

Students at Solon High, Middle schools win National Science Olympiad

Published: Sunday, May 20, 2012, 7:31 PM Updated: Monday, May 21, 2012, 7:27 AM



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By

SOLON, Ohio -- An innate passion for learning coupled with a dose of Lady Luck propelled **Solon High School and Solon Middle School students to first-place finishes in the National Science Olympiad Tournament** for the second year in a row this weekend, said science teacher Donna Ross.

It was the fifth consecutive win for the middle school team, and only the second time in 22 years that a high school and middle school from the same city took the championship.

"It's a little bit of a dynasty," middle school science teacher Drew Kirian said.

He's one of a team of teachers and parents who coached 21 competitors and alternates in seventh, eighth and ninth grades for two hours every Thursday evening to hone their knowledge and skills. The students had to compete to make the team. At the high school 60 students tried out.

"Our kids are competitive and put in a tremendous amount of time, countless hours researching and building things," high school Principal Erin Short said. "They were under a great deal of pressure to defend the championship. You could hear the relief in their voices Saturday night."

Nearly 6,400 teams from 50 states competed in state science Olympiads before the top 120 teams traveled to Orlando for the national event Friday and Saturday at the University of Central Florida.

The middle school team competed with projects in forestry, stars, water, anatomy, crime, disease, food, maps, meteorology, optics, rocks, heat, planets, bottle rockets, a mousetrap vehicle and an egg drop. Solon's team took top honors in launching Hacky Sacks and identifying constellations.



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Solon High School and Solon Middle School students won first place in the National Science Olympiad Tournament for the second year in a row this weekend.

Team co-captain Dorothy Chan, 15, said the competition "sparks your interest in science, and the parents and teachers provide great leadership."

She plans to pursue a medical career and enjoyed a crime-busting competition, solving the case of doughnut store burglary by identifying various powders and using DNA and fingerprint evidence.

Co-captain Stephen Dayneka, 14, especially liked a climate project and said that winning the championship was a "whole team effort."

The high school competition involved projects in astronomy, anatomy and physiology, disease, forestry, forensics, chemistry, helicopters, microbes, optics, proteins, robotics, rocks, music, thermodynamics, water, towers and an elastic launch glider.

Solon's team took first place in forestry, thermodynamics, towers, technical writing and gliders categories and earned medals in 13 of 23 events.

The high school students are responsible for their own extra studying, Ross said. Ross, who will retire next year, has coached the team for the last 15 years. During that time, Solon has notched 13 finishes in the Top 10.

"Unlike other teams that practice together each week, individual motivation brings depth to our team," said senior Roger Zou, 17, who is heading to Duke University. "And we have that mind-set to win."

Yale-bound Yuxi Liu, 18, said, "Veteran members and an influx of talent from the middle school, plus our hard work made the victory feel deserved."

The senior members of the team missed their prom, which was Saturday. One of the mothers had made corsages and boutonnieres for them and they wore them when they received their team trophy. The students also received medals.

The students were expected to be back in Solon about 10 p.m. this evening, but their travels aren't necessarily over. They may be invited to meet President Obama during a science fair at the White House.

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Donna Ross

Andrew Mikofalvy, top left, Ben Nudelman, Ayush Gupta, Roger Zou, John Zeng, Rick Yuan, Michael Li, Lisa Guo, lower left, Yuxi Liu and Lauren Kirian are senior members of Solon High School's science team.