

Library Science at Lake Villa District Library

Lake Villa District Library's Carol Rietzke has been using STEM---science, technology, engineering, math--
- to get kids excited about science long before it became fashionable.

In December 2008 Rietzke launched Science Specialists as a pilot program for kids in grades 4 – 6th. It started out as four programs per month that met quarterly and as an addition to LVDL's programming mix. "Science Specialists was a good fit for a library program as a means to promote using 21st century skills" said Rietzke. "All children need to be exposed to STEM and have hands-on experience with real science".

And Rietzke knows a thing or two about hands-on experience with real science. She earned a bachelor's degree in Medical Technology and worked as cancer research specialist in hospital labs. While at McLaren Hospital in Flint, Michigan, Legionnaires Disease was isolated for the first time from a human patient. She also had the opportunity to work with the famed HE-LA cells in cancer research.

It was when her kids reached school age and she volunteered for the hands-on science field trips that the idea of exposing kids to science began to take hold. Fast forward to 2007, Rietzke discovered the University of California at Berkeley's Understanding Science site and was able to develop a science program plan that would benefit 4th – 6th graders in an exciting and meaningful way. According to Rietzke, "For so long, science was taught as a demonstration and I wanted to show children the larger lesson. So when I read 'science relies on testing ideas with evidence gathered from the natural world' on the U of C/Berkeley site, I knew I was on to something".

The pilot program Rietzke started at LVDL in 2008 has been so well received she developed a program for kids in grades 1st – 3rd, Science Explorers, that is every bit as popular.

Rietzke's lab background doesn't limit the scope of the library's science programs. Engineering gets equal attention. Encouraging children to see engineering as a tool for problem solving is the big idea. The children work in groups to identify a problem, brainstorm a solution, design, build then test and evaluate. "It's not a one step process" said Rietzke "if something doesn't work, it doesn't mean it failed; it means you need to redesign".

The programs have become one of LVDL's most popular and Kerry Reed, Head of Youth Services, couldn't be happier. "Where everyone else is doing STEM activities" said Reed, "we have an actual, real-life, scientist leading ours! Carol is adamant about teaching the process of experimentation".

Visit www.lvdl.org for more information or call the Youth Services Desk at 847-245-5116.

Lake Villa District Library enriches life in our community by connecting people with resources, services and each other. The library is located at 1001 E. Grand Avenue in Lake Villa.