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Science camp hopes to help fill in gaps

270 students, 200 volunteers come to Orange for Summer Science Camp.

By **COURTNEY BACALSO**

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ORANGE – Victoria Gomez, 6, sits at her desk. She observes a coffee filter's reaction to water.

Her science instructor explains to the kindergarten students how to "not eat your science projects."

In other rooms at McPherson Magnet School, students are learning to fly a space shuttle or solder electronic parts; they are studying the workings of the human body and how to program remote-control cars.

More than 270 students will complete the Science Summer Camp Saturday at McPherson.

Hosted by the nonprofit TEAM Science, the six-day camp aims to make more students interested in math and science at an early age, with hands-on learning.

"We started inviting children in the fifth grade and up," Mungaray said. "But we soon realized that it was too late. So we decided to offer classes to children as young as 4. Math and science is one of those things that you have to start immediately, or it will get more difficult for them to progress."

The professionals involved get a rush out of teaching.

For one thing, they can help the future. In 10 years, half of the workers in many technical industries will be eligible for retirement.

Lee Schwartz, 91, is a former electronics instructor who retired several years ago.

"I saw it as an opportunity to teach more people about our industry," he said. "Some people are under the impression that we don't need this anymore, but we do."

Schwartz and former Cerritos College director Ken Hanson taught middle school children how to make a flashlight.

Their tools – an empty toilet-paper roll, a battery, wire, electrical tape, a light bulb and aluminum foil.

"Hands-on science was unheard of 16 years ago in the community-college level," program director Marie Mungaray said.

A group of 10 people – comprised of Boeing and Northrop engineers, teachers and other professionals – spent time looking through materials being used in classrooms today.

"Since there are not that many teachers with extensive science backgrounds, we hope to provide supplemental material to help them, especially if they don't feel comfortable teaching science," Mungaray said.

TEAM Science hopes to help address the lack of teachers who are proficient in math, science and technology in the K-12 levels.

"In some cases, the students' only exposure to science are the articles used for their reading," said Northrop Grumman engineer Kathryn Petrum. "We hope the work we do here can help fix that."

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