Students get kick out of electricity

Program seeks to develop novel ideas for energy

By Zachary K. Johnson
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STOCKTON — Some Harvard graduates, Stockton elementary school students and other young people kicked a soccer ball around Saturday at the University of the Pacific.

But it was no ordinary soccer ball.

After a few minutes, Hemali Thakkar scooped up the ball and plugged a cord attached to a small lamp into it. The light glowed with electricity generated from energy used to kick it around.

It’s called sOcketball, and 15 minutes of play could keep that lamp lit for three hours, Thakkar said. Electric light can be hard to come by in the developing world, so giving people a chance to read at night without igniting harmful fumes from kerosene lamps could be a boon.

The idea is simple, but the idea itself, can lead to more innovation, she said. “It’s about getting people to start thinking.”

And that’s why Thakkar and fellow Harvard graduates, who created the device, were at Pacific, starting with K-12 students who were there. About 20 students had submitted their own novel ideas to develop electricity, from putting solar panels on backpacks to putting magnets in skateboard wheels. David Bustamante, a fifth grader at Mable Bar-ron Elementary School, had the winning idea to harness the power of wastewater by putting turbines in kitchen drains.

The “Light the World” competition was a prelude to a talk given by Thakkar, Jessica Matthews, and Julia Silverman at Pacific. With Jessica Lin, who was not present, the four women were being honored as the first recipients of the Powell Emerging Leader Award for people under the age of 25 who have already made a notable impact. They were selected by the members of Pacific’s Powell Scholars Program.

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