

Discovering a Taste of Genetics

by Shea Feeney, San Francisco State University

The San Francisco Bay Area Science Festival is an exciting place to be for anyone who is interested in science and technology. The festival is a week-long series of events held in different cities around the Bay Area and it is all about making science fun and accessible to the general public. The festival ended with Discovery Days at AT&T Park in San Francisco on November 2, 2013. Despite the gloomy and rainy weather around San Francisco and the East Bay, the sun was shining directly over AT&T Park—it was destined to be a great day for science.

Our ASBMB-UAN chapter from San Francisco State University, led by Dr. Teaster Baird, Jr., teamed up with the UAN chapter from San Jose State University to put on an interactive booth where we fused genetics and candy into sticky, delicious fun. We taught kids about the basics of DNA and how to make their own candy version that they could take with them to eat. We used licorice as the sugar-phosphate backbone and colored marshmallows as the bases. To make it more interesting and personal, we had kids make their candy DNA sequence to be representative of their own features, such as their hair color, eye color, or if they could roll their tongue. Our booth was packed with kids and adults of all ages from opening to

closing with everyone eager to learn about DNA and how to make (and eat) their own. We had many requests from teachers and parents to take home a copy of the “protocol” so they could replicate it at home.



Our booth wasn't alone in offering kids and their families a fun way to learn about science. There were over 150 interactive booths about science on every level of the park, exploring topics from fossils to robotics in ways that you wouldn't see in a classroom. There was a science rapper who spit rhymes about DNA, enzymes, global

warming, and astronomy. At the Bio-Rad booth, people could even extract a sample of their own DNA from saliva and put it into a charm to wear as a necklace. On the baseball field, you could take a picture with a human-sized chromosome. At another booth, you could learn about how nutritious freeze-dried mealworms are—they even had samples! (They taste like nutty popcorn.) Last year, over 30,000 people attended the Discovery Days in San Francisco and this year appeared to be just as popular with something exciting for everyone to learn and do.

We and the UAN chapter from San Jose State University were thrilled to be a part of such a big science fair and we're all looking forward to bringing a new edible science topic to the table at next year's Discovery Days.