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## More Than Rocket Science

*YMS Science Olympiad Preparations Blast Off*

By Shauna Marlette

[shauna.marlette@yankton.net](mailto:shauna.marlette@yankton.net)

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For members of an athletic team, the results are very public — people know how much time and effort goes into every practice, every performance, every win or loss.

But for other teams, the time and effort that goes into building a winning tradition is often overlooked.

At the Yankton Middle School one of those teams that flies under the radar is the Science Olympiad team.

But even now, months before the local and state competitions will be held, more than 30 students meet twice a week — once after school and once in the evening — in the hopes of continuing a streak of success that has gone on for close to three decades.

The Yankton Middle School Science Olympiad team has won the state title every year it has been contested — 27 years, and according to middle school coach Cheryl Schaeffer. With the help of the other coaches Brooks Schild and Tom Merrill, YMS students are currently working hard on bringing home number 28.

"It has been a battle the last few years between Yankton Middle School and Yankton Sacred Heart Middle School," she said. "Last year they were within five points at the end. So, we are really working hard to make sure that they don't catch us this year. Every year, we work very hard to not be the team that doesn't win."

The Science Olympiad tradition continues into high school, where YHS last failed to win the state title in 1988.

"We have had such great support from the community through the years," Schaeffer said. "The tradition we have been able to build is completely because of the support we have had. It carries through into the high school team as well."

This year, instead of having the YMS and YHS teams practice separately, both teams are practicing at the middle school. Schaeffer said.

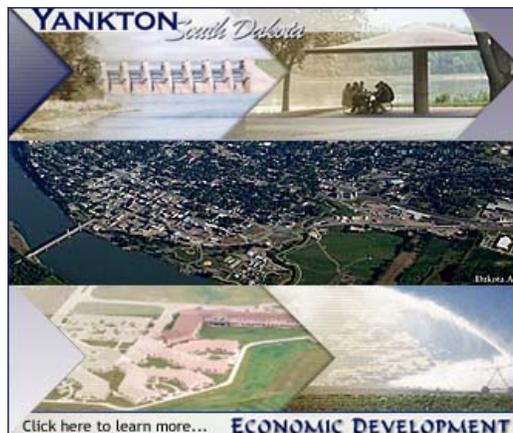
"It has just worked out so well," she said. "The high school students, most if not all of them anyway, all went through the middle school competitions and they have been great help for our middle schoolers."

With 23 different possible competitions in which to participate, Schaeffer said that Science Olympiad has something for everyone's interests.

"We start out in the fall and do assemblies with all of the students," she said. "From there, interested students and their parents come to a meeting where we discuss the process and the different competitions. The students then pick which



Members of the Yankton Middle School Science Olympiad team have been studying, preparing and testing their projects for the upcoming Science Olympiad contests next year. YMS has won the last 27 competitions. Shown are team members working with water pressure bottle rockets. (Shauna Marlette/P&D)



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ones interest them the most.”

According to the Science Olympiad website, tournaments are rigorous academic interscholastic competitions that consist of a series of individual and team events for which students prepare during the year. The competitions follow the format of popular board games, TV shows and athletic games. These events touch on the disciplines of biology, earth science, chemistry, physics, computers and technology.

Schaeffer said the competition is very self-driven.

“Students have to do their own research and find their own materials,” She said. “It is up to them to make sure that their projects work and that they understand why it does. There is a balance between events requiring knowledge of science facts, concepts, processes, skills and science applications.”

Typically, a student will participate in at least three different competitions.

“For the students, it is a lot of work, but also a lot of fun,” Schaeffer said. “The day we tested the rockets, the students had to provide their own materials, put them together and test them following the rules of the competition. When the competition comes, they have to build their projects on-site; they can’t use pre-built projects. So, they really need to know what they are doing.”

For now, the students are working hard to make their marks at the local, state and, hopefully, national levels.

“It is all building them for their future and having fun at the same time,” Schaeffer said. “We always hear comments about how fun it is, and I think that is why the program has been so successful through the years.”

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