

Students conquer the SARC with just cardboard and duct tape



By Brock Weir

Students conquered the pool at the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex on Friday afternoon ? but they weren't showing off their swimming prowess, rather just what they can do with a pile of cardboard and a few rolls of duct tape.

After beginning their morning with equal piles of cardboard and five rolls of duct tape, teams of Grade 7 students at Pickering College began construction work at the school at 7.30 a.m. and working around the clock ? even skipping recess! ? to get their boats done before loading them up for Aurora in the afternoon.

Designs for their respective boats have been weeks in the making, working in teams developing blueprints, and pitching their designs to their respective classes, a ?simulated corporate panel of potential investors.?

?They are very excited,? said teacher Elaine Kleim, watching from the sidelines as students were sized up for life jackets and had small strategy huddles on the poolside. ?I'm always nervous because you get to know what is going to float and what is going to sink so maybe we can judge it a bit sooner than they can, but it is cool when they are at the building stage when they find out a design is not going to work and to watch them problem solve.?

By midday, cardboard had been slapped together, seams had been waterproofed ? or so they hoped! ? with the duct tape, and then things got interesting.

?We started off with five rolls of tape and then we had the ultimate takedown challenge,? said Ms. Kleim. ?If you got the trivia right you got an extra roll.?

As students prepared to hit the water in their boats, with the ultimate objective to get out at the other end unscathed and intact to take on a secondary weight challenge, Ms. Kleim sized up the competition. There were one or two boats she had concerned about ? but they all had a pretty good chance as long as there was even distribution of weight?and duct tape.

When it was time to face the music, all but one boat made it to the deep end in one piece. Some fared better than others. Some were unscathed and relatively dry, while other boats took longer to drain than it did to cross the pool, inexplicably staying afloat.

?I think we did pretty well!? said Auroran Emma Kerswill, dripping after making sure her boat fared well in the weight challenge.

For her, one of the biggest challenges was accounting for the differences in building on the floor of the gym while accounting for the stability that would be needed on the water.

?It is taking the textbook stuff we have already learned and putting it onto a design that has to be stable on two separate rounds and we learned a lot. I was in the water and I just had to stay there and make sure it didn't completely sink. All we wanted was to make sure it would stay up and afloat until the next competition.?

For Alexander Smith, a fellow Aurora student, it was a matter of practice makes perfect, even though perfection was a lofty goal.

?We learned that even if you think you have made a really good boat, it can still have some difficulties in the pool,? he said. ?There is not any perfect design, but we have all done our best to make it great. When I was swimming alongside the boat, I was just hoping that it wouldn't break, that it would stay stable and stay moving to the end so we could finish that race.?

Added Julian Bolivar: ?I was just hoping it would come out in one piece! The most fun was how you can just take two perfectly good sheets of cardboard into something amazing like a boat and just hope for the best as you are trying it in the water.?

Rest assured, following the race, the students spent a good chunk of time ? and fun ? back in the water, carefully picking up stray bits of cardboard left over before swimmers took over the pool once again.