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Students Build Rockets, Engines and More at Career Academy *More than 130 middle schoolers get hands-on experience in STEM fields*

WHITTIER, Calif. – Before attending Rio Hondo College’s Career and Technical Education (CTE) Career Exploration Academy, Lakeside Middle School student Natalie Fernandez didn’t know much about alternative energy.

Two days into the academy, Natalie was making her own biofuel with vegetable and canola oil.

“It’s cool that we’re able to come here in the summer and learn these things,” Natalie said. “We’re turning the simplest things into something big.”

More than 80 students from the El Rancho Unified, Little Lake City, Mountain View and Valle Lindo school districts participated in this year’s weeklong CTE Academy to get hands-on knowledge of several Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) subjects. Nearly 50 more students from Little Lake and El Rancho Unified school districts will participate in the second week beginning July 14.

In the CTE Academy, students participate in two modules, each of which is contextualized with math and science. The subjects from which students choose include basic automotive maintenance, crystal radios, small engines, solid rockets, biofuels, auto body collision and basic electrical theory.

“They’re adapting very well,” said Rio Hondo College Alternative Fuels Technology Professor John Frala. “It’s challenging for them, but it’s fun. It’s a very good experience for them.”

The goal of the academy is to create curriculum that not only teaches students about technology, math and engineering, but to do it in such a way that is fun and memorable.

In addition to creating biofuel, students built and launched rockets, learned to check and change oil in a car, rebuilt engines and learned to build crystal radios, battery-free radios that run on power received from radio waves by a long-wire antenna.

(more)

“As students participate in the CTE Academy, they’re learning physics, math and chemistry while building radios and rockets,” said CTE Academy Coordinator Claudia Romo. “These are skills that they will take with them throughout their academic career, and perhaps beyond.”

Funded by State Senate Bill 70 and partnerships with the school districts, the CTE Academy is in its fourth year and has inspired hundreds of students to pursue further education in STEM fields. Little Lake City School District Assistant Superintendent Maria Soto, and Mountain View School District Assistant Superintendent Ray Andry and Director of Special Programs Roberto Lopez all visited the CTE Academy to see their students’ progress in the program.

“Rio Hondo College is not just here to serve the students enrolled, but to serve the community as well,” said Rio Hondo College Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss. “These students are receiving an education that they will always remember, and may even inspire them to pursue careers in STEM fields in the future.”

Photo Captions

CTE1: Local middle school students launch rockets they created at Rio Hondo College’s Career and Technical Education (CTE) Academy. The Academy, which is in its fourth year, gives students hands-on experience in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) subjects.

CTE2: Local middle school students create biofuel using vegetable and canola oil at Rio Hondo College’s Career and Technical Education (CTE) Academy. The Academy, which is in its fourth year, gives students hands-on experience in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) subjects.

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