

Ballard Nature Center's Family Science Night Made A Real Splash

Saturday, February 12, 2011 as temperatures reached above freezing and the snow and ice began melting, water was flowing both outside and inside at Ballard Nature Center. The title "Water, Water Everywhere," was truly a fitting name for this year's Family Science Night at the center. Adults and children alike watched with much anticipation as Brian Poelker, an Eastern Illinois University professor, poured water into a cup which was attached to a string and suspended from the ceiling directly above a participant's head. Poelker had asked for a volunteer from the audience and had slipped a precautionary raincoat, made of a trash sack, on the little girl as he was mentioning that usually the demonstration works and no one gets wet. Then Poelker placed a plastic disk on the cup and inverted it and let it swing. Remarkably the water stayed in the inverted cup and the little girl stayed dry; but not for long because soon the kids were all playing with water and discovering the amazing nature of water.



Youth at the "Bubbles Station" during the 2011 Family Science Night called "Water, Water Everywhere."

At the "Speedy Water" learning station, children moved a drop of water as quickly as possible across a waxed racetrack using only a craft stick, an activity designed to reveal water's cohesive property. While having fun making barges of aluminum foil to hold loads of pennies, children investigated density and displacement. Kids blew bubbles, peered through microscopes at aquatic creatures, tested whether objects would float or sink, and while blindfolded took a taste test of drinking water from groundwater or surface water sources.

Professor Poelker is an avid supporter of Ballard Nature Center and has been offering this family-oriented educational program to the community every February for five years. Assisting him this year as in the past were several of his students who acted as guides while the children experimented. These students, who are enrolled in Dr. Poelker's Early Childhood, Elementary, and Middle Level Education classes, revealed much skill while working with the children and exhibited a wonderful enthusiasm for teaching.

One participant who had traveled nearly 50 miles with her husband and three little boys to attend the event commented, "It was well worth the drive here," and later posted on Facebook, "We had so much fun!"

By Patty Gillespie (February 2011)