

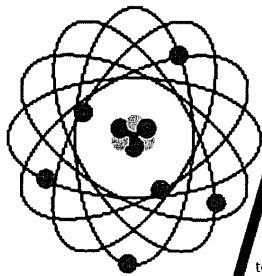
Kids go 'Mad' for science

Mad Science sparks kids' imaginations with interactive, after-school experiments

By LARRY SIGURDSON



Photos by MIKE STOTTS



Mad Science, a local company, strives to enhance Nevada's science education with professionally developed, hands-on science in after-school workshops, seminars, field trips and all-school assemblies for Clark County School District.

"Our mission is to spark the imagination and curiosity of children," said Scott Rosen, self-labeled chief mad scientist. "We do this by providing them with fun, interactive and educational activities that instill a clearer understanding of science and how it affects the world around us."

Teaching science in public schools is especially acute because in many cases, as a result of budget cuts, science as a subject has been dropped entirely from curriculums from kindergarten through high school. This is happening at a time the nation needs bright, well-educated mathematicians, scientists and engineers of all kinds more than ever before in history, just to compete in the global economy.

"Science, as a rule, is no longer being taught in 80 percent of our schools," Rosen explained. "There are some schools here and there that have excellent, well-trained science teachers and well-funded, outstanding programs. But, most do not have anything at all."

"That's where we come in," Rosen continued. "We offer a wide range of services to the schools, including in-class workshops correlated to the Nevada curriculum guidelines, after-school enrichment programs, exciting birthday parties, spectacular science assemblies and edutaining summer camps."

Last week Mad Science had its first session of the new semester at a valley elementary school for a group of kindergartners through second-graders.

"Good afternoon, my name is Rocket Rhonda," said the instructor to the 13 children assembled in the room. "Today we're going to do some work with acids and bases. Then we're going to make a rocket. Does that sound like fun?"

"Nevada is next to dead-last nationally in rankings for science literacy," Rosen said. "We are working hard to help move our students up the ladder. Our children won't be able to compete as adults if they don't have a thorough grounding in the sciences. They must at least understand the basics of biology, chemistry, electricity, physics, geology and other sciences if they are going to function in the high-technology world of the future, much less the world we live in today."

Mad Science provides education programs for more than 30 elementary and middle schools throughout Southern Nevada. "The district has determined that we provide a cost-effective way to bridge the gap between no science and a fully-funded in-house science program," Rosen said. "We are science on wheels. We bring the instructors, the certified programs, the materials, everything needed to provide an hourlong, exciting and educational experience for the appropriate grade level."

Rocket Rhonda was now showing a sign to the students with the poison symbol and the word "poison" written on it in big, bold, black letters.

"What does this sign say?" she asked as she held up the sign slowly turned toward each of the students.

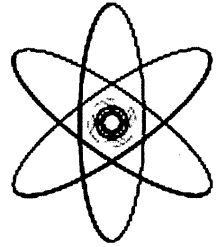
"Poison!" came the quick response from children.

"If you see this word on a box, do you eat what's inside?" Rocket Rhonda asked. "No!" the students responded loudly in unison.

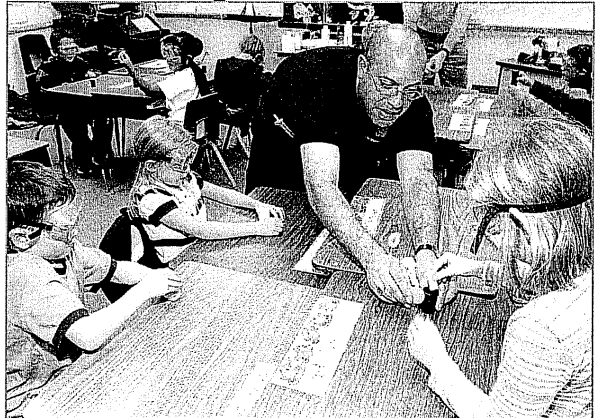
The programs offered by Mad Science meet national and state science standards, while using trained, reliable and entertaining instructors. All lessons are hands on and engaging, following a professional lesson plan, using safe equipment and materials.

Mad Science has developed more than 60 educational programs, encompassing more than 600 hands-on and engaging experiments. Parents are actively involved with the programs and must register their child or children in order for them to participate in Mad Science activities. "OK," Rocket Rhonda said as she moved on from the signs. "Now we're going to pour some vinegar into a beaker. What is vinegar? Is it an acid, or is it a base?"

"By exciting a student's imagination at an early age," Rosen concluded, "there is a good chance that they will develop a sense of curiosity and natural appreciation for science and what it can show them. With that foundation, we can then expect that they continue to pursue science as an interest throughout the rest of their lives."

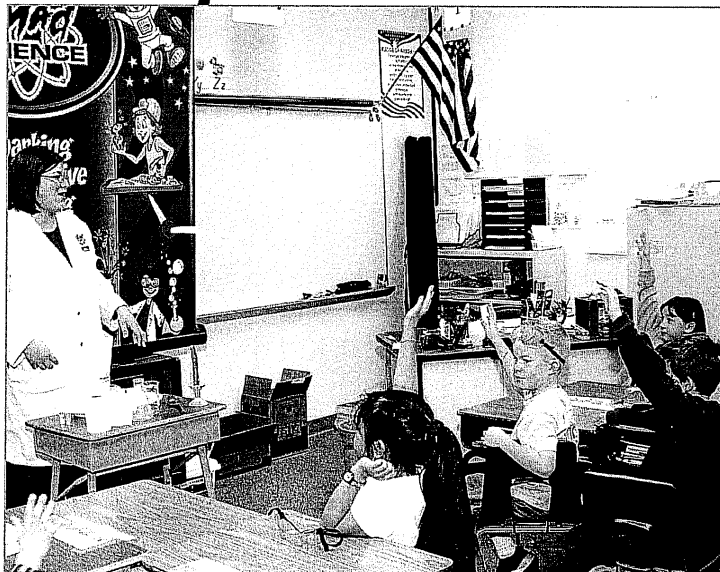


Students at Louis Weiner Elementary School learn to make rockets during their first-ever chemical workshop with Mad Science instructor Rocket Rhonda, pictured above and below with a group of kindergartners through second-grade students. At left, Sarah Peterson, a kindergartner, pays close attention to a lesson on acids and bases.



Mad Science can be reached at 257-6231 or www.madscience.org.

Larry Sigurdson is a Panorama correspondent.



MAD SCIENCE SITES

- Selma Bartlett Elementary
 - Hillcrest Academy
 - Frank Lamping Elementary
 - Estes McDonnell Elementary
 - Merrill Hill Elementary School and Preschool
 - Neil C. Twitchell Elementary
 - John C. Vanderburg Elementary
 - J. Marian Walker International
 - Foothills Montessori
 - Silver Springs Recreation Center
 - Black Mountain Recreation Center
 - Whitney Ranch Recreation Center
- Also, Mad Science will soon host week-long summer camps in Southern Nevada themed "Claws, Codes and Constellations" and "Chemicals, Cells and Crime." Call 257-MAD1.

SCIENCE CAMP

Applications are now available for 2004 National Youth Science Camp, to take place in the mountains of eastern West Virginia, June 24 through July 19. The four-week program includes lectures and hands-on research projects presented by scientists from across the country. Delegates must demonstrate academic achievement in science and the potential for thoughtful scientific leadership, according to the Nevada Education Department. For details, call (775) 687-9195.