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Camping for Engineers

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High school students participating in a University of Dayton engineering camp will help draft plans for the downtown Dayton Arcade, which has been awaiting redevelopment for 18 years.

Dayton Arcade developers will enlist help from the University of Dayton Pre-Engineering Program Camp (PEP) — Friday, June 19, through Sunday, June 21 — because they want to involve Ohio’s youth in rethinking the environment, renovation and revitalization, according to Steve Heins, public relations manager for Dayton Arcade LLC.

The students will examine ways to incorporate Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design principles into the arcade’s interior. The focus is on identifying high-performance green interiors that are healthy, productive places to work; are less costly to operate and maintain; and have a reduced environmental footprint, according to PEP camp coordinator Michelle Strunks.

"We have several campers from the Dayton area who are interested in civil and environmental engineering," Strunks said. "This is an opportunity for them to work on a highly visible local project."

Heins said the students’ work could help identify ideas that Dayton Arcade LLC can use in the future. He added that future opportunities may come up for other University of Dayton camps or engineering students to be involved in Dayton Arcade projects.

"They can be part of the arcade when it is restored," said Gunther Berg, CEO of Dayton Arcade LLC. "My expectation is to give kids a sort of identification (with the project). Maybe they can even tell their kids, 'Hey, I worked on that.'"

The students working on the Dayton Arcade project will be at the building from 9 to 11:30 a.m. Saturday, June 20. Students, PEP camp organizers and a representative of the Dayton Arcade LLC will be available for interviews. The other two projects that PEP campers will be involved in are in the areas of robotics and with grid independent houses that create their own energy needed for heating and cooling.

The PEP Camp is one of three University of Dayton School of Engineering camps this summer — along with the Minority Engineering and Technology Enrichment Camp (METEC) for High School Males and the Women in Engineering camp — with the goal of encouraging more students to get involved in the STEM fields of science, technology, engineering and math.

Participants in the three camps will come from as far away as California, Delaware, Florida and Massachusetts. Most of the hands-on activities during the camps, School of Engineering organizers say, are not available in high schools. The camps also feature question-and-answer sessions with industry professionals. Registration for all three camps is open to the public, but spots filled quickly and registration now is closed.

The School of Engineering's camp season kicks off with METEC June 14-20. Organizers believe METEC is the nation's first engineering camp that caters only to minority males. The METEC participants will work with sensors used in national security applications, robotics and materials used in aviation.

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics show about half the U.S. science and engineering workers are older than 45 years old. Undergraduate science and engineering enrollment is dropping. The National Science Foundation reports that minorities make up about 28 percent of the U.S. work force.

"Yet, African-Americans and Hispanics account for less than 6 percent of the science and engineering work force," said METEC coordinator Maceo Cofield. "C.M. Vest, former president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, best summarized the situation when he said, 'We need to open and encourage careers and opportunities for success in science and engineering to the great, diverse population of America. To do less is to put our collective future at severe risk.'"

Cofield said METEC will follow the University of Dayton model established 36 years ago with one of the nation's first Women in Engineering camps. That camp will be July 12-17.
"I found the Women in Engineering Camp to be very important and the deciding factor in my decision to pursue a career in engineering," former WIE camper Sarah Nisky said. "The camp showed me some of the things I can do as an engineer, which really helped me to realize what an engineer does. Going to this camp was one of the best and most important things I have done in my high school career."

WIE campers are scheduled to conduct hands-on experiments involving hydrogen fuel cells, robots and sensors; build balsa wood truss towers; and design a prosthetic device for a dog that lost a leg, according to WIE coordinator Annette Packard.

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