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Technology, creativity focus of program for kids at Red Stick International Festival

[The Advocate](#)

Countless parents have enrolled their children in piano lessons because they believe it will make them smarter.

But what about a banana piano — a few bananas connected by wires to a computer that plays notes when they're touched?

At first glance, it may seem like a silly game, but organizers of the [Red Stick International Festival](#) say fun applications of advanced technologies can help children get a leg up in a world that increasingly demands digital literacy.

The "banana piano" was one feature of the Kids' Lab portion of the three-day festival, which rebranded this year after nine years as the Red Stick Animation Festival. The goal of the event is to "showcase creativity and technology — anywhere it comes together," said Jesse Allison, a festival organizer and coordinator of LSU's [Experimental Music and Digital Media Program](#).

"(Children) already incorporate all this technology in ways adults barely comprehend. It's part of their lives," he said. "What we're doing is trying to bring out and bring up places where they can go and ... use it in ways that are really useful."

Many kids are accustomed to playing with cellphones or video games, but Saturday's activities prodded them to think deeper about technology and how it can be used. Ashton White, 6, was playing with the banana piano then dashed off toward an iPad-powered light painting game.

"When we talk about science and technology, it can start in places like this," his mother, Juanetta White, said. "He has an interest in it now, and now he's in school, you kind of feed that. It could turn into a career."

Nearby, children were checking out Snap Circuits — kits of circuits and boards that snap together to power lights, spin wheels, play music and more. Rock Bonaventure, 13, was putting circuits in place while his dad, Jason Bonaventure, helped and quizzed Rock about his science knowledge.

"The positive and negative complete the circuit," Rock explained, adding that he liked exploring the inner workings of technology.

Jason Bonaventure said it was a good learning experience for his son.

"It gets them outside of just playing Xbox, and figuring out how all these things work so they can get an interest in science and electronics," he said. "They don't get the opportunity to look at this by just playing."

The Kids' Lab, held in the River Center Branch Library downtown, was a mashup of any and everything technological and creative. Children used paint markers to draw designs on the second floor's windows while others looked at items made with a 3-D printer.

Mary Stein, assistant director of the East Baton Rouge Parish Library, which co-sponsored the festival, said people often stress the importance of STEM — science, technology, engineering and math — education, but they should also consider the arts.

"People in computer design maybe got their start with Legos ... and they started to see that there's a consequence to an action," she said. "When you do something more with it, you tell a story with the Legos."

Allison noted Baton Rouge has become somewhat of a digital hub in recent years. Electronic Arts, another festival co-sponsor, moved its [game testing center](#) to LSU's campus in 2013, for example.

Dominic Bazile, who was helping cut and fold paper versions of characters and objects from the "[Minecraft](#)" video game, wants to see his kids — 9-year-old Dominic Bazile Jr. and 14-year-old Collin Lewis — grow up with technology. They play "Minecraft," in which players design buildings and control characters, all the time, Bazile said, but he believes that's a good thing.

"It's a good way to be exposed to programming," Bazile said. "It's not just about creating things on the computer but thinking and being inventive. ... Going forward in the future, it's going to be very important that kids have a good grasp on technology. It's important that they be exposed at an early age."

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