Several of the North Pocono Science Olympiad students with examples of their projects. From left to right: Tyler Baldauff, Nikhil Patel, Macenzie Powell, Jared Krehely and Sean Smith. [PHOTO BY LINDA LEWIS]

Science Olympiad successful

By Bridget LaMonica
blamonica@gatehousemedia.com

COVINGTON TWP. – The North Pocono High School was full of students last weekend and it wasn't for a sporting event.

Saturday, Feb. 25 marked the first time a Science Olympiad Invitational was held at the school, and the kids were excited to share what they'd learned.

Kelly Bollard, a North Pocono alum who graduated in 2015, was volunteering that day and told from experience how exciting it was to hold an invitational at the school.

"We talked about it senior year," said Kelly Bollard. "Can we host our own invitational? We think it would be a lot of fun.

And so luckily the Crooms this year were able to do it."

In 2010, the North Pocono Science Olympiad team was at 11 members. This year they have 47.

"It's been a work in progress for about a year and a half," said Lindsay Croom, coach. "Our kids have been on us to do one as well. We've attended a number of invitationals and our students wanted

to host one here."

Fifteen plus school participated in the science based competition at North Pocono. The invitational consists of 23 categories that the students compete in. They choose their events at the beginning of the school year and work on their projects after school.

SCHOOL

"They're very specific events that students might not get in a traditional high school course," explained assistant coach Dr. J Croom. "It allows kids to explore that for a year or two."

The events that rotate out every two years are reminiscent of their times. For instance, in 2000, there was an event called Web Browsing.

This year, hydrogeology was one choice, a response to environmental issues related to the fracking industry.

Jared Krehely was one student in the wind power event. He 3-D printed the blades for his machine. "We try to generate the most voltage possible," Krehely said.

The event for Macenzie Powell was forensics.

"We are given a crime scene and we have to figure out who the suspect is," Powell said. "You have to test powders and plastics."

Nikhil Patel's event was towers. "We like to build the lightest tower to hold the most," Patel said. "It's about holding more than it weighs."

Tyler Baldauff, senior, explained one of his events, the robot arm. "In robot arm, we're given a task. This year we have stacks of pennies throughout the board and we have to design a robot to most efficiently and quickly as possible complete the task, which is pick up the pennies and move them to the center."

Team captain Sean Smith had projects for Game On, hovercraft, remote sensing and wind power. Game On is an event in which students use coding software called Scratch. For the event, students build a game based on an assigned topic.

As a measure of their dedication and work ethic, Dr. Croom explained that although in a typical class the students would have 135 hours of meeting time, they can spend from 200 to almost 300 hours meeting for Science Olympiad.

"I think our goal... is for them to broaden their perspective outside of what they see in the classroom," said Lindsay Croom. "Sometimes the kids accidentally find out something that they never thought they would ever like," she said. "They end up loving it. I think we just want to inspire our kids to be the best that they can to push themselves to work hard and I think that Science Olympiad does that for them."

Science Olympiad has made a profound impact on seniors going into like-minded careers.

Tyler Baldauff presented his projects for robot arm and electric vehicle. He plans to go to Penn State for electrical engineering.

"Honestly, Science Olympiad has probably been the best experience of my high school career," said Baldauff. "I don't know where I would be without it. It has just taught me so much throughout the years and it's just a great experience."

Alec Aversa, a senior, was doing the helicopter, optics and remote sensing events. He plans to go to Misericordia for computer science and mathematics. Sean Smith is going to the Pennsylvania College of Technology for Mechatronics Engineering Technology.

"Throughout the four years that I've been in [Science Olympiad], it's shaped me as a person," Smith said.

"And really opened me up to realize that there's a lot more work than goes into things than meets the eye."

Smith also pointed out that the school has helped furnish this appreciation for science with such things as their own 3-D printer. Smith's hovercraft was almost entirely 3-D printed, with additions of modified store-bought components, a computer fan and a DC motor.

The parents of these students, especially those with graduated students, have seen the benefit of the science-based competition on their children.

Alison Bollard, Kelly's mother, explained how her daughter's friend introduced her to Science Olympiad. Kelly Bollard improved academically and became a more independent student.

Karen Wolfe's daughter Melissa introduced Kelly to the competition. Both girls have now graduated, but Wolfe has another child, Eric, currently in Science Olympiad.

Wolfe discussed the importance of these students learning to work on tasks with a team and they were both thankful to the support they've seen for the students.

"I am most grateful to Mrs. Croom the coach and Dr. Croom assistant coach and the North Pocono school board for their support," Bollard said. "The school board has been very good to the North Pocono Science Olympiad team. Thank goodness for our school board seeing the importance."

They were also appreciative of the steps superintendent Bryan McGraw and Principal Ron Collins took towards getting the event at the school.