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The science of fun: 'Professor Steve' encourages experiments at home

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NEW ALBANY — Right before blastoff, Professor Steve set up the launch pad and got his rocket ready for fueling.

After the countdown, the engines pushed the spacecraft into the air, using only Alka-Seltzer and water.

Professor Steve showed children at the New Albany-Floyd County Public Library experiments involving flight and space travel Wednesday. But Steve Walden, the performer behind Professor Steve, said experiments aren't just for watching. He said children should perform them, as well.

Walden said though science toys can cost quite a bit, experiments don't have to cost anything and are a fun way for parents to encourage children to enjoy science.

"Every kid needs to put baking soda and vinegar together to make their own volcano," Walden said. "And get fancy with it. Get your Play-Doh, make a mountain and get some little natives dancing around it."

Finding science experiments for children can be as easy as looking in kitchen cabinets or finding out how children's toys work, he said. Simple experiments like getting a spoon to stick to your nose teaches how condensation works and how friction keeps the spoon from falling off, he added.

But he also said getting parents involved engages children.

"If you show an interest, your child or grandchild is going to think it's cool and they're going to want to learn with you," Walden said.

Jen Middleton, a Floyds Knobs resident, brought her children with her to see the show. She said they've performed simple experiments at home like making their own bouncy balls.



"Professor Steve" Walden puts a marshmallow man in a vacuum chamber to show how a lack of air pressure can affect objects. Walden said parents and children can perform simple, inexpensive science experiments at home. **Staff photo by Jerod Clapp**

“I think it’s important to get them interested in science to foster their learning and get them interested in discovering those things,” Middleton said.

But Walden said he understands coming up with ideas for experiments isn’t necessarily easy. He said resources on the Internet can help.

Abby Johnson, the Children’s Department manager at the library, said there are many resources for parents in the children’s library. She said there are several books geared toward science experiments they can perform on their own and teach children about the properties that make them work.

“We always tell parents they’re their child’s first teacher,” Johnson said. “They’re teaching them from the time they’re born.”

Walden said he hopes children not only get their hands on some science experiments at home, but that they cultivate an interest in the field as well.

Johnson said the more children can learn about science or anything else, the better.

“I think it’s great to instill that curiosity in their kids and to always ask questions about their world,” Johnson said.