

Fun while learning

880 students from 18 different SW MN schools attend Science and Nature Day at SMSU

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Photo by Samantha Davis Augustine Walter, left, Greysyn Honken, center, and Stella Harmsen participate in a bubbles demonstration Tuesday at the SWWC Science and Nature Conference at Southwest Minnesota State University.

MARSHALL — Hundreds of students from across southwest Minnesota stepped out of the classroom to meet at Southwest Minnesota State University for the 31st annual Science and Nature Conference Tuesday morning, hosted by the Southwest West Central Service Cooperative.

Kindergarten through eighth grade students from 18 different school districts participated in this year's event, with a total of 880 students and chaperones.

"We're going to have a lot of fun, and we're going to learn a lot," keynote speaker Dr. Tyrone Carter said. "We all have creativity inside of us."

Students eagerly filled the bleachers of the R/A Facility at SMSU, engaging in conversation with one another sectioned off by their schools.

Prior to splitting off for the day in a handful of educational science sessions, Carter gave a variety of interactive demonstrations to get the students excited for what the day was about to bring.

Carter is the director of marketing and curriculum design for America's Fun Science, an organization that provides hands-on science and engineering activities to schools, nonprofits, and community educational events across the Twin Cities and greater.

"This is at least our second year here at Southwest State, and I'll tell you a secret. My son went to Southwest State, and he was also a wide receiver (for the football team)," Carter said. "I've been coming to Southwest State for some years now, and I'm happy to be here."

With the students promptly offering to volunteer in Carter's activities, he picked several kids out of the crowd to join him up front.

"We all have greatness inside," Carter said. "If we work hard and we study, that greatness comes out, and then our dreams come true."

One of the demonstrations that earned a lot of the student's amusement was showcasing the theory of lift. Carter had a student hold a hair dryer vertically, which allowed a small plastic ball to float in the air right above.

"This is a true story that happened here when I was a kid. ... I did not fly on a plane until I was 21," Carter said. "When I flew on that plane I was so afraid ... Next thing you know, that plane had landed and I was so happy."

"This is when I found out whenever you have something that's curved, like this (ball) ... The air underneath will push it up," Carter added. "That's the same way an airplane wing works, because it's curved on the top and flat on the bottom, like a teardrop. That's the theory of lift. That is called Bernoulli's law."

Another demonstration that peaked a lot of laughter was when Carter poured frozen carbon dioxide over a group of students, which was mixed with soda.

"I got some frozen carbon dioxide, and it's about 109 degrees below zero ... This is the same gas they use for soda pop, so it's very safe," Carter said. "It's heavier than air, so you can actually pour it."

To send the students off to their sessions in fun style, about 25 students volunteered for Carter to pour bubbles that disappeared into their hands upon clapping, which was mixed with the frozen carbon dioxide and Dawn's dish soap.

SWWC brought in several presenters to host the 27 different group learning sessions, which covered a variety of lessons.

Some activities included greenhouse and gardens, forensic sciences, balloon rockets, MnDOT presentations, biology, planets, cheesemaking and more.

SWWC continues to host student enrichment conferences throughout the year to help students possibly find out what their interests are and work with fellow and new peers.

“Today, you will take a journey into the world of science, so embrace your spirit and curiosity, the joy of discovery and the power of knowledge,” said Matt Coleman, chair for the SWWC. “Ask questions, challenge yourself and never stop exploring your interests.”