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Tucson tech: SciFest, sister events focus on kids, science, growth too

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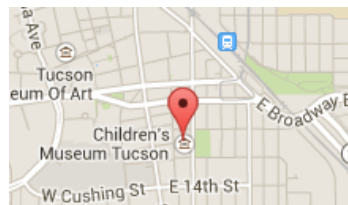
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February 05, 2013 12:00 am • David Wichner Arizona Daily Star

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Dry-ice experiments, static-electricity generators and other fun, hands-on science demonstrations are all part of Family SciFest, planned for its second run Feb. 16 at Children's Museum Tucson.

The kids' sci-fest, along with the inaugural Tech in Tucson Showcase expo and a tech innovation forum set for the same day, make up the Science in the City program. The events are part of the second annual Arizona SciTech Festival, which kicks off statewide Wednesday.

The aim of the festival, which is co-sponsored by the Arizona Technology Council, is to stimulate interest in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education and careers, to assure an ample supply of scientists in the future.

Last year's Family SciFest attracted about 1,200 participants, and organizers expect about 2,000 this year, said Brooke Sanders-Silverman, education director for the Children's Museum.

Such educational events are dear to Alex Rodriguez, a former Tucson Unified School District board president who was named director of the Tech Council's Southern Arizona regional office last September.

"STEM education is a national security and economic security imperative for our country," said Rodriguez, 42, a former Army officer who spent several years as a Pentagon policy adviser. "As a former school board member, I'm concerned we're not doing the things we need to do, fast enough."

The Tech in Tucson Showcase event and forum are part of an effort to expand council offerings in the region, and ultimately, to increase membership, he said.

"It's an undervalued resource that, if strengthened, can make a big impact in terms of Arizona's standing in the global market," Rodriguez said of the council.

The council now has more than 670 members statewide, including about 125 in Southern Arizona, Rodriguez said.

Rodriguez plans to increase the numbers of local council events, such as the upcoming tech showcase, luncheon seminars and networking mixers, to around 30 to 35 a year from about 25 last year.

About 25 exhibitors will have booths in the Tech in Tucson Showcase, spanning areas including space exploration, energy, optics, nanotechnology, semiconductors and environmental technologies, coordinator Steve Peters said.

The tech forum, Technology Innovation and Economic Development In Southern Arizona, will feature panelists including Mayor Jonathan Rothschild; Rep. Ron Barber, D-Ariz.; Bob Breault, chairman of the Arizona Optics Industry Association; Mike Sember, chairman of the BioIndustry Organization of Southern Arizona; and David Allen, executive director of the University of Arizona's Tech Launch Arizona.

Meanwhile, the Tech Council remains a strong voice at the Legislature, Rodriguez said.

This year, the council is pushing legislation to extend and expand the state's research and development tax credit, as well as a state-backed fund to attract private venture-capital investment in tech startups.

"At the end of the day, we want to have a bigger impact in terms of job growth and technology growth," Rodriguez said.

If you go

Science in the City 2013

(all events Feb. 16)

- Family SciFest, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Children's Museum Tucson, 200 S. Sixth Ave. (free).
- Tech in Tucson Showcase, 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., UNS Energy building auditorium, 88 E. Broadway (free).

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• Forum - Technology Innovation and Economic Development in Southern Arizona, 2 p.m. to 3 p.m., UNS Energy auditorium (free but registration required).

• For more information or to register for forum, go to scienceinthecity.tucsonlink.org

Contact Assistant Business Editor David Wichner at dwichner@azstarnet.com or 573-4181.

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Tags Technology, Alex Rodriguez, Arizona Technology Council, Children's Museum Tucson

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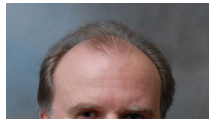
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