

High School Teachers Present “Mad About Science” to Parkway Students

A student going for a ride on a saucer powered by a leaf blower, a pendulum stopping just centimeters shy of a teacher’s forehead and laying on a bed of nails.

Slightly out of the ordinary, but just another day at the office for Whitesboro High School Science Teachers Mr. Buzz Putnam and Mr. John Bertrand.

Together, they put on a thrilling educational show called, “Mad About Science.”

Designed to get younger students interested in and excited about science before moving up to middle school and high school, the show was presented by Putnam and Bertrand to Parkway’s sixth graders in the school gym on December 23.

“We see it all the time, many students hit the 9th and 10th grade and aren’t excited to study and learn about science,” noted Putnam. “We are trying to do a little science and entertain at the same time.”

Did they ever.

The show, which is adaptable for all levels, featured Mr. Bertrand as Sir Isaac Newton, who’s widely recognized as one of the most influential scientists of all time. Not only did Bertrand play the part, he looked like it, too.

“Once you tell me we are going to do something like this, I always have to take it up a notch,” said Bertrand, who wore a long, dark brown wig to look like Newton.

Mr. Putnam, who in his multi-colored lab coat was more of a host, started the show by reenacting Newton’s discovery of gravity. Putnam and Bertrand - - playing the part of Newton - - then explained Newton’s first, second and third laws of motion. A series of experiments and demonstrations, coupled with music, not only added to the lessons, but kept the students zoned in and on their feet, while cheering and playing along.

“We enjoy doing it... it’s fun interacting with the kids,” said Putnam. “John is nice enough to be the persona, allowing me to play my role.”

As explained by Putnam and Bertrand, Newton’s First Law of Motion states every object in a state of uniform motion tends to remain in that state of motion unless an external force is applied to it.

Newton’s Second Law of Motion states the relationship between an object’s mass (m), its acceleration (a) and the applied force (F) is $F = ma$. Acceleration and force are vectors; in this law the direction of the force vector is the same as the direction of the acceleration vector.

Newton's Third Law of Motion states for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.

All great information for the students to absorb.

"The sixth graders are studying Newton's laws this year, so our show is a great precursor," said Putnam, who, with Bertrand, put on the show for the first time ever in Whitesboro.

"If you want Newton, we will give you Newton. Same goes for Einstein and Galileo," added Bertrand. "Our show can truly be designed for any grade level."

Each show, Putnam and Bertrand try to save the best for last. Typically, each ends with Putnam laying on a bed of nails with a cinder block on top of his chest and Bertrand, or "Newton," smashing the block with a sledge hammer. The act has the students nervous at first, but wildly cheering at the end.

"We are trying to clear up misconceptions by giving students a good taste of science right off the bat," said Bertrand. "Science is fun!"

Both Putnam and Bertrand say they are constantly tweaking their show, "Mad About Science," which was presented once before at Sauquoit Elementary School, so their audience can take even more away from it.

And although they don't have any plans to take the show to the road, both say "never say never."