Design challenge engages students

MILTON — Regional elementary and middle school students tackled environmental issues with specialty building toys during an educational session held Thursday morning at the Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit (CSIU).

The CSIU is one of 20 intermediate units statewide that hosts a K’Nex STEM Design Challenge, funded by Thermo Fisher Scientific.

Eight teams of students participated in the two-hour Face2Face competition where they designed, developed, and implemented a solution to an engineering problem with an environmental challenge.

The students were challenged to solve current major environmental issues. Teams were tasked to research environmental issues, identify one that the team would like to address, and create a solution to that issue by building a prototype out of K’Nex that supported their solution.

Teams of up to four students worked together on their projects. “This is play with a purpose,” said Colleen Epler-Braithwaite, STEM education consultant with CSIU. “This is the ninth year that the CSIU has held the event, sponsored by Thermo Fisher Scientific. This is the first time we’ve held the event in person since 2019.”

Teams were allowed to design solutions to an engineering issue by building a prototype out of K’Nex. Teams had to bring their own K’Nex pieces to the event, and students had two hours to put together their project.

The teams were competing for trophies designed out of K’Nex by Columbia-Montour

A guide to candidates for Commonwealth, Superior courts

HARRISBURG — In May, Democrats and Republicans will choose their parties’ candidates for three vacant seats on Commonwealth and Superior Courts. The winners will compete in the November general election.

Pennsylvania’s two intermediate appellate courts have the power to affirm or reverse decisions made in lower courts. Their rulings can be appealed to the state Supreme Court, Pennsylvania’s court of last resort.

The person who wins the open seat on Commonwealth Court could help shape Pennsylvania’s laws on everything from elections to firearms, while the two candidates who win seats on Superior Court could decide the outcomes of high-profile criminal cases. Judges on both courts are often top candidates to fill openings on the Pennsylvania Supreme Court.

The two intermediate appellate courts serve distinct roles in the commonwealth’s legal system.

Commonwealth Court presides over civil actions brought by and against the Pennsylvania state government and hears cases primarily in cases involving state departments and local governments. Superior Court handles criminal, family, and civil cases that are appealed by county Courts of Common Pleas.

Commonwealth Court Democratic candidates

Bryan Neft is an attorney based in Mount Lebanon who works in commercial litigation.

Neft previously ran for Superior Court in 2021, ultimately finishing behind the two other candidates in the Democratic primary.

A graduate of Boston University School of Law, Neft has predominantly spent his career in private practice. He clerked for former Superior Court Judge William Cercone in Pittsburgh from 1991 to 1995, drafting memorandums on civil and criminal issues.

Neft served as a committee member for the Mount Lebanon Democratic Party from 2016 to 2021, when he resigned to run for Superior Court. He was reappointed after his loss in the primary but resigned again in

Macri scores at BAPS.

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Go fly a kite

Cooper Zechman, a Mifflinburg third grader, flies the kite he made Thursday as part of the children’s engineering club at the Herr Memorial Library in Mifflinburg.
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Vo-Tech students, Justin Gibson, Lelani Altamirano, Ben Gearhart and Donovan McCloud helped restore solar powered recharging stations for electric powered harvesters.

Middle school students from the River Valley Nature School in Lewisburg created the Waste Reaper V6. “The Waste Reaper V6 picks up garbage and places it in a large plastic eating bacteria digests it,” said middle schooler Gabriel Martinez. “The reason it’s a V6 is because that’s how many prototypes we built to come up with this one; six of them.”

The River Valley Nature School—a private school founded in 1990—participated in the competition. Third graders Leonardo Serra-Harris, Mia Lott, Kaylee Morris and Rosie Timms created the Habitat Helper. “The Habitat Helper is solar powered and was designed to house animals until the homes are restored and rebuilt and then can be returned to their natural habitats,” said Timms. The other team of elementary schoolers from the River Valley Nature School included Jack Pfeifer, Isley Parrish and Sarah Stevenson. “They created the Plastic Eating Fishy King.”

They chose ocean pollution for their environmental challenge and our machine takes plastic from the ocean and breaks it down with eating bacteria,” Pfeifer said. “The interested passion to do something for nature is already there with the students, said teacher Elizabeth Sterling. “It’s empowering to the students to create something that helps the environment.”

Central Columbia elementary school students Jake Klingerman, Crue Flick, Caden Barber and Hank Bowman created the Eco Ship. “Our machine was designed to collect oil and trash from the ocean, solving two of the most challenging pollution problems today,” Bowman explained. Danville middle schoolers Munjala Mehta, Henry Nay- lor, Isaiah Sundaresan and Henley Coroner created the Salination Machine.

“This machine we developed for poor families, families living near the ocean but have no fresh water,” Mehta said, “the students really wanted to make a system that would be cost effective.”

Improve(t)ed Milan Experience (TIME). “We aged myself and remember playing with timer toys,” Kay said. “We used to think we were so creative, but to see these kids and their complex designs and their creations, I feel like we are in good hands.”

He said students likely don’t realize how much they are learning through the process. “There’s teamwork in that everyone has a role and they all work well together; it is nice to see,” Kay said. “There are so many brilliant things that makes me feel good, and is a credit to the teachers who are also here.”

Awards were given to the top teams. All team members in each division will advance to the state competition. The winners in the Elementary division were: 1. Dairyville Area School District; 2. River Valley Nature School 3. River Valley Nature School.

The winners in the Middle School division were: 1. Mid-West Area School District; 2. River Valley Nature School; 3. Danville Area School District. Jim Shetl can be reached at 570-742-9673 ext. 114 or jimd@standard-journal.com.