



Friscostyle school kids are enraptured by the Big Canyon Balloon

photo by Chris Fritchie

New Lessons in Learning

By Lynda Haschke

TERRI MONK and Laurie Henry quit teaching so they could... teach. Ms. Monk, a 20-year veteran educator and Ms. Henry, a former Teacher of the Year in the McKinney Independent School District, are science teachers who left their regular teaching jobs last year to form Trinity Science Solutions, a company whose main "product" is Big Canyon Balloon, an interactive inflatable "canyon."

New businesses and non-profit organizations have sprung up in recent years, offering interesting ways to take children beyond the classroom and teach them everything from the latest technology to some of the oldest stories the earth has to tell.

"It's not possible to pack these kids up and take them to the Grand Canyon," says Ms. Monk. "We saw a need to give kids a visual experience that would ignite their passion for science through a unique learning experience."

In Ms. Monk and Ms. Henry's case, they decided to design a huge – 40' wide x 15' tall x 15' deep, inflatable-canyon landscape that sits on a 30'x 40' tarp representing land and ocean. The purpose is to teach children from kindergarten to eighth grade how the earth changes over time. The canyon is constructed with connecting inflatable pieces that combine to create one large landform. A blue, translucent, fabric river cascades across the "land" and "ocean." Artwork depicts striated sedimentary layers on the canyon walls. Inside the large section of the canyon are fossils and an oil deposit airbrushed onto the layers of sediment.

Students learn about the world of canyon and delta formation through the innovative cold-air inflatable experience. Like time-lapse photography, the audience watches a deep canyon erode before their eyes. As the river section deflates, fabric-born sediments extend

under the river and out to the ocean, forming a delta.

The students then search inside the canyon wall to find a fossil record and an oil deposit to examine. They learn about the earth's finite supply of natural resources and ways to conserve them. For older grades, Ms. Monk and Ms. Henry discuss the differences between the earth and the moon. This creative, interactive approach to the difficult concept of erosion and deposition gives students a virtual experience, making an abstract concept "real."

"The best part of this experience is the kids' reactions," says Ms. Monk. "When they first see it, they think it's a bounce house or slide. When they find out it's not, their faces fall at first. But then they lose themselves in the experience and love it."

Teachers are also big fans. "We tell them to just consider this your science class for the day," Ms. Monk explains.



*Polly Tadlock at the school
named in her honor
photo by Chris Fritchie*

What's in a Name? A Lot!

YEARS AGO, Frisco's school board decided to honor the men and women who've enhanced the quality of the city's public schools. Today there are dozens of schools across Frisco named in honor or in memory of those who have had a positive impact on our schools. A recent honoree, Polly Tadlock, was recognized for her many years of service as a Frisco school

teacher. Still very active in the community as a Realtor, Mrs. Tadlock is proud to have her name associated with education in Frisco for years to come.

The Frisco School Board recently announced the names chosen for several new schools opening in 2010:

LIBBY MAUS MIDDLE SCHOOL

Eldorado & Coit - Libby Maus ended 12 years of outstanding volunteer service on the Fisd Board in 2002. As an educator, she taught homebound students. She was named Citizen of the Year by the Frisco Chamber of Commerce.

ROBERT COBB MIDDLE SCHOOL

Main & Teel - Robert Cobb served as a school board member for 10 years, from 1955-1964, and was vice president of the board for two years. A farmer and land-owner of large tracts west of town, Mr. Cobb's family is also included in the honor because of their involvement as volunteers and educators in Frisco schools over the years.

LAMAR AND NORMA HUNT MIDDLE SCHOOL

Preston & Lebanon - Lamar Hunt is known worldwide for his pioneering influences in professional football, soccer and tennis. The Hunt family worked closely with the City of Frisco and Frisco ISD to bring Pizza Hut Park to town. Their efforts put Frisco on the map.

GERALD SONNTAG ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Westridge Blvd. - Gerald Sonntag was a member of a pioneering Collin County family. During World War II, Mr. Sonntag volunteered to coach the high school football team and took it to a Bi-District Championship.

GEORGE AND DEBRA PUREFOY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Teel & Eldorado - Mrs. Purefoy is an educator with 21 years of service to the Fisd. Frisco City Manager George Purefoy has worked for the city and our youth since 1987. His efforts on behalf of Frisco ISD have saved taxpayer dollars and still provide great opportunities for Frisco's young people.

In addition, grade-specific lesson plans and games are posted on the company's website, to help teachers carry the lessons forward.

