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THE BATTALION

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The Science Guy speaks

Bill Nye educates and entertains fans at Reed Arena



JP BEATO • THE BATTALION

Bill Nye, "The Science Guy" speaks animatedly in front of a crowd of several hundred at Reed Arena Friday. Nye, who is an engineer, scientist and comedian, gained popularity with his television series "The Science Guy."

By Kyle Ross
THE BATTALION

Restless in their seats, hundreds of students from across Texas waited in eager anticipation. Some had arrived an hour early just to get the right spot to see their hero. The crowd clapped in unison, chanting "We want Bill!" Eventually, the wave broke out. And when "Bill Nye The Science Guy" stepped up to the podium in the middle of the floor, one would have thought he was at a Beatles reunion concert. Girls shrieked, boys pumped their fists and parents nodded their heads.

"We're here tonight to celebrate technology," Nye said. The words of an icon echoed off the walls of Reed Arena Friday. Boasting his signature bowtie and unkempt hair, this part-comedian, part-scientist addressed the crowd gathered for the weekend's Texas BEST (Boosting Engineering, Science and Technology) competition.

The competition, in its 11th year, gives teams of students a chance to battle each other using robots they build themselves. Each year, the robots are required to do different tasks under certain time constraints, but there is no given blueprint and no predetermined architecture for the robot. Each team uses its own design, spurring the imaginations of Texas students to new heights.

Steve Marum created the Texas BEST robot competition 11 years ago in his hometown of Sherman, Texas.

"We just wanted to create excitement among the students toward science, and what better way to do that than by building and competing with your own robot?" Marum said. "For the first one we held, the students were just given various junk to work with. There were 12 teams and about 200 students total. Now we give them specific parts in kits we make for them. There are now 500 teams with over 3,000 students involved. Maybe some of

these kids will invent something special someday."

This is the type of event that Nye says he lives for. Nye has spent the better part of his life trying to get young students excited about building robots or just science in general. Determined to raise a generation of TV-watching young people to become responsible voters, Nye says the future will have a bevy of critical decisions to make, ranging from cloning to vacations on Mars. He said it is important to ensure that students understand the world in which they live.

"What will be discovered in your lifetime?" asked Nye from within the spotlights of Reed Arena. "Your society will have a lot of serious questions to answer. You will have a lot of decisions to make. It will soon be time to find your place in the future."

"Are we alone? If we were able to go to Mars and find evidence of life or evidence of past life, it would change the world."

— Bill Nye
scientist, engineer, entertainer

For the first time, the crowd became quiet, taking in his words like that of a congregation to its preacher. But perhaps sensing the sudden seriousness, Nye performed his best impersonation of William Shatner (otherwise known as Captain Kirk of the Starship Enterprise of the TV series "Star Trek") sending the crowd into laughter again. It is what Nye has done his entire career: make people laugh and allow them to learn.

Using power point slides and a side-splitting, often rambling commentary,

Nye's lecture covered various subjects such as the history of the Mars mission, how sundials work and tectonic plates. But the most passionate moments of his speech were focused on how robots can be used in the future of scientific discovery, specifically on exploration of the galaxy.

"Are we alone?" Nye said. "If we were able to go to Mars and find evidence of life or evidence of past life, it would change the world. The whole planet would have to hold a meeting and talk about it. The way we will be able to explore far away places is with robots. And you are the ones who will bring that kind of future to mankind."

As if on cue, the crowd erupted in applause and standing ovations. Nye was able to reach his people and at the same time entertain them.

"I was really pleased with the job Bill Nye did tonight," said Marum, founder of the Texas BEST program. "He was able to keep the interest of the kids and that's what this whole thing is about."

Nye said he agrees with Marum. "It's a cool competition — a great competition," said Nye. "It's very important because our future lives in robots. The robots are going to change the world. So the people participating in this competition are going to be a huge part of that. It's quite an honor to be here."

Hours after his speech, the line that had formed for Nye's book signing was beginning to dwindle. Everyone wanted a handshake or at least a picture taken. The sort of underground society of intellectuals had come out of hiding for a night and most said they went home satisfied.

"I thought he did a good job. But I'm biased," said Robert Candalino, a senior nuclear engineering major at A&M. "He was actually pretty inspiring to hear about his view of the future. I'm about to graduate and it's good to hear the future of science is healthy."

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