Takes part in history research project

LAWRENCE — Erin Wold of Denison was among 54 University of Kansas students who chronicled an often overlooked portion of Kansas history.

As part of the History of the Peoples of Kansas course, the students researched the exodus of African Americans to Kansas in 1879. For the research project, each student selected a Kansas newspaper from that time period and wrote about what those publications reported about the exodus.

At the time of the exodus, Kansas was known for being progressive and tolerant, but the students found articles that seemed to suggest otherwise. Students reported finding articles with statements that indicated that white settlers did not want the African Americans in Kansas.

The class instructor, doctoral students David Peavler, said that he assigned the project current history books contain little about the exodus, in which 10,000 to 20,000 African Americans left the south after the Civil War to settle in Kansas. And what is available does not necessarily tell the whole truth.

The 54 research papers will be printed and bound together for distribution to local libraries and the state historical society.

Wold, a senior in history, is the daughter Vickie Wold.
Officials seek support for effort to remake the local economy around the life sciences.

By JASON GERTZEN
The Kansas City Star

University of Kansas officials asked for help Tuesday with an aggressive $800 million research expansion proposal intended to raise the state’s stature as a national bioscience hub.

Speaking to state lawmakers, civic leaders, researchers and others attending a morning presentation at the University of Kansas Medical Center, officials presented their plans for hiring 244 new faculty members and building nearly 900,000 square feet of additional lab space at their Kansas City, Kan., campus and in Lawrence.

The medical center has devoted more than $105 million to new facilities since 2000 and hired more than 150 new faculty members in the past five years, said Barbara Atkinson, the medical center’s executive vice chancellor. These investments have paid dividends in the form of increased research funding, a boost to the regional economy and medical advances.

Still, Atkinson said, the medical center ranks 81st nationally with $46 million in grants from the National Institutes of Health, a dominant source of medical research funding. The University of Iowa with its $137 million in national institutes grants and No. 30 ranking offers a compelling example of what a heightened commitment might mean in Kansas, she said.

“Iowa is a very good school, it has very good research, and it has put in a lot of investment,” Atkinson said. “We can do the same thing.”

University officials did not include a detailed financing plan along with their proposal for how they would expand existing research programs and establish new pursuits in the next decade. The $800 million would include a mix of state financing and contributions from private philanthropists.

This proposal marks another milestone in the region’s efforts to remake the local economy around the life sciences, said Drue Jennings, chairman of the Advancement Board, a support organization for the medical center and the University of Kansas Hospital.

Area leaders can help by supporting these initiatives as they continue trying to overcome geographical, political and other barriers that hinder cooperation, Jennings said.

“Everyone has a big role to play,” Jennings said.

Gov. Kathleen Sebelius did not attend the Tuesday presentation but said later that she was encouraged by the vision and welcomed discussion about how to reach its goals.

Nicole Corcoran, a Sebelius spokeswoman, said: “The University of Kansas Medical Center’s desire to invest in this growing industry can create jobs, spur economic development and enhance the educational and research missions of the University of Kansas.”

Bob Page, incoming president and chief executive officer of KU Hospital, said he supported the medical center’s aspirations for significant growth of its research operations.

“I strongly believe that for success in life sciences, all three aspects of the academic medical center on this campus must thrive,” Page said in a statement, referring to research, education and patient care.

Some other top leaders offered a more mixed reaction.

State legislators understand the importance of research and are willing to provide additional support, but any successful proposal probably will have to be more inclusive than the one presented Tuesday, said Melvin Neufeld, an Ingalls farmer who serves as speaker of the Kansas House of Representatives.

Wichita State University researchers, for example, have such in-depth expertise in bioengineering that it makes little sense to establish or expand similar programs in Lawrence and at the medical center, Neufeld said.

“The whole thing is driven toward Kansas City,” Neufeld said. “I want a lot more emphasis statewide.”

Earlier, during the presentation, Atkinson said the proposal was designed to include active participation by researchers throughout the state and in the Kansas City area.

