

Wowing kids with weird science

Science Theater comes to Battle Mountain

Heather Hill

BATTLE MOUNTAIN - How do you get kids excited and interested in science? Husband and wife team, Gary and Diane Handzel presented a series of action-packed shows Oct. 7 - 10 about rocks and minerals that had Battle Mountain kids clapping and laughing about science.

Get in the Act! Science Theater mixes Diane Handzel's 30 plus years of acting experience with hands-on entertainment for children in grades kindergarten through six. The duo spent Oct. 7 - 9 at Battle Mountain Elementary Schools and then Oct. 10 at Eleanor Lemaire Elementary School. Grades one through four were treated to the show.

The presentations vary according to which schools they are being performed at. Battle Mountain's shows featured rocks and minerals because of the importance of mining to the area, said the Handzels.

"The Department of Labor has said there will be a need to replace mining workers as that workforce ages and retires," Gary Handzel said. "We firmly believe that Science Theater can inspire students to view science as a career path. It gives them confidence that they can do science. They are not intimidated by science."

Diane Handzel, executive director of Get in the Act!, lead teaching artist and curriculum developer, said before the show that sometimes kids are not sure at first how take her wild acting and that after a few minutes they really get into it, but the Battle Mountain students seemed to get into it right away.

They giggled, applauded, raised their hands excitedly and answered various questions about rocks and minerals. They appeared thrilled about getting to participate in one-act presentations led by Diane Handzel.



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Get in the Act! Executive Director Diane Handzel has students take turns putting on performances about rocks and minerals during her Oct. 8 presentation at Battle Mountain Elementary Schools. For more photos, see Page 10.

She started the 50-minute presentation by having the students doing acting exercises and then presented information on the various rubble, using her acting skills and asking questions to get the kids involved in the show.

Next, the kids took turns performing skits revolving around rocks and minerals. Then they got to examine bits of slabs up close and talk about the different pieces.

Get in the Act! is a nonprofit organization run by a three-member voting board plus a five-member advisory board. Diane Handzel is the executive director of the board and her husband is the secretary. He also serves as the program manager. Prior to Get in the Act!, he spent more than 20 years as a financial consultant.

The couple, who live in Stateline, Nev., started Get in the Act! in 2001 and geared it toward science, turning it into a nonprofit in 2009. They work with the program fulltime, traveling to different schools to put on shows.

"It builds critical life skills like trust, respect and teamwork with their peers," Gary Handzel said. "It's particularly effective with non-traditional learners. Elementary students use different ways to learn. Some learn best by reading out of a book. Many students learn best by hands-on involvement in a classroom lesson."

Currently, they give presentations in California and Nevada and are hoping to expand to other states. The couple first started doing the shows in communities around Lake Tahoe. Prior to Battle Mountain, the Handzels brought Science Theater to Elko. The show has entertained more than 4,000 school children since its inception in 2009, they said.

Diane Handzel said she loves working with children and that the show not only inspires them but it inspires her as well.

"Science Theater's combination of energizing theater techniques, upbeat guided inquiry and hands-on dramatizations allows students to absorb concepts through proactive engagement of all their senses in the learning process," says a program brochure. "Each Science Theater program investigates intriguing science questions through dramatization that bring students to the stage to model the science concept."

Before each show, a lot of work goes into planning them and putting together a curriculum, which the Handzels work on hand in hand with each school.

They said that since they began performing at Zephyr Cove Elementary School near Lake Tahoe, test scores at the school in science have improved tremendously.

Presentations at other schools have focused on energy, electricity, magnetism, the solar system, seeds and plants, weather, and force and motion.

"National research shows that students who participate in the arts out-perform their peers on virtually every measure and at risk students are more likely to stay in school," Gary Handzel said.

The Battle Mountain shows were sponsored by Newmont Mining, Joy Global Foundation and the Nevada Arts Council.

"We sincerely thank them all for sponsoring our program because without them this is not possible," Gary Handzel said.

More information can be found at www.getintheact.org. Those who would like more information can call Gary Handzel at (775) 588-8614 or email him at info@getintheact.org.