



# PlastiVan™ Demand Outpaces Growth, as Braskem Commits Financial Support

*Sekisui SPI sponsors student events in Pa., and Braskem steps up as lead donor in the SPE Foundation's educational excellence campaign*

**By Eve Vitale**  
SPE Foundation Director

I was privileged to participate recently in a full week of activities with students at the Pennsylvania College of Technology in Williamsport, Pa. We arrived with the PlastiVan™ on Feb. 13 and — with the support of Sekisui SPI and the Thermoforming and Automotive divisions of SPE — conducted a jam-packed program on campus and in the surrounding community.

On Feb. 14, 90 high school chemistry students toured the plastics labs and actively participated with the PlastiVan and its various hands-on materials experiments. The next day, we engaged with 150 high school students at Central Columbia High School in Bloomsburg, Pa., just down the road from Sekisui's headquarters, and we hosted six sessions with the PlastiVan.

On Feb. 16, some 1,500 fifth-graders participated in a Science Festival on the Penn College campus, with an estimated 300-400 additional students and parents attending in the evening. The PlastiVan had a large booth at the fair. The following day, we took the PlastiVan to another school in Bloomsburg, and held five sessions with the PlastiVan and 89 high school students. Finally, on Feb. 18, we had 20 Girl Scouts join us to work on a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Math) project, in a 1½-hour session with the PlastiVan.

Sekisui SPI — a global thermoplastics supplier and sheet producer — not only sponsored the event but attended several sessions and told students about their company and about career opportunities in the industry. This brief video captures some of the excitement that transpired that week:

<http://bit.ly/PennCollegePlastiVan> .

## Strong workforce commitment

It was a tiring yet energizing week, but the good news doesn't end there. I'm excited to announce that Braskem has become the lead donor in the SPE Foundation's 75th Anniversary Campaign for Educational Excellence. Their generous contribution is a commitment to workforce development — the very topic that executives say, according to a recent report in *Plastics News*, is the industry's top challenge.

With Braskem's donation in support of plastics education we are further expanding the PlastiVan program and yet we still



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– Eve Vitale

can't keep up with demand. I get weekly calls from schools around the country looking for sponsorship to bring plastics education to their students. Unfortunately, without more support, many of these schools cannot be served. We need your help!

The mission of the nonprofit SPE Foundation is to support quality educational programs, including PlastiVan, scholarships and grants. As the foundation's director, it is my job to work at fulfilling our mission in bigger and better ways.

Mission-driven nonprofits know that to move forward we need the resources of time, talent and treasure, and we count on our members and donors for these. The most synergistic and impactful commitments are usually sustainable collaborations. For instance — businesses, individuals and plastics associations, such as SPE Sections and Divisions, the Plastics Pioneers Association, and the Plastics Industry Association (PLASTICS) often work together through the SPE Foundation to fund the PlastiVan for students from grades 5 through 12.

Until PlastiVan, many students have no idea how much plastic impacts their lives. We make it relevant to things they care about — entertainment, sports and transportation. Talking about the responsible and life-changing use of plastics creates interest in students of all ages.

I've been directly involved with plastics workforce development through education for the last six years – first at Kettering University, which led me to Detroit SPE, which led me to the SPE Foundation. This is what I've learned.

## Making a difference

Hands-on experience counts. Students move toward technology and ideas they know. It's important to get younger students generally familiar with plastics and older students involved with internships and co-ops, working with equipment, doing research, and interacting with plastics professionals.

At the college level, personal relationships matter. Students are very likely to follow the lead of a plastics professional they respect and trust.

We need to counter bad press and plastics haters with facts and hands-on experiences rather than ignoring our detractors. We can't appeal to students by denying the challenges they are well versed in, but need to educate them instead. Their passion for a cause can make a difference, and we can guide them toward the use of plastics technology to solve problems.

It takes a community — our community — to raise a workforce. Our success depends on each of us contributing



**Shannon Munro (in the foreground), executive director of Workforce Development & Continuing Education at Pennsylvania College of Technology, assists Eve Vitale (in the white lab coat) to direct 5th graders with their hands-on experiments during the recent Science Festival on the Penn College campus.** Courtesy of Pennsylvania College of Technology

consistently to the education of our next generations. It costs as little as \$7.50 to expose a child to the PlastiVan; \$75 can make a difference to 10 children; \$7,500 can fund a week's worth of PlastiVan visits.

If you'd like to make a difference, please consider a generous, tax-deductible donation to the SPE Foundation's 75th Anniversary Campaign for Educational Excellence. You can contact me at [evitale@4spe.org](mailto:evitale@4spe.org) or 810.814.6412 for more information. Best wishes for a prosperous 2017!