



Sue Rokos, Mohawk Valley Library System in collaboration with Ricki D. Shapiro, GE Volunteers Leader for Schenectady, NY

The Mohawk Valley Library System (MVLS) is a cooperative public library system serving 14 independent public libraries in Fulton, Montgomery, Schenectady and Schoharie counties in upstate New York. Public libraries provide an important resource for their communities by supplementing education through library activities and learning opportunities.

MVLS's "Science @ the Library" began in 1992 as "Science in the Summer" with a three-fold purpose:

1. to bring science education to grade school children and their families outside the confines of the regular classroom.
2. to offer accessible science programming to member libraries in rural areas that otherwise would be unable to provide for these services.
3. to give children an opportunity to meet and collaborate with real scientists, generating positive science experiences and planting the seeds for careers in science.



Teen volunteer Anna Winters says, "This program allowed me to experience the pleasure of watching children's faces light up with wonder and joy at the seemingly magic experiments they completed and the way they filled with pride when they realized they were learning how these experiments worked."



From planting seeds for careers in science, to providing developmental opportunities that encourage youth to thrive, to enriching lives that span more than four generations, Science @ the Library inspires and creates positive experiences for young and young-at-heart alike.



Science programs for children are provided consisting of 1 ½ hour sessions in science fair format with hands-on experiments in

- energy
- surface tension
- buoyancy
- sound
- light
- electricity
- magnetism
- chemistry

Stations are set up with GE and teen volunteers are positioned at each table to assist with activities. Instructions are provided at each station so that children and their families can proceed at their own pace.

The glue throughout has been these GE Volunteers, who model agelessness, empathy and a boundless enthusiasm for learning and teaching. "I continue to participate as a facilitator at age 94 because it's fun for me to see the reaction of the kids as they have "Aha Moments", said Rudy Dehn, a volunteer from Day 1.



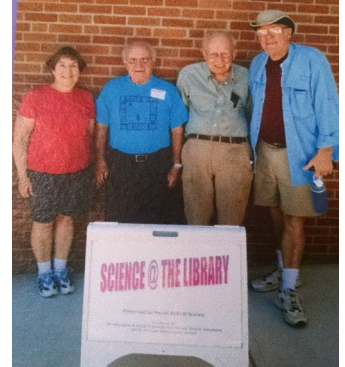
From taking educator training at miSci, (formerly the Schenectady Museum), to gleefully playing with experiments so they can figure out how to create new lesson plans each year, to driving an hour to present a program, the GE Volunteers will go anywhere and do anything to make connections with kids and learning.

We are currently facing the challenge of recruiting new volunteers as current retirees are not longer able to participate because of their advancing age and mobility concerns.

The program has evolved from "talking at" to "doing with," as we recognized early on from the "glazed look on the children's faces" that children learn best through play and interaction, not words, especially since many GE scientists tended to lecture, which is not the best way to engage children.



Annually, about 17 GE retirees – whose median age is 85, along with current employees volunteer for the program. Three retirees have been involved since the program's inception. Recruitment through a GE retirees' network, provides both a pipeline and a vital link between those who join as volunteers and long time participants.



Volunteers donate about 400 hours for Science @ the Library programs and 200 hours for demonstrations at school and libraries throughout the school year.

Parents told us they wanted to be involved and experience what their children were doing, and we realized that in rural environments, where children have fewer opportunities, the conversations that happened after the kids went home were as important as the activities themselves.



Equipment, science books and materials, which have been funded through GE Volunteers



grants, are used year-round by GE volunteers for library and school programs, enabling volunteers to maintain their far-reaching ability to promote science through the libraries and in cooperation with the schools.

Science is of interest to patrons of all ages; it brings new audiences and interactions into our libraries. This is evidenced by parental feedback: one offered thanks for "helping my children realize that science is more than a boring subject they have to sit through in class."

Early evidence that parents brought their sons to the "hard" science activities and their daughters to the "soft" ones led to lessons that incorporated both aspects, to facilitate learning by boys and girls in both arenas.



CONTACT US!
Science @ the Library Program
www.mvls.info
srokos@mvls.info