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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 22th, 2010

Forest Engineer “Connects” via Bridge with Franklin High School Students

PORTLAND, OR—For Gail Cordell, a science teacher at Franklin High School, determining whether to have an engineer visit the classroom during National Engineers Month was an easy decision. “They get teacher deaf,” explained Cordell about her students who tend to hit a rut around the mid-point of the school year. “It is so good for them to hear about science from someone fresh.” Cordell’s classroom was matched with forest engineer Paul Harlan from the Collins Company located in Lakeview, Oregon.



Harlan began his visit by discussing the benefits of creating a career plan even while still in high school. Harlan, whose father was a partner in an architectural engineering firm, was almost predestined to become an engineer. But, as a kid, he was discouraged by the idea of having to work under florescent lights. When he learned he could both be an engineer and work in the forest, he was sold on the idea. “Hopefully my visit will motivate these kids to explore all of the options out there, and to create some sort of route to pursue their interests.”

After a quick lesson about the types of careers one can make out of an engineering degree and the applications of engineering in the world around us, Harlan passed out several yardsticks, a few rolls of masking tape, and a stack of plain white paper. The students were challenged to create strong and aesthetically pleasing bridges from the materials provided. The value of a hands-on project being administered by a fresh face became instantly apparent as the classroom transformed into several clusters of engaged, problem solving, student engineers. “I like seeing kids light up when they learn something or figure out a solution,” claimed Harlan. “If even one kid discovers he or she wants to look more into engineering, it is all worth it.”



National Engineers Month (February) is orchestrated by the **Business Education Compact**, a local non-profit organization dedicated to “making learning real” for Oregon and SW Washington students. In its 16th year, the program has enabled more than 275,000 students to have the privilege of interacting with a real engineer in their classroom to date.

The **Oregon Forest Resources Institute** has partnered with 15 forestry organizations, including the Collins Company to participate in NEM across the state. OFRI’s mission is to improve public understanding of the state’s forest resources and to encourage environmentally sound forest management.

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