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Mauldin students design the future

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By Lorando D. Lockhart  
STAFF WRITER  
[llockhart@greenvillenews.com](mailto:llockhart@greenvillenews.com)

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MAULDIN -- A class of Mauldin Elementary students are using plastic pipes, balloons and push-up cylinders to demonstrate how tomorrow's engineers and scientists can use today's technology to shape the future.

At the same time, students are learning that science can be fun.

Kaiser Wilkes, 10, said he and fellow students Cameron Fritz and Georgia Marion created a model that could one day lead the students down a career path of science or engineering.

"I was interested in science a little bit before we began this project," Wilkes said.

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The 26 students showcased model cars for a group that included U.S. Rep. Bob Inglis (R-SC) and Arden Bement, who is head of National Science Foundation.

The demonstration was part of the foundation's and the Society of Automotive Engineers' "A World in Motion" program, which is designed to help bring K-12 students up to speed in the areas of math, science and engineering.

Science teacher Cathy Hale said the students worked 13 weeks to come up with their models and even endured a few cram sessions in order to get the models ready for Thursday's presentation.

"Each week builds upon the next, so that they are starting with a very basic toy and they're testing to make sure the wheels and balloons work," Hale said. "As they added more details to the toy, it required more testing."

Hale said the program takes students through the scientific process in order to understand how things work.

Matt Miller, an SAE program developer, said one component of the program is volunteerism.

Engineers from area companies spend time with the students to help mentor and encourage their growth in the sciences.

"The partnership between industry and education is something that we're very proud of," Miller said. "It's one of the keystones of this program. The program can be taught without volunteers, but it's much more valuable when you have a professional come in."

The program was established about 15 years ago and more than 2 million students have participated in the

program," Miller said.

Miller also said SAE began monitoring the students two years ago to learn how many students remain interested in science long enough to become professionals.

Greenville County schools began using the free program, which is funded by SAE International, in January and Union County schools implemented the program at the beginning of the 2005-06 school year in various grades.

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