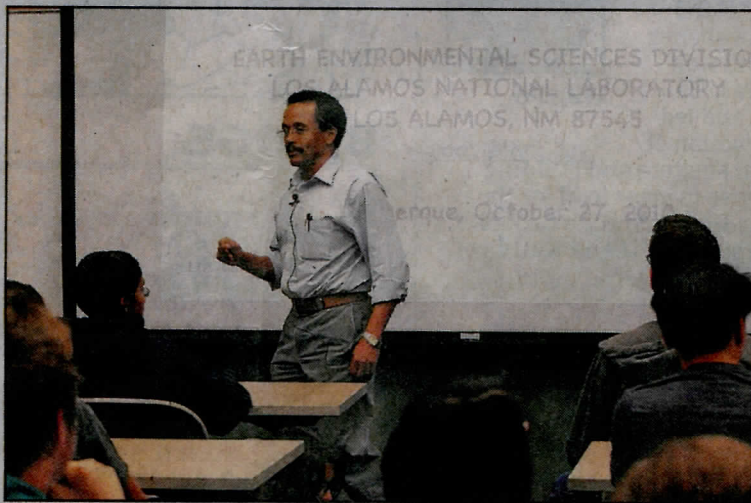


SCHOOLS



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Giday WoldeGabriel was featured in National Geographic because of his role in finding 4.4-million-year-old Ardi, the world's oldest hominid skeleton.

By ANDREA SCHOELLKOPF
Journal Staff Writer

The Los Alamos geologist was featured in National Geographic last summer because of his role in finding 4.4-million-year-old Ardi, the world's oldest hominid skeleton.

He's also been featured on the Discovery Channel.

But last month, the renowned Giday WoldeGabriel was at the front of an Albuquerque conference room filled with more than 100 teens. They listened with rapt attention to his tales of discovery in Ethiopia during the session held long after school was over for the day.

"This is a more relaxed atmosphere," WoldeGabriel said later. "I didn't see any obligation for these kids to be here. You could see these kids asking questions."

Twice a month, New Mexico scientists and other speakers are invited to talk to high school students as part of Café Scientifique, a program run through the Los Alamos nonprofit Science Education Solutions. After a vetting process to ensure the talks will be interesting to the high school set, speakers make the rounds to four cities: Los Alamos, Santa Fe, Albuquerque and Española.

FILLING UP ON SCIENCE

Café Scientifique, other programs give students extra servings from experts

They cover such topics as world health, brain synapses, supercomputers and DNA evidence in police investigations.

"We love it," said Albuquerque High senior Michael Neville, 17, who regularly rounds up classmates to attend the sessions at the University of New Mexico Center for High Tech Materials.

The cafes are one of several programs that informally connect the state's wealth of top scientists and researchers with its school children in an effort to promote science.

Santa Fe's Science Cafe for Young Thinkers began more than four years ago and typically holds three talks a semester. Sponsors are Santa Fe Public Schools, Santa Fe Institute and the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, among others.

The main point is to get middle and high school students interested in science by tapping into the local community, organizers said. Recent topics have included HIV and AIDS, veterinary science and black holes. A Charles Darwin impersonator from Illinois visited during one meeting and took questions from the teens.

Sessions tend to draw anywhere from 40 to 60 students, said Robert Eisenstein of the Santa Fe Alliance for Science.

The program is a spinoff of KNME-TV's Science Cafe, which is largely targeted toward an adult audience at Albuquerque's National Museum of Nuclear Science and History.

The Explora! science museum hosts Portal to the Public on Sundays. Scientists are set up in a museum laboratory, where they speak to a young audience and show off their work.



JIM THOMPSON/JOURNAL

Giday WoldeGabriel, a renowned Los Alamos geologist, talks to a young audience as part of Café Scientifique, a program that connects high school students to New Mexico's wealth of scientists and researchers.

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Science cafes serve experts

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Topics have included how to block airborne allergens through spores in your nose and how to filter water through nails.

"We really are looking for children to get an idea of what scientists do," said Ellen Welker, the museum's director of external relations. "The other thing that is more important: They get to meet scientists that are their neighbors in their own community."

The draw for many Café Scientifique attendees is the promise of extra credit, such as a recent La Cueva High math class that poured in to see WoldeGabriel's talk.

But up to half of them come back for future talks on their own, said Nalisha Johnson, a coordinator for the Science Education Solutions Cafés, which receive funding from the National Science Foundation.

Eldorado High senior Rhett Walker, for instance, peered from the back of a crowded room after arriving late to a recent Café Scientifique session. He planned to talk to the speaker afterward.

"When he's done we can go up and talk to him," said Walker, 17. "I've always been interested in science."

Albuquerque High senior Carson Kent said his involvement led to a summer internship at Sandia National Laboratories, thanks to a speaker he had met at one of the sessions.

"I've made contacts here," Kent said.

The talks also hope to bring contemporary finds and research to the teens, who may not get to hear about them in-depth when schools are following a state-mandated curriculum.

"A lot of times in public education, teachers don't have the time to cover really colorful subjects," said Elizabeth Gilbertson, a former teacher who now works for Science Education Solutions. "... We show them science isn't stuffy. There's a human element to science."

Scientists from Los Alamos, Sandia and University of New Mexico, among others, line up to participate, she said.

"It's all voluntary," Gilbertson said. "We know if science is to continue in this country, you have to get the youth excited."

WoldeGabriel said since his work and that of other scientists is publicly funded, they want to share what they know with the community.

"It's part of our responsibility to do public education and formal lectures," he said.

KNME Science Café

NOV. 20: 10 a.m. to noon, National Museum of Nuclear Science and History, 601 Eubank SE. Making stuff, led by Neal D. Shinn, Department of Energy Center for Integrated Nanotechnologies at Sandia National Laboratories. www.science-central.org. Free. RSVP at 277-2396.

Café Scientifique

DEC. 9: Fighting Infectious Diseases in the Developing World by Harshini Mukunan, Los Alamos National Laboratory. 7 p.m., Santa Fe Complex, 624 Agua Fria St., Santa Fe.

2011 schedule not yet available. Free. www.cafenm.org

Science Cafes for Young Thinkers

All cafes held in the O'Keeffe Education Annex, 123 Grant, Santa Fe, 6-7:30 p.m.

JAN. 26: Ready, Set Attack. How your Body Fights Infection. Lora Grainger, Taos.

FEB. 24: Food Security for Poor Countries. Jim Burleigh, Santa Fe.

APRIL 13: The Physics of Baseball. Alan Nathan, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

Free. www.sfafs.org

Portal to the Public

DEC. 12: 1-4 p.m. Explore how steam engines produce electricity, led by Curtis Peters, Sandia National Labs; Investigate the energy emitted by light bulbs. Dave Haaland, Sandia National Labs retiree; experiment with motion, forces and time, Cecelia Venuk, Sandia National Labs. Explora, 1701 Mountain NW. Included with paid admission to the museum. www.explora.us.