



1,225 Cookies?

Students, parents, faculty, staff and other volunteers from Miami Country Day School gathered on Friday April 20, 2012 to attempt, and later set, the Guinness Book of World Records™ for “The Most Cookies Baked In One Hour Using Solar Ovens.” The students needed to bake at least 1,000 cookies to set the record but far exceeded that goal, baking 1,225 cookies! The cookies had to meet specifications set by the Guinness Book of World Records™ and were judged by professionals in the field.

The event was led by Matthew Cohen, a sophomore, who has been actively involved in bringing attention to the solar oven movement for the past eight years. After seeing how the devastating 2010 earthquake left the people of Haiti suffering without electricity and unable to keep their drinking water safe, Cohen sprung into action. He launched a website www.powerfromthesun.us to educate people worldwide about the benefits of solar cooking and to help raise funds for Sun Ovens International to send solar ovens to Haiti. The 40 ovens used at the event were sent to needy families in Haiti while the cookies

were donated to Feeding South Florida. For more information about Matthew and his project, please visit: www.powerfromthesun.us.



About Solar Cooking

United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that more than 2.4 billion people lack adequate cooking fuels. For developing nations that are sun rich and fuel poor, Solar Ovens can use free sunshine to cook food and pasteurize drinking water. Countries like Haiti and Nepal have less than 2% of their original forests remaining. Cooking fires pollute the atmosphere and contribute to global warming and the greenhouse effect. Many people, primarily women and children, suffer from violent attacks while gathering wood or lung disease from cooking in the huts. Solar ovens do help make a difference.



Solar ovens that were sent to Haiti



Matthew Cohen with judges



Tyler Sherwood, Matthew Cohen, Steven Soriano

Students making cookie dough during the World Record attempt



MCDS Student Volunteers



Matthew Cohen and family

So Many Cookies. So Little Time.

“Two hundred twenty five!” It took but an instant for the disappointment to register on everyone’s faces. “One thousand, two hundred twenty five!” the judge announced a few seconds later. Two hundred students, parents, and volunteers greeted the new number with great energy and enthusiasm as the judge laughed at his short lived joke on the crowd. Every cookie had been scrutinized by the judges to make sure they were a certain size, sufficiently baked and carefully counted. The Guinness Book of World Records™ doesn’t make it easy.

Only a few years ago Matthew Cohen ’14 studied solar energy in the Lower School ACES (Abess Center for Environmental Studies) program. Now he sat in my office, his second year in Upper School, explaining that he wanted to create a Guinness World Record. He wasn’t interested in setting a record for a record’s sake. Matthew’s primary goal was to increase people’s level of awareness about solar energy and raise funds to send solar cookers to Haiti. With some guidance and help this rather quiet young man had done his homework. World records clearly don’t come easily and the logistics are daunting, but he had a plan and the cause was worthy.

I arrived around 10:30 a.m. to see student and parent volunteers scurrying about, making last minute preparations before the official timekeeper started the clock at precisely 11:00 a.m. Forty solar ovens lined in rows stood waiting at attention. Two large Villager Ovens positioned on the Plaza de Colombia had been adjusted to capture as much solar energy as possible. Paul Munson, who has worked with Country Day for years on solar energy initiatives, drove one of the Villager ovens all the way from Chicago specifically for the event. Despite the news that his mother had passed away only the day before, there was Paul cleaning panels and making last minute tweaks to the cookers. Several stations teeming with bowls, spatulas and other utensils for making cookie dough had been set up in the shade in the pool parking lot. Nothing could be mixed until the official start at 11:00 a.m.

All the worry about the Weather Channel’s prediction of rain proved pointless. In total there were 177 students and 44 parents, teachers, and friends of the

school including the official judges. The goal: 1,000 cookies baked in solar ovens in exactly one hour. Depending on one’s perspective 60 minutes can seem like no time at all or an eternity. When you’re trying to set a world record the clock seems to burn up time more quickly. When Matthew’s mother, Alison said, “GO!” the two hundred plus volunteers moved into overdrive. “Stop!” she announced over the megaphone 3,600 seconds later.

What I had witnessed over the course of an hour was absolutely incredible. One could teach an entire course around the lessons learned from the experience, i.e., the value of persistence, strategic planning, time management, risk taking, problem solving, the scientific method (creating the optimal cookie batter for solar ovens), cooperation and collaboration. As an educator, the greatest lesson for me however was not about solar power, rather the power of great teaching and learning. Schools refer to this process as transformational educational experiences. The wonderful learning experiences that Rowena Gerber and John Barbick create for our children in the Abess Center have the power to change lives as well as create world records. Matthew didn’t learn about the power of the sun vicariously. In the Abess Center he experienced it first hand. We’ve all heard the expression, “the best way to learn something is to teach it.” Matthew has been teaching about solar energy in one form or another since 4th grade. Setting a Guinness World Record was still one more lesson on what can happen when we harness the power of the sun. Baking 1,225 chocolate chip cookies in solar ovens in an hour is pretty amazing. Equally amazing is the kind of transformational learning that a sophomore in Upper School experienced in ACES when he was nine years old that lead him to believe that he could actually do it.

The renowned anthropologist, Margaret Meade, once wrote, “A small group of thoughtful people could change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.” She never said it had to be adults.

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