

Chesapeake expands energy education program

Chesapeake Energy Corp. has expanded an Oklahoma Energy Resources Board program that teaches students about the oil and gas industry.

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Chesapeake Energy Corp. is getting into the education business.

The Oklahoma City oil and natural gas producer has adapted the Oklahoma Energy Resources Board's Petro Pros program to teach students in its operating area about the industry.

Since 1995, the OERB program has relied on volunteers from state energy companies to teach young people about energy.

“The OERB Petro Pros program provides information to students that just isn't found in text books,” said Carla Schaeperkoetter, OERB's education director. “Through personal stories from the volunteers to hands-on activities that teach scientific discovery, we've been able to reach thousands of Oklahoma children and teach them about the valuable resources beneath their feet.

“Many of our Petro Pros tell us how rewarding it is to teach students about the industry, spark their interest in future oil and natural gas careers and really, just to show them the impact petroleum has on their everyday lives.”

An interactive option

Chesapeake liked the OERB program, but tried to make it more interactive, said Teresa Rose, the company's director of community relations.

“We really have had a lot of fun with it,” Rose said. “It really has been a great project for us.”

Chesapeake's “This School Rocks” program was designed for students, but Rose said it seems like it will appeal to adults, as well.

Chesapeake has teamed with the Metropolitan Library System to offer the program at three Oklahoma City area libraries, beginning last week in Edmond.

Rose said she hopes to draw a larger audience for subsequent sessions, but she was pleased with the level of interest at the initial library presentation.

“Every person that was there was really engaged,” she said.

Chesapeake conducted another session Thursday night at Ralph Ellison Library, 2000

NE 23. The final one will be at 6:30 p.m. Oct. 27 at the Midwest City Library, 8143 E Reno.

Rose said she hopes to add more library sessions in the future.

“We're eager to see how this test case goes. It may be something that we may begin working and presenting in all of our different areas,” she said.

Why they do it

Chesapeake is active in nearly every major shale play in the United States, so it works in a lot of communities.

Rose said many of those communities are not familiar with the oil and gas industry, so the company's education program is vital.

“We work to try to inform and education our neighbors, our royalty owners, the people that we're going to be working with in all of the areas in which we operate,” she said. “We really try to be proactive in our education and communication.”

She said Chesapeake reaches out to schools and organizations that work with kids to offer the company's expertise.

“We really are happy and eager to go out and make these presentations to just about any youth group that wants to hear it,” Rose said.

She said Chesapeake volunteers, known as “Rock Stars,” try to make their presentations memorable for students, with a number of different experiments to spark interest in the oil and gas industry.

They stress the industry's dedication to safe operations, while offering an understanding of what it takes to meet the country's energy needs.

“Electricity, and power, doesn't come from the wall socket or the gas pump,” Rose said. “That's what we want to help students understand.

“We use ‘This School Rocks' as an opportunity to communicate a broader understanding of our industry and about energy as a whole.”

The program can be adapted for nearly any age or grade level.

“It really focuses on helping kids understand the origin of rock, the different kind of rocks there are ... all the different pieces and components that our industry work with as we discover and extract natural gas in the field,” she said.

Since last spring, Chesapeake employees have made presentations to more than 1,100 students in Oklahoma alone.