

Science Olympiad challenges Heritage Middle students

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DELTONA -- Teacher Michael Cimino had an attractive hook working in his favor when he put out a call last fall for students interested in joining the Heritage Middle School Science Olympiad team.

He was willing to excuse them from the annual science fair project some students dread.

But even Cimino was surprised when more than 200 students wanted to try out for a program that required months of after-school work and Saturday sessions.

Thirty-five ended up making the two teams Heritage entered in the state competition after scoring well at regionals, putting in what Cimino said was the equivalent of 40 additional school days after regular classes and on Saturdays.

Why did they do it?

"It's so, like, fun," said eighth-grader Megan Medina, who worked with classmate Julia DeAngelo to build the lightest and strongest balsa wood bridge they could design.

Unlike a science fair where most students complete individual projects and prepare reports mounted on display boards that spell out their hypothesis, procedures and results, the Science Olympiad that dates back to 1983 features more hands-on events.

Students compete in 23 categories, including such challenges as building a battery-operated car, solving a hypothetical crime by analyzing physical evidence found at a scene or developing a device triggered by a golf ball that causes four mouse traps to snap in a specific order. Junkyard Challenge'

Cimino first encountered the program as a student teacher in Delaware. Now, in his fourth year of teaching at Heritage, he couldn't wait to introduce the program there. The Heritage students finished fourth in the recent state competition -- their best showing since they first entered in 2008 and tops among the half dozen Volusia schools that participated this year.

"It gets the kids so excited about science," Cimino said of the competition. "Those kids get a sense of pride competing against other schools."

"The kids do a lot of research on their own," said George Daniels, the other Heritage teacher who coached the Olympiad teams with Cimino. "It brings out their creative side."



Heritage Middle School science teacher Michael Cimino talks to students recently at the annual Science Olympiad. Volusia County School District



Louisa Cisneros, left, and Jacob Lacey compete in the junkyard challenge at the state Science Olympiad recently. Volusia County School District

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"Most of us in here, we like science," said seventh-grader Chancellor Hansen, "but you really have to be dedicated for this."

Some students, like Caterina Duffy and Katie Adams, said their experience with Science Olympiad got them interested in pursuing science-related careers. Caterina plans to enroll in the Science Technology Engineering and Math Academy at the new University High School in August, while Katie wants to be a behavior analyst.

There are lessons to be learned in fields other than science, too, with Cimino saying the Science Olympiad team members became "like a giant family."

Marissa D'Amico said the program is well worth all the hard work it requires. "You make new friends and make better friends with your old ones," she said.

And as for those science fair projects the Olympiad competitors didn't have to do -- about half the students did one anyway.

More information:

· [Florida Science Olympiad](#)



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