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Block Kids competition inspires local La Porte ISD fifth graders

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When fifth-grader Trace Spears' name was called as the overall winner of his school's "Block Kids" building competition, he was so surprised that he nearly knocked his new hard hat off his head.

His entry of a power plant at the mouth of the Mississippi River that powered New Orleans – his former hometown, complete with a "Café du Monde" powered by the plant – will now be submitted to the NAWIC Block Kids regional competition, with a chance to advance to the national level.

The Block Kids Building Program, sponsored by the National Association of Women in Construction, is a national competition that is sponsored on the local level by NAWIC chapters and other organizations in the construction industry. The NAWIC Houston chapter's Block Kids competition was held at Heritage Elementary School (LaPorte ISD) on Feb. 6.



Participants in the 'Block Kids' building competition

Nationwide, the competition is open to grades 1-6, but at Heritage, the entire fifth grade put their building creativity skills to the test. Some of the structures they built ranged from icons like the Empire State Building, the World Trade Center Twin Towers, the Washington Monument, and the San Jacinto Monument, to churches, hospitals, pyramids, fire stations, homes, and military bases.

The competition involves the construction of various structures with 100 interlocking blocks and three of the following additional items: a small rock, string, foil, or poster board. Students have one hour to build a small structure with those materials. Each competitor is on his or her own – no help from parents, teachers or judges.

Judges from NAWIC and industry partners interviewed each child about his or her creation. Students had to explain what they built, why they chose to build it, what purpose it would serve and what they would do differently if given the chance.

The judges were curious to find out what students already knew about construction and what types of careers in which they might be interested. Not surprisingly, there were quite a few who were interested in being architects, engineers, and various craft trades.

During his interview, Trace thoroughly explained his project and what inspired him to build it. Not only was his structure accurate, but his design's spectacular attention to detail set his creation apart from the others, though there were many very creative designs for judges to review. For example, he used his rock as a barrier of protection preventing barges and other vessels from hitting the plant. He also included the legendary Café du Monde benefiting from this power plant – it needs power to cook all those beignets!

"It is amazing to see what kinds of construction projects the kids come up with on their own," said De'Ann Gill of Becon Construction, NAWIC Houston's Block Kids chair. "Their creativity and thought processes are really inspiring. It gives me great pride to see such talent at such an early age. It is encouraging to think about how amazing the future of construction will be left to such talented and creative minds like the students at Heritage Elementary."

The top three winners from each of the four classrooms also included: Jonathon Quintanilla, Pierce Pluenneke, Ecstasy Garcia, Celeste Gladish, Ashley Holt, Leo Garcia, Sergio Olvera, Juan Hernandez, Hannah Kloesel, Maggie Simmons and Natalie Duenez.

Companies donating materials, promotional items, and volunteers include: Becon Construction, CB&I, RC Signs, Cadence McShane Construction, Fisk Electric Co., Burch Construction, Tellepsen Builders, Sunstate Equipment Co., Acton Mobile, Energy Waterproofing and Roofing Systems, RLI Surety, Austin Industrial, Starcon, Lyondell Bassell, Linbeck, Willbros, Expertox, Fluor, CLP Resources, Zenith Construction, Clark Construction, Curry Mechanical, RSC, Houston Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC), the Construction Maintenance and Education Foundation (CMEF), the Houston Business Roundtable (HBR) and many more.

NAWIC is a national organization dedicated to the advancement and support of women in the construction industry. One of NAWIC's objectives is to promote education and contribute to the betterment of the construction industry. Any woman in construction, business or a supporting industry is welcome to join. For more information, visit our Web site at www.nawic-houston.com.

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