“We are working hard to make sure the benefits of our programs extend across the state,” Atkinson said.

To reach Jason Gertzen, call 816-234-4899 or send e-mail to jjgertzen@kcstar.com.
Middle schoolers get early look at college life

Preparatory program is an opportunity to learn about education choices ahead of the curve.

By DAWN BORMANN
The Kansas City Star

Curtis Smart will be a freshman at Schlagel High School in the fall.

But it wasn't the high school initiation he focused on during his first month of summer vacation.

Instead, Smart and about 50 other Kansas City, Kan., middle school students talked about college last week.

The students attended a college preparation program, Pathways Partnership, which is designed to grab the attention of middle school students long before the college recruiters start to call in high school. The four-day program is sponsored by the Kansas City, Kan., School District, Kansas City Kansas Community College and the University of Kansas Edwards Campus.

Students are asked to attend the program for two years. During the first year, students attend hands-on workshops in science, dance, theater, graphic design and writing. In the second year, students go on the road to visit college campuses and ask questions. Ultimately, administrators believe the program helps students hone leadership and communication skills.

The questions range from "How many pages should a law student expect to read weekly?" to "Does a cardiac surgeon have time for fun?"

Because a lot of students don't learn about college until high school, it's the first chance for many of the middle school students to see a dorm room and learn about college basics, including financial aid.

It's the perfect time to get kids thinking about the future, college officials said.

"Too often colleges overlook the middle school group," said Thomas Burke, president of Kansas City Kansas Community College.

The earlier that students set goals, the more likely they are to succeed, he said.

And although the program benefits young students, it also has an added incentive for the participating Kansas schools and the state in general.

"It creates the possibility that they'll want to stay in Kansas," said Mary E. Ryan, an associate dean at the KU Edwards Campus.

Ryan and others love the program for its "light bulb moments.

"This week is about helping them to recognize the gifts and leadership skills they already have," said Stacy Tucker, Kansas City Kansas Community College Phi Theta Kappa director.

She and others relish watching students return for the second year.

Parents, many with cameras in hand, appear equally as proud when they attend graduation ceremonies held at the program's finale.

Gee Gee Taylor has experienced the program's effects firsthand. Her daughters, Kameia and Keneice Musgrove, both attended.

She has watched her children's leadership and communication skills improve dramatically.

Taylor believes the communication portion played a large role in helping her daughter receive a job at the Great Wolf Lodge.

"I feel like (the girls) have gotten a head start," Taylor said.

For freshman students like Smart, the college visits and subsequent discussion made him realize that if he wants to attend law school, he needs to think about his grades right now.

"It's not that far away, and time flies," he said.

To reach Dawn Bormann, call 816-234-5992 or send e-mail to dbormann@kcstar.com.
Casino ads’ backers not public till December

By Deb Gruver
The Wichita Eagle

Both pro- and anti-gambling groups say they plan to put money on the table to influence the Aug. 7 special election about a casino in Sedgwick County.

But voters may not know who is behind the billboards, TV commercials and print ads until months after the election.

Kansas law doesn’t require groups such as No Casinos in Sedgwick County to disclose who funded their campaigns, how much they spent and how they spent donations until Dec. 31.

That’s 21 weeks after the election.

Voters should know who’s trying to sway their vote earlier, some legislators say.

“Things get asserted as facts,” said Rep. Pat Colloton, R-Leawood. “But if you don’t know who’s putting it out there, you don’t know if you’re going to give it a lot of consideration.”

At The Eagle’s request, No Casinos, an offshoot of the political action committee Stand Up for Kansas, said it would consider filing its report earlier.

Chairman Mark Kahrs said he would talk to No Casino supporters.

“It’s extremely helpful to know which interest group is putting the fact forward for you to believe.”

Rep. Pat Colloton, R-Leawood

Now you know AUG. 7 ELECTION

Sedgwick County’s Aug. 7 “casino election” has two questions on the ballot:

Proposition No. 1:
Shall the Kansas Lottery be authorized to operate a lottery gaming facility in Sedgwick County?

