

Science Festival Coming to Nation's Capital

BY CYNTHIA D. MILLER

“Society gets what it celebrates. If we continue to focus on Lindsay Lohan and Britney Spears instead of science and technology, we will eventually outsource innovation,” said Larry Bock when explaining his resolve to strengthen the nation in the global technology playing field.

Bock has successfully started and sold 40 high-tech companies cumulatively worth more than \$40 billion, and with his wife established the Larry and Diane Bock chair in nanotechnology at the University of California at Berkeley.

Now a venture capitalist and philanthropist, Bock remembers clearly his inability to fill key technology positions in his companies with U.S. graduates. His resolve to change that strengthened when he noticed the excitement generated by regional science festivals held abroad.

Unlike traditional science fairs, the festivals were a true celebration of science and technology with a month or more of events leading up to a grand exposition. In the United States, Bock tested the concept with potential sponsors and advisors, finally piquing the interest of Lockheed Martin. With Lockheed as host, other sponsors, advisors and presenters soon followed, resulting in the first San Diego Science Festival held at Balboa Park in 2008. It attracted more than 250,000 attendees and was so successful that most sponsors built it back into their budgets the following year.

With a successful template in hand, Bock is helping to expand the concept by orchestrating the first U.S.A. Science and Engineering Festival in Washington, D.C. The festival officially launches Oct. 10 with a concert of “cool

science songs” at the University of Maryland campus. The next 14 days will include events and activities throughout the Washington region and will end with a two-day expo held Oct. 23-24 on the Mall and surrounding areas.

In the weeks preceding the expo, middle and high school students will have the opportunity to meet with Nobel Prize winning scientists at “Lunch with a Laureate” sessions. The “Nifty Fifty” program involves 50 top science professionals who will visit Washington area schools and speak about their areas of expertise. Schools and organizations may also register to host and orchestrate their own science events for students or adults, which must be fun and engaging and have an element of science incorporated in a clever way.

Examples include: The Cosmic Tenors, three famous physicists who incorporate their love of physics into opera; a one-woman show about the life of Madam Curie; tours of the Carnegie Institution for Science; teacher workshops to help educators incorporate science into their curricula; and a Science of Wine event.

To date, 30 satellite events throughout the country will be held concurrently with the expo to create a national network. The expo itself will have more than 1,000

hands-on, interactive exhibits and 50 stage shows, and all events are free. Activities will run the gamut of sophistication, from flight simulators to learning about engineering principles by constructing models from marshmallows and toothpicks. Teachers can also give credit to students who participate in one of the festival’s education tracks. The desired result will be the same — bringing festival attendees closer to science.

Once again hosted by Lockheed Martin and boasting support from more than 500 other companies and organizations, the goal is to have 1 million attend the festival in Washington, and participate in satellite events across the country. All involved are striving to make the U.S.A. Science and Engineering Festival the ultimate multicultural, multi-generational and multi-discipline celebration of science in the country.

For more information about the 2010 U.S.A. Science and Engineering Festival, visit www.usasciencefestival.org

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