

Ann Arbor Journal > News

WASHTENAW COUNTY: Area students show off their knowledge at Washtenaw Elementary Science Olympiad

Friday, April 27, 2012

By Donna Iadipaolo
Special Writer

Thousands of students brought science to life at the 10th annual Washtenaw Elementary Science Olympiad, the largest elementary Science Olympiad in the nation, held all day April 22 at Pioneer High School in Ann Arbor.

"Are you excited to be part of the largest Science Olympiad in the United States of America?" asked Ann Arbor Board of Education Trustee Christine Stead, before the awards ceremony for the second- and third-graders. The crowd yelled and applauded, filling the Pioneer gymnasium with cheers and glee.

"We are doing this because we enjoy it," said Washtenaw Elementary Science Olympiad board member Gilda Johnson. "We want students to learn science. We want to come together as a community.

"This is a tribute to Ann Arbor that we are able to keep this together and that we are growing every year."

There were officially 1,621 student participants representing 25 area elementary schools. Students competed in 20 different events spanning every science category, ranging from "Water Rockets," where student design pop bottle rockets, to "Infinity and Beyond," an event about astronomy.

Washtenaw Elementary Science Olympiad was possible because of the tremendous outpouring of community volunteers. Volunteer event coaches at each school and additional volunteers of the day were estimated about 600 people.

Dr. Stephanie Goodson, a pediatrician at the University of Michigan and mother of three, for instance, was motivated to volunteer as a coach this year.

"As a parent, and now as I coach, I can guarantee that every child will leave confident that they learned something that is above and beyond any elementary science curriculum taught in the classroom," she said. "Also, seeing so many participants, it is easily evident that science is important, no matter what your aspirations entail."

This is her son Jared Goodson's third year competing. He became involved as soon as elementary school students are allowed to participate, in second grade, and is currently in fourth grade.

"We never questioned if he was going to participate," said Goodson. "It was always what events he wanted to join. We were very supportive at home for the first two years, and this year I decided to coach the event Potions."

Students are allowed to be involved in many events. For instance, Jared also participated in "Pentathlon" and "Feathered Friends."

Goodson said that the educational benefits are numerous.

"They learn really specific scientific skills," Goodson said. "My fourth- and fifth-graders on the 'Potions' team could probably tell you more about the Periodic chart than a freshman in chemistry.

"In 'Feathered Friends,' Jared can look in the sky and identify a bird by its flight pattern, time of year (migratory patterns) or bird calls. In 'Anatomy,' I had to review my medical school anatomy books to keep up with his study guides."

Goodson said students learn how to "win with respect and lose with pride that they tried their best."

Another important skill students develop is perseverance, she said.

"It doesn't matter, win or lose, I know that my child has gained something that will follow them throughout their academic career," Goodson said. "Science is fun and important. We have already started to ask our first-grade daughter what events she wants to participate in and she has started talking about it with her first-grade friends."

Organizers said that Washtenaw Elementary Science Olympiad would not be possible without the support of sponsors, including Ann Arbor Public Schools, Toyota Technical Center, Ann Arbor Public Schools Education Foundation and others.

URL: http://www.heritage.com/articles/2012/04/27/ann_arbor_journal/news/doc4f9aa638c609f350372204.prt

© 2012 Heritage Newspapers, a **Journal Register** Property