Proposition No. 2:
Shall the following be adopted?
“Shall the Kansas Lottery be authorized to place electronic gaming machines in Sedgwick County?”

Advance ballots will be mailed to voters who request them starting July 18. Advance voting in person starts July 25.
about releasing their names before the election. But he said he would not be comfortable releasing how much money people donated until the group is required to.

Phil Ruffin, owner of Wichita Greyhound Park, said last week that he would start an effort to get the casino passed with billboards and radio and newspaper ads.

The ads will talk about tourism and other advantages of casinos and slot machines, he said.

George Wingert, who works for Ruffin, said Friday that his pro-casino effort is just getting organized. He said he would talk to supporters about reporting requirements and whether they would release information early.

Voters will be asked two questions on Aug. 7: Whether there should be a casino in Sedgwick County and whether there should be slot machines in the county.

It's important for people to know who is trying to influence their vote, said Colloton, who has been an avid supporter of strengthening campaign disclosure laws.

She cited a Johnson County special election as an example. Voters went to the polls about a $75 million bond issue to build a large soccer complex.

It turned out that the people who owned the property the county planned to buy were behind the effort to influence the vote, Colloton said.

"They were going to make millions of dollars on the sale of this property to the county. When people found out that all the promotion was being done by the people who were going to profit, it totally turned the evaluation," Colloton said.

The bond issue, which had had support across the board, was defeated, she said.

"Who's offering the facts really impacts the credibility you give it," Colloton said. "It's extremely helpful to know which interest group is putting the fact forward for you to believe."

Colloton said she believes the law should be changed from a flat Dec. 31 deadline to one that specifies that reports are due four days before an election.

Most elections — including the casino vote — are on Tuesdays, she said, and that would mean money raised through the Friday before would be reported.

Rep. Raj Goyle, D-Wichita, said he also would support a change.

"I think people have the right to know who's involved in the process," he said. "I strongly support greater disclosure all the way up until the election day."

Allan Cigler, a political science professor at the University of Kansas, said reports are not helpful if they're "filed so late that there can't be any real examination of them."

Groups such as No Casinos are not required to file any reports with the secretary of state's office because they are neither supporting a candidate nor lobbying on behalf of a statewide constitutional amendment, according to the Kansas Governmental Ethics Commission.

Instead, they file locally.

Under law, campaign finance reports are supposed to be delivered to Sedgwick County Election Commissioner Bill Gale by Dec. 31.

Gale said he'd received three or four calls from people with questions about reporting requirements.

Rep. Ann Mah, D-Topeka, said she thought revamping the law to require earlier reporting would be good, but should be tied to monetary amounts.

For example, campaigns that raise thousands of dollars might be required to report before an election, but groups that raise and spend only a few hundred dollars would still be allowed to report by the Dec. 31 deadline, she said.

Mah said "just a little group" of her neighbors fell under the end-of-the-year reporting law when they formed over an annexation issue in Topeka.

They spent hardly any money, and requiring stringent reporting before the election probably would have been unnecessary, she said.

"But when you have an initiative this big with this much money involved," she said of the casino election, "it would be a good idea to have the report out early."

Reach Deb Gruver at 316-268-6400 or dgruver@wichitaeagle.com.
20 ballots no longer a secret

BY BRENT D. WISTROM AND DION LEFLER
The Wichita Eagle

The law states that "no binding action by such (governmental) bodies shall be by secret ballot."

Swegle said the votes wouldn't immediately have to be made public because the ties meant no binding action was done. "Once the final action has been taken, then the ballots will be open to the public," she said.

Swegle's analysis was at odds with KU law professor Mike Kautsch, an expert on media and the law, and Mike Merriam, counsel for the Kansas Press Association.

Kautsch said he thinks all the votes are part of the debate leading up to a final decision, which the act requires to be open. "If they try to do something in an open meeting that has sort of a secret element, I don't see how that can be permissible under the law," he said.

"I'm really rather astonished they would think they can do that," Merriam said. "The whole point is the process has to be transparent and has to be open to the public. That's been the law for decades."

