

Sea-Air-Space: Mad Science, Marine Mammal Medicine Highlight 7th STEM Expo



A young attendee at STEM Expo is excited to learn about science. *Photo credit: James Peterson*

Hundreds of energetic students packed into the RiverView Ballroom at the Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center for the seventh year of the STEM Expo to kick off Sea-Air-Space 2025.

The event featured more than three dozen exhibits to help interest students in grades five through 12 to pursue a STEM career. It also threw in a little fun from presentations by Mad Science, which delivers innovative, educational science demonstrations aimed at children, and the National Marine Mammal Foundation, which showcased the Navy's marine mammal program and let students get up close with an inflatable

dolphin stand-in.

The STEM Expo drew not only students but high-level attendees from the sea service, including Chief of Naval Research Rear Admiral Kurt J. Rothenhaus.

“ONR is honored to be a part of this STEM event to get the word out to young folks around the country to think about a career in science, technology, engineering and mathematics,” Rothenhaus said. “I’m excited to see the many industry partners out this afternoon as well as our Naval Research Lab, all here to inspire the next generation to help build the future.”



The National Marine Mammal Foundation discussed how to keep Navy dolphins healthy. *Photo credit: James Peterson*
HII was the Champion Sponsor for the event and CACI sponsored the science stations.

Hands-on Fun

“In my section, we’re over there making a mess. We’re trying

to teach them some buoyancy” by having students build small boats that carried weight, said HII’s William Abaira, a structural engineer at Newport News Shipbuilding, who works on submarine pressure hulls.

“We’re trying to explain water displacement to them but fun gets in the way and it quickly turns into a competition of who can hold the most marbles,” he said. “But it’s super important, it’s one of those basic principles in shipbuilding, and it just gets kids really excited.”

Perry Haymon, with HII’s Ingalls Shipbuilding, was helping hand out brightly colored plastic “hard hats” to students to emphasize the importance of safety.

“I work in research and development. So, I see the importance of those new things, those new technologies. To see young minds come in and get interested in what we do at the shipyard, as well as all of HII ... is very important to us. We enjoy coming and seeing the faces of young people,” he said. “There’s a lot of energy here, from the people coming in, just getting hard hats, and also seeing the other events that we’ve got going on, from welding to virtual reality, and also building a boat to see how much weight you can actually carry.”

CACI had set up a booth where children could design their own hovercraft from common materials and test them in a wind tunnel. “It’s been such a fun experience getting to watch them do it,” said Sidney Finkenbinder, a media relations specialist at CACI. “Make one, test it out, see what they can change and make it better. That’s what it’s all about, getting to learn new things and try out new activities ... getting to see their faces