

Inspiring the next Einstein

CONFERENCE: Dozens of science exhibits get the attention of about 3,500 Inland students.

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By **ROBERT P. MAYER**
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Espie Dillard, 11, marveled along with her classmates at the seemingly endless rows of switches and flashing lights inside the 12-foot model of the space shuttle.

"It was very interesting learning how to use those things," the sixth-grader at California School for the Deaf, Riverside, said Thursday through an interpreter. "People actually use computers inside the rocket to communicate with people on Earth."

It was the live insects on display from the UC Riverside entomology department, however, that really caught her attention.

Organizers of the seventh annual Science and Technology Education Partnership at Riverside Convention Center hope such exposure to the dozens of science exhibits at the two-day conference will inspire many of the 3,500 Inland-area elementary students who attended to pursue a career in science.

"The future of this country is really in science, technology, (and) this is a way to get young people involved," said Rep. Ken Calvert, R-Corona, co-founder of the event.

The conference is geared to help reverse what many see as a growing deficit of scientists in the United States, as well as to meet the growing demand for a workforce with math and science skills.

"We don't have enough folks to do the hard things that make this country keep its technological lead," Calvert said.

Gary Velligan of the Traveling Space Museum made sure the students' experience of the simulated space shuttle was educational. Rather than have students whiz through the exhibit, quickly pressing buttons and moving on, he continually asked the students questions about the features of the space shuttle rather than simply point them out.

Why do the astronauts need exercise bars attached to the walls? To ward off the atrophying effects of a no-gravity environment.

Why do astronauts need to grow plants in the mini-greenhouse? To absorb carbon dioxide and emit oxygen.

"You make them think all the way through," Velligan said.

Fourth-grader Jackie Camuy learned about the use of microscopes and the habitats of animals in the "Splash Mobile," a self-contained mobile laboratory sponsored by Western and Eastern municipal water districts

"It was like I was actually in the forest looking for the habitat," said the student of Prado View Elementary in Corona. "It was fun and very educational."

Just how many students will become future scientists because of the conference is difficult to measure, Calvert said.

"But, if we can find one Einstein, that's worth a lot. And he may be right here in Riverside."

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Harada Elementary School Students learn about the sources of water pollution Thursday during the Science and Technology Education Partnership Conference at the Riverside Convention Center.