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## **Spooky Science has genome goo, ghost cannons and yes, exploding pumpkins**

The organizers of Spooky Science Weekend aim to occupy youngsters with activities that are fun and engaging while at the same time sparking an interest in the sciences.

“Spooky Science is of course a fun event for the children and a way for the University of Lethbridge to engage with the community, get together and share some fun. But the bigger purpose behind that is really to excite the children and the next generation for science,” says Dr. Ute Kothe, a professor in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry and the faculty supervisor for the Let’s Talk Science Outreach program. “If we instill a sense of curiosity and questioning this early, it’s a lifelong attitude that the children will carry with them.”

An interest in science has never been a problem for Laura Keffer-Wilkes, a University of Lethbridge PhD candidate and co-ordinator of Spooky Science Weekend. As a high school student, she recalls having fun isolating the DNA in bananas. The same experiment is in this year’s lineup of activities under its Halloween name — genome goo.

“It’s really easy and kids love it,” she says. “You just crush up the banana and you mix in some dish soap and salt and then you rinse it with some isopropyl alcohol — all things you have in your house, right? Then you get these goopy strings.”

Genome goo is one of 10 activities in the lineup, along with a magic show by Wayne Lippa, an instructor in the department. Spooky Science enlists the help of about 20 undergraduate and graduate students for each of the three sessions.

“We couldn’t do it without our volunteers. They’re amazing,” says Keffer-Wilkes.

Getting youngsters interested in science at an early age gives them a foundation for learning about scientific inquiry and skills they’ll use throughout life.

“We believe strongly that this enables them to become critical citizens who are able to deal with problems in everyday life. Often, applying science skills of inquiry and questioning really helps you get along. That’s why we do science outreach,” says Kothe.

Keffer-Wilkes, who’s originally from Ontario, completed an undergraduate degree at the University of Guelph. A six-month internship at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada’s Lethbridge Research Station brought her out west. Following her internship, she decided to resume her studies, completing a master’s degree at the U of L and now working on a doctorate. Keffer-Wilkes joined the Let’s Talk Science Outreach program at the U of L a few years ago.

“I want to get young kids excited about science so they understand it,” she says. “I want to educate more people that science isn’t scary and we need to understand to be able to make informed decisions for our country.”

Because of its popularity, all sessions of Spooky Science filled up shortly after registration opened on Oct. 8. The activities are free but cash donations are never booed.

Media are welcome to attend any session of Spooky Science. The Friday session goes from 6 to 8 p.m. and the Saturday sessions go from 2 to 4 p.m. and from 6 to 8 p.m. in the University Hall Atrium.

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