

LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Thanks to a statewide volunteer initiative, local youngsters learn about science, technology, engineering and math while on vacation



By Sean Flynn
Staff writer

MIDDLETOWN — The staff of the Newport County YMCA provides after-school programs for students in both Middletown and Jamestown, but when school vacations take place, like this week, and children arrive at the Y for a full day of activities, staff members need some help.

Close to a dozen volunteers from BankNewport stepped forward to provide science-technology-engineering-math, or STEM, enrichment activities in the gym and keep kids intrigued during the vacation.

“It’s the best part of my job, to tell the truth,” said Justin Medeiros, an accounting manager for the bank. “Getting involved in the community and seeing the kids happy and learning is very satisfying.”

The YMCA-BankNewport partnership this week is part of a statewide effort called the “April Vacation Volunteer Initiative” that began last year. The United Way of Rhode Island and the Grantmakers Council of Rhode Island, which is a membership organization of private, community and corporate foundations, organized the initiative that was at the YMCA for the first time this week, said Nancy Wolanski, program manager for the Grantmakers.

Both BankNewport and the United Way, which also had staff at the YMCA this week, are among the 29 members of the Grantmakers Council, which includes other major companies and organizations like Fidelity, Hasbro, CVS Health, Textron and the local van Beuren Charitable Foundation.

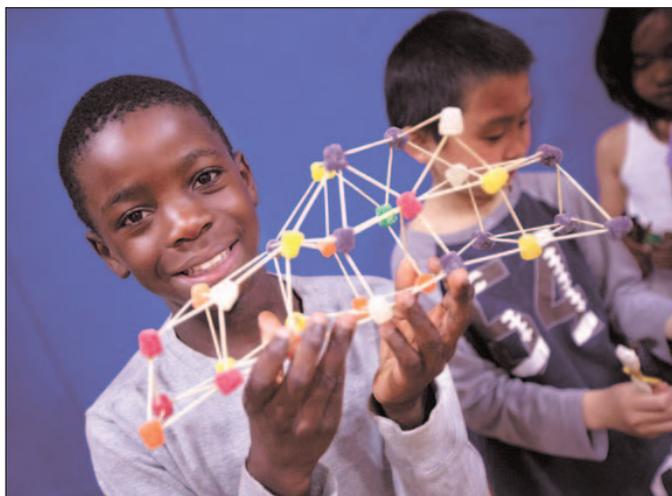
“It’s difficult to find funding for vacation programs like this,” said Anne Schultz, director of the YMCA after-school program. “Because it is such a challenge, we are grateful to volunteers who see the importance of enriching children’s lives.”

The YMCA is part of the After-School Leadership Circle, a United Way program. Similar programs were run in Bristol, North Providence and Pawtucket this week, said Lori DiMatteo, volunteer coordinator for the United Way, who also was present at the



David O'Connor Photography

BankNewport receptionist Jerilyn Silvia, above, works with Alexis Muschiano on a project this week at the Newport County YMCA. About a dozen employees from the bank volunteered for the student enrichment program. At top, Justin Hatch examines his project, and Mduduzi Clarkson, below, shows off his engineering project.



YMCA. BankNewport also sent a team to the Bristol-Warren Child Opportunity Zone program, she said.

The children at the local YMCA enjoyed the results of all this planning.

“I really like doing science,” said Marcell DosSantos, 7, who

attends Forest Avenue Elementary School.

“Today we built a really good bridge between two chairs that stayed up,” she said Tuesday.

The students that day were provided with kits that contained dowels, joints, household items and other materials for building

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structures. They could test the structures that best held weights or were the most resilient.

“It’s a lot of fun,” said Gabriel Pigeon of Middletown. “I really like building things.”

“This is my first time volunteering for an after-school activity,” said Kailie Gulino, a community relations coordinator for BankNewport. “Proficiency in science is something that we seem to lack in education nationally. To be able to make science fun for kids during April vacation is great.”

The engagement of community volunteers with April vacation

LEARNING A7