

# Wanted: Whiz kids from the Bronx

BY ROB SGOBBO

THE NAVY is looking for more future scientists and engineers — in the Bronx.

It's footing the bill for a new science studio that opened in Hunts Point last week for Bronx kids to engage in hands-on experiments.

The \$900,000 studio in the BankNote Building on Manida St. was designed by Iridescent, a national science education nonprofit that has already built similar studios in Los Angeles, looking to make science, math and engineering fun for kids living in low-income communities.

"A lot of kids think they don't like science or math, or are intimidated by it," said Iridescent founder Tara Chklovski. "Kids think, 'Oh, I'm too stupid,' or that scientists are only old, white males, but hopefully coming here they see that's not the case."

Over 1,000 schoolchildren were on hand to cheer on Navy Secretary Ray Mabus at Thursday's ribbon-cutting.

"It's centers like these that show we're investing in our future," Mabus said.

Inside the studio, crowds of kids were quick to lay their hands on gadgets and gizmos displayed on tables.

"It's a challenge," said Jhoel Grijalva, 11, putting a prism in front of a laser to make different two-dimensional shapes. "I'm making shapes I didn't even know exist!"

"It's about getting kids to explore things on their own, with their hands," said Tim Nissen, chief of design from the Museum of Math, a nonprofit that sponsored the experiment Jhoel was playing with. "It's about bringing fun and creativity to science and math."

But it's not all just fun and games — according to the Navy, engaging kids in science is critical to our national security.

"Our nation has fallen behind in comparison to other countries in producing college graduates in math and science," said the Navy secretary. "History is going to be made in this building — we're going to make our future leaders in the sciences here."

Mabus said the studio was created for "selfish" reasons on the part of the Navy — the service hopes to recruit the best and brightest students in the years to come.

"We hope to put our country back on top," said Mabus, adding that the Navy plans on doubling its spending on math and science education. "This is an exciting day."

But for the kids milling through the studio's exhibits, becoming the next Jonas Salk or Albert Einstein wasn't foremost in their minds — rather, they were just looking to have fun.

"I was showed how to build kites and how they can spin and be controlled to go up or down," said Zarina Lewin, 7, while holding a cardboard kite she made.

"It was just really fun to see how it flies, but I have to learn how to move it left or right. I still have a lot of questions, so I need to keep coming back."



**Jhoel Grijalva, 11, checks out the Museum of Mathematics' "Ring of Fire" at Navy-sponsored science studio in Hunts Point.** Photo by Viorel Florescu