

FABI and CTHB spread science fever at National Science Week

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Four post-graduate students from FABI recently participated in the National Science week in Piet Retief from 2-4 August 2010. The National Science Week, an initiative by the Department of Science and Technology (DST), endeavours to increase Science awareness among primary and secondary school students.

Students at FABI, with funding from the Centre of Excellence in Tree Health Biotechnology (CTHB), were among the exhibitors at the event. The representatives included Markus Wilken (PhD student), Jan Nagel, Kerry-Anne Pillay and Mmatshapho Phasha (MSc Students). Some of the attractions presented by the group included a range of exotic edible mushrooms, bacterial samples from everyday life, a mold terrarium, and samples of fungi used in FABI projects. The most popular experiments, however, were the science based magic tricks such as catching ice on a string or making paper clips float.

The main part of the FABI presentation was a 45-minute interactive demonstration. Various scientific experiments with subsequent explanations were used to encourage students to pursue a career in science. These experiments were aimed at introducing basic scientific principles to the students while being visually stimulating. The "Elephant Toothpaste" reaction proved to be the most fun. In this experiment, yeast is used to break down hydrogen peroxide into water and oxygen. Add some food colouring and liquid soap, and the result is a thick foam, resembling ice cream or umqombothi (African beer) according to the delighted students.

During the three days of the exhibition, a broad spectrum of students, ranging from grade 5 to 12 visited the FABI stand. A total of 1800 students representing 21 schools attended the Science week. The message from the FABI exhibition was well received and reaffirmed the importance of science to our community. Thanks to the efforts of institutions like the CTHB and FABI, the future of science in South Africa is in safe hands.



I caught it! An enthusiastic youngster demonstrating to his friend how to catch an ice cube on a string.



Dried insects and a light microscope were some of the attractions at the FABI exhibition.



Markus Wilken explaining some of the scientific principles behind the experiments presented at the National Science Week



Students watching another batch of Elephant toothpaste explode.