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Nimol Mao, 14, makes some slime with the help of "Mad Scientist" John Epstein during a presentation at Shriners Hospital.

What MAD -ness!

A national franchise's gee-whiz lab reactions galvanize youngsters' interest in technology

[Fun facts](#)

By Nancy Arcayna
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By the time a child leaves his home for school in the morning, he will have likely encountered 50 to 100 examples of science and technology, according to John Epstein, of Mad Science.

"Science allows children to better explore their world," he says.

Epstein puts on his white lab coat, grabs his traveling science lab and voilà! -- he becomes "John Electron," a "mad scientist" whose goal is to spark youngsters' curiosity and introduce fun to the potentially dull subject of science.

Epstein was once your typical meek, mild-mannered middle-school math and science teacher, but left the profession to earn more money in the corporate world. "Mad Science gave me the opportunity to get back into the field of education," he says.

His new job calls for demonstrations of chemical reactions, movie special effects and combining chemicals to make bubbling potions. "We are hoping to form partnerships with preschools," he says.



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Patients Christina Sablan, 6, left, and Antoinette Johnson, 10, watch the show intently.

The Mad Science Group is a national franchise on a mission to spark the imagination and curiosity of children through fun, hands-on and engaging science shows and activities. The group reaches 5 million children annually through live presentations throughout the United States, Canada and 20 countries overseas.

The program started in Hawaii last month, and "John Electron" is assisted by other mad scientists: Cosmic Colleen, Nuclear Neal, Helium Howard and Jupiter Jacques.

Epstein currently brings his lab to school assemblies; after-school programs; corporate, company and special events; and birthday parties.

"It's something different to do for a special occasion," says Epstein. "It's educational yet entertaining."

STUDENTS AT Makakilo Elementary School got a taste of Mad Science a couple weeks ago.

"It opened their eyes that science can be fun," said Principal Gary Chun, adding that teacher's plates are so full these days that "it's nice to have extra programs that enhance curriculum."



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Shriners Hospital patient Peter Gallo, 14, and his sister Christina, 12, get a laugh out of John Epstein's "Mad Science."

Chun shares Epstein's love of science. Earlier in his career, Chun taught science at Roosevelt High School and would give Epstein an A for his program. "It was entertaining but brought together a variety of scientific concepts," Chun said.

In a world in which technology continues to advance, Epstein recognizes that few children show interest in the subject beyond grade school, which doesn't bode well careerwise in light of growing competition from abroad.

Epstein knows firsthand how schools can squelch rather than encourage learning.

"Those rare days when we actually conducted experiments made the most memorable impressions," he says. "It's not that textbooks are bad, it's just that conducting experiments made it all seem so much more real."

"Once education is changed into play, it cements the learning. Once someone is interested, learning comes naturally," says Epstein, who was raised by his maternal grandparents.

"My grandfather was an engineer with Esso (now Exxon-Mobil). I was brought up with a sense of how important education is to the social fabric of society," he says.

"I have many fond memories of me sitting side by side with my grandfather, working in his shop, the green eerie glow of his oscilloscope, the smell of fresh solder."

Epstein says he was constantly asking questions, each one considered important by his grandfather.

By offering such inquiry-based science enrichment programs, he says children can be more engaged with their teachers, friends and families.

"The hands-on aspects of the program truly bring science to life before their very eyes," Epstein says. "We just want kids to be excited about science."

To find out more about Mad Science, call John Epstein at 680-0011. Cost of programs range from \$40 to \$349.

Fun facts

- >> It's impossible to sneeze with your eyes open.
- >> Hummingbirds are the only animals to fly backward.
- >> Tigers have striped skin, not just striped fur.
- >> No matter its size or thickness, no piece of paper can be folded in half more than seven times.
- >> There are more living organisms on the skin of a single human being than there are human beings on the surface of the earth.
- >> The human body has fewer muscles than a caterpillar's.

>> When you blush, your stomach lining also reddens.

>> Giraffes have no vocal cords.

>> The life span of a taste bud is 10 days, and most people have lost 50 percent of their taste buds by the time they reach age 60.

>> The housefly hums in the middle octave, key of F.

>> The surface area of a human lung is equal to that of a tennis court.



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"Mad Scientist" John Epstein pours what everyone expected to be water on his head. But it was gone!

Visit the Web site www.madscience.org, which offers more fun facts, a variety of science experiments, games and quizzes.