

Saturday mornings are for science

The best school days growing up were spent watching Bill Nye teach young children more about science. Learning about the effects of our own impact on the Earth is a vital part of every person's education. Professors at the University of Toledo are continuing these lessons for the Toledo community.

Saturday Morning Science is a program aimed at educating the Toledo community about various relevant scientific topics. The talks are organized by Joseph Schmidt, a professor of chemistry, and John J. Bellizi, an associate professor of biochemistry.

"I think everyone needs an exposure to some level of science," Schmidt said. "We can't just ignore the way the world works around us."

The public programs are presented by the UT Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry and the College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics and are open to the entire community.

"It's also bringing science to the public in a way that can make people understand and appreciate what science does for us and what it can do for us," Bellizi said.

Last weekend, Saturday Morning Science welcomed Monique Wilhelm, laboratory manager and lecturer from the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry at the University of Flint-Michigan. Her talk was called, "From the River to our Taps: The Poisoning of a City."

Wilhelm spoke about the origin and causes of the water crisis that occurred in Flint, Michigan, which began in 2014. She explained that the problem started when the city's water source was changed to the Flint River.

“They went to the Flint river water because it was used previously as a source, and it was only supposed to be temporary,” Wilhelm said.

The chemistry involved in changing the water supply from a lake to a river was explained by Wilhelm. Audience members were provided with kits to carry out demos to assist in their understanding. The demonstration utilized vinegar, salt and pennies to illustrate the effect that acidity can have on pipes.

“It was the change that caused this to happen,” Wilhelm said. “If we would have continued to get the lake water and never switched to the river water, we would never have had problems.”

After explaining the cause of the crisis, Wilhelm reflected upon the devastating impacts the water issue has had on the community.

“Flint is a community that is already living mostly in poverty,” Wilhelm said. “They can see the external effects, but they don’t know when they’re pregnant that the lead is possibly changing the developing fetus, that infants drinking formula are going to have neurological effects for a lifetime.”

This talk was well-attended by both UT students and faculty as well as local community members.

“I thought it was very good; I learned a lot,” said Rick Ray, a member of the community. “I’ll probably go to most of them if I’m in town. I especially want to hear the pollen one.”

This year, the series of talks begin at 9:30 a.m. in Memorial Field House room 2100. Before the talks, attendees can enjoy a light breakfast sponsored in part by Barry Bagels.

Schmidt emphasized that the organizers enjoy receiving

feedback from their attendees. He asked for suggestions for future events to be emailed to joseph.schmidt@utoledo.edu.