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TOP STORY

'The Future is Now': WKU's Idea Festival draws hundreds of students to campus

AARON MUDD amudd@bgdailynews.com 2 hrs ago



Trace Gearlds, an 8th grader at Monroe County Middle School, rides on Newton's Attic during the Idea Festival on Wednesday, February 13, 2019, at Downing Student Union. (Austin Anthony/photo@bgdailynews.com)

Austin Anthony

When Keiko Nishijima looks back on her memories of attending the Idea Festival at Western Kentucky University as a high school student, she remembers the creativity and inspiration it helped spark.

Now a Greenwood High School graduate, Nishijima supervised middle and high school students as they chipped in to complete a 32-foot-by-6-foot mural Wednesday during the sixth annual Idea Festival.

“It’s nice to see how artistic it becomes,” she said of the festival, which is organized by WKU’s Center for Gifted Studies.

About 800 students from school districts in Kentucky and Tennessee flocked to WKU for this year's festival. Morning speaker sessions in Van Meter Hall highlighted an artist and activist, entrepreneurs, an engineer and others. Afternoon sessions held at Downing Student Union featured improv comedy lessons, a dance floor controlled with computer programming, two makerspaces and other activities.

"Our goal is to inspire the next generation of creators, thinkers and entrepreneurs in our region," said Erika Solberg, the center's special programs coordinator. This year's theme was "The Future is Now."

"A lot of it is about how they can see what they want the world to be like and start working on that right now," she said.

With many attendees coming from rural districts, Solberg said the festival gives students a chance to try new things their schools might not have the resource to provide.

Andee Rudloff, a local artist, has been working with students through the festival since it started. On Wednesday, she handed out brushes and paint to students working on the mural, which incorporated symbols referencing this year's festival.

She enjoyed watching students come out of their shells while working on the mural, she said, noting it will travel around to participating schools that request it.

Mac Glidewell, executive director of the Governor's School for Entrepreneurs, walked students through an activity in which they molded chairs from Play-Doh to best reflect a customer's needs. Then he threw a curveball, announcing a pretend "recall" for the popsicle sticks students used.



“Kind of the idea behind that is to help them understand that if they ever do start a company one day that things might happen that are completely out of their control,” Glidewell said.

“They need to learn how to accept failure and to learn from it and not fear it, just know that to some degree it’s inevitable,” he said.

Glidewell judged that Abigail Sams, an eighth-grader from Graves County, had the chair that best fit the fictional customer.

Abigail said she appreciated getting to meet students with similar interests through the festival. Her experience with the entrepreneurship activity taught her that problems can be approached in different ways and to start by serving a customer’s needs first.

“Not everybody is the same,” she said.

– Follow education reporter Aaron Mudd on Twitter @BGDN_edbeat or visit bgdailynews.com.

Aaron Mudd

Education reporter. Covers education and related issues, focusing primarily on the Bowling Green and Warren County public school districts and Western Kentucky University.

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