



USA Science & Engineering Festival 2014

Tau Beta Pi hosted a booth April 25-27 at the third USA Science & Engineering Festival that took place at the Washington E. Convention Center. According to initial reports, approximately 325,000 people participated in the 2014 Festival.

This year, the main activity at the booth was an adaptation of a balloon-powered vehicle module where Festival participants attempt to design and build a vehicle to be powered only by the air being released from attached balloons. During the three-day event, nearly 1,500 Festival attendees stopped by the Tau Beta Pi booth where they were greeted by volunteers, including seven TBP alumni, collegiate members from the DC Gamma chapter at George Washington University, the Maryland Delta chapter at the University of Maryland Baltimore County, the DC Alpha chapter at Howard University, and the Maryland Beta chapter at the University of Maryland. A total of 26 volunteers led vehicle building activities that demonstrated important K-12 math and science concepts during the three-day Expo. Several of the volunteers attended multiple days of the Festival and volunteered countless hours. The overall success of the booth is a direct result of their great effort.

There was a wide range of materials made available to participants in building their vehicle, including but not limited to Styrofoam plates, cardboard, sponges, straws, dowel rods, wheels (plastic, rubber, and bottle cap) , and the necessary building utensils such as scissors and tape. The best part was that there were no limitations on creating whatever type of vehicle one could imagine.

Throughout the duration of the Festival more than 1,000 vehicles were constructed and tested on the Convention Center floor. It was determined that there was no exact number of wheels needed to build a successful vehicle as several had success with two, three, and even **no wheels!** While there was some disappointment associated with vehicles that did not move, it gave the volunteers a chance to discuss important math and science concepts and assist with design adjustments.

Several inquiries were made regarding the Association and the K-12 MindSET program. Teachers and parents received brochures and were invited to sign up to receive further details on participation with MindSET. Festival attendees also enjoyed free Association bookmarks, black and blue insignia pens, and the occasional inflated balloon request.

The Association's participation in the largest, ultimate celebration of engineering and science in the country was a success on many levels. Tau Beta Pi benefited from the national exposure, inspired the future generation of STEM professionals, increased the reach of the Association's K-12 program, and offered a unique experience to current college students and alumni to build camaraderie and a rapport toward a common goal beyond networking or socializing. As a result, all involved were challenged to think outside the box, took part in STEM learning, and had an awesome experience.