

LOCAL NEWS

San Bernardino students work with Garner Holt to build animatronic people, animals, and even a space alien



Garner Holt, center, checks out animatronic projects by Arroyo Valley High School students at his plant in Redlands. (Courtesy of Garner Holt Education Through Imagination)

By **FIELDING BUCK** | [fbuck@scng.com](mailto:f buck@scng.com) | The Press-Enterprise
PUBLISHED: April 12, 2019 at 11:45 am | UPDATED: April 12, 2019 at 12:51 pm

A group of students from San Bernardino's Arroyo Valley High School spent their spring break working on research projects.

But the week was more fun than it sounds.

The teens were building robotic people, animals, and even a space creature that talk and move in brief theme park-style shows.

It was part of Garner Holt Production's new educational initiative, which includes a partnership with the high school called Project Ani-Vation.

The Inland company and its founder, San Bernardino native Garner Holt, are leaders in the animatronics industry, creating hundreds of figures for places like Disneyland and [Knott's Berry Farm](#).

Holt, who taught himself how to build animatronic characters as a teenager, wants to make it possible for students to follow in his footsteps. It has created a product called SPARK-E, Specialized Personal Animatronic and Robotics Kit for Education. It's a clear figure with 10 programmable functions that students as young as third grade can customize.

The Ani-Vation students were divided into four teams, which picked topics to explore and fitted their SPARK-E figures with faces, wigs and costumes, programmed movements and lighting, dressed sets, wrote scripts, recorded dialogue and sound effects, and created slide shows to illustrate their themes.

The shows included a Roswell space alien explaining the solar system; a 19th-century suffragette tracing women's rights; a migrant farm worker describing life in California fields; and an endangered rhinoceros sharing statistics about poaching.

They were introduced by "Hawkie Balboa," an animatronic version of Arroyo Valley High School mascot, a hawk.

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