

Mad about science

Kids cook up chemicals, investigate crimes at Arvada summer camp

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At first it seems like a science teacher's worst nightmare. The desks are pushed to one side of the room; the chairs are stacked along one wall. Kids sit or sprawl on the newspaper-covered carpet floor, occasionally throwing rods through the air javelin-style.

However, this is a Mad Science camp, and instructor Diana Rayel, a.k.a. Dynamite Diana, seems comfortable with the frenetic pace.

"They're not throwing them at you. They're throwing them at the pile," she reassures one camper.

Although Rayel requests the poles be passed, not tossed, she doesn't snap about the occasional projectile or complain when a young boy trumpets through a tube.

The kids are surprisingly on task, working toward the creation of a geodesic dome, a structure reminiscent of playground jungle gym.

The campers, who range in age from six to 11, work without distraction. Despite the mercury topping 100 degrees outside, a kid asks to turn off the air conditioning because it's blowing too much. Another girl hurries back from the bathroom asking, "What did I miss, what did I miss?"

This kind of enthusiasm is exactly what Mad Science hopes to achieve.

Holly Hargrove has sent her children Chad and Meghan to two camps this summer, and they are preparing for their third.

"They have a great time," said the Arvada resident, who said her children are often eager to continue their experiments at home.

Next week, the Hargroves will explore the insides of Mannequin Paul and use forensic evidence to figure out who stole the ice cream during Chemicals, Cells and Crime Camp.

"Anything I can do to keep them doing something besides PlayStation is fine with me," said Holly Hargrove seconds before her son made a video game date with a fellow camper. The mother shrugged in response to the plans.

The international network of Mad Science franchises aims to hook youngsters on science through assemblies, classroom visits, after school programs, and birthday parties using hands-on



Photos by JUSTIN SAGARSEE

Luke Ostermiller, 9, samples the tasty sugar crystals that coat gum drops he used to make a model of crystal forms during the Mad Science Camp held at the Majestic View Nature Center.

CHEMICALS, CELLS AND CRIME CAMP

WHERE: Majestic View Nature Center, 7030 Garrison St., Arvada

WHEN: August 1 to 5

COST: \$199; half-day rates are available.

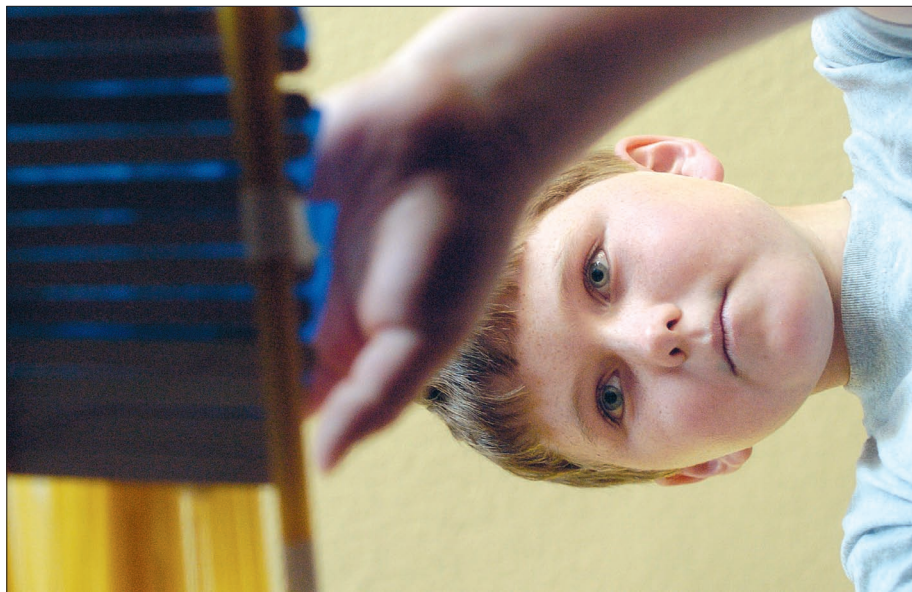
INFORMATION: For children ages 7 to 12. Call 303-403-0432.

activities and awe-inspiring feats of science such as sucking eggs into a bottle and creating indoor lightning.

"Our trademark is sparking a mad sense of learning," said Julia Caldron, who works in the Arvada headquarters of Mad Science of Colorado. "We create the spark that ignites the kids' imagination, curiosity and drive to learn about the world around them."

Caldron says explanations paired with flashy effects are key.

"It's one thing to have a very cool chemical reaction," she said. "But it's even cooler to under-



Chad Hargrove, 9, delicately places spaghetti noodles across the base of his bridge before testing its strength with a 16-ounce bottle of Gatorade.

stand why it happened and how it happened. That's the whole idea behind Mad Science — to give kids tools to understand the why of what happens in the world."

Mad Science Camps, like all Mad Science programs, are scripted at headquarters in Mon-

treal, Canada. Each five-day camp syllabus has an overall idea and themed days such as "Cell-abrasion" and "Machine Mania."

Seven-year-old Maggie Hofmann said the camp is "way funner" than science at school because of the lack of textbooks and activities in this month's Moving

with Science Camp, which range from making Tootsie rolls to dissecting owl pellets.

"It's about learning, but it's about having fun, too," Hofmann said. "In school you get in trouble because you don't do it right. But here you don't have to follow any rules."