

Lessons that make a connection

Students learn about architecture, engineering at Legos camp

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It's hard to tell whether A.J. Cummings, Kevin Kang and Kyle Maginot had more fun building their tower of Lego bricks or knocking it down.

But it's clear all three were having a blast — and picking up a few lessons — during Mechanical Engineering Lego Camp at Benedictine University in Lisle.

"Me and A.J. built the base. We were trying to reach the ceiling," said Kevin, 11, of Naperville.

"I had fun helping A.J. and Kevin build the tower," said Kyle, 12, also of Naperville.

During the camp, which is open to sixth- to eighth-graders, children used Lego pendulums and catapults to see how far objects could fly. They also worked with levers and pulleys, learning some of the elements of architecture and physics.

"There are a lot of real-world uses for the things we build," camp instructor Andy Nicky said.

Another lesson campers enjoyed was the "Kentucky do-nothing," a mechanism that spins around.

"The Kentucky do-nothing did nothing, it just looked cool," said A.J., 12, of Naperville.

"The thing that is different about the Lego camps is that they are educational but they're mostly fun," said Dee Guiney, area vice president of Green Apple Camps, which sponsored the event.

In addition to the mechanical engineering program, other camps are offered.

Young Builders is for children in preschool and kindergarten.

"The kids really love contributing their part to it and seeing it come together," Guiney said.

Lego Mania is for second- through fifth-graders, and Architecture is for second through eighth-graders.

"They learn about architecture and get to put it together. That's the part I think they like the most," Guiney said.

Joni Melhan, site director for Green Apple Camps, said there's no shortage of projects kids

can undertake and, fortunately, a limitless supply of the tiny, plastic building blocks.

“Once they get started they want to make it bigger — they want to use all of the Legos,” Melhan said.

The best part is that the knowledge comes painlessly, Melhan said.

“Legos are really interesting to build with, you can put your imagination to work,” said Chris Corrigan, 13, of Naperville.

The students’ enthusiasm is catching, Green Apple Camps area director Michelle Reed said.

“It’s that kind of excitement that keeps you motivated as a teacher,” Reed said.

It’s also resulted in some parents bringing their children for repeat sessions. Organizers are in the process of building a Web site where they’ll post pictures of campers’ creations.

The camps also brings out children’s artistic aptitude.

“If we’re doing individual projects,” Reed said, “they’re so proud of what they’ve done and what they’ve created.”