Tough to change minds

The new council member will take the former council seat of Carl Brewer, who was elected mayor in April.

Brewer initially declined to say who he had voted for but later urged that the ballots be made public. He said it will make it tougher to break the deadlock.

"When you go public, you've publicly just committed yourself," he said. "It makes it more difficult to change your mind and go another direction." Council member Jim Skelton said he didn't care who knew how he voted.

"It should be open. I voted for Treatha," he said before the ballots were released.

Others said they were just following the rules as they understood them. "I don't have any great angst about it one way or another," said council member Sue Schlapp. "Everyone will know about it eventually anyway, and all will be well."

Skelton said the confusion over whether the ballots should have been public highlights the need for an update of council rules, written when there five city commissioners instead of the current seven council members. Council workshops in the past two years have not led to any changes.

"We need a set of rules that reflects today's needs," Skelton said. "These rules are so antiquated, it's outrageous."

"We make rules for the public, we need to make rules for ourselves."

Reach Brent Wistrom at 316-268-6228 or Dion Lefler at 316-268-6527.

Mayor Carl Brewer, Vice Mayor Sharon Fearey and City Council member Jeff Longwell voted 20 times for Lavonta Williams during Tuesday's voting for a new District 1 Council member.

Council members Paul Gray, Sue Schlapp and Jim Skelton picked Treatha Brown-Foster each time.

The city released the votes, initially done by secret ballots, Thursday after The Eagle questioned whether keeping them under wraps violated the state's open meetings law.

Although council seats are nonpartisan, the vote split almost along party lines.

Please see BALLOTS, Page 8A
An Independence artist at the University of Kansas received the Hollander Family Foundation Award at the annual spring exhibition and competition art show.

Rachel James, a senior art major, was one of 53 students who received a total of approximately $225,300 in scholarships and awards. A faculty committee judged the students’ art projects displayed April 29 to May 3 on two floors of KU’s Art and Design Building.

James, the daughter of George James, graduated from Independence High School in 2002.
NHS students earn recognition during Special Awards Assembly

Students at Neodesha High/Middle School receiving awards during the Special Awards Assembly held May 8 include:

- **Dekalb Agricultural Award** - Sara Gudde
- **FFA Scholarship** - Riley Hall, Sara Gudde, Brianna Ewing, Anna Ray and Matt Glasgow.
- **Farm Bureau Recognition** - Brianna Ewing, Sara Gudde, Anna Archibald and Matt Shadduck.
- **Beta Sigma Phi Sorority Scholarships** - Xi Eta Epsilon Chapter - Mason Froebe, Kayla Schoonover and Chyrstian Dierks; Alpha Pi Chapter - Nikki Clark and Kathryn Barrett.
- **Penwell-Gabel Nursing Scholarship** - Tiffany Piatt.
- **Community Service Awards** - Paige Giger, Anna Archibald and Corban Thacher.
- **Kansas Board of Regents Award** - Chelsea Leck, Tiffany Piatt, Corban Thacher, Anna Archibald, Cory Buchanan, Paige Giger, Sara Gudde, Riley Hall, Crystal Hammar, Alicia Kinkaid and Brodie Larsh.
- **Masonic Lodge Scholarship** - Casey Osburn.
- **Army Presentation** - Haley Wheeler and Cory Buchanan.
- **Coffeyville Community College Scholarship** - Sean Cowen, Skye Fish, Jessica Leddy and Brianna Ewing.
- **Independence Community College Scholarship** - Riley Hall, Casey Osburn, Mason Froebe, Sheridan Harshman, Tiffany Spears, Matt Glasgow, Nikki Clark, Victoria Park, Emily Brooken, Kelly Whitson and Chelsea Leck.
- **Tri-Valley League Scholar Award** - Gold to Sara Gudde, Silver to Paige Giger and Bronze to Riley Hall and Cory Buchanan.
- **Dale Dennis Excellence in Education Award** - Paige Giger.
- **Outstanding Math & Science Student** - Sara Gudde.

