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South Shore YMCA holds day of hands-on learning

By **Katherine Isbell**

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QUINCY — The 350 children who gathered at the South Shore YMCA in Quincy on Thursday learned about inventing, problem solving and teamwork while participating in the South Shore YMCA's Thingamajig Invention Competition.

The children, between the ages of 5 and 14, gathered to show off inventions they made, as well as to participate in hands-on activities that included kaleidoscope making, demonstrations from the Hingham High School robotics team and team invention contests.

The event, which included children attending YMCA camps in Quincy and Hanover, was also open to the public. It is held in partnership with the YMCA's South Shore Natural Science Center. The center's executive director, Chris Jacobs, explained that the goal of the day is to fight summer learning loss.

“The Thingamajig Invention Convention was started in Washington, D.C., at the Metropolitan Y 23 years ago. They have been trying to spread it coast to coast and this is our third year,” Jacobs said, “It’s an opportunity for kids to try hands-on STEM activities and STEAM activities, the ‘A’ stands for the arts, and so we have all sorts of different hands-on activities for them to create, explore, to think outside the box, to be creative thinkers, to be problem solvers.”

As part of the Thingamajig Convention, campers made inventions that were judged by adult volunteers. A long table held all of the submitted projects, with categories including games and sound-making machines. Participants could submit inventions alone or with a partner.

Alora Clark, 9, of Quincy, made two inventions with her friend, fellow camper Athina O’Neill, 9, of Weymouth.

“This one is called Cannonball, and you take a piece of string attached to a cup and a ball is attached to the piece of string and you try to throw the ball into a cup to get points,” Clark said.

“Our second invention is called ‘No Charge Speaker,’ ” O’Neill said, “Basically, you put your phone in it and it makes music or whatever you want sounds.”

Participants also learned valuable lessons in teamwork and sportsmanship.

“My favorite part is being here and making my creation with my friends, and having all these activities,” said camper Colin O’Keefe, 10, of Hingham. “I personally think that it’s fun even though we’re competing, because it’s not like ‘rough’ competing. I’ve learned that when you try a creation it helps if you can all get along.”

At its heart, the day is all about encouraging children to use creative problem solving skills and look at challenges in a different way.

“For us, it’s about bringing campers here and exploring their creativity and using their own minds to make up different projects,” said Phil Gay, the director of day camps and community outreach at the YMCA. “It’s all about camper-driven projects instead of something where we’re telling them you need to do this this way. We’re giving them a problem and they’re solving it in their own way.”