

Learning rocks at IU Science Fest

By Abby Tonsing atonsing@heraldt.com Oct 27, 2018

A dozen children crowded around Ed Herrmann's collection of obsidian and chert displayed on an animal pelt on the floor. Geology and anthropology graduate students chipped away at the rocks with pressure flaker tools made of moose and deer antlers.

Herrmann's fingers were bandaged, as were those of the graduate students.

"Most of us are wearing band-aids, not because it's in fashion," the research scientist in geoarchaeology told the children.

He warned them that some of the rocks shouldn't be touched: they're too sharp.

"I'm trying to make a point," Herrmann joked.

After washing a fresh cut in the bathroom, geology graduate student Danielle Peltier returned to shaping a piece of black volcanic rock into a triangular spear head. A little girl wearing a pink coat watched Peltier work while the other children got distracted with a bamboo spear demonstration.

All it took was one slip of the pressure flaker and Peltier sheared off an entire corner of the spear head. The tool she had been working on was broken.

The little girl gasped, her mouth falling open.

Herrmann's stone tool making demonstration in the basement of the Student Building was just one as of 150 activities available to scholars of all ages during the fifth-annual Indiana University Science Fest. More than 550 professors, students and volunteers representing 26 different areas of scientific studies hosted interactive learning activities at several buildings across campus.

Indianapolis eighth-graders and friends Lauren Yelich and Annelise Moore took a break at a table inside Franklin Hall and snacked on homemade lunches. They had just raced toy cars using brain waves at the Neuroscience Club's booth.

Annelise said she prefers the more hands-on approach to learning about science to the worksheets she's expected to complete for school.

Lauren agreed, "I think it makes it a little more exciting."

Lauren's mother, Janna Stathyelich said Science Fest makes for a good field trip. They made the drive down last year and were so impressed by the chemistry magic show, they wanted to see what surprises were in store this year.

"Breaking open geodes was a hit," she said.