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110 Middle School Students Explore STEM Topics at Rio Hondo College's Eighth Annual CTE Career Exploration Academy

WHITTIER – Standing in a circle, five eighth-graders counted in unison to 30 as classmate Paul Chavez alternated between heart compressions and artificial respiration in a presentation of his lifesaving skills during a special summer class at Rio Hondo College.

When he paused, a partner used an automated external defibrillator to administer an electric shock to the practice dummy's heart, and then Chavez resumed his efforts.

A few doors away, eighth-grader Jerilee Castillo and a partner manipulated crankshafts in a small engine module to shift the position of a piston, noting how the changes altered intake and exhaust valves.

Both classes – as well as others focused on engineering/design and building crystal radios – are part of Rio Hondo College's eighth annual CTE Career Exploration Summer Academy, a weeklong exploration of career and technical education (CTE).

"We expose students not only to STEM topics, but also to the idea that they can be college students," Rio Hondo College Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss said.

The boot camp focuses on health science, engineering and automobile technology – all Rio Hondo College fields of study.

Chavez, who attends Lake Center Middle School, said the program has helped feed his curiosity.

"It's fun because we get to use all of the tools and stuff," said Chavez, who also noted that he made a 3-D keychain in his engineering/design class. "I like science."

Castillo, who attends North Park Academy of the Arts, said the class has augmented other courses she has taken.

MORE

Rio Hondo College, located in Whittier, California, is committed to the success of its diverse students and communities by providing dynamic educational opportunities and resources that lead to degrees, certificates, transfer, career and technical pathways, basic skills proficiency, and lifelong learning. For information on the College or its programs, please call 562-692-0921 or visit www.riohondo.edu.

“I’ve always wanted to build stuff. I want to know more about options for my career,” she said.

The program has grown from 30 middle school students in its first year to 110 this year. Students hail from Bassett Unified, El Rancho Unified, Little Lake City, Mountain View and Valle Lindo school districts.

Each day includes hands-on activities in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). For example, in the small-engine project, students break down and assemble a car engine. Along the way, they learn electrical theory, calculations and application. In a structural design class, they construct and test the strength of bridges.

Interim CTE Counselor Claudia Romo, who oversees the program, said students also learn to see themselves differently.

“We see a lot of students who, even at this age, don’t expect to attend college. But after being on a college campus, they see themselves as future college students. That’s our primary mission and we’re proud of that fact,” Romo said.

The academy culminated Friday, July 20, when the students present their projects, tour the Rio Hondo campus and receive information on college and career success.

“Our CTE Academy opens a window into the future for our area middle school students, helping them discover a world of possibilities,” Board of Trustees President Madeline Shapiro said. “It’s also a terrifically fun way to spend a summer week – taking apart engines, building radios and constructing bridges.”

PHOTOS

RHC_CTE_1-3: Middle school students from five area school districts work on small engines and practice CPR at Rio Hondo College’s CTE Career Exploration Summer Academy.

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