

Local students learn and win at Science Olympiad

By M.B. GILLIGAN
Post Correspondent

LEHMAN TWP. — March 12 was a truly memorable day for Dan Flynn, science teacher at Dallas Middle School. First, his wife, Victoria, delivered an 8 lb. 6 oz. son and then his team took fourth place in the regional level of the Pennsylvania Science Olympiad. He was on hand for the first but missed the latter.

The team, comprised of 15 students with two alternates, collected eight medals during the day's events. "We were hoping to be in the top seven," said Christie Potera, also a science teacher and coach for the team. "But we didn't expect a fourth. This is great."

The top seven teams in both the junior high and senior high divisions advance to the state level of competition in Juniata on April 25.

The Science Olympiad is an international non-profit organization devoted to increasing student interest in science and providing recognition for outstanding achievement in science education. This year's regional competition offered 34 individual and team events which were balanced between the various science disciplines of biology, earth science, chemistry, physics, computers and technology.

Some events are tests of science facts while others test a student's science applications and skills. Information packets listing the events and their requirements are available in the fall and students prepare throughout the year for the competition. Over 1,000 students from 29 junior high and 36 senior high schools, sporting a variety of team t-shirts, converged on the Penn State Lehman Campus for a full day of tournaments.

"This is the 14th year that we sponsored the event," said Karen Brace-Hodde, Penn State organizer. "It keeps growing and growing."

Two of the day's events involved robots. "The kids who built our robots were so excited," said Jean Lipski, teacher and coach for the junior high and senior high teams from Lake-Lehman.

Wes Kinter competed in the



A jubilant Dallas Middle School team, led by Principal Anthony Martinelli, celebrates its 4th place finish in the Regional Science Olympiad competition.

POST PHOTOS/M.B. GILLIGAN

senior division where the robot was required to move items into a box. The items included an empty paper towel roll, four ping pong balls, three empty film canisters, and a golf ball.

"I thought that you had to push the items," said Kinter who built an efficient push-bot and managed to move all of the items in the allotted two minutes. Seventh graders Michael Caffrey and Jeremy Stull, from Lake-Lehman, took second place in the junior high division.

Dallas student Chris Larson also built a robot to compete at this junior high event titled Robo-Billiards. He built it at

home and brought it to school unassembled. His teammate John Thompson helped put it together and paint it. His robot had to push billiard balls into the four coffee-can pockets in a five minute time period.

"We've been practicing at school and the carpet here is thinner and more packed down so I'll be able to drive it better," said Chris before the event. He was right as the team earned third place medals for their efforts.

Teams prepare for the Olympiad in a variety of ways. The Stroudsburg schools which took first place in both team cat-

egories have actual courses to prepare for the event. Lake-Lehman's teams are comprised

of their gifted education classes and they prepare in class. Dallas High School's team, under the

direction of science teacher Mike Cherinka, is a club that meets throughout the year during a weekly "flex" period.

Two of those team members, Joe Bednash and Matt Blockus, took third place for Write In Do It. "They put me in a room with a thing build out of K-nex. I had to write a description of how it was built and then Matt had to put it together just by following my instructions," said Joe.

Dallas Middle School students started meeting after school in the late fall to get ready for the March competition. Participants were chosen from the most interested, dedicated, and qualified of those who attended the many after school practices. Teams and events were picked and preparation began in earnest in mid-February.

The Bridge Building, Mission Possible and Egg Drop teams worked over the last several months to perfect their projects. The bridge, which was constructed ahead of time, had to meet certain specifications and be able to hold 15 kg of weight for five seconds.

"It is really nice to see kids get this excited about science."

Jean Lipski
Lake-Lehman team coach

"Our bridge didn't break," exclaimed Megan McDonald to her teammates shortly after the event.

Egg Drop competitors are given 10 straws, 10 Popsicle sticks, five rubber bands, 50 cm of string, 75 cm of masking tape, a piece of paper, a raw egg and 30 minutes. They need to put together a container to safely hold an egg for a drop of over 15 feet.

All the weeks of practice and preparation paid off for the Dallas Middle School team of Drew Slocum and Katie Gilligan. Their egg was one of only two out of 27 to not break when it hit the floor. Their near bulls-eye landing earned them first place medals.

Drew Slocum also won a third place medal with his teammate, Katelyn Fritzes, for Science Crime Busters where the students are given clues at a murder scene and they need to analyze them.

After school study with parent volunteer, Jane Ketchner, paid off for the DMS Science of Fitness team. Lauren Yurko and Debra Ketchner earned second place medals in the event, which involves a written test of the team's knowledge of nutrition, diet, exercise and the digestive system. Third place honors at both levels went to Lake-Lehman students. Kayla Platt and Ryan Bloom won in the high school division and Eddie Donahue and Chloe Kalma won in the junior high division.

"The Science Olympiad strengthens the kids' imagination and creativity," said Lipski. "It is really nice to see kids get this excited about science."



Lake-Lehman 8th graders Emily Deubler and Eric Stankiewicz worked on their entry for the egg drop event.



Lauren Yurko, left, and Debra Ketchner, Dallas Middle School eighth graders, earned third place ribbons in the Science of Fitness tournament.

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