Little Shop of Physics

May 2026 Newsletter

LSOP Hosts 32nd Annual Open House

On March 1, 2026, the Little Shop of Physics welcomed approximately 8,000 visitors to our 32nd Annual Open House at Colorado State University's Lory Student Center. This free public event featured more than 300 hands-on experiments, interactive presentations, and activities from over 30 science partners from CSU, across Colorado, and beyond. From pre-K to gray, learners of all ages explored science as something you do—asking questions, testing ideas, and discovering through direct experience.

At the heart of Open House is our incredible team. Nearly 200 interns, volunteers, and alumni made this event possible. Beginning in the fall, LSOP interns designed and built new experiments while refurbishing returning favorites. On the day of the event, they were joined by alumni, more than 150 CSU student vounteers, and community partners to transform the Lory Student Center into a vibrant, hands-on science playground; even CSU President Amy Parsons made an appearance!

The core of Open House remains our interactive experiment stations. This year's 300+ activities spanned topics including force and motion, electricity and magnetism, light and sound, illusions, and condensed matter physics (see page 3). Visitors explored themed spaces around the LSC, from the ever-popular Dark Room to outdoor activities with rockets and bubbles.

We also hosted a full lineup of interactive presentations: Science Demos with a Norwegian Accent (Magne Hognestad), The Million Volt Tesla Coil (Kenn Lonnquist), Physics of Music (Ansel Foxley), 15 Demos in 30 Minutes (Wendy Adams), and Liquid Nitrogen Ice Cream (CSU Chemistry Club). Open House was further enriched by more than 30 partner organizations,

Open House Continued

with highlights including Oglala Lakota Star Knowledge, Community Science Workshop, atmospheric science activities, engineering design challenges, and interactive exhibits from campus and national partners. We were also proud to feature Wellington Middle-High School students and contributions from CSU student groups.

We continued our partnership with the CSU Student Disability Center to offer a Sensory-Friendly space, providing a quieter, more accessible environment and reflecting our commitment to making science welcoming for all.

We extend our sincere thanks to our sponsors, including the College of Natural Sciences, the Matthew A. McCausland Foundation, as well as Jim Sites and Elaine Regelson. This year's Ramfunder campaign, with matching support from the McCausland Foundation, raised over $20,000 to support student interns and new experiments for Open House 2027.

Open House continues to be a powerful expression of what we believe at Little Shop of Physics: science is for everyone, and learning happens best through exploration, play, and discovery. We'll see you next year on Sunday, March 7, 2027 for our 33rd Annual Open House!

APS Condensed Matter Grant Update

Little Shop of Physics recently partnered with the American Physical Society Division of Condensed Matter Physics and CSU Assistant Professor Yulia Maximenko through a Public Engagement Mini-Grant. The project, *Quantum Matter You Can Touch*, combines Maximenko's research with LSOP's hands-on approach to make complex, often invisible ideas tangible and engaging.

New experiments explore both core concepts and real-world applications. *Negative Space Maze* models quasiparticles by guiding a "hole" through a maze of balls, while *Bearing Boundaries* represents crystal defects. *Spin Storm* and *Shake It Up* bring spin waves and vibrations to life. In *Quantum Levitation*, a YBCO superconductor floats above a magnetic track, while *Let's Start a Band Gap*, *Nitinol Noodles*, and *Piezo Vibrations* highlight applications like light emission, shape memory, and sound amplification. We also refreshed several classics, including *Magnetic Domains*, *Flashy Photon Radio*, *Mind the Gap*, *Thermo Art*, *Muscle Memory*, and *Light Rock*.

These experiments debuted at our March 1 Open House in a dedicated APS condensed matter room, coordinated by freshman Zach Herrmann, who built many of the experiments. Faculty, including Maximenko, and graduate students helped engage more than 1,000 visitors. In mid-March, Zach and Heather presented a selection of our condensed matter experiments at the APS Global Physics Summit meeting in Denver. Thousands of physicists from around the world had the opportunity to witness our experiments daily. Regardless of their level of expertise, whether they were research scientists, graduate students, or undergraduate students, they engaged with our hands-on experiments with curiosity and awe.

These activities are now part of our ongoing programming, including the Traveling Science Experience, bringing hands-on science to schools throughout the year. This project highlights the power of combining research and outreach, and we're excited to keep building on it!

Little Shop Visits New Mexico Schools

This spring break, the Little Shop of Physics crew packed nearly 100 hands-on experiments and traveled to New Mexico for a week of outreach. We visited Spartan Learning Academy in Bernalillo and the Native American Community Academy (NACA), whose high school program is located on the Central New Mexico University (CNM) campus. There, we also worked with students from CNM and College and Career High School. Across both sites, we engaged nearly 600 students in grades 7 and up, bringing interactive science experiences into classrooms and shared spaces.

Our crew—primarily CSU student interns—led experiments exploring light, motion, electricity, and magnetism. At Spartan Learning Academy, we were joined by a student from the CSU Native American Cultural Center (NACC), helping strengthen local connection and representation.

