In Our Schools: Camps gives STEM education an infusion of the arts

Written by Sara Tracey
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BINGHAMTON — A big buzz word in education today is STEM: a blend of science, technology, engineering and math courses. A local summer academy wants to emphasize those courses, but with a twist: integrating the arts.

Monday marked the first day of the new STEAM Summer Academy, a new four-week summer program for rising freshmen and sophomores from the Chenango Forks, Chenango Valley and Whitney Point school districts. The camp aligns itself with BOCES’ newly established STEM Hub of the Eastern Southern Tier. Representatives from institutions such as Lockheed Martin and Binghamton University will also be on hand to aid the students.

Even Monday’s get-to-know-you sessions were heavy in problem-solving curriculum. While teachers introduced themselves, they posed word problems and asked students to sketch out their logic. Pairs of peers designed and engineered the tallest free-standing newspaper structure they could muster.

During the course of the classes, students will build their own robots and determine what forces made Leonardo DaVinci’s helicopter fly.

Ron Crawford, senior manager for technical leadership development at Lockheed Martin in Owego, said mixing arts with STEM programs is a natural fit. Using creative thinking to develop the next biggest thing in technology will be a valuable skill when these students eventually court businesses for jobs, he said.

“We want to integrate these thoughts because, in context, it’s not a reach to think that way,” he said.

David Gill, superintendent of the Chenango Valley Central School District, said the summer camp is an example of how businesses and schools can collaborate, even when class isn’t in session.

“We have a variety of students interested in these topics, and getting more and more businesses involved could add to the sustainability of programs like this,” he said.

Megan Mihalko has learned a lot about technology from her dad, a software engineer for Lockheed. Now the 14-year-old rising freshman at Whitney Point wants to learn how she can add to her STEM skills.

“I get to see what I’m good at and what I know, and see if I can make it better,” she said.

Her partner in the newspaper tower challenge was 15-year-old Kara Hess-Hover, who will be a Chenango Forks high school sophomore. She said she draws and sketches her own designs,
but said she wants to possibly expand that into tech fields.

"I want to see if this is something I want to do later in life," she said.