

History Steeped in Science

A series on how Egg Harbor Township Schools and community groups are educating students in science, technology, engineering and math, collectively known as STEM.

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EGG HARBOR TOWNSHIP

The disciplines of science, technology, engineering and math, referred to collectively as STEM, are most often about creating tools to use today and in the future, but sometimes it can be about recreating an item from our past as well.

As Dr. Joyanne D. Miller School teacher Kelly Hunt got her students ready for her annual Civil War day at the school on Friday, June 7, she incorporated these concepts into hands-on projects in which the students would construct some of the weapons and tools used during that era in America's history.

"There were so many technologies that were created as a result of the Civil War, like guns, canons, submarines and the telegraph," Hunt explained. "So, when we started talking about the time period, I figured I would incorporate some of the STEM concepts and have the kids physically build some of these items."

While some students gathered period attire to wear and rehearsed speeches about historical figures, Civil War-era medicine, social dynamics, clothing or foods to present to the other students in the school throughout that day, a few students like 11 year-olds Bobby Baxter and Joe Glenn were busy building a working constructing a canon. With the help of a few family members at home and instruction from their teacher, the boys made a working canon that would shoot a ping-pong ball down the hallway.



Baxter said for the barrel of the canon, he and Glenn took a PVC pipe, drilled two holes in it, attached a rubber band inside "so when we pulled it back, it would fire" the ping-pong ball across the room toward the target. Baxter said his mother Laurie Baxter helped the boys work on the project. The students then mounted in on a piece of wood with brackets, attached an axel his grandfather Lorenzo Pomatto of Egg Harbor Township built to the bottom so they could mount wheels on the scaled-weapon. "Then we painted the wood a rustic brown color so it would look older and painted the PVC pipe black to look like a canon," Baxter explained before demonstrating the project in action.

The canon wasn't the only actual item Hunt's students built: others constructed on a hot-air balloon, a cross-section of a hand grenade, a Gatling gun, a minie ball and a Civil War-era camera, she said.

Bobby Baxter, left, and his partner Joe Glenn, both 11 present their homemade Civil War-era cannon.