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Young scientists to compete

400 to participate in regional science fair Sunday

March 18, 2004

By BoNhia Lee Staff writer

Expect more than exploding volcanoes and plant projects at this year's 25th annual Greater Syracuse Scholastic Science Fair.

Some projects will test memory and balance, others the effects of soda and juice on teeth. One will even study snow pollution in Onondaga County and whether it's safe to eat the snow.

About 400 youths in grades five to 12 will compete in the regional science fair Sunday at the Onondaga County Convention Center. About \$40,000 in prizes and scholarships will be divided among the winners.

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The fair is coordinated by the Milton J. Rubenstein Museum of Science & Technology and sponsored by Lockheed Martin Naval Electronics & Surveillance Systems and Bristol-Myers Squibb.

"Science and engineering jobs have grown at a higher rate than jobs in general," said Ann Nagle, director of marketing and public relations for the MOST.

"It's very important for us to do what we can to encourage and support young scientists to develop those skills and be comfortable," she said.

Participants at the junior and senior levels will be judged Sunday. The public is invited to view the projects from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. The awards ceremony will follow.

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Awards will be given by the American Chemical Society, the Association for Women Geoscientists, the National Society of Professional Engineers and others.

Nagle said several hundred judges from science and engineering fields will help judge the entries.

"It really is a community project," Nagle said.

The science fair is an annual event for Christopher Wood, 18, of Geddes, who is home-schooled. He's been participating since fifth grade, when he attended Manlius Pebble Hill school for a year.

"It's gotten better every year," Wood said. "As my research has gotten more involved, I've enjoyed it more."

Wood's project is titled "Engineering Biobased Industrial Acetic Acid Production."

The project requires him to separate the maple extract from wood chips. The extract contains sugars and acetic acid, an element found in plastic.

"Our original goal was trying to get fermentable sugars down, and we ended up realizing the acetic acid is worth a lot more," Wood said.

Wood has been working on his project with graduate students and professors from the State University College of Environmental Science and Forestry. He plans to continue his research and will attend ESF to major in paper science and engineering.

His mother, Mary Eileen Wood, says science fairs have allowed her son to meet mentors and other students with similar interests.

"I think what's most exciting is it's a way for youngsters to realize how much there is for them to learn," she said.

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