to double again, said conference organizer Vincent Cozzolino, also vice president of services at IBM. That's good news for students looking for a taste of engineering possibilities and a little hands-on experience.



Students at yesterday's New Faces of Engineering conference at SUNY New Paltz crowd around a cloud water deposition collector that was used on Whiteface Mountain in the northeastern part of Adirondack Park.

Times Herald-Record photos/KEN BIZZIGOTTI



Saugerties Middle School students Brian Catalle, 14, left, Bradford Clark, 13, Brian Olson, 13, and Justin Metz, 14, watch a marble sorter at work. The sorter was built by Ashley Wofrum, a SUNY New Paltz sophomore.

At a fiber optics workshop, three Highland Middle School students crowded around a white chip with wires and instructions. Their small fingers bent wires and pushed ca-

pacitors and resistors into the chip.

Though all three girls said they enjoyed science and technology, the final product of their 20 minutes of effort

seemed a little underwhelming. Once the final piece, a 9-volt battery, was in place, the contraption emitted a low chirping sound.

"What did you do?" asked



SUNY Albany professor John Hartley uses an optical microscope to view a computer chip 1,000 times smaller than a human hair.

seventh-grader Jaimie Rogner.

Fellow seventh-grader Bethany Krystek, who wants to be a civil engineer, didn't know. "Is that it?" she wondered.

More photos at
recordonline.com