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Maker Faire Inspires and Excites Wagner Ranch Students

By Sonya Grover and Sharon Murphy



Dr. Andrew Anagnost, right, with daughter Eloise on the far left, her little sister, Giselle, and Amelia Chen watch a car powered with rubber bands race away from them. Dr. Anagnost, Autodesk's senior VP of industry strategy and marketing, is one of the parents on Wagner Ranch's technology committee. Photo provided

exciting."

Held the same week as Earth Day, Autodesk's Wagner Ranch Maker Faire launched a futuristic theme, "2030 Challenge: Sea, Space, and Land." Challenging students to think about emerging trends and the future state of the world, this Maker Faire posed questions such as "How will sea life adapt to a changing environment?" and "What housing, food, and transportation might be needed to live on Mars in 2030?" Autodesk's goal was to introduce students not only to complex questions about the earth's future, but also to inspire interest in design and digital fabrication processes and innovation.

At various stations in the school's gym, students made sea creatures with 123D Sculpt+, created space colonies in TinkerCAD (a 3D design tool) to export into Minecraft, assembled all-terrain Mars rovers using cardboard and rubber bands, designed art with Sketchbook Express to create iron-on decals for reusable tote bags, crafted solar jars using light-sensitive solar cells and Mason jars, built rockets for the ever-popular stomp rocket design challenge, and much more.

"My favorite thing was seeing the 3D printers working," said Thomas Nelson, a fourth grader. "The melting plastic was awesome. We even got to see how to fix a 3D printer by changing what the computer says to it." Abby Ruppert, another fourth grader, was intrigued with rocket design. "The rockets were cool. You have to seal up every hole so the air doesn't get in. We launched them. We stomped on the bottles and the rockets went up!"

Thomas Nelson was inspired by his experience. "I learned how to make a model submarine on a 3D printer. I want to be an engineer and design stuff to build. Hopefully, I'll get to use a 3D printer." Abby Ruppert too took away the main lesson of the day noting, "It was cool figuring out how people make things. I want to try it!"

This local Maker Faire grew out of discussions held by the school's Technology Committee.

Besides the occasional whoosh of stomp rockets and the accompanying outbursts of delight, little broke the quiet concentration of 150 students intent on creating, crafting, building, and, yes, learning at an Autodesk-sponsored Maker Faire held at Wagner Ranch Elementary School in Orinda.

Originally founded in the Bay Area by Make magazine and now held all over the world, Maker Faires celebrate technology and engineering, as well as arts, crafts, hobbies, and really any kind of do-it-yourself project. They bring together tech enthusiasts, crafters, teachers, artists, engineers and families to explore and play. The Wagner Ranch fourth and fifth graders were thrilled with their experience.

Echoing the kids' enthusiasm, Wagner Ranch's principal, Adam Seville, commented, "This is what the future of education can look like. The maker movement is a growing and exciting trend in education. It's an opportunity to connect some of our most fundamental human traits - the inspiration to build, create and make - with some of our most current and growing technologies. To see students so authentically engaged in the process of creating, designing and experimenting is very

Consisting of four parents, two teachers, the principal and the Parents' Club co-presidents, the committee formed last year to assist in crafting a technology strategy for the school and district. Their strategy includes the purchase and maintenance of various devices (iPads and laptops), as well as brainstorming ways to promote and integrate STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math) learning in the classroom and beyond, such as planning parent education nights and founding after-school coding clubs. All Orinda elementary school technology purchases are funded by the various Parents' Clubs. The state and district provide no funds to purchase computers, tablets, and other devices.

Over 20 Autodesk employees assisted with this event and many parent volunteers were also on hand to help with the projects. Orinda United School District's superintendent, Dr. Joe Jaconette, also took part in the event, as well as OUSD's technology coach, Patsy Templeton, and technology director, Raymond Mar.

John Skidgel, head of Wagner Ranch's Technology Committee, commented, "Several years from now when some of these kids embark on careers in design and engineering, they'll have this event to remember as an eye opener. It's our hope that events such as this will inspire our kids to start tomorrow's Apple, Tesla or Google."

If you'd like to experience a similar event but on a much larger scale, you can attend the 10th Annual Bay Area Maker Faire - the "Greatest Show (and Tell) on Earth" - May 16 and 17 at the San Mateo County Event Center. Tickets for entry are required.

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