

HCC to celebrate Massachusetts STEM week

HOLYOKE – Holyoke Community College will recognize Massachusetts STEM Week, Oct. 21 to Oct. 25, with four days of activities and events, including a drone demonstration from the UMass Air aerial research group, agar art workshops (using colorful bacteria to paint), mobius strip magic, origami math, entomophagy (sampling treats made from edible insects), and much more.

STEM Week events at HCC begin at noon on Monday, Oct. 21, with an opening keynote presentation by Yadilette Rivera-Colón, Ph.D., associate professor of biology at Bay Path University. Rivera-Colón, who is also director of the university's Center of Excellence for Women in STEM, will give a talk related to this year's HCC STEM Week theme, "Reclaiming STEM Identities."

"We know that, during colonialism, a lot of math and science ideas were stolen from Africa and other parts of the world and co-opted by white Europeans who got the credit for those innovations," said Sharon Edwards, director of HCC's STEM Starter Academy program and STEM Week organizer. "There are also

certain marginalized groups that have been historically excluded from STEM fields, such as women and persons of color. 'Reclaiming STEM Identities' is a way for them to reclaim their relationship to STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math)."

Rivera-Colón's talk will lead into a 12:30 p.m. "brainstorming" event to launch the HCC Innovation Challenge, a month-long invention contest for HCC students.

From 2 to 3 p.m. on Monday, Oct. 21, biology laboratory technician Kim Howell will lead an Agar Art workshop where participants will learn to paint using bacteria cultures. Finished artwork will be photographed and displayed in an agar art gallery in the HCC Campus Center.

On Tuesday, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., HCC will welcome 60 middle school students from Springfield Middle School and Holyoke STEM Academy for a series of fun-filled science, math and engineering-based activities.

"The students will get to explore agar art, origami, slime, and the magic of

mobius strips," said Edwards. "During a Lego Challenge, they will work in teams to build a model of some surprise item only one team member can see. Then, during something we're calling 'Bugs on the Move,' the students will have to use everyday items, such as rubber bands, masking tape, and wooden blocks to build a catapult or anything they can think of to see who can propel a plastic insect the farthest."

After lunch, at 12:30 p.m., in the HCC Courtyard, students will have the opportunity to sample "cricket cookies" served by HCC students from the Culinary Arts Truck.

"Entomophagy is the practice of consuming insects as food, and a quarter of the world's population already embraces this practice," said Edwards. "The cookies are made from cricket flour. It's very high in protein. You don't even know they're made from crickets when you look at them."

Wednesday, Oct. 23, STEM Week events and activities, which are open to the public, include an Agar Art workshop (11 a.m., Marieb Building 114); a

drone demonstration from UMass Air (11 a.m., HCC soccer field), followed by a talk from UMass Air drone experts (12:30 p.m., Bartley Center lobby); a "Reclaiming Your STEM Identity" panel discussion (12:30 p.m., Frost Building 309); Culinary Arts Food Truck Cricket Cookies (1:45 p.m., HCC Courtyard); STEM Game Night (5 p.m., Marieb Building 116).

Public events and activities on Thursday, Oct. 24, STEM Week include "Unraveling the Magic of Mobius Strips," a hands-on activity (10 a.m., Kittredge Center 301-303); "Origami Math" (11 a.m., Kittredge Center 301-303), a closing keynote address from Marlowe Washington, HCC vice president of People, Culture and Equity (1 p.m., Kittredge Center 301-303), followed by a free showing of the feature film "The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks," starring Oprah Winfrey. The movie tells the story of a young African American woman who died of cervical cancer at 31, whose tissue samples, removed without consent, became the first immortalized cell line.