

# Young tinkerers show their stuff at Invention Convention



Matthew Murad, a second-grader from Olmsted School 64, presents his invention, Lightskis, during the 14th annual WNY Invention Convention. The competition was held on Sunday, May 1st, at the Central Library in downtown Buffalo. Mark Mulville/Buffalo News

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Old skis and a pair of headlamps for the bindings and 7-year-old Matthew Murad had the ingredients for his entry to the 14th annual Invention Convention and a better way to downhill ski near the woods at night: "Lightskis."

"That will definitely come in handy for me," he said standing by his display Sunday afternoon at the Central Library. "Too bad I invented after the snow melted."

The second grader at Olmsted School 64 was surrounded by competitors' cardboard signs, sketches and prototypes that were windows into other kid dilemmas.

Jeans embedded with lights at the hem to better see at night and have hands free to carry wood into the house. Rubber gloves fixed with toothbrush bristles at the fingertips for scrubbing the toilet. A backpack that opened into a jacket. A piano bench that glides for a young player with short arms to move and reach all the keys. Dog bowls on two levels so that a short and a tall dog could eat at the same time.

"It's creativity, communication, collaboration and critical thinking," said Miriam Kelley, a former Fisher-Price toy design executive, creative studies adjunct professor at SUNY Buffalo State College and board member at the Invention Convention, a nonprofit run by a team of volunteer professionals. "It's the four C's of the 21st century."

The competition began earlier this year with an invitation to local students to submit ideas based on materials they found at Goodwill Industries. This year, 82 inventions by 94 students at 11 area schools made it to the Sunday finale at the library.

Inventors manned displays and answered questions and proud parents quietly looked on until mid-afternoon, when everyone went downstairs to the auditorium where winners were announced, like Gianna Cicco's "Toasty Clothes" in the "Home/Garden" category.

Together with friend Aryona Nablo, she refinished a small dresser from Goodwill, painted it purple and slipped heating pads in the drawers so clothes could be warm and ready in the winter.

"We were cold when we got dressed in the morning and at night when we got out of the shower," said Gianna, 10, a fifth-grader who wore a headband decorated with a small, askew pink hat. "I used it once for my pajamas and it felt really good."

Once she put it together, teachers at Colonial Village Elementary School in Sanborn told her they wanted one. She was surprised by how well it turned out. "I didn't know a 10-year-old could do all this," she said.

For the kids showing off their inventions, creating something cool seemed like a bigger deal than winning.

Fifth-graders Annabella Cullinan and Emma Unger beamed as they explained they were inspired by rambunctious younger children in their lives – a brother and neighbor, respectively – when they made the "Toddler Tag Bag."

It was a nylon briefcase with a book about trucks, a tic tac toe game, a lock and a giant toy TV remote.

The assortment of \$16 worth of Goodwill finds and \$5 in store-bought velcro and whiteboard was intended to keep kids entertained so everyone else with them can enjoy dinner at a restaurant.

"So parents aren't frustrated and people around aren't mad at the kid," said Emma, 10, who goes to Williamsville's Nativity of Mary School with Annabella.

Emma's parents stood nearby, impressed by the girl's diligence and creativity. "I'm like, Oh my gosh, look at her go. She could be in sales one day," said Christina Unger.

Her husband, Jeff, agreed. "They're excited about it. That was the best part – just getting themselves out there and volunteering for this."

Meesha Henderson was equally impressed by her 5-year-old Maja Laghorne's interest in making a purse from a shirt at Goodwill, picking out a belt for a strap that matched the gray plaid and fixing a red barrett bow on the pocket for decoration.

To help Maja do everything herself, they used iron-on adhesives instead of a sewing machine.

"I wanted her to do it all," said Henderson, who had to keep Maja from wearing the purse until the competition was over. "She has really good taste to be so young."

Maja, who had pink beads in her braids and a shiny "Miss Kitty" purse, was known at home for making sure recyclables, like egg cartons, were rescued from the trash.

The kindergartner at School 79 pointed to her favorite part, a pink iron-on skull and crossbones patch she'd picked out at Walmart. She also used parts of the shirt to make a wallet and put in a fabric covered piece of cardboard to make the bottom flat.

Now that her purse invention had made it this far, she liked the idea of selling it, suggesting a series of steep prices, \$100, \$2,000 and \$100,000 before her brother leaned over to whisper a more reasonable \$12 in her ear.

Her mother smiled at the fun she was having being silly. "I let her do her thing," said Henderson.