Telling our stories

STEMapalooza makes exciting new connections

(Oct. 27, 2008) Kindergartener, policymaker, teacher or business executive—no matter what age or occupation—there was something for everyone at STEMapalooza. More than 6,000 participants, including 2,500 students from elementary school to college level, attended the convention Oct. 24-25 at Denver’s Colorado Convention Center.

The event supported connections across science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) and aimed to excite Colorado’s students about careers in these fields—which all too often go to workers from out of state, says Carole Basil, professor of education, past director of the Center for Applied Science and Math for Innovation and Competitiveness (CASMIC) and STEMapalooza organizer.

Friday’s events included a luncheon with guest speakers Tom Cech, CU Boulder Nobel Laureate and Colorado Governor Bill Ritter. Metro Denver WIRED hosted discussions showcasing partnerships between education and industry and developing recommendations for tackling the misconceptions that discourage many from pursuing careers in STEM fields.

Over the course of the two days, STEMapalooza featured more than 100 exhibitors from higher education, K-12, informal education organizations, workforce development, economic development and large and small business and industry. Exhibit highlights included an inflatable SkyLab planetarium that welcomed more than 2,400 visitors. First Robotics where children learned to operate kid-size robots, National Renewable Energy Laboratory’s trailer of information and activities and hundreds of other math and science activities for kids. The creative arts community also proved a strong presence, illustrating how the creative arts are fully integrated with math and science.

Students and teachers alike were thrilled with the hands-on activities. “I heard some of my students on the bus saying, ‘that was the best field trip ever!’” says Kay Walters, middle and high school science teacher. “I look forward to getting the information next year and doing it all over again.”

The event was in conjunction with the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices that recognized CASMIC as one of five regional compacts connected to the Colorado STEM Network.

“We hope for sustainability and institutionalization of work related to STEM,” says Basil. “Because of our location, size and STEM focus, we have the opportunity to be at the forefront of this work and be a driving force.”

Top photo: Colorado Governor Bill Ritter is surrounded by children during the taping of a public service message supporting STEM education.

Bottom photo: Angela Harris (left), GK-12 Math Dept. fellow, and faculty partner Associate Professor Diana White teach students math puzzles at the STEMapalooza event.