**Senior Project Awards** - Paper: Honorable Mention - Kelly Whitson, Sonja Snyder, Victoria Park and Clint Wason; 3rd Place - Tiffany Piatt, Elliot Silva, Corban Thacher, Kayla Schoonover and Sheridan Harshman; 2nd Place - Warren Gassaway and Sara Gudde; and 1st Place - Riley Hall, Anna Archibald and Paige Giger. Trifold: Honorable Mention - Elliot Silva, Derek Spears, Corban Thacher and Anna Archibald; 3rd Place - Warren Gassaway, Chelsea Lambert and Chris Harless and Sonja Snyder; 2nd Place - Brianna Ewing; and 1st Place - Victoria Park, Sara Gudde, Paige Giger, Mason Froebe, Heather Parks, Chelsea Lambert and Brodie Larsh. Presentation: Honorable Mention - Kelly Whitson, Derik Spears, Corban Thacher and Chelsea Leck; 3rd Place - Elliot Silva, Chelsea Lambert and Brianna Ewing; 2nd Place - Sara Gudde and Anna Archibald; and 1st Place - Paige Giger. Overall: Honorable Mention - Warren Gassaway, Victoria Park, Elliot Silva and Chelsea Peck; 3rd Place - Corban Thacher and Anna Archibald; 2nd Place - Sara Gudde and 1st Place - Paige Giger.


**KSHSAAwards - 8th grade** - Bree Anna Maples and Phillip Depew; Seniors - Elliot Silva and Chyrstian Dierks.

**National Honor Society** - Anna Archibald, Paige Giger, Sara Gudde, Tiffany Piatt, Haley Wheeler, Corban Thacher, Cory Buchanan and Emily Brooken.

**Catholic Men’s Organization Scholarship** - Chyrstian Dierks.

**Baker University Scholarship** - Chelsea Lambert.

**Booster Club Scholarship** - Riley Hall and Kelly Whitson.

**Community National Bank Scholarship** - Chyrstian Dierks.

**Cobalt Scholarship** - Cory Buchanan and Kayla Schoonover.

**First Neodesha Bank Scholarship** - Riley Hall and Sara Gudde.


**Scholarship Awards** - Anna Archibald - J.C. Reece Scholarship, Donnelly Scholarship; Chyrstian Dierks - J.C. Reece Scholarship, Dr. S.C. and Dorotha Sutherland Memorial Scholarship; Warren Gassaway - Charles C. Green & Louise Schaffer Green Scholarship; Paige Giger - Ray and Pauline Heller Scholarship, Lesco Scholarship, Kyla Hayes White Scholarship; Sara Gudde - Ray and Pauline Heller Scholarship, First Neodesha Bank Scholarship; Riley Hall - NHS Alumni Association Scholarship,
Katzer Family Scholarship, First Neodesha Bank Scholarship; Crystal Hammar - Depew Family Scholarship; Sheridan Harshman - Class 48/Royal Neighbors Scholarship; Alicia Kinkaid - NHS Alumni Assn. Scholarship; Chelsea Leck - NHS Alumni Assn. Scholarship; Casey Osburn - Osburn Scholarship; Tiffany Piatt - Bays/Basore Scholarship; Elliot Silva - Class of 51 Scholarship; Corban Thacher - Vickers Scholarship, Past Classes of NHS Scholarship; Haley Wheeler - Amoco Scholarship; and Kelly Whiston - J.C. Reece Scholarship.

Additional Scholarship Awards - Anna Archibald - Academic Scholarship from Kansas University and Wilson County Clerk Scholarship; Cory Buchanan - Chancellor's Scholarship from Kansas University, Endowment Merit Scholarship from KU, Department of Engineering, Engineering Diversity Scholarship from KU and Kansas USBC Bowling Scholarship; Sara Gudde - Putnam Scholarship from Kansas State University, Department of Engineering, Radiant Electric Cooperative Scholarship and WalMart Community Scholarship; Paige Giger - Pittsburg State University Honors Program Scholarship, Academic Scholarship from PSU and PSU Alumni Legacy Scholarship; Alicia Kinkaid - Academic Scholarship from Emporia State University; Derik Spears - Baseball Scholarship from PSU; Corban Thacher - Leadership Scholarship from KSU and Elks Club State Scholarship; and Haley Wheeler - Volleyball Scholarship from Labette County Community College.

