Students gather at Rutgers to show off cities of the future

by Seung Min Kim/ The Star-Ledger

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Kevin Cheetham, Melissa Clauss and Cameron Anderson, from left, all from Oakland, Bergen County, make some last minute adjustments to their city Nuova Venezia (New Venice) before the judging at today's New Jersey Future City Competition competition. The students spent more than 500 hours working on the city. They used satellite images to accurately recreate parts of the city.

About 150 middle-schoolers from throughout New Jersey gathered today at Rutgers University's Busch Campus Center in Piscataway to show off months of intricate planning, engineering and building of their ideal metropolis. During today's New Jersey Future City Competition, judges made their way around tables stacked with models of those towns, made from materials ranging from the conventional - cardboard, soda bottles, paint - to the not-so-norm - melted blue mints, lipstick tubes and working water pumps.

Before today's contest, the students used a computer software program to design their city of the future, and brought a model of their vision to be judged during the all-day event. In its 16th year, the competition challenges students to think creatively to devise solutions urban problems, while being able to defend their findings before judges, organizers said.

"I learned that there are all types of engineering," said Stephanie Jones, a 14-year-old from Northfield Community School in Atlantic County. "When you think of an engineer, you think of someone who works on a train or something. You don't think of someone working on a musical instrument or something like that."

Participants include children from Morris, Passaic, Monmouth, Essex, Middlesex, Hudson, Union, Somerset, Atlantic, Warren...
and Bergen counties. The winners, who will be announced later today, will get to compete on the national scale in Washington, D.C. next month.

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