

UCF Newsroom

LASERS AND LIGHTS SPARK GIRLS' INTEREST IN SCIENCE

By Erika Finnimore

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Twelve teenage girls held out their hands and watched as beads of liquid nitrogen rolled down their palms, evaporating before even hitting the ground. Lane Martin, a University of Central Florida graduate research assistant, demonstrated the uses of liquid nitrogen during UCF's Science Olympiad Adventure Camp.

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407-823-5007

"I love science because I love being able to see things in a different light," said Taylor Craven, as the beads vanished. "Here, we are learning what we can do in the future."

Craven was among the attendees of a weeklong camp offered by UCF's College of Optics and Photonics. Several hands-on activities and demonstrations led by UCF graduate students were designed to spark the girls' interest in science and math.

"Anything we can do to build positive attitudes and a positive association with science is great for anyone, but particularly we're looking to get more females interested in careers in science and math," said camp instructor Jamie Vander Wiede, a graduate student at UCF's College of Education.

While at UCF, the students enjoyed a tour of campus and learned about lasers and lights.

They engaged in hands-on scientific activities that included designing and building bottle rockets using Alka-Seltzer and water; creating towers and bridges out of wood and glue; and building water filtration systems using sand, rocks and baking soda.

They also conducted simple lab experiments and participated in problem solving activities.

Many of the camp participants are incoming freshmen at Lyman High School in Longwood. The high school provided the girls with the opportunity to attend the camp for free, thanks to a grant that supports initiatives to encourage female students to pursue careers in math and science. The school also is home to a magnet program called The Institute for Engineering, which emphasizes math and science education and prepares students to study engineering in college.

The week's activities will conclude today with a Mini Science Olympiad, where the future female

scientists and engineers will put what they've been learning to the test.

The competition is inspired by the annual Science Olympiad, a national tournament where elementary, middle and high school students compete in a blend of engineering, problem solving and science and technology events. UCF will host the Science Olympiad in May 2012.

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