Our visits took place in the homelands of the Pueblo people. We are grateful for the opportunity to work and learn alongside students, educators, and community members. We also participated in a cultural day at Petroglyph National Monument, reflecting on the long-standing traditions of the Pueblo people in this region. Along with time engaging with local cuisine, this helped our interns better understand the communities we visited.

Our next road trip will take place in May as we continue expanding outreach in the Four Corners region, including the homelands of the Ute Nations. We will host students for two days at the Southern Ute Education Center (SUEC) in Ignacio, CO. This year marks the 30th anniversary of our first trip to the SUEC! Our next stop will be to Kwiyagat Community Academy in Towaoc, CO, home of the Ute Mountain Ute people. This is our first time visiting Kwiyagat Community Academy.

We also thank Patrese Atine and colleagues at NACC for their partnership and helping us continue to support CSU's Land Grant Mission. Many thanks to the generous support of the Halliburton Foundation for these trips, including travel and Halliburton Science-at-Home kits for every student.

School Visits, Engagement Spaces, and Beyond

This semester has been filled with incredible moments of connection, curiosity, and hands-on science across our community.

Our school visits brought us to many area classrooms, including Bennett, Eyestone, Bacon, Dunn, Harris Bilingual, and Salida del Sol Academy. At Bennett we were joined by our colleague Ed Henry from the College of Liberal Arts, who brought along a ground-penetrating radar device—giving students the opportunity to explore this real-world technology in action. With his daughter attending Bennett, the day was especially meaningful for everyone involved.

At Eyestone, we were thrilled to welcome our partners from OtterCares to experience a school visit firsthand. Their continued support has been instrumental in expanding our reach, and thanks to them, we're excited to bring hands-on science to even more schools next year!

We also had the pleasure of welcoming students into our Engagement Spaces on campus. Visiting groups included Timnath Middle School, Peakview Academy, Big Thompson Elementary, and The Shine Program—a local day program for adults with intellectual and physical disabilities, who joined us three times this semester. We were also honored to host participants from the Colorado Science Fair and students in the EOC Triunfo program.
In addition, our Engagement Spaces served as a hub for connection beyond K–12 programming. We hosted all three finalists during the College's Dean search and welcomed renowned advocate and scientist Temple Grandin. Her visit left us inspired and energized in our mission to make science accessible to all.

School Visits continued

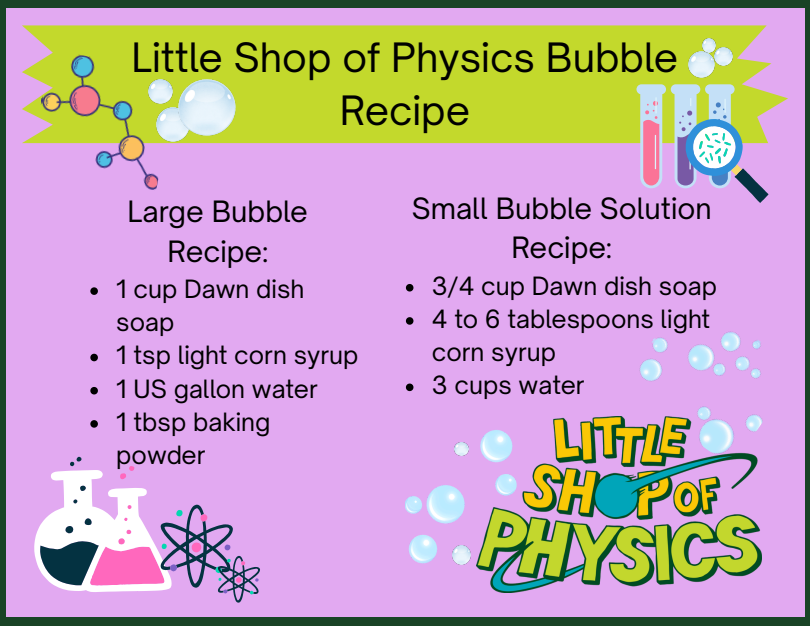
Beyond schools and campus visits, our team participated in a variety of events, including Noche de Ciencias, Society of Physics Students Zone 14 Meeting, Take Your Kid to Work Day at Anheuser-Busch, and STEAM Night at Belmar Elementary (to name a few)—continuing to meet learners wherever they are.

To celebrate a truly impactful year, we wrapped up the semester with a community science event at Maxline Brewing on May 9th. Sharing hands-on science with the public was the perfect way to celebrate alongside our community that makes our work possible!

Bubbles!

Summer is just around the corner, and one of our favorite activities is making bubbles! Each shimmering sphere is full of science, from optics and color to surface tension, and they're also just plain fun.

We're excited to share the Little Shop of Physics bubble recipe so you can try it at home on this colorful postcard created by our intern, Summer. We hope they spark a little curiosity and a lot of joy.



