

 print this

ODOT helps Burnt River students try their hand at engineering

Written by TOM STRANDBERG For the Baker City Herald March 08, 2010 03:10 pm
ODOT officials have presented a short course on engineering at several schools in Eastern Oregon

Students at Burnt River High School in Unity tried their hand at bridge engineering on Feb. 23 after a short course on the topic offered by engineer Tom Wallace, roadway manager for Region 5 of the Oregon Department of Transportation.

Senior Janeca Gregg created the most effective design by folding her paper like an accordion to create structural ribs that enabled her bridge to easily hold the weight of a textbook.

Fellow classmate Ban Du, a 10th-grade foreign exchange student from China, showed he also was up to the challenge. In true problem-solving spirit, he folded and tested several paper prototypes, working at it until he got the best results.

"As an engineer you are encouraged to experiment and try things, that's how you come up with new ideas," Wallace told the Burnt River class of about 30 students.

Ban Du said he plans to pursue an engineering degree.

"I would like to design bridges, buildings and things like that," he said.

Wallace, along with fellow engineers Craig Sipp, Pendleton project manager, and Ace Clark, construction specialist, were among two dozen ODOT technical experts who spoke statewide to Oregon students to recognize February as National Engineering Month.

Sipp, Clark and Wallace traveled to junior high schools and high schools in Hermiston, Heppner, Milton-Freewater, Unity and Burns.

"I really enjoy it," said Sipp, who along with Clark gave presentations to nearly 80 students at Heppner High School, Heppner Junior High School and the Hermiston Education Center. "The goal was to introduce the students to career opportunities available in the engineering field."

In addition to the popular hands-on bridge construction using a single sheet of paper, the men presented a PowerPoint program that showed various engineering challenges and projects within ODOT and around the world. Information about the construction of the world's largest bridge, rising 1,125 feet over a steep valley in France and extending 8,000 feet long, was a favorite topic.

Sipp, Clark and Wallace will most likely never know what impacts their visits have had on the hundreds of kids they've talked to. They do know, however, that it sometimes only takes a small spark to transform a young mind's passing curiosity into a lifelong thirst for knowledge.

Close Window