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## Science-loving kids can become official Labrats

January 6, 2008

**By Elisabeth Kilpatrick Staff writer**

Do you have a child who lives for the annual school science fair? If so, you might have a budding Labrat on your hands.

Labrats, a program created by SciTech Hands-On Museum's executive director, Shawn Carlson, combines science education and team-building activities in a weekly group session for kids. Designed for boys and girls in grades 6 through 12, Labrats aims to supplement science education in schools and encourage budding young scientists, Carlson said.

Final planning for Labrats is still in the works, Carlson said, but he hopes to launch the program this month. SciTech has been in talks with the Quad County Urban League to hold Labrats weekly meetings at the Urban League's new center, Carlson said.

The program is loosely based on the structure and values of Boy Scouts, but with a scientific twist. Boys and girls will learn about various science topics each week, and, if students are really excited about a certain topic, they can do additional work to earn merit badges in that field. The focus will be on learning and teamwork, Carlson said.

"We want to create community through Labrats," he said. "Our goal is to bond them emotionally and intellectually."

Details about the program's cost and schedule will be released soon. Parents interested in enrolling their children in the Labrats program can contact SciTech at (630) 859-3434.

The Labrats program will be co-ed, Carlson said, and was carefully designed to suit the needs of both boys and girls. In a five-month pilot study in New England in 2006, the co-ed model proved to be successful.

"In many areas, the girls kicked the boys' butts," Carlson said.

For now, Labrats is planning a launch in the Fox Valley area, Carlson said, and the program hopefully will expand throughout the region and, eventually, nationwide. A \$246,500 grant from Tellabs will fund Labrats for the first two years.

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