

The best of the best

Twin Tiers Science Olympiad Invitational hosted by Athens High attracts 'some of the best teams in the country'

BY JAMES LOEWENSTEIN (STAFF WRITER)

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Review Photo/JAMES LOEWENSTEIN Athens High engineering teacher James McNeil holds a plastic Gatorade bottle filled with 200 grams of sand. Students on Saturday were told the weight of the sand in the bottle, and they were instructed to drop the bottle from a height of 2 1/2 meters with a bungee cord attached to it. The teams had to calculate how long the non-elastic section of their bungee cords needed to be so that the bottle would drop as close as possible to the floor without touching it.



Review Photo/JAMES LOEWENSTEIN Students from North Pocono High School demonstrate a device that converts various types of energy, such as electrical energy to mechanical energy, and electrical energy to chemical energy



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ATHENS -

Among the many tournaments that the more than 5,700 Science Olympiad teams in the United States compete in, the annual Twin Tiers Science Olympiad Invitational stands out.

"Several of the best teams in the country" were at the 2014 Twin Tiers Science Olympiad Invitational on Saturday, a one-day science contest held at Athens Area High School, said Dick Rosin, a volunteer from Chemung, N.Y., who was helping to run the event.

The Twin Tiers Science Olympiad Invitational, which is held each year at Athens High, "is considered one of the best Science Olympiad invitational tournaments in the country because of the strength of the competition," said Susan Lockard, head coach of Athens High's Science Olympiad team.

Among the 21 high schools that sent teams to the tournament were Salon High School in Salon, Ohio, which has placed first at the National Science Olympiad for the past three years in a row.

There were also other schools at Saturday's contest that have sent teams to the National Science Olympiad, Lockard said. Only the top two teams at the Pennsylvania Science Olympiad state tournament advance to the nationals.

"I guess it (the Twin Tiers Invitational) has gotten the reputation of having a well-run program," said Sigrid Wilkinson, a retired science and math teacher from Athens High, who continues to serve as a volunteer with the Athens School District's Science Olympiad program.

"It's tough competition," Athens High team member Brittany Hajduga said about competing against Solon High. "They are nice to us and we are nice to them."

The 21 schools competing in the 2014 Twin Tier Science Olympiad Invitational came from Virginia, New Hampshire, New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. The tournament included 23 events, including a competition to see how long the students could keep the balsa wood gliders they had designed and built aloft in a gymnasium, and another competition to see how well they could design a system that would release a sand-filled Gatorade bottle attached to a bungee cord from a certain height, and have it drop as close as possible to the ground without touching it.

For Athens High School team member Taylor Liddane, Science Olympiad competitions are "more friendly" than a sports tournament or other type of competition. Members and coaches from other teams "will help you out and give you tips," she said.

Competing in the tournament "is like getting together with a bunch of friends that you haven't met yet," she said.

"It's more enjoyable" than other types of tournaments, agreed Athens High team member Courtney Shepler. "People support you."

Athens High is the only school in Bradford County that has a Science Olympiad team.

Lockard said there are over a dozen citizens from the community that have a professional background in science or engineering area that help out the team as volunteer coaches.

Wilkinson said Science Olympiad is more than just a competition. It's an alternative way to teach science, as kids have to "plan things, build things, and experiment with them," in addition to doing "book learning" about science.

Kids learn about science "big time," she said.

The book learning takes place in part in relation to the building projects, she said. But some competitions, such as astronomy and anatomy & physiology, are completely based on book learning, she said.

"These kids are motivated," Wilkinson said. "They study big time."

Hajduga said her math and science scores on tests in school would have been lower if she had not spent the last three years on Science Olympiad teams.

James Loewenstein can be reached at (570) 265-1633; or email: jloewenstein@thedailyreview.com.