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USU Leads 18th Annual Physics Day at Lagoon Amusement Park



More than 80,000 teens have participated in USU's annual Physics Day since 1989. This year's event is May 18.



Kaysville Junior High School

In what has become a spring rite of passage for scores of Intermountain teens, some 7,000 budding scientists will descend on Davis County's Lagoon amusement park for Utah State University's Physics Day, Friday, May 18. The day-long extravaganza features hands-on learning, academic competition and fun.

Middle and high school science students from Utah, Idaho, Wyoming, Nevada and beyond will transform the northern Utah überplayground into a giant laboratory to explore such basic physics concepts as gravity, projectile motion and centrifugal force.

"Physics Day motivates students' interest in science and relates abstract concepts to familiar examples in a fun way," says J.R. Dennison, USU physics professor and a founding organizer of the event. "What better laboratory to entice young people than an amusement park?"

Initiated by USU's Physics Department in 1989, Physics Day is coordinated by USU and partners Idaho National Laboratory, Lagoon and the Rocky Mountain NASA Space Grant Consortium. Participation, sponsorship, activities and prizes for the event have steadily grown during the past 18 years. Last year the day's top six academic competitors received four-year scholarship offers to USU, and more than \$60,000 in prizes were distributed.

"We estimate that more than 80,000 students

student Losaunne White designed the winning T-shirt logo for Physics Day 2007.

have attended Physics Day over the years,” says Dennison.

Months prior to the event, students prepare entries for the logo, demonstration and ride design contests. The day’s activities the annual Physics Bowl academic competition as well as experiments performed directly on the park’s rides. Students build their own accelerometers to measure G-forces on the Colossus roller coaster and design their own protective containers for the Sky Drop Contest, which involves dropping a raw egg bombardier-style from the 15-meter-high Sky Coaster ride – and keeping it intact.

While the day includes a boatload of conventional amusement park fun, Dennison said it’s gratifying to hear youngsters’ lively discussions about free fall, drag forces, energy conservation and impulse. “Who says physics has to be dull?” he says.

In addition to the coordinating partners, Physics Day sponsors include ATK Thiokol, Boeing, Eastern Idaho Regional Medical Center, Idaho NASA Space Grant Consortium, Mathsoft Engineering, Micron, Moog Aircraft, North Wind Environmental, SAIC, S&S Power, the U.S. Navy, USU’s College of Science, USU’s Admissions Office and USU Bookstore.

Related links:

- [USU Physics Day](#)
- [USU Physics Department](#)
- [USU College of Science](#)
- [Rocky Mountain NASA Space Grant Consortium](#)
- [Idaho National Laboratory](#)

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