

ODOT Engineer Brings “Aha!” Moment To Classroom

The way ODOT’s Ana Javonovic describes it, many (if not most) engineers have an “aha” moment. It’s that point in time when the solution to a problem appears. Like the proverbial light going on in the cartoon balloon. And that’s how she captured the attention of Mitchell High School students when she was recently in their classroom talking about engineering opportunities. Then she throws in the little practice session with paper, scissors and marbles.

You see, engineers are practical people, so Jovanovic throws in a bit of practice on top of her theory. Once she’s done explaining how engineers make things work, she lets’ her students get in on the act.

First there’s the theory. About how engineers make life better. Mechanical engineer, chemical engineers, and of course, public engineers who are the folks in ODOT who design our infrastructure.



But what really get’s the kids motivated is the test she puts them through. In a five minute window, they’re to build a ramp out of paper and tape on which they’ll launch marbles and see who can hit the target. Rushing to the task, the students huddle for a couple of minutes and then set to work. They create long deep V’s or circular tubes supported by paper I-beams and girders. Then

with a scramble they set to launching their marbles...

It’s not so important who wins, as it is they learn about what engineers can do. Science teacher Rhonda Brennan says, “I think they start to think outside the box. They begin to problem-solve as a team.” She adds, “They begin to experience what being an engineer would be like”.

Does it work? Here’s what 10th grader Ehianna Tolton says. “I learned a lot. What they (engineers) earn. I learned something about engineers. Now I see what they do.”



Ana herself has this to say, “I enjoy teaching, especially middle-school age children. They are very creative and this becomes apparent during the hands-on activity. It was very rewarding to see the students’ talent for math and science come out. “

Maybe it will linger into their careers...perhaps even at ODOT.