

# Frank Greene Science Fair kids — curious and confident

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POSTED: 01/30/2010 06:57:59 PM PST | UPDATED: 4 YEARS AGO

"Have you ever wondered what the formula for bubbles is?"

Clifford Choates, 8, allowed this question to float across the room. He was holding a star-shaped bubble wand tantalizingly to his lips, about to use the tools of science and his toy box to prove the hypothesis that no matter what shape a bubble starts out, it ends up round.

Initially, the star-shaped bubble blower had confounded him. "I was like, 'What's wrong with this? Is it broken?' " Clifford explained. "I was about to throw it away, but then my mom said, 'Son, there's no such thing as a star bubble.' "

Like Edison with his bulb, Clifford was about to light up that bubble.

The organizers of the Dr. Frank S. Greene Scholars Science Fair had positioned the bubble boy like a carny barker at the entrance to the event Saturday, an irresistible prelude to a morning filled with promise and prowess. Everywhere you looked in a conference room at Cypress Semiconductor, glittering thought bubbles filled the air.

## **MENTAL INCUBATOR**

Greene was a Silicon Valley engineer and visionary who worked hard to get African-American students interested in science and technology, and this year's eighth annual fair was the continuation of the remarkable legacy Greene left when he died the day after Christmas. The Dr. Frank S. Greene Scholars Program serves as an incubator to innovation, or what program director Gloria Whitaker-Daniels described as "our children doing something positive when no one is watching."

After an hour of close observation by the general public — mostly

grandparents and devoted aunts — several dozen scholars nervously took a seat next to their work. Parents were sequestered in an adjoining room, then one of the organizers came in to advise the kids how to effectively show-and-tell their projects. "Don't make the judges pull the information out of you," she said.

That wasn't exactly the problem the judges confronted at Redeat Adane's examination of which cleans better: hand sanitizer or soap and water. Science is Redeat's favorite subject at Westwood Elementary, where she's a fifth-grader, but she spoke so softly that the adults had to pose their questions from a near-crouch.

"I knew some of the questions, but sometimes I got nervous," she whispered when the judges departed. "I'm confident a little bit." Among the helpful hints revealed by her project: "Don't light a cigarette right after you use hand sanitizer," she advised. The alcohol in the sanitizer might cause your hands to explode.

### **LAB LOLLIPOP**

Not far from Redeat was Kayla Choates, Clifford's 1-year-older sister, whose project was titled, "Hey, there's corn in my candy!" A pint-size Pasteur studying the effect of high-fructose corn syrup in suckers, Kayla's investigation came about when she discovered she wasn't getting as much sugar in her diet as she thought.

"When I first heard there was corn in my candy, I felt really shocked," she told the judges, wearing a pink apron that said "Fabulous Kayla." One of the judges was so impressed she said, "You really are in the fourth grade, not the 10th?" As they left, Kayla handed each judge a lollipop she had concocted in her laboratory. Purely in the interest of science, of course.

In a thematically related exhibit, 10th-grader Tulani Aytch of University Preparatory Academy in San Jose, sat near the back of the room at a table covered with rotting human teeth and turkey bones. His project examined the effects of sugar and artificial sweeteners on both. Where had he found adult human teeth on which to experiment? "You can get anything on the Internet," Tulani explained.

The winners are to be announced at a luncheon today, where the Greene

Scholars will get a chance to speak directly to the late engineer's family. When the judges were finished with Clifford Choates on Saturday, he didn't seem to much care whether he had won anything. He was just happy to go back to blowing bubbles, no matter what shape they were.

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