"We've created TAKS-aligned lessons that are easily accessible on the website," says Ms. Monk. "Teachers love this!"

BENDING KIDS' MINDS

Last summer, the Frisco Independent School District and Leadership Frisco teamed up to create The Mindbender Academy, a week-long summer camp for upcoming 6th and 7th graders. The camp provides a hands-on approach to teaching science and technology.

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The Mindbender Academy is a summer camp that was created to address the shortage of young people pursuing scientific fields of study. Students attend a week-long program from 8:30 a.m. until noon, with a different project each day. The projects include building a model race car, a working hovercraft and a robot, developing their own Internet social network and learning about computer animation. Corporate sponsors Raytheon, Sanyo, Cisco, AmeriSource Bergen, Janimation and FarStar provide hands-on instruction during the week. Funding sponsors include the Frisco Education Foundation (see sidebar), NorthDallas Bank, EDS Credit Union and Strasburger.

Mindbender Academy costs \$100 per child which goes toward paying for materials used during the Academy. Application forms can be obtained from Fisd science and math teachers. For more information visit www.mindbenderacademy.com.

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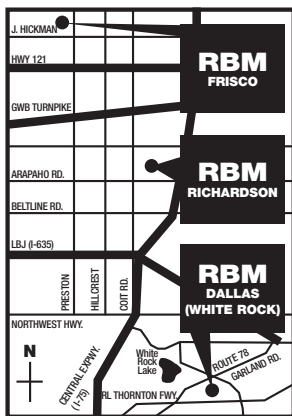
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Ten Years & Counting

THE FRISCO EDUCATION FOUNDATION has facilitated more than a quarter of a million dollars in scholarship funds for Frisco Independent School District graduates over the last ten years. In 1999, when Dr. Rick Reedy and the school board decided to appoint a board of directors for a foundation, the district had only one high school. No one really knew if the community would support a foundation for a district that only a short time before produced graduating classes of fewer than 100 students.

"It was the dream of the board at that time to offer deserving students, no matter what their economic situation, tangible evidence the community supports and encourages them to continue their education once they leave high school," Dr. Reedy said. "To date, more than 900 scholarships have been presented to Frisco students. And in these hard economic times, even more students and parents will be looking to the Foundation for help." Scholarships are limited to students who attend classes in the Frisco Independent School District.

The Frisco Education Foundation will be giving scholarships again in May – this time to students from four high schools. Director Allison Miller and the Foundation board members are working to ensure as many students in the FISD as possible receive scholarships. Visit: <http://www.friscoisd.org/community/FEF/index.htm> for information.



Students at Mindbender Academy put their heads together on a camp project

photo by Chris Fritchie

FROM MINDBENDING TO MIND STRETCHING

Mind Stretching Fun®. This is what Sci-Tech Discovery Center delivers to children across Collin County. This fun will be delivered in a very small package to Frisco residents during NanoDays 2009, a week long celebration of nanoscale science, technology and engineering held March 28-April 5. Nanotechnology is the engineering of functional systems at the molecular scale 100 nanometers or smaller.

Frisco teens will have the opportunity to join a free, hands-on learning session that will help to demystify this world that is too small to see, as well as demonstrate everyday applications of this revolutionary science.

From 2 p.m. -3:30 p.m. in the Teen Room of the Frisco Public Library, Dr. Elisabeth Marley from SMU's Lyle School of Engineering, will deliver a brief presentation titled "From Muscles to Lipstick: Seeing What is Too Small to See" and will assist participants in building their own carbon nanotubes. Teens will then have an opportunity for additional interactive experiences exploring structures, properties, materials and forces.

"The mission of Sci-Tech Discovery Center is to provide these dynamic

learning experiences that inspire people of all ages and backgrounds to embrace discovery through the exploration of science, math and technology," says Erica Yaeger, Sci-Tech's Executive Director. "This event is a unique way in which we can partner with a local municipality to provide the outreach programming of a national initiative."

According to the Nanoscale Informal Science Education Network (NISE), the sponsor of NanoDays 2009, advances in nanoscale science, engineering and technology are revolutionizing medicine, computing, materials science, energy production and manufacturing. Yet to the general public these advances remain largely invisible and difficult to understand. Through NanoDays 2009, NISE and Sci-Tech Discovery Center hope to capture the imagination of a new generation who may choose careers in nanoscale science and engineering.

Sci-Tech Discovery Center, Inc. was established as a 501(c)(3) non-profit, educational organization in 2004 in response to community demand for a cultural and educational destination in Collin County.

Lynda Haschke is a freelance writer who lives with her family in Little Elm.