

BUDDING INVENTORS

Students learn to stretch their imaginations

BY ROSEMARY MARTINEZ

"Innovative" is generally a term associated with businessmen, engineers and physicists, but at Mary Immaculate Catholic School in Farmers Branch, 8- and 9-year-olds strive to achieve the label.

Each year, third-graders at the school participate in a grade-wide invention convention. To prepare for it, they are tasked with an assignment that requires them to stretch their imaginations. Using at least one simple machine, they design an invention that makes life easier for potential consumers.

"Third-graders are very creative problem-solvers," said MIS third-grade teacher Eileen Blair. "They identify problems in their environment, develop and evaluate possible solutions ... three primary steps in creating an invention."

In addition to creative thinking and problem solving, preparations for the event incorporate learning through both social studies and science. The students first study inventors and their inventions, and discuss problems in the world around them. They then determine a need that should be fulfilled or a problem that should be solved.

Researching and planning their solution follows as the students draft preliminary drawings and list materials they will need. As part of this, the students study gears, inclined planes, levers, pulleys, screws, wedges, wheels and axles. They are then required to include at least one simple machine in their design.

The final step in preparing for the invention convention is for the students to create models or prototypes of their invention.



PHOTOS SUBMITTED BY ROSEMARY MARTINEZ

Mary Immaculate School students present their inventions at the school's grade-wide Invention Convention.

"Making my invention was really fun," said invention convention participant Devin Lalonde. "But I learned that I have to plan and have everything written down ... we made three trips to the store to get everything I needed."

On the day of the convention,

the students bring their creations into the classroom and briefly present them to their classmates. Inventions included things such as the Pillow-fluffer, Pole Vault Simulator, Automatic Plant Waterer, UnoSpinner, Mobile Marble Launcher, Smellable Door Stop and Moen Corn Butterer.

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The devices that the students introduced were as diverse as the children themselves, and they are presented with all the energy and enthusiasm of an infomercial.

Nine-year-old Natalie Long explained matter-of-factly what she and her classmates discovered from this learning activity: "Even a kid can be an inventor."

Rosemary Martinez submits to neighborsgo.com on behalf of Mary Immaculate School.



Above left: Rachel Chambers, Alicia Aranda, Angela Pelky and David Moen show their inventions that they designed to solve household problems. **Above right:** Emily McAfee demonstrates her Pillow-Fluffer invention.