

Giant squid, Facebook, star gazing and quirky goings on . . .

2008 Science Week Ignited students' enthusiasm for dynamic careers which stretch beyond the white laboratory ... and now for 2009



Science Week 2008 was a huge success with thousands of students from around the nation participating in more than 650 exciting experimental activities. In fact, Science Week was such a success organisers are already preparing for 2009 with a wide range of interactive events themed around the International Year of Astronomy.

Schools all over Australia will be able to learn more about astronomy, the planets and space through a special kit, which is being produced now by the Australian Science Teachers' Association (ASTA). To help teachers get ready, ASTA is producing a new resource booklet, it will be sent out in Term 2, 2009 to every classroom. The kit will be packed full with inspiring activities and information that teachers

can work through with their students.

National Science Week committee member, Ms Leigh Exelby, said in 2008 schools had demonstrated their scientific dexterity while taking part in a range of imaginative activities.

A new innovation was the use of Facebook and Myspace which captivated the 14–24 demographic and proved to be a great communications tool for organisers of what was the 11th annual National Science Week.

As part of the celebrations, science took to the streets as more than 1 million Australians were surprised, informed and entertained by shows, comedy routines, interactive displays, online activities and hands-on experiments held everywhere from museums to schools, zoos and even in pubs.

Talking to Education Today Ms Exelby said that, with a noted decline in students pursuing a career in science, this event was a way of showcasing the diversity of science in all of its forms.

And she said that while 2008 was a great success story, schools could start preparing now for 2009 by using the ASTA schools' kit during National Science Week to study astronomy, the planets and space.

"In 2008 we had some heavyweight draw cards like Australian big cat conservationist, Dr Luke Hunter and renowned US sceptic, Dr Michael Shermer, who took science to the people on a national tour of public presentations, discussion panels and debates," she said.

"On a regional level, school and community activities saw people from Tassie to Townsville, Darwin to Devonport and west to WA star gazing, myth busting, experimenting and enjoying some quirky goings-on.

"In Victoria with the help of technology, more than 5000 students were treated to a live online lesson from Dr Mark Norman, the Melbourne scientist who recently dissected a 245 kg giant squid, while in WA an university student set up Prof Funk on U-tube myth busting quandaries like 'do stripes really make you look fatter?'"

Also popular with the gaming generation was this year's Catchment Detox, an interactive online platform developed by the ABC which saw players making decisions about managing the environment and water resources in a sim style format.

"Catchment Detox was another example of how technology was used to help make National Science Week activities more accessible in regional areas," Leigh said.

"The ABC tends to develop an initiative each year – the schools get involved and there are usually prizes on offer.

"We can't wait for next year because with this level of enthusiasm, professionalism and expertise, Science Week can only get bigger and better."

Also making use of technology this year was the event's newly revamped website with many new interactive features designed to draw participants together from around the country. This year 60,000 students and teachers participated in the extravaganza through their schools.

Each state hosted its share of the fun with

more than 100 events registered in both WA and Tasmania and 76 in South Australia.

“Many of the schools chose to participate in National Science Week in their own way, which is really what we are after, given that there is a decline of students choosing to study science-based programs,” Leigh said.

“But is also important to target the wider community to showcase the reach science has in everyday life.”

It was for this reason that events like talks given at Melbourne’s Redback Hotel and pubs throughout the ACT were a pivotal part of the festival’s success.

To give Science Week even wider appeal, participation is encouraged with the provision of up to \$500,000 through the Commonwealth-funded National Science Week Grants Program, which funds community based events.

“It might be a library just wanting to put up a display or something more interactive,” Leigh said, adding that this year the City of Albury hosted a Border Stargazing event, inviting the community to join with an astronomer for workshops on reading the night sky and identifying celestial objects.

“I guess the message is that there are so many different forms an interest in science can take,” Leigh said. “To encourage school participation Commonwealth grants of up to \$500 are also available to assist with the running of science activities and events during National Science Week.

“This year we had schools who just wanted to run some experiments in the classroom, we had multi-school science festivals, integrated curriculum programs and one school in Victoria even invited a paleontologist to join them in the classroom.”

Applications for 2009 community-based grants have already opened for National Science Week, which will be on from 15th–23rd August; schools wanting to submit for funding can do so from March 2009.

So get involved, more information on schools’ grants is available by contacting the Australian Science Teachers Association (ASTA) National Science Week Project Officer on (02) 6282 9377, email nscwfk@asta.edu.au or visit the ASTA website at www.asta.edu.au.



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Jacqi Deighan

Food Educator, Chef's Toolbox Cooking Consultant, Chef, Writer, Motivational Speaker and Coach

CONTACT

Jacqi Deighan
Natural Kitchen Strategies
344/45 Glenferrie Road
Malvern Victoria 3144
03 9500 8003
0412 390 834
www.naturalkitchenstrategies.com.au
jdeighan@naturalkitchenstrategies.com.au

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