

# Kids learn about comets at the Homewood Science Center

BY NICK ULANOWSKI

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University of Chicago representatives helped kids and their parents build model rockets, comets and stars and taught them about outer space at the Homewood Science Center on Saturday, Jan. 22.

Juliet Crowell, a public outreach manager at the University of Chicago, and Louise Gagnon and Yue Pan, U of C students in astronomy and astrophysics, shared their knowledge with the group. As everyone participated, a kid-friendly YouTube playlist about astronomy selected by Crowell was presented in the Michael Wexler Theater space.

The kids were given prepared materials to assemble their comet model, but they had lots of flexibility for the color and length of the ribbon representing the comet's tail.

"A comet's tail can be millions of miles



Nick Ulanowski/H-F Chronicle  
Yue Pan, right, helps a family learn about the constellations.

long," said Gagnon to one of the kids.

"It's a big ball of ice and dust. So, if you were to go in the street and scoop up a bunch of snow and make a snowball, and have dirt and gravel and stuff in it, that's kind of like what a comet is," Gagnon told a parent. "When a comet gets closer to the sun, radiation from the sun melts a little bit of the comet, pushes

it and blows it backwards. That's what creates the tail."

Gagnon said she was originally a math major, but she switched to astronomy. She said she first became interested in astronomy when she was a kid. She said there was an "outreach center" near where she grew up in Connecticut that let people look through the telescopes.

After building their model comets, many of the kids ran around the room, holding the model up like a toy and pretending it was a comet flying through space.

A map of the constellations and our solar system was laid out on one of the tables. Pan and Gagnon answered questions about asteroids, the eight planets and the satellites surrounding them.

"Each one of these planets (is) unique," said Pan. "Some of them are gaseous. They're located more on the outer region of the solar system. Some

of them are rock planets and they're made of rocks mainly. So, they're in the inner region of the solar system."

Pan, from Beijing, China, said she became interested in astrophysics after watching the 2014 film "Interstellar" in middle school. The movie tells the story of astronauts who travel through a wormhole near Saturn.

"['Interstellar'] is all about five-dimensional space and black holes and stuff that we don't really understand. And I think that's what captivates me into astrophysics," said Pan. "There's a need for more people to get involved in this field to figure out what we don't know about our universe."

The STEM Saturday program had a casual atmosphere. Throughout the morning, parents and kids arrived to construct the comet, star and rocket models. Dominique Barksdale, science center event coordinator, said that 60 people participated in the event.

# H-F senior Charlie Knetl selected top tuba player in state

BY MARILYN THOMAS

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Homewood-Flossmoor High School senior Charlie Knetl was selected the top tuba player and performed with the all-state band during the annual Illinois Music Educators Association conference in Peoria.

Students audition for the ILMEA state honor. For Knetl, this was the second year he auditioned and was selected first chair in the tuba section for the district band. Judges selected Knetl to advance to all-state band from his audition tape and his performance. He auditioned again and was selected first chair for the all-state performance.

H-F teacher and band director Sarah Whitlock said Knetl's honor places him as "one of the top tuba players in the state of

Illinois" adding that Knetl has been "a motivator for his peers and a driver of the H-F band program."

Knetl gravitated to the tuba as a fifth grader at Homewood's Millennium School.

"It was different and it caught my attention and there was no one else playing it, so I wanted to give it a shot," he recalled. "There's a point where it was bigger than me and very hard to carry, but you get used to that after a while. Once you start moving up through the years you notice (the tuba) is different from all the other instruments, sound wise."

Knetl, the son of Amy and Brian Knetl of Homewood, said he hasn't selected a college yet, but he plans to minor in music and major in astronomy.

In addition to the ILMEA honor, Knetl was also recently recognized as an Illinois

State Scholar for his outstanding academic work, class rank and ACT/SAT test results. At H-F he is enrolled in advance placement courses and is a member of the National Honor Society and Tri-M, the music honor society.

Knetl also won honors from the Illinois High School Hockey League for scoring three goals in an all-star game in January. Top regional players were selected to make up four all-star teams for play in Oak Lawn. Knetl was named most valuable player. He's been playing a defense position on the H-F hockey team since his freshman year.

At the beginning of the school year, Knetl was a member of the golf team, and when hockey season wraps up, he'll be on the boys' tennis team. He plays doubles in competition.



Provided photo

Homewood-Flossmoor High senior Charlie Knetl performed on the tuba as first chair for the all-state band sponsored by the Illinois Music Educators Association.

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