



# Delaware schools: Serious science is family's fun

## Three generations excel at state and national levels

By EDWARD L. KENNEY • The News Journal • May 21, 2010

Last year, science teachers Jillann and Tom Hounsell retired from H.B. du Pont Middle School in Hockessin following an unprecedented string of appearances representing Delaware at the **National Science Olympiad**.

This year, Dana Wisnoski and Tom Hounsell Jr. -- their daughter and son -- continued the tradition when their school team qualified for the nationals for the 25th time in the 26 years the competition has been held. Their students will represent Delaware in the middle-school category as they compete today and Saturday at the University of Illinois.

"It's a tradition that needs to continue for the benefit of the kids," Wisnoski said.

She and her brother were well-schooled, she said.

"I think they were prepping us long before we knew they were prepping us," Wisnoski said of her parents.

"They called when they needed help. We're on speed dial," added Tom Sr., who along with Jillann will accompany their children to the nationals to assist if needed.

Last year, Tom Jr., 34, was at Stanton Middle School -- which, like H.B. du Pont, is in the Red Clay Consolidated School District -- but transferred to H. B du Pont this year. Wisnoski, 40, had been teaching social studies at H.B. du Pont for 10 years but transferred to the other science slot vacated by her parents.

The second-generation science teachers are no strangers to the competition.

As a seventh-grader at H.B. du Pont, Wisnoski won gold at the nationals in the bridge-building category. It was the year the team took second place, the school's highest finish at the nationals.

Tom Sr., 66, who taught at H.B. du Pont for 35 years, blames his school's lone loss in the state competition in 1999 to a little cockiness on the part of the students.

"It hurt that the kids didn't put forth the effort required to win," he said. "They thought they were going to walk into first place, and Corpus Christi [School in Elsmere] did the job."

Schools can send two teams to the state championship, which was held in March this year. H.B. du Pont finished first and third, sandwiched around Newark Charter School. Only the first-place team gets to go to the nationals. The Charter School of Wilmington, the perennial winner, will represent Delaware in the high school division.

Fifteen students and seven alternates from H.B. du Pont qualified to make the bus trip Thursday to Champaign, Ill., for the nationals. They have been practicing science categories such as catapult trajectory and electrical circuitry after school twice a week since December, first for the state and then the nationals.

"It takes lots and lots and lots and lots of practice. It's just practice and then practice some more -- but

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it's fun," Jillann Hounsel said.

"Most schools don't practice as much as us," said competitor Edward Bao, 13, an eighth-grader. "If you can work hard, you can do well at what you're doing. That's my belief."

Martin Kurian, 14, an eighth-grader, competed last year with the Hounsell parents and this year with their children.

"There hasn't been much difference," he said. "It's just been a smooth transition."

As if the two generations of scientists were not enough, Wisnoski's 14-year-old son, Brad, a ninth-grader, also is a member of the H.B. du Pont team this year.

"Wow, time goes fast," Tom Sr. said. "It just seems like yesterday that we started the whole thing."

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Three generations of the Hounsell family pose in a science lab at H.B. du Pont Middle School: (from left) Tom Hounsell Jr., his sister Dana Wisnoski, Wisnoski's son Brad, and their parents, Jillann and Tom Hounsell Sr. (The News Journal)



H.B. du Pont Middle School eighth-grader Edward Bao, a member of the school's state champion Science Olympiad team, readies catapult for testing at school Wednesday. (The News Journal/JENNIFER CORBETT)

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H.B. du Pont eighth-graders Katie Chambers (right) and Ely Carmark practice identifying substances Wednesday in preparation for the National Science Olympiad this weekend. (The News-Journal/JENNIFER CORRETT)



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Chris Deng, an H.B. du Pont eighth-grader, checks out a battery-powered buggy the team will use in the competition. (The News-Journal/JENNIFER CORRETT)

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