



FEATURED CHEMIST:
Dr. John P. O'Brien

I was really excited this morning when I left to meet John P. O'Brien. Dr. O'Brien is both a chemist and an inventor who works at DuPont's Central Research and Development Department! His job is to invent new types of fibers, plastics, and other materials.

On the way to DuPont with Dr. O'Brien, he told me that ever since he was very young he always wanted to be a chemist. He said he remembered his older brother getting a chemistry set when they were younger. Watching his father and older brother run cool experiments made Dr. O'Brien fascinated with chemistry for the rest of his life! All throughout school, chemistry was his favorite

subject. After talking about his childhood, we arrived at DuPont and headed straight for the lab!

Dr. O'Brien gave me a tour of his lab and showed me all the equipment he uses for his projects. We even tried out some of the equipment! The equipment is used to study different natural materials. I watched as he tested spider webs, cocoons, and plant fibers along with other things that he found in his own backyard!

Dr. O'Brien told me many fibers and materials found in nature have very useful properties that scientists are still unable to copy. For example, I was really surprised when Dr. O'Brien told me that some types of



spider silk are much tougher than nylon or even steel!

He told me that by studying how nature makes materials he hopes to be able to find ways to make similar materials in his lab. So far Dr. O'Brien has done a very good job of inventing new things!

He showed me a piece of carpet which was made from a new fiber his company invented called "Sorona". The special thing about Sorona is that unlike a lot of fibers





that are made from oil, Sorona is made from renewable corn sugar! He was lucky enough to receive the 7,000,000th (seven millionth) U.S. patent in history for a new fiber he invented which feels like cotton but is also made from corn!

I thanked Dr. O'Brien for his time and headed on my trip back home. As I sat in my seat on the airplane, I looked at the

window at all the natural products found right outside! Next time you are in your own backyard, look around at all the natural materials around you. Ask yourself what makes the rocks hard and the cotton feel so soft. The chemistry found in nature is amazing! By studying the natural world, maybe one day you could even invent something new, just like Dr. O'Brien! ♦

Personal Profile: Dr. John P. O'Brien

What is your favorite food?

Hamburgers

And your favorite color?

Blue

Do you have a favorite movie?

The Time Machine

What do you like to do in your spare time?

Fly in a small airplane

Could you share an accomplishment that makes you proud?

Making the world's largest cellulose fibers

Are there any interesting projects you were a part of?

Making artificial spider silk in bacteria

What day is your birthday?

May 8th

Please tell us a little about your family.

Wife: Karen, daughter: Cathleen, and son: David

