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SRNS Education Outreach Programs Excel Despite COVID-19 Restrictions

AIKEN, S.C., July 15, 2021 – Last year, Savannah River Nuclear Solutions (SRNS) Education Outreach programs faced daunting limitations due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but the organization saw an opportunity to enhance and extend the reach of their broad range of initiatives despite these challenges.

According to Kim Mitchell, SRNS Education Outreach, the staff explored and optimally utilized virtual tools in place of face-to-face communication.

“Adopting a new web-based approach to meet the needs of those participating in our various programs required a fast and steep learning curve for us. This was true for the participating educators and students, as well. That said, the end-result was a high level of success combined with a rewarding experience,” said Mitchell.

“By providing new and innovative virtual opportunities to our schools, we were able to reach more students and educators than ever before,” said Taylor Rice, SRNS Education Outreach. “Offering web-based programs allowed schools throughout the region the opportunity to participate in our competitions and programs, without travel being a problem.”

Mitchell explained that the benefits found through efforts to work through the pandemic will continue to play an important role in the future of Education Outreach. Examples include the creation of a new program, STEMulating Conversations with SRS Experts, as well as video and virtual reality programs that bring the Savannah River Site (SRS) to classrooms throughout South Carolina and Georgia.

“Our Wet Wonders and Feathers in the Forest videos demonstrate



Savannah River Nuclear Solutions “Feathers in the Forest” is the second in a series of videos to help students virtually visit the Savannah River Site to experience the education resources found there.

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the value of this concept,” said Mitchell. “In the past, we brought a limited number of groups of students each year to SRS for a series of ‘hands-on’ environmental science experiments and lessons. Though I’m confident we will return to this popular method, we will also continue to reach deeply into classrooms throughout our region—and beyond—with the current and future videos, plus virtual reality programming.

“We recently completed and made available a science-based video on how a mass spectrometer functions. Students journey through this highly sensitive piece of equipment by riding on an electron beam to demonstrate the spectrometer’s ability to identify the molecular makeup of a substance. It will soon be added to our new web-based library as a virtual reality program as well,” Mitchell added.



Kim Mitchell, SRNS Education Outreach, leads participants through this year’s virtual South Carolina Regional Science Bowl competition, which involved a significant learning curve for all involved.

At this point, the demand for these videos is quickly growing. To date, more than 23,000 students have seen the videos, and educators have received corresponding guides.

“It’s important to credit the value of this new approach to members of our video production, graphics, laboratory, R&D engineering and IT groups within SRNS,” said Mitchell. “They stepped up and teamed up with us in our hour of need. None of this would have been possible without their assistance.”

Savannah River Nuclear Solutions, a Fluor-led company with Newport News Nuclear and Honeywell, is responsible for the management and operations of the Department of Energy’s Savannah River Site, including the Savannah River National Laboratory, located near Aiken, South Carolina.

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