

SCIENCE OLYMPIAD

Science showcase

Students gather to test their scientific knowledge



Fleetwood High School students Jane Burnett, left, and Leiana Corpora test substances to try to figure out what they are during the forensics competition at the Berks County Science Olympiad on Thursday. DAVID MEKEEL — READING EAGLE



Sophia Fu, a junior at West Chester East High School, prepares to take part in the forensics competition during the Berks County Science Olympiad at Kutztown University on Thursday.
DAVID MEKEEL — READING EAGLE



Twin Valley students Kayla Maniscalco and, left, Lilith McHugh take part in the forensics competition during the Berks County Science Olympiad on Thursday. DAVID MEKEEL — READING EAGLE

BY DAVID MEKEEL

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Sophia Fu smiled as she walked across the Kutztown University campus Thursday morning, a clear plastic tub filled with beakers and rulers and vials and calculators in her hands.

“That’s a Cyprus tree, you can tell by the needles,” she said. “And all of these seeds on the ground are oak.”

A year ago, Fu wouldn’t have known what either were. But lately she’s been working to hone her identification skills, preparing for the event she was taking part in at Kutztown.

The West Chester East High School student was one of about 250 high school and middle school students who gathered at the college for the annual Berks County Science Olympiad.

The event provides an opportunity for science-loving students to compete in a variety of STEM-related events, showcasing their knowledge and skills in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

One of the events that Fu competed in was forestry, which is why she was able to pick out the Cyprus trees and oak seeds.

“I wouldn’t have known that if I didn’t do the research,” she said.

As Fu spoke, she was on her way to the Boehm science building, where she was set to test her mettle in the forensics competition.

“It’s fun because you get to do a flame test on powders to try to figure out what they are,” she said with a laugh.

Leiana Corpora and Jane Burnett, from Fleetwood High School, also competed in that event. The pair spent about 40 minutes testing various substances — pouring acid on them, looking at them under a microscope, heating them up — in hopes of solving a mystery.

The students were tasked with solving a fake crime: Taylor Swift had returned to Berks County for some rest and relaxation when she discovered someone had broken into her home. There were several suspects, and a number of materials that were found on each. The students had to test materials found at the crime scene to try to identify the guilty party.

“I thought it was really fun,” Corpora said. “And difficult.”

When asked if she and Burnett had succeeded, she didn’t exactly brim with confidence.

“I hope so,” the high school junior said, shrugging her shoulders.

This year was the first time Corpora had competed in the Science Olympiad. She said she held helped out classmates in the past with their preparation for the event, and decided to give it a go herself this time around.

“And I wanted to do this because forensics is what I want to do for my job,” she said. “I want to be a medical examiner.”

Across the lab, Twin Valley High School students Kayla Maniscalco and Lilith McHugh felt a little more sure of their deductive skills.

“I think we got the right person,” Maniscalco said. “But I don’t know if we got all the answers right.”

Maniscalco, a sophomore, said the forensics competition was hard, but that she enjoyed taking part in it.

“It was fun to do, I like chemistry and stuff,” she said.

A bit earlier in the day inside the McFarland Student Union, Darius Holman also said he was having a fun day at the competition.

“I always try to make things as fun as possible,” he said, moments after testing how much weight a wooden structure he built could hold. “Even if I know we won’t win. The last thing I want to do is make it a pain-staking process.”

Holman, a junior at Central York High School, said he got involved with Science Olympiad with an eye on the future. He wants to be an earth sciences teacher some day, and is currently serving as a student teacher at his high school.

The teacher he’s student teaching with leads the Science Olympiad team, and Holman said he wanted to see if that’s something he’d one day be able to do.

Students from 15 schools participated in Thursday’s event: Antietam Senior-Middle School, Bayard Rustin High School, Boyertown High School, Central York High School, Exeter High School, Fleetwood High School, Gov. Mifflin High School, Kutztown High School, B. Reed Henderson High School, Schuylkill Valley High School, Sun Valley High School, Twin Valley Junior-Senior High School, West Chester East High School, Wilson High School and Wyomissing Junior-Senior High School.

Winners of the event will move on to a regional competition. For more information on Science Olympiad, visit www.soinc.org.