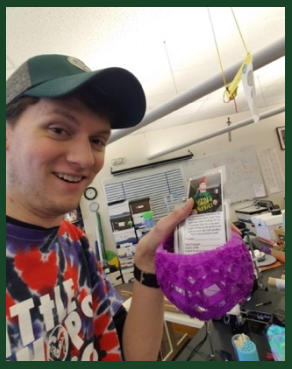
Unexpected Inspiration by Summer Turner

During my first-year orientation at Colorado State University, I remember looking through a large crowd gathered around a giant white ball held up by people decked out in protective gear and funky, bold tie-dye shirts. As I walked closer and began to see what was going on, I became intrigued about who they were and what they were doing with that giant white balloon. As they spoke about their program, and I watched the balloon fill with smoke and explode with a boom, I knew right then and there that I wanted to be one of those enthusiastic people in tie-dye.

Science has always been a passion of mine, and sharing it with others is something I have always wanted to pursue. The Little Shop of Physics program here at CSU not only allowed me to further explore my passions for science but also for teaching others about the world around us. This program has helped me develop the ability to work with all kinds of people, and it has also given me the confidence to tackle any problem head-on with a hot glue gun and determination. I not only found purpose here but also a second family of kind, supportive, and encouraging team members ready to build me up and help me pursue any idea that came to mind.

The inspiration and passion of our staff shine through the students they impact, myself included. Working alongside these brilliant educators pushed me to view ideas and solutions from different angles, considering all possibilities and methods. I have learned not only to lead but also to listen to and learn from students. I could not have asked for a better program to be a part of. If I could say one thing to those unsure of their passions in science, it would be to join the Little Shop of Physics. You will find inspiration in places you never thought, and gain so many incredible skills, friendships, and experiences. Thank you, Little Shop, for all the love you have given me over these years.

History of the Hardworking Intern Card by Bryan Stanley



In fall 2016, the physics department was taking its annual photo on the steps of the Administration Building. As I stood in the back as a physics student, a wild herd of tie-dye approached: the Little Shop of Physics crew. I remembered LSOP visiting my elementary and high school classes and attending their open house as a kid, where everything felt exciting. As we waited for the photo, I spotted a student I recognized from class among the sea of colorful shirts and immediately asked how they got involved. They told me to meet them the next Tuesday morning.

That Tuesday, I showed up to the morning meeting unannounced. No one knew I was coming, yet I felt completely welcomed. We kicked things off with a pile of random items to "Brian-storm" physics concepts, and I was hooked. At the next meeting, we were out on the Monfort Quad tossing big colorful balls against a backdrop of fall foliage. The moment was photographed and later used for promotional materials because, like many LSOP activities, it looks great with ChromaDepth glasses. Within days of joining, photos of me in tie-dye were already being widely shared.

The LSOP community was incredible. I loved working in the shop, traveling to schools, going on road trips, and gathering around the table for lunch. As I moved through undergrad, I discovered physics education research (PER), completed a summer internship, and presented at the American Association of Physics Teachers national meeting. In my final year, I completed an honors thesis on LSOP's impact on student attitudes toward science. I graduated from CSU in spring 2019 and stayed on with LSOP that summer before heading to Michigan for graduate school. On my last day in the shop, I laminated 90 "Hardworking Intern" cards with my face on them and hid them throughout the space. Finding one meant you were working hard on your next project.

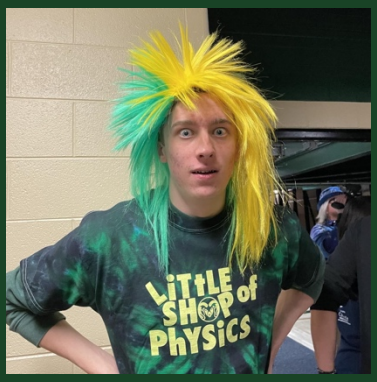
I attended Michigan State University for graduate school, where I studied PER focused on informal physics programs. After earning my PhD, I became an assistant professor at Lansing Community College, where I now teach physics. I regularly bring LSOP-inspired activities into my classroom and local community events.

Even now, a few years removed from my time at LSOP, I make a point to visit whenever I can. I still feel a rush of excitement when someone sends me a photo of an intern card that's been discovered. Seeing those tie-dye photos still circulating feels like a full-circle moment, going back to the day I first joined LSOP.

Graduating Interns

Congratulations to our graduating interns!

Alec Brickl



Tripp Pientka

Kaity Jesik

Summer Turner

Upcoming Events

We have lots of fun public events coming up! Please join us for:

- **2nd Saturday:** June 13 at CSU Spur in Denver
- **Lagoon Concert:** Wednesday, June 17 at the CSU Lagoon
- **Neutrino Day:** Saturday, June 12 at SURF in Lead, SD
- **The 33rd Annual Open House:** Sunday, March 7, 2027 at CSU Lory Student Center

For the latest information, please visit our website.

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