



Everything New Orleans

The Times-Picayune

School's new lab gets students stoked Outreach efforts mesh with joy of learning

Sunday, August 16, 2009

By Jenny Hurwitz
West Bank bureau

With his eyes fixed on the computer screen, 17-year-old Wayne Treaudo shifted the three-dimensional hoop displayed on his monitor, twisting its dimensions and experimenting with its alignment with a rapid series of mouse clicks.

His assignment: to create a movie sequence showing an animated box leaping through a hoop.

While he'd never used this type of software before, Treaudo dived right in, testing out different scenarios and playing around with colors and screen views.

"It's fun," he said. "I want to be a graphics designer, so this is the best thing for me."

Treaudo, a senior, was getting a glimpse of his future with the help of his school's new state-of-the-art computer graphics lab, which made its debut this month at Algiers Technology Academy.

The concept for the lab originated as an outreach project associated with Special Interest Group of GRAPHics and Interactive Techniques (SIGGRAPH), a computer graphics conference that was held in New Orleans the first week in August. It was designed in conjunction with SIGGRAPH, Walt Disney Animation Studios, Autodesk, Dreamworks Animation and the George Lucas Foundation.

The lab consists of 45 Disney-donated computers, while the software, which is used to create advanced animation and motion pictures, was donated by Autodesk.

On the surface, the lab will allow students to gain practical experience making animated motion pictures and complex computer graphics. But it also will test the bounds of their mathematical thinking and could be used to supplement a wide array of subjects, including art and science, according to Jerome Solomon, the SIGGRAPH 2009 outreach chairman.

"Math, science, linear equations, algebra -- all these things are key to how we implement graphics," said Solomon, who works for Industrial Light and Magic. "We hope this lab can be a tool for kids to learn any area that interests them."

The lab was unveiled with some cinematic flair, including a popcorn machine outside, a red carpet leading up to the entrance and framed posters from Dreamworks animated movies such as "Shrek" and "Kung-Fu Panda" decorating the walls. Students working at the new computer stations said they were impressed with lab's spruced-up appearance.

"The room was basically empty last year, so to see all this, I was amazed," said Brittney Mack, 15, a sophomore at ATA.

Marty Sixkiller, the Dreamworks project manager who helped set up the lab, had been teaching

students some animation basics the morning of the lab's debut. Already, he could sense the potential impact of this lab on ATA students.

"I would see the excitement in their eyes when they saw items come to life. They kept asking for more and more," Sixkiller said. "I got goosebumps. I really got excited about their passion to learn."

©2009 timespic