

# SCIENCE ON THE SQUARE

Megan Mayhew



There's no better place to spend a Thursday night in Madison than on State Street, especially when the Madison Night Market merges Science on the Square to kickoff the Wisconsin Science Festival! The 10-day statewide festival celebrates science, art, and technology all across Wisconsin. This year's festival—its 15th—began on October 16 with Science on the Square, a fusion event with the Madison Night Market where outdoor STEAM-themed activities mixed with vendor tents and indoor locations on and around State Street. Visitors enjoyed a variety of activities, from an Instrument Petting Zoo filled with rock and roll instruments and getting up-close with insects, to live physics demos and stargazing.

Each year, the festival highlights a special topic and in 2025, it featured 'Rock & Roll.' This feature highlighted the music, motion, and geology that shapes Wisconsin, engaging audiences of all ages by blending earth science, physics, and music to create a dynamic, interactive, and appealing way for kids, families, and lifelong learners to explore science. Science on the Square brought all of these different topics together with over 20 hands-on outdoor science stations and a dozen indoor activities to engage curious minds.



State Street brimmed with energy as thousands of people from the community came together along State Street for Science on the Square and the Madison Night Market. Photo credit: Ueda Photography.

Here's a peek into what a walk up State Street looked like during Science on the Square!

## 500 & 600 Blocks

Curiosity was already in the air starting at the 600 block. The UW Doctor of Audiology Program taught us how to protect our ears – especially at a rock and roll concert. Just a few steps away, we dove into hands-on experiments from different UW-Madison labs, exploring everything from microplastics and microbes to the mysteries of the human brain. With each “a-ha!” moment, excitement built for the next discovery.

## 400 Block

The Einstein Project Mobile Design Lab on block 400 was a highlight of the night. We made our own souvenirs while learning about 3D printing technology! With our new creations in hand, we danced down State Street to the music of Troye Shanks and the Wisconsin Singers.



The mobile Einstein Design Lab invited passersby to stop in and get creative with 3D printing and other hands-on activities. Photo credit: Ueda Photography.

## 300 Block

It wouldn't be a science festival without slime! At the Society of Women Engineers' station, scientists of all ages rolled up their sleeves to make their own slime masterpieces while learning about the chemistry behind the novelty. Smiling (and sticky), we were ready to keep exploring.



Making slime with the Society of Women Engineers. Photo credit: Ueda Photography.

## 200 Block

Brains! The Neuroscience Training Program's station instilled awe in spectators with a hands-on brain demonstration. Afterward, we put our own brains to the test at Sencha Tea Bar where Allen Centennial Garden's “To float or not to float” activity was stationed. There, we hypothesized whether based on their densities, a cranberry or blueberry would float. So much fun and science – “Zombie” by The Cranberries played in my head as we continued down State Street to explore the rest of Science on the Square.



Learning all about the human brain with the Neuroscience Training Program's hands-on station. Photo credit: Ueda Photography.

## 100 Block

By block 100, we were craving some Wisconsin flavor. We grabbed a slice of the Science Festival's “What's the Buzz” pizza at Ian's Pizza and explored the Ice Age Trail Alliance's booth to discover how glaciers shaped Wisconsin's landscape and learned more about the physics of sound with the UW Physics Department. Fueled by pizza and fresh knowledge, we were ready to explore the festival activities around the Capitol.



UW-Madison Physics students helped explain the physics of sound with market-goers. Photo credit: Ueda Photography.

## Capitol Square & Beyond!

The excitement didn't stop at the end of State St, the Capitol Square was buzzing with excitement! With live music and a live physics demonstration from the UW-Madison Wonders of Physics group, energy was everywhere. Activities were also available for exploration at the Madison Veterans Museum, Madison Children's Museum, and Madison Central Library – ensuring that there was no shortage of hands-on science experiences for all to enjoy.



Participants were blown away at the Wonders of Physics show. Photo credit: Ueda Photography.

As the night came to a close, the glow of the Capitol, the blend of music and laughter, and the spirit of discovery captured exactly what makes the Wisconsin Science Festival and Science on the Square special – it gathers a community of curiosity, excited to engage with science, art, and technology in our state. After this year's rockin' festival, we are already looking forward to next year!

To learn more about the 2025 Wisconsin Science Festival, and stay in the loop for the 2026 festival, visit [WiSciFest.org!](https://www.wiscifest.org/)