

JAN. 31/07

Illuminating the science in everyday life

New after-school program helps kids learn about chemistry's role around the world

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NORWALK — A Norwalk Education Foundation program will soon bring ghosts in the bathroom, disappearing glass and rubber bones to students in several of the city's after-school programs.

The "You Be the Chemist" after-school program, sponsored by the NEF and Norwalk's Arch Chemicals, will teach students about chemistry's role in their daily lives and in the world. Students will delve into surface tension and humidity in the lesson "Ghosts in the Bathroom," chemical compositions in "Disappearing Glass" and the skeletal system in the "Rubber Bones" activity.

"This chemistry enrichment program allows us to incorporate science in the after-school program, which is something we've wanted to do for some time," said David Harris, NEF's after-school program manager.

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After-school program teaches chemistry

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The program is catered toward children from kindergarten through sixth grade and will soon be available to students at several after-school programs, including the Norwalk YMCA, ACHIEVE and the Mid-Fairfield Child Guidance Center. Arch Chemicals and The Chemical Education Foundation have provided NEF with the program, and chemists from Arch Chemicals will instruct after-school providers on teaching the program's lessons during a Feb. 9 instructional at Jefferson School.

Once the three-hour training is completed, NEF will loan curriculum books and chemistry kits to the after-school programs. The chemistry program has a total of 30 lessons, ranging from classes on sub-atomic particles to calories, and each lesson is accompanied by a lab "to make science fun," Harris said.

"We're creating a link between what goes in after school and what goes on during school," Harris said. "And we're still keeping after

school a fun and lively environment where kids can learn ... (The chemistry program) gets kids excited about science, and it could make them more excited about science during the school day."

Arch Chemicals, a national specialty chemicals company, is sponsoring numerous "You Be the Chemist" programs across the country, from Norwalk to Tennessee.

"It's exciting because there's a lot of hands on lab work that's really stimulating and it makes science more exciting than the pure textbook kind of stuff," said Dale Walters, manager of corporate communications for Norwalk's Arch Chemicals. "It's a neat way to help bring key issues involving chemistry to students and teachers, and these issues affect our daily lives without many of us even realizing it. There's the science of water pollution, cleaning up hazardous waste sites and the chemistry involved in foods and nutrition."

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