PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Utah, Idaho and Wyoming students gather at Lagoon to learn the physics of fun

NETCAST: Students at Physics Day had to offer guesses at tougher questions than birthdates and weight

BY LYNZE WARDLE
Standard-Examiner Davis Bureau
wardle@standard.net

FARMINGTON — Students descended on Lagoon amusement park Friday to study the physics behind the fun. Nearly 6,500 students from Utah, Idaho and Wyoming came to conduct experiments on the park’s rides and showcase their knowledge of science.

Since 1989, Physics Day has been sponsored by Utah State University and the Idaho National Laboratory.

The goal is to get students excited about science, said USU physics professor and event founder JR Dennison.

“It’s a heck of a lot more fun to study the physics of the Colossus than to sit in class and watch how wooden blocks slide down a ramp,” he said.

Kaysville Junior High School teacher Mark Tolman has been taking his science classes to Physics Day for 12 years.

Tolman said for most students, the appeal is simple.

“The highlight is that they get to miss school and go off playing,” he said.

The day was not all fun and games, however.

Kaysville Junior High School students Knisie Giles and Tiffani Balling brought special, cushioned containers for the egg drop contest.

Participants inserted a raw egg into their container, then tried to drop it onto a target while riding in the park’s gondola. The objective was to hit the target without breaking the egg.

Other students in Tolman’s class brought models of amusement park rides they had designed.

The models were judged on how well they utilized real laws of physics.

The highlight of the day was the Physics Bowl, where teams of high school students tried to answer science questions.

This year, the first- and second-place teams, both from Lone Peak High School in Highland, received four-year, full tuition scholarships to USU.

Dennison said he hopes the activities will encourage students to pursue careers in science.

“It shows students that not only can you get a job in this area, but they engineering and physics can be pretty fun things,” he said.

Box Elder High School students used one of the park’s biggest attractions to conduct their physics experiment.

Using a plastic tube, a weight and an elastic band, sophomores Jolynn Carr and Katelynn Sumko helped create an accelerometer, which measures speed.

They planned to ride the Colossus roller coaster and use the accelerometer to measure the G-force on every loop.

“It really is kind of cool,” Sumko said. “We get to use things we learned in class in a real project.”