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Commentary: STEM helps scientists share with students

By Arundi Venkayya Cox, Business Editor

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Remember sitting in algebra and physics classes and wondering when you would ever use those lessons “in the real world?”

Today, educators and business people around the region are working to answer those questions for students through the Dayton Regional STEM Center, which was created about two and a half years ago with a grant from the National Governors’ Association and additional support from the Montgomery County Educational Service Center and partners.

STEM stands for science, technology, engineering and math. And the STEM Center is dedicated to changing the way that students view those fields by demonstrating their value in real-life applications.

Now, the center is seeking additional industry partners.

“We work together with business and industry and scientists and engineers to design the lessons,” said Margy Stevens, assistant superintendent of the Montgomery County ESC and executive director of the center. The center has a program called STEM Fellows.

STEM Fellows are teachers and business and industry scientists and researchers, who donate their time to the STEM Center. “Now, half of the fellows come from the business sector,” she added. “We are looking for people who have a passion about STEM and who are willing to put in the time.”

Current industry partners include employees from the Air Force Research Lab, Mound Laser & Photonics, Cornerstone Research Group and Thaler Machine Company.

The center also is seeking industry partners where teachers can do mini-internships for a week or two, Stevens said.

The program has shown students real-life uses of science, technology, engineering and math, said Jim Grote, principal electronics research engineer in the materials & manufacturing directorate at AFRL and a STEM Fellow.

“We’ve made it more of an applications-oriented learning,” Grote said. “We’re trying to give them a hands-on experience. The kids retain it a lot better.

“The biggest thing for STEM is to get kids energized in science, technology, engineering and math. Grote said he thinks the STEM curriculum will make an impact in the workforce but it’s hard to tell because the program is so young.

"You never know when that student that you instructed who go into science may work in your lab," he said. "They may end up being a colleague. It's all worth it. It's just rewarding."

For more information, visit www.daytonregionalstemcenter.org