Baker University announced the Deans List for Spring 2007. Jordann Johnson and Joshua Morgan were among the students earning 3.5 or higher grade point average.

Area students among more than 780 named to FHSU’s spring 2007 Deans Honor Roll.

Fort Hays State University deans have named 783 students to the Deans Honor Roll for the 2007 spring semester, according to Dr. Larry Gould, FHSU provost.

The list includes undergraduate students from Kansas, with the exception of those from Hays. To be eligible, students must have enrolled in 12 or more credit hours and have a minimum grade point average of 3.60 for the semester.

Hoxie: Jennifer K. Follis, Stephanie Ann Oelke, Karl A. Pratt and Laura M. Shaw
Selden: Ashley Rae Stevensson and Robynn R. Wessel

For the second consecutive year and the sixth time in the 10-year history of the event, the Kansas State University Powercat Tractors Design Team finished first at the annual American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers International Quarter-Scale Tractor Student Design Competition, May 31-June 3, in Peoria, Ill.

Competing against 28 teams from the United States and Canada, the K-State team also received the “Sound Quality Award” for having the quietest tractor and minimizing noise pollution. The team earned first-place points for the written design report and took second place in the four pulls of the “tractor pull” portion of the competition.

All teams were required to use unmodified, 16-horsepower Briggs and Stratton engines and Bridgestone/Firestone tires. The rest of the design was up to each individual team. The K-State tractor used four engines with a four-wheel drive system.

Finishing behind K-State were Purdue University, second place; Laval University, third place; University of Kentucky, fourth place; and University of Illinois, fifth place.

K-State team advisers are Mark Schrock, professor of biological and agricultural engineering; Pat Murphy, professor of agriculture and natural resources; Randy Price, assistant professor of biological and agricultural engineering; and Darrell Oard and Lou Ann Claassen, biological and agricultural engineering staff assistants.

Team members and their hometowns include:
Hoxie; Jonathan Schmidt, junior in agricultural technology management,

New University of Kansas students and their parents from Sheridan county will be welcomed into the KU family at the Jayhawk Generations Welcome Picnic at 6:30 p.m. Monday, June 18, in Oakley. Those being welcomed into KU from Hoxie are Kelsey Hill and Marci Shaw along with their parents.

The KU Alumni Association and its Northwest chapter will greet the next generation of Jayhawks at Annie Oakley Park, Fifth and Price streets. Area alumni, new students, students interested in learning more about KU and parents are invited to attend and enjoy complimentary food and beverages. Each new Jayhawk will also receive a free T-shirt.

Chapter members coordinating the event are: Jeff Mason and Travis Daise, both of Goodland, president and vice president, respectively; Paul Steele of Colby, secretary; and Kurt Vollersten of Oberlin and Mike Day of St. Francis, co-chairs of student recruitment. Alumni association staff will arrive with the signature KU trailer full of grills, burgers and brats for the festivities. Current KU students, alumni and university representatives will mix and mingle with students to answer questions and offer advice.

Alumni association representatives and guests planning to attend are: Sarah Blaney, Kansas Honors Program coordinator; Mike Davis, senior vice president for alumni programs; and Heath Peterson, director of Kansas programs.
Ethan A. Schmidt and his son, Connor took the traditional walk down the hill to commencement exercises May 20 at the University of Kansas, Lawrence.

Cooper was a 2007 graduate of KU's Hilltop Child Development Center.

His dad, Ethan received a doctorate degree in history with major fields in U.S. history, ethnohistory, and a secondary field in the Atlantic world.

