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Guided By Science

GV Students Prep For State Science Olympiad

By Travis Gulbrandson
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GAYVILLE — When most people think of school-related competitions, science isn't usually the first thing that comes to their mind.

But science will be the main item on the agenda when the 14-member Gayville-Volin School's Science Olympiad team competes in the state tournament this weekend.

The tournament will take place at the University of South Dakota on Saturday. The opening ceremony will begin at 8:30 a.m., and the day will conclude with an awards ceremony at 4:45 p.m.

Science Olympiad provides students with an opportunity to use their critical thinking skills in a wide variety of team events.

"They cover a number of areas," said Jenny Rice, Science Olympiad coach and Gayville-Volin School librarian. "They go anywhere from anatomy, life science, earth science, there's some forensics, chemistry, engineering, things like that. So there's a number of opportunities, depending on what the kids want to get into."

Many of the events involve building a machine to perform a specific task.

One of the events — Battery Buggy — requires students to build a battery-operated car.

Seventh-graders Weston Maysis and Brandon Van Osdel constructed theirs out of Legos and power it with C-volt batteries.

"We're supposed to get it to go a certain distance in a certain amount of time," said Maysis.

"It has to go five to seven meters, and the wheel base has to be 20 to 26 centimeters," Van Osdel added.

Rice said the requirements

of each event are carefully specified.

"Science Olympiad does a pretty good job of spelling out exactly what they'd like the students to be aware of, and a lot of it is student-driven," she said. "They have the parameters in front of them, and a lot of it is on their own."

Seventh-graders Alexis Ellison and Morgan Nielson are participating in the Junkyard Challenge, which involves building a structure connected to four mousetraps. The traps have to be set off in sequence, activated by a golf ball that's placed in the center of the structure.

"You just have to make sure the order of it goes (correctly) because you do have to mark the mousetraps, and if you don't go in that order, you also get docked," Ellison said. "It's a lot harder than you think."

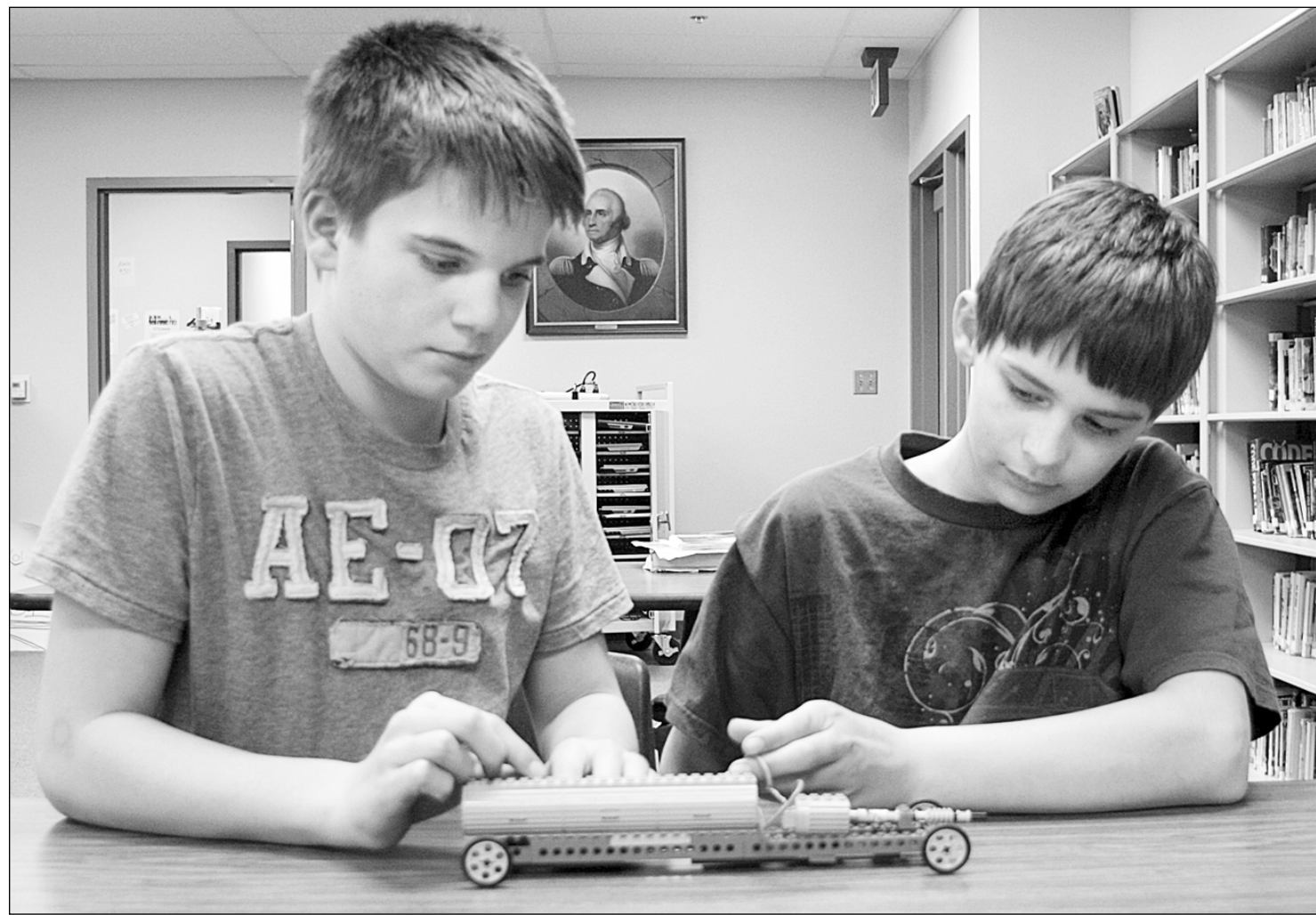
Sophomores Luke Buffington and Cameron Coke have constructed a water clock.

"What we do is calculate the amount of drips that come out per second. Then, in the contest, they'll give us a random interval of time, and so we'll count the number of drips and then use that number to calculate how much time went by," Buffington said.

Coke said there is no specific design requirement apart from the elimination of using actual clock parts or electricity.

Rice said students have something to gain from participating in Science Olympiad.

"I think it's a really good way to teach kids about inquiry-based learning, where you ask an open-ended question and they actually have to search for an answer," she said. "It's not a multiple-choice kind of deal; it's not true-false. They learn the process of solving a problem



Gayville-Volin seventh-graders Weston Maysis and Brandon Van Osdel work on the car they constructed for the Battery Buggy event of this year's state Science Olympiad tournament, which will take place Saturday at the University of South Dakota. (Travis Gulbrandson/P&D)

rather than just answering the problem, so I think overall, it's really good at inspiring some creativity for the kids."

"Overall, it's a good way to learn and expand on things you don't really have time to learn in school," Buffington said.

"It's just cool how you have nothing to work with and at the end you have something

(to show for it)," Nielson added.

Rice said next year's Science Olympiad season may be expanded a bit.

"Normally, I would like to start a little earlier," she said. "This year, we had about a four-month season. We got the information in December, (but) we didn't actually start practicing until January just because we're a small district.

The kids are stretched pretty thin as it is. They're all busy." This fact has required practice to take place before school or during the home-room period.

"A lot of it is researching, memorizing, doing some minimal experimentation," Rice said. "We do as much hands-on stuff as we can."

This is Rice's first year as Science Olympiad coach, and

she said it's been a good experience.

"I really have enjoyed it a lot, and I think we've got a lot of really good kids," she said. "I'm excited to see what they'll do... They really have worked hard, and they should represent the school really well."

For more information about Science Olympiad, visit www.soinc.org.

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