

Tech Bytes

By Pete Weiss

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Creating future scientists and technologists

The latest effort to ensure Long Island has a continuing supply of well-educated science and technology workers reaches out to middle- and high-school students and their parents. The goal is to have kids and parents take a closer look at careers in science and technology.

Spearheading the effort is Outreach Program for Long Island Technology Education, an initiative of the Center of Excellence in Wireless & Information Technology at SUNY Stony Brook. OPLITE was founded in late 2006 to combine the efforts of academia and corporations in encouraging students at all levels to consider pursuing science and technology education and careers. By reducing duplication of outreach efforts and coordinating messages, OPLITE seeks to make outreach efforts more effective.

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The next major event for is a “Technology is Now” career fair to be held at Smithtown High School West on Tuesday, April 1 at 7 p.m. Representatives from BAE Systems, CA, Cisco Systems, IBM, Microsoft, Motorola, Northrop Grumman, SUNY Stony Brook, Underwriters Laboratories, Verizon, Viacom and others will talk to more than 300 students and their parents. Visit www.cewit.org/oplite for more information.

The areas for future employment include nanotechnology, homeland security, biotech, smart transportation and alternative energy research. Given the lead time involved – four to 10 years – depending on the student’s age, the timing for such an effort seems about right, as these industries have been the subjects of recent regional initiatives.

In the 1960-61 timeframe, jolted by the Soviet Union’s leap into space late in the previous decade, the U.S. educational system started turning out scientists, engineers and technicians in massive numbers. Local school systems, aided by federal funding, started out at the middle- school level and identified those students with the aptitude and desire for those careers.

Today, there has yet to be a similar defining “Sputnik” event. Some say that high energy costs, concerns about sustainable growth and the general “green” movement will be impetus enough. But these are situations that have snuck up on us – Al Gore, Greenpeace and others notwithstanding – and so don’t quite have the same shock value as an adversary orbiting something potentially deadly over our homeland.

Their goal is worthwhile, but OPLITE and others pursuing similar goals have their work cut out for them.