While at KU, Ethan was a two-time recipient of the Lila Atkinson-Creighton Scholarship for graduate research. He also received the history department outstanding graduate teaching assistant award, Kansas Board of Regents James Pearson fellowship, Eddie Jacobsen Fellowship, and the Sherman and Irene Dreizenzen Award from the Harry S. Truman Good Neighbor Foundation.

He is a graduate of Peabody High School and received his bachelor's degree and master's degree from Emporia State University.

Ethan, his wife Elizabeth, and sons Connor and Dylan will move to Lubbock, Texas, in July where he has accepted a position as assistant professor in the Texas Tech history department.

He is the son of Tom and Susie Schmidt of Peabody.
A heap of hands-on fun

A Mad Science program Thursday in Leawood sought to bolster interest in science. Toward that end, Courtney Renegar (left) of Mad Science created a hovercraft that Michael Wilson, 8, of Olathe, tried out.

Coalition’s demonstrations, other efforts are aimed at increasing excitement for “discovering the world.”

By MELODEE HALL BLOBAUM
The Kansas City Star

“Have fun” was rule No. 3 for the 190 or so kids and adults at the Mad Science program Thursday in Leawood.

But it might be rule No. 1 for KC Science Inc., a coalition that’s hoping to pique youngsters’ interest in science, inspire them to consider careers in the field and raise science literacy across all age levels.

“Science issues in the news tend to be overly politicized,” said Erica Reynolds, KC Science Inc. project manager. “We need to be reminded that science is about fun and inquiry and discovering the world and being curious.”

Since receiving a grant in November, the partnership has focused on raising awareness of science through programs on public television and science nights at the Johnson County Library and Science City.

They’ve created a Web site that
spotlights science careers and provides resources for students who want to learn more.

And they’ve produced an online calendar of science events taking place all over the metropolitan area, like the one Thursday at the Leawood Pioneer Library.

Youngsters got equal doses of science and fun from Courtney Renegar, whose Mad Science moniker is Catalyst Courtney.

By watching toilet paper fly, they discovered how wind lifts airplanes. They saw firsthand how hot air is lighter than cold air by launching a hot-air balloon. And they learned the strength of air pressure by riding a hoverboard.

Such hands-on fun is essential to sparking an interest in science.

Six-year-old Lauren Van Winkle of Leawood, whose mom brought her to Thursday’s program, didn’t remember studying science in first grade this year. But she did remember the boat races.

“They were fun,” she said.

Her mom, Susan Van Winkle, said the races were part of the science curriculum, introducing the idea of wind power and mass.

Science is Michael Burns’ favorite subject. The Leawood 10-year-old hopes to be a chemist someday, and what he likes best about science is experiments.

His mom, Patty Burns, said Thursday’s program appealed to all three of her children, all of them interested in science.

“It’s bringing science to life,” she said.

That’s music to Steven B. Case’s ears.

Case, associate director of the University of Kansas Center for Science Education and a founding member of KC Science Inc., said active engagement in science was the best way to create appreciation for the subject.

He was involved with summer enrichment programs in the Shawnee Mission School District for 20 years and saw how the hands-on science programs encouraged ordinary kids to take science classes and do well in them.

But it wasn’t just the kids who grew to appreciate the subject.

“It starts a conversation in the family,” Case said. “It creates a level of appreciation and conversation that wasn’t there before.”

The effort is essential as Kansas City seeks to become a bioscience leader in the Midwest, Case said.

“The development of individuals who are literate and excited and understand the issues is really quite critical,” he said. “It’s the only way to sell ourselves as a bioscience hub. That kind of effort requires this kind of community excitement.”

Reynolds said it was easy for people to understand connecting kids and science. What’s harder is the notion of adults connecting with science once they’ve finished high school biology, chemistry and physics.

“They don’t think of science as something adults do,” she said.

KC Science Inc. hopes to change that, creating science appreciation opportunities much the way that other institutions work on arts appreciation.

“They don’t teach people to play the cello,” Reynolds said. “But they teach them to appreciate it.”

To reach Melodee Hall Blobaum, call 816-234-7733 or send e-mail to mblobaum@kcstar.com